

Turkey in NATO

An Ambivalent Ally

Louis A. Delvoie

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Occasional Paper Series

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.

This paper tells the story of Turkey's often-troubled relationship with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, of which it has been a member since 1952. At several points in that long history, Turkey's policies, postures and actions have led its allies to wonder if they had been right to welcome it as a partner in European security. But Louis Delvoie's analysis reminds us that there has been every bit as much doubt on the other side: Cyprus, détente, post-Cold War changes in NATO's doctrine and direction, the rise of political Islam, two wars in Iraq – all have prompted profound questioning of the alliance by important elements of the Turkish political class. In his view the complex interplay among domestic forces, regional pressures, the continuing impasse over Cyprus, and Turkey's controversial bid for EU membership makes Ankara's continuing commitment to the alliance less certain now than ever before.

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Director, QCIR

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Turkey in NATO: An Ambivalent Ally

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.”¹¹

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.”¹² 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.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, securing admission to NATO became the single most important objective of Turkish foreign policy. Not only would membership in the alliance go a long way towards allaying Turkey's immediate security concerns, it would also represent a significant step in Turkey's long-term plan to become more closely associated with Europe and the West.³ Recognizing that American support would be key to the success of its candidacy, the Turkish government not only lobbied the US Administration but also dispatched a brigade of troops to fight alongside the United States in the Korean War. (Turkey eventually sent a total of 25,000 troops to Korea and suffered heavy casualties.) This calculation proved correct as the United States became instrumental in overcoming the resistance of countries such as Britain, Norway and Denmark which argued against Turkish membership in NATO on the grounds that Turkey was neither an Atlantic nor a democratic country.

Despite the reservations of some European countries Turkey (along with Greece) was admitted to NATO in 1952. For Turkey this represented both a security guarantee and the assurance of an ongoing flow of Western economic and military assistance, which it badly needed. For many Turks it was also "a sign that Turkey had finally been fully accepted by the western nations on equal terms."⁴ The advantages for Turkey were fairly evident, but the advantages for the alliance as a whole were no less substantial. With Turkey firmly aligned with the West, the Soviet Union had to deploy significant forces to its southern front to the detriment of the size of forces it could muster on the central front against Western Europe. The assurance that any Soviet attack on Western Europe would generate armed intervention by Turkey became one more element, and a not insignificant one, in NATO's deterrence posture vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. Turkey's membership in the alliance also provided the West with a solid political and military base not far removed from the all-important oil fields of the Middle East, a base from which Western countries would exercise influence in the region and from which they could resist the spread of Soviet influence. In short, Turkey's admission to NATO could at the start be seen as a win-win situation for all concerned, but it was not to prove problem-free.

Cuban and Cypriot Intrusions

The balance of the 1950s saw a steady strengthening of Turkey's ties to NATO and its member states. The United States established bases in Turkey and by the end of the decade the two countries were linked by no less than 56 agreements. Turkey became a founding member of the Baghdad Pact and subsequently of the Central Treaty Organization, thus contributing yet further to the success of the Western policy of containing the Soviet Union. In the Middle

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."⁵

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."⁶ 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."⁷ 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

tent. These tensions were compounded by the fact that the two military coups which had occurred in Turkey during this period (1960 and 1971) were greeted with dismay in most western capitals.

Détente, Doubts and Diversification

These episodic tensions and crises in Turkey's relations with its NATO allies were more than sufficient to foster serious doubts among Turks about the value of an alliance which was perceived as insensitive to Turkey's interests, unappreciative of Turkey's contribution to the common cause and all too often prone to side with Greece against Turkey. By the late 1960s, another factor came into play. The slow emergence of détente in East-West relations tended to eliminate the sense of imminent threat from the Soviet Union which had first prompted Turkey's pursuit of membership in NATO. All of these factors set the scene for a lively debate in Turkey over whether or not the country should withdraw from NATO, given that after 1969 any member state was entitled to do so upon giving one year's notice. Whereas NATO membership had always been contested by a variety of leftist and fringe elements in Turkish society, this time the debate engaged distinguished academics, leading politicians and retired senior military officers.

