Chapter 4

Turkey and Security in the Eastern Mediterranean

Turkey will be a critical partner in Alliance efforts to address security challenges on the European periphery, including risks associated with uncertain Russian futures. The United States will have an independent interest in security cooperation with Turkey for power projection in adjacent areas of critical interest—the Balkans, the Caucasus and the Caspian, the Levant, and the Gulf. To the extent that NATO moves to become a more geographically expansive, power-projection alliance, this interest in Turkey’s role will be more widely shared. But Turkey itself is experiencing profound internal change, and Turkey’s relations with several of its neighbors remain troubled. Improved relations with the EU can have a positive effect in both dimensions.

Internal Uncertainties
The future direction of Turkish external policy, and the future of Turkey as a security partner for the West will be driven to a great extent by internal developments. Even if the overall direction of Turkish policy remains steady and pro-Western, Turkey’s ability to play an active role in adjoining regions and in NATO affairs (including the peaceful resolution of disputes with Greece) will depend on political stability in Ankara. The outlook is uncertain and is characterized by

flux on three broad fronts: secularism versus Islam, the state versus its opponents, and the future of Turkish nationalism.2

The Atatürkist tradition of statism, Western orientation, secularism, and non-intervention has been under strain for decades, critically so in the period since the Gulf War. The struggle between secular and Islamist visions of Turkey as a society has been a focal point for Turkish and Western observers since the electoral successes of the Refah Party and its leadership of a coalition government. The removal of Refah from power and the banning of the party and its leadership from Turkish politics thrust the military to the forefront. The 1999 general elections produced a nationalist coalition of the right and the left, with a sharp decline in support for centrist parties and for Refah’s successor, the Virtue Party. The consolidation of military influence in defense of the secular state also means that, more than ever, the Turkish military is a key interlocutor on foreign and security policy issues.

Beyond the question of secularism versus Islam, the internal scene is defined by the broader conflict between the state and its opponents—from the religious right to the left. The defining struggle in this context is the ongoing war between Ankara and Kurdish separatists. Even apart from the capture of Abdullah Ocalan, the security forces have achieved considerable success in containing the PKK insurgency in the southeast, a conflict that has claimed perhaps 40,000 lives over the last decade. Cities in the southeast are now more secure, but the conflict is far from over and exerts a continuing drain on the Turkish economy and society. The human rights consequences of the war in the southeast and in northern Iraq have also imposed incalculable opportunity costs on Turkey in its relations with the EU and the West as a whole.

The improved security picture in the southeast is the result of better counterinsurgency techniques and aggressive cross-border operations in northern Iraq that have shifted much of the war against the PKK off Turkish territory. Yet little progress has been made on the

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more fundamental issue of a political approach to Kurdish rights in the southeast (and for the majority of Kurds living elsewhere in Turkey). Without a resolution of this problem, there will remain some potential for Kurdish separatism and other forms of opposition to the state, including Islamism, to interact in unpredictable and potentially destabilizing ways. The social stresses resulting from a decade of strong economic growth and the rise of a dynamic private sector, but with increasing income gaps and high inflation, are other troubling elements on the internal scene. Corruption and a burgeoning illegal sector have further contributed to discredit the traditional political class and to inhibit the emergence of a credible centrist alternative in Turkish politics—an alternative that the Turkish military and business community, among others, would like to encourage.

Against this background of political and social change, Turkish nationalism has emerged as a powerful force uniting diverse elements—military and civilian, secular and religious. The strong showing of the Nationalist Action Party (MHP) suggests that Turkish nationalism has supplanted Islamism as a popular political force. More vigorous nationalism is evident in closer attention to Turkish sovereign interests, greater affinity and activism in support of Turks abroad, and a more assertive and independent external policy. Rising Turkish nationalism, dating from the period of the Gulf War but gathering pace in recent years, has paralleled other important changes in Turkish foreign policy, notably the growing role of public opinion and the rise of potent lobbies (Turkish Cypriots, Bosnians, Azeris) in Ankara. These factors are now central to policymaking in key crisis areas, from the Aegean to the Caucasus, and in relations with the United States and Europe. Although Western policies, especially the attitude of the EU toward Turkish membership, are part of this new foreign policy equation, U.S. and European leverage is arguably more limited than in the past.

