Over the last decade, Turkey has become a more important and assertive regional actor, and much of this new activism has been directed toward the Middle East. Ankara is focused more heavily than ever before on events to the south and east, not as an alternative foreign policy orientation but rather as a response to perceived security challenges. With some exceptions, Turks tend to see the Middle East more as a sphere of risk than as a sphere of opportunity. Leaving aside Turkish policy toward Cyprus and the Aegean, addressed in Chapter Four, Ankara also has some emerging challenges and opportunities in the Mediterranean, including those posed by NATO and EU initiatives.

THE POLICY SETTING

Many aspects of Turkish foreign policy are linked to the country’s internal politics. This linkage is quite close and direct in the case of developments in the Middle East, which are seen largely through an internal security lens. The most obvious example of this continues to

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2We are grateful to Alan Makovsky for this formulation.
be the linkage between developments in Northern Iraq, Syria, and Iran and Turkey's Kurdish problem. The waning of the PKK insurgency has yet to weaken this linkage, and Turkey’s military and civilian leadership remains focused on the containment of separatism through legal and security means and through economic development programs in the southeast of the country. The behavior of Turkey's Middle Eastern neighbors continues to be seen as a significant factor in this struggle. So, too, are the uncertainties introduced by American strategy toward Iraq. There is also a continuing linkage in the minds of many Turks between the phenomenon of Islamism in Turkish politics and the activities of “fundamentalists” in Iran, Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere across the Middle East.

The growth of a dynamic and internationally oriented private sector has led to more diverse patterns of regional engagement. Turkey's business community tends to be secular (although there is a parallel, if less influential, Islamic business sector) and highly supportive of Turkish integration in European and Western institutions. It is not, by and large, a community that looks South or East, culturally or politically. It is nonetheless among the most active proponents of Turkish economic engagement in Eurasia and the Middle East. It is notable that the opening of the Turkish economy and the expansion of the private sector in the Özal years were accompanied by an important opening to North Africa and the Middle East. Özal enhanced relations with the Gulf states, as well as Libya, Iraq, and Iran, attracting Arab capital to Turkey and encouraging Turkish commercial involvement across the region (Turkey's large-scale construction contracts in Libya and elsewhere date from this period). The activity of the Turkish private sector, especially its powerful holding companies, is now a permanently operating factor in Turkey's Middle Eastern engagement.

Energy security is another factor driving Turkish attention to the Middle East. Access to adequate energy supplies at reasonable prices

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is now acknowledged as a key factor in Turkey’s ability to sustain high growth rates over the coming years—and high growth is seen as essential if Turkey is to converge with European income levels. Over the last decade, Turkey’s energy demand has risen by roughly 10 percent per year. Even with Turkey’s economic crisis, energy demand is expected to continue its rise, although perhaps at a more modest pace in the near term. Oil accounts for 65 percent and natural gas for over 20 percent of current consumption. Access to oil, although important, is generally seen as less of a concern for Turkey than access to adequate and predictable gas supplies. Gas is an increasingly popular fuel in Turkey, as elsewhere, and supply arrangements are infrastructure intensive and relatively inflexible. Russia is now Turkey’s leading gas supplier, but Central Asian and Middle Eastern supplies are likely to become more important over the coming decade. Turkey has very limited domestic energy supplies—satisfying only 3 percent of current usage in the case of natural gas. As a result, Turkish perceptions of the Middle East increasingly feature references to energy security, Turkey’s role in Western access, but also access to meet the country’s own growing demands.

Western interest in Turkey as a strategic partner is closely bound up with the question of Turkey’s role on the European periphery, looking toward Eurasia and especially the Middle East. This is a perspective that sits uncomfortably with Turkey’s sense of European identity and policy aspirations. It is also a perspective that has loomed larger after the end of the Cold War and the shift of attention from geostrategic competition in the center of Europe to challenges elsewhere, including the Levant and the Persian Gulf. European and American perspectives affect the Turkish calculus in the Middle East in complex ways but may no longer be a strongly limiting element in Ankara’s policy. In this context, the growth of a new and explicitly strategic relationship with Israel offers an important new geometry in Turkish relations with the Middle East.

Overall, the Middle East is likely to continue as a focus for an external policy that has become more active and independent. This, in turn, will make Turkey a more important but potentially more difficult ally

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for the West as it too explores new approaches to regional security and power projection. Growing Turkish military capability and willingness to contemplate regional intervention in defense of national interests will also make Turkey an increasingly significant regional actor in its own right.

A TRADITION OF AMBIVALENCE

Turkey’s relations with its Middle Eastern neighbors have long been characterized by mutual ambivalence. During the Ottoman centuries, Turkey was a Middle Eastern power—at times the preeminent Middle Eastern power—with an empire stretching from Arabia to North Africa. The experience of Ottoman rule has left an enduring legacy across the region and has also been reflected in the foreign policy outlook of the modern Turkish republic. The legacy in both cases is an uncomfortable one.

Arab nationalism emerged in large part from the struggle against Ottoman rule, a reality that has left its mark on the outlook of secular nationalists across the region. Arab opinion, especially in Egypt and to a lesser extent elsewhere, tends to regard Turkey as a former colonial power whose regional aspirations should be treated with suspicion. At the same time, Islamists around the Middle East tend to reject the Western orientation of modern Turkey and are understandably hostile to the strongly secular character of the Atatürkist tradition. Some Arab modernizers, notably Bourghiba in Tunisia, have found the Turkish model attractive. But, in general, Turkey and Turkish regional policy have been regarded with suspicion. This tradition has been reinforced by Ankara’s membership in NATO and its Cold War alignment with Washington at a time when Turkey’s Arab neighbors were either nonaligned or aligned with the Warsaw Pact. The legacy of this modern history can still be felt across a region in which the Cold War generation of intellectuals and leaderships remains largely in place.

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6 For a discussion of Turkish policy in the Middle East before and after the formation of the Republic, see William Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy 1774–2000*, London: Frank Cass, 2000. For an earlier survey, see Vali, *Bridge Across the Bosphorus: The Foreign Policy of Turkey.*
Turkish diplomacy has had periods of greater intimacy with the country’s Arab neighbors, including a period following the oil crises of the 1970s. These periods of rapprochement have not, however, translated into closer cooperation on issues of importance to Ankara. A leading example is provided by the Cyprus problem. In 1964, and again following the Turkish intervention in 1974, Arab opinion was uniformly negative, despite Turkey’s role as protector of fellow Muslims on Cyprus. In the 1960s, Arab support for Greece actually included the supply of arms to the Greek Cypriot militia. In the years since 1974, not one Arab (or Muslim) state has recognized the “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus,” and states across the Middle East have consistently supported UN resolutions calling for the withdrawal of Turkish forces from the north of the island.

