
Between Allies and Rivals: Turkey, Nuclear Weapons, and BMD

Mustafa Kibaroglu



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Ifri
27 rue de la Procession
75740 Paris Cedex 15 – FRANCE
Tel : 33 (0)1 40 61 60 00
Fax : 33 (0)1 40 61 60 60
Email : ifri@ifri.org

Ifri-Bruxelles
Rue Marie-Thérèse, 21
1000 – Brussels – BELGIUM
Tel : 32 (0)2 238 51 10
Fax : 32 (0)2 238 51 15
Email : info.bruxelles@ifri.org

Website : <http://www.ifri.org/>

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About the Author

Professor Mustafa Kibaroglu (Ph.D., Bilkent University, International Relations Department, 1996) is currently the Chair of the International Relations Department at Okan University, in Istanbul, and has held this position since September 2011.

Professor Kibaroglu used to teach in the Department of International Relations at Bilkent University in Ankara from 1997 to 2011. Previously, he used to be a Research Fellow at UNIDIR in Geneva (1995); IAEA Fellow at the University of Southampton (1996); Post-doctoral Fellow at the Monterey Institute in California (1996/97); and Sabbatical Fellow at the Belfer Center of Harvard University (2004/05). He is a Council Member of Pugwash, and Academic Advisor of the NATO Centre of Excellence Defence Against Terrorism in Ankara.

Professor Kibaroglu is the co-author of *Global Security Watch – Turkey* (2009), published by Praeger, and the co-editor of *Defence Against Weapons of Mass Destruction Terrorism* (2010), *Bioterrorism: Threats and Deterrents* (2010), *Responses to Nuclear and Radiological Terrorism* (2011), *Defence Against Terrorism* (2011), and *Analysis and Strategies to Counter the Terrorism Threat* (2011), published by IOS Press. He is also the author and co-author of numerous chapters in books as well as articles in academic journals, such as *Security Dialogue*, *Nonproliferation Review*, *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, *Middle East Quarterly*, *Arms Control Today*, *Middle East Journal*, *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, *Middle Eastern Studies*, *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, *Middle East Policy*, and *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*.

Contents

Introduction	7
Turkish Perspectives on Iran’s Nuclear Program	11
Official View	11
Views in the Public Domain	14
Views in Scholarly and Intellectual Circles	15
Turkey and NATO’s ‘Extended Deterrence’	19
The Legacy of the Cold War	20
Current Debate on Remaining US Nuclear Weapons in Europe	22
Turkey and Ballistic Missile Defense: Between Assurance and Autonomy	27
Turkey’s Concerns About BMD	27
Decreasing Foreign Influence?	30
The HQ-9 Deal and Turkey’s Quest for Autonomy	32
Conclusion	35

Abstract

This paper discusses Turkey's attitudes vis-à-vis nuclear weapons and Ballistic Missile Defense in the light of recent developments in the Iranian nuclear program and NATO's evolving concept of extended deterrence. On the one hand, the long-standing forward deployment of US tactical nuclear weapons in Turkey and the country's role in the US Phased Adaptive Approach BMD architecture are still considered to be key elements of national security. On the other, security guarantees offered to Turkey by NATO and the US appear less and less credible in the face of rising regional threats. As this paper shows, there is a growing gap between official policy and public perceptions inside Turkey vis-à-vis the US, Iran, and nuclear weapons, as well as a growing Turkish aspiration to autonomy in its security and defense policy. While one should not expect Turkey to develop nuclear weapons anytime soon, an unchecked Iranian regional power could bring Ankara to hedge its bets in the long term. Turkey's controversial recent decision to buy a Chinese system for its national air and missile defense rather than European or US equipment should be seen in the light of this search for autonomy.

* * *

Cet article examine les positions adoptées par la Turquie sur les armes nucléaires et la défense antimissile balistique (DAMB) à la lumière des évolutions récentes du programme nucléaire iranien et de la posture de dissuasion élargie de l'OTAN. Si le stationnement d'armes nucléaires tactiques américaines sur le territoire turc et l'implication de la Turquie dans l'architecture de défense antimissile balistique américaine en Europe sont toujours considérés comme des éléments déterminants de la sécurité nationale du pays, la montée des menaces régionales rend Ankara sceptique quant à la solidité des garanties offertes par l'OTAN et les Etats-Unis. Un décalage croissant apparaît ainsi entre la posture turque officielle et les vues exprimées par l'opinion publique et un nombre croissant d'experts sur des sujets tels que l'importance de l'alliance avec les Etats-Unis, les relations avec l'Iran ou, enfin, l'opportunité pour la Turquie de se doter d'armes nucléaires. Bien qu'une telle orientation soit extrêmement improbable à court terme, la Turquie aspire à être plus autonome dans ses choix et capacités stratégiques, et l'émergence d'un rival régional ambitieux et doté de l'arme nucléaire pourrait à terme l'amener à prendre ses dispositions en ce sens. C'est également au regard de cette quête vers l'autonomie que doit être interprétée la récente décision turque de préférer un fournisseur chinois à ses alliés européens ou américain pour l'acquisition de son système de défenses sol-air.

Introduction

The presence of American nuclear weapons on Turkish soil and Turkey's reliance on NATO's 'extended deterrence' have become subjects of discussion in Western security circles. They are focused on the value of the assurances provided to Turkey by the Western alliance in preventing the Turks from acquiring capabilities that would enable them to produce nuclear weapons following the path of their eastern neighbor, Iran.

Due to its geopolitical location, Turkey is unique in that it combines two features. First, it is a neighbor of Iran, with its developing nuclear capability, and it is feared, especially in the West, that progress in the Iranian nuclear program may trigger Turkish policymakers to invest in large-scale exploitation of nuclear energy projects, including enrichment and reprocessing technologies. Second, Turkey is a member of NATO, whose extended nuclear deterrence strategy is believed to provide credible assurances against actual and potential enemies, including countries that possess, or are likely to possess, nuclear weapons.

In these circumstances, one might argue that Turkey should be satisfied with the assurances provided by its Western allies and thus feel confident that Iran's advanced nuclear capabilities will not pose a serious threat to its security. However, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and their means of delivery, in the Middle East in general and in relation to Iran's nuclear program in particular, constitute the major topics of discussion among Turkish policymakers, scholars, intellectuals and civil and military security analysts. These discussions are centered on the threats posed to Turkey's national security and the ways and the means of countering them effectively.

Against this background, this paper will, in the first part, discuss how Iran's nuclear program is perceived in both official and unofficial settings in Turkey, such as government circles and the presidency on the one hand, and scholarly circles, think-tanks, and the media on the other. This section will highlight the gap between the viewpoints expressed by the representative figures on either side about the degree of the perceived threat posed by Iran's nuclear program.

The apparent mismatch between the rhetorical statements of official figures and the serious concerns articulated unofficially by scholars, experts, intellectuals, journalists, retired officials and politicians with respect to Iran's advanced nuclear capabilities, inevitably gives way to critical questions, frequently asked in Western security circles: Does NATO's

extended nuclear deterrence serve as a powerful assurance for Turkey concerning the implications of Iran's nuclear program? Will Turkey eventually go down the same path as Iran, despite the powerful assurances given by the allies, in order to build its own nuclear capability so as to strike a balance with its historic rival in case the latter crosses the nuclear threshold?¹

With these questions in mind, this paper will, in the second part, discuss the meaning and value of NATO's extended nuclear deterrence for Turkey's security, and, in this context, the significance of the US nuclear weapons that have long been stationed on Turkish soil. It will also discuss the reasons behind the deployment as well as the sustained desire of Turkish officials to keep these weapons not only in Turkey but also in four other host nations, namely Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands and Italy, as part of the burden-sharing principle of the Alliance, and what might be Turkey's reaction should the European allies decide otherwise.

Along with the traditional positive security guarantees given to Turkey by the extended deterrence strategy of the Alliance, Western security analysts also hope that the deterrent potential of NATO's missile defense projects provides additional assurances to Turkey against the perceived threats from the ballistic missile and weapons of mass destruction capabilities of neighboring states.

Hence, in the third part, this paper will discuss the background of Turkey's decades-long attempts to erect its own air defense capability, in cooperation with its allies, and how these attempts have failed to produce tangible results so far.

Finally, a discussion will follow about how these unsuccessful experiences may have affected the strategic decision-making processes in Turkey concerning the types of capabilities that should be developed in the country, such as the controversial decision of the Turkish government to cooperate with a Chinese company to develop Turkey's air defense system vis-à-vis future contingencies.

¹ For an extensive discussion on the subject, see Mustafa Kibaroglu, "Nuclearization of the Middle East and Turkey's Possible Responses: Does Turkey Need to Be Reassured That it Does Not Need to Develop Nuclear Weapons?" EDAM Discussion Paper Series 2012/5, November 2012.