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3 Despite its extremist past, the MHP garnered 18 percent of the vote in the 1999 elections, second only to the nationalist Democratic Left Party's 22 percent.

The Primacy of Internal Security Concerns

Turkish security perspectives are unique when viewed against the background of Alliance-wide concerns. No other member of the Alliance faces a similar range of external security challenges or such significant internal problems. Many of these challenges are typical of the post–Cold War security environment. At the same time, Ankara retains a high degree of concern about residual risks from Russian behavior. The net result is a degree of exposure and security consciousness unique within NATO.

Internal security concerns top the Turkish agenda and color perspectives on external actors such as Greece, Syria, and Iran. The Turkish General Staff consistently cites the struggle against antisecular forces (Islamists) and separatism (the PKK) as the number one and two defense priorities. The former is largely a political and judicial sphere of activity. The latter consumes a good part of Turkey’s defense resources and energy, and is seen as integral to guaranteeing the unitary character of the Turkish state. Even in the midst of a large and costly defense modernization program (perhaps as much as $80 billion over the next decade, $150 billion over the next 25 years), the military devotes enormous resources to the conduct of operations against the PKK. One consequence of this effort has been a steady improvement in the mobility and operational readiness of Turkish forces, a development with implications for the military balance with Syria, Iran, Greece, and Russia. For Turks, operations against the PKK are defined as counterterrorism, and the primacy of this activity gives Ankara a strong interest in seeing cooperation against terrorism incorporated in NATO discussions.

The battle against the PKK also provides the lens through which the Turkish military and civilian leadership view the situation in northern Iraq. The issue of northern Iraq is a leading source of suspicion in relations with the United States and Europe. The United States and Europe view northern Iraq as a function of policy toward Baghdad and

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5 These two priorities are sometimes reversed.
6 Including within the military itself. There have been numerous purges of military officers for antisecular activities in recent years.
7 Some 200,000 military and gendarmerie personnel are deployed for this purpose in the east and southeast of the country.
Iran, and are concerned about regional security and human rights. For Ankara, developments in northern Iraq are viewed in relation to their effect on Kurdish nationalism, separatism, and the viability of the PKK. Thus, Operation Provide Comfort was viewed with enormous skepticism by many Turks (although tolerated by the military), as are U.S.-brokered agreements between the two leading Kurdish factions. Both have been interpreted as policies aimed at fostering rather than dampening Kurdish aspirations at Turkish expense. Turkish policymakers have tolerated, but are clearly uncomfortable with, the use of Incirlik air base for strikes against Iraqi targets.8

Relations with Iran are also part of the Turkish security equation. There has been some concern among Turkish officials about an Iranian hand in Turkish politics, including philosophical and monetary support for Islamists. In all likelihood, the Iranian role in this regard has been minor. Sympathetic Turkish businessmen and, especially in earlier years, Saudi donations, have almost certainly played a larger role in the growth of Islamic institutions and politics in Turkey. Iran has also been implicated in support for the PKK, and reported Turkish strikes against PKK targets on Iranian territory have been part of a cyclical pattern in Turkish-Iranian tensions.9 Iranian nuclear and ballistic missile programs are a source of growing concern in Ankara and reinforce the Turkish interest in intelligence and TBMD cooperation with Israel. These concerns also encourage a conservative view of NATO nuclear policy and a strong interest in counterproliferation as part of the new NATO agenda.

Greek-Turkish Conflict: Outlook and Consequences

A third, more proximate, source of risk in Turkish perception concerns relations with Greece. Objectively, there can be little strategic rationale for premeditated conflict on either side. Open conflict would

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8 Between late December 1998 and July 1999, as part of Operation Northern Watch, U.S. and British aircraft operating from Incirlik struck Iraqi targets in the northern no-fly zone on more than 60 occasions. U.S. European Command (EUCOM) figures cited in European Stars and Stripes, July 27, 1999, p. 2.

pose enormous political risks for both Ankara and Athens, quite apart from uncertainties at the operational level. Yet the risk of an accidental clash in the Aegean (on the pattern of the Imia-Kardak crisis of 1996) remains, given the continuing armed air and naval operations in close proximity and the highly charged atmosphere surrounding competing claims over air and sea space. NATO has achieved some success in convincing both sides to pursue military confidence-building measures agreed to in 1988, which might reduce the risk of incidents at sea and in the air. It is unclear whether these measures will be fully implemented. On Cyprus, the planned delivery of Russian-supplied S-300 surface-to-air batteries and the Turkish threat to respond militarily to their deployment raised the stakes considerably. The Cypriot decision not to deploy this system on the island defused an explosive situation.

