

The New Activism in Turkish Foreign Policy

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Articles & Testimony

Pleased with his decision to throw in Turkey's lot with the winning U.S.-led coalition against Saddam Hussein, Turkish President Turgut Ozal declared at a 1991 post-Gulf War press conference that Turkey "should leave its former passive and hesitant policies and engage in an active foreign policy."¹

Ozal's decision to back energetically the anti-Iraq coalition effort caught many Turks and long-time observers of Turkey by surprise. Ozal had simply brushed aside Ankara's longstanding policy of non-interference in Middle East disputes. The reasons for his decision are complex and still debated. For one, he anticipated that a grateful United States would reward his support with increased backing for Turkey. (Using a gambling metaphor, he would explain to his critics, "I put in one and take out three.") For another, he intensely disliked Saddam Hussein, whom he reportedly called "the most dangerous man in the world" in his March 1990 meeting with President George Bush.²

Some believe that Ozal reckoned an impending war would redraw the map of the region and that he harbored hopes of occupying Iraq's northern provinces, areas claimed by the young Turkish state in the early 1920s.³ (In another oft-stated justification of his policies during the crisis, Ozal was wont to say "this time we want to be at the table, not on the menu.") Others are convinced that Ozal's decisive choice to back the coalition was merely virtue made of necessity: since the UN was about to embargo Iraq and Turkey was dependent on the United States, why not show enthusiasm and conviction about doing what is required anyway, shutting down the Iraqi oil pipeline that traverses Turkey and granting U.S. fighter aircraft the right to use Incirlik Air Force Base?

All of these considerations may have been elements in Ozal's decision-making. However, at the root of his thinking appears to have been an idea less episodic and more strategic in nature. Ozal was convinced that Turkey had achieved a new stage in its development, one that allowed it to assume a more forceful position in the region and the world.

Throughout the Cold War, Turkish foreign policy was typically insular and passive, encapsulated by Turkish diplomats with the saying attributed to Kemal Ataturk "peace at home, peace abroad." Turkey focused its energy on internal development and sought to avoid foreign tensions that could divert it from that goal. Traditionally, Turkey viewed itself as an underdeveloped state, its military ill-equipped and focused strictly on protecting borders and maintaining internal order, not projecting power. It remained neutral during almost all of World War II, joining the allied side only in the war's waning days with the outcome already decided. Almost from birth, Turkey sought to

avoid conflict with the Soviet Union -- only Stalin's post-World War II claims on Turkish territory drove Turkey into alliance with the West -- and to demonstrate to its neighbors in former Ottoman Middle Eastern and Balkan territories that it had left its imperial past behind. In the first decades of its existence, Turkey had little interest in its Middle Eastern neighbors, neither to woo, nor antagonize. For the Turkish republic, the Arab world represented the backward ways Turkey itself hoped to shed. Later, when states like Syria and Iraq aligned themselves with the Soviet Union, Ankara had all the more reason to avert clashes.⁴

In joining the Gulf War coalition, Turkey broke several of its long-standing taboos. It took sides in a Middle Eastern dispute. It assumed a war-like posture on a Middle Eastern border for the first time since a brief period of tension with Syria in 1957. It allowed its soil to be used for a non-NATO, "out-of-area" operation. Finally, it agreed to serve as a springboard for U.S. Middle East policy for the first time since the U.S. intervention in Lebanon in 1958 -- an event recalled with regret in Turkish foreign policy circles ever since Turkey moved toward a more pro-Arab orientation in the 1960s. Ozal also overturned conventional wisdom about his own foreign policy instincts. Widely seen as motivated almost solely by economic considerations, Ozal upset the odds by moving rapidly to assure the United States that he would close down the Iraqi-Turkish pipeline and support an economic embargo on Iraq, one key's key trading partners.⁵

Building on the momentum of his leadership during the Gulf War, Ozal continued to push the borders of the possible in Turkish foreign policy. Although initially cautious not to raise the hackles of the faltering Soviet Union, he embraced the idea of close relations with the newly independent Turkic-language states once Soviet demise was clearly imminent; he boldly predicted that the twenty-first century would be "the century of the Turk." He seemed to consider, but drew back from, military intervention on Azerbaijan's side during its war with Armenia. Ozal also authored several creative foreign policy initiatives aimed at enhancing regional stability, including an effort to encourage trade and investment among Black Sea states. His opening to Greece in the 1980s culminated in a blueprint for rapprochement known as the Davos Agreement, which he and Greek Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou signed in 1988. The "Davos process" was the most hopeful turn in Greek-Turkish relations in decades, though it ultimately fizzled as a result of Papandreou's inability to sell it to the Greek public.

Ozal died in 1993. He and his bold policies were subject to much criticism in Turkey at the time (and remain controversial today), but his conviction that Turkey should pursue an activist foreign policy appears to have carried the day. As demonstrated by an autumn 1998 crisis with Syria -- when Ankara threatened to use military power to force Damascus to forswear support for anti-Turkish terrorism -- Turkish foreign policy at the end of the 1990s bears little resemblance to the staid, cautious policy of years previous.

The activist trend in Turkish foreign policy since the Gulf War includes both a wider scope for imaginative diplomatic initiatives and a greater preparedness to use or threaten to use force. Preoccupied as it is with fighting a Kurdish separatist insurgency that has taken nearly 40,000 lives since 1984, Ankara is far from adventurist in its foreign policy. It continues to try to use diplomacy and multilateralism, as far as possible, to promote stability and prosperity in its various regions. Most manifestations of its assertiveness are in the realm of diplomatic initiative, not the use of force. Its activism is a measured activism.

The reasons for Turkey's greater assertiveness are various and overlapping: more prosperity; a better-equipped and more experienced military; the decline of neighboring states; greater regional opportunity; and a greater sense of policy independence marked by the ending of restraints imposed by the Cold War. This increased independence is also influenced by the loosening of politically dependent ties and allegiance to Western Europe, and, to some extent, by the declining reliability of the United States as a source of sophisticated armaments.⁶

The notion of increased Turkish foreign policy activism is not new; it has been alluded to and discussed previously, including by this author.⁷ The contention here is that this activism represents a trend resulting from structural

factors in Turkey's domestic, regional, and international environment and, as such, that this trend is likely to grow in the years ahead. In the following pages, the reasons for, and evidence of, the emergence of this activist trend will be detailed and its implications for the region will be considered.