Turkish Perspectives on Iran's Nuclear Program

Under the influence of the powerful currents of cultural debates – the 9/11 incident being the benchmark event that deepened the cleavages between Eastern and Western cultures, with Turkey located between the two – the 2000s have witnessed the rise of anti-Western sentiments among the Turkish population. The implications of rising anti-American and anti-Israeli sentiments in Turkey for Turkish-Iranian relations manifested themselves in the form of powerful popular support for Iran's defiance of US pressure to stop advancing its nuclear program. The genuine support given to Iran in its confrontation with the West in general, and the US in particular, could be observed in the comments submitted online by the public sent to the Internet pages of daily papers and news portals covering the Iranian nuclear issue. What is interesting to note here is the tacit alliance developed between the conservative and 'religious' segments of Turkish society and the secular nationalists and marxist/anti-imperialist (i.e. *Ulusalci*) groups, both of which resented US policies toward Turkey in particular and the Middle East in general.

It is not possible to say that the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi*-AKP) government was not affected by the degree of anti-American sentiments that were quite widespread among Turks. Bitter statements have been made by both AKP deputies and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan himself who, time and again, harshly criticized the United States and/or Israel with respect to their tough stance toward Iran. However, this does not mean that Turkey's concerns about Iran's efforts to acquire strategic capabilities, which may lead to the building of nuclear weapons, have evaporated altogether during the AKP government. There is no substantial evidence to suggest that the developments in Iran's nuclear capabilities have been taken lightly by the AKP deputies, ministers or Erdogan himself.

Official View

True to the long-standing state policy of Turkey toward Iran, which is distilled from the centuries-old history of relations and the inherent rivalry between the two nations, the AKP government's stance toward Iran's nuclear program was not significantly different from that of previous governments in terms of the substance of policy.

Turkey's official stance toward Iran's nuclear program is, indeed, clear. Top Turkish politicians have underscored on many occasions that

Turkey recognizes the right of Iran, being a state party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), to develop nuclear technology, provided that it remains fully on a peaceful track and that Iran allows the application of full-scope safeguards inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) so as to give the international community full confidence about its true intentions.

This policy has translated into many public statements in the past years. In response to a question posed by a journalist during the Munich Security Conference on 9 February 2008 about why Turkey did not seem to be worried about Iran's nuclear program, Erdogan replied that "our Iranian colleagues tell us that they want nuclear energy for peaceful purposes to satisfy their energy needs, not for weapons".²

On 25 March 2012, Erdogan reiterated his views following his visit to Tehran, saying that Iranian religious leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei had "stated it clearly that there is no room for nuclear weapons in Sharia" (Islamic law). Erdogan added that "after having heard this statement, I can't claim that Iran is developing nuclear weapons, and President Ahmadinejad also confirms the statement. So, don't they have a right to develop a nuclear program for peaceful purposes?"³

On 26 November 2013, in his weekly address to AKP parliamentarians at the Turkish Grand National Assembly, Erdogan praised the signing of the deal between Iran and the P5+1 countries in Geneva after long deliberations; he emphasized that "this development indeed justified that Turkey had done the right thing by signing the Tehran Protocol together with Brazil and Iran back in May 2010".⁴ In his address, Erdogan reiterated his view that his government "supported Iran's right to peaceful nuclear energy and that the dispute over Iran's nuclear program [can] only be solved through negotiations, not at all by imposing sanctions".⁵

Even more recently, on 29 January 2014, Erdogan emphasized, during his official visit to Tehran where he met with Iran's new President Hassan Rouhani, the value of good neighborly relations between the two countries and the significance of increasing trade volume in that regard, as well as Turkey's sustained support for Iran's treaty rights to develop peaceful nuclear energy.⁶

² Erdogan made these remarks during a press conference after he participated in the annual Munich Security Conference in Munich, Germany on 9 February 2008. The press conference was broadcast live on Turkish TV channels, such as *NTV* and *CNN Turk*.

³ Available at: <http://wap.ntvmsnbc.com/Haber/Goster/25335202>.

⁴ The video of Erdogan's address is available at: <http://www.mynet.com/sebastiyarilan-anadolu-ajansi-izle-basbakan-erdogan-iran039in-nukleer-programi-konusunda-vid-1876607/>

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ The trade volume started to increase steadily under AKP governments over the last decade and reached USD 22 bn in 2012, but figure dropped to USD 13.5 bn in

Similarly, President Abdullah Gul, during his address to the United Nations General Assembly in September 2010, said: “Iran should not consider developing nuclear weapons”, adding that “if Iran acquired nuclear weapons capability Turkey will be the country that will be most negatively affected by such a development”. Gul also emphasized during an interview that “the West should not underestimate how seriously we take the issue of a nuclearized Iran; after all, we are neighbors and nuclear weapons would threaten us most of all”.

Again, in May 2012, Gul said that “Turkey is concerned about the possibility of nuclear proliferation and the spread of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East” but he made it clear that “this principle extends not only to Iran but also to Israel”. Leading Turkish politicians were not necessarily particularly vocal about Israel’s nuclear capability until relations started to get tense toward the end of the 2000s.⁷ Bilateral relations reached their lowest point with the Gaza Flotilla incident in May 2010.⁸ Gul also warned that “attempts to develop or acquire such weapons may well trigger a regional race for their possession, which in turn would lead to further instability threatening international peace and security. That is why we have always called for the establishment of a Weapons of Mass Destruction-Free Zone in the Middle East including both Iran and Israel”.⁹

2013 due to fluctuations in the world economy and the limited impact of sanctions against Iran. Erdogan expressed his hopes for increasing the trade volume to USD 30 bn in the next few years.

⁷ For decades, Turkish governments have opted to stay out of the Arab-Israeli conflict for various reasons. But the rise to power of the AKP in 2002 caused a dramatic change in Turkey’s traditional stance toward the region. Prime Minister Erdogan wanted to assume a role between Syria and Israel, which was not at first warmly welcomed. Eventually, after a series of events, including the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri in 2005 and the war between Israel and Hezbollah in Southern Lebanon in 2006, Turkey was approached by both Syria and Israel to take the initiative in bringing the parties together. The Turkish side has seemed content with the progress made during these talks, as hinted by Turkish Foreign Minister Ali Babacan to the press on a number of occasions. Nevertheless, the scale of the Israeli military operation in Gaza and the news of the mounting civilian casualties, accompanied by dramatic pictures of the misery and suffering of Palestinian women and children, elicited a powerful reaction among Turks. See Mustafa Kibaroglu, “Will the smoke of Gaza cloud Turkish-Israeli relations?”, *Bitterlemons-International*, January 2009, available at: <http://www.bitterlemons-international.org/inside.php?id=105>. Also see Mustafa Kibaroglu, “No short-term fix to relations”, *Bitterlemons-International*, June 2010, available at: <http://www.bitterlemons-international.org/inside.php?id=1275>.

⁸ On 31 May 2010, Israeli commandos launched an operation aboard the Turkish civilian cruiser *Mavi Marmara*, which was heading toward Gaza with a view to delivering the humanitarian aid packages collected by a Turkish non-governmental organization, İnsani Yardim Vakfi (IHH). Israel’s operation claimed the lives of nine Turkish citizens. Since then, Turkish-Israeli relations have hit the bottom, and the embassies on each side remain closed after Turkey withdrew its ambassador in Tel Aviv and asked Israel to do the same for its ambassador in Ankara.

⁹ “Turkey warns of wider regional risks in Iran strike”, *Today’s Zaman*, 22 May 2012, available at: <http://www.todayszaman.com/news-281185-turkey-warns-of-wider-regional-risks-in-iran-strike.html>.

More recently, President Gul emphasized in his opening address to the 60th Pugwash Conference on Science and World Affairs convened in Istanbul in November 2013 that “Turkey is against all sorts of WMDs in our geography [region] and supports the destruction of the existing ones”. He further noted that “showing tolerance to *de facto* ownership of WMDs of some countries in the Middle East, which is going through a transformation process, entails an additional burden to the region which is already struggling against many problems”.¹⁰

It is clear from these statements by leading Turkish politicians that their attitude toward Iran’s nuclear program has been consistent in acknowledging its rights to peaceful uses of nuclear energy. It has remained so regardless of the highly divergent foreign policy objectives of the two countries concerning the ongoing civil war and atrocities in Syria – where Bashar Al Assad’s regime is staunchly supported by the Iranian clerics whereas Turkish government officials would like to see that regime being replaced by a democratically-elected government, formed by those who are now in opposition.

Views in the Public Domain

Contrary to what one would expect, Iran’s nuclear ambitions are not necessarily resented by the Turkish public, for a number of reasons.¹¹ First, Iran’s defiance of the US pressure to halt its enrichment program is seen as the dignified stance of a small country against a global hegemonic power. Second, Islam is seen as a common denominator between Turks and Iranians, regardless of the predominantly Sunni and Shia character of the respective nations, while the emergence of another Muslim nation with atomic power after Pakistan in the face of ‘Christian’ and ‘Jewish’ atomic bombs is generally seen as a necessary equalizer. Third, due to anti-American and anti-Israeli sentiments, grown since the US invasion of Iraq and Israel’s Gaza offensive as well as the Flotilla incident on the high seas of the Eastern Mediterranean, anything that is seen as hurting American or Israeli interests is usually welcomed in the Turkish public domain.

