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# Turkey's Military and Defense Policies

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**ABSTRACT** *In the post-9/11 era and now in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the meaning of security and the means of ensuring it have radically changed. As a NATO member state situated in a geography that poses multiple threats to its security and even existence, Turkey seeks to maintain its own domestic and regional security while contributing to a global environment of peace and order. The unique threats posed to Turkey by domestic and regional terrorism and the ongoing conflict in Syria in particular have prompted Ankara to invest in projects focused on the development of new technologies and, more broadly, in improvements in the country's indigenous defense industry. This commentary highlights a number of these projects, along with the factors that contribute to Turkey's present security outlook.*

**Keywords:** Security, Defense Strategy, Turkey, NATO

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## Introduction

**S**ecurity has undergone a fundamental transformation since the end of the Cold War on the domestic, regional and international levels. Evolving from a state-centric understanding to a human-centric one, there has been also transformation in the definition of security. As a concept, security is the prevention and elimination of identified, actualized or probable risks, threats and dangers that cause human beings to experience anxiety and concern. In keeping with this definition, all of the security policies and strategies set by the Republic of Turkey are for the protection of humans and human dignity within the regional and global security landscape, and are based on the understanding of “let man flourish, and the state will also flourish” originating from Turkey’s historical and cultural heritage.

Following the proclamation of the Republic, Turkey preserved its defense-oriented military strategy, which was based on the requirements of the post-World War I security environment, until the emergence of terror threat in the 1980s. From then onward, Turkey began forming its military operation and develop fire-power to support its defense strategies with domestic and national technologies. Due to the increasing asymmetric threats in its surrounding neighborhood, Turkey has concentrated its military strategy on generating a cross-border security and stability corridor since 2016 and has supported this new strategy with the

development of high technology systems in its defense industry.

Turkey’s defense industry has a great historical background. In the first years of the Republic, some significant steps were taken, notably in the direction of setting up arms and ammunition factories and cannon repair shops, as well as marine and aviation industries. In the aftermath of World War II, Turkey continued to improve its defense capabilities within the framework of the strategies of the alliances of which Turkey was, and still is, a part, namely the UN and NATO. Military demands arising from the Cyprus Peace Operation conducted between 1960 and 1974 and the arms embargo imposed on Turkey revealed the need for a strong national defense industry. In line with these demands, Turkey’s efforts to improve its national defense industry have progressed with a vision of having a self-sufficient army in military and defense terms (i.e. the Turkish Armed Forces Foundation, Turkish Aerospace, ASELSAN, ASPİLSAN, HAVELSAN and ROKETSAN).

Following the end of the Cold War, the changing nature of the global and regional geopolitical environment made a huge impact on Turkey’s security perception. Since the 1990s, increasing global terrorism has shaped Turkey’s defense needs, as it has done all around the world. Turkey’s combat experience, gained through the large-scale military operations it has conducted against terrorism, has contributed greatly to its defense system products and technologies. Thus,

thanks to its achievements in its national defense industry, Turkey now advocates its interests in a wider geographic area to the best of its ability.

Starting from 2016, developments in international politics, particularly in the Middle East, have affected Turkey directly. Consequently, our military strategy has been outlined with a 'strategic defense' approach to maintain cross-border security. The aim of bolstering this ongoing strategy through improvements in the country's indigenous defense industry still endures. In the beginning, projects such as the Armored Combat Vehicle, Light Transport Aircraft, Beginner Trainer Aircraft, Cougar Helicopter, *Hürkuş* Training Aircraft, *Göktürk-1* Surveillance Satellite, Rapid Response Boats, National Infantry Rifle, Mine Protected Vehicles, Air Defense and Missile Systems stood out. With the experience gained from the design and production of these products, main battle weaponry projects started to take their place in the product range. MİLGEM, MİLDEN, *Altay* Tank, *Atak* Helicopter, Unmanned Air Vehicles, Armed Unmanned Air Vehicles, Unmanned Combat Air Vehicle Systems (*ANKA*, *Bayraktar*, *ANKA-S*, *Bayraktar Akıncı*) and Multi-Purpose Amphibious Assault Ship (TCG ANADOLU) are projects carried out on the same path. The efficiency of the weaponry manufactured with domestic and national technologies in the Turkish defense industry has been proven in the Euphrates Shield, Olive Branch, Peace Spring and Spring Shield Operations,

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which have recently been conducted in order to maintain cross-border security, and have earned a noteworthy worldwide reputation. Turkey will continue to launch high-tech defense industry projects in this direction.

### **The Transformation and Development of Turkey's Military and Defense Strategies**

Today's global security environment is shaped by social, economic, political, military, technological and environmental transformations. The present power centers in the world are being displaced as a result of regional, mutually interacting conflict environments, social and political turmoil and domestic conflicts; these forces compel the current global order to transform. As a result, this transformation makes it difficult to establish a stable environment all over the world.

In this day and age, threats against national security have taken on a



Minister of National Defense Hulusi Akar spoke at the first welding ceremony of the ship *Piri Reis*, the first of the New Type Submarine Project and the fifth ship *Seydi Ali Reis* at Gölçük Military Shipyard Command, December 22, 2020.

