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Turkey and the Transformation of NATO

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ABSTRACT

Recent years have made it clear that NATO is going through a transformation process; Turkey will be one of the allies most affected by this process. Both the future of NATO and Turkey's perception of NATO membership will be at stake unless the allies can reach consensus on the core strategic issues of the transformation agenda. Analysts urgently need to come up with convincing answers to the following questions: In which ways has NATO's transformation been going through? Why does Turkey feel uneasy with some aspects of the process? What steps should Turkey take in order to ensure that the transformation of the Alliance is viewed positively at home?



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CONTENTS

A short history of NATO's transformation | 4

Turkey's approach towards NATO's transformation | 4

The Future of the Alliance | 9

Turkey's Limits and Options: Some Policy Recommendations | 10

TURKEY AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF NATO

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As recent years have demonstrated, doubts over NATO's credibility have been on the rise in Turkey. Critical questions in this regard involve the ways in which NATO's transformation is being handled; the reasons why Turkey has begun to feel uneasy with some aspects of this process; and the consideration of what Turkey can and should do to ensure that the transformation of the alliance is viewed positively at home. Both the future of NATO and Turkey's perception of membership will be at stake unless the allies can reach consensus on the core strategic issues of the transformation agenda, such as threat definitions, the enlargement process, the war in Afghanistan, NATO's role in the Black Sea region, NATO's relations with Russia, EU-NATO cooperation, the installment of missile defense shields in central and eastern Europe, and so on. As the transformation struggles forward, Turkey will be too valuable an ally to lose, given the fact that the specter of civilizational clashes has increased dramatically in the post-9/11 era. In the process leading to the election of the new Secretary General, Turkey played a key role in strengthening the point that the personality of the Secretary General would not only affect the end result of the war in Afghanistan but also the image of the alliance across the Islamic world. Turkey's input and involvement in NATO in the new era is vital: key factors in ensuring its continuance include understanding how best to handle the transformation process and what Turkey can do to manage the transformation strategically.

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NATO as the 'European collective defense organization' has gradually transformed itself into the 'global collective security organization' performing military and political functions simultaneously.

A short history of NATO's transformation

Even though the initial *raison d'être* of NATO was to help secure the territorial integrity of its members against the Soviet threat, the alliance performed other functions as well. NATO symbolized the togetherness of the nations that embrace liberal-democratic norms at home and abroad; it helped legitimize the presence of the United States as a security actor in Europe, and it served to put Germany down so that it could never again pose a serious challenge to security in western Europe. NATO has long offered a security blanket under which European allies could intensify their supranational integration process and turn the EU into a Kantian security community.¹ And following the evaporation of the Soviet threat, the alliance has continued to preserve its relevance. During this process, the number of members has increased to 28, and the alliance has adopted new strategic concepts and missions. NATO as the 'European collective defense organization' has gradually transformed itself into the 'global collective security organization' performing military and political functions simultaneously.

As the strategic documents adopted in 1991 and 1999 demonstrate, in addition to its traditional Article-5 missions,² NATO has increasingly adopted non-Article-5 missions, such as intervening in intra-state conflicts, doing crisis-management activities, aiding other regional organizations in their peace operations, dealing with cyber-terrorism, and fighting global/transnational terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. With its latest 'Operation Allied Protector,' NATO now takes action against piracy and armed robbery at sea. During this process of change, the Allied Command for Transformation was established and the NATO Response Force was created with a view to improving NATO's expeditionary war-making capabilities. Further, institutional relations were developed with key partners such as Russia and Ukraine and key regions such as the Mediterranean and the Gulf.³

Turkey's approach towards NATO's transformation

Three fundamental concerns have become important in shaping Turkey's response to the transformation of the alliance in the post-Cold War era. First, Turkey has been concerned with the ways in which this process would impact the continuation of the

1. Robert Kagan, "Power and Weakness Why the United States and Europe See the world differently," *Policy Review*, 2002, <http://www.hoover.org/publications/policyreview/3460246.html>

2. Such missions concern NATO's commitment to territorial integrity and defense of its members in the face of conventional state-to-state attacks.

3. While the Mediterranean Dialogue aimed at improving the security cooperation with the littoral states of the Mediterranean Sea, the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative aimed at the same thing with the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council.

alliance's commitment to Turkish security, particularly in the absence of the Soviet threat. Second, Turkey has been anxious to see whether the process would erode the credentials of Turkey's western/European identity. Third, Turkey has been concerned with the possibility of whether the process would negatively impact the country's evolving cooperative relations with neighbors, particularly Russia.

