

TURKEY AND NATO: QUESTIONING THE SOLIDARITY

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Abstract: Turkey and NATO have been going through a complex and complicated relation especially after Turkey has decided to buy first Chinese Air Defense Systems and then S-400 Air Defense Systems from Russian Federation. The Alliance's reaction with the expression of Secretary General Stoltenberg has been mild so far highlighting that the procurement of defence systems is a national decision. Individual member states, especially the US, however, have been vehemently opposing Turkey's decision and the US has resorted to several measures, such as removing Turkey from the F-35 program or imposing sanctions under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA). Turkey's main argument that member states, namely the US, denied selling Turkey Air Defense System, such as Patriots and they did not consider technological transfer to Turkey, which has been regarded by Turkey as a key factor for the procurement, was overlooked by Allies. The critics even included questioning Turkey's NATO membership.

Turkey's cooperation in recent with the Russian Federation, including procurement of defence systems, has been criticized by the West as well as among scholars and politicians in Turkey. Turkish officials, including President Erdogan and Defense Minister Akar, however, insistently underlined Turkey's position in the Alliance and Turkey's decisiveness for the membership. This paper analyses the relations between Turkey and NATO in the light of the recent crisis and argues that Turkey, as clearly states by Turkish officials, does not question its membership.

Keywords: S-400, Air Defense Systems, Turkey, NATO, CAATSA


TÜRKİYE VE NATO: DAYANIŞMANIN SORGULANMASI

Özet: Türkiye'nin önce Çin'den Hava Savunma Sistemleri sonra da Rusya Federasyonu'ndan S-400 hava savunma sistemleri almaya karar vermesinden bu yana NATO ve Türkiye arasında karmaşık ve sorunlu bir dönem yaşanmaktadır. Savunma sistemleri tedarik etmenin milli bir karar olduğunu ifade eden Genel Sekreterin ifadeleri ile NATO'nun tepkisi oldukça yumuşak olmuştur. Ancak başta ABD olmak üzere bazı üye devletler bireysel olarak Türkiye'nin kararına oldukça sert tepki göstermektedirler. Örneğin ABD Türkiye'yi F-35 programı dışında tutma ve CAATSA olarak bilinen Hasımlarına Yaptırımlar Yoluyla Karşılık Verme Yasası kapsamında yaptırım uygulama gibi tedbirlere başvurmuştur. Türkiye'nin ittifak üyelerinin özellikle de ABD'nin PATRIOT gibi hava savunma sistemleri satmayı ya da Türkiye için hayati önemde bir faktör olan teknoloji transferini reddetmelerinden dolayı S-400 alımına başvurduğuna yönelik temel argümanı üyeler tarafından göz ardı edilmiştir. Bu konudaki eleştiriler Türkiye'nin NATO üyeliğinin sorgulanmasını bile içermiştir.


Türkiye'nin yakın dönemde savunma sistemlerinin tedarik edilmesi dâhil Rusya Federasyonu ile yaptığı işbirliği batılı devletlerde olduğu kadar Türkiye'deki bazı siyasiler ve akademisyenler tarafından da eleştirilmektedir. Ancak Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan ve Savunma Bakanı Akar'ın da içinde bulunduğu resmi yetkililer Türkiye'nin ittifak içerisindeki konumunu ve üyeliğe yönelik kararlılığının altını çizmişlerdir. Bu çalışma yakın dönemde meydana gelen krizler ışığında Türkiye ve NATO arasındaki ilişkiyi analiz etmekte ve Türk yetkililer tarafından da sıklıkla vurgulandığı şekilde Türkiye'nin NATO'ya üyeliğini sorgulamadığını öne sürmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: S-400, Hava Savunma Sistemleri, Türkiye, NATO, CAATSA

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Introduction

Collective Defense, the doctrine in Article 5 of the Washington Treaty by which "members agree that an armed attack against one or more of them shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them will assist this state including the use of armed force," has formed the backbone of the NATO Alliance since its establishment. Apart from symbolic maritime operations after the September 11 attacks, though, Article 5 has never been invoked, and the "solidarity" of members in a real threat has never been tested. Nonetheless, solidarity has become the most used motto of NATO and has been described as the backbone of its success.

European members have always questioned the solidarity and reliability of the USA during the Cold War in the event of Soviet aggression, especially in a nuclear attack. Yet none of them dared to give up the US military commitment, especially its nuclear umbrella, with the one exception of De Gaulle's France, which challenged US hegemony by withdrawing France from NATO's military structure in 1966. America's urging European members to adopt a "flexible response strategy" notwithstanding, European states preferred to accept American leadership rather than escalating problems into a crisis that could result in the dissolution of the Alliance.

The post-Cold War period opened a new era for Europe with the disappearance of the Soviet threat, and the major European States, under the leadership of France, focused on the idea of structuring a European Army without the US, questioning the existence and effectiveness of NATO. Europe's inability to stop the genocide in Bosnia without US involvement, however, underlined for Europe the importance of the Alliance as well as US military capabilities. NATO invented new tools to show its effectiveness, such as Crisis Management, an Out-of-area strategy, and cooperation with non-Member states, yet Europe did not give up the dream of establishing European security without the US. But then, the Russia-Ukraine crisis and the Russian annexation of Crimea served as a wake-up call for NATO and especially for Europeans, highlighting the importance of US military capabilities against the Russian threat.

