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Turkish Foreign Policy, Security and Economics Magazine



# THE STRATEGIST



## The Tenets of Turkish Foreign Policy After 24 June Elections

Sibel KARABEL & Elnur İSMAYIL

Interview with Ambassador  
Dr. Oguz Celikkol

Turkey and NATO in Retrospect:  
Hard to Classify as a “Win-Win”  
Relationship

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Russian-Turkish Relations  
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The New “Great Game”:  
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US/Turkey  
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Daniel SERWER

Energy security as an  
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Strategic Implications  
of the Ilisu Dam

Paul A. WILLIAMS

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## Editor in-Chief's Note

We are pleased to introduce the second issue of The Strategist Journal to our readers and subscribers. The Strategist as well as its Turkish version 'Strategist' aims at analyzing current international agenda with a scientific approach. Considering the turbulent and dynamic nature of the international system, this stance entails to broaden and deepen the analysis and hopefully to help generate vital contributions to the literature.

Under this perspective, The Strategist comprises analyses inked by foreign policy experts, academicians, economists, and related veterans. Of particular relevance here is that The Strategist focuses more on the Turkish foreign policy and sets out to shed light on Turkish foreign policy to the international public.

In this issue, Mustafa Kibaroglu, President of WISEMEN Center for Strategic Studies and Dean of MEF University, discusses Turkey's vocation as an ally in NATO with respect to the country's national interests in his analysis entitled "Turkey and NATO in Retrospect: Hard to Classify as a "Win-Win" Relationship". Kibaroglu points out the perspective Turkey has developed over time in its counterterrorism struggle as a NATO ally within North Atlantic Security Organization.

The analysis "The Tenets of Turkish Foreign Policy After 24 June Elections" co-authored by WISEMEN Foreign Policy and Security Expert Dr. Elnur İsmayıl and WISEMEN EU and Asia-Pacific Studies Expert Sibel Karabel aims at examining Turkey's foreign policy posture in the post-election period of 24 June 2018 with particular reference to Turkey's major foreign policy issues.

In his analysis, named "Strategic Implications of the Ilisu Dam" Researcher Paul A. Williams assesses the details of Ilisu Dam, which will store Tigris River water, taking into account of security, energy and technical aspects of the project.

Retired Ambassador and Dr. Mehmet Öğütçü in the article "The New Great Game: What Awaits Us?" deals with key drivers of current international issues by portraying a broader global picture. However, Öğütçü also delves into Turkey's foreign policy after 24 June elections in this global perspective.

Director General of Russian International Affairs Council Andrey Kortunov undertakes an extensive analysis of Russian-Turkish relations in his article "Russian-Turkish Relations Need a Stronger Foundation". Kortunov stipulates main themes that comprise as common points and obstacles between Turkey and Russia in a constructive manner.

Researcher Journalist Aura Sabadus discusses the contentious nature of the term 'energy security' by giving references to some disputed projects such as Nord Stream II in his analysis named, "Energy Security as an 'Unsafe' concept".

Prof. Daniel Serwer in his op-ed "US-Turkey Relations" undertakes a commentary on recent developments in American\*Turkish relations with a perspective from the US.

Also in this issue, Retired Ambassador, and Kültür University Faculty Member Oğuz Çelikkol gave an interview on Turkish foreign policy challenges in the context of new global and regional dynamics.

We hope you enjoy this issue and do let us know if there are any queries regarding the context and topics of the journal.

**Sibel KARABEL**

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# THE STRATEGIST



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**Aura SABADUS**



European Council Summit meeting in Brussels.  
(Belgium, 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> June)

General elections were held throughout Turkey on 24 June 2018. Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has won a new five-year term after securing outright victory in the first round of a presidential poll.  
(Turkey, 24<sup>th</sup> June)

Presidential election in Venezuela. Nicolás Maduro is re-elected with a large majority but in a context of very strong abstention.  
(Venezuela, 20<sup>th</sup> May)

The United States, France, and the United Kingdom carried out a series of military strikes involving aircraft and ship-based missiles against multiple government sites in Syria. They said it was in response to the Douma chemical attack against civilians on 7<sup>th</sup> April, which they attributed to the Syrian government.  
(14<sup>th</sup> April)

The United States withdraws from the JCPOA and threatens with sanctions for companies that continue to trade with Iran.  
(USA, 8<sup>th</sup> May)

Armenia protest leader Nikol Pachinian has been elected as Armenia's new Prime minister by the Armenian Parliament.

(Armenia, 8<sup>th</sup> May)

Armenian Prime Minister Serzh Sargsyan had announced his resignation after series of anti-government protests.

(Armenia, 23<sup>th</sup> April)

U.S. Embassy in Israel moved from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem after US President Donald Trump announced the United States recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel on December 6th 2017.

(Israel, 14<sup>th</sup> May)

Lebanon's Parliamentary election. Hezbollah has gained political ground in Lebanon.

(Lebanon, 6<sup>th</sup> May)

Parliamentary elections were held in Iraq. Muqtada al-Sadr's bloc (Shia) wins parliamentary poll.

(Iraq, 12<sup>th</sup> May)

Presidential elections were held in Azerbaijan. President Ilham Aliyev was re-elected president for a seven-year term.

(Azerbaijan, 11<sup>th</sup> April)

First meeting between South and North Korean leaders Moon Jae-in and Kim Jong-un at the « inter-Korean » summit in Panmunjeom.

(North and South Korea, 27<sup>th</sup> 2018)

U.S. President Donald Trump met with North Korean Supreme Leader Kim Jong-un in Singapore, in the first summit meeting between the leaders of the United States of America and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

(Singapore, 12<sup>th</sup> June)

# Turkey and NATO in Retrospect: Hard to Classify as a “Win-Win” Relationship

Turkey is a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) since February 1952. Most of the allied countries, and the United States in particular, have long seen Turkey as their “staunch ally” thanks to its significant contributions to the security and defense of the West against the threats posed by the Soviet Union during the Cold war era.

## Mustafa KİBAROĞLU

Prof., BİLGESAM President, Dean of MEF University





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Most of the allied countries, and the United States in particular, have long seen Turkey as their "staunch ally" thanks to its significant contributions to the security and defense of the West against the threats posed by the Soviet Union during the Cold war era.

Yet, there have been tough times as well in this relationship, especially when Turkey and Greece have been at odds with each other over a host of issues, either in Cyprus or in the Aegean that brought the two NATO allies to the brink of hot confrontation.

There were also heavy criticisms towards Turkey, time and again, from the leading members of the Alliance, such as the one that surfaced prior to and during the Lisbon Summit in November 2010 where the "Missile Shield" was a key issue on the agenda and Turkey was (wrongly) blamed for obstructing the implementation of the project, which was not the case, at all.

Despite ups and downs in the alliance relations, neither Turks, nor their Western allies have felt the need to call Turkey's membership into question until recently.

The tide seems to have turned several years ago, especially when Turkey sought cooperation and collaboration with China over the procurement of air defense systems, after a series of failed attempts to do so from its Western allies.

The situation has further deteriorated with the signing of the contract between Turkey and Russia over the sale of an elaborate air defense system, namely the S-400s.

This controversy between Turkey and the allied countries had ramifications as well as repercussions, particularly, in the public domains of both sides.

Voices have been heard, for instance, among the Turks, questioning NATO's added value to Turkey's security and defense, as well as among the Westerners, suggesting taking a tougher stance against Turkey so as to punish its initiatives to collaborate with the rivals of the Alliance like China and Russia.

But, the tone of criticism towards each other reached its peak in the aftermath of the coup attempt in Turkey on July 15, 2016 by a group of military officers who have long been embedded in the Turkish Armed Forces, but who were inde-

ed devoted members of a cult, now labeled as the "Fetullahçı Terör Örgütü (FETÖ)".

Because, the coup plotters used, among others, the refueling aircraft that belonged to the Turkish Air Force, but allocated to NATO operations over the Syrian airspace and thus stationed at the Incirlik base, operated largely by the US military.

This incident gave way to endless and relentless accusations among the Turks, of all walks of life and all ranks, towards NATO of being complicit with the coup plotters in order to topple the democratically elected government in Turkey.

Hence, the value of NATO as an organization that was supposed to enhance Turkey's security as well as to protect its sovereignty and territorial integrity has lost almost all of its currency among Turkish citizens.

Interestingly, the very same incident has also become the source of serious concerns among a number of "security experts" in the West who frequently argued that the tactical nuclear weapons, which belong to the United States, but stationed at the Incirlik base, were not anymore safe and that they should be withdrawn from Turkey immediately.

Some have even gone farther away to argue that the Turkish government would seize these nuclear weapons and use against the US and/or its partner countries, such as Israel and the Gulf monarchies in the Middle East.

These security "analysts" argued that Turkey would no more deserve the positive security assurances provided by its NATO allies and that it should be "kicked out" of the Alliance at an early date.

The Brussels Summit of the Alliance to be convened on July 11-12, 2018, on the days this article is being finalized, will hopefully not feature such groundless accusations or meaningless arguments on its agenda.

But, outside this official sphere, some "experts" on NATO issues will most likely continue to propagate their "analyses" and their conclusions as to how Turkey has become a security burden for the West and why the members of the Alliance should alienate it.

Amid such debates, both inside and outside of the country, as to whether Turkey should continue to be a NATO ally, this article will discuss, in Part I, how, indeed, Turkey's membership in the Alliance has created major obstructions in its fight against





*NATO Leaders Summit, Brussels 2018*

terrorism for decades since the late 1970s and, in Part II, how Turkish governments have found their own solutions, in one way or another, by seizing the opportunities that emerged out of the conjunctural changes taking place in the world, without tangible support coming from their allies.

### **Part I - Limitations Caused by Turkey's NATO Membership in its Fight Against PKK Terrorism**

The most important challenge that Turkey had to deal with, during the 1980s and the most part of the 1990s, was rather the wide-ranging support that was given to the PKK primarily by Turkey's immediate neighbors to its south, namely Syria, Iraq, and also Iran, to some extent.