Greater Prosperity

In 1980, the year Turkey undertook major reforms to open its economy, moving from statism and autochthony toward private initiative and export orientation, Turkey's nominal gross domestic product (GDP) stood at \$58 billion; by 1997, it had more than tripled to \$187 billion. During that period, its annual export level increased nine-fold, from \$2.9 to \$26.8 billion. In the 1990s, Turkey has averaged more than 5 percent real growth per annum.

Despite persistent fiscal problems such as inflation and budget deficits, and a likely slow down in growth for 1998, the structural changes of the past two decades are likely to sustain long-term economic performance.

Entrepreneurial success and growing prosperity have distinguished Turkey from many of its Third World neighbors, imbuing the Turkish elite with a sense of genuine accomplishment and self-confidence.

Military Gains

Part of this greater prosperity has been put toward building a more effective military. Between 1985 and 1995, Turkey's defense expenditures more than doubled, in constant (1995) dollars, from \$3.1 billion to \$6.6 billion. This occurred at a time when post-Cold War defense spending was in decline or holding steady in most NATO states. Defense expenditures in the United States, for example, declined from \$352 billion to \$265 billion during this period; total defense expenditures by NATO states declined from \$560 to \$470 billion. The only other NATO state that followed Turkey's pattern was Aegean rival Greece, where expenditures increased from \$3.1 (the same total as Turkey's in 1985) to \$5.1 billion.⁸

A closer look suggests that most of Turkey's increased expenditure was put toward upgrading equipment. Again, alone among NATO states, Turkey more than doubled its annual expenditure on equipment between 1985 and 1996. Overall, annual NATO spending on equipment declined by nearly one-quarter during this period.⁹

Ankara intends to continue this trend. The draft 1999 defense budget, likely to be approved by Turkey's parliament, allocates \$3.4 billion (in current dollars) to equipment procurement, an increase of nearly 10 percent over the previous year. The Turks say they foresee spending over \$30 billion on arms in the next eight years and up to \$150 billion by 2030. Among the big-ticket items to be contracted over the next decade are 1,000 main battle tanks, 145 attack helicopters, and four airborne early warning aircraft.¹⁰

Over the past decade-plus, Turkey has acquired the building blocks of a modern conventional force. Probably the most important addition to Turkey's arsenal has been the highly regarded F-16 fighter aircraft, which Turkey co-produces with the U.S. firm Lockheed Martin. Turkey has acquired more than two hundred F-16s since they began rolling off the assembly line in 1989. Ankara has also contracted with Israel to modernize more than one hundred of its F-4 and F-5 fighters.

Turkey's arsenal also received a major boost in the early 1990s as a result of "cascading," a process that resulted from the 1990 Conventional Forces in Europe treaty (CFE) limiting the military equipment that states of NATO and the former Warsaw Pact are allowed to maintain. As a result of the CFE, Turkey received the excess top-of-the-line equipment formerly owned by the United States and, to some extent, its European allies, who were paring down to meet CFE-required limits. In turn, Ankara substituted this equipment for its older equipment as it satisfied its own CFE-required limits.¹¹ The most important gain for Turkey in this process was its acquisition of nearly a thousand U.S.-made M-60 tanks to replace Korean War- and early-1960s-era M-47s and M-48s.

In addition to F-16s and M-60s, Turkey now has multiple-launch rocket systems, Cobra attack helicopters,

unmanned aerial vehicles, and a counter-battery radar system. It has also undertaken modernization of its navy, significantly increasing the number of its modern submarines, frigates, and anti-ship-missile-capable combatants.¹² Further, its pilots and ground troops have gained valuable battle experience fighting the Turkish-Kurdish separatists based in northern Iraq since the end of the Gulf War.

Neighboring States in Decline

Three of Turkey's traditional rivals on its borders have suffered serious setbacks in military strength in the 1990s: Russia, Iraq, and Syria. Most prominent among these is Russia, a centuries-old rival. The Ottoman empire and the Russian empire, predecessor states to today's Turkish republic and Russian federation, fought more than a dozen wars over a quarter-millennium from the late seventeenth century until World War I. In 1945, Soviet claims on the Turkish Straits and portions of eastern Turkey impelled Ankara's decision to seek the protection of membership in the Western alliance. During the Cold War, Turkey anchored NATO's southern flank against the Soviet Union. Throughout the Cold War, however, and particularly after 1962, Turkish strategic planners questioned how much NATO, with its primary focus on the central front, would do to blunt a Soviet attack on eastern Turkey.¹³

Thus, for Turkey, the most significant aspect of the demise of the Soviet Union was that, for the first time in centuries, it no longer shared a border with a Russian empire. The corrosion of the Russian military machine, evident in Chechnya, for example, has also been a source of reassurance for the Turks.

Mistrust and wariness continue to characterize the attitudes of Turkey's and Russia's security planners toward one another today. The two states compete for influence in, and energy pipeline routes from, the Caucasus and Central Asia. Each intermittently suspects the other of stirring up troubles with its ethnic minorities. Russia questions what it sees as a Turkish naval build-up in the Black Sea. Turkey is particularly unhappy with Russia's decision to sell S-300 anti-aircraft missiles to the Greek-Cypriot-controlled Republic of Cyprus -- a sale which some Turkish security officials are known to believe is not merely a commercial deal, as Russian official spokesmen say, but rather a Russian bid to win influence in the Mediterranean.

Nevertheless, the Turkish-Russian relationship of today is far more relaxed than it has been for decades. Mitigating security concerns has been a boom in commerce. In the 1990s, bilateral trade and Turkish investment in Russia have shot upward. The official trade volume has more than doubled, from \$1.9 billion in 1992 to \$4.1 billion in 1997, with unofficial trade, the so-called "suitcase trade," worth several billion dollars more, notwithstanding recent Russian efforts to regulate it.¹⁴ In purchasing some \$2.1 billion worth of goods from Turkey in 1997, Russia was the second-largest market for "official" Turkish exports. Russia's current economic woes are depressing 1998 bilateral trade figures, but Turkey is likely to retain its relative economic importance to Russia. That was no doubt a key factor in the Russian government's November 1998 decision not to grant political asylum to Kurdish separatist leader Abdullah Ocalan, despite a nonbinding vote in the Duma calling on it to do so.