ARIF AKDOĞAN / AA Photo

hybrid structure. In addition to the threats led or supported by states, the asymmetric risks posed by terrorism, human trafficking and weapons of mass destruction, as well as risks that economies and social structures face in the struggle for the division of resources, environmental disasters that expand the threat spectrum and the fact that illegal agents gain the ability to use technology effectively, further increase security risks. These conditions inevitably make countries sensitive to possible crisis areas in other regions as well as in their own lands.

Turkey's defense strategy aims at finding common solutions to international problems in a collaborative way that supports peace on a global scale. Turkey implements this strategy thanks to the contribution of its distinguished, deterrent, efficient, motivated, well-trained and disciplined Armed Forces that are equipped with high-level weaponry produced domestically with national resources.

Taking into consideration Turkey's geography, it is possible to clearly see that the country is surrounded by an

area hosting numerous conflicts and instabilities. It is a necessity for us to be powerful and remain stable in such a region. As a matter of course, Turkey follows security policies that prevent risks and threats in compliance with international law and adheres to its effective, deterrent and rigid defensive strategy to protect its national rights and interests.

Today's fragile security environment, continually sculptured by new threats and risks, has made it more vital than ever to maintain peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic region. Having contributed to preservation of peace and stability in Europe in the Cold War years, Turkey attaches particular importance to the development of cooperation in the new security environment through partnerships and alliances.

NATO is a worthy exemplar of these partnerships and alliances. Turkey supports the role undertaken by NATO by actively participating in the alliance's activities, and contributes to the development of intercountry cooperation in NATO's enlargement process. Turkey also significantly contributes to the dialogue and cooperation efforts of the alliance as a country with historical, cultural and social ties to many regions in which NATO already exercises operations.

The European Union is another exemplar. Turkey's relation with the EU, which is acknowledged as one of NATO's strategic partners, is a matter of delicacy as it is an EU candidate country. The NATO-EU partnership

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is also a provision of the joint struggle against existing risks and threats within the scope of the principle of the 'indivisibility of security.' However, when improvement in relations is considered, the principles of the preservation of the transatlantic link and the recognition of NATO as the main actor in European security should not be neglected. With this insight, Turkey will continue to contribute to the development of the aforementioned cooperation, on the condition that parties comply with the agreed-upon framework that forms the basis of the procedures and principles of NATO-EU relations.

While remaining on its own guard against current threats with its deterrent military force, Turkey will continue its multifaceted efforts to contribute to the maintenance of peace and stability in its surrounding regions as well. In respect to this, with the aim of protecting its rights and interests, Turkey preserves its presence with its navy in all seas that it borders, backs the international activities that serve the peace and stability and persists in performing its

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duties so as not to allow a *fait accompli* and any steps to be taken ‘despite Turkey’ in our region. We continue to plan our national defense capabilities and abilities in line with current and future defense requirements in order to ensure our lasting security against all kinds of threats and dangers toward our country.

### **Turkey’s Military and Defense Strategies Perception**

The main objective of the Republic of Turkey is the preservation of its survival and security and the peace and welfare of its citizens. In order to achieve this goal, we continue our efforts to establish peace and stability around us, taking into account the treaties to which we are a party and the territorial integrity of the countries in our geography.

As a result of the successful operations of the Turkish Armed Forces, internal

and external terrorism that targets the survival and security of our country has been minimized. Unfortunately, many neighboring and allied countries support or condone efforts to create an autonomous region as the beginning of a so-called state right next to our borders. In addition to terrorist organizations, internal conflicts and external interventions pose a threat to the territorial integrity of the countries in our region, with which we share historical and cultural ties, triggering mass movements. The condition of these states and their people constitute a risk for Turkey’s strategy of creating a peaceful and stable area in its surroundings.

Turkey will definitely not allow the formation of any state or autonomous zone by terrorist organizations that threaten its own survival and security in its geography, and will resolutely continue to take the necessary measures to avert threats in this context. Turkey will continue to support countries and peoples with whom we share a common past and culture, in line with the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights; in considering our common interests, we will not hesitate to use force for this purpose in line with the rights granted by international law and mutual agreements.

### **Conclusion**

In our region, there are developments that threaten international peace and stability and that can have also implications on a global scale. The most

recent example is General Haftar's attacks on the legitimate Government of National Accord and civilians in Libya. Although these attacks threaten the security of the entire region, unfortunately many countries continue to support Haftar with political, military and economic aid. As another example, Armenia's unjust attacks and illegal occupation of brotherly Azerbaijan continue. And human rights violations in Syria persist despite all the attempts made to prevent them. Within the framework of these current developments, it is clear that the risks threatening the security and stability of our region still exist.

In the context of the global pandemic we are currently experiencing

and the crises in our region, the international organizations of which Turkey is a member have not been effective. This situation has revealed the need for adjustments to increase the effectiveness of international security organizations, especially the United Nations. The incapability of international organizations to ensure peace and stability in our geography have made bilateral military agreements more important. Turkey will continue to support and lead the efforts to ensure harmony and stability together with the countries that share the same ideals, in order to eliminate the risks and threats to itself and to international peace, while preserving its national rights and interests. ■

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