Under direct Soviet threat since the beginning of the Cold War, Turkey has been one member of the Alliance that did not question NATO's solidarity, despite crises such as the withdrawal of Jupiter missiles without consultation, or the US embargo on military equipment to Turkey after the Cyprus Peace Operation of 1974. During and after the Cold War, Turkey has hosted crucial NATO military bases and US nuclear weapons under the NATO command, despite serious crises about the Alliance's solidarity. Neither has Turkey or the Alliance ever questioned Turkey's membership, nor has a strategical partnership with Russia been on the agenda of the Turkish community.

As Europe focused on the idea of a European Army, Turkey, along with the US and UK, remained fervent supporters of the Alliance. Turkey has been urging NATO allies, especially the US to stop the support the PKK terror organization. Turkey harshly criticized the Allies' attitude, however, and NATO's symbolic support during the Gulf War such as the reluctant deployment of Patriot missiles against Iraq's Scud missiles and withdrawal of the missiles in a very short time raised concerns for the Alliance's solidarity and NATO's commitment to defend Turkey.

More recent crises—the deal with China for procurement of an air defence system, the rapprochement between Turkey and Russia, Turkey's purchase of S-400 missiles from Russia, political divergences with the Allies on Syria, and especially the Allies' open support for the PYD terror organization—all resulted in discussion among member states of Turkey's adherence to the Alliance, and NATO's solidarity and commitments in Turkey. Some Turkish officials and academics have raised the issue of Turkey's exit from the Alliance and potential membership in Eurasian organizations such as the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) or the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which would constitute an important divergence from the current strategical orientation of Turkish foreign policy.

This article discusses the future of NATO-Turkey relations in the framework of recent and current crises and discussions. It argues that despite the recent crisis between Turkey and the Allies (especially the US), both NATO and Turkey have strategical interest in being in the same boat. Statements by NATO and Turkish officials have bolstered this idea and underlined that both sides see recent developments as a temporary crisis that will not change Turkey's strategical relations with the West, especially with the NATO Alliance.

1. History of Relations between NATO and Turkey

Devastated during WW2, Europe desperately needed American conventional and nuclear military support to deter the Soviet Union immediately after the war. Still, some Europeans, especially De Gaulle's France, remained dubious about the reliability of the US and UK. De Gaulle claimed that if the Red Army were to overrun West Germany, NATO's integration of forces would fall apart because the destruction of West Germany would inevitably lead to the divergence of national interests. With the Soviets in control of Germany, American and British leaders would have to focus on the survival of their forces, as Churchill had done in May-June 1940 with Operation Dynamo (Varat, 2008: 100).

After the Soviet acquisition of nuclear capability in 1949, American nuclear forces became crucial for the security of Europe. The Alliance, therefore, adapted the "massive retaliation" concept in 1954, which called for the massive use of nuclear weapons to defend Europe against aggression. (Pedlow). Despite the fact that Europe would be devastated while the North American continent would remain untouched, Europeans did not have another option to deter Soviet aggression than massive retaliation, the most feasible concept to spare huge conventional forces. Signs of mistrust remained, however, including credible deterrence, control over nuclear forces, and strategic flexibility between the US and Allies (Johnston, 2017: 88).

Soviet acquisition of intercontinental missiles capable of striking North America changed the security paradigm for the US, which replaced its official "massive retaliation" concept with the "flexible response" concept that provided flexibility for the President in case of a Soviet conventional attack rather than deciding directly for the use of the nuclear weapons. Thus, the flexible response concept institutionalized a weakened American commitment to European defence, replacing the specific guarantees of massive retaliation with fungible and vague ones (Johnston, 2017: 111).

The US officials then urged Allies to endorse flexible response strategy in NATO whose purpose is "to allow NATO a greater flexibility and to provide for the employment as appropriate of one or more direct defence, deliberate, escalation and general nuclear response, thus confronting the enemy with a credible threat of escalation in response to any aggression below the level of major nuclear attack." (MC 14/3) The European Allies, especially France, strongly opposed America's efforts to persuade NATO to adapt the flexible response concept, and consequently, the situation remained deadlocked until France withdrew from NATO's integrated military structure in 1966 (Duffield, 1991: 132). The remaining Allies, without France, reluctantly endorsed the flexible response strategy; still, the solidarity problem persisted in minds until the end of the Cold War.

Doubts concerning America's commitments have been continuing since the establishment of the Alliance. For this reason, since the end of the Cold War, Europe, under the leadership of France, have been urging the EU to create a European Army without US hegemony and leadership. States that staunchly oppose an ineffective NATO include the UK and Turkey, which sees no chance of joining the EU soon.

For Turkey, the issue of solidarity is more acute than for Europeans because of Turkey's many reasons not to rely on the US and European allies. Both the Cuban crisis, in which the US withdrew its Jupiter missiles without consulting Turkey, and America's embargo after the Peace Operation in Cyprus in 1974, clearly indicated that Turkey could not rely on the Alliance, and especially the US, during the Cold War. America's embargo on weaponry after the 1974 Peace Operation highlighted for Turkish politicians the need for an independent defence industry, investing in the first Turkish defence companies.

During the first Gulf War, the Alliance declared support for Turkey if Iraq attacked Turkey. (Friedmann, 1990) At Turkey's request, between August 1990 and March 1991 the Alliance executed Operation Anchor Guard, the first real mission in NATO's history, in which NATO AWACS flew 1,129 missions and 8,581.8 hours. (1990-1991 Operation Anchor Guard) Subsequently, in January 1991, in response to the Turkish request, NATO launched Operation Ace Guard, in which NATO deployed ACE Mobile Forces (Air) in Turkey. In this, 42 German, Belgian and Italian planes were stationed in eastern Turkey as a tripwire in case Iraq attacked, (Haberma, 1991) in addition to the 96 US fighters. In addition, the US and the Netherlands sent Patriots to bolster Turkish air defence.