At times, Turkish officials are moved to speak almost warmly of their country's long-time foe. Following the December 1997 EU summit, which excluded Turkey from the European Union's (EU) list of candidates for membership, Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz announced a freeze in political relations with the EU and asserted that Turkey could look to Russia, along with the United States, the Turkic states of the former Soviet Union, and Israel, for political support. The Turkish ambassador to the United States, Baki Ilkin, recently asserted that the S-300 deal, should it be completed, would "not determine the future" of growing Turkish-Russian ties. Turkey and Russia, he said, "have been building strong bonds of friendship and cooperation . . . and those good relations will continue."¹⁵ Clearly, the classic cartoon image of Russian bear and Turkish wolf facing one another across a common border, teeth bared and poised to strike, is not appropriate today.

The collapse of the Soviet Union has boosted Turkey's security on other borders as well. In the latter decades of the

Cold War, Syria and Iraq were Soviet allies and received top-of-the-line Soviet equipment. This imposed a double restraint on Turkey in its often uneasy relations with those states. In the first place, Ankara knew that any conflict with either Syria or Iraq could draw in the powerful Soviets. Second, those states' militaries were better equipped than Turkey's (as well as being more battle-experienced), making Turkish officials leery of confrontation with them, despite Turkey's manpower advantage. In the spring of 1990, a confident Saddam Hussein reportedly even taunted the Turkish prime minister about Turkey's weakness and isolation.¹⁶

In the 1990s, the tables have turned. Syria no longer receives modern weaponry on a gratis basis from Moscow, and, lacking hard currency, has been unable to update significantly its inventory. The current military imbalance favoring Ankara over Damascus was transparent in the recent Syrian-Turkish crisis.

Likewise, Iraq's military was badly weakened by the 1991 Gulf War, and UN-imposed sanctions limit its ability to acquire new arms or to rebuild its arms industry. Moscow retains an interest in reviving its relations with those states, but it lacks the resources to subsidize arms sales to Syria, and arms sales to Iraq are off-limits due to sanctions. On a regular basis, Turkey has been using air power since 1991 and land forces since 1995 to attack separatist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) concentrations in northern Iraq. As many as 35,000 to 40,000 Turkish land forces troops have entered Iraq at a time. Turkey confines its attacks to the region held by Iraqi Kurds, currently beyond Baghdad's control.

The recent crisis with Syria reflects Turkey's emergence as an assertive, self-confident power in its region, emboldened, at least in confronting Syria, by its ties with Israel. Brought to world attention with reports of Turkish troops massing at the border, the crisis was Turkey's response to years of frustration with Syrian support for PKK terrorism and guerrilla warfare. Turkey accused Syria of waging "an undeclared war" and warned of military consequences if backing for the PKK did not cease.

From the outset of the crisis, Syria showed little stomach for military confrontation. There was no significant Syrian deployment on its Turkish border. Whether out of fear of the Turks alone or out of fear of a two-front war with Turkey and Israel, Asad clearly did not want to test Turkish resolve. Syrian President Hafez Asad sued for peace, readily accepting most of the Turks' demands. Damascus pledged to ban all PKK activities in Syria and assured Turkey that the organization's leader, Ocalan, had already left Syria.¹⁷

Turkey says that it will carefully monitor Damascus' compliance and that it reserves the right to take military action if Syria reneges. Ankara has reason to be cautious. Three times before, in 1987, 1992, and 1993, Syria gave Turkey assurances about the PKK which were enforced only for a short time and then ignored.¹⁸

Syria has supported the PKK since the late 1970s, but a diffident Turkey almost never publicly called attention to the fact before the 1990s.¹⁹ What distinguished the 1998 crisis from the ongoing tension of the past was the credible threat to use force issued by a Turkey that sees itself, and is now seen regionally, as powerful enough to make good on its threat. The regional respect Ankara probably has gained as a result of its face-off with Syria would be undermined, however, if Syria were seen to circumvent its commitments without provoking a Turkish response.

To Russia, Iraq, and Syria might be added a fourth weakened neighbor, the Islamic Republic of Iran, which was bled by an eight-year war with Iraq in the 1980s and, with oil prices low, has had trouble re-charging its economy in the 1990s. Iran does not present a serious conventional threat to Turkey.

All this is not to say that Turkey's external security environment is untroubled. Its bordering Middle Eastern neighbors -- Iran, Iraq, and Syria -- all have weapons-of-mass-destruction (WMD) programs. Iran, in particular, is widely believed to be less than a decade away from developing a nuclear weapon. Turkey, which has long been under the U.S./NATO nuclear umbrella, has no known national WMD capability, no anti-missile capability, and no significant offensive missile capability. Several neighbors support the PKK and Iran remains supportive of Islamic

fundamentalism.²⁰ Moreover, the Cyprus and Aegean Sea disputes remain flashpoints, making war with Greece always a looming possibility. Despite these threats, Turkey's overall security environment in 1999 is more hospitable than it has been for decades.

Greater Regional Opportunity

Turkey finds the world of the 1990s a place of far fewer constraints and far greater possibilities than the era of the Cold War and Arab-Israeli freeze. With little fanfare or credit, and within the means its resources have allowed, Turkish diplomacy has been quick to exploit opportunities. Before the formal disintegration of the Soviet Union, Turkey had recognized all the constituent republics that declared independence.²¹ In particular, it set about building independent ties to the Turkic-language states of the former Soviet Union by establishing air routes from Istanbul, beaming television broadcasts to the region, initiating an annual "Turkic summit", offering scholarships to thousands of students to matriculate in Turkey, training Central Asian and Azerbaijani diplomats, and, of course, seeking regional commercial opportunities. Moreover, in the international arena, Turkey has been the most outspoken defender of Azerbaijan in Baku's dispute with Armenia over Nagorno Karabakh.