Turkish ambivalence toward the region also operates at several levels. First, the Atatürkist tradition in foreign and security policy was in large measure a rejection of the conditions of weakness and overextension that characterized the Ottoman empire in its last years. The Ottoman presence in Arabia and the Levant was understood as a source of vulnerability, ultimately incompatible with the construction of a modern, unitary Turkish state. The allied defeat of Turkish forces in the Middle East was the proximate reason for Turkish withdrawal, but the Turkish position in negotiations with the allied powers from 1918 onward made clear that the retention of a position in the Middle East was not a priority for the new nation. Even the question of control over Mosul, with its important oil resources, was not pursued as vigorously as it might have been. The strategic priority at the time for the Turkish leadership was the consolidation of national sovereignty within pre-armistice lines. To the extent that territorial and regional issues played a role, Turkey’s position in the Balkans and the Caucasus loomed larger (a preference strengthened by the fact that many members of the Ottoman administrative elite had links to these regions). One notable exception to this was the extension of Turkish control over the province of Hatay in the south.

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8France formally ceded the sancak of Alexandretta (Hatay) to Turkey in 1939. Syria continues to dispute Turkish sovereignty over the province.
Taken together, this early experience formed the basis for an enduring, arm’s length approach to the Arab Middle East.

Second, the Western orientation of Republican Turkey gave tangible expression to an existing cultural diffidence toward the Arab world. Atatürk’s Western outlook has been explained as an attachment to an ideal rather than a specific geographic orientation. The civilization to which Atatürk and his successors have aspired was centered in the West. The Arab Middle East, by contrast, has symbolized Oriental backwardness for generations of Turkish elites (Persian civilization is viewed as a case apart by many Turks, and secular modernization in Iran during the 1930s closely paralleled developments in Atatürk’s Turkey). These images of the Arab world have had an enduring influence on Turkish views. They have persisted alongside extensive Turkish commercial activity in the Middle East and are even shared by Turkey’s Islamists. When Erbakan made his well-publicized tour of Muslim states shortly after taking office as prime minister in a Refah-led government, not one Arab country was included on the itinerary.

Turkish diffidence regarding the Middle East, especially the Arab world, also affects Turkish interaction with the West. Although aware of the country’s role and interests in the region, any suggestion that Turkey is a Middle Eastern rather than a Western country is still greeted with suspicion. “The researcher who says he is in Turkey because he is interested in Middle Eastern politics is quickly informed that he [or she] is in the wrong place.” The security policy and strategic studies approaches developed since 1945 have reinforced this preference, particularly in the United States where Turkey’s NATO membership invariably marks the country as “European” in foreign and defense policy circles.

Third, Cold War imperatives focused Turkish attention westward. Like NATO’s other southern members, Turkey’s strategic planning was oriented toward the country’s role in the Central European competition between the Alliance and the Warsaw Pact. Turkey had

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10 Fuller, “Turkey’s New Eastern Orientation,” in Fuller and Lesser, Turkey’s New Geopolitics: From the Balkans to Western China, p. 51.
security concerns outside this setting, including a number in the Middle East, but these were marginal to planning in Brussels and Ankara. And many Middle Eastern questions, including the problem of security in the Persian Gulf, were derivative of larger questions about Soviet intentions and Alliance policy “out-of-area.” Close ties between the Soviet Union and Arab neighbors, including Syria, also argued for a cautious approach to the Middle East. In the 1950s, Ankara adopted a more active approach to security cooperation and Alliance-building, including participation with Iraq and Pakistan in the 1955 Baghdad Pact and later with Britain, the United States, Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan in the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO). There were also overtures to Egypt. But these efforts were firmly embedded in East-West rather than regional realities. The tradition of restrained policy and minimal engagement in the Middle East survived multiple Arab-Israeli wars, the Iranian revolution, and Turkey’s own Cyprus intervention which was, geographically at least, a Middle Eastern crisis.

THE GULF WAR AND AFTERMATH

The 1990 Gulf War was a watershed in Turkish foreign and security policy, above all in relation to the Middle East. Turkey’s approach to the crisis and its aftermath represented a firm break with the past and continues to shape Ankara’s regional perceptions. In the years leading up to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, Turkish planners were already considering the implications of Turkey’s growing economic relationship with Iraq and, in particular, Baghdad’s heavy reliance on Turkish pipelines to the Mediterranean for oil exports. This route had acquired greater significance during the Iran-Iraq war in light of

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constraints on shipping from Iraqi ports in the Northern Gulf. At the same time, Turkey was heavily reliant on pipeline revenues as well as energy supplies from Iraq. Indeed, before 1990, Iraq was Turkey’s largest trading partner.

In the event, Ankara adopted a very active stance as part of the Gulf War coalition. Iraqi oil exports through Turkish pipelines were cut off as part of UN sanctions. Turkey deployed (with considerable difficulty) some 100,000 troops on the border with Iraq, and allowed air strikes against Iraq to be conducted from Turkish bases, including Incirlik air base near Adana. Several factors were at play behind this forward-leaning policy. The absence of Cold War conditions meant that Turkey could pursue a more active, pro-Western policy without fear of a Russian response. Moreover, the crisis offered an opportunity for Ankara to demonstrate its strategic importance to Europe and the United States in a post–Cold War environment. President Öcal himself saw the crisis as offering a window of opportunity to press Turkey’s interest in EU membership and to construct a new ”strategic relationship” with Washington.

Turkish decisionmaking during the Gulf crisis also reflected changes in civil-military relations in Ankara. Elsewhere in Southern Europe, military establishments adopted an activist stance, arguing for more substantial contributions to coalition military efforts wherever possible. Political leaderships were generally more cautious, preferring symbolic deployments placing few personnel in harm’s way. In Turkey, this situation was reversed. President Öcal and elements of the civilian political leadership pressed—successfully—for an active diplomatic and military contribution. The Turkish military establishment, including the Turkish General Staff (TGS), pressed for a more cautious policy, fearing the longer-term consequences for Turkey’s regional position. Their approach also reflected some concern about the capability of Turkish forces to wage intensive, mobile warfare against Iraqi forces (in fact, this experience was instrumental in spurring Turkey’s subsequent defense modernization program). At base, however, the military’s attitude reflected a more traditional and measured approach to questions of intervention and national

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13 In a conversation with one of the authors in the late 1980s, a senior Turkish officer underlined Turkey’s growing control over the Iraqi oil spigot.
sovereignty. Then chief of the TGS, General Torumtay, resigned over the question of Turkish policy during the crisis. In all likelihood, Özal’s ability to champion successfully a more assertive pro-Western policy may have been supported by a parallel debate within the military itself about Gulf policy.

Gulf War developments have left an enduring legacy in Turkish policy. Subsequent events have confirmed Turkish perceptions of the region as a source of risk, but the tendency since 1990, and especially since the mid-1990s, has been toward continued activism coupled with greater independence and attention to sovereignty issues. Many Turks view the Gulf War, in particular the establishment of a Western protectorate and no-fly zone in the Kurdish areas of Northern Iraq, as the catalyst for Turkey’s decade of conflict with the PKK in Southeastern Anatolia. In this interpretation, the war spurred Kurdish nationalism and also provided a logistical and political opening for the PKK to operate across porous borders with Iraq, Iran, and Syria.