The Greek-Turkish dispute has evolved considerably over the past decade, with significant implications for regional stability and crisis management. First, the geopolitical context has changed, with the end of Cold War imperatives giving both Greece and Turkey greater freedom of action. Turkey has become a more independent and assertive regional actor, although outside the European mainstream. Greece, by contrast, has become more European in orientation. Second, both countries have experienced substantial internal change over the past decade. Public opinion is a critical influence in both countries, reinforced by the growing role of the media in periods of crisis. Nationalism may now be a more powerful force in Turkey, but for both countries, the Aegean and especially Cyprus are the nationalist questions par excellence. Third, there has been an increase in the scope of Greek-Turkish competition and the potential for linkage and escalation. Beyond traditional disputes over the Aegean and Cyprus and the status of minority communities in Thrace and Istanbul, developments in the Balkans and in the larger eastern Mediterranean balance (i.e., involv-
Greek strategists talk of Muslim “encirclement” in the Balkans. Turks allude to a looming “Orthodox axis” embracing Greece, Serbia, and Russia. Turkey also alleges a Greek role in support of the PKK, raising the possibility of Greek-Turkish competition moving into the realm of state-sponsored terror. As a result, long-standing issues are now imbedded in a wider sense of geopolitical rivalry.

Fourth, and very significantly, the military balance in the eastern Mediterranean has been shifting in Turkey’s favor—especially in the air. The balance in ground and amphibious forces has long been skewed in Turkey’s favor. Only at sea is the balance more nearly even. Both countries have ambitious modernization plans and are acquiring a greater capacity for mobility and longer-range strike. A military clash between Greece and Turkey today would have far greater potential for destructiveness and escalation than in previous decades. As Ankara faces an array of security risks on its borders, apart from Greece, there will be continuing incentives for military modernization, but with inevitable spillover effects on the balance in the Aegean. The Turkish defense-industrial, intelligence, and training relationship with Israel is a new element in this calculus.

It is arguable that since the Turkish intervention of 1974, Cyprus has been more of a political than a security issue in Greek-Turkish relations. Recent developments have combined to make Cyprus once again a central problem in the eastern Mediterranean. The establishment of a joint Cypriot-Greek defense doctrine has had the effect of tying Cyprus firmly into the broader bilateral competition. There is now a very real possibility that the “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus” will respond to the prospect of Cypriot EU membership by annexing itself to Turkey, effectively eliminating any possibility of a settlement on the island, and possibly complicating Ankara’s own membership bid. Finally, the Cyprus situation has become more heavily militarized. The large-scale Turkish Army presence remains. The Greek

Cypriot National Guard has itself acquired more modern equipment, including Russian tanks.

From the Turkish perspective, the Russian role is central. Observers in Ankara do not accept that the transfer of weapons to Cyprus is simply a hard-currency transaction for Moscow. Rather, it is seen as part of a broader Russian strategy of influence and presence in the eastern Mediterranean, with the basic motivation of pressuring Turkey.\(^{15}\)

Apart from the tangible risk of a Greek-Turkish clash if the Russian S-300 missiles had been deployed as planned, the transfer of this system would also have had implications for U.S. and Israeli security interests in the region. The radar system associated with the S-300s would be capable of monitoring the air space over a large part of the eastern Mediterranean. Information obtained might find its way to Russia, and perhaps Syria or Iran, and could complicate U.S. air operations in the event of an eastern Mediterranean or Middle Eastern conflict.