Turks exchange views on Internet websites, blogs and chat-rooms about whether Iran’s nuclear ambitions constitute a threat to Turkey or not, and whether Turkey should possess nuclear weapons or not. Regarding the degree of the perceived threat from Iran’s nuclear aspirations, the majority of Turks do not believe that Iran, as a friendly Muslim nation, would want to threaten Turkey with its nuclear weapons, today or in the future, especially when Israel is considered to be Iran’s prime target.

¹⁰ President Abdullah Gul, Opening address, 60th Pugwash Conference on Science and World Affairs, available at: http://www.pugwash.org/reports/pic/60/60_documents/Presidency_of_the_Republic_of_Turkey%20_%20H.E.pdf

¹¹ A quick scan of the Turkish media at any time interval can provide ample sources supporting this argument. Moreover, public opinion polls conducted by distinguished research centers such as the Pew Charitable Trusts also support the view that Iran is not considered by most Turks as an enemy of, or a threat to, Turkey, available at: <http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?PageID=826>.

The Syrian civil war, which erupted in March 2011, caused much deterioration in Turkish-Syrian relations – resulting, among others, in the deployment of NATO’s missile defense systems on Turkish territory along the Syrian border as a precautionary measure against possible attacks from Syria. It does not, however, seem to have changed attitudes in the Turkish public domain, despite the fact that Iran is a close ally of Syria. This is possibly because the leadership cadres of the Turkish and Iranian governments and the top diplomats continue to visit each other’s countries or meet on the sidelines of international conferences, where they appear before the public emphasizing “the depth of friendly relations between the two countries” against all the odds.¹²

On the issue of possessing nuclear weapons itself, the prevailing view among the Turkish population is one that supports having nuclear weapons for reasons similar to those expressed in other countries, whether they are invoking national security concerns, as India and Pakistan did, or other purposes such as regional hegemony, national pride and prestige, as in the case of Iran.¹³

Views in Scholarly and Intellectual Circles

Notwithstanding the above-mentioned sentiments in the Turkish public domain with regard to Iran’s nuclear ambitions, scholars, intellectuals, journalists, community leaders and retired civil and military public servants have also expressed their views, assessing the negative implications of Iran’s nuclear ambitions for Turkey’s national interests.

According to Prof. Umit Ozdag from Gazi University in Ankara, who is Director of the 21st Century Turkey Institute, “Iran’s acquisition of nuclear weapons would cause Iran gaining gravity in regional developments, in the Middle East, Central Asia and the Caucasus at the expense of Turkey. For example, a nuclear Iran will have more influence over Azerbaijan.” According to Ozdag, “Turkey will not accept living side by side with an Iran possessing nuclear weapons for a long period of time, and it will produce nuclear weapons to achieve the balance since it will be difficult to live with an Iran whose self-confidence has excessively mounted. If Iran possessed

¹² Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu and his Iranian counterpart Mohammed Javad Zarif attended a special panel on 1 November 2013 during the 60th Pugwash Conference on Science and World Affairs held in Istanbul. The two continued to meet after that event; the most recent meetings took place in late January 2014, during the Geneva-II Conference, convened to discuss the tragic situation in Syria, and at the World Economic Forum held in Davos.

¹³ *Public Opinion Surveys of Turkish Foreign Policy 2012/1* by the Center for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies (EDAM), available at: <http://www.edam.org.tr/document/Edam2012Survey1.pdf>. See also: <http://www.zamansiz.com/turkiye-nukleer-silah-sahibi-olmali-mi>; <http://www.byturks.net/turkiye-nukleer-guc-sahibi-olmali-mi>; <http://www.hackhell.com/archive>; www.turkish-media.com/forum, and <http://www.heavymetaltr.com>.

nuclear weapons today, Turkey could not have pursued the same foreign policy toward Syria easily.”¹⁴

Dr. Sebnem Udum, a non-proliferation expert from Hacettepe University in Ankara, suggests that “Turkey should have a military, diplomatic and political roadmap. In the worst case scenario, there is a great chance that Turkey would be a target. Turkey has the capacity to reciprocate, however, in order to deter a potential attack, Turkey should have [an] active defense system as well as second-strike capability.”¹⁵

Soli Ozel, an expert on Middle Eastern affairs from Kadir Has University in Istanbul, argues that “Turkey has no interest in having a nuclear-armed Iran as its neighbor. It is cognizant that this would trigger a race to acquire nuclear weapons by Iran’s foes in the Arab world. Nuclear arms, plus increasingly sophisticated missile systems, would also tilt the balance of power between two neighbors of similar size in favor of Iran.” Ozel also emphasizes that “Turkey has even less enthusiasm for war, waged by either Israel or the US. It believes a diplomatic solution to the nuclear standoff can still be found, if the Iranians are given a return ticket to the international system and a normalization of relations with the US.” According to Ozel, “Turkish authorities are increasingly worried about the fragmented nature of the Iranian regime and the growing clout of the Revolutionary Guards Corps.”¹⁶

Dogan Heper, a columnist in the daily *Milliyet*, argues that, “following the end of the Cold War, the world has entered a process of turmoil or a process of restructuring. Even though it is not possible to give a lucid answer to the question of how long this process will continue and what the shapes of the states will be, in order not to regret at the end of this process Turkey should take preventive measures, that is, it should be strong.” For Heper, the first condition of being strong is “not to compromise the unity and the integrity of Turkey and to attach importance to nuclear research and development”. Heper states three main reasons to bolster the argument that it is essential for Turkey to develop nuclear weapons. First, possessing nuclear weapons is a means to protect the unity and the integrity of Turkey, and its standing in the region. Second, in addition to boosting its standing in the region, an army possessing such a capability would render Turkey an arbiter, a determining power in its region. Third, a success in the nuclear arena would boost Turkish morale, strengthen the sense of unity of 75 million people, and consolidate their pride in being Turkish citizens. For Heper, Turkey’s elevation to the status of a nuclear

¹⁴ Umit Ozdag, “Nukleer bir Iran ve Turkiye-Iran Dengesinin Bozulmasi [A Nuclear Iran and Upsetting the Turkish-Iranian Balance],” *Yenicag*, 19 April 2012, available at: <http://www.yenicaggazetesi.com.tr/nukleer-bir-iran-ve-turkiye-iran-dengesinin-bozulmasi-22438yy.htm>

¹⁵ Sebnem Udum, “Turkey’s Policy on Iranian Nuclear Issue”, *Ortadogu Analiz*, Vol. 4, No. 43, July 2012, available at: http://www.orsam.org.tr/tr/trUploads/Yazilar/Dosyalar/2012716_inceleme4.pdf.

¹⁶ Soli Ozel, “How the Iranian Nuclear Standoff Looks from Turkey”, Bloomberg commentary, available at: <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-02-21/how-the-iran-nuclear-standoff-looks-from-turkey-commentary-by-soli-ozel.html>.

power seems to be a somewhat inevitable outcome, because, he contends, “new conditions in the world are compelling Turkey to develop nuclear weapons”.¹⁷

Kadri Gürsel, political analyst from the *Milliyet* daily, asserts that “if Iran becomes a nuclear weapons capable state, such a development will leave Turkey with two options: one would be to be protected by NATO’s nuclear shield; and the other would be to develop a nuclear capability”.¹⁸ According to Gürsel, none of these options would bring favorable results for Turkey. If protected by NATO, Turkey would be a regional player totally dependent on the Alliance; if tried to develop nuclear (weapons) capability, it would become a source of threat in its region.

In addition to these views on the civilian side, top-ranking military officers, such as the former commanders of the Turkish Air Force, Gen. (Ret.) Halis Burhan and Gen. (Ret.) Ergin Celasin, have argued that “if Iran develops nuclear weapons Turkey should do the same so as to be able to preserve the balance of power between the two countries and also in the region”.¹⁹

Similarly, Colonel Taner Altinok, former Director of the Institute for Defense Studies of the Turkish Military Academy in Ankara, argues that “Turkey should definitely follow the path that Iran walked over the years, both for energy generation purposes so as to meet Turkey’s growing demand for energy and also for attaining nuclear weapons capability to better protect Turkey’s national interests. Regional balances and conjugal developments compel Turkey to do so.”²⁰

Former Minister of State Vehbi Dincerler, from the right-of-center and conservative Motherland Party (*Anavatan Partisi-ANAP*), takes the issue to yet another level, in connection with the possibility of Iran developing nuclear weapons capability, and argues that “Turkey should not only develop nuclear weapons, but the quantity as well as the quality of Turkey’s nuclear weapons arsenal should be at par with those of the other nations in the region”, pointing at the Israeli nuclear capability.²¹ Mr. Dincerler, who served for several terms in the cabinets of the ANAP governments in the 1980s and 1990s, is currently serving as a senior advisor to Prime Minister Erdogan.