The Alliance officially provided support for Turkey, yet the statements by Belgium and Germany, that both would need to consult their governments before authorizing these fighters' use in case of aggression, lay the groundwork for Turkey's questioning NATO's commitment and solidarity. (Molla, 2019: 36) In the Turkish view, the Allies' Operation Provide Comfort, which operated under the guise of protecting the people of northern Iraq, the role of troops from İncirlik (the "Poised Hammer Forces") in creating an autonomous region in northern Iraq, and these NATO members' support for the PKK terror organization, gave rise to the current security threat against Turkey in northern Iraq and Syria. Thus, Turkey retains doubts about the real purpose of Allied support for Turkey.

NATO again failed in honouring its commitments when Turkey asked for support in its fight against the PKK terror organization, which has been robustly supported by the "Allies." France and Germany, have always criticized Turkey's fight against the PKK, ignoring the fact that Turkey's opening its borders for refugees from northern Iraq has constituted one of the main reasons for the rise of PKK activities in Turkey in the 1990s, because many terrorists entered Turkey then under the guise of being refugees.

The Second Gulf War, in 2003, provided another test of both NATO's commitment to Turkey and US-Europe relations within the Alliance. Turkey's requests provoked a crisis in the Alliance and paralyzed NATO, especially when France vetoed Patriot deployment plans. America's call for support of Turkey in the event of an Iraqi offensive did not receive Europe's support, triggering a serious crisis in the Alliance. In February 2003 Turkey requested consultations within the framework of Article 4 of the North Atlantic Treaty. The Alliance finally deployed AWACS and Patriots to defend Turkey, in the so-called Operation Display Deterrence, on 20 February 2003, but the mission, which ended on April 16, clearly indicated the reluctance of the Allies, especially the Europeans, despite America's efforts.

As mentioned above, Turkey has been having crisis problems individually with Allies rather than NATO. Trust and solidarity have always been a serious problem in the Alliance and not only for Turkey. Like Turkey, other members always had problems and crises with other Allies. However, despite these serious crises, Turkey's membership in NATO has not been on the agenda of either Turkey or the Alliance, and yet Turkey's moves alarmed members, especially the US, resulting in their questioning Turkey's adherence to NATO.

2. Recent Crises

The history of Turkey-NATO relations is replete with solidarity issues between Turkey and its NATO Allies. But both sides devised ways to sort out problems by allowing the Alliance to develop common policies to resolve them. Recent crises in the defence area increased doubts about solidarity between the Allies and Turkey and resulted in questioning Turkey's membership in the Alliance and the extent to which Turkey could rely on NATO in a real crisis. As Dursun-Ozkanca pointed out, thus far the strongest case illustrating Turkey's potential break with the West lies in defence matters (Dursun-Ozkanca, 2019: 116).

2.1. The Chinese Air Defense System

Turkey's air defence system is part of NATO's Active Layered Theatre Ballistic Missile Defense (ALTBMD), established in 2005 to protect the Alliance's deployed forces. In 2010 the Program was extended to protect NATO's territory and population with a comprehensive Ballistic Missile Defense Program, called EPAA, and which includes the radar station in Kürecik in Turkey. Turkey has been part of ALTBMMD since the beginning of the program. However, Turkey's focus on missile defence systems, and its efforts to achieve a robust missile defence capability, date back to the Gulf War of 2003, when Turkey asked NATO to deploy missile defence systems against the ballistic missile threat from Iraq (Egeli, 2014: 40). Based on NATO's decision, the Dutch deployed Patriot systems under NATO command in southern Turkey; the Patriots remained in Turkey only about three months, however, before the Netherlands withdrew them.

Turkey again asked the Alliance to deploy a missile defence system in 2012, after Syria shot down a Turkish fighter and fired rockets into southern Turkey that resulted in the death of Turkish citizens. In response, to demonstrate the solidarity of the Alliance the US, Germany, and the Netherlands deployed Patriot systems under NATO command in three Turkish cities. Over time, political divergences on Syria between the Allies and Turkey, and especially Turkey's operations against PYD terror organizations, which unfortunately NATO members openly and robustly supported, created fractures within NATO and led to the Allies' (except Spain) withdrawing their Patriot systems, thereby demonstrating why Turkey should opt for a national missile defence system. In other words, Turkey's efforts to establish a national air defence system heralded a crisis between the Allies and Turkey.

The major crisis began with the announcement by the Turkish Undersecretariat for Defense Industries in September 2013 that Turkey had selected a Chinese state-owned company to build Turkey's first long-range air defence system. The Chinese FD-2000 system won the bid, competing with the US Patriot, Russian S-300/S-400, and French-Italian Samp-T systems (Akşam, 26 September 2013). Turkey insisted that price, co-production, and technology transfer were the major factors in selecting the Chinese firm.

NATO members, especially the US, reacted harshly to Turkey's decision, maintaining that the Chinese system is not interoperable with NATO's ALTBMD architecture and that Chinese missiles connected to the NATO architecture could infiltrate or exfiltrate secret data concerning NATO's systems. Seven senators sent a letter to the Obama administration advising the administration to "exert all available diplomatic pressure to prevent Turkish procurement of a CPMIEC missile defence system and ensure NATO will never allow such a system to be integrated into NATO's security architecture", and proposed several measures, including Turkey's expulsion from the NATO Air Defense Ground Environment (Meick, 2013). The US National Defense Authorization Act of 2014 banned funding for integration of any missile defence systems of the People's Republic of China into the missile defence systems of the United States or NATO (National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2014, 2013), opening the door to a crisis if Turkey continued with its decision.

