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## Occasional Paper Series

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The Queen's Centre for International Relations is pleased to present the fifty-eighth in its Occasional Paper series. After a hiatus of several years, the series is being re-launched. By pleasant coincidence, the author of this paper, Louis Delvoie, also wrote its not-so-immediate predecessor, published in 1997. The Occasional Papers are intended to reach the policy-community and the broader public with short analyses of contemporary trends and issues in international security and in Canadian foreign and defence policy.



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# Turkey in NATO: An Ambivalent Ally

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After the Treaty has been in force for twenty years, any Party may cease to be a Party one year after its notice of denunciation has been given...

(Article 13, The North Atlantic Treaty)

The rhetoric which normally surrounds any celebration of a major milestone in the evolution of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization is replete with references to the alliance's success and longevity. What often goes unsaid is that NATO is remarkable in the history of alliances in that no country which has ever joined it has ever left it, and this despite the fact that it is now over 55 years old. Quite the contrary. The history of NATO is characterized by the periodic expansion of its membership, and never by its contraction, even after the basic Cold War rationales for its creation and existence have ceased to have much resonance. The accession of yet more new members in 2004 underlines this reality, and can be seen as a re-affirmation of the attractions which the alliance continues to hold.

Under these circumstances, it may indeed seem churlish to ask whether this happy state of affairs can last forever. It would, however, be somewhat unusual if the passage of time and changing political and geo-strategic realities did not eventually lead one or more members of NATO to question the continued usefulness or advantages of membership in the alliance. Both the historical record and current phenomena suggest that Turkey might be one of the first to do so.

By virtue of history, geography and culture, Turkey has always been something of an odd man out in an alliance made up primarily of Western European nations and founded on a trans-Atlantic bargain between those nations and North America. Integrating Turkey into NATO always made for a rather problematic fit, and repeatedly led to bouts of discomfiture either for the alliance or for Turkey. This remains true today, despite the fact that the alliance held its 2004 summit in Istanbul. A number of old causes of estrangement continue to enjoy a long shelf life, and new ones have been added to the list in the decade or so following the end of the Cold War, the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the geo-political re-alignments to which they gave rise. Whether viewed from the perspective of the evolution of Turkey's domestic politics and foreign policy or from that of the ups and downs in Turkey's relations with the United

States and with the European Union, there are reasons to wonder whether Turkey may not some day come to regard NATO membership as more of an encumbrance than an asset.

## **The Foundations of Alliance**

Alignments and alliances represented a very real break with the course on which modern Turkey had been set by its founder Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s Atatürk had concentrated virtually all of his energies on domestic reform and nation-building efforts. In international affairs he was largely content to see Turkey pursue a very low key role, characterized by both isolationism and neutrality. His successor, İsmet İnönü, held fast to this approach throughout the Second World War. It was not until after the war that Turkey reluctantly abandoned neutrality in the face of immediate threats to its security and territorial integrity.

At the end of the Second World War, Joseph Stalin launched what can only be termed a political and diplomatic offensive against Turkey. He sought to gain control of the Turkish Straits and to secure the return of Turkish territories that had once briefly been part of Georgia. Egged on by his security chief and fellow Georgian, Lavrenti Beria, Stalin brought considerable pressure to bear on the Turkish government to achieve these objectives and to secure for the Soviet Union a position of influence in Turkish affairs. In the face of these pressures, the Turkish government sought the help of the United States. As a later Soviet leader, Nikita Khrushchev, was to put it in his memoirs, Stalin and Beria “succeeded in frightening the Turks right into the open arms of the Americans.”<sup>11</sup>

The response of the United States administration was both sympathetic and forthcoming. President Truman “concluded that it was vital that the Soviet Union, neither by force nor the threat of force, obtain control over Turkey. He decided, therefore, that the United States must resist, even with arms, any Soviet aggression against Turkey.”<sup>12</sup> This decision led over a period of months to the promulgation in 1947 of the Truman Doctrine, which also covered Greece and Iran. While the Turkish government welcomed the announcement of the Truman Doctrine, it was far from clear as to what the Doctrine would mean in practice given the United States’ increasing preoccupations in Western Europe and the Far East. The Turkish government, engaged in a continuing war of nerves with the Soviet Union, was looking for far more precise security guarantees than the United States appeared able or willing to give on a bilateral basis. This eventually led the Turkish government to turn its attention to the nascent North Atlantic Treaty Organization and to the binding security commitments embodied in Article 5 of its founding Treaty.