Security

Today, there is an intra-alliance consensus that contemporary threats concern transnational terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, drug trafficking, organized crime, cyber-terrorism, the spreading of epidemics, piracy, environmental pollution, and the lack of good governance in failed or weak states. From the contemporary perspective, the maintenance of standing mass armies in anticipation of conventional territorial attacks no longer serves to address today's global and soft security challenges. The old strategies of deterrence and containment do not suffice in dealing with the asymmetrical threats posed by non-state actors. This consensus, however, does not relieve Turkey of anxiety regarding the question of whether NATO's transformation will erode its traditional territorial/nuclear security commitments. Two occasions in the recent past appear to have led Turkish decision-makers to doubt whether the European members of the alliance continue to view Turkey's territorial defense as part of their responsibilities. Both took place in the context of Turkey's proximity to Iraq. First, although in 1991 and 2003 Turkey asked NATO to deploy early warning systems and Patriot missiles to Turkish territory against the possibility of an Iraqi attack, some European members of the alliance initially hesitated to respond to Turkey's demands positively. Second, the reluctance of some western European members of the alliance to recognize the PKK as a terrorist organization or to commit to ending the PKK's activities in their territories has worried Turkey. As long as Turkish public opinion remains convinced that the PKK owes its existence, at least in part, to support coming from European countries, Turkey's commitment to NATO will be bound to decrease in the years to come.⁴

Turkey has signed on to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and has thus far adopted a position of non-nuclearization in its foreign policy. However, the changing nature of regional politics in the Middle East in the wake of the latest war in Iraq might pose challenges in this regard. For example, Iran's nuclear ambitions raise strong concerns that it may acquire the technology to produce nuclear weapons. It is no secret that

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4. *Milliyet*, 24 March 2007, 87 % of Turkish people believe that the main reason behind PKK's resilience is foreign support.

Turkish decision-makers will find it hard to resist domestic calls for nuclearization if NATO prevaricates in offering a full nuclear commitment to Turkey.

other countries in the region might then follow suit. Turkish decision-makers will find it hard to resist domestic calls for nuclearization if NATO prevaricates in offering a full nuclear commitment to Turkey.

Another factor fueling Turkey's doubts concerns the lack of a common strategic understanding around which all NATO members stand united. Divisions among the allies have become crystal-clear in the post-Iraq war era. For example, while the Central and Eastern European allies view NATO as a traditional security organization united against Russia and serving to minimize the strategic influence of France and Germany, the United States values NATO as a tool-kit to utilize in the materialization of its global security interests. For their part, the western European allies value NATO to the extent that it helps the EU develop its own security capabilities.⁵

This intra-alliance dissent recently became conspicuous, as the allies found it hard to coalesce around a common position concerning either NATO's enlargement to include Ukraine and Georgia on the one hand, or the installment of missile defense shields in the territories of Poland and the Czech Republic on the other. Whereas the United States and the central and eastern European allies adopted a supportive line, the western European allies tip-toed a fine line to avoid provoking further Russian belligerence. Despite the assurances given by the United States that NATO's enlargement would not aim at containing Russia and that the installment of a missile defense shield in Eastern Europe would mainly target the potential Iranian threat, key western European allies could not restrain themselves from sharing Russia's vehement opposition to these initiatives.

During the Cold War era, Turkey's relations with NATO revolved around Turkey's commitment to European security and the alliance's commitment to Turkey's security in the face of a common Soviet threat. This finely-balanced equation has become difficult to maintain in the post Cold War era, given that the European allies' need to rely on Turkey's security cooperation has begun to decrease in the absence of the Soviet threat, and the fact that Turkey's security has begun to be affected more by Middle Eastern than European developments. Whereas Ankara has continued to perceive itself under conventional security threats and valued NATO mainly for its Article-5 commitments, the European members of the alliance have begun to enjoy the peace dividend of the end of the Cold War and have taken utmost care not to get involved in non-European contingencies.

Turkey has long valued membership in NATO for another reason, namely that NATO's multilateral platforms enabled her to experience a relationship of equals with the United States. Yet in this regard also, Turkey has grown increasingly discontented with the US's unilateral policies over the last decade. Based on their experiences in Kosovo, the Americans appear to have drawn the conclusion that doing wars by committee, i.e. through NATO, decreases the operational capabilities of the US army. Decisions are taken slowly and non-American soldiers are not on a par with US soldiers in terms of their capacity to fight high-tech wars. The fact that former US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld argued in 2003 that from that time forward missions should determine the coalitions, rather than the reverse, could be seen as a harbinger of Turkey's diminishing power to shape US policies through NATO. The unilateral foreign policy stance of the Bush administration certainly discouraged the European allies from investing their security in NATO. It is no coincidence that the European allies sped up their efforts to endow the EU with foreign, security and defense policy capabilities during the Bush era.