The US brought forward the issue that the Chinese company is under American sanctions for violations of Iran, North Korea and Syria Nonproliferation Act. U.S. Ambassador to Turkey Frank Ricciardone stated that the US is concerned about that Chinese company, and its role as a nuclear weapons technology proliferator in the world (Hurriyet Daily News, 02 October 2013). However, as Rıza and Brannen pointed out, it is worth noting that "U.S. concerns about CPMIEC, which, along with its subsidiaries, have been sanctioned multiple times by the US for violations of Iran, North Korea and Syria Nonproliferation Act and other U.S. laws since 2003, were publicly aired only after the Turkish decision" (Ali Rıza and Brannen, 2013).

Meanwhile, NATO Officials warned Turkey with a softer tone. Secretary-General Rasmussen said that while choosing a defence system was a national decision, "the system acquired by the individual country must be able to work and operate with the systems in other countries," implying that the Chinese system does not comply with that expectation (Fraende, 2012). The international media came alive with reports referring to anonymous NATO officials who warned of possible serious outcomes. One of the officials even termed the incorporation of

the Chinese system into NATO's system a "virus" and "a possible most futile effort (Bekdil, 2013).

Comments emerged that Turkey was trying to push western companies to bargain. Statements by Turkish officials seemed to prove this allegation. After Minister-President Erdoğan stated that Turkey had already decided on the Chinese company, Turkish officials remained optimistic about CPMIEC's bid, estimating a deal could be signed by April 2014, with the delivery of the SAM system by 2017; but then-President Abdullah Gül stated that the CPMIEC deal "is not definite and there is a shortlist, and China is at the top of it," (Hurriyet Daily News, 30 September 2013) thereby keeping the door open for other options.

Despite the optimism of Turkish Officials, however, Turkey declared in late October that the bidding deadline was extended to the end of January 31, 2014. Later Turkey extended the bidding deadline first to the end of April and then to the end of June. Having been the staunch supporter of the Chinese option, Erdoğan hinted at the flexibility of the decision, stating that due to technical problems about know-how and co-production, Turkey might go for the French-Italian company, which was number two on the shortlist (Cumhuriyet, 08 September 2014).

Both pressures by NATO members and problems with the Chinese company concerning technology transfer (or so stated Turkey to cover its cancellation decision) resulted in the cancellation of the deal in mid-November 2015, after 26 months of discussions with the Chinese company. Turkish officials also declared that they decided to embark on an R&D project for a national missile system rather than purchasing from other states.

As during the Cold War, so too during this crisis neither NATO nor Turkish officials questioned Turkey's membership in the Alliance. As noted above, the NATO Secretary-General implied that NATO expected the deal would be cancelled, but he did not officially call for cancellation because he cannot openly criticize member states for their national policies. Member states, though, the US in particular, reacted severely and took concrete steps to discourage Turkey. American senators urged the administration to exclude Turkey from the ALTBMD architecture, which would have included the crucial radar station at Kürecik, but Turkey's membership never became an issue.

It was the same on the Turkish side. While some Turkish officials and politicians were proclaiming their resolute decision on the matter, including Erdoğan, President Gül declared that the decision was not definite, adding "there is no doubt that Turkey is primarily in NATO" (Hurriyet Daily News, 30 September 2013). On October 25, roughly one month after the decision, Erdoğan softened his stance by announcing that if there are proposals from other companies, they could be considered (Bekdil, 2013). In the end, Turkey cancelled its decision and the coherence of the Alliance remained intact.

2.2. S-400 Missiles

Turkey declared that it cancelled the deal with the Chinese company for the air and missile defence system because of technical problems with the company, but many observers commented that Turkey yielded to pressure from its Allies. Turkey continued with its policy to purchase the system in parallel to develop national R&D projects. Immediately after the announcement of the cancellation, Turkey reportedly started negotiations with Russia to procure the S-400 system, having previously rejected Russia's offer to sell Turkey the S-300 system.

The meeting between Erdoğan and Putin in March 2017 formed the cornerstone of the negotiations. After the meeting, Putin's spokesperson reported that both leaders agreed on the sale of the S-400 missile system while Fikri Işık, Turkish Minister of Defense, stated that while major progress had been made, he could not confirm that the deal was in the signature phase. (Akşam, 16 Mart 2017) The media reported (and Erdoğan later confirmed) that both sides agreed in July and that the agreement was signed in December 2017. However, a written statement by the Turkish Ministry of Defense on July 12, 2019, about the first shipment of S-400 batteries (even though Russian and Turkish authorities once stated that delivery would occur in early 2020) claimed that the deal for the purchase was signed on April 11, 2017 (S-400 Uzun Menzilli Bölge Hava ve Füze Savunma Sisteminin İntikali, 2017). With delivery having begun in July 2019, all components of the S-400 missiles had arrived in Turkey as of October 2019 and it was reported that Russia had started the training program for Turkish officers.

In April 2017, Fikri Işık stated in a meeting with US Defense Officials that Turkey had tried to procure the urgently needed air defence system from NATO states first, but they did not provide a cost-effective proposal, and after that Turkey looked for other options (Yeni Şafak, 14 April 2017). Turkey simultaneously continued negotiations with France and Italy for procurement of SAMP-T systems and they signed an agreement in early 2018 for an 18-month-long study to determine the needs and priorities for the potential joint production of an anti-ballistic missile system. However, as noted by Turkish Defense Industries Directorate Chair İsmail Demir, France's stance against Turkey's Operation Peace Spring operation in Syria seemed likely to prevent a comprehensive deal with both NATO states (Hürkuş, 2020).