From the early 1980s until the mid-1990s, Turkey's counterterrorism efforts were significantly undermined because of the limitations that Turkey faced in deterring the countries that have supported the PKK.

These limitations, however, were not necessarily emanating from Turkey's weaknesses politically or economically, or lack of military capabilities.

#### **Limitations caused by NATO's Strategies on Turkey's Force Posture**

Turkey's inability to deter its southern neighbors from providing shelter and all sorts of logistical support to the PKK was mainly stemming from its responsibilities within the North Atlantic Alliance.

This may, at first, sound as a highly controversial statement, and one may ask "how in the world NATO membership would negatively affect the ability Turkey, being a 'staunch ally' and doing its

**Limitations caused by NATO's Strategies on Turkey's Force Posture Turkey's inability to deter its southern neighbors from providing shelter and all sorts of logistical support to the PKK was mainly stemming from its responsibilities within the North Atlantic Alliance.**



utmost to contribute to the defense of the North Atlantic Alliance, to effectively fight against PKK terrorism?”

For this to be properly understood, one must explain how Turkey's role in the Alliance strategies undermined, unintentionally though, its capacity to deter its southern neighbors who supported the PKK for many years, due to the deep divergences of opinion, between Turkey and the NATO allies, as to how to deal with the PKK terrorism.

Starting from the mid-1980s, in addition to the Armenian terrorist organization ASALA, which was responsible for the assassination of more than 30 Turkish diplomats, Syria has supported the PKK terrorist organization that waged irregular warfare against the Turkish security forces with the objective of separating the southeastern parts of the country, which is heavily populated with the Kurdish citizens of Turkey.

The head of the PKK, namely Abdullah Öcalan, was able to run his terror organization from his apartment in Damascus, Syria's capital city.

Despite its Kurdish separatist rhetoric, the PKK specifically targeted Kurdish villagers who have not supported their separatist claims and killed civilians, including women and children.

At the beginning, Turkey was caught unprepared to effectively counter such attacks. The security forces had to be reorganized, restructured, and redeployed so as to develop a military capability commensurate with the dimensions of the threat posed by the PKK to the security of the citizens and the unity of the nation.

By the time the PKK emerged as a major security problem for Turkey, the primary concern of the Turkish military was the threat perceived from the Soviet Union. Hence, the task of conducting counterterrorist operations was left to the Gendarmerie and the Police until after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

PKK's attacks on the villages and the fighting between the security units and the PKK terrorists claimed the lives of tens of thousands of people on both si-

**Whenever a Turkish prime minister or a president sent a formal letter to the Syrian president Hafez Al Assad, asking him to stop giving support to the PKK, Assad looked at the troop concentration level of the Turkish Army across the border and saw literally nothing that would make him scared of the possibility of a Turkish incursion into Syria.**

des over a decade until the mid-1990s.

The Turkish General Staff took over the responsibility to conduct the counterterrorism campaign since 1994 and brought to an end with the capture of Öcalan in February 1999. Getting this result, however, was not easy and brought Turkey and Syria to the brink of war.

### **Difficulties in Deterring Syria from Supporting the PKK**

Turkey had warned Syria, time and again, on its support to the PKK (and to the Armenian terrorist organization ASALA, previously). Nevertheless, the Syrian authorities, throughout the 1980s and also 1990s, have taken none of Turkey's warnings seriously.

Whenever a Turkish prime minister or a president sent a formal letter to the Syrian president Hafez Al Assad, asking him to stop giving support to the PKK, Assad looked at the troop concentration level of the Turkish Army across the border and saw literally nothing that would make him scared of the possibility of a Turkish incursion into Syria.

Hence, Turkey was not able to push the Syrian leadership toward cooperation any further partly because of the lack of enough military capability along the Syrian border that could be put behind the political stance toward Syria.

This was also partly due to the warnings of especially the European members of NATO advising Turkey to stay away from getting involved in any conflict with its Middle Eastern neighbors, due to their fear of escalation to a conflict between NATO and the Warsaw Pact because of the close links of the Soviet Union and Syria.

To put it simply, NATO member Turkey could not deter Syria from supporting the PKK because of its responsibilities arising from being a NATO member! Sounds strange! But, let's see why and how that was the case:

Prof. Dr. Ali Karaosmanoğlu from Bilkent University used to say that when Turkey joined NATO, the parties tacitly agreed that Turkey would help contain



*Operation Olive Branch*

the Soviet Union. Should deterrence have failed, Turkey would have made its facilities available to NATO and would have distracted as many Soviet forces as possible from a campaign in Central Europe.

In other words, Turkey risked its own devastation and invasion as a NATO ally by sitting in the immediate neighborhood of the Soviet Union simply because 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. NATO's strategic calculations developed around this priority, and Turkey's contribution was considered in function of such a contingency.

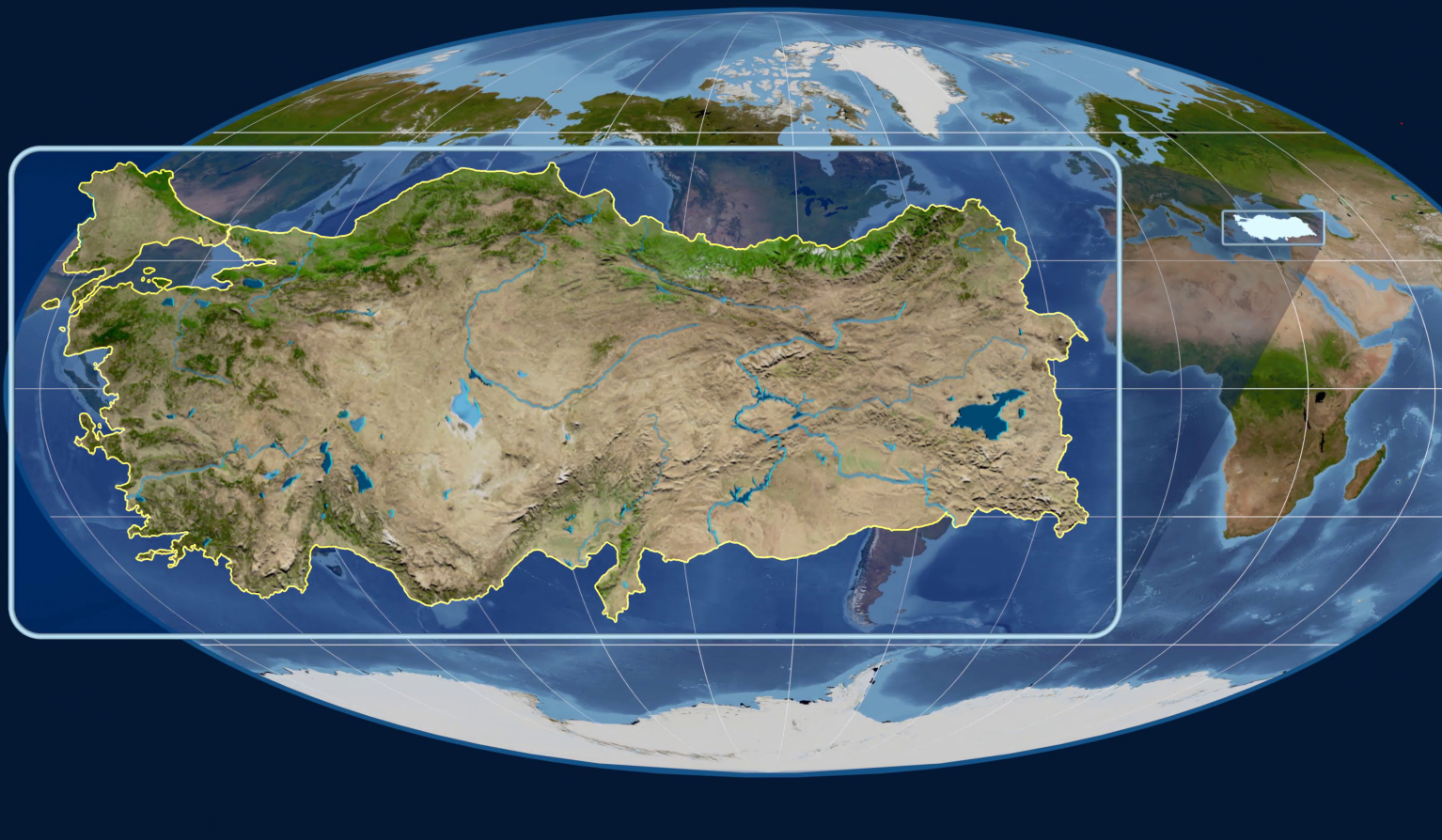
Turkish Army, largest in NATO after the United States, tied down around 25-30 Warsaw Pact divisions on the Soviet and the Bulgarian borders. Due to the fact that the Soviet Red Army had to deploy a sizeable portion of its capabilities in the Georgian, Armenian, and Azerbaijani Soviet Republics neighboring Turkey's eastern provinces, its ability to launch a powerful assault on the Western European nations had diminished significantly.

On the contrary, the ability of the Soviet Union to invade large segments of the Turkish territory from the east had grown considerably. Moreover, the Soviet Army across the border needed only a few days to get ready in order to launch a surprise attack on Turkey.

Now let's see how Turkey's NATO membership had serious implications for its relations with its Middle Eastern neighbors.

**Turkish Army, largest in NATO after the United States, tied down around 25-30 Warsaw Pact divisions on the Soviet and the Bulgarian borders. Due to the fact that the Soviet Red Army had to deploy a sizeable portion of its capabilities in the Georgian, Armenian, and Azerbaijani Soviet Republics neighboring Turkey's eastern provinces, its ability to launch a powerful assault on the Western European nations had diminished significantly.**





### **Middle East as NATO's "Out-of-Area"**

Since the early days of the creation of the Republic in 1923, Turkish political and security elite saw the Middle East as a zone of intricacies that must be stayed away from interfering with local political and military affairs. This has been one of the unwritten rules of Turkish foreign policy for most of the twentieth century.