East, Turkey became the first major Muslim country to establish diplomatic relations with Israel and to play a moderate and moderating role in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The 1960s and 1970s, however, saw a series of significant rifts develop in Turkey's relationships with its NATO allies. The first of these occurred at the time of the Cuban missile crisis of 1962. While some of the details continue to be debated, it seems clear that during the Soviet-American negotiations aimed at defusing the crisis, the United States government gave tacit assurances to the Soviet Union that as part of a deal to secure the withdrawal of Soviet missiles from Cuba, the United States would withdraw the Jupiter missiles which it had recently installed in Turkey. Although the United States government at the time publicly denied the existence of such a deal, the fact was that the Jupiter missiles were removed from Turkey in April, 1963. In justifying their decision, the United States authorities argued that the Jupiter missiles were obsolete and were of dubious military value. In Turkey, however, the decision was widely interpreted as a case of the United States protecting its own security interests at the expense of Turkey's. And at the very least, "in the aftermath of the Cuban missile crisis a seed of doubt about NATO commitments was planted among the Turks."<sup>5</sup>

These doubts were given new impetus by the Cyprus crisis of 1963-64. When it became apparent that Turkey was contemplating military action to resolve the crisis, the administration of President Lyndon Johnson reacted vigorously. In what Undersecretary of State George Ball described as "the most brutal diplomatic note he had ever seen", President Johnson warned Turkey that any military action that might lead to Soviet intervention would call into question the United States' obligations to Turkey under the terms of the NATO Treaty. The note had the desired effect, of course, and Turkey abandoned any plans for military action. The episode, however, left a lot of rancour in its wake, some of it prompted by not entirely unfounded suspicions that the Greek lobby in Washington had played a major role in determining the American position. In Ankara, both the public and many politicians came to the conclusion that "neither NATO nor the United States was concerned about protecting Turkey's vital interests."<sup>6</sup> And there were widespread demonstrations calling for Turkey's withdrawal from NATO and for the withdrawal of American forces from Turkey.

Much the same story was to be repeated during the Cyprus crisis of 1974 when Turkey did actually invade and occupy the northern part of the island. The reaction of virtually all of Turkey's NATO allies was highly negative and resulted in strong condemnations. The US Congress voted an embargo on all further military assistance to Turkey. "This embargo, which was intensely supported by the vocal and important Greek-American community, remained in place until 1978 and led Ankara to suspend US operations at military installations in Turkey."<sup>7</sup> The end result, of course, was a set of tense and peculiar relationships for countries which were supposedly firm security allies within the great NATO



support from the West in the event of Soviet aggression, it would not be helped in the event of a purely regional war (f) Turkey would be deprived of the information and experience it acquired through participation in NATO, and would have no influence on the decision making of the alliance.

While this debate went on for several years and revealed significant divergences of opinion in Turkey's political, military and academic elites, it did not lead to the country's withdrawal from NATO. As one Turkish scholar put it at the

importance it had traditionally given to its relations with the Arab world, especially the Gulf states. On the one hand, the Turkish economy was hard hit by rising oil prices and the country needed all of the help it could get to surmount its economic problems; Turkey saw in the new immense wealth of the Gulf states a ready source of economic assistance which it began to pursue with consider-

prevailed throughout the early 1980s led to an evident rapprochement between Turkey and the United States, and to significant increases in American military and economic assistance to Turkey. But as the Cold War drew to a close in the second half of the decade, a new element came into play in determining Turkish attitudes towards NATO. This was the fate of Turkey's longstanding application for membership in the European Community (EC). The EC's formal rejection of Turkey's bid in December 1989 gave rise to much disappointment and bitterness in Turkey. This was accompanied by the realization that "Developments in the east had outpaced whatever meager prospects Turkey might have enjoyed in western European eyes. The rebirth of 'a Europe free and whole' pushed 'Turkey the Stepchild' to the bottom of the list of strategic priorities for western Europe."<sup>12</sup> This was a harbinger of new difficulties which Turkey would have to confront in the post-Cold War world.