Turkey officially stated that the first Russian-built system will be operational in April 2020 and that the timetable for the second system, to include technology transfer and co-production—the so-called red line for Turkey—was not yet clear (Ersöz, 2020). As Gürcanlı noted, though, the Russian TASS agency quoted a Russian official as stating that technology transfer had not been included in the agreement (Gürcanlı 2020).

Turkey's decision resulted in a severe American reaction, just as it had when Turkey announced a potential deal with the Chinese company. US officials brought up the issue of interoperability with NATO systems as well as the security of NATO systems and threatened that the Russian deal might overshadow cooperation between Turkey and NATO states in defence matters.

Five days later, the chairs and ranking members of the US Senate's Armed Services and Foreign Relations Committees published an op-ed stating that Congress would block Ankara from purchasing F-35 fighters, cancel Turkish participation in the F-35 program, and impose sanctions on Turkey under the US's Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) if Turkey accepts delivery of the S-400 systems (Inhofe et al, 2019). Thus, in the first week of April 2019, both the US administration and senators warned Turkey of the serious consequences of the deal. On June 7, 2019, the US Secretary of Defense again sent a letter to his Turkish counterpart warning of consequences if Turkey did not step back from a deal by July 31, in particular excluding Turkey from the F-35 fighter program, and implementing sanctions under CAATSA which is against the basic principles of being Ally (Dilek and Oğuz, 2021). None of these warnings, in addition to others, prevented the delivery of the S-400 systems to Turkey

between July and October 2019, opening a new phase in the crisis between the US and Turkey. There have been also some news in the media arguing that there have been ongoing discussions between Turkish and Russian officials for the procurement of second S-400 systems.

Discussions were focused on whether the S-400 missiles will be operational in April 2020 as announced by Turkey. All Turkish officials, though, including President Erdoğan, Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu and Minister of Defense Akar, have insistently stressed that the system will be operational as planned. Çavuşoğlu even stated that the recent crisis between Turkey and Russia, when dozens of Turkish soldiers died in İdlib in an Assad regime attack supported by Russia, the most serious crisis since Turkey shot down a Russian fighter in October 2015, would not affect the implementation of the S-400 systems (Milliyet, 15 February 2020). However, Turkey announced a delay because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Warnings by member states (especially the US) notwithstanding, NATO officials stuck to the Alliance's principles. Secretary-General Stoltenberg described Turkey's purchase of the Russian system as Ankara's own "national decision" (as the former Secretary-General had done for the Chinese missile system deal), adding that it is a challenge and that it is well known there is a disagreement between Turkey and especially the US on this issue (Hurriyet Daily News, 15 September 2018). He reiterated his views in April 2019 before the meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs: "It's a national decision for each NATO Ally to decide on procurement of capabilities. But at the same time, we see that this is now an issue that has created disagreement between Allies. And NATO provides a platform for Allies to address issues like this" (Doorstep statement by NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg ahead of the meeting of NATO Foreign Ministers", 04 April 2019).

Turkey insisted that America's concerns about interoperability, cyber security, or information secrecy are groundless, because the Russian system is planned to be stand-alone, and if connected to NATO architecture, there will be interface software developed by Turkey. Some international analysts or experts also have announced that the US' concerns are not valid. Michael Kofman, an analyst with the CNA Corporation, for example, said "American concerns are overblown and their talking point is not technically valid. The only thing the S-400 can do with its radars is tracking the flight profile of the F-35, something that Russia already does in the Middle East and the Baltics, as the S-400 in Syria and radar stations in Kaliningrad track American aircraft such as the F-35 and F-22 all the time" (Mueller and Gibbons-Neff, 2019).

Unlike the Chinese deal, the expulsion of Turkey from the Alliance has been officially stated during the S-400 crisis. In April 2019, Mike Pence, US Vice President, warned Turkey bluntly, "Turkey must choose. Does it want to remain a critical partner in the most successful military alliance in history or does it want to risk the security of that partnership by making such reckless decisions that undermine our alliance?" With this, a high official opened the question of Turkey's membership. Turkish Vice President Fuat Oktay responded to Pence's comments by referring to American support for the PYD: "The US must choose. Does it want to remain Turkey's ally, or risk our friendship by joining forces with terrorists to undermine its NATO ally's defence against its enemies?" (Chiacu, 2019).

Apart from spontaneous statements such as these, though, Turkey, the US, and NATO remained calm about the issue, without questioning Turkey's membership in the Alliance. As when Turkey decided on the Chinese company, NATO members, mainly the US, brought up the issue of interoperability and threatened/implied sanctions to Turkey. Other members, influenced by the US, mainly highlighted their concerns rather than taking any action against Turkey. Apart from anonymous comments, NATO officials stressed that this is a national decision, to which each Ally has a right. Başat Öztürk, Turkey's permanent representative to NATO, maintained that the S-400 is not a NATO problem, it is a bilateral problem, and that including NATO in this issue and harming the coherency of the alliance would be a mistake (Hurriyet Daily News, 25 June 2019).