The main arguments put forward at the time in favour of Turkish withdrawal from NATO can be summarized as follows⁸: (a) The dismantling of American military bases in Turkey would reduce the country's exposure to nuclear attack (b) Turkey would not risk involvement in conflicts outside its own region, or ones in which it had little direct interest (c) Turkey could have a much more independent foreign policy, including more freedom of action in dealing with the Cyprus problem (d) A major impediment would be removed to Turkey's development of closer relations with many Arab countries (e) There would be an improvement in the domestic political climate, since leftist anti-Americanism would lose its target (f) The United States would come to Turkey's assistance in the event of a Soviet attack whether or not it was a member of NATO; as was the case of France, the United States had too much at stake in Turkey to allow it to be occupied by the Soviet Union.

The principal arguments put forward against Turkish withdrawal from NATO can be summarized as follows: (a) Turkey would be deprived of much of the economic and military assistance it received from the West (b) American military aid to Turkey would be discontinued while similar aid to Greece might be stepped up to Turkey's disadvantage (c) The Soviet Union would try to exploit Turkey's isolation and would be the principal beneficiary of Turkey's withdrawal (d) The Turkish armed forces might become paralyzed by a shortage of spare parts for military equipment of Western origin (e) While Turkey might still receive

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 time:

Despite all of these objections to the nature and implications of the Atlantic alliance, the other real alternative – a return to Kemalist neutrality – is judged unrealistic or harmful. It would jeopardize the nation's security, would endanger economic development, and would at least slow Turkey down on her road toward the fundamental goal of becoming an equal member of the Western society of nations.⁹

That said, dissatisfaction with Turkey's relations with NATO and the West, did lead the country to take advantage of emerging international realities to explore new options in its foreign policy in the 1970s.

The climate of *détente* prevailing in East-West relations allowed Turkey to be more receptive to overtures from the Soviet Union, which now appeared willing to admit past mistakes and to apologize for the threatening attitude it had adopted towards Turkey in the last years of the Stalin era. Relations between the two countries improved steadily, marked by the exchange of numerous official visits and the conclusion of several bilateral agreements. Just at the time that the United States, pre-occupied by the Vietnam war, began to cut back on its programme of economic assistance to Turkey, the Soviet Union began a programme of its own. This Soviet programme took on more substance with the passage of every year. "By 1978, the Soviet Union was aiding forty-four different development projects in Turkey and by the end of the decade Turkey received more Soviet economic assistance than any country in the third world except Cuba."¹⁰ Whatever other interpretations may be put on this reality, it seems fair to say that it created an extraordinary anomaly. Although a member of NATO, Turkey was receiving generous economic assistance from the one country that the alliance was dedicated to opposing and resisting. Nothing perhaps better underlined the unique position which Turkey occupied within NATO at the time. The extent of the anomaly was only partially diminished by the cooling in Soviet-Turkish relations which occurred following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in late 1979.

New international realities combined with Turkey's disenchantment with its NATO allies, especially over the Cyprus question, led Turkey to further diversify its foreign policy in the direction of the Arab and Muslim worlds. The Arab oil embargo put in place after the Arab-Israeli war of 1973 and the steep increases in the price of oil which ensued led Turkey to re-assess the relatively low level of

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 considerable success. On the other hand, the oil crises and price hikes of the 1970s allowed Arab countries for the first time to exercise a degree of political and economic influence on the world scene; this too was not lost on Turkey which saw the political advantages of closer relations with Arab countries from which it had long been at least partially estranged. In both the economic and political spheres, Turkey saw in its openings to the Arab world a means of decreasing its dependence on the West.