### **The Post-Cold War Order**

The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, the end of the Cold War, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the disintegration of Yugoslavia all created new opportunities and challenges for Turkey. The emerging reality was nicely encapsulated in the title of a study published by two RAND scholars in 1993: *Turkey's New Geopolitics: From the Balkans to Western China*.<sup>13</sup> On the one hand, Turkey was unable to avoid various forms of renewed engagement in Balkan lands once ruled by the Ottoman Empire, thus creating new irritants in its relations with Greece. On the other hand, Turkey took the initiative to try to exercise a degree of influence in the newly independent republics of Central Asia (especially the Turkic speaking ones) and this brought it into direct competition with Iran. These new realities and concerns did not, however, entirely displace old ones which had been fundamental to Turkey's attachment to NATO.

Turkey still has a large, well armed and potentially hostile neighbour to the north in the form of the Russian Federation, the successor state of the Soviet Union. The temporary security respite which was provided by the collapse of the Soviet Union has been reversed by the retention of Russian bases in Armenia and the agreement for Russian forces to

At the same time, however, the realities of the post-Cold War world gave rise to new doubts about NATO and its reliability as a guarantor of Turkish security. As one Turkish scholar put it:

The seriousness of the instabilities and vulnerabilities in the 1990s emanating from the regions around Turkey acquire added significance against the background of the transformation that the Western alliance has undergone since 1990 in response to the elimination of the Soviet threat and the emergence of regional conflicts such as the war in the former Yugoslavia. Thus NATO is no longer the NATO of the Cold War years. More specifically, the relevance of Article 5 is very much in doubt under today's circumstances. This implies that Turkey, as any other ally on the flanks, should have less confidence than it might have had during the Cold War that the principle of collective defence would be invoked in case of aggression against it.<sup>15</sup>

These doubts became all the more serious when, to the facts of Turkey's geo-

were to arise as a result of the European Union's (EU) slow but determined efforts to develop a Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and a European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP). Turkey became profoundly uneasy about being outside the decision-making processes of the evolving CFSP/ESDP, but met with little success in its endeavours to rectify this situation. In fact, "the question of where and how Turkey should fit into the new European security architecture has been conspicuously absent from the mainstream of European discussions about post-Cold War European restructuring."<sup>20</sup> This led Turkey to stand in the way of initiatives aimed at defining and developing new forms of cooperation between NATO and the EU, while asserting that "the European pillar of NATO is not the European Union, it is the European allies."<sup>21</sup> Needless to say, Turkey's allies in the European Union were anything but amused by Turkey's rearguard actions on this front.

Another major irritant to emerge in the 1990s concerned Turkey's policies





agreements; the visits to Iran and Libya were to give rise to serious expressions of concern on the part of the United States government. On the other hand, Erbakan proposed the creation of a multilateral body, the D-8, to further economic cooperation among Turkey, Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Nigeria and Pakistan. For the rest, however, Erbakan did not significantly alter traditional Turkish foreign policy, whether in relation to the EU, the Cyprus question or northern Iraq. And he did not pursue any weakening of

The first goal is to make Turkey an integral part of Europe's unification process. Historically, geographically and economically, Turkey is a European country. It is therefore quite natural that she should become a full member of the European Union, sooner rather than later. Turkey brings the contemporary standards of democracy, secularism, free market economy, good governance and habitual regional cooperation to the threshold of the Middle East and Eurasia.<sup>31</sup>

Coming from a government with strong Islamist roots, this statement is notable for its pragmatism, its European orientation and its endorsement of secularism.

While clearly signalling its attachment to Western Europe, the JDP government was unable to avoid precipitating a crisis in Turkey's bilateral relationship with the United States. In the run-up to its war against Iraq in early 2003, the US Administration put heavy pressure on the Turkish government to allow it to station forces in Turkey so as to be able to create a second front for the assault on Iraq. After much toing and froing, and despite offers of billions of dollars in American economic assistance, the Turkish Parliament (reflecting the strong anti-war sentiment in Turkish public opinion) eventually turned down the American request. Much to its annoyance, the US Administration was obliged to make major changes to its military planning and deployments in the days immediately preceding the launch of its operations against Iraq. The resulting rift in Turkish-American relations was only partially repaired when after the war the Turkish government rather reluctantly agreed to the deployment of 10,000 Turkish troops to Iraq to assist the United States in maintaining security there. In the event, both the US-sponsored Iraqi Governing Council and the Kurds of northern Iraq vehemently protested against the idea of Turkish troops in their country and the plan was quietly dropped. The outcome proved to be something of a triumph for Prime Minister Erdogan. By making the offer, he had mollified both the United States and his own generals; by not having to carry it out, he avoided a political backlash in his own party and in Turkish public opinion.<sup>32</sup>