As the ambassador pointed out, the crisis is between individual members, in particular, the US and Turkey rather than between the Alliance and Turkey. Therefore, describing the issue as a NATO crisis would be a mistake. Certainly, questioning Turkey's membership would provide Russia with an excellent opportunity to argue against the solidarity and cohesion of the Alliance. Despite problems with several Allies, especially the US and France, as one of the strongest members of the Alliance Turkey is firmly part of NATO politically and militarily. As Özer put it, "the purchase of the S-400 has indeed destabilized Turkey's relations with the US and other NATO allies, but it has not changed its geopolitical vision and traditional alignment with the West" (Özer, 2019).

2.3. The Syria Crisis

The Syrian crisis became a test as to how far the Alliance was bound to its commitment to Turkey in case of aggression by a third party. The downing of a Turkish jet by the Syrian regime heralded a deeper crisis between Turkey and Syria. Turkey informed the Alliance of the incident in the context of Article 4 of the Washington Treaty, then officially requested the Alliance to provide air defence systems when Syrian missiles struck southern Turkey. The Alliance declared support for Turkey and Rasmussen stated that "obviously Turkey can rely on NATO solidarity and NATO has all necessary plans in place to protect and defend Turkey if necessary" (The Guardian, 09 October 2012). Patriot missiles from the US, the Netherlands, and Germany were deployed in southern Turkey against Syrian missiles in early 2013. Spanish patriots then replaced Dutch batteries in 2016 while Italy deployed SAMP-T systems to replace the German patriots in June 2016.

The US withdrew its Patriots at the beginning of 2016 while Spain and Italy maintained them until the end of 2019, as Italy withdrew its SAMP-T when Turkey launched Operation Peace Spring. Spain extended the deployment of Patriots for another six months, until June 2020 (Hayatsever, 2019). France had declared it was considering deployment of SAMP-T missiles in Turkey but there has been no development on this matter. Thus, NATO's air defence support for Turkey continues with the Spanish Patriots. In other words, Turkey experienced conditional air defence support, which changed based on political divergence or convergence, rather than unconditional support in the framework of solidarity between Allies.

The Alliance's solidarity was tested again during the Russia-Turkey crisis of October 2015. Russian violations of Turkish airspace and Turkey's downing of a Russian fighter led to a serious diplomatic crisis. Turkey called for a NATO emergency meeting in September and October 2015

because of Russian air space violations and the Alliance strongly condemned Russian incursions in the meetings. It is worth noting that during the meeting of ministers on October 8, no concrete measures were adopted. In reply to a question whether there had been any discussion that NATO might send ground troops to Turkey, Stoltenberg stated that “The idea of rapid forces is that by increasing preparedness and readiness we can deploy forces to the south or the east if and when needed,” (Press conference by NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg following the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Defence Ministers session, 08 October 2015) without giving a concrete response.

After Turkey shot down the Russian fighter—the first downing of a Russian fighter by a NATO member since the 1950s—in late October, Turkey called for another emergency NATO meeting. Stoltenberg underlined the Alliance's solidarity again but refrained from articulating any specific strong commitments, instead of calling for lowering the tension between the two sides (Statement by the NATO Secretary General after the extraordinary NAC meeting, 24 November 2015). After the meeting of Defense Ministers on December 1, he repeated the existence of contingency plans to defend Turkey (Statement by NATO Foreign Ministers on Assurance to Turkey, 01 December 2015). After the meeting of Defense Ministers in February 2016, he described a packet of measures, including air surveillance or AWACS, air policing, increased maritime and military maritime presence in the eastern Mediterranean, and other military capabilities (Pre-Ministerial press conference by NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, 09 February 2016).

Turkish operations in Syria created another problem between Alliance members and Turkey. The Alliance officially supported Turkey's military operations in Syria although individual members, especially the US and France, harshly criticized it. Concerning Operation Olive Branch, launched in January 2018, Stoltenberg stated that Turkey, as do all NATO members, has the right to defend itself, adding that this must be done in a proportionate and measured way (Daily Sabah, January 25, 2019). Again, Operation Peace Spring, launched in October 2019, created a major rift between the Allies. President Trump had reacted against the S-400 deal less vehemently than American senators but dispatched a letter to President Erdoğan before the operation threatening harsh economic sanctions if Turkey embarked on the operation. US senators voted for economic sanctions after the operation started. French President Macron, who described America's withdrawal of troops from Syria without coordinating with Europeans as "brain death," asked what NATO's mutual self-defence pact, enshrined in Article 5 of its founding treaty, might mean in the future, and pondered whether it could be invoked if President Bashar al-Assad's forces retaliated against Turkey's military operation in northern Syria (France24, 13 October 2019). Thus, Macron openly questioned the basis of the Atlantic Treaty underlining that Allies might not defend Turkey in case of a possible Syrian attack.

Despite Turkey's clear statement that the operation was directed against the PYD terror organization, almost all NATO Allies, except Hungary (Hürriyet, 11 Ekim 2019), criticized the Turkish operation. The EU passed a resolution to limit arms sales to Turkey, EU leaders urged Turkey to withdraw its troops, and Macron called the operation "madness" and NATO's failure to reach a "serious mistake". (Muller, 2018) During his meeting with Stoltenberg, Macron accused Turkey of undermining NATO solidarity, arguing that "Turkey cannot expect solidarity with other

NATO allies if it carries out military operations in Syria without consultation or coordination" (Peel and Milne, 2019).