A Greek-Turkish clash—over Cyprus, or the Aegean, or over ethnic conflict in Thrace—would have profound implications for Turkey and the West. It would also have operational consequences for the United States. In strategic terms, a conflict under current conditions might result in the open-ended estrangement of Turkey from the West, an even more serious situation than that which followed the 1974 events on Cyprus. In 1974, Cold War imperatives argued for restraint in sanctions against Ankara. Today, no such constraints exist, and European opinion, in particular, is likely to be strongly critical of Turkey regardless of the circumstances surrounding a clash. The process of NATO adaptation would also be dealt a blow. New command arrangements in the south would become unworkable. Further enlargement of the Alliance would become difficult against the backdrop of a Greek-Turkish conflict, and failure to prevent, much less contain, a clash would be regarded as a major failure for the Alliance. More broadly, a Greek-Turkish conflict might encourage “civilizational” cleavages in the Balkans and elsewhere. Even Israel might be sensitive to the political consequences of too overt a military relation-

\(^{15}\) Turkish General Staff (TGS) officials point to the presence of some 30,000 to 40,000 Russians on Cyprus as evidence of this trend.
ship in the context of a conflict over Cyprus, especially if Israeli weapons were used, and might look for ways to scale back its cooperation.

The operational consequences could be no less severe. U.S. and allied forces in the eastern Mediterranean might find themselves in harm’s way. Criticism of Ankara from Washington or in NATO—a virtual certainty—might cause the Turkish leadership to terminate or suspend key aspects of bilateral defense cooperation and could produce a forced withdrawal from Incirlik. A Greek-Turkish clash would almost certainly provoke active Allied efforts to contain the crisis, negotiate a disengagement, or introduce peacekeeping arrangements. U.S. air and naval forces would likely be called upon to assist in monitoring or separating the combatants.

The risk of a clash and the likely strategic and operational consequences make risk reduction an imperative for NATO, the EU, and the United States. Much of the day-to-day risk in Greek-Turkish relations now stems from air operations, whether in the Aegean or over Cyprus. The air balance is increasingly central to strategic perceptions on all sides. Turkey has made air force modernization a priority, and air power has been the leading vehicle for Turkish assertiveness in the Aegean. So too, in Greece, the air force has emerged as the “hard line” service in the perception of foreign observers, reflecting the reality of daily confrontations in the air and a changing air power balance. As both states acquire large inventories of capable aircraft, as well as new command and control and refueling capabilities, the air dimension can only loom larger in the regional balance. It is therefore worth considering what direct role the United States Air Force Europe (USAFE) and AIRSOUTH might play in risk-reduction efforts, perhaps at the tactical level (e.g., exchanges and pilot-to-pilot meetings).16

More positively, and despite U.S. concerns about regional escalation, the Kosovo crisis did not produce new Greek-Turkish tensions. The crisis in fact produced some limited cooperation between Athens and Ankara. Overall, both countries have adopted a relatively cautious

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16 Cold War era agreements with the Soviet Union on reducing the potential for incidents in the air could provide useful benchmarks. Confidence-building measures discussed among Arab and Israeli negotiators in the context of ACRS (the multilateral arms control and regional security talks) could provide another.
Turkish-Syrian Conflict: Outlook and Consequences

In recent years there has been a marked increase in Turkish attention to Syria as a security challenge. Indeed, the concern over Syria and the development of a more assertive strategy toward Damascus have been notable changes on the Turkish defense scene, changes that have until very recently drawn little attention in the West. A good expression of Turkish concerns was contained in a well-known analysis by Ambassador Sukru Elekdag, who spoke of a “two-and-a-half war strategy” for Turkey, in which the risk of conflict with Syria figured prominently.18

Numerous issues are on the agenda with Syria—disputes over Tigris and Euphrates waters, continued Syrian claims on the Turkish province of Hatay, Syrian criticism of Ankara’s relations with Israel, weapons of mass destruction, and above all, Syrian support for the PKK. The last has been a proximate and serious source of risk. Ankara has periodically threatened to strike PKK camps in Syrian-controlled parts of the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon. There has also been a continuing potential for hot-pursuit incidents between Syrian and Turkish forces pursuing PKK guerrillas on the border. PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan had been based in Damascus, and Syria facilitated PKK operations in Turkey both financially and logistically. In the fall of 1998, Ankara made it clear that Syrian support for the PKK would no longer be tol-

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17 Greece and Turkey are playing a leading role in the formation of a Balkan peacekeeping brigade. Greece allowed Turkish aircraft to transit Greek air space in support of humanitarian operations in Macedonia and Albania.