Turkey's membership in NATO has further consolidated the policy of staying aloof from Middle Eastern politics. The impact of NATO was mainly due to the limitations in its primary area of responsibility, which had originally excluded the Middle East.

In the eyes of the most Western European members of NATO, the Middle East has long been considered to be out of the area of their responsibility to defend against the Soviet encroachment, with the exception of some limited planning covering the oil-rich Gulf region.

There were a number of reasons for considering the Middle East as "out-

**Another reason why Turkey's membership in NATO has further consolidated Turkish policy to remain aloof from the region was Turkey's force posture, which heavily depended on the threat perceived from the Soviet Union on the northeastern frontier and Bulgaria on the northwestern frontier.**

of-area." First and foremost, the North Atlantic Alliance was formed, in the first place, against the threats posed by the Soviet Union to the Western European nations, even if it was not explicitly stated in the text of the Treaty.

Hence, anything that would increase the threat level perceived from the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact would be unacceptable to especially the Western European members of NATO.

In this respect, Turkey's relations with its Middle Eastern neighbors, particularly Syria and Iraq, both of which were close friends of the Soviet Union, would carry the risk of involvement of the Soviets in any conflict between them and Turkey.

Turkey's relations with Syria and Iraq were not good, not only because of their support to the PKK but also because of the deep divergences of opinions regarding, for instance, the ways and means of using of the waters of the Euphrates and the Tigris rivers that are originating from Turkey and flowing through the Syrian and Iraqi territories all the way down to the Gulf.





**Considering the role of the military power in backing political decisions, number one rule of effective deterrence, Turkey's ability to deter its neighbors from advancing their policies, such as supporting terrorism that were damaging Turkish national interests was limited because of the limited military capabilities, which couldn't be allocated to contingencies that would involve its Middle Eastern neighbors.**

Moreover, Turkey and Syria have also disagreed over the status of Hatay district of Turkey, which was annexed to Turkey in 1939 after a period of French occupation when Syria was governed under the French mandate following the fall of the Ottoman Empire in 1920.

Hence, if Turkey entered in a conflict with Syria and/or Iraq because of such contentious issues, and if NATO had to honor its Article 5 commitment and involved in the conflict on the side of Turkey, the Soviet Union would most likely side with its Middle Eastern allies Syria and Iraq.

Such eventualities would run the risk of escalation of a bilateral local conflict to one between NATO and the Warsaw Pact, and also possibly to a superpower confrontation that might even lead to a nuclear exchange.

No members of NATO would, therefore, like a conflict between Turkey and Syria or Iraq to break out that could pave the way to an East-West confrontation.

With these in mind, Turkey was advised (informally though) by its NATO allies not to act in such a way that would cause a confrontation with Middle Eastern neighbors and to keep the profile of its relations low with the regional states.

Another reason why Turkey's membership in NATO has further consolidated Turkish policy to remain aloof from the region was Turkey's force posture, which heavily depended on the threat perceived from the Soviet Union on the northeastern frontier and Bulgaria on the northwestern frontier.

The bulk of Turkey's military capabilities were allocated to the contingencies involving a Soviet offensive on Turkey's eastern provinces, possibly with a concomitant attack of Bulgaria from the Thrace region.

As such, Turkey was left with hardly any meaningful military capability, especially the land forces that could be deployed along its southern and southeastern frontiers neighboring Syria, Iraq, and Iran.

Considering the role of the military power in backing political decisions, number one rule of effective deterrence, Turkey's ability to deter its neighbors from advancing their policies, such as supporting terrorism that were damaging Turkish national interests was limited because of the limited military capabilities, which couldn't be allocated to contingencies that would involve its Middle Eastern neighbors.

To be continued ...■





# The Tenets of Turkish Foreign Policy After 24 June Elections

**Sibel KARABEL**

BİLGESAM Research Coordinator

**Elnur İSMAYIL**

Dr., BİLGESAM General Coordinator





With a decisive victory of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in the first round of the presidential elections held on June 24, 2018, Turkey ushered into a new era in terms of the country's political system as well. Turkey has opted out the parliamentary system and adopted the executive presidential system of governance. In this respect, some significant changes with regard to judicial, executive and legislative branches of the government and new regulations relevant to these modifications will have considerable repercussions. One may argue that the new political system would have impacts both upon Turkish domestic politics and foreign/security policies alike. It is crucial therefore to encounter questions such as whether there will be a tremendous shift in the tenets of Turkish foreign policy.

**Turkey cooperates diplomatically, economically, and militarily with Western countries including the United States (US), European Union (EU), and with NATO on a variety of issues ranging from Afghanistan to Ukraine. Yet, at the same time, Turkey deepens its ties with Russia and Iran in the Middle East.**

Since the mid-2000s, the question of the direction/shift in Turkish foreign policy has become the subject of a vivid discussion in the academic and international public opinion. It is to be noted that these sorts of debates take place at times, like when Turkey has become dialogue partner with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) that enables to ask whether Turkey leans to the 'East'. Intensifying the debate, Turkey remains one of the best constructive partners of the West. Turkey cooperates diplomatically, economically, and militarily with Western countries including the United States (US), European Union (EU), and with NATO on a variety of issues ranging from Afghanistan to Ukraine. Yet, at the same time, Turkey deepens its ties with Russia and Iran in the Middle East.

Given this foreign policy posture and important changes triggered by the transformation of the political system of Turkey, it is worth looking at key foreign policy issues that Turkey needs to address during this new period.

#### **Relations with the EU**

According to the new political system, Turkey abolished the EU Affairs Ministry and merged that post with that of the Ministry of the Foreign Affairs. It is far from clear to analyze the consequences of that change for the relations between Turkey and the EU. Yet, some conclusions can be drawn from the current attitudes of both sides.

Following the 24 June elections, both Ankara and Brussels have given messages, which confirm the

*President Erdogan, NATO Leaders Summit*



will of compromises and continuation of their political and economic relations. However, the relations between Turkey and the EU have soured in the last years. In terms of the enlargement process, the outcome of the 13 years of negotiations cannot be considered fruitful. Out of 35 chapters of *acquis communautaire* of the EU, only 1 has been provisionally closed and 15 have been opened until now. Moreover, it is quite clear from the latest EU Summits and leading EU states' government briefings that the Union's enlargement vision will not be inclusive in the foreseeable future particularly one ponders Turkey's accession process to the EU.

As for other thorny issues that bind Turkey and the EU, upgrading Customs Union and visa liberalization, remain salient and unsolved. Customs Union that have entered into force in January 1996 as a part of 1963 Ankara Agreement between Turkey and the European Community, contains asymmetries to the detriment of Turkey's foreign trade. Although the negotiations for upgrading the Customs Union have started, the political will of the Union in seeking to modernize the Customs Union again would be more decisive.

**There is no doubt that the Trump administration will be interested in sustaining good relations with the new Erdoğan administration in the following years, even these relations will be complex, taking into account current realities and different national interests of Ankara and Washington particularly in the Middle East. The White House is aware that the main strategic ally in the region is Turkey, not only because of its NATO membership but also for its strategic location.**

On the other hand, in the framework of March 2016 Turkey-EU Statement, Turkey has fulfilled its commitments regarding the migration deal. Yet, one important issue still hangs unresolved; visa liberalization. According to the Roadmap established by the EU and Turkey, Turkey has fulfilled 67 out of 75 benchmarks. However, one contentious issue, which is associated with Turkey's code of terror, still pends as unresolved.

One promising source in terms of Turkey-EU relations might be the lifting of the state of emergency in Turkey which has also taken place as a criticism in 2018 European Commission's Report on Turkey.

Taking into consideration, that Austria is going to take the presidency in the EU in the next sixth months, relations between Turkey and the EU will likely be in difficult times. Austria is one of a few European countries, because of its policies is considered by Turkey as anti-Turkish. However, it can be expected that in the near future tensions between Turkey and the EU will likely lessen due to pragmatic stances and historic relations that bind two regions.



All these above-mentioned arguments suggest that in the context of the new political system of Turkey, the country's European vocation and the challenges attached to that process would likely follow the previous path pursued by Turkey.

### **Relations with the US**

Relations with the US is also one of the priorities in Turkish foreign policy. Since the formative years of the relations between the US and Turkey, there have been ups and downs in Ankara-Washington relations. However, last years relations between two countries are at its all-time low level. Yet, the shared interests of both states keep their ties in a strategic status. There is no doubt that the Trump administration will be interested in sustaining good relations with the new Erdoğan administration in the following years, even these relations will be complex, taking into account current realities and different national interests of Ankara and Washington particularly in the Middle East. The White House is aware that the main strategic ally in the region is Turkey, not only because of its NATO membership but also for its strategic location.

Turkey's anti-terrorist operations against militants in the northern part of Syria are criticized in the US. The White House characterizes those terror organizations such as PYD/YPG as US allies in the fight against the ISIS. On the other hand, Turkey designates Syrian People's Protection Units (PYD/YPG) as Syrian extension of the PKK terror organization that is one of the national security threats to the country. In that sense, Turkey criticizes the US for sustaining support to that terror organization.

Just one week prior to the Presidential elections in Turkey on June 18, based on the agreement between Washington and Ankara, American and Turkish militaries have started to patrol in Syrian town Manbij. It could be regarded as the White House's concession to Turkey despite the growing tensions between Washington and Ankara on the fight against terrorism in the Middle East region. Even some pundits argue that Manbij agreement may pave the way for a new cooperation between two NATO allies in Syria again.