But the greatest crisis between the Allies and Turkey has been the Allies' support of the PDY terror organization. Turkey's Syrian policy had been aligned with the NATO Allies for a long time, but the rise of DAESH (called also ISIL or ISIS) in summer 2015, along with Iran and Russia's support for the Assad regime, changed the situation on the ground, prompting Western states, led by the US, to accept the PYD terror organization, an affiliate of the PKK terror organization, as their partner in the fight against DAESH. Thus, NATO allies, especially the US, have been providing heavy weapons and ammunition to the PYD since then, first secretly, then openly. Turkey prioritized the removal of Assad from power, while the US prioritized the fight against the DAESH, arguing that the Kurds were the best-organized force on the ground in the fight against DAESH in Iraq and Syria (Dursun-Özkanca, 2019: 118).

The Allies openly refused to recognize the PYD as a terror organization. Furthermore, many described it as a close and effective partner against DAESH, even more, effective than Turkey. The crisis escalated to the extent that Turkey, in the meeting of leaders in December 2019, threatened NATO with vetoing the Baltic Defense Plan unless the Alliance stopped supporting the PYD terror organization and officially recognized the PYD as a terror organization. In the end, Turkey endorsed Baltic Defense Plan while plans to defend Turkey will be revised, which was reflected in the summit declaration as "We are adapting our military capabilities, strategy, and plans across the Alliance in line with our 360-degree approach to security" (London Declaration, issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in London 3-4 December 2019). It was agreed in the meeting that the plans to defend the Baltics and Turkey will be issued at the same time. This was later verified by Turkish and foreign officials (Sözcü, 10 Aralık 2019: *Milliyet*, 09 Aralık 2019). Thus, the crisis between the Allies was resolved, nevertheless.

Support of the Allies for the PYD terror organization under the guise of their so-called fight against DAESH created a crisis between Turkey and the Allies, rather than between NATO and Turkey. The Allies continue to support the PYD even though Trump declared several times that DAESH was defeated (Rogers et al, 2019)—thereby revealing their real purpose of undermining Turkish policies in the region rather than fighting against DAESH.

The Alliance's refusal to declare the PYD as a terror organization might be regarded as a crisis between NATO and Turkey rather than between members. However, problems in the Alliance, as in the Baltic Defense issue, were solved nevertheless through the Alliance's procedures. As Hulusi Akar noted, "NATO is stronger with Turkey, and questioning Turkey is meaningless" (*Milliyet*, 09 Aralık 2020). Therefore, Turkey should insistently continue to persuade the Allies to stop supporting the PYD, especially since they lost their fake argument that the PYD is fighting against DAESH. It is worth noting that Russia also does not accept that the PYD is a terror organization, and there is a PYD office in Moscow.

3. The Future of NATO-Turkey Relationship

The existing and future security environments, mainly in Eurasia, and the changing security perceptions of the Alliance, should be analyzed before predicting NATO-Turkey relations in the

future. Russian policies especially play an important role in future policies of the Alliance because they directly affect the security of member territories. In recent years Russian active involvement in Georgia, Ukraine and Syria especially played a crucial role in shaping and defining NATO's policies.

In essence, the early post-Cold War era provided a period of relative peace between Russia and NATO. But the 2008 Russian-Georgian war, and especially the ongoing Ukrainian crisis that resulted in Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea (the first border change by force in Europe since the Cold War), altered the security paradigm in Europe. Europeans, who had been aiming toward a security system without the US, concluded again, as during the Bosnian war, that Europe needs the US against the Russian threat, as had been the case during the Cold War against the Soviet threat. Thus, NATO, which Europeans had been trying to replace with a European Union Army, became once again vital for the security of Europe.

The Ukrainian crisis served as a "wake-up call" for the Alliance (Young, 2014). In the face of the growing Russian threat, at the Wales Summit in 2014 NATO adopted the Readiness Action Plan (RAP). RAP consists of "assurance measures" that comprise a series of land, sea, and air activities, reinforced by exercises and "adaptation measures" that provided long-term changes to NATO's forces and command structure, to enable the Alliance to react swiftly and decisively in emerging crises.¹ After the Ukrainian crisis, the Alliance renewed its focus on defending member states from external threats, namely Russia; thus collective defence became once again the focus of the Alliance. Europeans, especially Eastern Europeans, increased efforts to bolster the American guarantee, by increasing the US military presence in the continent.

NATO has been called the strongest military alliance in history. Despite several failures, such as creating ongoing chaos in Libya, it has played a crucial role in peace and security in the post-Cold War era, especially in preventing genocide in Bosnia and Kosovo given Russian blocking efforts in the UN Security Council. It has been the only Alliance system that can leverage Russian and Chinese military capabilities. It is the main platform that provides US nuclear and conventional assurance for Europe, including Turkey, although there have been serious concerns about the American commitment in a real war. Despite failures, as vis-a-vis Turkey in the struggle against the PKK, and ambiguities and suspicions over possible future crises, as articulated by Macron in case of a possible Syrian assault against Turkey, NATO still provides assurance and deterrence for members against external threats.

Changing security perceptions after Russian actions also altered the Alliance's attitude against this state, which had been described as a partner less than 10 years previously. Since the Ukrainian crisis, Russia has been perceived as the main threat against the Allies, although NATO prefers to refrain from openly articulating this position in official texts, just as Russia is regarded as the main reason for violence and insecurity in the Euro-Atlantic region (Wales Summit Declaration, 2014). On top of this, the London Declaration in December 2019 for the first time in history referred to Chinese "growing influence and international policies" as a challenge for the Alliance, thus opening a new page in the Alliance's history.