In the aftermath of its occupation of northern Cyprus in 1974, and the almost unanimous condemnation of its action by NATO allies, Turkey cast its foreign policy net wider still in search of support for its position and for recognition of the new Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. Portraying the plight of the Turkish-Cypriots as that of a Muslim minority which had suffered grievously at the hands of a non-Muslim majority, the Turkish government sought to enlist the sympathy and support of the Muslim world as a whole through the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). In pursuit of this strategy, the Turkish government decided in 1978 that Turkey should become a full member of the OIC. In the event the move proved less useful than the government had hoped, since many Arab states valued their relations with Greece and were lukewarm towards Turkey because of its relations with Israel and its moderate position on the Arab-Israeli conflict. While expressing its solidarity with the Turkish Cypriot community, the OIC did not extend official recognition or membership to the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.

If the benefits to Turkey of OIC membership were modest, the costs were real. On the domestic front it created political controversy and opposition from those who contended that Turkey was constitutionally secular and should not join a religion-based international organization. In foreign affairs it obliged Turkey to tread some very fine lines in an organization (most of whose members were non-aligned and/or deeply hostile to the West) which tended to view NATO as an arch symbol of Western domination.¹¹ This reality tended once again to underline Turkey's unique and somewhat anomalous position as the only OIC country to be a member of the alliance.

All of the efforts which Turkey made in the 1970s to diversify its foreign relations and to find new partners were aimed partly at reducing its dependence on the West, which was perceived in Turkey as being unsympathetic or inimical to the country's interests. This did not, however, prevent Turkey from once again asserting its solidarity with its NATO allies in the aftermath of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The deepening chill in East-West relations which

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."¹² 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*.¹³ 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 return to Georgia. In short, Turkey once again has Russian forces on its border.¹⁴

These security concerns merely re-inforced the other main virtue which Turkey saw in NATO membership: it remained the sole institutional expression of Turkey's western orientation and of its desire to become an integral part of the West.

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.¹⁵

These doubts became all the more serious when, to the facts of Turkey's geopolitical situation, were added conspiracy theories, which claimed that Greece was mounting a coordinated effort in cooperation with Syria, Armenia and Iran to encircle Turkey.¹⁶

Many of these concerns were reflected in Turkey's response to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990. In an effort to demonstrate Turkey's continuing importance to the West in the post-Cold War era, President Turgut Ozal decided that Turkey should be one of the first countries to join the US-led anti-Iraq coalition (a move reminiscent of Turkey's dispatch of troops to Korea in 1950). And despite the costs to the Turkish economy and severe criticism from opposition parties and from the general public, Ozal remained stalwart in his support for the coalition. This earned him immense gratitude and financial assistance from the US administration.¹⁷ The response of Turkey's other allies in NATO was, however, far less reassuring.

Most of Turkey's NATO allies had not offered to bolster the Turkish military to prepare for the possibility of an Iraqi attack. While the Dutch had sent units of modern Patriot ground-to-air missiles, for example, Belgium, Italy and Germany merely sent outdated and lightly armed warplanes that were already ear-marked for retirement.¹⁸

The reticence or reluctance displayed by some of Turkey's European allies, especially Germany, at the time of the Gulf crisis and war raised yet more concerns regarding the predictability of NATO security guarantees, and those concerns would continue to shape Turkish attitudes for the balance of the decade.¹⁹

As the decade unfolded, new uncertainties were to emerge in Turkey's relations with its NATO allies, especially its European allies. The first of these

