Turkish Defence Policies and Armed Forces: Continuities and Changes since the Cold War

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Turkish Defence Policies and Armed Forces:

Continuities and Changes since the Cold War

Since the end of the Cold War, the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) have experienced major transformations in civil-military relations, military operations, and military capabilities as a result of Turkey’s changing international and regional roles. Yet, despite the changes that TAF went through in order to cope with its new surroundings, continuities with the previous episodes were also discernible due mostly to the persistence of domestic security threats.

The first transformation has been in the sphere of civil-military relations. During the Cold War years, the Turkish general staff had assumed a guardian role, which led to three military interventions and one coup in the late 1990s. Since the early 2000s, the military had been brought under civilian control, but the coup attempt of July 15, 2016 shows that, despite the changes in this sphere, old patterns of behaviour continue.

In the sphere of military operations, during the Cold War years, the main security doctrine of Turkey as a NATO country was status-quo oriented and defensive. However, since the 1990s, Turkish security policy has become more assertive in order to have regional power status and to face multifaceted threats emanating especially from the Middle East. This has led TAF to participate in international peacekeeping operations, but also to become embroiled in the Syrian civil war and carry out operations in Iraq. An element of continuity in the military operations sphere has been TAF’s preoccupation with domestic threats. Communism, political Islam and Kurdish separatism were the main sources of threat during the Cold War years and in the 1990s. Although, with the changes in the first sphere mentioned above, civilians have become more responsible in determining security priorities, Kurdish separatism and Islamic
groups, such as the movement led by Fethullah Gülen and ISIS, continue to preoccupy Turkey’s defence strategies.

Finally, in the third sphere of military capabilities, TAF has significantly increased its arms and modernized its weapons. Yet, TAF is still a conscript army and ranks 12th world-wide in terms of size.¹ Turkey aspires to reduce its dependence on Western countries in terms of weapons supplied, but the belief that a big army is needed to combat domestic threats leads to the maintenance of conscription, which does not bode well for the modernization of TAF.

Overall, since the end of the Cold War, Turkey has been trying to balance its regional and international aspirations with domestic circumstances. This chapter will trace these elements of change and continuity by, first, analysing security priorities from 1990 onwards, based on the press briefings of the National Security Council and other official defence documents. Then, the chapter will examine civil-military relations, military operations and military capabilities in three separate sections. Each section is organized chronologically by focusing on three periods, namely 1991-2002, 2003-2010, and 2011-2017. 1991 was marked by the end of the Cold War and the start of a series of coalition governments in Turkey. 2003 was the year that the Second Gulf War started and the year following the election of the Justice and Development Party (JDP) to power in Turkey, leading to long a period of single party governments. Finally, 2011 was set as the cut-off date because of the start of the Arab Spring at the end of the previous year and the general elections in Turkey, which brought the JDP to power by 50 % of the votes and began a new era of majoritarian rule under the leadership of the then Prime Minister, and since the 2014 elections, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

National Security Priorities and Military Strategy:

The concept of national security entered Turkish political terminology with the 1961 constitution following the coup d’État that took place a year before. The constitution established the National Security Council (NSC) and blurred the distinctions between, on the one hand, ‘defence’ and ‘security’ policies, and on the other hand, ‘external’ and ‘internal’ threats. The new military doctrine fused domestic and foreign threats into the broadly defined and ambiguous notion of ‘national security’.  

In its initial years, the NSC was envisioned as a platform in which the government and the general staff could consult each other on security issues stemming mostly from the Cold War environment. However, after the 1971 and 1980 coups, both the responsibilities of the NSC and the weight of the general staff vis-à-vis the civilians in decisions were increased. As a result, the NSC and the general staff became the main institutions that determined strategy and doctrine. After the election of the JDP to the government in 2002, the general staff lost its dominance over the civilians. Yet, the NSC has continued to be the main platform where national security priorities were discussed and determined. The NSC also has been the arena where the National Security Policy Document (NSPD), the so-called Red Book, is prepared. The clout of the NSPD is so dominant that it is referred to as the ‘secret constitution’ of Turkey because presumably no law can be legislated in contradiction to it.

Full texts of the NSPD and the NSC meeting minutes are not disclosed to the public. Haphazard information on the NSPD leaks to the public every 4-5 years when it is renewed, which can give some clues regarding national security priorities. Similarly, after each Council

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meeting, a press briefing is issued on the NSC website summarizing the main matters that were discussed and outlining the policies that are being followed. These briefings also contain warnings and relay wishes addressed to the international community and neighbouring countries, providing a useful tool to understand the main elements of military doctrine.