On the longer-term question of Turkey's continuing membership in NATO, the attitudes of the JDP government are far from clear. The government's comprehensive foreign policy statement cited above dwells at considerable length on its commitment to relations with the United States and the EU, but the references to NATO are few and incidental. Beyond an historical allusion to Turkey's entry into the alliance and a mention of Turkey's participation in NATO operations in Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan, there is nothing. This certainly contrasts sharply with the attitudes of earlier secular governments which tended to regard NATO membership as central to the achievement of their political and security objectives. This relative silence may be purely accidental or coincidental, but it could also reveal something more. In Turkey there still exists a fairly strong body of opinion which casts doubts on Prime Minister Erdogan's disavowal of the JDP's Islamist roots as little more than a tactic. "Many still suspect

that Mr. Erdogan has a 'secret Islamist agenda' which he would like to enact once he has consolidated his hold on the state [and] pushed the generals into the shade."<sup>33</sup> Only time will tell whether this is indeed the case, but if it is, there is reason to wonder whether an Islamist agenda could cohabit comfortably with NATO membership.

## **Turkish Futures**

The future of Turkey's membership in NATO will depend on a number of international security, Western European and Turkish variables. Western Europe will probably have to pass a number of tests if it is to anchor Turkey in NATO and in the West. Turkey in turn will have to pass a number of tests in its domestic politics and foreign policy orientations if it truly wants to achieve a place in Europe. Whether the will or the capacity really exists on either side of the equation to surmount existing obstacles is very much open to question.

There seems to be little doubt that the West, and Western Europe in particular continue to value Turkey as an ally. In the post-Cold War era "Turkey's role as the south eastern flank of NATO in preventing Soviet expansion was replaced by its capacity to act as a stabilizing force in an inherently tumultuous region."<sup>34</sup> As a force for stability Turkey is variously described as a buffer between Europe and the Middle East, as a pivotal player in a zone of conflict encompassing the Balkans, the trans-Caucasus and the Middle East or as the meeting place of Europe, Central Asia and the Middle East. Regardless of how the geo-political configuration is described, Turkey is regarded as an asset to NATO in regional terms. More broadly, Turkey serves Western interests in two important ways. First, the United States in particular has found that having the

will be less automatic and more conditional, with potentially negative consequences for Turkish interests.<sup>37</sup>

These broadly based concerns have, if anything, been reinforced by episodes and crises in Turkey's relations with the United States and with Western European countries over the last decade. Indeed, the point would seem to have been reached where, if NATO is to remain the key institution linking Turkey to the West, a "vigorous reassertion of NATO's commitment to Turkish security will be required to stem Ankara's fears about erosion of security guarantees."<sup>38</sup> But are such new commitments likely to be forthcoming? The newly enlarged NATO of 2005 is unlikely to be able or willing to offer them to Turkey for fear, among other things, of precipitating demands for similar, more explicit guarantees from its newer members.

Even more central to Turkey's current foreign policy objectives is the fate of its application for EU membership. The EU has set out a number of criteria which Turkey must meet as a prelude to formal negotiations and eventual membership. These criteria cover areas such as economic reform and development, human rights and good governance, the treatment of the Kurdish minority and the role of the military in Turkish politics. In its first year in office the JDP government of Prime Minister Erdogan embarked on a wide ranging programme of reforms in order to meet the EU criteria and "has made a splendid start in its effort to reverse decades of corruption, economic mess and authoritarian abuse of power."<sup>39</sup> The process and implementation of reform has, however, been slowed down due to the resistance of Turkish elites reluctant to see their powers and influence infringed and reduced. These elites include not only the generals, but also an assortment of police chiefs, prosecutors, judges, political bosses and press barons. It remains to be seen how successful they will be in their rearguard resistance to the government. What is already clear, however, is the somewhat paradoxical nature of the situation. At the behest of the EU the Turkish government is seeking to curb the powers and influence of elites which have traditionally been the strongest defenders of Turkey's secularism, of its Western orientation and of its membership in NATO. If the government is successful, what will be the longer term consequences of that success for Turkish politics and Turkey's foreign policy?