¹ For more information about RAP see "Readiness Action Plan" on NATO Official Website, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_119353.htm, (Accessed on 21.03.2020)

Turkey has been a member of the Alliance since its accession in 1952, with NATO's second-largest army after the US. Turkey has been hosting several strategically important NATO bases, including İncirlik, and is one of the five states that still host American tactical nuclear weapons under the NATO umbrella. The radar system of the European Phased Adaptive Approach (EPAA), namely the European Missile Shield, is located in Kürecik, Malatya. Turkey establishes a buffer zone between the Middle East/Asia and the European part of the Alliance, while it is one of the three NATO states that border on the Black Sea, where NATO has been pursuing policies to contain Russia. The Turkish Straits play a crucial role in restraining access by the Russian Navy into the Mediterranean and providing more options for NATO in the Black Sea.

Turkey has been part of NATO missions such as in Bosnia or Kosovo and provided a robust Land Forces presence for NATO missions in Afghanistan. Turkish Naval Forces are provided with an important contribution to NATO Operation Ocean Shield and Operation Active Endeavour, and it has been part of the ongoing Operation Sea Guardian in the Mediterranean while Turkish Naval Forces operate as part of NATO Standing Naval Forces in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. Turkish Air Forces have participated in the air campaign NATO conducted against Libya in 2011 as they did in Bosnia and Kosovo in the past. Turkey provides an airbase for NATO AWACS flying over Iraq and Syria for the support of Coalition forces fighting against DAESH. Turkish Armed Forces are also one of the most contributors to NATO exercises all around the world.

Turkish Armed Forces is an important part of NATO's Gradual Readiness Forces system. In 2021, Turkey will assume the command of NATO's Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF), a joint force consisting of a land component supported by air, maritime and special forces, that will be deployed in a very short time in case of aggression against member states. If the Alliance would decide, Turkish forces will consist of the Spearhead of NATO Response Forces and will be the first military unit to involve in the conflict to deter and dissuade aggressive forces, most probably the Russian military in 2021.

NATO is stronger with Turkey and Turkey feels safer with NATO, keeping in mind solidarity might be a problem in a real case, as it was during the Cold War for all Europeans. Turkey's strategic orientation has been staying part of NATO and becoming part of the EU, which seems unrealistic for the short and mid-term. Although not welcomed for now by other nations, President Trump's call to include some Middle East Nations into the Alliance again underlined the importance of Turkey for the Alliance again.

Therefore, it is fair to underline that Turkish strategic orientation has not changed. As pointed out in the report prepared by SETA, despite setbacks in the relation between Turkey and NATO since Turkey's accession into the Alliance, motto's like "NATO without Turkey" or "Turkey without NATO" seems not a product of rational thinking (Seren, 2020). As Hulusi Akar, Minister of Defense, stated, for both Turkey and the Alliance "NATO is stronger with Turkey and questioning Turkey's membership is pointless" (Milliyet, 09 December 2019).

Conclusion

One of the most adherent members of NATO and its policies, Turkey has been undergoing hard times in converging its policies with NATO members, especially in the just-past decade, although not for the first time. When considering the crises of the Cold War, though, two important factors have changed the situation compared to previous incidents. First, Turkey has focused on self-sufficiency in the defence industry, which has mitigated the threat of Western sanctions. Secondly, Turkey has cooperated with Russia and China to counter Western policies that conflict with its national interests.

Turkey's agreements first with China and then with Russia to procure an Air and Missile Defense System, and Turkey's policies divergent with its Allies because of Western Allies' betrayal and back-stabbing of Turkey in Syria emerged as hot topics that created friction between the Allies and Turkey. Turkey's deal with China for Air and Missile Defense Systems was cancelled for political or technical reasons, but Turkey went on to purchase and deliver S-400 systems from Russia, and execute operations in Syria, despite strong pressure from NATO allies, especially the US.

Many commentators inside and outside Turkey consider the deals with China and then with Russia as a major change in alignment, even to the extent of theorizing that Turkey plans to exit the Alliance. However, Turkey repeatedly and insistently has stressed that the decision was based on military requirements, not politics, and added that Turkey had been ready to negotiate with the Allies for procurement of the same systems if the technological transfer issue could be solved.

Turkey started the adventure in Syria in the same boat as NATO Allies. But the Allies' opted to support the PYD terror organization, which has been declared a threat against Turkey's national security by Turkish authorities and changed their Syrian policies in a way that conflicted with Turkish policies and priorities. Thus, Turkey cooperated with Russia and sometimes with Iran that conflicts with the policies of its Allies, especially after their heavy support for the PYD.

The recent rapprochement between Turkey and Russia seems a tactical strategy rather than a strategical orientation or change of axis, again as argued by some politicians or scholars. Two episodes make it clear that the rapprochement is temporary rather than a strategical partnership: Turkey's call to NATO for assurance after the Turkish Air Force downed a Russian fighter; and the crisis with Russia in Idlib, after some fifty Turkish soldiers were killed in artillery fire by Syrian regime forces backed by Russia. Despite recent serious crises between the Allies and Turkey (not between Turkey and NATO), the Turkey-NATO relationship remains strategically and critically important for both parties.

Turkey has placed its security and deterrence efforts with the NATO Alliance since its accession, during which time Turkey has provided massive security and political and military contributions to the Alliance. Given the security environment in the recent past and near future, the Allies cannot risk losing Turkey, and Turkey cannot risk exiting the world's strongest military alliance—especially considering recent crises such as Ukraine and Syria. NATO and Turkish officials have repeatedly underlined this fact. In sum, the recent crises that affected relations between some Allies and Turkey will in no way harm the relationship between Turkey and NATO.

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