Although initial post-Soviet speculation that Turkey would emerge as the leader of a Turkic-language bloc of states has proven far-fetched, Turkish policies toward the region appear to be yielding dividends. Turkish trade and investment in the Turkic-language states have been steadily increasing. Turkey may ultimately be linked by pipeline to energy resources in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan (as the United States advocates), though that remains uncertain. Some of the Turkic-language states reportedly have been politically supportive of Turkey in the Islamic Conference Organization (ICO). Russia is the dominant power in the region, but, over time, as a Turcophone elite inevitably replaces the current Russophone elite, Turkish gains are likely to be considerable.

In the Balkans, Turkey established working relations with all the states of the former Yugoslavia, including Serbia. It developed close ties with Muslim Albania and with Macedonia, to the initial annoyance of Greece. Turkey took on Bosnia and its sufferings as a special cause. Uniquely a member of both NATO and the ICO, Turkey played a role in convincing NATO to step up its pressure on Serbia, while urging restraint upon ICO members unhappy with the West's initially hesitant approach.

Relations with Israel Just as the Middle East was the site of Ozal's path-breaking decision to join the anti-Iraq coalition in 1990, setting the pattern of activism in foreign policy for the years ahead, that activist trend is nowhere more evident today than in the Middle East. This region has been the object of several of Turkey's 1990s foreign policy departures: application of force in northern Iraq, threat of force against Syria, and, most dramatically, the opening of a bold diplomatic and military relationship with Israel.

Turkey saw the Israel-PLO Oslo agreement as an open door to build close relations with Israel, and it rushed through. For a variety of self-interested and sentimental reasons, Ankara had long backed PLO positions on the peace process; in 1989, Turkey was among the first states to recognize the Palestine National Council's "Declaration of Independence for Palestine." At the same time, it clearly shared a community of interests with Israel, with both states pro-Western, anti-radical U.S. allies; although Ankara downgraded relations with Israel to the second-secretary level in the 1990s, the two states were widely rumored to have an intelligence relationship. When the PLO recognized Israel, Ankara decided there was nothing to inhibit it from developing relations with Israel to the fullest extent. Less than two months after the September 1993 signing of the Oslo agreement on the White House lawn, the first-ever Turkish foreign ministerial visit to Israel took place. Since that time, relations with Israel have grown dramatically. In virtually all respects, there have been numerous reciprocal senior-level visits. Trade has spurred, non-official contacts, through tourism and academic exchanges, have proliferated. Relations between the militaries have grown especially close. In 1996, three major agreements were signed that powerfully support bilateral ties: a military training and cooperation agreement, which allows each side to train in one another's air space; a defense industrial

cooperation agreement; and a free-trade agreement.

Strategic considerations dominated Turkey's thinking in building ties to Israel. The primary objective was to put pressure on Syria for its support of anti-Turkish terrorist groups, primarily the PKK. That strategy appeared to have paid off for Turkey during its recent crisis with Syria, when Damascus was doubtlessly preoccupied with the possibility that a clash with Turkey would quickly develop into a two-front war (despite Israel's public effort to distance itself from the conflict).

A second major Turkish goal in initiating close relations with Israel was to achieve an arms relationship with a technologically advanced, Western-oriented, inventory-compatible state free of anti-Turkish lobbies. This, too, appears to have been achieved. Israel is upgrading Turkish F-4 and F-5 jet fighters, selling Turkey its sophisticated Popeye air-to-ground missiles (while planning for future co-production), bidding to sell Turkey attack helicopters and other armaments, and sharing its know-how in joint training efforts.

Ankara's third key goal was to win support from the American Jewish community to ease the problems it encounters in the U.S. Congress from pro-Greek, pro-Armenian, pro-Kurdish, and human rights lobbies. Although American Jewish groups do indeed show increasing interest in Turkey, it is at best uncertain whether that will result in greater congressional support for Turkey any time soon.

The economic component of Israeli-Turkish relations has also achieved considerable importance for Ankara. Turkish exports to Israel have increased thirteen-fold since 1989, from \$30 million that year to \$390 million in 1997. Overall trade volume has grown seven-fold during this period, from \$90 million to \$620 million. In 1989, Israel was merely Turkey's thirteenth largest market in the Middle East and North Africa. By 1997, it was second largest, and, in the first six months of 1998, Israel (\$220 million) had virtually pulled even with Saudi Arabia (\$230 million) as Turkey's leading Middle East/North Africa market.²²

The Arab world and Iran have been increasingly critical of Turkish-Israeli relations, even before the recent Turkish-Syrian crisis. A September 1998 meeting of Arab foreign ministers called on Turkey to end its military relationship with Israel "due to the danger it entails to the security of Arab countries."²³ Despite oft-stated Turkish and Israeli protestations that their cooperation is not aimed at third countries, it is not surprising that Arab states would recoil at the notion of cooperation between the region's two most militarily powerful and economically dynamic states, both non-Arab and both the frequent object of Arab castigation. Indeed, Israel's and Turkey's common sense of otherness in a region demographically and politically dominated by Arabs has helped cement their partnership.

Although not seeking to antagonize the Arab world or Iran, Turkey is not likely to alter its relations with Israel in response to their protests. The Islamic Middle East has declined in economic importance to Turkey; once consuming some 45 percent of Turkish exports in the early 1980s, it now buys just 10 percent. Further, Ankara has despaired of gaining support on the Cyprus issue from the Arab world or Iran, which have long shown more sympathy to the Greek Cypriot cause.

The regional states most critical of Turkish-Israeli relations are Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Egypt. The former three border Turkey and oppose Israel, thus feeling most directly threatened. Egypt's opposition reflects its self-image as leader of the Arab world, its desire to limit Israel's regional normalization before a comprehensive Middle Eastern peace has been achieved, and its hope to serve as the arbiter of the pace and extent of that normalization process.

Not all of the Arabs are quite so vigorously opposed, however. Significantly, the PLO, with which Turkey has enjoyed close relations for years, has never criticized the Turkish-Israeli partnership; it has merely asked for Turkish intervention with Israel to advance the peace process. Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates were willing to receive ship visits from Turkey during a regionally controversial Turkish-Israeli-U.S. search-and-rescue naval exercise in January 1998.