Likewise, former Minister of State Sadi Somuncuoglu, from the right-of-center Nationalist Movement Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi-MHP*),

¹⁷ Dogan Heper, “Türkiye ‘Atom’ Yapabilir [Turkey May Build Atomic Bomb]”, *Milliyet*, 26 January 2006.

¹⁸ Kadri Gürsel, “Nukleer Anlasma Laik Dis Politikaya Zorluyor [Nuclear Deal Imposes a Secular Foreign Policy]”, *Milliyet*, 25 November 2013, available at: http://dunya.milliyet.com.tr/nukleer-anlasma-laikdis/dunya/ydetay/1797292/default_.htm.

¹⁹ Interviews with Gen. Burhan, Gen. Celasin, 11 February 2008, Ankara.

²⁰ Interview with Col. Altinok, 10 March 2008, Ankara.

²¹ Interview with Mr. Dincerler, 11 February 2008, Ankara. Mr. Dincerler reiterated his views on the matter during a private conversation with the author in 2013.

argued that “taking into consideration the security situation in the world and the presence of nuclear weapons capable states in its region, Turkey should be ready to exploit nuclear technology for military purposes as well”.²² Mr. Somuncuoglu remembers that, during his first term as a minister in the Süleyman Demirel cabinet in 1977, he was harshly criticized, especially by the Americans, for publicly suggesting that Turkey should consider developing nuclear weapons.²³

The above list of those who commented publicly on the subject is not exhaustive, and their views or remarks are available in the open media sources. Others from similar backgrounds have expressed their personal views to the author during private conversations over many years, on the condition of anonymity. The ones presented here provide insights into the prevailing views in Turkish society at various levels.

²² Interview with Mr. Somuncuoglu, 27 October 2010, Ankara.

²³ *Ibid.*

Turkey and NATO's 'Extended Deterrence'

The discussion in the previous part suggests that, even though Turkey's official approach toward Iran's declared nuclear intentions is one of acknowledgment of its rights, emanating from Article IV of the NPT, many in Turkey, including those who have occupied important positions in the current as well as previous governments and also in the state bureaucracy, are seriously concerned about the extent of Iran's advanced nuclear capabilities.

Thus, a critical question that is on the mind of most Western security analysts is whether the possible nuclearization of the Middle East,²⁴ with particular emphasis on Iran's nuclear program, is likely to cause Turkey to go down the same path and end up joining the ranks of the proliferators. Therefore, regardless of its official rhetoric about Iran's 'peaceful' nuclear program, Turkey is considered in the West to be among those countries that are said to be likely to proliferate in case Iran's nuclear ambitions cannot be thwarted.²⁵

Hence, in this part, the value of the extended deterrence provided to Turkey by NATO and the significance of the US nuclear weapons stationed on Turkish territory will be the subjects of discussion, with a view to seeing if they would constitute enough assurance to Turkish policy-makers and thus keep Turkey from 'going nuclear' in case Iran further advances its nuclear capabilities.

²⁴ Iran's much-advanced and controversial nuclear program is seen as instigating other countries in the Middle East to take such actions as they deem appropriate in order to protect their national interests. For instance, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries have already announced their interest in a possible shared nuclear program, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) signed a USD 20 billion deal with South Korea in December 2009 for the construction of a nuclear power plant; this will host four reactors, each having 1,200 MWe capacity, giving a total installed capacity of 4,800 MWe, once completed. Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al Faisal declared in January 2007 that any nuclear program would be developed under strict controls and with peaceful intentions, to be an example for any country seeking to adopt the technology without any intention to join the nuclear arms race. See World Nuclear News (WNN), *Nuclear Energy an Option for Gulf States*, 11 April 2007, available at: http://www.world-nuclear-news.org/nuclear/Policies/110407Nuclear_energy_an_option_for_Gulf_states.shtml.

²⁵ In private conversations on numerous occasions around the world, the author was asked questions along these lines by authorities including scholars, experts, diplomats, and military and civilian officers, etc.

The Legacy of the Cold War

Since its accession to NATO in 1952, Turkey has been given “positive security guarantees” by the other members of the Alliance, thanks to Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty signed in Washington in 1949. Accordingly, Turkey’s entire territory would be eventually covered by a “nuclear umbrella” that would effectively deter possible attacks from other countries. At the crux of the “extended deterrence” capability of NATO are the US nuclear weapons that have been deployed on allied countries in Europe, including Turkey, for more than 50 years.²⁶

In the Cold War era, Turkey relied heavily on the presence of nuclear weapons on its territory for national security. The Turkish political and security elite considered these weapons to be a credible deterrent against the Warsaw Pact in general, and the huge military might of the nearby Soviet Union in particular. Nuclear weapons were deployed on Turkish territory according to the mutual commitments of Turkey and NATO. At the heads of government summit meeting of NATO convened in Paris in December 1957, on the recommendation of the United States, the topical issue on the agenda was the deployment of Intermediate Range Ballistic Missiles (IRBMs) in Europe. Around 1960, the American *Thor* and *Jupiter* missiles became operational in the United Kingdom, Italy and Turkey. Although the *Jupiter* missiles were first placed near Izmir in 1961, they were withdrawn by 1963 as part of a secret agreement between US President John F. Kennedy and Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev to resolve the Cuban Missile Crisis that erupted in October 1962.²⁷

The withdrawal of the *Jupiter* missiles from Turkey did not dramatically change the role that Turkey would play in the nuclear strategy of the US or in NATO’s contingency planning. The United States still sought to display NATO’s solidarity with Turkey and to demonstrate the Alliance’s commitment to extended nuclear deterrence.²⁸ As a consequence, in the early 1960s, US nuclear weapons deliverable by American and Turkish military aircraft were deployed at airbases in Ankara (Mürted), Eskisehir, Balikesir and Malatya (Erhac), and squadrons of jet fighters were assigned to nuclear-strike missions as part of NATO contingency plans.²⁹ In addition to these, the Incirlik Airbase near Adana on the Eastern Mediterranean coast of Turkey was allocated to the US for stationing nuclear-capable US

²⁶ Mustafa Kibaroglu, “The Future of Extended Deterrence: The Case of Turkey,” in Bruno Tertrais (ed.), *Perspectives on Extended Deterrence*, Research Coll. and Documents No. 3, Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique, Paris, 2010, pp. 87-95.

²⁷ Nur Bilge Criss, “Strategic Nuclear Missiles in Turkey: The Jupiter Affair (1959–1963),” *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 20, 1997, pp. 97-122.

²⁸ Mustafa Kibaroglu, “Turkey and Shared Responsibilities,” in Scott Sagan, ed., *Shared Responsibilities for Nuclear Disarmament* (Cambridge, American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2010), p. 25.

²⁹ General Ergin Celasin (Ret.), former commander of the Turkish Air Force (1999-2001), recalls flying with these jet fighters in the early 1960s when he was at the rank of lieutenant. Author’s interview with General Celasin, 15 February 2010, Ankara.

bomber aircraft.³⁰ By the mid-1980s, the US had stored some 500 nuclear warheads in Turkey; as many as 300 of them were bombs for aircraft. US nuclear bombs were stored at four airbases for use by four Turkish Air Force units. The Turkish squadrons, consisting of nuclear-certified aircraft such as F-104s, F-4s and F-100s, were armed with four types of bombs, with yields up to a couple of hundred kilotons. The US Army also had nuclear weapons in Turkey, which were allocated for support of the Turkish First and Third Armies.³¹

The initial deployment of nuclear weapons in Turkey under the auspices of its NATO membership owes more to the geostrategic significance of the country for the United States in its confrontation with the Soviet Union than any specific requirement stated in the North Atlantic Treaty in that regard.³² As was the case for other allies such as Portugal, Denmark and Norway, the treaty did not involve a compelling undertaking for member states concerning deployment of nuclear or any other weapons systems on their territories. There were, however, good reasons for Turkey to rely on the nuclear strategy of the Alliance in general and the presence of nuclear weapons on Turkish soil in particular for deterrence purposes. Soviet claims on the Turkish Straits³³ and on some of the eastern provinces of Turkey during Stalin's reign gave rise to grave security concerns among the Turkish political and security elites. Turkey's vulnerable situation in the aftermath of World War II and the timely pledge of the United States to extend its security umbrella toward Turkey marked the beginning of substantial US-Turkey bilateral military cooperation.³⁴

When Turkey joined NATO, the parties tacitly agreed that the Turks would help contain the Soviet Union. Should deterrence fail, Turkey would have made its facilities available to NATO and distracted as many Soviet forces as possible from a campaign in Central Europe.³⁵ The military thinking of the Alliance focused on the central front as the main area of Soviet/Warsaw Pact threat, putting an overwhelming emphasis on the contingency of a massive attack through Germany into Western Europe.³⁶ Defending Turkey was seen as being vitally important to the Europeans as

³⁰ Mustafa Kibaroglu, "Acceptance and Anxiety: Turkey (Mostly) Embraces Obama's Nuclear Posture", *Nonproliferation Review*, Vol. 18, No. 1, March 2011, pp. 201-217.

