Chapter One

INTRODUCTION: TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY IN TRANSITION

Turkey faces a troubled environment, domestically and internationally. Uncertainties regarding the country’s future and its external policies have increased significantly as a result of Turkey’s own economic crises and political turmoil, troubling developments in nearby regions, and challenges further afield. The opening of the 21st century has seen a multiplication of variables influencing Turkey’s foreign and security policy. As a consequence, the task of understanding and assessing Turkey’s international role has become more complex and far more difficult.

During the Cold War, Turkey was a key part of the Western defense system. Ankara acted as a bulwark against the expansion of Soviet influence into the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East. It tied down some 24 Soviet divisions that might otherwise have been deployed on the Central front. It also supplied important bases and facilities for the forward deployment of nuclear weapons and the monitoring of Soviet compliance with arms control agreements. With the end of the Cold War, many in Turkey and the West assumed a much reduced role for Turkey as a regional actor and as an ally of the West. These assumptions, however, proved unfounded. Rather than declining, Turkey’s strategic importance has increased.

At the same time, Ankara’s policy horizons have expanded and Turkey has become a more assertive and independent actor on the international stage. Where once Turkey primarily looked West, today Turkey is increasingly being pulled East and South as well. As a re-
result, Turkey has been forced to redefine its foreign and security policy interests and to rethink its international relationships.

At the same time, Turkey has faced new domestic challenges from Kurdish separatists and Islamists. Economic changes, especially the growth of a dynamic private sector, have eroded the role of the state and created new political and economic forces that have challenged the power of the old Kemalist bureaucratic elite. These forces have increasingly influenced both the style and substance of Turkish foreign and security policy. Indeed, the debate between state-centered conservatives and reformers—a debate that cuts across private and public circles in Turkish society—has been greatly sharpened by the economic crisis of 2000–2002. Looking ahead, the crisis and its political consequences could have important implications for the composition and orientation of Turkey’s foreign policy elite.

TURKEY AS A “PIVOT” STATE

If Turkey were a small state located in Antarctica or the South Sea Islands, these changes might matter little. But Turkey stands at the nexus of three areas of increasing strategic importance to the United States and Europe: the Balkans, the Caspian region, and the Middle East. Thus, how Turkey evolves is important both to the United States and to Europe.

Indeed, in many ways, Turkey is a “pivot” state par excellence. Population, location, and economic and military potential are key requirements for pivot states. But the defining quality of a pivot state is, above all, the capacity to affect regional and international stability. By this measure, Turkey clearly qualifies, along with such states as Mexico, Brazil, Algeria, Egypt, India, and Indonesia. This disparate list of states is tied together by their capacity to promote regional stability—or disorder. A prosperous, stable Turkey would be a factor for stability in a number of different areas: the Balkans, the Caucasus, the Middle East, and Europe. But an impoverished, unstable

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Turkey wracked by religious, ethnic, and political turmoil would be a source of instability and concern in all four regions.

What sets Turkey apart from other developing pivot states is its membership in the Western strategic club, principally through the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) but also through its evolving relations with the European Union (EU). Thus, developments in Turkey are directly linked to U.S. and Western interests. A reorientation of Turkey’s foreign policy or serious threat to its democratic order would have important political and security consequences for both the United States and Europe.

Turkey’s sheer size, moreover, gives it important geostrategic weight. Turkey’s population is currently nearly 67.8 million—the second largest in Europe behind Germany—and may be close to 100 million by the middle of the 21st century. This would make Turkey the most populous country in Europe. Integrating a country and economy of this size will place significant burdens on an EU already reeling from the demands posed by admitting much smaller countries from Central and Eastern Europe. The challenges for Turkey and Europe will be daunting. How each side responds to these challenges will have an important effect not only on Turkey’s evolution but on Europe’s political and strategic evolution as well.