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."²⁰ 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."²¹ 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 and attitudes towards the Kurds, both internally and externally. The campaigns of successive Turkish governments to repress secessionist movements among Turkish Kurds involved massive human rights violations by the security forces, including the wholesale destruction of villages and the displacement of populations. The chorus of objections to these actions first engaged Kurdish communities and human rights organizations in Western Europe, but was soon joined by European governments, especially those of Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands which took retaliatory measures against Turkey. The US Congress also became increasingly critical of Turkey's human rights violations, and under the influence of Greek and American lobbies, blocked the sale of American helicopters and frigates to Turkey.²² These criticisms and actions gave rise to profound resentment among Turks for whom the Kurdish question is a vital matter of national unity and territorial integrity. These resentments were if anything intensified by the West's support for the Kurds of northern Iraq after the Gulf War of 1991. The creation of a more or less autonomous Kurdish entity in northern Iraq was anathema in Ankara, where it was seen as an inducement to secession by Turkey's Kurdish minority. In the rather subdued terms of one Turkish scholar: "Turkey and Europe view the northern Iraq issue through different lenses. While Iraq poses foreign policy, security and economic issues for Turkey, it is more a human rights concern for Europe."²³

Given the doubts and disenchantment which Turkey harboured about its relations with the West in the 1990s, it was not surprising that it once again set forth on the path of diversification. On the economic front, Turkey was instrumental in efforts to give a new lease on life to the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) which linked it to Iran and Pakistan, and which in 1992 was expanded to include six newly independent Central Asian republics, as well as Afghanistan. Turkey also displayed an interest in establishing regional cooperation arrangements which included Russia and thus became a sponsor of

regional organizations such as the Black Sea Cooperation Naval Task Group whose membership consisted of Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Ukraine, Russia and Turkey.²⁴

In both domestic and foreign policy terms, the most controversial of these diversification initiatives was the decision to develop much closer defence relations with Israel. Motivated by its dwindling trust in NATO and concerned by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in the region, the Turkish military pressed the government to enter into a series of agreement with Israel covering exchanges of intelligence, defence production and military training.²⁵ "Both Israeli and Turkish defence officials maintained that the close military and defence cooperation between the two countries was not directed at any third party, but there could be little doubt that they intended to send a message to regional 'troublemakers' such as Iran, Syria and Iraq with which Turkey had difficult if not bad relations."²⁶ These moves by the Turkish government elicited the strongest possible criticism in the Arab world and in the OIC, as well as among opposition parties in Turkey. That successive Turkish governments did not give in to this opposition and continued to intensify defence relations with Israel was perhaps the strongest available evidence of the extent to which Turkey's military establishment had come to lose confidence in the security guarantees embodied in Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty.

The Islamist Surge

These developments in Turkey's foreign and security policy were paralleled by the slow but steady emergence of a new force in Turkish domestic politics: the Islamists, as represented by the Welfare Party led by Necmettin Erbakan. Although invariably described as "moderate", the Welfare Party consistently adopted anti-Western positions; it sided almost automatically with countries such as Iraq, Iran and Libya which had been the object of Western criticism or sanctions. While advocating solidarity with the Islamic world, Erbakan betrayed a desire to see Turkey lead and even dominate it rather than play a secondary role in a Western led world order.²⁷ While in opposition, Erbakan called for Turkey's withdrawal from NATO as part of a broader plan for the creation of a new Muslim world order which would include an Islamic UN, an Islamic NATO, a common Islamic currency and an Islamic Common Market.

Such statements and positions emanating from the leader of an avowedly Islamist party were anything but astonishing. They did, however, take on a new significance when Erbakan became Prime Minister of Turkey in June 1996. Would they now become government policy? In fact, once in power Erbakan's Islamic initiatives proved far more modest. On the one hand, they consisted of visits to a number of Muslim countries in pursuit of economic cooperation

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 Turkey's relations with NATO, no doubt in deference to the views and influence of the Turkish military.²⁸

What was perhaps most unusual about Erbakan's time in office was his policy towards Israel. Although he had been highly critical of the growing ties between Turkey and Israel while in opposition, Erbakan did nothing to change or reverse them once he became Prime Minister. On the contrary, he signed a 600 million dollar contract with Israel for the modernization of Turkish combat aircraft, and showed himself willing to help consolidate the bilateral relationship.²⁹ In so doing, Erbakan was not only bowing to the wishes of the Turkish military, but was also operating at direct cross-purposes with his intention to develop closer relations with Arab and Muslim countries. As one writer put it:

In terms of its relations with the Arab and Islamic worlds, the military has backed Turkey into a cul-de-sac because of the close relationship it has forged with Israel.... Whether intended or not, Turkey is now regarded in the Arab world as having abandoned this relative neutrality in favour of a de facto military alliance with Israel.³⁰

The end of Turkey's first Islamist led government in 1997 coincided with a meeting of the OIC at which Turkey was severely censured for its relations with Israel. This somewhat anomalous outcome was testament not only to the continuing influence of the Turkish military over elected governments, but also to their determination to find supplements or alternatives to NATO to guarantee Turkey's security.

There were significant differences between the first and second Islamist led governments in Turkey. Whereas the Welfare Party had included Islamist ideals and objectives in its platform in the 1990s, the Justice and Development Party (JDP) seemed intent on putting some distance between itself and its Islamist roots during the election campaign of 2002. Rather the JDP put the emphasis on creating jobs and fighting corruption. Once it came to office with a clear majority in Parliament on November 2002, the JDP and its leader Recep Tayyip Erdogan embarked on an ambitious reform programme intended not only to improve the economy, but also to improve Turkey's prospects for gaining admission to the EU. Indeed, the JDP government made clear its foreign policy orientations in a comprehensive statement issued by the Foreign Ministry in 2003. In listing its objectives, it stated that:

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.³¹

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.³²

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."³³ 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."³⁴ 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 support of a Muslim government and army in diplomatic and peacekeeping endeavours in Muslim countries is an important political as well as military asset.³⁵ This has been demonstrated over the years in Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan. Second, as the West continues to try to improve its often difficult relations with Muslim countries, against the backdrop of the war on terrorism, there would seem to be little doubt that "if any country is going to prove that Islam can coexist with modernity and democracy, it will almost certainly be Turkey."³⁶ In short, Turkey continues to have much to offer the West.

The question now is, what is the West as represented by NATO and the EU prepared to pay to secure what Turkey has to offer? In the security sphere, there would seem to be little doubt that Turkey no longer has the confidence it once had in NATO.

The twin processes of NATO enlargement and adaptation, in particular, raise issues of concern to Ankara...there is considerable and not unreasonable concern that in a changing NATO, security guarantees

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

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."³⁸ 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."³⁹ 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.⁴⁰

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.⁴¹ 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.⁴²

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.”⁴³ 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 country’s Western orientation may find themselves challenged and overwhelmed by other forces which have emerged in the internal debate over Turkey’s identity. On the one hand, there are the pan-Turkish nationalists who want to see the country break out of its isolation by re-engaging with the Turkic world from the Caucasus to North Western China. On the other hand, there are the Islamists for whom the preferred foreign policy orientation is a deepening and broadening of Turkey’s relations with the countries of the Middle East and of the Muslim world at large.⁴⁴ While neither of these alternatives would offer Turkey anything vaguely approaching the economic and other advantages it might

hope to derive from EU membership, they may in due course seem attractive to a country and an electorate which see themselves as having been constantly rebuffed, if not humiliated, by Western Europe.

Conclusion

Turkey's long and troubled history as a member of NATO could slowly but surely be coming to an end. New forces in domestic politics are challenging the elites which were the backbone of Turkey's commitment to the alliance. The evolution and enlargement of NATO in the post-Cold War era, combined with a series of specific incidents in Turkey's relations with the United States and its European allies, have all led Turkey to harbour ever growing doubts about the reliability of the alliance's security guarantees. The realities of Turkey's politics and economics, in conjunction with Western European concerns and attitudes, can only lead to the conclusion that EU membership for Turkey is at best a distant dream, if not a mirage. In the meantime Turkey finds itself daily challenged by the realities of its region(s), replete with new dangers and opportunities. Against this background it would be passing strange if Turkey did not at some time come to re-examine the fundamentals of its foreign policy, and perhaps conclude that NATO membership was more of an encumbrance than an asset in the pursuit of new foreign policy objectives.