³¹ William M. Arkin, "Washington Report: Playing Chicken in Turkey", *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Vol. 41, No 9, October 1985, pp. 4-5.

³² *World Armaments and Disarmament SIPRI Yearbook 1982*, London, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 1982, p. 7.

³³ The straits of Istanbul (Bosphorus) and Canakkale (Dardanelles) in Northwestern Turkey are strategic sea routes for the countries adjoining the Black Sea. The status of the straits is agreed upon in the Treaty of Montreux of 1936.

³⁴ See Melvyn P. Leffler, "Strategy, Diplomacy, and the Cold War: The United States, Turkey, and NATO, 1945-1952", *Journal of American History*, Vol. 71, No. 4, 1985, pp. 807-825.

³⁵ See Bruce R. Kuniholm, "Turkey and the West", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 70, No. 2, 1991, p. 41.

³⁶ See Ali L. Karaosmanoglu, "Europe's Geopolitical Parameters" in Subidey Togan, V.N. Balasubramanyam (Eds.), *Turkey, Central and Eastern European Countries in Transition*, New York, Palgrave, 2001, pp. 271-289.

it would retard or even prevent a powerful Soviet assault on Western Europe.

During the 1960s and 70s, the Soviet threat was felt more explicitly both in Turkey and in the United States as the Russians closed the gap with the Americans in the nuclear field. The Soviets also increased their military presence and capabilities both in conventional and unconventional weaponry across the eastern frontier of Turkey, as well as their naval presence in the Mediterranean. This period also witnessed intensifying relations between the Soviet Union and Syria and Iraq in many respects, including cooperation in the military field. The growing military presence of the Soviet Union in both quantitative and qualitative terms across the southern flank of NATO provoked the Alliance in general and Turkey in particular to rely extensively, though gradually, on nuclear forces.³⁷

Current Debate on Remaining US Nuclear Weapons in Europe

Turkey still hosts US tactical nuclear weapons on its territory, albeit in much smaller numbers. They are limited to one location, the Incirlik base.³⁸ All nuclear weapons have been withdrawn from the other four bases mentioned above. Even in the absence of an imminent nuclear threat to Turkey's security since the Cold War, the view among both civilian and military Turkish security elites with respect to the stationing of US nuclear weapons on Turkish territory does not seem to have changed even a little. Since these weapons constituted one of the most strategic aspects of Turkey's national security strategy, every Turkish government has calibrated its position vis-à-vis this particular issue along the lines of the long-established state policy in this respect. Most government officials believe that this state policy should not be subject to fluctuations based on short-term political goals or hasty decisions.³⁹ Hence, the current AKP government pursued more or less the same policy with respect to the status of US nuclear weapons deployed in Turkey, and assigned equal significance to the role they play in the security of the country.

There are specific reasons why Turkish government officials and civilian and military bureaucrats want to retain US nuclear weapons on Turkey's soil. The main ones are the prestige attached to nuclear weapons, and the perceived threats from the still uncertain international security environment. Turkish government officials' views may be outlined as follows:

³⁷ In the early 1960s US *Thor* and *Jupiter* missiles became operational in the UK, Italy and Turkey. They had a range of approx. 3,000 km and a warhead yield of 1.5 megatons. Jupiters in Italy (30) and in Turkey (15) were phased out by 1963. See *World Armaments and Disarmament SIPRI Yearbook 1982*, Taylor & Francis & Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 1982, p. 7.

³⁸ Hans M. Kristensen, *US Nuclear Weapons in Europe: A Review of Post-Cold War Policy, Force Levels, and War Planning*, Washington, Natural Resources Defense Council, February 2005, p. 9.

³⁹ Author's interviews with government officials, including advisors of top executives, in June and July 2010.

“Nuclear weapons continue to preserve their critical importance for the security of the North Atlantic alliance, yet they are regarded more as political weapons. Our country is committed to the vision of a world free of nuclear weapons, and thus we support every effort in that direction. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that attaining such a goal will not be possible any time soon, and that more time and patience will be needed to realize this objective. Hence, so long as these weapons do still exist in other parts of the world, it is indispensable for NATO to preserve a safe, secure, and effective nuclear arsenal that will be capable of deterring all sorts of enemies in order to ensure the security of all of its allies. In NATO’s new Strategic Concept our country wanted to see an explicit confirmation of the commitment of the alliance to the preservation of an effective and credible deterrent by way of maintaining a combination of conventional and nuclear weapons capability. In addition to that, our determination for the preservation of the transatlantic link and solidarity as well as fair risk and burden sharing to continue to constitute the fundamental principles of the nuclear strategy of the alliance will persist.”⁴⁰

Not all European allies’ positions, however, are fully compatible with that of Turkey. Some of the allies in Western Europe express strong opposition to the presence of US nuclear weapons on their territories, while other allies in Central and Eastern Europe strongly support the deployment of these weapons in Europe. For instance, in February 2010, the foreign ministers of Belgium, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Norway stated in a letter to NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen that they “welcome the initiative taken by President Obama to strive toward substantial reductions in strategic armaments, and to move towards reducing the role of nuclear weapons and seek peace and security in a world without nuclear weapons”.⁴¹ It is also emphasized in the letter that there should be discussions in NATO as to what the allies “can do to move closer to this overall political objective”.⁴²

Among the five European countries that continue to host US tactical nuclear weapons on their territory, the situation of Turkey exhibits certain peculiarities and thus creates a number of difficulties with respect to dealing with the actual and potential threats to its national security. Turkey is much closer to the regions, the Middle East in particular, from which the Alliance perceives threats emanating from the proliferation of WMDs and their delivery vehicles, such as ballistic missiles, and tries to take effective counter-measures, such as deploying missile defense to protect the

⁴⁰ Written notes on the 2010 US Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) (in Turkish), given to the author upon his request by officials from various branches of the government, July 2010, Ankara. Name of the notetaker withheld by request.

⁴¹ Letter to NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen from the foreign ministers of Belgium, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Norway, 26 February 2010, available at: <http://www.armscontrol.org/system/files/Letter%20to%20Secretary%20General%20NATO.pdf>.

⁴² *Ibid.*

territories and populations of allied countries. Turkey shares to a great extent the Alliance's threat perception and acts accordingly in the decision-making forums where, for instance, NATO's Strategic Concept is discussed.

Hence, Turkish key officials would prefer the strong deterrent capability of the nuclear strategy of the Alliance – based on the principle of burden-sharing allowing a number of member states to host US nuclear weapons on their territory as part of the current extended deterrence strategy – to the option of NATO seeking to deter potential enemies with only the conventional capabilities of the European members of the Alliance, which, in the view of Turkish officials, would not be effective enough.

If, however, US nuclear weapons are withdrawn from the other European allies, no new country is willing to host nuclear weapons with a view to sharing the burden, and Turkey stands out as the only country (perhaps with Italy⁴³) where US nuclear weapons are still deployed, then Turkey may well take a radical decision to send the weapons back to the United States.⁴⁴

Such a likelihood makes many security analysts and policy-makers in the West wonder whether the Turks would decide to obtain their own nuclear weapons in case the US tactical nuclear weapons are withdrawn from Turkey. Three points help to address what is a clear concern in Western security circles.

First of all, almost everybody in the international security realm admits that the tactical nuclear weapons deployed in European countries, including the ones in Turkey, have no significant military value as there appears to be no realistic scenario in which these weapons could be used.

Second, the 'extended deterrence' provided by NATO to its members may be achieved by other means than the forward deployment of nuclear weapons, such as deployment of ballistic missile defense systems on Turkish territory, temporary deployment of US nuclear submarines in the Eastern Mediterranean, and also by way of port visits to allied countries such as Turkey, thus delivering a powerful message to unfriendly countries.⁴⁵ After all, out of the 28 members of NATO, no nuclear weapons are deployed in 20 of them that benefit equally from NATO's deterrent.⁴⁶

⁴³ Italy is believed to host US nuclear weapons, but it is not clear whether it wants to get rid of them. For an account of US nuclear weapons deployed in Italy, see Hans M. Kristensen, *US Nuclear Weapons in Europe: A Review of Post-Cold War Policy, Force Levels, and War Planning*, Washington, Natural Resources Defense Council, February 2005, p. 9.

⁴⁴ Conversation with a high-ranking Turkish diplomat, 29 January 2010, Ankara.