Incredible as this may seem in a NATO context, even some sophisticated Turkish observers will argue that Turkey’s allies have deliberately facilitated Kurdish aspirations to foster the breakup of the Turkish state. The suspicions of Western policy regarding Turkey and the Middle East are deeply rooted (Turkish analysts often refer to this as part of the “Sèvres syndrome”—a reference to punitive post-World War I terms that would have imposed draconian territorial and sovereignty concessions on Turkey). The elimination of the Allied ground component in Northern Iraq and the transition from Operation Provide Comfort to the air-only Operation Northern Watch eased some Turkish concerns. But the U.S. and British use of Incirlik air base for the conduct of the operation remains controversial among the Turkish public and politicians.

Turks are fond of saying that the Gulf War had two losers, Iraq and Turkey. By any measure, and despite a good deal of cross-border smuggling, Turkey has lost billions of dollars in pipeline fees and trade revenue from the Iraqi sanctions regime, for which Ankara has never received adequate compensation.14 Moreover, Turkish policy

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14It has been estimated that the loss of Iraqi trade, including pipeline fees, has cost Ankara some $2 billion per year. Turkey did receive roughly $2.2 billion in compen-
during the Gulf War never produced the immediate benefits in Turk-
ish relations with Europe and the United States that Özal had pre-
dicted. The neuralgic issues, from Cyprus to human rights, remained
as constraints in relations with the West. Prolonged conflict in
Northern Iraq and in Turkey’s own Kurdish areas hampered eco-
nomic development plans and has even become a factor in discus-
sions of the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline.

The experience of the Gulf War clearly reinforced traditional Turkish
sensitivities regarding national sovereignty. These sensitivities have
been acute in relation to the Kurdish issue and Ankara’s conduct of
counterinsurgency operations within Turkey and in Northern Iraq.
They have also made themselves felt in Turkish policy toward West-
ern intervention in Iraq since 1990. In contrast to the Gulf War,
Ankara has been unwilling to allow the use of Turkish bases for of-
fensive air operations against Iraq during any of the subsequent
confrontations with Baghdad, including the 1996 crisis over Iraqi op-
erations in the north, and Operation Desert Fox. The rationale for
this reserved attitude toward renewed coalition operations is that
inconclusive operations against Iraq raise the level of tension with a
neighbor with whom Turkey must ultimately coexist. As a matter of
public diplomacy, Ankara has been unwilling to participate in the
renewed strategic bombardment of Iraq. But Turkey also has serious
concerns about the revival of Iraqi military capability, especially
WMD and missile programs, and is a quiet beneficiary of the military
containment of Iraq. Given fundamental Turkish discomfort with
the regime in Baghdad, and the desire for a “seat at the table” in any
post-Saddam arrangements for the region, Ankara may feel
compelled to support American military intervention in Iraq—but
the political and economic price of future cooperation is likely to be
high.

**CONTOURS OF THE NEW ACTIVISM**

In the context of a post–Cold War foreign policy that is generally con-
servative and multilateral (Ankara’s approach to the Balkans is ex-
emplary in this regard), Turkish policy toward the Middle East has

satory payments, mainly from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, in 1991, and a further $900
been less restrained and more unilateral in character. The contours of this new activism can be seen in recent Turkish policy toward Northern Iraq, Syria, and Israel and to a lesser extent toward Iran.

A FORWARD STRATEGY TOWARD NORTHERN IRAQ

From the mid-1990s, Turkey’s strategy toward the Kurdish insurgency has emphasized cross-border operations into Northern Iraq. The aim of these operations has been to deny the PKK sanctuaries in adjacent areas and to ensure that a large proportion of the fighting is carried out on Iraqi rather than Turkish territory. The result has been the establishment of a *de facto* Turkish security zone in Northern Iraq, on the pattern of the Israeli arrangement in Southern Lebanon before the 2000 withdrawal. Together with the increasing proficiency of Turkish forces in counterinsurgency operations, the cross-border strategy contributed to the gradual containment of the PKK threat in its military dimension (it has not made a similar contribution to the development of a satisfactory political strategy to address the Kurdish problem). The frequency of Turkish cross-border operations since 1994 tends to obscure the fact that this kind of intervention would have been almost unthinkable in the pre-Gulf War tradition of Turkish policy toward the region. The scale of these operations, involving as many as 35,000 troops, has also been remarkable. Although the operations have taken place under conditions of murky sovereignty in Northern Iraq, they have changed regional perceptions of the threshold for Turkish action. Indirectly, the Turkish strategy toward Northern Iraq has probably had the effect of strengthening the credibility of Turkish threats to intervene across other Middle Eastern borders in response to internal (i.e., PKK-related) security challenges.

The combination of the battle against the PKK, and the risk of renewed large-scale refugee flows, assures that the situation in North-

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16Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy 1774–2000*, p. 309. It was claimed that the cross-border operations in 1995 were the largest military deployments outside Turkey’s borders since the foundation of the Republic. The 1974 intervention in Cyprus may cast doubt on this, but the scale remains impressive.
ern Iraq will remain high on the Turkish security agenda. During and after the Gulf War, as many as 1.5 million refugees crossed into Turkey and Iran in response to Saddam’s oppression of the Kurds in Northern Iraq. The potential for sudden, renewed refugee movements on Turkey’s borders remains a leading concern for Ankara. Indeed, Turkey’s support of coalition operations in the Gulf, and later Operations Provide Comfort and Northern Watch, has been motivated at least in part by the desire to monitor and control costly refugee movements.

Strategically, Turkey faces the prospect of continued unpredictability and potential aggression from the regime in Baghdad. American preferences aside, Ankara would probably accept the return of full Iraqi sovereignty in the north as a means of containing residual threats from the PKK and managing the Kurdish problem. Turks have little sympathy for the regime in Baghdad but will continue to find an effective Iraqi government, of whatever stripe, preferable to a political vacuum in Northern Iraq, or worse still in Iraq as a whole, that might foster Kurdish separatism and irredentism. Turkey has a clear economic interest in the reintegration of Iraq and the restoration of the large-scale trade relationship that existed before the Gulf War.

That said, Turkey would clearly prefer to see Iraqi reintegration without a restoration of Iraq’s conventional and unconventional military capability. The Turkish military today is in a far better position to address this risk than in 1990 and will be in an even better deterrent position in the coming years. But the reconstitution of Iraqi military power would place Turkey in an uncomfortable position. It would reinforce Ankara’s status as a front-line state in the Western confrontation with Baghdad. It would increase the risk of a renewed conflict between Iran and Iraq, a conflict that could destabilize the region and threaten Turkey’s economic interests. It would also encourage the European tendency to see Turkey as a barrier to Middle Eastern insecurity, rather than as an integral part of the European security system.