**Figure 1: The Frequency of Foreign Policy Topics in the NSC Press Briefings (1991-2002)**

Figures 1 to 3 summarize the most frequently discussed foreign policy issues in 154 NSC meetings in 1991-2002, 55 in 2003-2010, and 40 in 2011-2017. Three significant points can be discerned from these figures, as well as from the news on the NSPD. First, several topics appeared in every period, displaying an amount of continuity in security priorities. In domestic

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3 At the time of writing, only briefings from 2003 onwards were available. I relied on Gürpınar, ‘Milli Güvenlik Kurulu ve Dış Politika’, for the earlier briefings.  
matters, Kurdish terrorism and political Islam were identified as the most important threats Turkey faced in the 1997 NSPD.\(^5\) Kurdish separatism appeared in every NSC briefing from the 1990s onwards, except for a year between June 2014 and June 2015 when the JDP government started a process of (ultimately unsuccessful) peace talks. Conflict with the PKK, a group that is considered as a terrorist organization by Turkey, the USA and the EU, was seen both as a domestic and foreign policy issue due to the presence of Kurdish groups across the border in Iraq and Syria. For this reason it is not surprising that, following the 2003 Iraqi invasion, Ankara has been preoccupied with developments in this neighbouring country, the flow of immigrants across the border, and the presence of Kurdish insurgents in Northern Iraq.

Cyprus (including the broader issue of security in the Eastern Mediterranean) has also been a cause of concern ever since the dispute between the Greek and Turkish communities on the island during the Cold War years. Turkey intervened in 1974 and helped establish the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) in 1983 which is still not recognized by the international community. The TRNC has been under the protection of Ankara since then, and disputes, as well as peace negotiations over the island, have been one of the top priorities of the NSC. Until 2011, Cyprus, TRNC and the Mediterranean were the most frequently addressed issues in the meetings after Iraq. Aside from these two issues, the EU and disputes with Armenia were also on the agenda every period. Although not apparent in the NSC press briefings, disputes with Greece over the Aegean Sea territorial waters, continental shelf, airspace and islands are also known as one of the external threat concerns present in every NSPD.\(^6\)

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The second element that can be observed is the change in the variety of subjects that were discussed from one period over another. There was a significant drop in the number of matters that were addressed in the period 2003-2010 when compared with its predecessor. The period after 2002 coincided with the reforms in the NSC that reduced the military’s dominance, more promising relations with the EU, and the JDP’s new foreign policies aimed at establishing friendlier relations with Middle Eastern neighbours. In terms of language, the press briefings of 2003-2010 were also more succinct and less antagonistic. The NSPD was revised two times during this period, in 2005 and 2010. The document that was prepared in 2010 was written for the first time under civilian influence, and therefore, reflected the priorities of the government at

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the time. Religious reactionism and movements, including the one led by Fethullah Gülen, were deleted from the domestic threats section and Iran, Iraq and Greece were removed as top security priorities.\footnote{Aslı Aydıntaşbaş, ‘ Kırmızı Kitap’ta Köklü Değişim’, Milliyet, 28 June 2010, http://www.milliyet.com.tr/kirmizi-kitap-ta-koklu%20degisim/asliaydintasbas/siyaset/yazardetayarsiv/28.06.2010/1256142/default.htm.}

**Figure 3: The Frequency of Foreign Policy Topics in the NSC Press Briefings (2012-2017)**\footnote{Compiled from ‘Basın Bildirileri Arşivi’.}

National security concerns, however, fundamentally shifted following the Arab Spring and the 2011 general elections. As Figure 3 shows, Syria became the most frequently discussed matter. Refugees from Syria that reached more than 3.5 million as of 2017\footnote{Adem Yazıcı, ‘HÜGO: Türkiye’deki Toplam Mülteci Sayısı 3,6 Milyonu Aştı’. Hürriyet, 12 April 2017, http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/hugo-turkiyedeki-toplam-multeci-sayisi-3-6-mi-40425054.} and immigration as a general issue were debated 20 times. Turkey became more involved with the Middle East; and developments in Libya, Yemen and Egypt were surveyed in the NSC meetings. ISIS became a
cause for distress, at first, as a terrorist group operating in Iraq and Syria. However, after the January 2016 NSC meeting, ISIS was included along with Kurdish separatism as a major domestic threat. On Kurdish insurgency, the NSC continued to address the issue both as an internal and external matter stemming from the instability in Syria and Iraq. The Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG) and Democratic Unity Party (PYD) operating in Syria were seen as affiliates of the PKK, and the NSC press briefings asked the international community and allies not to rely on them to combat ISIS. Another matter that changed after 2011 was the re-inclusion of the Gülen movement as a domestic threat. After the June 2014 meeting, the movement was referred to as the ‘parallel state organization’, and following the July 2016 coup attempt, it was dubbed as the Fethullah Terrorist Organization (FETÖ). In 2015, the NSPD was also revised to include the Gülen movement back into the list of domestic security threats.\footnote{11 ‘Cemaat Yeniden Kırmızı Kitap’ta’, Cumhuriyet, 29 April 2015, http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/turkiye/265713/Cemaat_yeniden_Kirmizi_Kitap_ta.html.} 

In many respects the defence policy goals and military strategy of Turkey are still defined the same way as it was set out in the early aftermath of the Cold War. In 1990, former Chief of the General Staff Necip Torumtay summarized Turkish security policy in four points:

The first objective is to preserve and protect the independence and the unity of the nation, the indivisibility of the country and the republic. The second objective is to contribute to the lessening of international tension, and to just and lasting peace and in freedom. The third aim is to prevent with credible deterrence the threat to use of force. Last, but not least, to benefit from collective security systems.\footnote{12 Necip Torumtay, ‘Turkey’s Military Doctrine’, Daş Politika 1 (2009): pp. 256–264 at 259.}

These aims were reiterated in the White Papers of 1998 and 2000 prepared by the Ministry of National Defence. Emphasizing the unique geographical position of Turkey in an unstable region, the defence objectives were pronounced as safeguarding the territorial unity and
sovereignty of the country, and facilitating and participating in the establishment of international and regional stability. The strategy to achieve these objectives was outlined in four points:

1. Deterrence: maintain and develop military capabilities to deter internal and external enemies
2. Collective security/defence: cooperate with and contribute to NATO and other regional and international alliances
3. Forward defence: detect threats across borders and carry out preventative interventions before threats reach Turkish territory
4. Military contribution to crisis management and intervention in crises.\textsuperscript{13}

These strategies and security priorities have influenced civil-military relations, military operations and capabilities of Turkey as will be discussed in the following sections.

**Civil-Military Relations:**

Turkish defence policies and armed forces’ operations, capabilities and expenses cannot be thought separately from civil-military relations. The Turkish Republic was founded by the armed forces in 1923, and for the most part of Turkish history, the military has assumed a guardian role. During the Cold War, Turkey had three military interventions, in 1960, 1971 and 1980. Following the latter coup, the general staff became the primary decision-maker in security and defence policies, and oversaw the entire political process through the NSC.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the dominance of the military and the NSC continued. TAF became the principal actor that fought against the Kurdish insurgency and tried to control the rise of political Islam. Following the February 1997 NSC meeting, the general staff, along with secular civil society groups, judiciary and politicians, pressured the then governing coalition of the Welfare Party (WP) and the True Path Party to resign. The leader of the WP, Necmettin Erbakan, was the first Islamist Prime Minister of Turkey and his discourse and foreign policies were viewed as threats to the secular republic. The covert coup of 1997 demonstrated that the Cold War guardian role of the military was sustained into the 1990s, giving the impression that Turkish civil-military relations were the main impediment to further democratization.

Things began to change, however, in the early 2000s. After the WP was closed down by the secular judiciary, a younger group of leaders from the party founded the JDP and won the elections in 2002. The JDP supported the EU membership of Turkey and brought together an unprecedented alliance of forces consisting both of liberals and Islamists, including the Gülen movement. The new government started a reform process following EU prescriptions and gradually curbed the formal powers of the military in the NSC and the entire system.

In 2007, the general staff issued a warning against the JDP on its website, threatening to intervene if the government’s candidate was elected the president. Although the threat never materialized, with the blessing of the JDP government, Gülen affiliates in the police forces and judiciary began investigations on coup plots in 2008. Through the coup investigations, hundreds of officers were dismissed from the military within five years. However, the cooperation between the Gülen movement and the JDP, which led to the historic events surrounding the
investigations, did not last long. In 2013, they publically parted ways over a corruption scandal, involving ministers and Erdoğan’s family, and presumably leaked by the Gülenists.¹⁴

The conflict between the JDP government and Gülenists reached new heights on 15 July 2016 when a bloody coup attempt targeted President Erdoğan, the government and the parliament. The coup was put down by segments within the armed forces that opposed the plotters and citizens who went out on the streets to fight against the putschists. Nearly 250 people, including civilians, died, and more than 2,000 were wounded during the coup. The JDP government accused Gülen and his followers, now called FETÖ, as the only culprits of the putsch. Following the events of that fateful night, the government started a major purge within the state. In one year, 50,510 public employees were arrested and 149,411 people, including around 5,000 academics, were dismissed from their jobs.¹⁵

The purges in the military have been quite significant as well. Until the first anniversary of the coup, 7,655 personnel from TAF were expelled, including 150 generals/admirals and 4,287 officers.¹⁶ Until March 2016, there was a 38% decrease in the number of generals, and the force that was most considerably affected was the air officers. While before the coup attempt, there were two pilots for every combat plane, the ratio fell to 0.8 after the dismissals.¹⁷

¹⁴ For a detailed analysis of Turkish politics and civil-military relations from the 1920s until 2016, see Yaprak Gürsoy, *Between Military Rule and Democracy: Regime Consolidation in Greece, Turkey, and Beyond* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017), chapters 4 and 6.
According to another report, some brigades are now being commanded by colonels because of a shortage of generals.\(^\text{18}\)

Moreover, a major amendment package was introduced a few days after the coup. With these changes, military high schools and academies were closed down, the path that would allow civilian and religious high school graduates to become officers was opened and a new National Defence University, under the control of the Ministry of National Education, was founded. Additionally, the gendarmerie was split from the general staff and all military hospitals were integrated to the Ministry of Health.\(^\text{19}\) Given the weakness of TAF vis-à-vis the civilians after the coup attempt, the government has been involved in military promotions and is likely to further curb the autonomy of the military.