TURKEY AS A REGIONAL ACTOR

In the past decade, moreover, Turkey has emerged as an increasingly important regional actor, wielding substantial military as well as diplomatic weight. Nowhere has this been more evident than in the Middle East. This growing involvement in Middle Eastern affairs represents an important shift in Turkish policy. Under Atatürk—and for several decades after his death—Turkey eschewed involvement in the Middle East, but in recent years Turkey has been heavily engaged in the region. The Gulf War was an important turning point in this process. Against the counsel of his security advisors, President Özal opted squarely to allow the United States to fly sorties against Iraq from Turkish bases. Turkey also shut down the Kirkuk-Yumurtalik oil pipeline as part of the effort to impose economic sanctions against Iraq.
Ozal’s action was an important departure from Turkey’s traditional policy of avoiding deep involvement in Middle Eastern affairs. At the same time, it opened a new period of greater activism in Turkish policy toward the Middle East, which has intensified visibly since the mid-1990s. This more active policy contrasts markedly with the more passive approach that characterized Turkish policy before the Gulf War.

The most dramatic example of this new approach to the Middle East has been Turkey’s growing relationship with Israel. The Israeli connection has strengthened Turkey’s diplomatic leverage in the region and was a factor in Ankara’s decision to force a showdown with Syria in the Fall of 1998 over Syria’s support for the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). The renewal of Arab-Israeli tensions, however, could put new strains on Turkey’s relations with Israel.

Deeper involvement in the Middle East has not been cost free. The burgeoning security relationship with Israel has complicated Turkey’s already mixed relations with its Arab neighbors. Turkey also faces new threats, including from weapons of mass destruction (WMD) deployed on or near its borders. Turkey is already within range of ballistic missiles that could be launched from Iran, Iraq, and Syria and this exposure is likely to grow in the future as more countries in the region acquire ballistic missile technology and the capability to deploy weapons of mass destruction. A nuclear-armed Iran or Iraq could dramatically change the security equation for Turkey and could have broader consequences for military balances elsewhere on Turkey’s borders. The renewed confrontation between Israel and the Palestinians, counterterrorist operations in Afghanistan and possibly elsewhere, and the potential for conflict with Iraq place all these issues in sharper relief.

At the same time, Turkey’s greater involvement in the Middle East has complicated relations with Europe. Many Europeans are wary of Turkish membership in the EU not only because of the political, economic, and cultural problems it would present, but because they fear it will extend Europe’s borders into the Middle East and drag Europe more deeply into the vortex of Middle Eastern politics. Thus, Turkey’s Middle Eastern involvement has raised new dilemmas about its European or Western identity. The deeper its involvement
in the Middle East, the more problems this poses for Turkey’s Western orientation and identity.

The end of the Cold War also opened up new horizons for Turkish policy in the Caucasus and Central Asia—areas that were previously closed to Turkish policy. Although Turkey has been cautious about exploiting these possibilities, the emergence of the Caucasus and Central Asia has given a new dimension to Turkish policy. Turkey now has interests in the region that it did not have during the Cold War. This inevitably affects its security perceptions and relations with its Western allies.

At the same time, Turkey’s interest and involvement in the Caucasus and Central Asia have complicated relations with Russia and given the historical rivalry between the two countries new impetus. Increasingly, Russia has come to see Turkey as a major rival for influence in the region and has sought to stem Turkey’s efforts to establish a geostrategic foothold there. But Russia also remains an increasingly important trade partner. This gives Turkey a strong incentive to keep relations with Russia on an even keel. Indeed, the growing economic interaction between Russia and Turkey is one of the most important developments in Turkish policy toward Eurasia and could have a significant effect on Turkey’s relations with Moscow over the long run.

Turkey’s relations with Europe are also undergoing important and stressful change. The EU’s decision at the December 1999 Helsinki summit to accept Turkey as a candidate for membership, after years of keeping Turkey at arm’s length, helped to ease strains in Turkey’s relations with Europe. But membership would require major changes in Turkey’s internal policies and practices. Turkey would have to cede a degree of sovereignty that many Turks may find difficult to accept. Membership could also require Turkey to open up its internal practices to outside scrutiny to an unprecedented degree, and the military will have to accept a less prominent role in Turkish politics. Several years after Helsinki, Europeans still have reservations about the pace of Turkish reform, and Turkish opinion about the EU has become more ambivalent and critical. Moreover, the prospects for Turkish progress on EU-related reforms are now closely tied to the outcome of Turkey’s efforts to emerge from its economic and political crisis.
In short, Turkish membership is by no means assured. Many Europeans are still not convinced that Turkey should be admitted, both for cultural as well as economic reasons—reservations that are compounded by the sheer scale of Turkey as a society. At the same time, the EU’s decision to create a distinct European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) creates new security dilemmas for Turkey. Turkey is not a member of the EU and is not likely to be one in the near future. Thus, it continues to see NATO as the main vehicle for managing its security and defense problems. This sets it apart from many of its European allies who favor a stronger European and defense identity and complicates its relationship with Europe. As the EU develops a stronger security and defense component, the tensions between Turkey’s strong attachment to NATO and its desire for EU membership could intensify.

