

COUNTRY CHAPTER ON TURKEY

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TURKEY DISCUSSES ITS COMPLEX RELATIONSHIP WITH NATO

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Traditionally, Turkey has been NATO's bulwark on its South-Eastern flank. Turkey has always been an outlier, however. Unlike in Western Europe, relations with NATO have not been based on a strong institutional foundation – the integrated military structure in Southeast-Europe collapsed already in the 1960s under pressure from the emerging Greek–Turkish conflict – but rather on strong ties between the American and the Kemalist-oriented Turkish militaries. But even this bilateral relationship has not been without strains, which intensified when the US Congress imposed an arms embargo in response to the Turkish invasion of Cyprus. Moreover, the recurrent military coups have hardly been in keeping with NATO's image of a community of democratic states.

Recently, three structural shifts have complicated Turkey's relations with NATO even further: (i) the upheavals that destabilized large parts of Turkey's immediate neighbourhood; (ii) the stalling of Turkey's long march towards the West; and (iii) the rapid progress of Turkey's military and technological capabilities, which has bolstered Turkey's self-perception as a self-reliant and leading power in the region. In hindsight, the failed coup and the subsequent purges, particularly in the military, appear to have been a watershed.

Today, relations with NATO and its member states are strained in several regards. Most importantly, Turkey perceives a huge gap between what it believes it deserves and what it gets from its NATO allies. Partly reacting to a supposed denial of respect and attention for its interests, partly as a result of its more independent and assertive foreign policy, Turkey today sees NATO as just one reference point of its security among others, such as a functioning relationship with its »frenemy« Russia. Turkey will not leave NATO but will try to change it, with a view to making the alliance more amenable to Turkish interests and more flexible and compatible with its nationalist foreign policy. For the time being, however, Turkey finds itself increasingly isolated.

Turkish think tanks interpret these developments and Turkey's future within NATO from a variety of perspectives. More liberal and multilaterally oriented institutes, such as EDAM, see the country's isolation as partly self-inflicted and worrisome, and propose strategies for rebuilding bridges. More conservative and nationally oriented institutes

such as SETA,¹ tend to blame Turkey's NATO partners for the recent quarrels and support Turkey's more nationalist and assertive course within NATO. In their view, NATO needs to change in order to better accommodate Turkish interests.

TURKISH THREAT PERCEPTIONS AND RESPONSES

As already mentioned, Turkey's security concerns and threat perceptions are a product of its exposed geographical location and its perception of links between external threats and internal conflicts. In the eyes of the Turkish government, external threats accumulated in the aftermaths of the US intervention in Iraq and of the Arab Spring. The resulting instability, state failures and civil wars threaten Turkey's security indirectly through spillover effects, such as refugee flows, and directly as the resulting security vacuum at Turkey's border has been filled by hostile terrorist organizations – such as the PKK, the YPG and ISIS – and potentially hostile powers, such as Russia and Iran. Unlike its NATO allies, Turkey designates the Syrian-based Kurdish self-defence forces the YPG as a terrorist organization with close ties to the PKK. Even more worrying in the view of Turkish foreign policy elites are the links between external threats and internal conflict dynamics.²

Traditionally, the Turkish sense of danger and encirclement has been further fuelled by its liminal status within Western security institutions (Rumelili 2003). The de facto failure of the EU accession process and differences between Turkey and its NATO allies have aggravated the Turkish sense of neglect and rejection by its Western partners, accelerating the autocratic turn³ and the search for a »non-Western« identity,

¹ EDAM and SETA are representative of the landscape of Turkish think tanks and this analysis will mainly focus on their publications.

² Many observers note, however, that militarized conflict between state authorities and the PKK within Turkey escalated again after the AKP lost its parliamentary majority in the 2015 elections, in which the Kurdish HDP came out stronger. After the election, the government changed course from trying to woo the Kurdish population away from the HDP to confronting and suppressing the Kurdish party, as well as escalating the conflict with the PKK.

³ This autocratic turn was both one of the many causes and a consequence of the stalling accession process.

as well as an independent, self-reliant security policy. Reacting to the conflict dynamics at its borders, Turkey began to intervene in Syria and Iraq with a view to controlling its neighbourhood.