Another development following the coup has been the straining of Turkey’s relations with the USA. Gülen resides in Pennsylvania and the American government has refused to extradite him, to the dismay of the JDP government. There is also a strong belief among the majority of the public that the US was somehow involved with the plot. Public and government opposition to the US, along with the purges and the amendments, increases the likelihood that TAF would be re-created in the following decades, possibly also affecting its NATO and Western orientation, as well as capabilities.\(^\text{20}\)


Military Operations:

Since 1991, TAF’s military operations seem to have two contradictory trends. On the one hand, Turkey has continuously contributed to international security and peacekeeping operations under the NATO, UN and EU frameworks. Turkey has prioritized such participation by establishing separate Peacekeeping Departments in each of the three forces and the general staff\(^{21}\) and establishing the Partnership for Peace Training Centre in Ankara in 1998.\(^{22}\) On the other hand, TAF has carried out numerous unilateral operations across the Iraqi border in the 1990s, and after a period of inaction, again in Northern Iraq and Syria after 2007. TAF has also had significant presence with more than 40,000 troops in Northern Cyprus.\(^{23}\)

Although, on the face of it, participation in multilateral peacekeeping missions and carrying out unilateral operations do not go together, when Turkish security priorities and strategy outlined above are considered, there is no inconsistency. While participation in international missions is in tune with the second and fourth elements of Turkish strategy (namely collective security and military contribution to crisis management), independent actions against especially Kurdish elements in Northern Iraq and Syria are congruous with Ankara’s security priority of internal unity and the third element of its strategy (forward defence).

The appendix to this chapter lists in detail Turkey’s participation in international operations according to years, areas, operations and contribution levels. As the list clearly shows, TAF’s commanding roles and involvement in peacekeeping missions in Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan have been quite significant. Although most international operations involved the

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land forces, the Turkish air force and the navy have been also active in several NATO missions. Turkey was 37th in the world and 4th in NATO in its number of uniformed UN Peacekeepers in 2012. When it is considered that TAF participates more in NATO and EU operations than UN ones, it is clear that it has been one of the leading forces in Western efforts of peacekeeping.  

The proactive role Turkey takes on in places far away from its own territory, such as Africa and Southeast Asia, cannot be solely explained in terms of security threats. There is no major public support in such involvement either. For instance, sending troops to Lebanon was highly unpopular because it was seen as a pro-Israeli decision. Ankara has, indeed, persisted in providing for collective security mainly because of its overall security anxiety, rather than specific ones involving the areas of troop deployment. As the only Muslim majority country in the Western alliance, Turkey has wanted to prove its continued worth by contributing to Western security following the Cold War. This is why, under the leadership of the then President Turgut Özal, Turkey took part in the First Gulf War, enabled the economic embargo (to the detriment of its own interests) and allowed the use of air bases on its land. Ever since this first involvement in international operations after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Turkey has been trying to project the image that it is not a culprit of instability in the Middle East and, with its own Western and Muslim identity, is an integral part of any solution. This image has been stressed also with the hopes that the international community would support Turkey’s efforts vis-à-vis the Kurdish insurgency.

When TAF’s overall operations are taken into account, indeed, military campaigns against Kurdish elements in Northern Iraq and Syria have been quite significant. The first operations in Northern Iraq started in 1983 and after three border crossings in the 1980s, TAF’s land and air strikes in the region became recurrent in the period of 1991-1999, at the height of Kurdish separatism. By one account, TAF carried out a total of 42 operations against the PKK in the 1990s, the most significant ones being the Steel operation in 1995 (involving 35,000 soldiers) and the Hammer and Dawn operations in 1997. In another operation in Africa in February 1999, the leader of the PKK, Abdullah Öcalan, was captured. This development ushered in an era of peace and there were no cross border deployments after 2002, marking a period of change.

Peace did not last long and operations restarted in late 2007, continuing with the Sun Operation in Northern Iraq in February 2008 and three months air and land strikes on Qandil in 2011. More recently, after ISIS forces captured Mosul in Iraq, Turkey sent troops and arms to its Bashiqa camp near the town, presumably to train Iraqi forces, but possibly also to prevent the strengthening of the PKK in the region. There is now one Turkish battle group with around 2,000 combatants in Iraq, to the disdain and vocal opposition of Bagdad.

With the start of the Syrian War, TAF has been involved in the conflict in Northern Syria as well. The first operation was carried out in February 2015 and it was a limited mission to transfer 35 Turkish personnel from the tomb of Suleyman Shah and the monument itself, a Turkish enclave to the south of Kobane. Following several terrorist attacks in the south of

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Turkey targeting civilians, however, Turkey heightened its involvement in the Syrian war, from implicitly assisting and providing safe haven to anti-Assad groups, to direct intervention. TAF’s Euphrates Shield campaign lasted almost a year between August 2016 and March 2017. Turkey first targeted ISIS, and then captured al-Bab, preventing Kurdish autonomous regions of Afrin and Kobane to unite and the YPG to take hold of the west of Euphrates, Turkey’s previously declared diplomatic ‘redline’.  