Perhaps the area where Turkey’s relations have witnessed the most dramatic change, however, is with Greece. After years of hostility, Greek-Turkish relations have slowly begun to improve, bolstered in part by “earthquake diplomacy.” The key question, however, is whether the recent rapprochement is durable. Does the thaw represent a qualitative change in relations that will lead to a lasting détente or is it just the lull before a new storm? So far, the thaw has been limited largely to nonstrategic areas such as trade, the environment, tourism, and a variety of nontraditional security matters. However, if it is to be durable, it will need to address the core issues of the Aegean and Cyprus.

Cyprus, in particular, remains a major obstacle to a more far-reaching rapprochement. Indeed, if anything, Turkish views on Cyprus have hardened in recent years. Turkey has increasingly come to see Cyprus as a wider strategic issue, going beyond the protection of Turkish brethren on the island. This security dimension is likely to continue to color Turkish views on Cyprus and make any settlement of the issue difficult. With the EU’s decision to admit Green Cyprus at its Copenhagen summit in December 2002 a near certainty, the Cyprus problem could become a flashpoint in relations between Ankara and Brussels.

In the Balkans, too, Turkish policy is in flux. After the collapse of the Ottoman empire, Turkey effectively withdrew from the Balkans. But the end of Cold War has witnessed renewed Turkish interest in the
region. Turkey’s relations with Albania, Macedonia, and Bulgaria have visibly improved. Turkey has actively participated in the Implementation Force (IFOR), the Stabilization Force (SFOR), and the Kosovo Peacekeeping Force (KFOR) and would likely contribute to any Western peacekeeping operation in Macedonia. But Turkey’s sympathy for the Muslims in Bosnia and elsewhere worries many Europeans—especially Greeks—who fear that at some point Turkey might be tempted “to play the Muslim card.” So far, Ankara’s approach to the region has been moderate and multilateral. But a more nationalist government in Ankara might not be as restrained.

Finally, Turkey’s relations with the United States have witnessed important changes. The United States has come to see Turkey as a key strategic ally and a more capable actor in these regions. Turkey’s increasing involvement in the Balkans, the Caucasus, and the Middle East, in addition to the war on terrorism, and the U.S. desire to bolster moderate voices in the Muslim world, have reinforced Turkey’s strategic importance in Washington’s eyes.

But U.S.-Turkish perspectives differ on many issues, especially in the Gulf. Turkey has strong reservations about U.S. policy toward Iraq, which it fears will lead to the creation of a separate Kurdish state in Northern Iraq. A U.S. invasion of Iraq could put new strains on U.S.-Turkish relations. Ankara also does not share Washington’s view about the need to isolate Iran, which is an important trading partner and source of natural gas for Turkey. These differences hinder the development of a true “strategic partnership” between Turkey and the United States.

Moreover, in recent years Turkey has become increasingly sensitive about issues of national sovereignty and has imposed tight restrictions on the use of its bases to monitor the no-fly zone over Northern Iraq. A more assertive Turkey—especially one more deeply involved in the Middle East—is likely to be even more sensitive about the use of its facilities in operations that directly affect its regional interests.

At the same time, Turkey’s strategic environment will be strongly influenced by the evolution of America’s regional and defense policies beyond the Gulf—including the new focus on counterterrorism worldwide. Washington has supported financial assistance to Ankara, as Turkey struggles to recover from its economic crisis, but
tolerance for Turkey’s renewed demands on the International Monetary Fund (IMF) may be reaching a limit. The character of U.S.-Russian relations will also have important implications for Ankara’s own planning, and Turkey will have a strong stake in the evolution of U.S.-led missile defense efforts. More broadly, the evolution of U.S.-European relations will influence “where Turkey fits” in Western interests and strategy.