### **Relations with Russia**

After shot down of Russian warplane by Turkish fighter jet near Syria-Turkey border in 2015, relations between those countries have worsened. But since President Erdoğan's public apology for plane crisis and Russia's support to Turkey during the failed coup d'etat both countries have started to restore their relations. It might be argued that in a way, Turkish and Russian Head of States Erdoğan's and Putin's victory in last elections strengthens the future of Turkey-Russia relations.

Turkey and Ankara cooperate in Syria. Both parties, alongside Tehran, are co-sponsors of the Astana process. Ankara and Moscow agreed to set up de-escalation areas in some parts of Syria, specifically in the western part of Idlib province. Even though it seems that Ankara, Moscow, and Tehran act together in solving the Syrian crisis, there are still different attitudes. While Russia and Iran support Assad regime politically and militarily, Turkey calls for the removal of Assad and supports Syrian opposition forces, which most of them considered as terrorists in Tehran and Moscow.

**Turkey warns its NATO ally that it could have a negative effect to the strategic partnership, if the US is going to impose any sanctions on Ankara, especially in the procurement of F-35 fighter aircraft.**



Turkey is the first NATO country that purchases Russia's S-400 defense system and cooperates in the defense industry. The transfer of S-400 to Turkey has been scheduled for 2019. Turkey proposes joint production of the new Russian S-500 anti-ballistic missile systems. The US has been concerned by Turkey's decision to purchase Russian S-400 surface-to-air air defense systems. Turkey warns its NATO ally that it could have a negative effect to the strategic partnership, if the US is going to impose any sanctions on Ankara, especially in the procurement of F-35 fighter aircraft.

Energy is one of the most significant issues between Ankara and Moscow. Both states are interested in the development of their energy cooperation, including collaboration in nuclear power. Akkuyu, which is the first Turkish nuclear power station and aims to reduce Turkey's dependence on energy import, is the best example for the most prominent projects between Russia and Turkey. Based on the agreement the power plant is going to be inaugurated in 2023.

Realistically thinking, Moscow and Ankara have different and conflicting interests in their neighborhood. It should also be remarked that there are still visa restrictions on Turkish investors and citizens.

### Turkey-Israeli Relations

For the most of the Western countries, the breakdown of Turkey's strategic alliance with Israel comprises a cause of concern. Strategic relations between Turkey and Israel in the 1990s was one of the most significant developments in the Middle East and their relations were deepening in all areas, specifically militarily, economic and political. In early 2009, bilateral relations between those countries went worse because of Israeli military operations in Gaza and the West Bank. Relations became frozen in May 2010 when the Mavi Marmara flotilla, which has tried to breach the Gaza blockade, was stormed by the Israeli army.

Today, the blockade of Gaza still remains one of the major worries for Ankara in its relations with Tel-Aviv. Turkey and Israel should focus on reestablishing diplomatic relations, even it seems uncertain in the near term because of the tensions surrounding crisis in May 2018.

But for Turkey, aiming to become an energy hub of the region, energy cooperation between Turkey and Israel could be helpful to realize its aim. There were attempts about the possibility of building a natural gas pipeline from Israel to Turkey.

Fight against terrorist organizations along its borders in Syria and Iraq seems to be a priority in Turkish security policies in the foreseeable future. In the last few years, Turkish military operations in northern part of Syria have yielded results. Euphrates Shield Operation and Operation Olive Branch were held successfully. Terrorist groups were driven out by Turkish military forces from Afrin city in Syria. For its own security, Turkey should continue to fight against terrorist groups in Syria and in Iraq.

Last but not least, due to its geostrategic location, political, economic and military positions, being in the heart of Eurasia, and at the intersection of different civilizations, Turkey should necessarily follow the multi-dimensional foreign policy strategy that aims at cooperation and collaboration with regional and global powers, integration projects, and military-political blocs.

In the face of dynamic shifts and transformations in the international arena coupled with an era of uncertainty, Turkey's foreign policy priorities loom larger than usual. On the other hand, drawing on the key foreign policy highlights enshrined in the election manifesto of President Erdoğan, one may anticipate the current trends in Turkish foreign policy agenda. Referring to the foreign policy, President Erdoğan stressed the commitment of Turkey to joining in the EU despite ongoing tensions and insufficient political will from the part of the EU. This vision indeed deserves high significance in the sense that it manifests Turkey's 'enlargement perspective' as a strong bid with its the negotiations with the EU.

As for the military operations, President signaled new military operations along the borders of the country in the name of national security and counterterrorism. Overall, one of the most important emphases has been to identify Turkey as a global and leading power able to produce its own arms ■



## Sibel Karabel, Editor of Strategist Magazine, has conducted interview with WISE MEN Board Member and Kültür University Faculty Member Ambassador Oğuz Çelikkol

**Sibel KARABEL:** *Turkey has been through an election period recently. Regarding Turkey's future in this context, how would you assess the new governments' foreign policy priorities? In addition to this, what do you think Turkey will face as main foreign policy issues in this era?*

I think Syria will be a significant foreign policy issue for Turkey for the foreseeable future. Since the situation in Syria has been occupying an important place in Turkey's foreign policy agenda, Turkey has taken both military and diplomatic steps to strengthen its position in Syrian crisis for a long time. The two military operations that took place one after another were quite important and created the necessary atmosphere for Turkey to be a major player in Syrian question since Ankara now establishes its presence in that country.

The first military operation that took place in Cereblus-Al Bab area, namely, Euphrates Shields Operation created first military success Turkey obtained in Syria. Due to this operation, large

area equivalent of some 2000 square kilometers came under the direct control of Free Syrian Army (FSA), which Turkey supports. Another military operation, this time in Afrin, namely Olive Branch, came as the next success that put another large area equivalent of some 2000 square kilometers under the FSA control. With these two military operations, west of Euphrates River in the Syrian side of Turkish-Syrian border now are under the military control of FSA. These two consecutive operations prevented the extension of YPG/PYD control beyond the west of Euphrates River. After these two military successes, this time Ankara has scored a notable diplomatic success with Membiç Agreement. It is striking in the sense that it was the first time the United States (US) and Turkey tried to reach an agreement to help revitalization of Turkish American cooperation at least in Syria. If successfully implemented Membiç Agreement could reestablish the confidence in Syria, which was lost between two NATO allies before. The first signs indicate that Membiç Agreement is being successfully implemented.



There is disagreement between Turkey and the US regarding the methodology of the solution to Syrian crisis. At the beginning of the Syrian crisis, Turkey and US cooperated in Syria extensively but unfortunately cooperation and trust between Ankara and Washington has evaporated in time. First for one reason or another, the US lost interest in Syrian political crisis. At the onset, Turkey and US were on the same side defending regime change in Syria and a political solution to Syrian civil war. But during the Obama administration, the US lost its interest in the regime change in Damascus. The US did nothing to prevent first Iranian then Russian direct military involvement in Syria. Then when ISIL appeared in Syrian civil war and became a major player, the US's interest in Syria returned. Yet, this time the US policy in Syria was confined only with the struggle against and to defeat ISIL. That was a very narrow objective. And Washington under the Obama administration completely failed to create an extensive and comprehensive Syrian strategy to encounter Iranian and Russian advances in Syria.

Washington's lack of comprehensive Syrian strategy lead to Turkey's and the US's foreign policy divergences in Syria. Turkey was interested with all aspects of Syrian crisis including a political solution to Syrian civil war but the US increasingly focused on only defeating ISIL. Adding to all, when the US chose YPG/PYD as a local partner in its struggle against ISIL, this raised major concerns in Ankara. The important thing to note is that Turkey recognizes YPG/PYD as extension of PKK terrorist organization in Syria. After Trump administration, the US's policies in Syria was taking shape to disregard territorial and political unity of that country. Ankara has been very much concerned that the US is depending on a terror organization to fight against another terrorist organization. Another concern of Ankara in this process has been when supporting YPG, Washington inclined for the creation of an entity just southern border of Turkish-Syrian border.

**Turkey has taken both military and diplomatic steps to strengthen its position in Syrian crisis for a long time. The two military operations that took place one after another were quite important and created the necessary atmosphere for Turkey to be a major player in Syrian question since Ankara now establishes its presence in that country.**

Now of course with Memiç agreement the confidence is returning between and eventually it is hoped that cooperation will also come back between Washington and Ankara in Syria and the two NATO allies could cooperate their Syrian policies once again.

Now ISIL is out of the picture, what will happen to Syria is very important to Turkey.

In other words, Turkey's basic concern is that while Syrian political crisis is being solved, Syrian political unity and territorial integrity should be maintained. This is particularly important and it is hoped that Memiç Agreement could be an example that Turkish-American cooperation is also extended to the eastern part of Euphrates River where YPG/PYD is controlling today.

When Iraq is concerned, before the elections in Turkey there were some talk of a military operation in Kandil. And in Northern Iraq Hakurk Area, Turkish military operations have been continuing for some time. It looks like Turkey is implementing a new strategy to counter PKK presence beyond its southern borders. That means that Turkey is going to prevent infiltration of PKK to Turkey from its southern borders by establishing a presence in Northern Iraq.

In the past there were some operations against PKK in Iraqi territories, we have witnessed especially many air military operations. Yet, this time it is going to be if necessary more permanent engagement. Turkey is going to follow PKK terrorists as south as Kandil area. Kandil area has a difficult topography and stands on the Iraqi-Iranian border. The fact that Turkey is now showing willingness to make military land operations in these areas which are more than 100 kilometers southern of Turkish border manifests that Ankara is determined to preclude PKK activities in Northern Iraq, south of Iraq-Turkish border as it does in Northern Syria.

The other main challenge for Turkey of course remains in its relations with European Union (EU). Unfortunately,



Operation of Olive Branch

mostly due to the EU's lack of political will, the accession talks have stalled. It is much apparent that there is not much willingness on the part of the EU even to open negotiation talks for upgrading and modernization of the Customs Union between Turkey and the EU. And anti-Turkish rhetoric in Europe is on the rise alongside xenophobia and anti-Islamic sentiments. All signs indicate that the EU and leading countries in Europe see Turkey not as an ally and a partner (in NATO and EU) but a rival (especially in the Balkans) and even an adversary like Russia.