With a growing capacity for mobile operations, experience from years of cross-border campaigns in northern Iraq, and against a background of military cooperation with Israel, Turkish decisionmakers appeared confident in threatening military action against Syria.\(^{19}\) The departure of Ocalan from Syria in December 1998 under strong Turkish pressure—and his apprehension in Kenya in February 1999—is evidence of Turkey’s new-found willingness to use its regional weight and operational capabilities abroad. The October 1998 “Adana Agreement” called for the end of Syrian support for the PKK and put in place a monitoring arrangement. Turkish officials are reportedly confident that PKK activity in Syria has been much reduced, although activity in Syrian-controlled areas of Lebanon persists.

A serious Turkish-Syrian clash would have significant consequences. A large-scale intervention aimed at toppling Assad is unlikely, but an unequivocal Syrian defeat on the ground could well weaken Assad’s leadership and perhaps change the dynamics in the Middle East peace process (which may have been part of Assad’s calculus in agreeing to Ocalan’s departure for Moscow and, eventually, elsewhere). Open conflict, or even a protracted period of brinksmanship with Syria, could cause Ankara to seek NATO backing on the basis that terrorists should not be allowed a sanctuary, and that the territory of a NATO member is threatened by Syrian behavior. Given the controversy over the PKK and Kurdish issues in Europe, many allies are likely to balk at the prospect of support for Ankara. NATO’s failure to provide a determined response would strongly reinforce existing Turkish concerns about “selective solidarity,” first raised during the Gulf War when Germany appeared reluctant to provide ACE (Allied Command Europe) Mobile Force (AMF)-Air reinforcements to Turkey. Sensitivities about Syria’s role in the peace process and congressional

\(^{19}\) On October 6, 1998, Prime Minister Yilmaz issued what he described as a “last warning” to Syria over support for the PKK. The TGS and the Turkish parliament have issued similar warnings, and relations have recently been described as a virtual state of war. See “Turks Give Syria Last Warning,” Washington Post, October 7, 1998; and Howard Schneider, “Turkish Parliament Threatens Syria Anew,” Washington Post, October 8, 1998.

\(^{20}\) The military gap between Syria and Turkey is large and growing. Turkey’s ground forces are roughly twice the size, and many of Syria’s high-grade units are tied down on the border with Israel. In the air, Turkey enjoys considerable superiority with its large inventory of F-16s and other capable aircraft; Syria has perhaps 40 modern, operational fighters (MiG-29 and Su-24). See analysis in Alan Makovsky and Michael Eisenstadt, “Turkish-Syrian Relations: A Crisis Delayed?” Washington Institute, Policy Watch, No. 345, October 14, 1998.
concerns might also complicate the response from Washington. Even Israel, generally interested in pressuring Syria, might not find an open conflict in its interest, especially if there is movement in the peace process.21

If significant Syrian territory is lost or the survival of the Assad regime is threatened, it is not beyond imagining that Syria might employ Scud B and C missiles against Turkish targets, possibly including Ankara. Adana and Iskenderun would be particularly vulnerable. In this case, the prospects for escalation would increase, as would the incentives for Turkey to explore future deterrent strategies outside a NATO framework. The issue of NATO’s exposure to WMD and missile risks would acquire a dramatic and tangible quality.

In sum, Ankara is well placed to achieve an operational success, but conflict with Syria could weaken, rather than strengthen, Turkish ties with the West. In the worst case, perceived abandonment by NATO could produce a crisis in relations with the Alliance.

Confrontation with Syria would be an important test for the Alliance, and will be seen as an Article V rather than an Article VI commitment. Just as promoting confidence-building measures and strategic dialogue between Greece and Turkey is strongly in the Alliance interest, the United States and Europe can play a critical role with Syria by bringing pressure on Damascus to ensure that its disavowal of the PKK is permanent, and that any future Israeli-Syrian disengagement does not increase the risk to Ankara.22

The Competition with Russia

Turkey and Russia no longer share a border, but relations between these two historic competitors are, in many respects, less stable

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21 Israel was reportedly less than enthusiastic about providing intelligence and other assistance to Turkey in its confrontation with Syria. See “Levantine Labyrinths: A Mini War Between Turkey and Syria Cannot be Excluded,” Foreign Report, No. 2515, October 6, 1998, p. 1.