Notes

1. Quoted in V. Mastny and R. Craig Nation (eds.), *Turkey between East and West* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996) p. 45.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 46.
3. B. Rubin and K. Kirisci (eds.), *Turkey in World Politics* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999) p. 2.
4. Y. Celik, *Contemporary Turkish Foreign Policy* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1999) p. 37.
5. V. Mastny and R. Craig Nation, *Turkey between East and West*, p. 54.
6. Y. Celik, *Contemporary Turkish Foreign Policy*, p. 49.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 51.
8. The next two paragraphs draw directly on F.A. Vali, *Bridges across the Bosphorus: The Foreign Policy of Turkey* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1971) pp. 157-162.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 163-164.

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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* (Philadelphia: Transaction Publishers, 2003) p. 53.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
22. H. Barkey and G. Fuller, *Turkey's Kurdish Question* (Lanham, MD: Rowan and Littlefield, 1998) pp. 161-162 and B. Rubin and K. Kirisci, *Turkey in World Politics*, p. 122.
23. H. Bagci, "Turkey and Europe", p. 52.
24. G.M. Winrow, *Turkey and the Caucasus* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2000) pp. 58-59.
25. B. Rubin and K. Kirisci, *Turkey in World Politics*, p. 118.
26. J. Salt, "Turkey's Military 'Democracy'" in *Current History*, Vol. 98, No. 625, February 1999, p. 76.
27. H. Barkey and G. Fuller, *Turkey's Kurdish Question*, pp. 104-105.
28. P. Robins, "Turkish Foreign policy Under Erbakan" in *Survival*, Vol. 39, No. 2, Summer 1997, pp. 83-93.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 84.
30. J. Salt, "Turkey's Military 'Democracy'", p. 78.

31. This twelve page policy statement can be found on the web site of the Turkish Foreign Ministry at www.mfa.gov.tr
32. See Gwynne Dyer, "Clever Turkish PM lets time do his fighting for him" in *The Kingston Whig-Standard*, November 13, 2003, p. 9.
33. "Turkey: A revolution, of sorts" in *The Economist*, August 2, 2003, p. 46. These suspicions may well be re-inforced by Mr. Erdogan's far more critical attitude towards Israel in recent months. See "Turkey and Israel: A Strategic Friendship Cools" in *The Economist*, June 26, 2004, p. 52.
34. Y. Celik, *Contemporary Turkish Foreign Policy*, p. 114.
35. B. Rubin and K. Kirisci, *Turkey in World Politics*, p. 137.
36. S. Kinza, "Dreaming in Turkish" in *World Policy Journal*, Vol. XVIII, No. 3, Fall 2001, p. 78.
37. I. Lessor, "Beyond 'Bridge or Barrier'", p. 216.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 220.
39. "Turkey's Reform: A worrying hiccup" in *The Economist*, October 4, 2003, p. 50.
40. "Turkey: The importance of backing Erdogan" in *The Economist*, January 31, 2004, p. 15.
41. M. Teitelbaum and P. Martin, "Is Turkey Ready for Europe" in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 82, No. 3, 2003, p. 98. These statements by Giscard d'Estaing and Schmidt are a reflection of the strong opposition to Turkish EU membership which exists not only in France and Germany, but also in the Netherlands and Austria. See "Turkey and the European Union: The Unwelcome Guests" in *The Economist*, December 11, 2004, pp. 48-49.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 111.
43. Y. Celik, *Contemporary Turkish Foreign Policy*, p. 116.
44. See F. Halliday, *Nation and Religion in the Middle East* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000) pp. 187-188.

Biographical Note

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