I think for the new government, relations with Greece and Cyprus issue may also be a challenge. For sometime Turkey and Greece have managed to establish "good" relations which reflected its positive results in increasingly economic cooperation between Ankara and Athens. They built their current relations on a ground not by exploit the contentious issues, which have negatively affected relations between two countries for a long time. The base for this cooperation is that they have managed to freeze all the existing difficult issues between two countries. Also were very careful to take into consideration the sensitivities on the other side. But unfortunately we have been witnessing in Greece that there are some politicians and some institutions are departing from this base.

**Sibel KARABEL:** *Do you observe a radical shift in the US's foreign policy priorities towards Middle East under Trump's administration? If so, could you stipulate as main themes?*

It is noticeable that under Trump administration, due to Mr. Trump's business background probably the President evaluates the world from more an economic point of view. In this respect, his perception and categorization of states as foes and friends is different than previous US presidents. According to this mentality, China and Germany, which challenge the US on the economic front, should be placed as foes rather than friends. In this logic, Russia is viewed as a developing country, which does not challenge the US economically even though it is an important global military power. Trump inclines to assess Russia as an exporter of natural resources than a rival industrial power that is not a threat to US supremacy in the world.

According to Trump's perception, the US is losing its economic superiority in the world and challenged not by Russia but by China and the EU (mainly Germany). That is why probably he refers statements such as 'German cars are invading American markets'. China is seen as the number one rival and adversary, which may supersede the US dominance as the biggest economy in the world in the near future.







Under the light of these realities, it might be argued that if Trump is elected in the second term, the US foreign policy may change more dramatically. Trump administration and transatlantic relations may change even further. All the important problems between the US and its transatlantic allies became very open to the world in G7 Summit in Canada. We may witness the continuation of these confrontational attitudes of the US and between the US and European powers in the NATO Summit in Brussels.

When we come to the Turkish-American relations, in Syria most likely we'll see more cooperation which is going to help create more trust between the US and Turkey. Yet, unfortunately in the Middle East Trump administration supports for the Prime Minister Netanyahu's intransigent policies against Palestinians. And of course US's forthcoming plan to settle Palestinian problem again may cause more divergences in the US and Turkey relations. Inevitably this new American plan may cause more frictions in the relations.

Another challenge may come from Iran if Trump administration may decide to put more economical or military pressure on Iran. Turkey already indicated that except the framework of the United Nations, it would not follow any unilateral economic sanctions against Iran. But all the signs demonstrate that Trump administration would pressure on European states and also on Turkey, and increasingly isolate Iran economically. Trump administration, on the other hand may decide to follow Israeli and Saudi advice and take some controversial military action against Tehran, which also would lead to more instability in the region.

**Sibel KARABEL:** *In your view, what might be the major trends in the Middle East in the near future?*

On closer examination, the main trend as I mentioned would be Saudi-Iranian conflict that already affects civil wars in Syria, Iraq and most notably in Yemen. Also we see trends of this conflict in Arab countries like Bahrain and Lebanon. In Yemen, the war started between Saudi and Iranian proxies. But now Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates are directly involved in the Yemeni civil war. As a new trend, we observe more direct involvement of regio-

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nal and global powers in the Middle East conflicts. In Iraq, Iranian influence and involvement is quite apparent. Civil war in Yemen unfortunately created a very severe human tragedy in that country. It seems like the conflict will escalate in the coming months and unfortunately the human tragedy that is created in Yemen also is going to be negatively affected.

Another crisis in the Middle East involving all the players might occur due to Trump's prospective new Palestinian peace plan. All signs indicate that this new plan is pro-Israeli and prepared alongside what Prime Minister Netanyahu has been defending for a long time. President Trump already has taken first steps by his decision to move American embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem as a prelude to this peace plan. Trump explained this controversial Jerusalem decision in his own words by stating that: "I took Jerusalem off the negotiation table."

It becomes obvious that Palestinians will not like and accept this new American plan. Trump may increase pressure on the Arab countries like Saudi Arabia and Egypt, which need Trump administration for different reasons to support this plan in order to push on Palestinians. Palestinians are going to be resisting this plan and this may create some tensions in the Middle East. If Trump administration insists on this new plan, the US may pave the way for new divisions in the Middle East and again shift the attention from the civil wars to the Palestinian issue.

In this sense, Trump administration is diverged itself from previous US administrations which at least tried to demonstrate some degree of impartiality when it comes to negotiation table between Palestinians and Israeli. This is the reason why even Palestinian Authority no longer accept Trump administration as the honest broker (intermediary) in the negotiation table.

**Sibel KARABEL:** *Dear Mr. Ambassador, on behalf of the journal The Strategist and myself, I would like to thank you for sharing your insights about challenges of Turkish foreign policy.* ■

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**Russian-Turkish  
Relations  
Need A Stronger  
Foundation**

**Andrey KORTUNOV**

Director General, Russian International Affairs Council





**Russia and Turkey are neighbors with extensive and diverse bilateral ties - including trade and investments, energy and construction, as well as a vibrant social, humanitarian, and cultural interaction. Moreover, they share a vast common neighborhood; for both countries, this neighborhood presents tempting opportunities and serious challenges at the same time.**

Relations between Russia and Turkey have always been and will continue to be a controversial subject. For both countries, this is a very special relationship; it contains a lot of emotions, mythology, prejudices, uneasy legacies of the past and sometimes unrealistic hopes for the future. The glass remains half-full or half-empty; depending on how one looks at it and on whether one tries to fill it or to drain it.

Even over the last couple of years, this relationship experienced dramatic ups and downs, sudden U-turns from cooperation to confrontation and back to cooperation. The 2015 – 2016 crisis, albeit a short one, demonstrated both the fragility and the resilience of this unique set of connections linking the two countries together. No doubt, in years to come we will see more of surprising developments in Russian-Turkish relations that we cannot possibly predict today. Still, there are a number of features of this relationship, which are likely to remain constant in the observable future.

First, relations between Moscow and Ankara will remain important for both sides. Russia and Turkey are neighbors with extensive and diverse bilateral ties – including trade and investments, energy and construction, as well as a vibrant social, humanitarian, and cultural interaction. Moreover, they share a vast common neighborhood; for both countries, this neighborhood presents tempting opportunities and serious challenges at the same time. Both countries claim a special Eurasian status in world politics that puts them in a league of their own, distinguishing Russia and Turkey from other purely European or Asian states. Therefore, it is hard to imagine the two powers drifting too far away from each other and losing interest in the bilateral relationship.

Russian air defense systems (S-400)



Second, there will be a mixture of common, parallel, overlapping and colliding interests driving Moscow and Ankara in dealing with each other. Elements of cooperation and competition (hopefully, not direct confrontation) will be blended by politicians into a single sweet and sour cocktail and offered to the Russian and Turkish public. We will continue to live with numerous paradoxes. For instance, Turkey is a NATO member, but it plans to purchase the most advanced Russian air defense systems (S-400). The two countries actively cooperate on the ground in Syria, but they have very different attitudes to the current Syrian leadership in Damascus. Russians and Turks are equally interested in stability in the South Caucasus, but quite often, unfortunately, they find themselves on the opposite sides of the barricades in the region.

Third, various external players – both global powers (the European Union, NATO, and the United States) and regional actors (Iran, Gulf States, and Israel) will continue to have a profound impact on Russian-Turkish relations. External players can push Moscow and Ankara closer to each other, but they can also push Russians and Turks apart by offering either of them alternative options for strategic, political and economic cooperation. The Russian-Turkish cooperation will also depend on such independent variables as the rise of international terrorism, fluctuations of energy prices,

volatility of the global economic and financial system and, more generally, on the fundamentals of the emerging world order.

Both sides should be interested in more stable, more predictable, and less adversarial Russian-Turkish relations. It is particularly important today when the international system at large is getting less stable and less predictable. Besides, both Russia and Turkey face enormous challenges of economic, social and political modernization in a less than perfect external environment; it would be stupid to add to existing lists of their foreign policy problems a new round of the Russian-Turkish confrontation.

So, is it possible to prevent colliding interests from curbing joint work on common problems? What can we do to reduce risks of potential future crises between Moscow and Ankara? How can we mitigate the negative impacts of external factors on our bilateral cooperation?

The immediate answer to these questions is clear – above all, we need to enhance our communication lines. This is not about preparing the next Erdogan-Putin meeting, neither about generating new technical proposals for the Russian-Turkish Intergovernmental Commission. This is not about military-to-military contacts on the ground in Sy-

ria. The enhancement of communication should bring it far beyond serving operational needs of political leaders. Let's face it: there will be no real trust between Russia and Turkey until we deal together with the most sensitive, the most divisive, the most unpleasant issues dividing us. These issues include mutual historical grievances, existing suspicions about one side allegedly supporting subversive and even terrorist groups on the territory of the other side, concerns that the partner country might abruptly reconsider its commitments to cooperation if it gets a better deal from a third party, and so on. In case they cannot discuss these issues at the official level today, one should start with a second track format providing for informal expert dialogues.

Even more important would be not to limit such dialogues to articulating existing disagreements and conflicting narratives, but to identify ways, in which disagreements can be bridged, and narratives – reconciled. As the recent history demonstrated, the “agree to disagree” approach is not good enough to move the relationship ahead. If it is not possible now to resolve difficult problems, let us at least try to stabilize areas of potential conflict. For instance, Russia and Turkey will continue to disagree on the problem of Nagorno-Karabakh. Nevertheless, they can exercise their respective influence on both sides of the conflict in order to prevent a new outbreak of military hostilities and further losses of human lives. Likewise, Moscow and Ankara are not likely to come to a common position on Crimea. However, Turkey can play an important positive role in preventing any further cultural and civic alienation of the Crimean Tatar population in the peninsula.