Odd-man-out in the Arab world has been pro-Western Jordan, which sent a military observer to the trilateral naval exercise, has publicly defended Turkish-Israeli claims that their relations do not threaten the region, and has worked behind the scenes at various Arab League and ICO meetings in recent years to dilute resolutions condemning Turkey for relations with Israel and other issues. Over the past two years, Turkish-Jordanian military relations have been growing steadily. There have been several senior-level visits, and the two armies exchanged unit-level troop training visits in spring 1998, amid discussion of possible joint air exercises. Jordan, which sees Syria as a threat, clearly feels an affinity with the Turkish-Israeli partnership. Yet, despite its peace treaty with Israel, Jordan's Hashemite monarchy will feel constrained from overtly joining a trilateral security relationship with those two states until there is clear progress toward a final Israeli-Palestinian peace; roughly two-thirds of Jordan's population is Palestinian. Jordan will feel free to pursue closer bilateral ties with Muslim Turkey, however, and through that medium, may indirectly approach security cooperation with Israel. For Turkey, a special relationship with Jordan is particularly valuable at a time when it is regularly under assault at Arab League fora.

Regional Multilateralism During this decade, Turkey has sought to build or back multilateral structures that promise enhancement of regional stability as well as national influence or material gain. This interest in regional multilateralism has extended to participation in peacekeeping efforts and, most recently, to initiation of a peacekeeping force in the Balkans.

In 1990, Ozal introduced his Black Sea Economic Cooperation Zone (BSECZ) initiative, intended to ease trade barriers and facilitate investment among Black Sea littoral states. Formally launched in 1992, the group has been enlarged to include several non-Black Sea members, some eleven participants in all.²⁴

The BSECZ has been slow to establish itself as a trade organization. Nevertheless, BSECZ states hold regular summits, offering the possibility of discussions "on the margins" for leaders who otherwise do not meet, such as those of Armenia and Azerbaijan or, for that matter, Turkey and Greece. Moreover, whether the result of institutional contact or other reasons, Turkey's trade with the states of the BSECZ has grown steadily. BSECZ members Bulgaria, Romania, and Turkey intend to implement their own free-trade agreement in 1999, another Turkish initiative.

The Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) was formed in the mid- 1980s with an original core of Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey. The Muslim-majority states of the former Soviet Union were added later. ECO, like BSECZ, does provide a convenient meeting point, so it perhaps serves a diplomatic purpose, even if so far no discernible economic one. Through BSECZ and ECO, Turkey is involved in a regional multilateral enterprise with six of its eight bordering neighbors, that is, all but Iraq and Syria.

An active participant in the multilateral track of the Middle East peace process, before that effort stalled in reaction to stalemate in Israeli-Palestinian talks in 1996, Turkey chaired a sub-committee of the Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) multilateral working group. Ankara has also been a strong supporter of other multilateral efforts in the Middle East, including the Middle East and North Africa Economic Summits and the short-lived Israeli proposal for a Conference on Security and Confidence-Building in the Middle East (CSCME).

Turkey has become an enthusiastic participant in multilateral peacekeeping operations both in its immediate region and further afield. Until 1993, Turkish troops had never served outside of Turkey, other than in the exceptional circumstances of Korea and Cyprus. Since 1993, Turkish forces have participated in numerous peacekeeping, peace-monitoring, and related operations, in Somalia, Bosnia, Albania, Georgia, Hebron, Kuwait (the UN Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission), Macedonia, and Pakistan (training Afghan refugees on mine-clearing).²⁵

As a result of yet another Turkish regional initiative, several Balkan states agreed in September 1998 to set up a Balkan peacekeeping force to be deployed in NATO- or WEU-led operations sanctioned by the UN or the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). This force is the first regional military grouping to

include NATO and former Warsaw Pact members. Ankara also proposed a similar force for the Caucasus and a naval peacekeeping force for the Black Sea.²⁶

Declining Influence of the West

At its historic December 1997 summit in Luxembourg, the EU announced the next set of candidates for full membership in its organization, achievement of which is a longstanding, priority of Turkish foreign policy. Turkey's exclusion from the list of candidates provoked deep anger in Ankara. Although the EU has not closed the door on the possibility of eventual membership, many Turks have already concluded that membership is no longer a plausible prospect, either because of EU prejudice against Muslims, Greek influence in the EU, German influence in the EU, or some combination of these factors. (EU voting rules, which require unanimity, give each member the equivalent of veto power.)

By effectively dispensing with the "membership incentive," the EU has lost much of its ability to influence and impose restraints on Turkish foreign policy behavior, including on those issues on which it places high priority, such as the Cyprus dispute and Greek-Turkish relations. The EU is not bereft of influence in Ankara; more than half of Turkey's total trade volume is with the EU, and the Turkish government continues to support its customs union agreement with the EU that went into effect in 1996. Still, the EU has little ability to dissuade Turkey from a foreign policy course Ankara considers to be in its national interest.²⁷

U.S. influence remains very high in Turkey, which counts on Washington as its primary supporter in the international arena. The United States, almost alone in the Western world, has backed Turkey's efforts to host Caspian Sea energy pipelines, its effort to gain EU membership, its contention that the PKK is a terrorist group, its right to send troops and aircraft into northern Iraq to fight the PKK, and its demand that PKK leader Ocalan be extradited or otherwise brought to justice.

Nevertheless, even Washington's influence has fallen somewhat in Ankara, mainly because of a steady decrease in levels of U.S. security and economic assistance, which was ended completely in this fiscal year. Although the economic and political costs of assistance for Turkey had grown in recent years -- security assistance was offered only as market-rate loans and congressmen often tried to attach political conditions to economic assistance -- many Turkish foreign and security policymakers are concerned that termination of aid sends a signal that the United States is downgrading relations with Turkey.