22 Many of the considerations noted in relation to Syria could also apply in the event of a PKK-related clash with Iran. This prospect—once remote—has come to the fore as a result of cross-border incidents and increased tension between Ankara and Tehran in the summer of 1999. Some analysts now suggest that Iran is set to replace Syria as a leading regional sponsor of the PKK, and has become a planning factor for the Turkish military. See Alan Makovsky, “Turkish-Iranian Tension: A New Regional Flashpoint?” Policywatch, No. 404, August 10, 1999.
today than they were during the Cold War. In general, the Turkish security establishment's concerns about Russia are focused on longer-term issues: pipeline geopolitics, ethnic conflict and political vacuums in the Caucasus, and the possibility that Turkey might have to face the military risks of a resurgent Russia alone. In particular, Ankara is concerned that NATO, as a whole, will prefer to purchase room for maneuver on further NATO enlargement, Balkan policy, and other controversial issues by allowing Moscow a free hand in dealing with the near-abroad and its southern periphery. Turkish planners fear that Russia will exploit CFE treaty adjustments to rebuild its military potential opposite Turkey. The renewed emphasis on nuclear weapons in Russian military doctrine is another source of concern, encouraging a very conservative attitude toward NATO nuclear policy in Ankara. The sum of these concerns produces a striking degree of wariness about Russian intentions, even as Turkish relations with Russia have expanded dramatically in the economic sphere.

More recently, frictions with Russia in the security realm have acquired a more direct and near-term quality. Russian arms transfers to Cyprus and Iran are the key elements in this regard, but Turks are also concerned about the potential for Russia to play a destabilizing role in the Balkans and the eastern Mediterranean as a whole. Economic and political crises in Russia and the conflict in Chechnya also compel Turks to consider the spillover effects of widespread turmoil across the Black Sea, from refugees to disruption in energy and trade flows. This is an area in which Ankara would like to see greater NATO presence and activity, especially given Partnership for Peace (PfP) activities which, as Turkish naval officials are keen to stress, make the Black Sea a "NATO sea."

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23 For a Russian perspective, see Nicolai A. Kovalsky (ed.), Europe, the Mediterranean, Russia: Perception of Strategies, Russian Academy of Sciences/Interdialect, Moscow, 1998.

24 A senior Turkish TGS official described CFE changes as a "green light" to Russia to rebuild its military capability opposite Turkey. General Cevik Bir, "Turkey's Role in the New World Order: New Challenges," Strategic Forum, NDU-INSS, No. 135, February 1998.

25 In the early 1990s, it was fashionable to speculate about vast new economic and political opportunities for Turkey in the Turkic republics of the former Soviet Union. In reality, Russia itself, rather than Central Asia, has emerged as a leading economic partner for Ankara. Russia is now Turkey's leading trade partner (prior to the Gulf War, it had been Iraq), largely the result of energy imports.
The Outlook for Relations with the United States and NATO

The changing state of Turkish-EU relations and new European defense initiatives place greater pressure on the bilateral relationship with Washington, as well as on relations within NATO—the key badge of Turkish membership in the West. Observers on all sides acknowledge that the relationship with the United States has experienced repeated strains in the period since the Gulf War. In the absence of a substantial redefinition of the rationale for the “strategic relationship” between Ankara and Washington, policy differences over Iraq, Iran, the Aegean, and human rights, and democratization issues within Turkey itself, have come to dominate the agenda. The political turmoil in Turkey in recent years has complicated Turkey’s ability to engage the West in positive ways. But it has also brought unprecedented attention to relations with Turkey and has given Turkish policymakers a strong stake in repairing the country’s image and rebuilding the strategic relationship. Turkey’s contributions to Kosovo air operations and KFOR have had a particularly positive effect in this regard.