Sometimes, what we routinely perceive as a part of the problem might become a part of the solution. For example, the Turkish membership to NATO is commonly regarded in Russia as an obstacle on the way to more productive security cooperation with Ankara. Counterintuitively, it is exactly the Turkish membership, which can help to reduce the risks of dangerous

**It is also important to make sure that cooperation between Russia and Turkey is not regarded by either side as the “second-best option” when the “first best option” is not available for this or that reason. Russia is not an alternative to Turkey’s cooperation with the European Union; neither Turkey is a substitute for Russia working harder to resolve its problems with the United States and Europe.**

incidents in the Black Sea. These risks started growing in 2014 when both Russia and NATO significantly increased their naval presence here and engaged themselves into ever more frequent naval exercises. Why does not Ankara take an initiative in promoting more confidence-building measures between Russia and NATO in the Black Sea? Thinking strategically, one can even imagine a more important role for Turkey as a country that might be best suited to facilitate a renewal of the currently nearly dormant NATO-Russian Council.

It is also important to make sure that cooperation between Russia and Turkey is not regarded by either side as the “second-best option” when the “first best option” is not available for this or that reason. Russia is not an alternative to Turkey’s cooperation with the European Union; neither Turkey is a substitute for Russia working harder to resolve its problems with the United States and Europe. Situational alliances based on shared frustrations and common complexes of inferiority usually do not last. We need the Russian-Turkish relationship to acquire a strategic depth of its own. To quote Saint Augustine, “the higher our structure is to be, the deeper must be its foundation.”





A close-up, slightly angled view of the American flag, showing the stars and stripes. The flag is the background of the entire page.

# **US/TURKEY RELATIONS**

**Daniel SERWER**

Prof., Middle East Institute, Washington D.C.



In Turkey's 24 June elections, President Erdoğan has won both enhanced presidency and a coalition majority in parliament that also comprises Turkish nationalist as well. It remains to be seen to what extent the consequences of Turkey's elections will touch upon the relations between Turkey and the US. The question is how the US might make it through the coming years, possibly even a decade or more, with an erstwhile ally moving in a different system?

The current occupant of the White House makes these questions more difficult than they would normally be. He is on the outs with Erdogan, but not for example Turkey's relations with Russia. Trump and Erdogan might agree entirely on those issues. But President Trump has continued to insist on supporting the PYD/YPG (Syrian extension of terrorist organization of PKK) in the fight against ISIS and hasn't proven much help on the extradition of Gulen, which are the two things Erdogan cares about the most.

Ironically, the best approach is one Trump might find attractive: a transactional relationship that relies less on Turkey as an ally and more on its usefulness to the US.

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The most important aspect of that usefulness is geography. The Incirlik air base is critical to U.S. operations throughout the Levant. So long as it remains available, the US will have to try to improve relations with Erdogan. As Syria's northern neighbor with a long common border, Turkey hosts the largest number of Syrian refugees. The US has spent around \$600 million to support them. That aid needs to continue.

The immediate crunch issue is the sale of F35s to Ankara, which Congress is trying to stop. What is needed is a compromise, one that ends Erdogan's threat to buy Russian S400 air defenses while allowing the transfer of the F35s. Secretary Mattis is said to be working a deal of that sort. I can't help but wonder whether a Patriot sale might also still be something Erdogan still wants. I've never met a Turkish security expert who thought buying the S400 system was a good idea, or that it could ever be used to shoot down a Russian aircraft. Turks are fond of saying that they want the U.S. to act like a NATO ally. Turkey should too.

On the other hand, the agreement on Manbij appears to be working so far



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*The Incirlik Air Base*

and needs to be completed with reformulation of the town's governing body and withdrawal of YPG forces east of the Euphrates. That is what Vice President Biden promised. Erdogan is right to insist. But Turkey should also want the Americans to stay in eastern Syria, since withdrawal would almost surely mean that the YPG would seek Assad and Russian protection. The Americans may not be able to restrain the YPG entirely from supporting the PKK inside Turkey, but Assad would clearly be prepared to weaponize the Kurds again to undermine Turkish sovereignty.

Much tougher will be the issue of prisoner releases: Ankara holds dozens of Americans, apparently hoping to trade them for Gulen. It is hard to convince Erdogan that Trump does not have the same power over Gulen's fate that Erdogan has over the Americans Turkey holds. If, however, a U.S. court decides in favor of extradition, I doubt the Trump administration will stand in the way. The key here is for Turkey to provide a U.S. court with the best available evidence of Gulen's involvement in the coup attempt.

This, I'm afraid, is how we will need to proceed: issue by issue, looking for trades we can reasonably do that Erdogan will find attractive. It will be a hard slog, one during which concern about human rights abuses will likely find little public expression.

The strongest potential leverage the Americans have now on human rights is economic: Turkey is headed in a bad economic direction that will


be made much worse if secondary sanctions against Iran are instituted. Relief from secondary sanctions could in principle be traded for easing the crackdown, but Trump isn't likely to do that. He is aiming to bring down the Islamic Republic. However unlikely it may be, some of his advisers seem to think the Mojahedin-el Khalq could govern in its place. This isn't likely to work. Erdogan will have strong incentives to surreptitiously violate the sanctions, which he did even during the Obama era.

Erdogan has won. Trump is in power. Elections have consequences ■

# The New “Great Game”: What Awaits Us?

**Mehmet ÖĞÜTÇÜ**

Dr., Ret. Ambassador

A world map is visible in the background, rendered in a muted, sepia tone. In the foreground, a row of white chess pieces, including pawns, knights, and a rook, is arranged on a black and white checkered board. The lighting is soft, creating a sense of depth and focus on the chess pieces.

New players have joined the game, who were previously on the side-lines of the Cold War's bipolar order. Despite the global financial crisis, the "Middle Kingdom" has conquered a place on almost all of the world's playing fields. Beijing has positioned itself to challenge the dollar as the global reserve currency, become a technology leader and extend its position of power via the Belt and Road Initiative throughout the world.



The game-changers in today's world has coincided with the emergence of US President Donald Trump's erratic administration, which is pursuing goals that are completely detached from those of Europe generally. Trump's abandonment of the Iran nuclear deal, combined with Russian President Vladimir Putin's increasing belligerence and Chinese President Xi Jinping's growing ambitions, indicates that the world is entering an ever more confrontational and dangerous phase.

It is not possible to itemize the great currents of twenty-first-century geopolitics with the same confidence as those of the nineteenth, but there are a few obvious ones. There is the rise of China. There is increased political tribalism and a possib-

le breakdown of liberal democracy on the horizon. In the nearer term, there is jihadist terrorism. And in the era of US President Donald Trump, it is hard not to wonder if the world is headed toward a future of declining co-operation and a return to naked, zero-sum great-power competition. But with the usual caveat that accompanies every prediction about the twenty-first century—namely, that it depends on humans still being around—none of these forces really matters, either.

It is also difficult to argue that what's happening in the failed states of Syria, Iraq and Libya, the stormy waters of the East Mediterranean, the hardening sanctions and new axes against Iran, the Kurdish corridor, the intensified currency, trade,







**It coincided with the emergence of the irregular administration of US President Donald Trump, which in general follows the goals that are totally disconnected from Europe.**

technology and energy wars and a decoupling of Europe from the US are unrelated to the designing of a new “Great Game”, now more visible and feasible than hitherto around our geography.

This game or whatever we call it will inevitably affect each of us as the individuals, the nation, the region, the companies, the militaries, the civil societies and the world at large. Hence, we have to understand it better and try to influence its evolution to the best of our abilities.

New players have joined the game, who were previously on the side-lines of the Cold War’s bipolar order. Despite the global financial crisis, the “Middle Kingdom” has conquered a place on almost all of the world’s playing fields. Beijing has positioned itself to challenge the dollar as the global reserve currency, become a technology leader and extend its position of power via the Belt and Road Initiative throughout the world. This has led to the prediction of a new bipolarity—in former National Security Advisor late Zbigniew Brzezinski’s words, a “G-2 World.”

The name of the game in today’s world is speed by which things are happening in our lives, industries and geopolitical space . Long-lead time is long past; we now have to work into short deadlines and short-term gains. Connectivity has expanded; there are now more than 4 billion people around the world using the internet . Things get outdated easily and there is a sense of permanent uncertainty and instability that prevails.

Predicting the future is not so difficult in light of what we already know. Two key megatrends are likely to shape our world out to 2030: demographic patterns, especially rapid aging in some OECD countries and increasing youth population in developing and emerging nations; and growing resource demands which, in the cases of food, energy and water, might lead to scarcities, despite current oversupply in energy, more obesity than food famine, and waste of water resources. These trends exist in today’s inter-connected world, but during the next 15-20 years they will gain much greater momentum.

When we reach the world of 2030, which will no doubt be radically transformed from our world today, no country—whether the US, China, or any other large country—is likely to remain a hegemonic power. A neo-polar world is in the offing. The empowerment of individuals and diffusion of power among states and from states to informal networks will have a dramatic impact, largely reversing the historic rise of the West since 1750 and restoring Asia’s weight in the global economy .

For centuries, the west has been at the heart, and the principal shaper, of the game-changing developments around the globe. This is perhaps no longer so. The western nations still fire shots for certain decisions and choices in economy, energy and geopolitics that affect our lives at the end of the day, but increasingly some emerging nations, dubbed as BRICs, powerful in technology, trade, finance and military, want more directorship to be given for them on the management board of our planet.

Over the past few years, the European continent has experienced a period of turbulence - a change of elites, an outburst of populism, and a polarisation between the east, centre and west of Europe. The rise of euro-scepticism has led to concerns over the rule of law in Poland and Hungary. Alongside this, the Catalan separatist challenge is likely to divide Spain – and possibly the EU, while Switzerland’s relationship with the bloc is deteriorating . Brexit, rise of far right in Germany, France, Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands, a marked decoupling from the US, and worsening threat of terrorism are disturbing.