Following the end of the Euphrates Shield operation, President Erdoğan warned that Turkey can carry out strikes again. Ankara views Kurdish autonomy in Northern Syria with anxiety, fearful that it would lead to an independent Kurdish state that might eventually lead to a loss of Turkish territory or at least strengthen the PKK. The recent armed transfers and cooperation between the USA and PYD against ISIS is also seen detrimental to Turkey’s interests in the region. The Syrian War will continue to preoccupy Turkey and the chances for a return to the 2002-2011 period of no conflicts with the neighbours is unlikely in the foreseeable future.

There is also the potential of Ankara to get entangled in more and unexpected conflicts in the Middle East, such as in the dispute with Qatar and Saudi Arabia. Turkey has committed to take Doha’s side on the issue and deployed around 300 military personnel, armoured vehicles and howitzers in the summer of 2017. Doha and Ankara had cooperated in economic relations before the crisis began, and Turkey’s current participation in the crisis is parallel to its continued

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regional power aspirations. Overall, in the contemporary era of conflicts, Turkey will find itself torn in between its role as an international peacekeeper and its continued security priorities and ambitions.

**Military Capabilities, Procurement and Expenditure:**

Security priorities have led to a drive to increase TAF’s capabilities and building up of a defence industry from the late 1980s onwards. These efforts and military operations discussed above resulted in high military spending when compared with other European countries. Although TAF has become a modern force with high capabilities and Turkey has reduced its dependence on defence imports from Western countries, old patterns continue in this sphere as well. TAF is still a conscript army and the Turkish defence industry is far away from achieving self-sufficiency.

The military modernization program and domestic procurement of weapons can be traced back to the Reorganization of Defence Industry Act of 1985. The Defence Industry Development and Support Administration (DIDSA), which directed the Defence Industry Support Fund, was founded with this act. In 1989, DIDSA became the Undersecretariat of the Defence Industry (*Savunma Sanayii Müsteşarlığı*, UDI), which has functioned under the Ministry of Defence since then, with its own off-budget and auditing-free accounts.\(^{35}\)

Following the experience of the First Gulf War that highlighted Turkey’s inferior capabilities, a military modernization program was announced in 1996, with the purposes of procuring new and advanced equipment, improving the systems that were already in stock and developing domestic defence production. The program assigned $150 billion for the increase of

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military capabilities through domestic production until the 2020s. In the first decades of the program, Turkey produced F-16 fighter jets, Armoured Infantry Fighting Vehicles (AIFV) and radio systems.\textsuperscript{36}

There were three interrelated reasons for these initiatives. First, during the Cold War, Turkey was in the collective security scheme of NATO and could count on its Western allies to defend against its major external threat, the Soviet Union. However, with the end of the Cold War, threats changed and, as shown above, Turkey’s southern neighbours and especially Iraq became priorities. Second, internal security threats gained pre-eminence and Western allies could not be relied on to defend against these new challenges. The US arms embargo following Turkey’s intervention in Cyprus in 1974 had shown that this type of dependence could result in equipment shortages directly influencing TAF’s capabilities. Since the 1990s, the German governments have also occasionally banned selling military equipment to Turkey due to its record of human rights in its combat with Kurdish guerrilla forces in the southeast.\textsuperscript{37}

Third, since the 1990s, Turkey wanted to become a regional power, with considerable impact in the Balkans, Middle East and the Caucasus. It was believed that only a capable military and a developed defence industry would provide the necessary prestige and hard power to sustain these efforts. This is why, despite changing governments, efforts to increase military capabilities have continued for three decades. The recent JDP governments, as well, prided themselves with


many procurement projects and launches, showing them off as major achievements for both domestic public support and for external prestige.\textsuperscript{38}

Through the military modernization and defence industrialization programs, Turkey has been able to produce new age military equipment. Some of the highlights can be listed as follows:

- Göktürk-2: high resolution, remote sensing satellite
- Altay: Main Battle Tank (MBT)
- Ejder Yalçın: armoured vehicle for urban and cross-country terrains
- Kirpi/Hedgehog: mine resistant ambush protected vehicle for carrying troops, weapons, command and control systems, and detecting and disposing of mines
- Anka: Medium Altitude Long Endurance (MALE–class) Unmanned Air Vehicle (UAV) system for reconnaissance, surveillance and target detection
- Atak: T-129 attack and tactical reconnaissance helicopter
- Milgem: patrol and anti-submarine warship (corvette).\textsuperscript{39}

According to the 2017-2021 Strategic Plan of the UDI, some of the on-going projects include the development of air and ballistic missile defence systems,\textsuperscript{40} the TF-X fighter jet, Anti-Air Warfare (AAW) defence frigate, and submarines with air-independent propulsion systems.\textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{38} For an overview of these reasons, see Hüseyin Bağcı and Çağlar Kurç, ‘Turkey’s Strategic Choice: Buy or Make Weapons?’ \textit{Defence Studies} 17, no. 1 (2017): pp. 38–62 at 41–46, 54–57.