Identity

Paradoxically, as the western European allies have begun to value NATO less and resist Turkey's EU membership more, Turkey's attachment to the alliance from an identity-related perspective has increased.⁶ Turkey has been very much against the idea that the European Union replace NATO as the key security organization in Europe, given the fact that the European Security and Defense Policy does not include Turkey as a full member of the European security architecture.⁷

Turkey sees France's reintegration into NATO's integrated military command as a welcome development, for it symbolizes the continuing relevance of NATO as the most important security organization in Europe and beyond. However, Turkey will certainly be less capable of shaping the details of EU-NATO institutional cooperation in its favor if France's return to NATO's military structure was part of a deal in which the United States promised to support ESDP on France's terms.

One particular identity challenge facing Turkey in regard to NATO has been how to respond to the famous 'out of area or out of business' dilemma of the alliance. NATO going out of area would produce two opposing outcomes from Turkey's perspective. On the one hand, it would be difficult for Turkey to build its European identity on NATO

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6. H. Tank Oğuzlu, "An Analysis of Turkey's Prospective Membership in the European Union from a 'security perspective,'" *Security Dialogue*, 2003, Vol. 34, No. 3, pp. 285-299.

7. Mahmut Bali Aykan, "Turkey and European Security and Defense Identity/Policy (ESDI/P): A Turkish View," *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 2005, Vol. 13, No. 3, pp. 335-359.

Turkey would feel especially alarmed if Russia were to interpret NATO's enlargement as an assault on Moscow and in turn adopt assertive policies in the wider Black Sea regions encompassing the Caucasus.

membership should the alliance expand beyond Europe. On the other, such a move would offer Turkey the chance of demonstrating its relevance to western security interests in the post-Soviet era.

Even though Ankara acquiesced in NATO's enlargement, Turkey's perception of this process has undergone some fluctuation. On the one hand, enlargement has strengthened Turkey's front state identity, as opposed to the flank state identity it maintained during the Cold War era. On the other, the marginal utility Turkey formerly extracted from its NATO membership has begun to decline with the addition of new members. For example, since Bulgaria and Romania joined NATO in 2004, Turkey is no longer the only ally representing NATO in the Black Sea region.

Since the time NATO initiated the Partnership for Peace Program in 1994, Turkey has played a key role in attempting to project the alliance's norms to new partners. The expectation on the part of Ankara has been that this tack would help Turkey boost the credentials of its western/European identity. To this end, a PFP training center was opened in Ankara in 1998. Whether this move will have the desired effect remains to be seen.

Neighbor, Russia

Turkey has been particularly concerned with the ways in which NATO's evolving relations with Russia will impact Turkish-Russian relations. Turkey would feel especially alarmed if Russia were to interpret NATO's enlargement as an assault on Moscow and in turn adopt assertive policies in the wider Black Sea regions encompassing the Caucasus. The events that transpired during the recent Russian-Georgian war of August 2008 corroborate Turkey's fears. From Ankara's perspective, Russia's integration into the international community as a liberal-democratic country would certainly serve Turkey's security interests. However, for this to happen, Russians must not perceive NATO as a threat to its security.

Despite the fact that Turkey and Russia have a long relationship of enmity and rivalry, the last two decades have witnessed growing economic and political cooperation between the two.⁸ Turkey does not want to see this cooperation sabotaged by growing tension between Russia and the West. Reflecting such concerns, Turkey recently resisted American intentions to 'NATO-ize' the Black Sea region by extending Operation Active Endeavour from the Eastern Mediterranean Sea. Both Moscow and Ankara hold the view that the existing Black Sea Harmony initiative already contributes

to security in the region and that the signatory states should respect the terms of the Montreaux Convention on the Straits, under which the entry of war ships from non-littoral countries to the Black Sea is subject to strong limitations and regulations. Turkey's opposition to the NATO-ization of the Black Sea mainly emanates from fears that this might lead to the militarization of the area. Turkey does not want to find itself in the middle of any quarrel between the US-NATO and Russia that might stem from NATO's military exercises in the sea.

Another point that appears to unite Turkey and Russia is their opposition to the construction of US military bases in Bulgaria and Romania. Moreover, the two countries have recently adopted a cautious attitude both in regard to NATO's proposed enlargement to include Ukraine and Georgia, and toward the American plans to install missile defense shields in the territories of Poland and the Czech Republic.

The Future of the Alliance

As for the future of the alliance, contradictory signals abound. While France's reintegration into NATO's military wing⁹ and the new multilateral direction that President Obama has brought to US foreign policy offer optimism, these might not help save NATO's continuation.