Taken together, Turkish preferences with regard to the future of Iraq are not very much different than those of Ankara’s American and European allies. But proximity and the close link to Turkish internal security concerns mean that Turkey has a relatively strong interest in regional stability and less interest in the risks inherent in regime change. Again, none of this may stand in the way of Turkish support for a “serious” American effort to change the regime in Iraq.

Iraqi WMD programs pose a special dilemma for Ankara. Turks viewed the Iraqi use of SCUD short-range missiles against Israeli and Saudi targets with alarm and have reacted with concern to periodic Iraqi threats to launch missile attacks on Turkish territory in retaliation for U.S. and British strikes launched from Incirlik as part of Operation Northern Watch. With the progressive extension of ballistic missile ranges across the Middle East, Turkish population centers are now fully exposed to such attacks. For the Turkish military, with its tradition of staunch territorial defense, the inability to counter or deter such threats to the Turkish homeland is particularly worrying. It can be argued that Turkey was exposed to far more extensive missile and WMD risks from the Soviet Union during the Cold War. But that vulnerability was shared with other members of the Alliance and Turks had little reason to doubt the solidity of NATO security guarantees, including the threat of nuclear response. The deterrent situation vis-à-vis Iraq (as well as Iran and Syria) is far murkier, especially in light of NATO’s evolving strategy. The emergence of a nuclear Iraq (or Iran) would place all of these issues in very sharp relief. A nuclear breakout on Turkey’s borders would pose a range of strategic dilemmas for the West. Even short of new nuclear risks, Turkey will have strong incentives to augment its interest in missile defense with the acquisition of greater deterrent capabilities of its own, including the development of a national missile capability. This, in turn, could affect military balances and strategic perceptions elsewhere, including the Balkans, the Aegean, and the Caucasus.

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A Strategic Relationship with Israel

The development of an overt strategic relationship with Israel offers a different example of Turkish activism in the region. Ankara has had a long-standing, low-key, and cooperative relationship with Israel since the establishment of the Jewish state. From the early 1990s, the relationship began to acquire a more overt and substantive character. Developments since the mid-1990s have moved the relationship into a far more significant realm. Starting with a military training and cooperation agreement in 1996, Ankara has pursued a multi-faceted relationship with Israel, ranging from defense-industrial collaboration and intelligence-sharing to economic development and tourism.19 Plans are also in place for Turkey to export substantial quantities of Manavgat River water to Israel.20

The new relationship was facilitated by a period of progress in the Middle East peace process that eased the potentially significant challenges for public diplomacy, both in Turkey where public opinion remains sensitive to the Palestinian problem and across the Middle East. The Turkish-Israeli relationship serves compelling national interests on both sides. Yet observers of the relationship have noted that Ankara is often more open and sweeping than Israel in its description of bilateral ties.

The Turkish rationale is threefold. First, the dominance of the Kurdish challenge at the top of the security agenda in the mid-1990s, and the steadily increasing Turkish concern about Syria’s role in support of PKK operations, led Ankara to consider ways of gaining decisive leverage over Damascus. This rationale may have taken on greater urgency with the potential, as it was then seen, for an Israeli-Syrian military disengagement as part of a comprehensive Middle East settlement. This might have left Syria free to concentrate its forces and planning against the Turkish border.

19 For a good survey of the relationship, see Efraim Inbar, “The Strategic Glue in the Israeli-Turkish Alignment,” in Barry Rubin and Kemal Kirisci, eds., Turkey in World Politics, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2001, pp. 115–126. See also Meliha Benli Alunisik, “Turkish Policy Toward Israel,” in Makovsky and Sayari, eds., Turkey’s New World: Changing Dynamics in Turkish Foreign Policy, pp. 59–73.
Second, despite Turkey’s NATO membership and its participation in the Gulf War coalition, Ankara continues to face periodic difficulties in the transfer of arms and military technology from the United States and Europe. Although Western governments remain committed to the support of a strategic ally, European parliaments and the U.S. Congress have been inclined to measure such transfers against Turkey’s human rights performance, further complicated by the war against the PKK and outstanding disputes with Greece. By the mid-1990s, Ankara was actively exploring ways to diversify its military procurement against the background of an ambitious modernization program. Russia was an option for unsophisticated systems, and some Russian equipment was purchased for use in counterinsurgency operations where Western scrutiny was greatest. Israel offered an altogether more extensive opportunity for diversification, technology transfer, and training. The importance of these benefits to Turkey is underscored by the Israeli use of Turkish facilities and airspace for training. This activity is highly significant given the general sensitivity of Turkish officials, and especially the Turkish military, to issues of national sovereignty. Some Western observers have actually complained (somewhat inaccurately) that Israel now enjoys better and more predictable access in Turkey than Ankara’s NATO allies.

Third, a close and explicit relationship with Israel was seen in some Turkish circles as a way to reinforce the strategic relationship with Washington. This argument is made in the context of American interest in the development of a regional alliance of pro-Western states. A variant holds that the Turkish-Israeli relationship allows

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21 The 1996 Military Training and Cooperation Agreement between Turkey and Israel outlined a range of joint training and information-sharing activities, including Israeli access to Turkish airspace for training purposes. Other bilateral agreements provide for technology transfer, joint research, intelligence-sharing, strategic policy-planning talks, and bilateral and multilateral military exercises (on the pattern of the two “Reliant Mermaid” search and rescue exercises held in cooperation with the U.S. Navy in 1998 and 1999). Jordan has participated as an observer in these exercises.

Bilateral arms transfer and defense-industrial agreements have included Israeli modernization of 54 Turkish F-4s for $650 million, a subsequent deal for the upgrade of 48 F-5s, and co-production of the Israeli Popeye II air-to-ground missile. There have also been discussions regarding Turkish participation in the Arrow antiballistic missile (ABM) program, co-production of Merkava tanks, and upgrades to Turkey’s aging M-60 tanks. Altunisik, “Turkish Policy Toward Israel,” in Makovsky and Sayari, *Turkey’s New World: Changing Dynamics in Turkish Foreign Policy*, p. 67.
Turkey to enlist the Israeli “lobby” in support of Turkish interests, including a more stable arms transfer relationship and other matters. This may well be the least persuasive element of the Turkish calculus, reflecting a Turkish preoccupation with the American system of lobbies and an underestimation of complexities on the Israeli side and among Israel’s supporters in Washington.

The Turkish-Israeli relationship also serves some additional and shared security concerns related to the containment of Islamic extremism, counterterrorism, and monitoring and countering the proliferation of ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction. Turkish strategists take the regional ballistic missile threat very seriously as Turkish population centers are already within range of systems deployed in Iran, Iraq, and Syria. Together with the United States, Israel is a leading source of missile defense technology, and Turkey, Israel, Jordan, and possibly Egypt are likely partners in any U.S.-led theater ballistic missile defense architecture. Turkey is looking to participate in the Israeli-led Arrow missile defense system, although this will require U.S. approval as American-source technology is involved.22

How durable is the Turkish-Israeli relationship in light of continuing crises in Israeli-Palestinian relations? Ankara has traditionally pursued an arm’s length approach to Arab-Israeli disputes. But the Palestinian issue, in particular, does have resonance for the Turkish public, which remains highly sympathetic to the Palestinian position.23 Turkish analysts prefer to describe the Turkish approach as “balanced,” and this is a reasonable description of Ankara’s policy given the initiatives under way with Israel.24 A good example of this balanced posture can be seen in former President Demirel’s participation in the international commission (the Mitchell Commission)


established to investigate the nature and handling of violence in Palestinian areas of the West Bank and Gaza.