⁴⁵ Mustafa Kibaroglu, "Turkey and Shared Responsibilities", *op. cit.*

⁴⁶ Three of the 28 NATO members – the US, UK and France – are Nuclear-Weapons States under the NPT and possess their own nuclear weapons. Five other members – Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Turkey – host

Third, the Turkish Air Force no longer has any operational link with the remaining tactical nuclear weapons.⁴⁷ F-104s have not been in service since 1994. F-4s are still in service after modernization of some 54 of them by Israeli Aerospace Industries in 1997. Only the F-16s of the Turkish Air Force participate in NATO's nuclear strike exercises known as *Steadfast Noon*, during which crews are trained in loading, unloading and employing B61 tactical nuclear weapons. The Turkish aircraft in these exercises serve as a non-nuclear air-defense escort rather than a nuclear strike force.⁴⁸

Hence, the US nuclear weapons that have long been stationed on Turkish territory have now only symbolic value. Their possible withdrawal *alone* is not likely to prompt Turkey to embark on a nuclear program and to get involved in a nuclear adventure.

nuclear weapons that belong to the United States. No nuclear weapons are stationed in any of the remaining 20 members of the Alliance.

⁴⁷ Mustafa Kibaroglu, "Isn't it Time to Say Farewell to US Nukes in Turkey?", *European Security*, Vol. 14, No. 4, December 2005, pp. 443-457.

⁴⁸ Email exchange with a retired top military commander of the Turkish Air Force, 23 April 2010, Ankara. See Mustafa Kibaroglu, "Reassessing the Role of US Nuclear Weapons in Turkey", *Arms Control Today*, June 2010, available at: https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2010_06/Kibaroglu.

Turkey and Ballistic Missile Defense: Between Assurance and Autonomy

Another dimension to the issue of assurances provided to Turkey by the Alliance against the threat of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery vehicles in its region emerged with Turkey's decision to host essential parts (i.e. the radar site in Kürecik, Malatya in Eastern Turkey) of the NATO-wide ballistic missile defense (BMD) system. The essential question here, in connection with Turkey's decision to take an active part in the project, is whether the deployment of an advanced missile defense capability would positively affect the perception of the Turkish security elite, and provide reassurances vis-à-vis the threat posed by the military capabilities of neighboring Iran in particular, and by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East in general, and thus keep Turkey from 'going nuclear'.

Turkey's Concerns About BMD

When the US National Missile Defense (NMD) project was launched by the Clinton administration in the early 1990s, Russia, China and European allies of the US as well as Turkey were quick to raise their concerns about the project. While Russian opposition was mainly based on a legal stance, as the development and deployment of a national BMD capability by the US was in clear violation of the ABM Treaty, China also harshly criticized the NMD on the grounds that the project could very well offset the significance of its strategic deterrent, based on a limited number of ICBMs. European members of NATO, on the other hand, worried mostly that the US NMD could antagonize Russia.⁴⁹ From the standpoint of Turkey, coming to a conclusion about the *pros* and *cons* of the American NMD project was rather difficult. On the positive side, due to Turkey's close military and political relations with the United States, the development of an effective air-defense capability by the Americans could be considered to have a constructive impact on Turkey's security. Many countries in Turkey's neighborhood are known to possess WMDs and ballistic missiles. Hence, should the US choose to share its missile defense capability with its allies, it could have a positive effect on Turkey's security. Notwithstanding this, Turkey was concerned about the military implications of the project for itself: NMD had originally been designed to counter long-range ballistic

⁴⁹ For a comprehensive discussion of this matter, see Mustafa Kibaroglu, "Turkey's Place in the Missile Shield Project", *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 2, Summer 2013, pp. 223-236.

threats such as ICBMs, which have minimum ranges of 5,000–6,000km. This kind of capabilities appeared to be of limited practical use for Turkey, since it did not perceive any threat from countries that far away, as opposed to theater missile defense systems such as the *Patriot*, *Arrow-I & II* or *S-300* series, which could be effective against the threats posed by the short- and medium-range ballistic missile capabilities of the countries in its neighborhood.⁵⁰

Eventually, most of the issues of disagreement between the United States and its European allies, including Turkey, over the development of the BMD capabilities have largely been resolved as a result of changes in the systems involved and thus in the resulting protection offered to Europe. While the Bush administration proposed deployment of a radar in Czech Republic and of Ground Based Interceptors (GBIs) in Poland through bilateral agreements, the Obama administration revised the threat assessment and the missile defense architecture accordingly in 2009. The resulting European Phased Adaptive Approach to BMD followed the assessment that Iran's advanced ballistic missile capability, seen by the US as the primary source of threat, was not yet advanced to the level that it could reach US territory. Nevertheless, the Obama administration also maintained that Iran could still hit the territories of the allied countries in central and Eastern Europe, requiring the deployment of tailored BMD capabilities (i.e. radars and shorter-range interceptors) on the allied territories closer to Iran. Hence, Turkey's geographical place gained prominence in the eyes of the American authorities.⁵¹

The international media coverage of the NATO meeting of foreign and defense ministers held in Brussels on 14 October 2010 – in the run-up to the Lisbon summit of the Alliance in November where a decision was to be taken with respect to the ballistic missile defense project in Europe – gave the impression that Turkey and other NATO members were having a row over the development of the project. That was not the case.⁵² Even though Turkey and the leading members of the Alliance did not see eye-to-eye on every single aspect of NATO's missile defense project, the degree of divergence of opinions was not as wide as it seemed from a distance. Hence, breakthroughs were possible during the Lisbon summit, and Turkey has become an important partner in NATO's missile defense project. The radar site in Kürecik started to operate as a NATO asset concomitantly with the Chicago summit meeting of NATO in May 2012.⁵³ The geographical location of Turkey, in the vicinity of volatile regions, and in a rather hostile environment, requires the deployment of air-defense systems all over the country against the threat posed by the missile capabilities of a number of countries that surround it. Despite their willingness to deploy BMD assets in the country, Turkish authorities still had concerns about three major issues.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Craig Whitlock, "European Missile Shield Plan Is Expected to Gain Support", *The Washington Post*, 14 October 2010, available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/10/14/AR2010101405260.html>.

⁵³ Mustafa Kibaroglu, "Acceptance and Anxiety", *op. cit.*

First, Turkey wanted the project to be a NATO initiative rather than an American project, based on the lessons learned from the *Jupiter* missile crisis in 1962. The Turkish government was not consulted by the Kennedy administration when it decided to withdraw these missiles to resolve the Cuban Missile Crisis. Such an attitude on the part of the major ally, the United States, caused deep resentment among the Turkish political and security elite, which resonated for many years. Hence, Turkey did not want to be left in a one-on-one situation with the United States in such a delicate matter, where the parties' weight would be disproportionate in terms of decision-making if it ever became necessary to activate the system in a future contingency.⁵⁴

Secondly, Turkey had doubts as to whether the US would really want collaboration in this matter for protecting Turkey, or whether Israel's security in the face of the threat posed by Iranian missiles would be its real concern. Prime Minister Erdogan expressed concerns about whether NATO's missile defense capability would also be used to protect Israel in case it was attacked (by Iran).⁵⁵ Turkish government officials would also have liked to know exactly who would control the operation of the Alliance's BMD capabilities, since Turkey wanted every single square inch of Turkish territory to be covered by the missile defense system once it became fully operational.⁵⁶

Thirdly, Turkey did not want any country's name to be explicitly put forward as the source of the threat against which the Alliance would be developing the project. Instead, Turkey suggested that the Alliance conduct a threat assessment study about the proliferation of ballistic missiles worldwide and the countermeasures that would justify the need to install such a system on NATO territory. There were two reasons why Turkey was sensitive about naming any specific country. One related to relations with Iran, especially at the level of the top political leaderships on both sides, who were concerned about the sensitivities that would be created in the public domain by citing a neighboring country as a target. The other, and probably more important, reason was Turkey's concerns about Iran's possible exploitation of this situation. Turkish authorities believed that, if Iran were explicitly cited as the source of threat, the Iranian leadership would have a justification for further advancing their missile and other military capabilities.⁵⁷ Therefore, Turkey's opposition to naming a particular

⁵⁴ Mustafa Kibaroglu, "Nuclearization of the Middle East and Turkey's Possible Responses", *op. cit.*

⁵⁵ Political sensitivities notwithstanding, the difficulty here is that the NATO-wide missile defense structure will have to benefit to a great extent from the US air and missile defense systems that have already been deployed and are being deployed in various places on ground-based as well as sea-based platforms, and that will have to be expanded to cover the entire NATO territory. This in turn may require activation of various sub-systems that may also cover Israeli airspace. Hence, this technical issue, which has political implications, will have to be tackled by the allied countries.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ A similar exploitation could be observed in Iran's use of the threat posed by Israel and the US for advancing its own nuclear capabilities and legitimizing its

country was not the result of an emotional attitude but rather arose from a calculated, rational decision, with a view to putting a halt to Iran's growing missile capabilities.⁵⁸ This point was overlooked by many amid the debates on whether Turkey was drifting away from the West and getting closer to Iran.⁵⁹

Decreasing Foreign Influence?