THE TRANSNATIONAL DIMENSION

Turkey’s interests and policy are also shaped by a number of cross-cutting transnational—and transregional—issues, especially the spread of WMD and the proliferation of ballistic missile technology. Turkey’s increased exposure to WMD is bound to influence its security perceptions in the future. At the same time, this exposure gives Turkey a much stronger interest in missile defense than many of its European allies, which do not (yet) face the same degree of vulnerability to these threats.

Terrorism is another transnational issue having a significant effect on Turkish security perceptions. The number of assassinations of prominent Turkish officials and journalists in the last decade, and the persistence of left-wing and right-wing terrorism inside Turkey, have heightened Turkish sensitivity to the dangers of international terrorism and given Ankara a strong interest in combating its spread. This could become an issue in Turkey’s relations with the United States, especially if some of Turkey’s neighbors, or groups within Turkey, were to begin to conduct terrorist attacks against Turkish bases from which U.S. forces were operating. Moreover, Turkey has defined its long struggle against the PKK insurgency in Southeastern Anatolia as a battle against terrorism, and the United States recognizes the PKK as a terrorist group. Turkey may also play a significant longer-term role in Western counterterrorism strategy in the Middle East and Central Asia.

Energy has also emerged as an important factor influencing Turkish policy. Turkey’s growing energy needs have given Turkey a strong interest in developing ties to energy-producing states in the Middle East and the Caspian region. Turkey’s strong support for the development of the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline has become a critical element in its strategy in the Caucasus and Caspian region. Turkey has also
sought to expand economic cooperation with Iran in the energy field despite strong U.S. objections. And it has been eager to revive energy cooperation with Iraq and see the current sanctions against Baghdad lifted. With the development of new oil and gas routes to bring Caspian and Middle Eastern supplies to world markets, Turkey is also emerging as a key energy entrepôt and transshipment state, especially for Europe.

Finally, Turkish policy has been affected by the increased emphasis on human rights in Western policy. The Kurdish issue, in particular, has been a source of tension in Turkey’s relations with Europe, especially Germany. But human rights concerns have also had an important effect on relations with the United States. Concerns in this area have had a substantial influence on the character of the bilateral relationship in recent years, including security cooperation and arms transfers. Human rights will undoubtedly remain on the agenda and will take on added significance as Ankara looks to European integration and also in light of Turkey’s ambitious defense procurement plans. Indeed, one motivation behind Turkey’s efforts to expand defense-industrial cooperation with Israel has been its desire to offset the human-rights-related constraints it has faced in trying to procure military equipment from the United States and key European countries such as Germany.

INTERNAL CHANGE

The Turkish domestic scene is also experiencing important changes, many of which are having an effect on Turkey’s foreign and security policy. In the last decade, many of the key tenets of Atatürkism—Westernization, statism, secularism, and nonintervention—have come under increasing assault. The democratization of Turkish society has created space for a variety of new groups and forces that have challenged the power of the Kemalist state. These challenges, including challenges from Turkey’s secular reformists to the traditionally strong state apparatus, will be a key force shaping Turkish society and policy over the next decades.

In addition, the Islamist movement in Turkey has undergone an important evolution in the last several years. The experience of an Islamist Refah-led government—forced to resign under pressure by the military and secular forces in June 1997—raised the specter of a
changed foreign policy orientation, with greater attention to Turkey’s relations with the Islamic world. In actual fact, there was little change in Turkish policy during this period, and even the Refah leadership was unwilling or unable to derail Turkey’s expanding relationship with Israel. Refah’s successor, the Fazilet (Virtue) Party, supported Turkish membership in NATO and actually championed the idea of EU membership on the assumption that European integration would mean more freedom of action for Turkey’s Islamists. Today, with Fazilet banned, there is a tendency toward fragmentation in religious politics. The dominant tendency among Turkey’s religious politicians—many operating under legal bans on political activity—is now toward what is described as “Muslim democracy,” loosely patterned on the model of Christian democratic parties in Europe. The Justice and Development Party, the leading successor to the Virtue Party, enjoys widespread support among Turkey’s electorate. The foreign policy orientation of these Muslim democrats appears increasingly mainstream but reflects a degree of wariness regarding globalization and integration and can be nationalistic in tone.