Since the start of the Arab-Israeli conflict, Turkey has, with rare exceptions, supported Arab resolutions regarding the issue in the UN.\textsuperscript{25} At the same time, Turkey has played a role in the post-Madrid peace process, notably through its service as a mentor in Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) talks, part of the multilateral track of the process. These negotiations enjoyed considerable success in establishing a set of regional confidence-building measures related to conventional forces. The negotiations, always subject to the vagaries of relations on the bilateral track, foundered on WMD-related questions. By all accounts, however, the Turkish role in facilitating discussion of conventional confidence-building measures (e.g., information sharing, pre-notification of exercises, etc.), informed by Turkey’s own experience with the CFE (Conventional Forces in Europe) talks, was exemplary.\textsuperscript{26}

The Turkish-Israeli relationship is not immune to the pressure of public opinion, even outside Islamist circles where opposition has always been pronounced. Given the strong interest of the Turkish security establishment, the business community, and secular nationalists in the continuation of the strategic relationship, little short of a full-scale Israeli offensive against the Palestinian Authority is likely to derail current initiatives. Even in the worst case, the cultural and tourism aspects of the relationship may wane, but the military and defense-industrial aspects are almost certain to continue, although perhaps in a lower-key fashion. The rapid growth in bilateral trade, from roughly $100 million in 1991, the year of full Turkish diplomatic recognition, to as much as $2 billion in 2000 (a figure that


\textsuperscript{26}One of the authors was able to observe Turkey’s skillful mentoring role firsthand in 1994 as a member of the U.S. delegation to the ACRS talks, one of the multilateral tracks of the post-Madrid peace process.
includes defense trade), has also created a strong constituency for the relationship within both countries.

Turkey’s increasingly substantive relationship with Israel has provoked strong criticism from Turkey’s Arab neighbors as well as Iran. Egypt, with its own well-developed sensitivities to the geopolitical balance, and its own expectations of leadership has been especially critical. Periodic Turkish-Israeli and trilateral Turkish-Israeli-U.S. maritime exercises in the Eastern Mediterranean (Reliant Mermaid) have been viewed negatively by Cairo and others. After some initial interest, Jordan is no longer willing to participate in such exercises as an observer. The deepening crisis in Israeli-Palestinian relations has made the issue of Turkish defense cooperation with Israel even more contentious in the Arab world. Yet, as a practical matter, Arab leaderships seem to have reached a grudging acceptance of the Turkish-Israeli relationship as a new strategic factor, and one unlikely to fade under regional pressure.

Confrontation and Rapprochement with Syria

The relationship with Israel may have facilitated a third key demonstration of Turkey’s new regional policy: pressure on Syria. Turkish concerns over Syria are long-standing and encompass a number of flashpoints. Syria continues to claim the Turkish province of Hatay and is engaged in a running disagreement with Ankara over the share of downstream waters from the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Friction over water has been exacerbated in recent years with the completion of the Atatürk Dam and growing Turkish requirements associated with the GAP development project in Southeastern Anatolia. The risk of Turkish-Syrian conflict over either of these issues is remote, although they contribute to a climate of mistrust. A far more serious issue has been Syrian support for the PKK. The PKK leadership, in-


29See Williams, “Turkey’s H2O Diplomacy in the Middle East,” pp. 27–40.
cluding Abdullah Öcalan, had long been resident in Damascus. The Syrian regime, with an eye on its own Kurdish minority, had also provided material support to the PKK, including the use of training bases in the Syrian-controlled Bekaa Valley in Lebanon. In the Turkish view, Syrian support and the infiltration of PKK fighters over the border was a key factor behind the strength of the insurgency on Turkish territory. Ankara lobbied consistently for U.S. and European pressure on Syria to end its support for PKK "terrorism."

Following years of veiled threats of retaliation, including suggestions that Turkey might strike PKK training camps inside Syria and Lebanon, a full-scale crisis erupted in relations with Damascus in the fall of 1998. Turkish officials openly declared their belief that Syria was waging "an undeclared war" on Turkey and that this would bring a Turkish response. The Turkish military deployed reinforcements to the border with Syria against a background of rising tension. The crisis ended in October 1998 with Syrian agreement (the so-called Adana Agreement)—under the pressure of imminent Turkish intervention—to end its support for the PKK and the expulsion of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan from Damascus.

In addition to providing the first step in the subsequent capture of Öcalan in Kenya, the Adana Agreement has transformed the relationship with Syria. Although some fundamental frictions remain, including Syrian irredentism, water, and proliferation issues, the direct link to Turkish internal security perceptions has been broken, at least for the moment. Turkish officials remain wary of the durability of Syrian commitments to abjure support for the PKK. But Syrian compliance is closely monitored, and Damascus is unlikely to provoke renewed Turkish pressure in a period of regime consolidation and against a background of greater international sensitivity to the sponsorship of terrorist organizations. Moreover, in the wake of the Israeli withdrawal from Southern Lebanon, Syria is under increasing pressure regarding its own presence in that country. Given Ankara's

30 Ankara had already threatened to strike these PKK bases in Lebanon in the early 1990s, and by the mid-1990s discussion of the risk of a hot-pursuit clash with Syria were commonplace in Turkey and the West.

31 Some Turkish observers, not only Ambassador Sukru Elekdag, had been arguing for a more explicit and tougher strategy toward Syria for some time before the events of 1998.
relationship to Israel, Turkish leverage over Syria has probably never been greater, and the prospects for renewed Turkish-Syrian tension are limited under current conditions. Should the Israeli-Palestinian confrontation escalate to a regional conflict involving Lebanon and Syria, Ankara is likely to be a passive rather than an active participant—but still an unavoidable factor in Syrian calculations.

Looking ahead, Turkey could be a beneficiary of any economic opening in Syria. The practical aspects of the current Turkish-Syrian rapprochement already include steps to facilitate cross-border trade and transport. Under conditions of increased trade between Syria and the EU, as envisaged within the Euro-Mediterranean partnership process, Turkey would be the key link in overland traffic between Syria and Europe, although the Syrian market itself is likely to remain modest. Much will depend on the prospects for an Israeli-Syrian peace agreement in the coming years. Here, too, Ankara has some specific interests. As early as 1986, Özal proposed a “peace pipeline” making Turkish water available in the service of regional peace and development. As a water surplus state in a water-short region, Turkey has much to contribute but also much at stake. Ankara would be a leading beneficiary from a comprehensive settlement but will want reassurance regarding the use of its resources. In this context, there has always been some concern that the regional parties, and above all the United States, will pressure Turkey to offer water-sharing arrangements that might not be in Turkey’s best interest (e.g., without adequate compensation).