The disparities between the EU and third countries are also growing. Irregular migration is still a problem – managing it requires legal pathways and a greater international co-operation. The EU needs to complete the EU monetary union, but what actually people from different parts of the EU want is not the same – and therefore there are completely different ideas of a monetary union and future vision of the EU.

On the eastern end of the world, there is a growing confidence that China is on the rise (again), while the west is in gradual decline. The Chinese challenge to the west, increasingly assertive and effective, is taking place on three main fronts: ideological, economic and geopolitical. In the realm of ideas, the Communist party leadership is strident in repudiating western liberalism and developing what's called the "Beijing Consensus" as opposed to the Washington Consensus that created the post-war order.

Chinese President Xi Jinping and his colleagues argue that one-party rule works well for China — and should extend long into the future. China is increasingly confident that its "model", with "Chinese characteristics" can combine tight political control with continued rapid economic growth and technological innovation. Great power rivalry is the motor of history, now as always. The story of the age is the rise of China and its geopolitical consequences, and the future will depend on how Beijing and Washington manage their relationship.

The US has always had an outsize sense of its ability to determine China's course. Of course, China here could be replaced by present-day Egypt or Venezuela, or by South Vietnam before the fall of Saigon in 1975. Americans have often thought that they could alter another country to their liking and then felt frustrated when things turned out otherwise. Still, Campbell and Ratner's self-reflection is admirable. And their counsel—that Washington should focus more on its own power and base its China policy on more realistic expectations—is worth taking seriously.

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Some US watchers in China find the country we have studied for years increasingly unrecognizable and unpredictable. We should do our own self-reflection to examine what went wrong. Political polarization, power struggles, scandals, a lack of confidence in national establishments, tweets doubling as policy announcements, the frequent replacement of top officials in charge of foreign affairs, vacancies in important government positions—similar problems existed before, but their intensity and scope have been particularly stunning since the 2016 US presidential election.

The way the Trump administration is wielding US power and influence is bewildering to Chinese political analysts. In recent years, Americans have often asked China to follow the "rules-based liberal international order." Yet, Washington now has abandoned or suspended some of the same rules that it used to advocate, such as those of the Paris agreement on climate change and the Trans-Pacific Partnership. It has become harder and harder for foreign-policy makers in China to discern what rules the Americans want themselves and others to abide by, what kind of world order they hope to maintain, and where Washington is on major international issues.

Beyond the new China phenomenon, some of the other significant game-changing developments in the early 21st century include Trumponomics, prices hikes for "black gold", re-emergence of Asia in the cutting-edge technologies, and exporter of capital, Russia gaining new geopolitical spheres of influence, forex swings and cryptocurrency fever, Venezuela as a sinking ship, possible confrontation with Iran, demise of African dictators, a more dangerous world, trade wars, and green energy revolution.

Science and technology are actually what matter most. When looking back today, the most important geopolitical feature of the nineteenth century is obvious: it was the era of the Industrial Revolution. Without it, there is no rising middle class and no real pressure for democracy. There is no capitalist revo-



lution because agrarian states do not need one. There's no colonization at scale because there is a hard limit to a non-industrial economy's appetite for raw materials. There is no total war without cheap steel and precision manufacturing. And with the world still stuck largely in a culture and an economy based on traditional subsistence agriculture, there is quite possibly no end to slavery and no beginning of feminism.

The key drivers of this era were the steam engine, germ theory, electricity, and railroads. Without the immense economic growth they made possible in the twentieth century, everything else would matter about as much as if it had happened in the Middle Ages. Just as the Industrial Revolution transformed everything a couple of centuries ago, so the digital revolution is doing it again. Right now, the world is at the dawn of a second Industrial Revolution, this time a digital revolution. Its impact will be, if anything, even greater than that of the first .

Turkey's June 24 elections ushered in a new constitutional order with significant ramifications for the country's international role. Tayyip Erdogan became Turkey's first popularly elected executive president with almost 53 percent of the national vote. He will enjoy a range of executive prerogatives with full and exclusive responsibility for policymaking. He will be responsible for the conduct of foreign policy as well, unlike in the previous system, where the now vanished office of the prime minister had been entrusted with executive authority.

The systemic transformation that the post-24 June 2018 elections have brought about will have a huge impact on the conduct of foreign policy . For many years, Turkey's highly regarded foreign service was composed exclusively of career diplomats who charted and guided the implementation Turkey's foreign

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policy. The Foreign Ministry was thus seen as one of the three key pillars of the Turkish state along with the military and the Finance Ministry — institutions distinguished by their allegiance to the nation rather than the ruling party.

Under a presidential system, the Turkish diplomatic corps is likely to be remodelled along the lines of the US system, with a combination of political appointments and career officers. The AK Party's new ally in parliament is its elections partner, the ultra-nationalist National Movement Party, who is widely expected to leverage its position as king-maker and seek influence over all policymaking, creating a new set of difficulties for President Erdogan in foreign and security policy.

All in all, Turkey cannot continue business as usual in this new Great Game till shaping up sand has the potential to be one of the game-makers (at least in the region around it) by any objective criteria given its relative power and significance in a vast geography from China to Germany and Russia to Saudi Arabia. The challenge remains whether Ankara will rise to the expectations in a democratic, economically sound and reliable fashion. ■





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# Strategic Implications of the Ilisu Dam

**Paul A. WILLIAMS**

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After 12 years under construction, Turkey's Ilisu Dam will soon begin storing Tigris River water. At 24 million cubic meters, its concrete faced rock-fill body is reportedly the largest of its kind in the world and second in Turkey only to Atatürk Dam on the Euphrates River. The reservoir will span 300 square kilometers and hold 10.4 billion cubic meters (bcm) of streamflow. This could sink the sprawling metropolis of Los Angeles, California, under several meters of water, but its more mundane purpose is to power six 200-MW turbines, the fourth highest installed capacity in Turkey, and generate 4 Gigawatt (billion kilowatts) hours of electricity per year, just under one month's national hydro-power output for 2017.

The dam has drawn applause and criticism alike. Although the project began receiving public investment and attracting interest from multinational companies, foreign banks, and export credit agencies two decades ago, anti-dam activists eventually pressured external backers to withdraw from the project twice in the 2000s, forcing the Turkish government and domestic banks to cover its TL 8.5 billion price tag (about \$2 billion at current exchange rates). Activists objected that this project would destroy the area's cultural, ecological, and historical richness, as symbolized by the ancient town of Hasankeyf in Batman province, but as Wageningen University professor and water expert Jeroen Warner observed in a 2012 article, some of Ilisu's opponents in the late 1990s stressed the dam's potential to provoke "water war" instead of the above themes that became predominant later.

As the original construction consortium had formed before the signing of the 1998 Adana Accord, whereby Syria agreed to expel protagonist Abdullah Öcalan of the PKK, the terror organization associated with many attacks against Turkey's eastern dam projects over the past 30 years (see below), Damascus was still locked in a Cold War mindset of reflexively threatening any entity associated with Turkey's damming of the Euphrates or Tigris. Export credit agencies stipulated that

Turkey should maintain the flow of Tigris water downstream, and in 2009, Turkey agreed – just months after withdrawal of most foreign backers – that Syria should be able to divert 1.25 bcm of Tigris water for irrigation of new lands in the Hasakah area.

This project invoked more palpable worries of acute water shortage in Iraq, where the Euphrates and Tigris rivers join. In the Euphrates Basin, Iraq faces the cumulative impact of five large dams – Keban, Karakaya, Atatürk, Birecik, and Karkamış – and related irrigation projects in Turkey as well as midstream Syria's Tabqa Dam and other smaller reservoirs and hydropower plants. The Turkish watershed of the Tigris Basin hosts more dams: Kralkızı, Dicle, and Batman, to be joined by Ilisu and Silvan, which is scheduled for completion in 2019 on the Kulp tributary just upstream from Batman Dam. These five installations' total active storage volume – about 14 bcm (half of that in Ilisu) – could, as Turkish sources have been asserting for years, help smooth out the Tigris's highly variable flows.

However, Iraqi water users fear the drought-compounded effects of deep cuts in the river's estimated average annual flow of 20–21 bcm, which demarcates 30 kilometers of the Turkey-Syrian boundary before reaching Iraq's Mosul Dam, which has about the same storage capacity as Ilisu. In a January 2018 interview with state broadcaster TRT, Turkish Minister of Forestry and Water Works Veysel Eroğlu reassured that Turkey would postpone Ilisu's filling from March to June, while Turkey's Ambassador to Iraq tweeted that Iraq would thereby gain more time to store water for summer.

Turkey accounts for about 40 percent of Iraq's Tigris water supply, so Baghdad has to spread its concern to other upstream territories as well. Absent during earlier calculations of "transboundary" flow into Iraq, the present "Kurdistan Regional Government" (KRG) controls three key dams. Dohuk Dam lies on a smaller tributary flowing





into the reservoir of the aging Mosul Dam, while Dukan Dam impounds the Little Zap, which starts in Iran. Iran's Garan Dam and newly built Daryan on the Diyala tributary may impact reservoir volumes and power output of the KRG-area Darbandikhan Dam and then streamflow levels into Iraq's Hemrin Dam. Also in the KRG-run territory, the unfinished Bekhme Dam would have 17 bcm of storage and 1500 MW of installed capacity – more than Ilisu – on the Greater Zap. This tributary originates in Turkey, where ongoing projects pose uncertain, but likely minor, downstream impacts.