Indeed, the reassertion of Turkish nationalism is arguably a far more important influence on foreign policy than religious politics in Turkey. Although nationalism has been a key component of Turkish foreign policy going back to Atatürk, the Gulf War gave it new impetus. Many Turks felt that Turkey paid too high an economic and political price for its support of the United States in the Gulf War. Moreover, these sacrifices did not bring the expected rewards vis-à-vis membership in the European Union. The tepid European response provoked considerable resentment among the Turkish public and reinforced a sense that Turkey had to look after its own interests more vigorously. Events in Bosnia and Chechnya, where Turkish affinities are engaged, reinforced this nationalist inclination. In a very different fashion, Turkey’s current economic crisis—and resentment over the role of international financial institutions—has also been a spur to nationalist sentiment.

The coalition that emerged after the 1999 elections, comprising Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit’s Democratic Left Party (DSP), the center-right Motherland Party (ANAP), and the right-wing Nationalist Action Party (MHP), reflected this growing nationalist orientation. The DSP and MHP rode to power in 1999 on a tide of rising national-
ism, fueled in part by the struggle against the PKK as well as Turkey's perceived rejection by Europe at the time. In many ways, their success was due to their ability to capture what Alan Makovsky has termed “Turkey’s nationalist moment.”

Nationalist sentiment, along with closer measurement of Turkish national interest, has fueled a more active and assertive Turkish foreign policy. This has been reflected, in particular, in Turkish policy toward Syria, where in the fall of 1998 Turkey openly threatened to use military force to compel Damascus to cease its support for the PKK. It has also been reflected in the restrictive attitude that Turkey has taken toward American use of Incirlik air base. And it could be seen in the strong Turkish reaction to a proposed Armenian genocide resolution in the U.S. Congress in the Fall of 2000.

Another important trend has been the growing influence of the independent media, especially television. The media played an important role in the crisis over Imia/Kardak, which brought Turkey and Greece to the brink of war in January 1996, as well as in the first Chechnya crisis. Moreover, Islamist and other political groups now have their own television stations, giving them unprecedented access to a much broader cross section of the Turkish public. Public opinion and the media are now far more important factors in Turkish external policy than ever before.

At the same time, the growth of a dynamic private sector has served to weaken the role of the “strong state” and strengthen the power of civil society. The business community, in particular, has emerged as an important political force in Turkey. The Turkish Industrialists’ and Businessmen’s Association (TUSIAD) and other institutions have emerged as outspoken advocates for reform and have proposed new policy initiatives on a broad range of social, economic, and political issues, including the Kurdish issue. Turkish entrepreneurs have also played a leading role in the expansion of economic ties to Russia, Central Asia, and the Middle East and have been at the forefront of the recent rapprochement with Greece. Together with the changing

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role of the military in Turkish society, the landscape for debate and policymaking on a range of issues, including foreign and security policy, is changing rapidly, with new actors operating alongside traditional elites.

Finally, the role of the military as a key actor in Turkish foreign and security policymaking continues to evolve in important ways, and more significant changes could lie ahead. On key issues, from the Kurdish issue in its regional context, to NATO policy, the military establishment has exercised a dominant influence. The military has also had a subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, role in the evolution of Turkish politics in recent years, although Turkey’s tradition of direct military coups is probably a thing of the past. As Turkey faces stark choices regarding reform and European integration, the position of the military in Turkish society and policy has come under increasing criticism. Turkey cannot meet the EU’s “Copenhagen criteria” without a substantial change in the role of the military. Moreover, it is doubtful that the Turkish military itself is monolithic in its opinion regarding important issues such as European integration, détente with Greece, and the path of reform in Turkey itself. Changes in the role of the military will be both an influence on and a product of a changing foreign policy.

WHY THIS BOOK?