Ankara will have some additional concerns regarding Syrian missile and WMD programs, as well as the regional military balance in the event of a Syrian-Israeli disengagement. Of all the regional proliferators threatening Turkish territory, Syria has been of the greatest concern for Turkish planners because the Syrian threat has, in Turkish perception, coupled capabilities with intentions. The end of direct Syrian support for the PKK—if durable—may have fundamentally altered this calculus. But Turkish strategists will continue to be wary of chemical and missile developments in Syria. Finally, Turkey will seek

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32It is noteworthy that open briefings on theater missile defense offered by both U.S. and Turkish officials have featured the hypothetical defense of the Turkish port of İskenderun (a major oil terminus and a key port for NATO reinforcement of Southern Turkey) against Syrian missile attack.
strong assurances regarding limits on the redeployment of Syrian forces in the event of a Syrian disengagement with Israel. In the absence of such limits, Turkish strategists fear that Damascus would be free to reposition its substantial if increasingly obsolete forces to face Turkey.

**Friction and Engagement with Iran**

To a lesser extent than in relations with Syria, recent Turkish relations with Iran have also shown a propensity for assertiveness. Here, too, there is an important link to Turkish internal security and development concerns, notably Islamism, the Kurds, and natural gas. Since the Iranian revolution, Turkish secularists have been concerned about the prospect for the export of Iranian radicalism. Iran, for its part, has complained about the presence of Iranian opposition groups in Turkey, including elements of the *Mujahidin-I Khalq*, and alleged cross-border operations. In the 1990s, some prominent terrorist attacks on secular Turkish journalists, intellectuals, and businessmen were thought to have Iranian connections.

The electoral successes of the Refah Party in the early 1990s fueled a debate in Turkey and elsewhere over the extent of links between Turkey’s Islamists and Tehran. Many Turkish secularists allege a close connection, including substantial funding. The Erbakan government clearly had an interest in improved relations with Iran as part of a general attempt to shift Turkey’s foreign policy gaze eastward, a shift strongly and successfully opposed by the Turkish military and Turkey’s foreign policy establishment. Turkey’s Islamists have certainly been more interested in developing a close relationship with Iran than in closer ties to the Arab world—a reflection of the preference prevalent in Turkey’s religious and secular circles. Yet, in terms of substantive backing, links to supporters in the Gulf, especially Saudi Arabia, have probably been more important in funding the expansion of Islamic activity in Turkey, including the construction of religious schools. Over the past decade, the bulk of the financial support to the Refah (Welfare) and Fazilet (Virtue) Parties, and Turkey’s looser Muslim political movements has almost certainly come from traditionally oriented, religious businessmen inside Turkey.
From the mid-1990s, Ankara and Tehran developed a more cooperative relationship, the centerpiece of which was an agreement to contain the activities of Kurdish insurgents active on both sides of the border. These and subsequent agreements over PKK operations have been tenuous and dependent on the vagaries of PKK deployments. Turkish cross-border operations in Northern Iraq and, more recently, the expulsion of the PKK from Syria have forced the PKK to operate from sanctuaries in Iran. This has provoked a tough response from Ankara. As early as 1995, Prime Minister Ciller threatened military strikes against PKK bases in Iran. In July 1999, the Turkish air force reportedly struck PKK camps inside Iranian territory (Iran claimed that the strikes hit two Iranian villages). Coming in the wake of Turkish threats to intervene over Syrian support for the PKK, the Turkish willingness to threaten and use force against PKK targets in Iran has been interpreted as further evidence of Ankara’s new assertiveness in the Middle East.

Energy supply and investment is an increasingly important facet of Turkish-Iranian relations. Despite periodic frictions over Kurdish issues and Iranian support for terrorism and radical Islam, energy trade offers a focal point for cooperation, against a backdrop of growing Turkish concern over the country’s energy supply situation. The Erbakan government signed an agreement that had already been negotiated by Erbakan’s predecessor Tansu Ciller for the import of Iranian and Turkmen natural gas via a pipeline from Tabriz to Erzurum. With the opening of the Tabriz-Erzurum line in 2002, Iran has emerged as one of the leading exporters of gas to Turkey, alongside Russia.

In general, Ankara favors a policy of political and economic engagement toward Tehran and opposes economic sanctions and containment. In this respect, Turkish policy is far closer to the European than the American approach. Given the potential for economic cooperation, and the importance of bilateral cooperation in policy toward the Kurdish problem, Ankara has a strong interest in Iranian openness and political reform. Under conditions of reform, together with a relaxation of American policy, Turkey would be well posi-

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33Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy 1774–2000*, p. 314.
tioned to play an even more active role in the diplomatic and economic engagement of Iran.

Over the longer term, however, there are some countervailing considerations that could cloud Turkish-Iranian relations. Turks take Iran seriously as a regional actor, and despite points of common interest, Turkey and Iran are essentially geopolitical competitors in the Middle East and Central Asia, including Afghanistan. Iran’s nuclear and ballistic missile ambitions—and the Turkish response—will be a central part of this equation. To date, Iranian WMD programs have been overshadowed in the Turkish calculus by more proximate risks from Iraq and, above all, Syria, where proliferation has been combined with multiple flashpoints for conflict. Nonetheless, Iran arguably poses the most serious long-term proliferation risk for Turkey. A nuclear Iran in possession of missiles capable of reaching all major Turkish cities, while holding the territory of Ankara’s NATO allies at risk, would fundamentally alter the geopolitical landscape facing Turkey. The need to monitor and counter this threat is almost certainly an important part of the current Turkish-Israeli intelligence and defense relationship. It is a key motivator for Turkish participation in U.S., NATO, and Israeli missile defense initiatives. Indeed, Turkish strategists are already beginning to discuss the utility of a Turkish deterrent in the form of a national missile capability. Much more remote, but not beyond the bounds of credibility, would be the development of a Turkish nuclear capability—unthinkable under current circumstances, but not inconceivable over the coming decades if the NATO nuclear guarantee is uncertain.

THE WESTERN CONTEXT FOR TURKISH REGIONAL POLICY

Turkish-Western cooperation during the Gulf War had an important effect on Western perceptions of Turkey’s role in security terms. The war and subsequent crises have strongly reinforced the notion of Turkey as a pivotal actor and a strategic partner. The focus of this interest has been largely Middle Eastern. Ankara’s role in successive Balkan crises has redressed this imbalance to some extent. Yet the demonstration of Turkey’s Gulf role (reinforced by recent policy toward Israel, Syria, Iran, and Afghanistan) looms behind and may well complicate the question of where and how Ankara fits in emerging European security arrangements. For Turkey, the long-standing fo-
cus on the country’s place in the European system may prove difficult to reconcile with a more active role in the Middle East.