Turkey is a leading “consumer” of security in the new NATO—many key Alliance planning contingencies involve Turkey in some fashion. TGS strategists themselves note that Turkey’s role has changed from a “flank” to a “front.” Turkey and Turkish facilities can also play a critical, possibly unique role in Alliance power projection from the Black Sea and the Caspian to the Gulf. But these advantages, conferred by geography, are only theoretical in the absence of a shared strategy toward these regions. As Turkish military and civilian decisionmakers have become more attuned to sovereignty concerns and Turkey’s own security interests, the prospects for security cooperation with Turkey have become less predictable, even as a changed strategic environment has increased the utility of Turkish bases from the perspective of Western planners.26

In recent confrontations with Iraq, Ankara has been tolerant but unenthusiastic about allowing the use of Incirlik for offensive air op-

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erations in the Gulf. Even the strikes by Allied aircraft within the rules of engagement of Operation Northern Watch are viewed with concern by Turkey’s civilian leadership. Overall, the Turkish calculus has been to avoid the unpredictable internal and regional consequences of too-close involvement in the U.S. conflict with Iraq. Ankara is concerned about Iraqi intentions, and is certainly concerned about WMD and missile risks emanating from Iraq. But the political risks of putting Incirlik at the disposal of U.S. forces (i.e., beyond Northern Watch and NATO tasks) will only be tolerable in relation to operations aimed at producing fundamental change in Baghdad or reshaping the security situation in the northern Gulf. In these cases, Ankara would almost certainly want “a seat at the table” and could envision a more-forward-leaning role, as in the Gulf War. Ankara is also sensitive to operations that might embolden rather than contain Kurdish movements in northern Iraq.

The transition from Operation Provide Comfort to Operation Northern Watch (i.e., the end of the ground operation in the north) improved the climate for cooperation and political acceptance of operations at Incirlik. Despite recent labor disputes and some continuing difficulties in day-to-day relations, the operational outlook has improved in the context of Northern Watch. The training environment has become somewhat more permissive, with improved access to the Konya training range for U.S. aircraft. Yet the prospects for the use of Incirlik beyond Northern Watch, and for non-NATO purposes, remain uncertain. The use of Turkish bases in the latter stages of the Kosovo air campaign, a NATO operation, may signal an expanding Turkish view of how their assets and territory may be used for crisis management.

Even though Turkey’s own debate over foreign and security policy has become more active and more complex, basic issues such as arms transfers remain key measures of the bilateral relationship in Turkish perception. Some recent arms transfer successes have contributed to a positive climate, and the Turkish military continues to prefer U.S. equipment. But Turkish policymakers still tend to regard congressional scrutiny of arms transfers as a de facto embargo and have taken steps to diversify the country’s defense-industrial relationships (Israel, France, and even Russia figure prominently in this regard). Pending
purchases of attack helicopters and co-production of main battle tanks will be major tests of the arms transfer climate in the wake of the release of U.S. frigates, a development applauded by Turks but also acknowledged as a fortuitous result of congressional bargaining. The end of any formal U.S. aid to Turkey has also recast the question of what is meant by “best efforts” in the bilateral Defense and Economic Cooperation Agreement (DECA).

A key future challenge will be to involve Turkey in a more predictable fashion in U.S. and NATO strategy toward the European periphery—i.e., security management in the critical regions adjacent to Turkey. To do so, it will be necessary to recast Turkish-western security relations to address the new transregional problems—proliferation, terrorism, refugees, and energy security are prominent examples—facing Turkey and the Alliance. It will also be necessary to accomplish this without reducing Turkish confidence in NATO as a security guarantor in relation to traditional Article V risks, especially from Russia, Syria, and Iran. In the balance of bilateral and NATO approaches to Turkey, it will be useful to emphasize the Alliance dimension wherever possible.

Turkish military officials themselves emphasize the importance of NATO activities as a way of engaging (“re-engaging” may be a more accurate term) Europeans in Turkey’s interest. This link is likely to acquire greater importance as Ankara seeks to assure itself of participation in emerging EU defense efforts. As Turkey’s own sizable military establishment continues to modernize and become more capable of power projection missions, the United States and NATO may look to Ankara to play a direct role in Alliance tasks beyond territorial defense and the provision of well-located facilities.

For efforts at bolstering strategic cooperation to be successful, key near-term risks must be contained. It will be difficult, perhaps impossible, to preserve a legitimate role for Turkey in European security in the event of a conflict over Cyprus or the Aegean. A clash with any of Turkey’s Middle Eastern neighbors, in which NATO and EU support is not forthcoming, would similarly jeopardize prospects for engaging Turkey in Western security strategies in the Balkans, Caspian, or the Gulf.