A more significant reason for the marginal decline in U.S. influence is the politicization of arms sales. Turkey prefers and depends on U.S.-origin military equipment -- 80 percent of its military inventory is U.S.-made -- but it has found the United States an increasingly less reliable source of arms in recent times. For example, pro-Greek Congressmen held up the transfer of three frigates to Turkey for over a year in 1996 to 1997. Human rights concerns in the United States, which extend to the executive branch, have so far stifled Turkey's ability to purchase attack helicopters. In 1997, U.S. arms manufacturers were given permission to bid on a Turkish contract for 145 attack helicopters, but with no assurances that a successful bid would be approved. In ending foreign aid and withholding arms, Washington forsakes means of influencing Turkey.

Foreign Policy Leadership

In his day, Ozal and the Turkish military viewed one another warily. Ozal considered the military cautious to the point of timidity. The military tended to view Ozal as reckless. Ironically, the primary heir to Ozal's foreign policy activism today is none other than the military itself. The military relationship with Israel, aggressive pursuit of the PKK in northern Iraq, confrontation with Syria, and widespread participation in peacekeeping operations are the products of initiatives by the Turkish military.

The military exercises its foreign policy influence in Turkey through a half-civilian, half-military body known as the

National Security Council (NSC). In recent years, when there has been a succession of weak civilian governments, the military has emerged as the dominant factor.²⁸ Civilians do retain importance. President Demirel, who chairs the NSC is often a key broker. The strongly nationalist policies advocated by Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit, and seemingly backed by Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz, regarding the Cyprus problem and relations with the EU, have been very influential in policymaking. The Foreign Ministry retains significant influence as well. Still, a policy strongly advocated by the military will almost certainly be implemented; a policy strongly opposed by the military almost certainly will not.

Implications for the Region

Turkey's emergence as a true regional power, underscored by its strategic relations with Israel and growing security ties with Jordan, surely strengthens its deterrent credibility and wins it greater respect among its neighbors.

Turkey's threat, for example, to destroy S-300 missiles if deployed in Cyprus appears all the more plausible. When Turkey recently threatened Syria with military action, Egypt apparently warned Asad not to test Turkish resolve. It is also possible, some believe, that the region will react to growing Turkish strength not by mollifying Ankara, but by forming alliances to counter it. Speculation has focused on various possible groupings of Turkey's less-than-friendly neighbors: Syria-Iraq-Iran, Greece-Syria, and an "Orthodox-plus" alliance of Russia, Greece, Serbia, Armenia, and Iran.²⁹ In 1996, Greek Defense Minister Gerasimos Arsenis reportedly called upon his government to boost ties with Turkey's neighbors for the sake of coordinating anti-Ankara policies.³⁰ Greek, Armenian, and Iranian foreign ministers have met trilaterally on an annual basis since 1995; though they have not announced any common anti-Turkish undertakings, Ankara naturally sees this grouping as distinctly unfriendly. Turkish security planners, who believe Athens and Damascus signed an agreement in 1995 on Greek use of Syrian airbases, take seriously the possibility of encirclement as a long-term threat. At this point, however, there appears little prospect that any of these disparate and mostly resource-limited groupings are likely to pose a coordinated threat to Turkey.³¹

Greece, Turkey's most bitter foe in the region and the one that nurses the widest range of grievances against Turkey, is the state potentially most affected by Turkey's growing strength and assertiveness. Greece, approximately one-sixth Turkey's size in population, will be hard-pressed to keep up with Turkey's military development plans. Meanwhile, Turkey's military is likely to gain qualitatively through its cooperation with Israel. It is not fully clear, however, whether Greek perceptions of Turkey's growing strength make Greek-Turkish hostilities more or less likely. Probably it is the latter. Nevertheless, some in Greece reportedly believe that it is preferable to have a confrontation earlier rather than later, that is, before the growing military gap becomes too great.³²

Problems in Turkey's relations with Western Europe and, to a lesser degree, the United States make Ankara less likely to be responsive to Western diplomatic initiatives, particularly on the Cyprus and Greece-related issues that seem most to concern Brussels and Washington. A decline in U.S. influence has potentially worrisome implications; U.S. diplomacy is largely responsible for having averted Greek-Turkish clashes three times since 1976.

Implications for the United States

Post-Cold War Turkey is an important ally for the United States. Its manifold strategic roles are now widely recognized: a moderate, pro-Western state in an unstable area; a rare, probably unique, example of democracy, however flawed, in a Muslim-majority state; a supporter of Israeli-Palestinian peace and a pace-setter in Islamic world normalization with Israel; a base for Operation Northern Watch, which enforces a no-fly zone in northern Iraq, a key element of Washington's Iraq strategy; an ideological counterweight to Iran; a buffer against resurgence of Russian aggression; a forceful but pacific and anti-separatist advocate of the causes of besieged Muslims in its region (Azerbaijan, Bosnia, Chechnya, and Kosovo), all of whose kin are liberally represented in Turkey's population mix; an important, non-Russian line of communication with the West, and to some extent a role model, for the still-unsteady Turkic-language states of the former Soviet Union; and a potential outlet for Caspian Sea energy resources

as an alternative to Russian and Iranian routes.

U.S. public rhetoric has affirmed Turkey's strategic significance in the post-Cold War era. In the earlier part of the Clinton administration, U.S. officials emphasized Turkey's role as a "front-line state" that is "at the crossroads of almost every issue of importance to the United States on the Eurasian continent."³³ More recently, Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott asserted that U.S.-Turkish relations have "even more of a hardheaded, geopolitical, strategic rationale in the post-Cold War period than . . . during the Cold War."³⁴

Yet the United States shows little interest in building Turkey into a strong regional power capable of enforcing common bilateral interests. This reflects constraints on U.S. resources; domestic political considerations, particularly with regard to U.S. supporters of Greece and Armenia; skepticism regarding Turkey's regional image, which is still colored by age-old rivalries and an imperial past; concerns about Turkey's human rights shortcomings; and a certain wariness among some officials as to whether a strong Turkey able to act as an independent regional force would necessarily regularly behave in ways that enhance U.S. interests. This last point is particularly important. Some U.S. policymakers wonder if a stronger and therefore more independent Turkey would be more or less confrontational with Greece, more or less forthcoming on Cyprus policy, and more or less inclined to support U.S. policy toward the Kurds of northern Iraq.