\textsuperscript{40} The need to develop domestic missile defence capability became apparent when Turkey had to rely on NATO for such capabilities after the First Gulf War and, more recently, as a result of the Syrian civil war. As with the overall decision to sustain a domestic defence industry, the retraction of the Patriot antimissile system by the Dutch government in 2014 urged Turkey to build up its own systems and not to rely on Western powers. Gulden Ayman and Gulay Gunluk–Sesen, ‘Turkey’s Changing Security Perceptions and Expenditures in the 2000s: Substitutes or Complements?’ \textit{The Economics of Peace and Security Journal} 11, no. 1 (2016): pp. 35–45 at 39.
As a result of procurement efforts, TAF ranks among the top militaries of the world in terms of some of its equipment and systems. For instance, Turkey is one of the 15 countries in the world that has Military Information, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) Satellites.\(^{42}\) Turkish Air Forces has 1,018 aircrafts, and among NATO countries, Turkey’s the total fleet size is outranked only by the USA.\(^{43}\) Additionally, Turkey is among the top 10 countries worldwide in terms of the number of MBTs in active service.\(^{44}\)

Although expansion of the defence industry played a critical role in improving Turkey’s military capabilities, the sector overall has led to mixed successes. On the positive side of the coin, in 2011, 54% of Turkey’s defence needs were met by domestic resources. From 2002 to 2015 arms exports increased from $247 million dollars to $1.655 billion.\(^{45}\) Dependence on Western powers have decreased and, with the ability to diversify its imports to non-Western countries, such as China, Japan, and South Korea, Turkey has gained important leverage vis-à-vis the USA and European suppliers.\(^{46}\) On the negative side of the coin, however, Turkey is still far away from self-sufficiency in arms production and relies on the US for advanced systems. In many projects Turkey partners up with foreign companies and continues to be dependent on

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\(^{43}\) ‘Chapter Ten’, The Military Balance, p. 560. This in contrast with Germany which gradually decreased its number of MBTs because of the expectation that there would not be any wars on its territories (see Ina Wiesner’s chapter in this volume). The continued importance given to MBTs in Turkey is parallel to the types of internal and external threats the country is exposed to.

\(^{44}\) ‘Stratejik Plan’, Savunma Sanayii Müsteşarlığı, pp. 36–44.

other countries for know-how and technology transfer. Similarly, although exports increased to countries with almost no defence industry (such as Saudi Arabia, Turkmenistan and Pakistan), the amount of arms imports still outweighs exports significantly, making foreign currency surplus an impossible goal to achieve in the short-run.\footnote{According to WMEAT data, for the years between 2004 and 2014, Turkey’s mean arms exports to imports ratio was 0.055. ‘WMEAT 2016 Tables II–IV – Arms Transfer Deliveries, 2004–2014’. World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers 2016, U.S. Department of State, accessed 15 August 2017, https://www.state.gov/t/avc/rls/rpt/wmeat/2016/index.htm.}

**Figure 4: Military Expenditure of Turkey as percentage of gross domestic product, 1991-2016**\footnote{Compiled from ‘Data for All Countries’, SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), accessed 15 August 2017, https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex.}

![Military Expenditure Graph](image_url)
Concurrent with the military modernization and defence industry programs, Turkey has had high levels of military spending since the end of the Cold War. According to the data of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), there was first an increase in spending from 3.8% of GDP in 1991 to the peak of 4.1% in 1997 as shown in Figure 4. This increase coincided with the fight against Kurdish insurgency, operations in Iraq, and the post-modern coup. Military expenditure then shows a significant and continuous decline from 3.9% in 2002 to 2% in 2016. Although this drop can be explained with increasing civilian control over the military, the data on military spending as percentage of GDP must be read with caution for three reasons. First, although military expenditures declined, Ayman and Gunluk-Senesen show that spending on the police and coast guard increased 150% and on the gendarmerie increased 50% between 2000 and 2014. In other words, costs of internal security compensated for the decrease in external security in line with Turkey’s security priorities. Second, the off-budget funds are not transparent enough, making it difficult to calculate military expenditures fully. Finally, decreases in terms of percentage of GDP are due also to the growing Turkish economy.

Indeed, when the same figures are presented in constant dollars, it is clear that there has been no significant decrease in military spending since the Cold War (see Figure 5). It is possible to observe more spending in the 1990s, similar to the previous figure, but spending has been around the same range when averages are taken into account. Based on SIPRI data, Turkish annual military expenditure was around $14.8 billion on average between 1991 and 2002, $14.2 billion between 2003 and 2010, and $15.2 billion between 2011 and 2016. Moreover, as Figure 5 shows, Turkish military expenditures have been constantly higher than the average amount spent among European countries. Worldwide, between 1991 and 2016, Turkey ranked in the top 20

spending countries, ranging somewhere between 11th (in 1998 and 1999) and 19th (in 2006) in different years.