Would the deployment of an advanced missile defense capability on Turkey's territory significantly limit its potential aspirations toward going nuclear in response to Iran's development of nuclear weapons capability? A careful reading of Turkey's major concerns about deployment of BMD systems suggests that Turkish authorities do indeed consider the presence of NATO's sophisticated defensive capabilities as a highly valuable strategic asset for Turkey's protection against both actual and potential threats emanating from its neighborhood.

Nevertheless, this may be the prevailing view among Turkish officials currently, but, due to changing circumstances both inside and outside of Turkey, it may not remain so in the longer term; thus the credibility of the assurances provided by NATO, presented as insurance policies against Turkey's potential inclination toward 'going nuclear', may be called into question.

Many Turkish security analysts believe that NATO failed the first immediate test of solidarity – when Turkey called on the allies in 1991 to deploy the Rapid Reaction Force on Turkish territory against the threat posed by Iraq following its invasion of Kuwait in August 1990. The Western European members of NATO especially dragged their feet in living up to their Article 5 commitments, arguing that the Middle East was 'out of the area' of NATO's operation zone.⁶⁰

A similar situation arose in February 2003, when Turkey formally asked the North Atlantic Council to enact Article 4 of the Washington Treaty with a view to starting deliberations on the possible measures that each member nation would have to take in the run-up to the second Gulf War, in order to protect Turkey against Iraq's much-vaunted missiles and weapons of mass destruction. Western European allies such as Germany, France and Belgium did not want to enact Article 4 on the grounds that a war in Iraq would result from unilateral US policies that would not be justified by United Nations Security Council (UNSC) decisions, and that all NATO members had to observe the principles and objectives of the UN Charter, as indicated in Article 1 of the North Atlantic Treaty. Therefore, the Western

actions in the eyes of the public domains in the greater Islamic world and elsewhere.

⁵⁸ In retrospect, one can see that this attempt failed, and the sanctions managed to cap Iranian progress in terms of ballistic missiles.

⁵⁹ Mustafa Kibaroglu, "Nuclearization of the Middle East and Turkey's Possible Responses", *op. cit.*

⁶⁰ Mustafa Kibaroglu, "The Generals' Discontent", *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Vol. 57, No. 2, March/April 2001, pp. 28-30.

European allies of Turkey did not believe they had an obligation to protect Turkey in a war waged due to the illegitimate action of another ally, the United States. Nevertheless, unaware of such legal interpretations of the Treaty articles, most Turks felt that NATO members had once again failed to honor their Treaty obligations toward Turkey.

It was only in response to Syria's hostile act on 22 June 2012 of downing a Turkish jet in the Eastern Mediterranean that the NATO Council, meeting at Turkey's request, issued a statement that underscored the solidarity of the allied nations with Turkey against the Al Assad regime in Syria, followed by the deployment of *Patriot* anti-ballistic missile systems in Turkey's southeast.⁶¹ Many in Turkey, however, incorrectly tended to believe that these missiles were deployed to protect Israel against possible missile attack by Iran. For instance, Seval Kavcar, of the nationalist daily *Ortodogu*, argued, "as confirmed by many articles published in Western newspapers", that the real motive of the United States in deploying its air-defense systems in Kürecik and Diyarbakir was not to protect Turkey but rather to protect Israel against Iranian and Syrian missiles.⁶² Similarly, Hakan Ozden from *Yenisafak*, a pro-AKP daily paper, asked who exactly would be protected by the *Patriot* battalions deployed on the Turkish-Syrian border, and indeed expressed concern about them being deployed to protect Israel.

The powerful image of NATO in the eyes of many Turks has been diluted due to the transformation of the Alliance from a collective defense organization, with a 'hard power' stance, to a collective security organization, with a perceived 'soft power' approach. No less important, in terms of the credibility of the assurances provided by the Alliance, is the effect of anti-American sentiments in the Turkish public domain in undermining the significance of NATO, which is starting to be seen as an organization that "serves primarily the interests of the United States and [is] helping it to establish its world hegemony".⁶³ This can best be seen in the harsh criticisms leveled against the NATO BMD projects.⁶⁴

⁶¹ "Doorstep statement delivered by the NATO Secretary General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen following the meeting of the North Atlantic Council", 26 June 2012, available at: http://www.nato.intcps/en/natolive/opinions_88662.htm?SelectedLocale=en.

⁶² Neval Kavcar, "Gizli Isgal [Hidden Invasion]", *Ortodogu*, 20 December 2012, available at: <http://www.ortadogugazetesi.net/makale.php?id=12228>. Also see Hakan Ozden, "Sinira yerleřtirilecek Patriotlar Kimi Koruyacak? [Who will the Patriots that are Deployed on the Border Protect?]", *Yenisafak*, 31 December 2012, available at: <http://yenisafak.com.tr/yorum-haber/sinira-yerlestirilecek-patriotlar-kimi-koruyacak-31.12.2012-440122>.

⁶³ Nearly 80 % of Turkish people think that Turkey and the US are not allies anymore. Findings of this poll are available at: <http://www.transatlantictrends.org>.

⁶⁴ The BMD radar in Kürecik became operational as a NATO asset in May 2012 at the time of the Chicago summit of the Alliance. Mustafa Kibaroglu, "NATO'nun Balistik Fuze Savunma Sistemi ve Turkiye [NATO's Ballistic Missile Defence and Turkey]", *Uluslararası İlişkiler Dergisi* [Journal of International Relations], NATO Özel Sayısı [Special Issue on NATO], Vol. 9, No. 34, Summer 2012, pp. 183-204.

The HQ-9 Deal and Turkey's Quest for Autonomy

The Turkish government's decision announced on 26 September 2013 to approve the bid of Chinese firm CPMIEC (China Precision Machinery Import-Export Corporation) to supply the FD-2000 surface-to-air missile, the export version of the *HongQi-9* (HQ-9) air-defense systems – which was harshly criticized by its Western allies – may have its roots in the developments highlighted in the previous section.

Turkey's Western allies expressed grave concerns about the damage that this Chinese system might cause to the integrated air-defense system of the Alliance that will soon become operational. Some argue that integrating the Chinese assets into the defense infrastructure of the Alliance would be the “equivalent of inserting a ‘virus’ into NATO's command and control system”.⁶⁵

NATO's top military commander reportedly urged Turkey to buy a missile defense system that is compatible with other NATO systems. The comments by US Air Force General Philip Breedlove, NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), added to pressure on Ankara to rethink its decision to build a missile defense system with a Chinese firm. Stressing that the choice was for Turkey to make, Breedlove said he was anxious that all NATO members should take decisions that contributed to the collective defense of the Alliance, and selected equipment that would work with other NATO systems.⁶⁶

CPMIEC is subject to US sanctions for violations of the Iran, North Korea and Syria Nonproliferation Act. The annual National Defense Authorization Bill, passed on 12 December 2013 by the US Congress, contained a clause barring the use of “2014 funds to integrate missile defense systems of the People's Republic of China into US missile defense systems”. The Senate and House Armed Services Committees said: “Such a system would not be compatible with, and should not be integrated with, missile defense systems of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.” It is also argued that without US subsidies the cost for Turkey to install the Chinese missiles might become steeper.⁶⁷

The criticisms of the Turkish decision to favor a Chinese firm, also expressed by numerous other individuals and institutions, have rather solid

⁶⁵ “Turkey Asks for Extension of NATO Patriot Missiles, Recommits to Chinese Missile Deal Blasted by NATO”, *The Tower Magazine*, 15 November 2013, available at: <http://www.thetower.org/turkey-asks-for-extension-of-nato-patriot-missiles-recommits-to-chinese-missile-deal-blasted-by-nato/>.

⁶⁶ Adrian Croft, “NATO's top commander questions Turkish missile deal with China”, *Reuters*, 6 November 2013, available at: <http://news.yahoo.com/natos-top-commander-questions-turkish-missile-deal-china-235058358.html>.

⁶⁷ Steve Wilson, “Congress to block Turkey using US funds to buy missile system from blacklisted Chinese firm”, *The Telegraph*, 14 December 2013, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/turkey/10517547/Congress-to-block-Turkey-using-US-funds-to-buy-missile-system-from-blacklisted-Chinese-firm.html>.

grounds that can hardly be contradicted. It might have been expected that Turkey, a NATO member for more than 60 years, would have chosen an air-defense system compatible with those produced by the allies.⁶⁸

Co-production as well as deployment of air and missile defense systems in Turkey was not a new topic for Turkish politicians, diplomats or the military, nor was it a new item on the agenda of Turkish-American relations. The issue has been on the negotiation table, initially at a bilateral level with the American authorities, since the temporary deployment of US *Patriot* air and missile defense systems during the first Iraq war in 1991. Since then, the Turkish authorities have been more than willing to deploy elaborate air-defense systems permanently in Turkey, especially in regions neighboring the Middle East. Despite extended negotiations, no consensus could be found in order to go ahead with a joint project, to be developed at the bilateral level. Turkey's desire back in the late 1990s was to have a share in the development of the ballistic missile defense technology, which was unacceptable to the United States.