Turkish officials have accentuated Ilisu Dam's upsides. These include provision of a non-imported source of renewable energy and at least 4,000 jobs, bringing TL 1.5 billion into the economy per year, enough to pay off the costs of the dam in six years, including those of road construction, expropriation, resettlement, and relocation of historical artifacts, notably the Mausoleum of Akkoyunlu ("White Sheep") Dynasty heir Zeynel Bey, who died fighting Ottoman forces in the 1473 Battle of Otlukbeli. Though the reservoir may drown up to 500 archaeological sites, a February 2018 report in The Guardian quotes the director of the Ziyaret Tepe dig – site of the Assyrian city of Tušhan – as crediting the dam for accelerating excavations and increasing what we know about the area's history. Officials have also underscored how Ilisu's construction spurred completion of the highway between Midyat and Dargeçit (near the dam site) and new asphalt roads in the transportation-poor provinces of Batman, Diyarbakir, Siirt, and Şırnak. Ilisu's completion also opens the way to building Cizre Dam, Turkey's last major Tigris River multipurpose project, which will generate 1.2 Gigawatt-hours per year and enable irrigation of 120,000 hectares of land. This would be equal to the total amount of irrigated land in 1989 across the entire Southeast Anatolia Project (GAP) region (then six, now nine, provinces), which includes Ilisu and Cizre projects and aims to add up to 1.8 million hectares and 27 billion kWh per year, respectively, to Turkey's irrigated land and power supply, while raising the

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region's welfare and lowering its out-migration rate.

Since 2008, Turkey has been building a series of reservoirs in Şırnak and Hakkari provinces on the Tigris River's Hezil tributary system (which forms part of the Turkey-Iraq border) and a few more projects with similar physical contours are planned for the Greater Zap. Some media discussions of the salient security ramifications of this "Border Dams Project" darkened perceptions of the Ilisu Dam even further by sensationalizing it as a means of flooding the steep gorges and other features of the rocky terrain that have served as PKK passageways, hideouts, and depots. Contrary to allaying concerns about Ilisu, these remarks inflamed a "security dilemma," in which dam projects and their military protection forces enticed the PKK to target them and aggravated a spiral of conflict that eventually broke a 26-month ceasefire that began in May 2013 and led to large-scale military operations during July 2015–December 2016 in Dargeçit, Nusaybin, Cizre, and Silopi.

On the other hand, the PKK's ceasefire never really applied to dams or proximate military assets in Turkey's eastern river basins. My own preliminary compilation of events based on news reports indicates that, during the ceasefire period, at least 27 attacks occurred against dam-related targets, mostly by the PKK or related militant groups. In addition to abducting Ilisu workers on two different occasions and attacking Batman Dam's main gendarmerie post, the PKK targeted the Silvan project 22 times in 2015, half of those before the end of the ceasefire. Just before the re-start of Turkish security operations, the KCK, a PKK offshoot, actually declared war on Turkey's "military dams" for violating the spirit of a ceasefire. Ilisu Dam itself was not an exclusive driver of this dynamic, but perceptions of its role in increasing Turkey's ability to cut "flows" of water and PKK forces ensured that it would generate further controversy even before it could power a single light bulb. ■



# Energy Security as an 'unsafe' Concept

**Aura SABADUS**

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Energy security is a concept that is not just used, but also heavily abused by governments.

Academic research on security as a broad term and energy security as a specialist subfield acknowledges its limited ability in defining it, describing it as a mere ‘speech act’ whereby something becomes ‘a security problem when elites declare it to be so.’

It is therefore this arbitrariness in describing something as an energy security risk that raises concerns, since more often than not governments will use it in order to justify policies that are either politically dubious or cannot be explained based on standard economic reasoning.

This article proposes to analyse three instances where governments have used the energy security objective to pass through policies that proved questionable in the long-term.

Although it cannot be argued that in any of the three cases governments acted in ways that deliberately harmed national interests, the tactics pursued in the name of energy security had left them vulnerable to corruption and foreign influence.

### **(Un)Necessary Projects?**

A leitmotif of EU and Turkish policy-makers is the guarantee of energy security through access to resources.

In this context the construction of the Nord Stream II pipeline is a topic that is holding the agenda of policy-makers at both EU and member states level. Yet, despite the plethora of articles written on this subject few analysts and politicians seem to have paid attention to the reality on the ground.

Russia’s Gazprom, the company which spearheads the project and aims to build a 55 billion cubic metre/annum (bcm/a) pipeline along the existing Nord Stream I across the Baltic Sea into Germany, claims that the new corridor will guarantee security of supply and cheaper prices for recipient countries.

However, it is worth remembering that Europe already benefits from a well-integrated transit infrastructure with a capacity of over 140bcm/a that crosses Ukraine, a country, which also boasts vast storage capacity.

Furthermore, according to a study carried out by a Berlin-based consultancy in June 2017, Europe had in 2016 a total import capacity of liquefied natural gas of 136 million tonnes per annum (MTPA), of which only 27 percent were used that year.

Considering the underutilised LNG capacity and the existence of the vast Ukrainian transmission system it is questionable why some European policy-makers perceive Nord Stream II as a guarantor of energy security.

Nor is it clear what benefits Nord Stream II would bring in terms of diversity of supply and prices, since Germany and central European countries, which will be the likely off-takers of gas imported via this pipeline are already dependent on Russian imports.

Gazprom is also in the process of building TurkStream, which will carry Russian gas across the Black Sea into Turkey with possible further deliveries to Europe.

Quite what benefit TurkStream I, the pipeline that will feed the Turkish gas market, will bring to Turkey itself is unknown.

The country has contracted volumes of 14bcm/year via the existing Trans-Balkan pipeline, which will be diverted to TurkStream I once it is commissioned next year.

The capacity of this line is 15.75bcm/a, but one may well ask why Turkey and Russia need to build a whole new pipeline when the country already receives 14bcm/a via the existing infrastructure and, if needed, could contract the additional 1.75bcm/a via Blue Stream, the other Russian pipeline supplying Turkey.

Blue Stream itself has hardly been used at its full capacity of 16bcm/a, raising questions when it was first mooted whether it was really necessary for Turkey, and prompting some authors to argue later on that the pipeline mainly benefited Russian contractors involved in its construction.

### Legal Changes

Governments also use energy security as a means to change the law in ways that do not necessarily serve the public interest, but will, for sure, work in favour of a chosen few.

In 2014, the Hungarian government signed an agreement with the Russian state nuclear energy company, Rosatom for the construction of two VVER-1200 reactor blocks with a 1200MW installed capacity.

**Turkey, like many EU member states expecting to liberalise their gas markets in the early 2000s sought to enact the transfer of gas volumes imported by the state companies to the private sector.**

Despite concerns about the profitability of the deal, the government opted to bypass the normal transparent procurement procedure, whereby the project would have been brought up for open debate and the public given a chance to understand the costs, benefits and risks associated with this project.

It is not clear what benefit the bypassing of the transparent procurement procedure had for Hungary as a whole, but, if anything, it contributed to growing Russian influence in the country.

Turkey itself chose to amend its landmark Natural Gas Market Law (NGML) 4646 in 2004 to introduce a controversial 'seller's consent' clause which effectively allowed producer countries selling gas to Turkey to give their final nod of approval to companies looking to import from these countries.

This ultimately benefited Gazprom, which was the only company that accepted the transfer of contracts from the state company BOTAS to private importers.

Turkey, like many EU member states expecting to liberalise their gas markets in the early 2000s sought to enact the transfer of gas volumes imported by the state companies to the private sector. This was part of the wider goal to create market competition and spread out risks to third parties.

But while European countries held the transfer in a transparent manner, in Turkey the process happened behind closed doors, with only a handful of importers gaining access to information about contractual prices and gaining Gazprom's ultimate approval to import gas.

In exchange, Gazprom gained a firm presence in the Turkish downstream sector and was granted access to sensitive information about importing companies' shareholding structures.

### Innocent Measures?

A recent EU investigation found that Russia's Gazprom has been using tac-



tics such as restricting buyers from reselling imported gas, a move that acted against free market principles and blocked regional market integration.

What it did not mention was that Gazprom was also forcing transmission companies in EU member states to implement seemingly innocuous measures, but which blocked the flows of natural gas and ultimately the integration of regional markets.

An investigation found that Gazprom had forced the Romanian transmission system operator Transgaz to implement the Russian gas day at its border with Ukraine even though the European gas day should have applied after the expiry of a long-term transit contract held by Transgaz.

The Russian gas day starts at 10:00 hours Moscow time or 08:00 hours Central European Time (CET), while the European gas day starts at 05:00 hours Coordinated Universal Time (UTC) for winter time or 04:00 hours UTC for summer time, when daylight saving is applied. CET is one hour ahead of UTC.

Sources quoted by the investigation noted that Gazprom threatened to cut gas supplies via the Trans-Balkan pipeline, which supplies gas to southern Europe and Turkey ahead of winter 2016 if Transgaz did not implement the Russian gas day.

**Although governments repeatedly reference energy security as a justification for specific policies, the concept is notoriously difficult to define, making it virtually impossible to establish reliable benchmarks by which energy security can, indeed, be attained.**

Transgaz said it had to comply with the request in order to guarantee security of supply in the region ahead of the cold season.

However, questions remain as to why the transmission system operator of Romania, an EU member state, did not seek to re-open the issue with Gazprom once the winter season was over and to implement the European gas day as required under EU regulations?

### **Conclusion**

This discussion has shown that although governments repeatedly reference energy security as a justification for specific policies, the concept is notoriously difficult to define, making it virtually impossible to establish reliable benchmarks by which energy security can, indeed, be attained.

The examples of several countries analysed here shows that the ambiguity of energy security as a concept has left the door open to certain decisions or practices that created opportunities for restricted groups.

These included contractors looking to get involved in large construction projects such as large pipelines, entrepreneurs expecting to clinch profitable, but opaque deals or the political elite looking to bolster internal clout by gaining support from influential external powers. ■

MEHMET ÖĞÜTÇÜ

THE NEW GEOPOLITICAL JOURNEY : TURKEY'S NEXT TEN YEARS

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