**Figure 5: Military Expenditure by country, in constant (2015) US$ millions**

Aside from high military expenditure, another element of continuity of Turkish defence policies and armed forces has been conscription. While all of the 47 Council of Europe member countries, with the exception of Azerbaijan, have abandoned conscription entirely or allowed the

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50 Ibid. The European averages are my own calculation (the total European military expenditure divided by the number of countries where data is available for each year excluding Turkey).
option of civil service to replace compulsory draft, there are yet no serious plans to abolish conscription in Turkey.\textsuperscript{51}

Turkey inherited from the Cold War years, 18 months of draft for all male citizens, which was briefly reduced to 15 months in the period 1993-1994. In 1995, the service period was increased back to 18 months due to the Kurdish conflict. In 2003, service times were again reduced, and today all Turkish male citizens after the age of 18 are drafted for 15 months, and then function as reserves until the age of 41. Service time is reduced for university graduates, who can be drafted either for 12 months as reserve officers or for 6 months as privates. Despite the occasional introduction of partial exemptions through payments, the conscription system is essentially the same as the one that was introduced in 1927.

According to WMEAT data, the average number TAF personnel for the 2004-2014 period was 485,000. Turkey has the 12\textsuperscript{th} largest military in the world and second in NATO after the US. An average of 0.7 \% of Turkey’s population was under arms for the 2004-2014 period, a figure placing Turkey 35\textsuperscript{th} worldwide and second in NATO after Greece.\textsuperscript{52} Although the trend in the world is to professionalize the military and hire more skilled personnel to use high-tech equipment, the persistence of conscription has impeded developments in this respect and has added on to high military expenditures in Turkey.

The main reasons given for this insistence are the special geographical location of Turkey and the continuing internal threats. However, the militaristic security culture also plays a role. As noted by Demirtaş,

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\textsuperscript{52} ‘WMEAT, Table 1, Military Expenditures and Armed Forces Personnel’. 
By forcing male citizens to dedicate some of their youth period to military, it is possible to keep them in the orbit of statist culture and not let them develop the sense of human security and individual-centred worldviews.

In addition, in Turkey, different from Western cultures, military service is seen as one of the stages of manhood, a sort of initiation rite for becoming an adult man….The maintenance of conscription is a way of producing and reproducing gender-based stereotypes and reconstructing the role of heroism.\footnote{Demirtaş, ‘Understanding Turkish Perception of Conscription and Reluctance to Reform’, p. 367.}

In sum, Turkey struggles between continuity and change in the sphere of military capabilities as well. It has modernized its armed forces and defence industry to a considerable extent. The Global Firepower index ranks Turkish military strength $8^{th}$ out of 133 countries, based in part on the strength of its forces and manpower.\footnote{‘2017 Turkey Military Strength’, Global Firepower, accessed 15 August 2017, http://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.asp?country_id=turkey.} Notwithstanding these achievements, however, there are still shortcomings arising from the continuation of conscription.

**Conclusion:**

This chapter analysed Turkish defense policy and armed forces by examining three periods and highlighting changes and continuities. After the end of the Cold War, Turkey set out its goals as projecting more power to its surrounding regions and protecting its internal security. Contributing to international missions abroad, carrying out operations across the borders to prevent any threats materializing within the country, and building up the capabilities of the military (through conscription, a domestic defence industry and high military expenditures) were set out as the main strategies. These goals did not change, however circumstances at home and in the neighbourhood shifted dramatically.

In the period of 1991-2002, the military had guardian roles and supervised domestic and defence policies. Moreover, TAF fought against the Kurdish insurgency in the southeast and
carried out operations in Northern Iraq. At the end of the 1990s, TAF had been successful in putting down PKK terrorism and Turkey entered a period of high prospects.

In the period of 2003-2010, under the leadership of the first two JDP governments, the EU membership process gained pace and along with a series of reforms, a more balanced relationship between the civilian power holders and the military was established. Turkey had peaceful relations with its neighbours and was seen as the model Muslim democracy in the Middle East by the Western alliance.

Things changed yet again after 2011. Turbulence in the Middle East and strengthening of the PKK at home and its affiliates in Northern Syria and Iraq, as well as the new threat of ISIS, forced Turkey to abandon its peaceful relations with neighbours and deploy troops across the border. In domestic politics, the JDP governments’ alliance with the Gülen movement fractured, leading to the 2016 coup attempt. These developments are also putting Turkey’s alliance with the US and European powers to a tough test. Time will tell if these circumstances would also lead to further shifts in Turkey’s defence policies and the capabilities of its armed forces.
Select Bibliography:


## Appendix – Foreign Deployments of Turkey as Part of International Operations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AREA</th>
<th>YEARS</th>
<th>OPERATION NAME</th>
<th>FRAMEWORK</th>
<th>CONTRIBUTION &amp; DEPLOYMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Afghanistan  | since 2002 | *ISAF* *Operation Resolute Support (since 2015)* | NATO      | *on average 922 personnel each year  
*1 infantry brigade HQ (in 2011 - 2014)  
*2 infantry battalions (in 2011 - 2014)  
*led the ISAF operation from June 2002 to February 2003 and in February-August 2005.  
*commanded the Kabul Regional Command Capital (RCC) in April-December 2007 and in November 2009-November 2012  
*responsible for the Kabul International Airport in February-August 2005  
*gave $1.5 million to the Afghan National Army (ANA) Trust Fund and $2 million to the Helicopter Initiative  
*trained more than 14,000 ANA members in Afghanistan and in Turkey |
|              | since 2013 | UNAMA          | UN        | 1 observer |

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Since</th>
<th>Involvements</th>
<th>Organizations</th>
<th>Personnel Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bosnia-Herzegovina</td>
<td>since 1994</td>
<td>*UNPROFOR *IFOR; SFOR *EUFOR *EUPM</td>
<td>UN NATO EU</td>
<td>*average 1,308 personnel each year in 1994-2004 *average 273 personnel since 2005 *1 infantry brigade group *leads one of the five Regional Coordination Centres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1996-1997</td>
<td>UNMIBH</td>
<td>UN</td>
<td>26-27 civilian police personnel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 observer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2011-2012</td>
<td>OSCE</td>
<td></td>
<td>1-2 experts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kosovo</td>
<td>since 1999</td>
<td>KFOR</td>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>*average 647 personnel each year * 1 battalion task force *assigned personnel in HQ *led Kosovo Multinational South Task Force Command in May 2007-May 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>since 2008</td>
<td>EULEX</td>
<td>EU</td>
<td>around 91 personnel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>since 2009</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2-12 experts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>since 2010</td>
<td>UNMIK</td>
<td>UN</td>
<td>1 observer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croatia</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>SFOR</td>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>34 personnel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albania</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Operation Alba</td>
<td>Various Contributing Countries</td>
<td>around 700 personnel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FYROM</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Essential Harvest</td>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>1 infantry company team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>*Deny Flight *IFOR/SFOR Air Component * Deliberate Forge * EUFOR Air</td>
<td>NATO EU</td>
<td>*170 personnel (in 1995-1997) *4-18 F-16s</td>
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<tr>
<td>Iran/Iraq</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>UNIMOG</td>
<td>UN</td>
<td>15 observers</td>
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<td>Iraq/Kuwait</td>
<td>1991-2002</td>
<td>UNIKOM</td>
<td>UN</td>
<td>6-7 observers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Period</td>
<td>Operation</td>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>Notes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>2009-2012</td>
<td>NTM-I</td>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>*2 experts</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*donor country to the NTM-I Trust Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*trains Iraqi officers at the Center for Excellence on Defence Against</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Terrorism and the Center for Partnership for Peace in Ankara</td>
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<tr>
<td>Libya</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Operations Unified Protector</td>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>*at least 1 frigate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*1 submarine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*2 tanker aircrafts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*4 F-16s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>UNOSOM II</td>
<td>UN</td>
<td>*320 personnel</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*1 mechanized infantry company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>UNSOM</td>
<td>UN</td>
<td>1 observer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>1995-2009</td>
<td>UNOMIG</td>
<td>UN OSCE</td>
<td>*4-5 observers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Republic of Congo</td>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>EUFOR EUPOL Kinshasa</td>
<td>EU</td>
<td>*17 personnel (in 2007)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*1 expert (in 2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Timor</td>
<td>2000-2004</td>
<td>UNTAET</td>
<td>UN</td>
<td>1-2 observers</td>
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<td>Sudan</td>
<td>2005-2011</td>
<td>UNMIS UNAMID</td>
<td>UN</td>
<td>1-4 experts</td>
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<td>Hebron</td>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>TIPH</td>
<td>Various Contributing Countries</td>
<td>3 observers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>since 2015</td>
<td></td>
<td>OSCE</td>
<td>6-14 experts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>since 2007</td>
<td>*UNIFIL *Maritime Task Force (in 2007-2009)</td>
<td>UN</td>
<td>*average 321 personnel each year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*233 navy personnel in 2007-2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*1 engineer instruction company</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Baltic countries | 2006 | Baltic Air Policing | NATO | *led the mission in April-July 2006  
* 4 F-16s and support personnel were deployed in Lithuania's Siauliai International Airport |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adriatic</td>
<td>1994-1996</td>
<td>Sharp Guard</td>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>1 frigate</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Arabian Sea and Gulf of Aden | since 2009 | *Operation Ocean Shield  
*CTF-151 | *NATO  
*Combined Maritime Forces | 1 frigate |
| Mediterranean Sea | since 2011 | *Operation Active Endeavour  
*SNMG 2  
*SNMCMG 2 | NATO | *1 frigate  
*1 mine hunter ocean  
*taken over the command of the forces in July 2015 |