A similar situation was experienced in the triangular relations between Turkey, the US and Israel with respect to cooperation on the development and eventual deployment of the *Arrow-II* missile defense system as well. While the Americans put the blame on the Israelis as being the ones who did not want to share this new and sensitive technology with Turkey, the Israelis articulated almost exactly the same views about the attitude of their American counterparts.⁶⁹ All in all, the project was shelved, at least from the perspective of Turkey, due to the deterioration of Turkish-Israeli relations in the late 2000s.⁷⁰

Against this background of failed attempts to secure the cooperation of Western allies, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu emphasized that the decision was based on objective criteria, not politics. He said that "for us, this is a process based purely on objective criteria. There is no political or ideological dimension". He also noted that he had discussed the issue with both Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel and Secretary of State John Kerry during his visit to Washington in mid-November 2013. Davutoglu said "the decision is made because the US refuses to jointly produce the system, which is the top requirement for Turkey". Davutoglu, noting that the bidding for the system had started in 2009, and the US had not raised concerns until now, added: "Of course you always prefer to have

⁶⁸ The other bidders were the US partnership of Raytheon and Lockheed Martin, offering the *Patriot* air-defense system; Russia's Rosoboronexport, marketing the S-300, and Italian-French consortium Eurosam, maker of the SAMP/T *Aster 30*. It is, therefore, worth analyzing why such a decision was made by the Turkish authorities.

⁶⁹ Conversations with American and Israeli military and diplomatic staff as well as academics on the sidelines of conferences in Turkey as well as in the US, who would not want to be named.

⁷⁰ Mustafa Kibaroglu, "Acceptance and Anxiety", *op. cit.*

defense systems from our allies, from NATO, and especially from the United States, [but] we expect joint production by our allies.”⁷¹

The Chinese HQ-9 system included co-production solutions, as requested by the Turkish authorities.⁷² Moreover, the Chinese firm committed to providing enough battalions of the system to be deployed in Turkey in regions where Turkish security officers believe that air and missile defense capability is needed, within a couple of years. In addition to co-production and quick delivery of several battalions, which will be made operational soon, Turkish defense professionals argue that “by developing the necessary inter-phase software the problem of compatibility can be overcome without much difficulty” and that “Turkey is capable of doing that”.⁷³ Top executives from the Under-Secretariat of Defense Industries (Turkish acronym: SSM) in Ankara, which operates under the auspices of the Turkish Ministry of Defense and is responsible for evaluating the offers against certain criteria, such as technical capabilities to meet requirements, cost of procurement and co-production, and the like, confirm the above arguments made by software engineers. They also say that “the bidding process is not finalized yet – should the Chinese firm fail to comply with its commitments, it would be a normal procedure to go ahead with the firm that ranked second, which was not made public by the SSM authorities due to the confidentiality principle”.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Kristina Wong, “Turkish official defends purchase of Chinese anti-missile system”, *The Washington Times*, available at: <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2013/nov/18/turkish-official-defends-purchase-chinese-anti-mis/#ixzz2s78>.

⁷² See “US-sanctioned Chinese firm wins Turkey missile defense system tender”, *Hurriyet Daily News*, 26 September 2013, available at: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/us-sanctioned-chinese-firm-wins-turkey-missile-defense-system-tender.aspx?pageID=238&nID=55234&NewsCatID=345>.

⁷³ Telephone conversation with an expert, who wished not to be identified, from the Turkish Under-Secretariat of Defense Industries (SSM) in Ankara, October 2013.

⁷⁴ Conversations with top executives of the Under-Secretariat of Defense Industries, Ankara, 28 October 2013.

Conclusion

Turkey's allies in the West have understandable concerns about the possible actions that Turkish policy-makers may, sooner or later, take with respect to Turkey's national security in view of the fact that Iran might become a nuclear power. Hundreds of years of rivalry are embedded in the very fabric of Turkish-Iranian relations, even though it may not have surfaced much over the last decade under the AKP government, until the eruption of the Syrian civil war. Even within the parameters of the current political order in the region and in Turkey, it would be naive to think that the Turks would simply sit back and watch so dramatic development as Iran crossing the nuclear threshold, either by way of testing a device, or by leaking evidence to the world about its nuclear weapons-building capability, with undeniable evidence attached.

Should this happen, the above discussion on the various Turkish perspectives on Iran's nuclear program, as well as on the extent of the assurances provided to Turkey by NATO, be it in the form of 'extended nuclear deterrence' strategy, or in the form of erecting a BMD system against the ballistic missile and WMD capabilities of Iran today and in the future, suggests that Turkey – contrary to what most foreign observers argue – would not be in a rush to take radical steps against Iran that might necessitate abruptly breaking with its longstanding policy of promoting WMD nonproliferation regimes.

Against the threats that may be posed by Iran and its nuclear weapons capability, therefore, NATO will still be considered as an organization that may provide tangible support during contingencies that might involve confrontation with Iran. The possibility of such a scenario is implicit in Turkish officials' insistence on keeping US tactical nuclear weapons in Turkey, even if no-one in the responsible posts in the state bureaucracy would admit this publicly. It may be further argued that the deployment of six *Patriot* battalions by the United States, the Netherlands and Germany in Turkey's southeast along the Syrian border strengthened that view, even though the press has been skeptical about the 'real intentions' of the United States in getting such a decision from the North Atlantic Council in November 2012.

Nevertheless, it would also be naive to believe that the Turks will be fully satisfied with the solidarity of the allies for an extended period of time, during which Iran would continue to entertain its successful elevation to the category of nuclear weapons-capable states, without necessarily suffering the consequences of violating its international legal obligations. In such

circumstances, the next generation of decision-makers may very well lose their confidence in the proper implementation and effectiveness of the nuclear non-proliferation regime, if it survives such a blow after the North Korean example. They may very well put every option on the table, including a comprehensive nuclear energy development program with proper investment in enrichment and reprocessing technologies, both of which may also give Turkey the option to exploit them for various purposes in the future.⁷⁵

The government's controversial decision of 26 September 2013 to give the green light to a Chinese firm for the deployment as well as co-production of BMD systems in Turkey at a time when similar NATO assets were deployed on Turkish soil is an indication of the prevailing wish among Turkish decision-makers to become as self-reliant as possible in the field of strategic weapons systems. The Under-Secretariat of Defense Industries, which is responsible for developing as well as guiding such projects, has been both reformed and largely renovated; its original site has been expanded into a huge state-of-the-art campus housing several buildings that may host hundreds of qualified experts and administrative staff, while its budget has been hugely increased. In 2012 figures, the total value of some 180 projects that are said to be under way amounts to around USD 25 billion. Nearly USD 200 million is reportedly spent on research and development activities by the SSM.⁷⁶

These and other measures being developed by Turkey against the proliferation of WMDs and their means of delivery imply that Turkey is, indeed, not at all willing to become a 'pariah state', risking the sudden cutting of its centuries-old ties with the modern world (i.e. NATO membership, European Union vocation, etc.), by trying to develop clandestinely a crash nuclear weapons program. However, Turkey's current economic potential and its advancing technological and scientific capabilities⁷⁷ may provide enough confidence to the next generation's decision-makers to develop the necessary infrastructure that may be transformed from peaceful to military applications, if need be, and depending on the state of affairs in regional and world politics.

Going nuclear is certainly not an ideal scenario for a country like Turkey that has powerful aspirations toward becoming a prosperous and advanced democratic state in its region. However, by no means may such a goal be achieved only by way of Turkey's own assets and efforts. Its

⁷⁵ Mustafa Kibaroglu, "Iran's Nuclear Program May Trigger the Young Turks to Think Nuclear", *Proliferation News and Resources*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 20 December 2004, available at: <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/npp/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=16284>.

⁷⁶ Conversations with the top executives from the Under-Secretariat of Defense Industries, Ankara, 28 October 2013.

⁷⁷ These have been (1) indigenously developed in the higher-education institutions, whose number has tripled over the last decade, and in the private sector in close collaboration with academia, as well as (2) transferred from abroad via cooperative deals with Russia and China, due to the reluctance of its Western allies in the area of sensitive technology transfer.

allies must be much more supportive of Turkey's vocation to become fully integrated into the Western security structure, and also more determined to solve the dispute over the Iranian nuclear program peacefully. Failure to do so may trigger a cascade of proliferation in the region from which no-one can remain aloof.

However, if the unpredictability of Iran's nuclear ambitions persists, and if the diplomatic efforts to halt Iran's steady advances in its nuclear program fail in the medium term, despite high expectations from the implementation of the Geneva accord reached between the P5+1 countries and Iran on 24 November 2013, no country in the region would like to depend solely on others' assets, no matter how sophisticated or powerful they may be, or on their security assurances, for the survival of their regimes against the threats posed by the clerical regime in Iran – which, with nuclear weapons capability at its disposal, would likely be emboldened in its foreign relations. Turkey would not be an exception to that rule.

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