Even though it was through NATO's last minute interventions that the recent conflicts in the Balkans came to end, and although all the military operations undertaken by the European Union thus far have been rendered possible by the EU's access to NATO's strategic and operational assets, structural causes of pessimism outweigh those of optimism. One such factor is that many European allies do not share the global strategic vision of the United States and therefore spend less on military capabilities. The more content the Europeans feel to live inside the borders of 'Fortress Europe,' the more the United States will define its security interests and policies unilaterally and the less it will value European cooperation within NATO.

Transatlantic allies also differ as to how to deal with resurgent Russia. While the western Europeans allies, led by the Franco-German duo, support a constructive engagement policy with Russia given that both share a common geopolitical environment, the US views Russia as a competitor whose geopolitical influence in the wider Black Sea region should be contained through every possible means, including the accession of Ukraine and Georgia to NATO.

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9. Chiara Rogate, *France returns to NATO's integrated military system: Sarkozy's Sea change*, ISPI Policy Brief, No. 128, April 2009

As the need on the part of the West to reach out the Islamic world has increased, Turkey's significance within NATO has also increased.

Another point of contention concerns the question of how the war in Afghanistan may relate to the future of the alliance. While the Americans tend to see this war as a make-it-or-break-it issue for NATO, the Europeans argue that this war cannot solely be won through NATO's military strategies. More civilian efforts are needed. This stance partially explains why the majority of Europeans still oppose the idea of sending more combat troops to Afghanistan.¹⁰ While the Americans are predisposed to see NATO evolve into a war-making machine, the Europeans tend to value NATO in the context of crisis management activities.

Turkey's Limits and Options: Some Policy Recommendations

It is certain that Turkey's perception of NATO will be increasingly affected by the ongoing intra-alliance quarrels. The critical question ahead is whether Turkey is capable of using the transformation process to its benefit. Turkey's limits are clear. Turkey is a mid-sized country which has long acted on the peripheries of the alliance. While the dynamics of the EU accession process compel Turkey to adopt a pro-European position on the issue of transformation, the country's long strategic cooperation with the US appears to leave Turkey with no option but to follow Washington's lead. These limits recently became clear when Turkey had to agree to France's reintegration into NATO's military command and the appointment of the former Danish Prime Minister as the new Secretary General.¹¹

Despite these limitations, Turkey is far from powerless. Four particular developments in recent years have strengthened Turkey's bargaining capability within NATO. The first is the inability of the European Union to turn into a credible foreign and security policy actor, speaking with one voice and adopting a global strategic vision. The second is the relative decline of the US' power across the globe. Third, civilizational issues have influenced NATO's transformation agenda in the post 9/11 era. As the need on the part of the West to reach out the Islamic world has increased, Turkey's significance within NATO has also increased. Fourth, Turkey's national power has been on the rise relative to its neighbors to the south and north and its partners to the west. Today, Turkey is in a stronger position than in the past, in terms of both hard and soft power capabilities, to shape her environment. Turkey and the United States have in recent years adopted divergent policies on many of the issues occupying the European and Middle Eastern security agenda.

10. John K. Glenn and Oliver Mains, "Engaging Europe on Afghanistan," *German Marshall Fund*, Policy Brief, January 2009.

11. [NEWS ANALYSIS] "Turkey's consent to France's return to NATO missed and misread," *Today's Zaman*, 11 April 2009, <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/detaylar.do?load=detay&link=172082>

These developments suggest that in the post-Cold war era, Turkey's commitment to NATO should not be taken for granted. Rather, it needs to be earned. Turkey's cooperation will increasingly depend on the extent to which the alliance remains relevant to the improvement of Turkey's hard and soft power capabilities. Turkey's relations with Russia on the one hand and the Middle Eastern countries on the other will influence Turkey's view of NATO. Equally important, Turkey's support of NATO's transformation should not be seen as automatic, particularly if it does not include NATO's support for Turkey's ongoing struggle against PKK terrorism, or if it carries the risk of impairing Turkey's relations with key states in the Islamic world such as Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan.¹² It appears that the Cold War era 'abandonment-entrapment' dilemma has now been reversed. As of today, Turkey fears the possibility of being abandoned by the alliance less than the possibility of being entrapped in unwanted contingencies.

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What should Turkey do in order to arrest the process of NATO's transformation in unwanted ways? First, Turkey should cease to define membership in NATO through identity-related lenses. Turkey would do well to build its relations with NATO on the basis of common interests. As the EU members of the alliance have been at odds among themselves regarding how to define NATO's emerging roles, and as NATO has become a more-global and less-European organization, Turkish decision-makers should not invest in the idea that membership in NATO will boost Turkey's western European identity, and with it the prospects of EU accession. Membership in the EU will be supported more by Turkey's democratization performance at home than Turkey's contribution to western security through NATO.