In short, many of the traditional paradigms that characterized Turkey’s international role and international relations over past decades are no longer valid. Turkey’s domestic and foreign policies are evolving in new and important ways. At the same time, Turkey’s geopolitical environment is changing, creating new opportunities but also new risks and vulnerabilities. Thus, a fresh look at Turkey’s foreign and security policy is both timely and necessary.

This book explores these changes and their implications for Western policy. It expands on previous RAND work on Turkey.4 However, it

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4See, for example, Graham E. Fuller and Ian O. Lesser, Turkey’s New Geopolitics: From the Balkans to Western China, Boulder, CO: Westview/RAND, 1993; Ian O. Lesser, Bridge or Barrier? Turkey and the West After the Cold War, Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1992; and Zalmay Khalilzad, Ian O. Lesser, and F. Stephen Larrabee, The Future of Turkish-Western Relations, Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2000.
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is not a historical survey. Rather it focuses on key areas where Turkish policy is changing and examines the implications of these changes. Special attention is paid to security and defense issues because these issues are at the forefront of the Turkish debate, and because Turkish thinking on these matters will have important implications for where Turkey “fits” in the emerging Euro-Atlantic security architecture over the coming decades.

Chapter Two of this book examines the effect of domestic changes on Turkish foreign and security policy, taking into account the country’s ongoing economic crisis. In particular, it focuses on the outlook for Turkey’s traditionally “strong” state; pressures for and obstacles to modernization and reform; the rise of new policy actors in the private sector and elsewhere; the changing role of the military; the prospects for Islamism and nationalism; and the internal aspects of Turkish security perceptions. Finally, the analysis discusses the consequences of internal developments for Turkey’s ability to play an active international role.

Chapter Three explores Turkey’s relations with Europe in the aftermath of the EU’s Helsinki summit. How will the decision to accept Turkey as a candidate for EU membership and subsequent developments affect Turkey’s relations with Europe and with other key actors such as the United States and Russia? What does it mean for Turkey’s domestic reform agenda? What problems lie ahead? How will the creation of a European Security and Defense Policy within the EU affect Turkey?

Chapter Four examines Turkey’s relations with Greece and the Balkans. It focuses in particular on the prospects for a deepening of the recent détente between Ankara and Athens. It also assesses the broader implications of the rapprochement for relations with the EU, NATO and the United States. Finally, it looks at the implications of the Greek-Turkish relationship for stability in the Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean. How strong is Turkey’s new activism in the Balkans? What are the driving forces behind it? What are the implications for Turkey’s relations with its key allies?

Chapter Five examines Turkey’s relations in Central Asia and the Caucasus. Particular attention is focused on how Turkey’s ties to the newly independent states in these regions will affect Ankara’s rela-
tions with Russia and Iran. The chapter also examines “pipeline politics” and the prospects for energy cooperation in both regions. Finally, it analyzes the effect of domestic influences on Turkish policy toward Central Asia and the Caucasus.

Chapter Six examines Turkey’s involvement in the Middle East. How are Turkey’s relations with Iran, Iraq, and Syria likely to evolve? What are the implications of Turkey’s deepening defense cooperation with Israel? How durable is it? What effect will uncertainty in the peace process have on relations with Israel and Turkey’s wider regional interests? Finally, how are issues such as WMD, missile proliferation, and energy trends likely to shape Turkish foreign and security policy?

Chapter Seven focuses on Turkey’s relations with the United States in light of evolving bilateral interests and policy concerns. In particular, it examines how new factors—the growing role of the EU, the Turkish-Israeli relationship, Turkey’s increasing economic interaction with Russia, and Ankara’s relations with other key regional actors such as Iran—are likely to affect Turkey’s ties to the United States. Finally, it explores how domestic changes and new strategic concerns in the United States and Turkey may influence the evolution of bilateral ties.

The final chapter offers overall conclusions and observations and assesses the implications of a changing Turkish foreign and security policy scene for relations with the West. What problems are Turkey’s evolution likely to pose for Western policy? Can we expect greater convergence or divergence in policy approaches? How can policy differences in areas of shared concern be reduced or eliminated? Finally, to what extent is Turkey’s foreign and security policy evolution amenable to international, including Western, influence, and to what extent will Turkish external policy be driven by domestic forces?