In general, U.S. policymakers would like to see Turkey capitalize on its new strength and confidence to take bold initiatives toward the Cyprus problem and Greece. Talbott recently urged Ankara to demonstrate "path-breaking statesmanship"³⁵ toward Greece. Current trends in Ankara, however, suggest a more self-confident Turkey is rather more inclined to dig in its heels on what it views as its rights in regional disputes.

Whatever U.S. attitudes on these questions, a stronger, more activist Turkey is emerging. As crucially located as it is, Turkey will remain important to U.S. policy initiatives in the region. It thus may behoove Washington to recognize that Turkish responsiveness to U.S. policy needs in the region will vary depending on Ankara's perceptions of the level of support it receives from the United States. Doubts Washington harbors about the reliability of a powerful Turkish ally may be assuaged by Turkey's track record of support for most major U.S. policy initiatives -- and, perhaps to some extent, by the fact that today's Turkey of measured activism reflects the vision first outlined by one of the United States' strongest boosters in Turkey, Turgut Ozal.

Notes

1. Quoted in Philip Robins, "Turkish Policy and the Gulf Crisis: Adventurist or Dynamic?" in Clement H. Dodd, ed., *Turkish Foreign Policy: New Prospects* (Cambridgeshire, UK: Eothen Press, 1992) p. 70.
2. Related by former U.S. Ambassador to Turkey Morton Abramowitz (who was present at the Bush-Ozal meeting), in a speech introducing Ozal at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, January 26, 1993. Also cited in Amatzia Baram, *Building Toward Crisis: Saddam Hussein's Strategy for Survival* (Washington: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1998) p. 111.
3. See, for example, Necip Torumtay, *Org. Torumtay'in Anilari* (Istanbul: Milliyet Yayinlari, 1994) pp. 115-116.
4. To be sure, there were occasional lapses in this status-quo orientation. These resulted mainly from popular Turkish involvement in the fate of ethnic kin in Cyprus and Bulgaria and from rivalry with Greece. These episodic policies of assertiveness were implemented only when the odds were clearly in Turkey's favor or when public demand for action overwhelmed the government's innate caution. There was also a brief flurry of involvement in Middle East defense schemes devised by the West in the 1950s, the best known of which was the short-lived Baghdad Pact of 1955. Participation in these plans was, in effect, the dues the West exacted from Turkey for its admission to NATO.

5. The formal decisions to close the pipeline and join the embargo were issued only when the relevant UN Security Council resolutions were passed, but Ozal told U.S. Ambassador Abramowitz of his plans to close the pipeline before the UNSC vote. Interview with Abramowitz, October 17, 1997. See also, George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998) p. 331 regarding a conversation between Ozal and Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney to similar effect.

6. Interestingly, several of these factors have played a role in Turkey's recent efforts to prevent neighboring states from protecting PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan, whom Turkey, the United States, and others accuse of responsibility for PKK acts of terrorism. Syria expelled Ocalan in response to Turkish military threats; Russia expelled him probably out of concern for Turkey's ability to influence Russian Muslim groups as well as Turkey's growing impact on the Russian economy. It is unclear what will happen to Ocalan in Italy, his third port of call in recent weeks. However, as this goes to press, initial Italian government sentiment in favor of granting Ocalan asylum appears to have ebbed. A key aspect of these second thoughts was the response of Turkish consumers, who initiated popular boycotts of Italian goods. Turkey was Italy's twelfth largest export market (\$4.4 billion) in 1997. Until recently, Turkey probably was not strong enough in any of these respects -- military strength, market size, or regional influence -- to have had much impact on neighbors' decisions regarding a matter of this type.

7. See, for example, Alan Makovsky, "Israeli-Turkish Relations: A Turkish 'Periphery Strategy'?" in Henri J. Barkey, ed., *Reluctant Neighbor: Turkey's Role in the Middle East* (Washington: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1996) p. 147; Sabri Sayari, "Turkey and the Middle East in the 1990s," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 26, no. 3 (Spring 1997): pp. 44-55; and, especially, Malik Daring and Caution in Turkish Foreign Policy," *Middle East Journal* 52, no. I (Winter 1998): Pp. 32-50. Mufti, p. 48, sees present-day Turkish foreign Policy as "a real struggle . . . between the Proponents of boldness and the advocates of caution," with the outcome uncertain.

8. IISS Military Balance, 1997-98, Table 53, "International Comparisons of Defence Expenditure and Military Manpower in 1985, 1995 and 1996," p. 293.

9. SIPRI Annual 1996, Table 8.1 "NATO distribution of military expenditure by category, 1986-95," p. 329.

10. Umit Enginsoy, "Turkish Budget Anticipates Arms-Buying Program," *Defense News* (October 26-November 1, 1998): p. 32. As the article notes, Turkey is a beneficiary of a \$2.5 billion "Turkish Defense Fund" for the procurement of arms established primarily by the United States, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia after the Gulf War. The fund was established as a reward for Turkey's firm backing of the anti-Iraq coalition.

11. Because of its Middle Eastern borders, Turkey fought for, and successfully won, "an exclusion zone" in the CFE negotiations. This zone, designating, in effect, the portion of Turkey beyond the European security arena, is roughly bounded by a line just west of the Turkish-Syrian border to a point just north of the mid-point of the Turkish-Iranian border. Turkey has greater flexibility in its equipment limits and military movements in its territory south and east of that line, which covers roughly one-fifth of the country.

12. IISS, Military Balance 1997-98, pp. 67-69. As a gauge of Turkey's modernization efforts, cf. the 1980 inventory virtually bereft of modern equipment, detailed in IISS, Military Balance 1980-81, pp. 31-32. I would like to express my thanks to my colleagues at The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Michael Eisenstadt and visiting military fellow Col. Haldun Solmazturk of the Turkish armed forces, for helpful insights pertinent to this section.