Second, Turkey should oppose the idea that NATO become a global security organization encompassing as many non-European countries as possible. Turkey should support NATO's efforts to develop institutional relationships with 'contact countries' such as Japan, Australia, South Korea and New Zealand, short of full membership. Otherwise, Turkey's marginalization within the alliance will continue unstopped.

Third, Turkey should not support NATO in becoming an international platform, a move which would confer legitimacy onto some multinational peace operations not authorized by the United Nations. To Ankara, the main source of international legitimacy should continue to rest with the United Nations. Ankara should equally oppose the idea that NATO turn into a global league of democracies, for this would create discrimination against the countries that would remain outside NATO.

12. Transatlantic Trends Key Findings, *German Marshall Fund Report*, 2008, p.5

If the new strategic concept defines energy security as the core mission of the alliance, Turkey will certainly play a pivotal role, as Turkey has already transformed itself into a hub of energy transportation.

Fourth, Turkey should increase its efforts to help broker a long-term reconciliation between Pakistan and Afghanistan. This would certainly bolster Turkey's power and prestige within the Alliance.

Fifth, Turkey should speed up its efforts to bring energy issues to NATO's transformation agenda. If the new strategic concept defines energy security as the core mission of the alliance, Turkey will certainly play a pivotal role, as Turkey has already transformed itself into a hub of energy transportation.

Sixth, Turkey's influence within the alliance will certainly increase if Ankara contributes to the strengthening of NATO's expeditionary military capabilities. In this context, Turkey's army is her most important asset within the alliance, and Turkey's performance to date is encouraging. Turkey contributed to the NATO Response Force, which was first created during the Prague Summit of 2002 and declared operational at the Riga Summit of 2006. In a similar vein, Istanbul now hosts one of the regional commands of the recently established Rapid Deployable Corps Headquarters. Similarly, Turkish troops have served in various NATO-led peace operations. Notable examples in this regard concern Turkey's participation in NATO missions in Kosovo, Bosnia, Macedonia and Afghanistan.

So far Turkey's position on NATO's role in Afghanistan has been closest to that of the European Union. Even though Turkey led the ISAF twice in the past, once in 2003 and then in 2005, Turkish troops have not performed combat functions against the Taliban forces in southern Afghanistan. Turkish troops mainly contribute to security and stability around Kabul and perform peacekeeping and peace supporting activities.¹³

Finally, Turkey should do whatever possible to prevent NATO from adopting a new strategic concept that might be understood as targeting the Islamic world. It is within this context that Turkey paid close attention to the election of NATO's New Secretary General. Turkey initially opposed the appointment of former Danish Prime Minister Rasmussen to this post on the grounds that Rasmussen did not play a conciliatory role during the infamous cartoon crises three years ago and that he resisted Turkish calls to forbid the broadcasting of Roj TV from Danish territories. In Turkey's view, the fact that Rasmussen supported the publication of cartoons insulting the holy symbols of Islam in the name of freedom of thought has not contributed to the western efforts to win the hearts and minds of people across the Muslim world.¹⁴ In return for its acquiescence

13. "Afghanistan pitfalls await Turkish troops," *Today's Zaman*, 28 April 2009, <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/detaylar.do?load=detay&link=173725>

14. "Rasmussen declares NATO candidacy, but Erdoğan opposed," *Today's Zaman*, 04 April 2009 <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/detaylar.do?load=detay&link=171414>

in the new Secretary General it was alleged that Turkey asked Rasmussen to ban the broadcasting of Roj TV and to appoint a Turkish figure to a high-level position in the NATO bureaucracy.¹⁵ The United States played a key role behind the scenes in allaying Turkey's concerns, indicating that Turkey's commitment to NATO will be decisive in NATO's future, particularly in Afghanistan.

15. "NATO meets Turkey's demands for Rasmussen's chief," Saturday, 04 April 2009, http://www.worldbulletin.net/news_detail.php?id=39470.

Recent years have made it clear that NATO is going through a transformation process; Turkey will be one of the allies most affected by this process. Both the future of NATO and Turkey's perception of NATO membership will be at stake unless the allies can reach consensus on the core strategic issues of the transformation agenda. Analysts urgently need to come up with convincing answers to the following questions: In which ways has NATO's transformation been going through? Why does Turkey feel uneasy with some aspects of the process? What steps should Turkey take in order to ensure that the transformation of the Alliance is viewed positively at home?

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