There is, of course, a much broader question which needs to be addressed in assessing Turkey's prospects for admission to the EU. It is essentially a civilizational question. Even if Turkey were able to meet all of the political, economic and technical criteria established by the EU, should/would it be allowed to accede to membership given all that separates it from Europe? For advocates of Turkish membership the answer to this question is unambiguous. In an article published in early 2004, *The Economist* put it this way:

Turkey has already been accepted as a potential candidate. To reverse that now would send a dreadful signal to pro-western and pro-democratic

forces in other Muslim countries. It would be a geo-strategic error of historic proportions.<sup>40</sup>

But opponents of Turkish membership are no less categorical in their views. Although European memories of the Ottoman Empire and semi-mythical images of “the Turk” have largely been consigned to the history books, the sense that Turkey is essentially foreign to Europe is alive and well. It came out very explicitly in some well publicized statements by two of Western Europe’s elder statesmen, who no doubt felt that they could speak frankly since they were no longer bound by the discipline of office. In an interview with *Le Monde* in November 2002, former French President Valéry Giscard d’Estaing said that: Turkey’s capital is not in Europe, 95 per cent of its population lives outside Europe, it has a different culture and way of life, it is not a European country. He concluded that Turkey’s admission to the EU would mean the end of Europe. Giscard d’Estaing’s views were to be echoed subsequently by former German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt.<sup>41</sup> These kinds of assessments both give rise to and are buttressed by worst case scenarios of what Europe might have to cope with if Turkey were admitted to the EU. Here is one example:

Particularly worrisome is the possibility that Turkey’s military once again take power, especially if it feels the country is threatened by resurgent Islamists. Should an Islamist takeover and coup occur, EU leaders would find themselves facing an impossible choice between endorsing a military takeover or accepting an Islamist regime in their largest member state.<sup>42</sup>

When combined with the perennial bogey of massive Turkish migration westwards, these sorts of fears may well be sufficient to ensure that Turkey is never admitted to the EU. The EU’s hesitant and highly conditioned decision of December 2004 to enter into formal negotiations with Turkey in late 2005 does not fundamentally alter this reality.

For a variety of political and economic reasons, Turkey has “tolerated a constant barrage of criticism and various rejections from the Europeans.”<sup>43</sup> If, however, it should become patently evident that Turkey’s longstanding bid to join the EU is bound to fail, the secularist forces which have long sustained the



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10. V. Mastny and R. Craig Nation, *Turkey between East and West*, p. 57.
11. On these and other problems associated with Turkey's membership in the OIC, see Ekmededdin Ishanoglu, "Turkey in the Organization of the Islamic Conference" in Kemal Karpat (ed.), *Turkish Foreign Policy: Recent Developments* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1996) pp. 78-99.
12. V. Mastny and R. Craig Nation, *Turkey between East and West*, p. 74.
13. G. Fuller and I. Lesser, *Turkey's New Geopolitics: From the Balkans to Western China* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993).
14. B.A. Robertson (ed.), *The Middle East and Europe: The Power Deficit* (London: Routledge, 1998) p. 164.
15. D.B. Sezer, "Turkish Security Challenges in the 1990s" in S. Blank (ed.), *Mediterranean Security in the Coming Millennium* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 1999) p. 264.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 267-268.
17. See James Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1995) pp. 283-285.
18. Y. Celik, *Contemporary Turkish Foreign Policy*, p. 77.
19. I. Lesser, "Beyond 'Bridge or Barrier': Turkey's Evolving Security Relationship with the West" in A. Makovsky and S. Sazani, *Turkey's New World* (Washington: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2000) p. 206.
20. H. Bagci, "Turkey and Europe: Security Issues" in M.S. Radu (ed.), *Dangerous Neighbourhood: Contemporary Issues in Turkey's Foreign Relations*







## Biographical Note

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**Louis Delvoie** was educated at Loyola College, the University of Toronto, McGill