13. 1962 was a watershed because of the Cuban missile crisis, which was resolved when the United States agreed to remove nuclear missiles from Turkey as a trade-off for the removal of Soviet missiles from Cuba. Apparently, the deal was made without consulting the Turks, many of whom began seriously to question thereafter the reliability of NATO guarantees. See George Harris, *Trouble Alliance: Turkish-American Problems in Historical Perspective, 1945-1971* (Washington: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1972) pp. 93-95. Turkish concerns

were raised further, and more dramatically, in 1964, when the United States warned Ankara that NATO might not protect it against a Soviet invasion if Turkey intervened militarily in Cyprus.

14. In 1997, exports and imports were roughly evenly divided after several years in which Turkey ran a trade deficit. For 1992 statistics, see Gareth Winrow, *Turkey in Post-Soviet Central Asia* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1995) p. 37. Trade statistics for 1997 were kindly supplied by the office of the Turkish Foreign Ministry's Dis Ekonomik Iliskiler Kurulu (DEIK, Foreign Economic Relations Commission) in Istanbul.

15. Ambassador Baki Ilkin, in response to a question following a speech at The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, September 2, 1998.

16. Baram, p. 111. Saddam reportedly said that the West would have little concern for Turkey with the ending of the Cold War. At the time, many in the Turkish foreign and security policy establishment agreed with Saddam's assessment and worried about its implications. Ironically, Turkey's assistance to the Gulf War coalition is what convinced many Western policymakers that Turkey would continue to be a valuable strategic asset and ally in the post-Cold War world.

17. For a full text of the agreement in English, see *Turkish Probe*, no. 302, (October 25, 1998): p. 12. The actual title of the official text, in the Turkish version, is simply "Tutanak" ("Minutes") suggesting that it is something less than a formal agreement, though it was widely perceived as such. It was signed for Turkey by the number-three man in the foreign ministry, Deputy Undersecretary Ugur Ziyal, and for Syria by the head of Political security in the interior ministry, General Adnan Badr al-Hasan. The official text reportedly was in Turkish and Arabic only. The Turkish version leaked; the Arabic version thus far has not.

18. For a brief review of past Turkish-Syrian agreements on terrorism, see Daniel Pipes, *Syria Beyond the Peace Process* (Washington: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1996) pp. 60-63. See also Sibel Utku, Mustafa Erdogan, and Alpharlan Esmer, "Monitoring Syria," *Turkish Probe* (October 25, 1998): pp. 11-12.

19. In a strong signal that Turkey was laying the groundwork for a more confrontational approach, Foreign Minister Hikmet Cetin visited Israel in 1993 and called for Turkish-Israeli strategic cooperation against "Syrian-sponsored terrorism." *Mideast Mirror*, November 16, 1993.

20. According to signed "minutes" of Syrian-Turkish discussions held October 19-20, 1998, Syria foreswore its support for the PKK. Damascus did indeed expel PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan, who went to Russia and then on to Italy. It remains to be seen, however, if Syria will truly cease its many other forms of support for the PKK, including basing and transit rights.

21. Winrow, p. 12.

22. Information for 1989 derived from IMF, *Direction of Trade Statistics Yearbook*, 1996, pp. 432-433; for 1997, from IMF, *Direction of Trade Statistics Quarterly*, September 1998, p. 234; for first half of 1998, from information supplied by DEIK.

23. Foreign Broadcast Information Service, "Egypt: Arab League Issues Resolutions," FBIS-NES-98-260, September 17, 1998.

24. The BSECZ members include Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Turkey, and Ukraine.

25. General Huseyin Kivrikoglu, "Turkey," *Military Technology*, no. 6 (June 1998): pp. 46-47.

26. The Multinational Peace Force South-Eastern Europe, as it is officially known, will be headquartered initially in Bulgaria. It will consist of some 3,000 to 5,000 dedicated troops from seven participating states, Albania, Bulgaria,

Greece, Italy, Macedonia, Romania, and Turkey; Slovenia and the United States will serve as observer states. In explaining these initiatives in mid-1998, General Cevik Bir, then deputy chief of staff of the Turkish military, said that "Turkey's importance and responsibilities as a power center and stabilizing force in the region have increased." Kelly Couturier, "Turkey Assuming Lead Peacekeeping Role," *Washington Post*, July 16, 1998, p. A25; Interview with Colonel Haldun Solmazturk, who worked on peacekeeping issues in the Turkish General Staff from 1992 until September 1998, October 28, 1998.

27. In a speech at the Defence and Security Forum in London, October 21, 1998, Turkish Ambassador Ozdem Sanberk declared that "our inter-dependence and partnership with Europe have been seriously undermined . . . This means that, regionally, we may follow tougher policies than we did in the past." In an interview with the author, Turkish State Minister Sukru Gurel, who is responsible for policy toward the EU, said flatly, "The EU has lost its position and influence with us," November 1, 1998.

28. See Umit Cizre Sakallioglu, "The Anatomy of the Turkish Military's Political Autonomy," *Comparative Politics* (January 1997) pp. 151-166, especially pp. 157-8.

29. For the best exposition of this viewpoint, see Daniel Pipes, "The Real 'New Middle East,'" *Commentary* (November 1998): pp. 25-29.

30. Mufti, pp. 34-35.

31. According to highly respected commentator Sukru Elekdag, "The defense cooperation agreement concluded between Greece and Syria in June 1995 has utmost significance in relation to Turkey's security." Sukru Elekdag, "2 1/2 War Strategy" *Perceptions* 1, no. 1 (March-May 1996): pp. 33-57. The article cites Greece and Syria as Turkey's most likely military foes; attributes Turkey's traditional reluctance to confront Syria over terrorism to its concern that Greece would exploit the situation militarily; and urges that Turkey be prepared to fight "2 1/2" wars simultaneously, that is, against Greece, Syria, and (the "half") the PKK. Elekdag's article is sometimes cited by scholars and commentators as representing Turkish doctrine, though there has never been any official statement so indicating.

32. Wes Jonasson, "Greece and the U.S. Fall Out" *Middle East International* (August 21, 1998): p. 14.

33. Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Richard Holbrooke, statement before the House International Relations Committee, March 9, 1995.

34. Speech by U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott, "U.S.-Turkish Relations in an Age of Interdependence," delivered at The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, October 14, 1998.

35. Ibid. ❖

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