Turks have traditionally portrayed the country’s role as that of a *bridge* between east and west, north and south, and between the Muslim world and Europe. Europe, for its part, has been more inclined to see Turkey as a *barrier*—a strategic glacis on the European periphery, holding Middle Eastern risks at bay.\(^3\) This image of Turkey as a barrier in security terms is reinforced by recent descriptions of Turkey as the West’s new “front line” state. But Turkey’s desire for closer integration within EU defense arrangements—something the EU has thus far resisted—and Europe’s own concerns complicate this simple picture.

Even in the wake of the EU extension of candidacy status to Turkey at the December 1999 Helsinki summit, European governments resist the idea of allowing Ankara to participate fully in foreign and defense policy decisionmaking. Ankara’s tough stance on this issue—discussed in detail in Chapter Three—attests to the strength of the Turkish conviction that Europe cannot expect to benefit from Turkey’s geopolitical position, including its role in relation to Middle Eastern risks, if it is unwilling to give Turkey a full seat at the European table.

Europe, for its part, is inclined to recognize the substantial contribution of Turkish diplomacy and military power to security on the southern periphery. But it is also concerned about Turkish regional behavior, as well as Turkey’s own internal problems. Since the Gulf War, when some NATO allies questioned the need to deploy even token reinforcements to Turkey, Ankara has been concerned about the problem of “selective solidarity” and the growing conditionality of long-standing security guarantees. These concerns have had an effect on Turkey’s own strategy and planning, especially with regard to the Middle East, where European security commitments are assumed to be least predictable and where Turkey is increasingly inclined to

\(^3\)The “bridge versus barrier” debate continues to have a central place in Turkish strategic discourse. See Lesser, *Bridge or Barrier? Turkey and the West After the Cold War*. For a reassessment at the end of the decade, see Ian O. Lesser, “Beyond Bridge or Barrier: Turkey’s Evolving Security Relations with the West,” in Makovsky and Sayari, *Turkey’s New World: Changing Dynamics in Turkish Foreign Policy*, pp. 203–221.
go its own, more assertive way. If Turkey were to become embroiled in a “hot pursuit” incident with Syria or Iran, some European allies might balk at a NATO response.

Some European observers and officials are even inclined to see Turkey as “part of the problem” in the new security environment. Traditional concerns about the movement and status of Turkish workers have been compounded by the position of Turkey as a transit point for illegal migrants seeking entry into Europe from the Middle East and further afield.\(^{35}\) Turkey is also a major entrepôt for drug smuggling and a variety of international criminal activities affecting Europe. In policy terms, these new challenges should make Turkey a more essential security partner for Europe. In many circles, however, they have only deepened European reservations about Turkey’s place in Europe.

In the Turkish perception, the United States has played a very different role as a promoter of the country’s strategic importance, particularly in the Middle East and, more recently, in places such as Afghanistan, further afield. As noted above, Ankara does not share all of Washington’s policy objectives in the region. Turks are skeptical of the strategy of containment vis-à-vis Iran and are wary of plans for Iraq that appear to foster Kurdish separatism. Ultimately, however, the concentration of hard security challenges on Turkey’s Middle Eastern borders, and the longer-term problem of reassurance with regard to Russia, mean that the United States remains the essential strategic partner for Turkey. Indeed, the Russian factor is very much part of the Turkish regional view. Turks view Russia as a potentially serious threat to Ankara’s interests from the Balkans to the Gulf. Turks share the American concern about Russia’s role in the spread of missile and WMD technology, as well as conventional arms transfers, to Iran. In the event of a sharp deterioration in Russian relations with the West, Moscow is likely to find more room for competition in its policy toward peripheral areas, including the Middle East, than in Europe. This friction would touch directly on Turkish interests.

Turkey’s role in energy security could become more central to Turkish-Western, and especially Turkish-U.S., relations. Turkey figures prominently in the American debate with regard to power projection in the Caspian and the Gulf (Baghdad is closer to Southeastern Turkey than it is to the lower Persian Gulf), although the record regarding Turkish-U.S. cooperation in Gulf security since the early 1990s is quite mixed. The use of Incirlik air base has been essential to the maintenance of the no-fly zone in Northern Iraq. But Ankara has been very unwilling to facilitate strikes against Iraq proper since the Gulf War. On Iran, as noted above, the Turkish position parallels that of Europe and stresses economic and political engagement. So despite the fact that Turkey’s geographic position makes it a potentially important partner for Gulf security—especially if U.S. strategy is realigned to reduce military presence in the Gulf itself—a good deal more, and more effective, joint discussion and policy planning would be necessary for Ankara to accept such a role.

Turkey is directly affected by the progressive extension of the European security “space” to take account of problems emanating from the south, from the Mediterranean, and from the Middle East. NATO’s current strategic concept, as well as the tasks envisioned for emerging EU defense arrangements, reflect this trend. Many of the leading contingencies, and some of the most demanding ones, could be on or near Turkey’s Middle Eastern borders. Turkey’s heightened role in this context was almost certainly a key factor in the EU’s strategic decision to offer Turkey candidacy status.

TURKEY AND THE MEDITERRANEAN

Turkish interests in and policy toward the Mediterranean are of a fundamentally different character than in the Middle East. Ankara’s contemporary policy toward the region as a whole is conditioned by three factors: the place of Cyprus and the Aegean in relations with Greece, Europe, and the United States; the role of Russia; and the evolving place of the Mediterranean in Western strategic initiatives.

The changing dynamics in relations with Greece are discussed elsewhere in this book (see Chapter Four). But it is important to note a fundamental asymmetry—one of several—in Turkish-Greek relations. Whereas the Mediterranean and the maritime environment generally are central to the Greek geostrategic outlook, the Turkish
strategic tradition is essentially continental rather than maritime. This is not to say that Turkey lacks significant interests in the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean. Ottoman Turkey was a Mediterranean naval power for hundreds of years, and the Mediterranean itself was a leading battleground in the 500-year competition between the Ottoman empire and the West. Yet, it can be argued that the strategic tradition of modern Turkey, strongly reinforced by the foreign and security policy inclinations of the Republican state, has looked primarily to the risks and opportunities on Turkey’s land borders. Overall, the Turkish tradition is far closer to that of Germany and Russia than to the maritime orientation of Britain, the United States, or even Greece. The big strategic challenges, as seen from Ankara, whether in the Balkans, the Caucasus, Central Asia, or the Middle East, have a strongly continental flavor. With the exception of the situation in the Aegean, Turkey’s maritime flank is essentially secure.

Turkish strategists do, of course, think about the country’s access to Mediterranean Sea lanes for trade and defense. Hence, the great concern over the issue of Greek armaments on “demilitarized” islands in the Aegean. Similar concerns were evident in the Turkish view that new air bases and surface-to-air missiles on Cyprus threatened Turkish freedom of action in the Eastern Mediterranean. As an increasingly important entrepôt for energy and nonenergy trade, Turkey must also be concerned about the free movement of shipping through key choke points in the Eastern Mediterranean—through the Straits themselves, as well as the Suez Canal and the Aegean approaches. In today’s strategic climate, threats to these lines of communication are perhaps more likely to come as a result of environmental accidents or terrorism than through conventional interdiction. Restoration of the former Iraqi oil shipments through Turkish pipelines to the Mediterranean, and the realization of the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline scheme, would underscore this interest, as would the expansion of Turkish water shipments from Mediterranean ports. New gas pipelines in the Eastern Mediterranean will also be meaningful in the context of Turkey’s own energy interests. Notable developments here include a stalled Israeli-Egyptian agree-

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ment for the shipment of Egyptian gas through a pipeline network that could also bring gas supplies to Turkey and a proposal to bring Algerian gas to Greece and Turkey via a pipeline across the Adriatic.

In its historic competition with Russia, Turkey has been concerned about the extension of Russian sea power and influence beyond the Black Sea to the Balkans and the Mediterranean. This concern was at the heart of 19th century Turkish-Western cooperation over the “Eastern Question.” It was similarly a central part of the Turkish stake in the Western Alliance throughout the Cold War. Echoes of this concern about Russian activism in the region persist today. The Russian factor was prominent in Turkish perceptions of the S-300 dispute. Officials in Ankara have also viewed with some alarm the Russian presence in the Republic of Cyprus—perhaps as many as 30,000, mostly visitors, in recent years. These elements are sometimes portrayed as part of a wider problem posed by Greek-Cypriot-Serbian-Russian affinity and cooperation—an “Orthodox Axis” threatening Turkish interests and with a natural center in the Eastern Mediterranean. In the wake of Greek-Turkish rapprochement and changes in Belgrade, this notion is now far less popular than at the height of the Balkan crises in the mid-1990s.

Western initiatives in the Mediterranean are another key element in Turkish policy toward the region. Both NATO and the EU have Mediterranean initiatives under way. These can be useful vehicles for Turkish diplomatic and military engagement at a multilateral level in North Africa and the Middle East.37 Turkey, as a nonmember Mediterranean state, is a participant in the EU’s Euro-Mediterranean Partnership program, often referred to as the “Barcelona Process.” This initiative has generally been focused on North Africa and the Western Mediterranean. But like other Mediterranean cooperation initiatives, it has acquired a greater stake in the Eastern Mediterranean in recent years. The Barcelona Process has faced considerable difficulty in its economic, political, and security dimensions, and the Southern Mediterranean partners have been highly critical of the process. The evolution of the EU’s relationship with Turkey could be viewed as a critical test of the initiative and the future of Eu-

urope’s overall Mediterranean strategy. But Turkey’s position in the Barcelona Process is now greatly overshadowed in both Ankara and Brussels by Turkey’s post-Helsinki status as a candidate for EU membership. Despite some continued opportunities for project funding, it is therefore very unlikely that Barcelona will feature prominently in future Turkish policy toward the Mediterranean or the EU.

NATO’s Mediterranean Dialogue is potentially more significant from a Turkish perspective. Like all Mediterranean security dialogues, it has suffered from an unavoidable linkage to the state of the Middle East peace process. Nonetheless, the NATO initiative has moved in directions that bring it closer to Turkish interests. The center of gravity in the initiative has shifted progressively to the Eastern Mediterranean, with Israel, Egypt, and Jordan emerging as the most active interlocutors for the Alliance. Ankara has a natural stake in the evolution of these relationships, and Turkey’s existing cooperation activities with Israel and Jordan can provide a basis for other multilateral cooperation. There is also a growing interest in moving beyond dialogue to a more extensive program of cooperative activity in the defense realm, including exercises in search and rescue and civil emergency response.\(^{38}\) Turkey has substantial capabilities in these areas, and could easily host new Alliance programs at its facilities in the region. Like other South European members of the Alliance, Turkey has a broader stake in promoting Mediterranean initiatives as a means of focusing additional attention to security issues in its own backyard. And as a Muslim country, Turkey has a stake in this and other Mediterranean dialogues aimed at forestalling “civilizational” frictions.

LOOKING AHEAD

This analysis suggests a number of overall observations regarding Turkey’s role as a security actor in the Middle East. The first and perhaps the most revealing is that Turkey’s foreign and security pol-

\(^{38}\) The application of Turkey’s security cooperation with Israel and Jordan to the NATO initiative, as well as plans to hold computer and search and rescue exercises in Turkey in 2001, is stressed by TGS officials. TGS briefing at Turkish War Academy, Istanbul, January 24, 2001.
icy establishment sees the Middle East more as a sphere of risk than an area of opportunity. Turkey’s economic engagement in the region may increase, and Ankara’s diplomatic involvement may wax and wane, but a wide range of security issues, from conventional threats to borders to WMD and refugee flows, will remain at the center of Turkish policy. Questions of policy toward the region will also remain closely linked to questions of internal security—Islamism and the Kurdish problem—especially for Turkey’s military leadership.

Second, Turkey’s relations with the Arab world are likely to remain ambivalent—at best. Turkish elites, and even Turkey’s Islamists, are reluctant to see the Arab Middle East as a natural partner for Turkey. Europe, and the West, will remain the dominant frame of reference across the political spectrum, even if Turkish relations with the EU and the United States are troubled.

Third, the Middle East will nonetheless continue to be a leading area of activism in Turkey’s external policy. Turkish policy toward the region will likely be more assertive, less cautious, and less multilateral in character than elsewhere. Again, this is a product of perceived risk and sensitivity to national interest, rather than a product of affinity. It will include the willingness to contemplate military intervention, especially where there is a perceived link to Turkey’s internal security.

Fourth, the strategic relationship with Israel is part of this pattern of regional assertiveness and is proving durable even in the face of crises in the Middle East peace process. In the worst case, continued Israeli-Palestinian conflict could force a return to a lower-key approach but with far greater substance than in previous decades.

Fifth, Turkish military restructuring and modernization plans will make Ankara an increasingly important regional security actor in its own right. This suggests that Turkey’s future role, coupled with a more assertive approach to diplomacy and the use of force, will go well beyond its traditional one as a facilitator of Western access and

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39 For a somewhat different view emphasizing the parallel growth of Turkey’s economic and political engagement in the region, see the excellent discussion in Kemal Kirisci, “The Future of Turkish Policy Toward the Middle East,” in Rubin and Kirisci, *Turkey in World Politics: An Emerging Multiregional Power*, pp. 93–114.
power projection. Indeed, in the absence of a more concerted U.S. approach to Turkey on strategic planning for contingencies in the Gulf and elsewhere in the region, access to Turkish facilities cannot be taken for granted.

Finally, and over the longer term, these observations suggest that Turkey will be neither a bridge nor a barrier in relation to the Middle East but rather an increasingly capable and independent actor—a more significant and possibly more difficult regional ally.