However, Turkey's military interventions in its near abroad and further away in Libya, as well as in the war between Azerbaijan and Armenia, and the establishment of bases, for example, in Qatar, is not driven by defensive motives alone. Its military power, based on the size of its armed forces and its military-technological prowess, allows Turkey to flex its muscles as a rising power in the region and to pursue more actively its geopolitical and ideological aims by using military force, if necessary. In the course of this re-orientation Turkey has become embroiled in conflicts not only with its neighbouring countries but also with countries further away, not to mention with its NATO partners. Long-standing disputes with Greece over sovereign rights and the delimitation of exclusive economic zones in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean have escalated again, and multifaceted disputes with France have resulted in militarized interstate disputes. Instead of having »zero problems with our neighbours«, as postulated by former foreign minister Davutoğlu's doctrine (Tol 2013), Turkey today seems to have »zero friends« (Askerov 2017). The 2016 coup-attempt played an important role in reorienting Turkey's threat perception. It impacted on »Turkey's entire range of domestic and foreign policy dealings and equations« (Egeli 2019: 13–14). Turkey's political authority began to treat the in-country development and production of long-range air and missile defense systems as a priority. Soon after, they announced their decision to favor a Chinese offer that came complete with licensed production and the promise of technology transfer. Yet, with this decision came NATO's objections and challenges around integration and information security. In 2015 came the rollback of the pro-China decision, opting instead for the indigenous development of air and missile defense systems (in close conjunction with a foreign technological and industrial partner). The attempted coup heightened Turkey's mistrust of its Western partners and its determination to assert itself and actively pursue its national interests by military means, if necessary.

Turkish think tanks from different backgrounds and perspectives share the threat assessment. EDAM researchers, for instance, point out that while most alliance members consider Russia and China to be NATO's main foes (for example, Tuygan 2019c), for Turkey the situation in Iran, Iraq and Syria, as well as terrorist organizations PKK, YPG and ISIS pose important threats (for example, Kasapoğlu 2019a; Kasapoğlu/Ülgen 2018a)⁴. Pundits diverge in their views on the causes and consequences of the developments that led from »zero problems« to »zero friends«. A researcher from EDAM points out that Turkey's isolation is »self-inflicted« (Tuygan 2019d):⁵

»the government is far from admitting that our diplomatic isolation is the result of a disastrous combination of democratic decline and misguided foreign policy« (Tuygan 2020c). As a consequence of this policy, »we are at odds with all major powers and all regional countries« (Tuygan 2019a). In the same vein, one interviewee described the isolation as »the biggest threat for Turkey«.⁶ »Due to the failures of Turkish foreign and security policy ... we don't have any friends left ... and on top of that we have managed to attract the animosity of almost all regional neighbours, all global powers at the same time, which is a very precarious position«.⁷ To get out of this trap, members of this camp suggest that Turkey should »prioritize diplomacy« and »rebuild relations with Turkey's traditional allies« (Tuygan 2019a).

The causes and consequences of Turkey's isolation are perceived differently by some pro-AKP and/or nationalist think tanks. In their view, Turkey is one of the countries that contribute most to NATO, but also a country that has been particularly affected by terrorist violence (Ataman 2021), refugee flows and threats posed by Iran and Russia. While Turkey helps other alliance members, it has felt »left alone« when its security was threatened (Duran 2017; Yalçın 2017, 2019b; Köse 2020). The lesson to be learned from this experience of lacking understanding and solidarity is that Turkey needs to take care of its own security and cannot depend on others. The withdrawal of German and US Patriot missile defence systems in 2015, which had been deployed within NATO's mission »Active Fence« in 2013, came to symbolize the alliance's alleged lack of reliability.⁸ It also formed the background, as SETA's Hasan Yalçın outlines, to the fateful decision to purchase the S-400 air-defence system from Russia: »In the most critical period, they [NATO allies] signalled that they would leave Turkey on its own. They withdrew Patriots. Therefore, Turkey wants to provide its own security. If we cannot do it now by ourselves, we aim to buy the technology from other than NATO sources and develop its technology« (Yalçın 2017). In addition to this exceptional threat perception, the Turkish debate on the future of NATO is influenced by its bilateral relationships to the United States and Russia.

TURKEY, THE UNITED STATES AND NATO: EXPECTATIONS OF THE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

As already mentioned, the United States has been Turkey's most important ally within NATO. But this relationship has never been without frictions.⁹ Researchers agree that these

⁴ One SETA researcher also counts Gülen movement (FETÖ) as a global threat for Turkey (Köse 2019c).

⁵ This article is published on his personal webpage, not EDAM. In one of his texts, however, he also shared the link to his personal webpage (Tuygan 2020b). Therefore, some articles from his webpage are also used for the analysis.

⁶ Interview with an expert, 25.01.2021.

⁷ Interview with an expert, 25.01.2021.

⁸ Germany and the United States withdrew the Patriots after Turkey changed the course of the fight against ISIS and started to attack PKK positions in Iraq. The complaint of a lack of NATO solidarity is somewhat misleading, as the German and US batteries were replaced by Italian and Spanish Patriot units.

⁹ The relationship between Turkey and the United States was also contested during the Iraq War in 2003 (Müftüler-Bac 2005).

frictions have become more serious in recent years because of the conflicting strategies they are pursuing in Syria, reactions to the attempted military coup and the lack of American responsiveness to Turkish views more generally. Today, the climate is poisoned by mistrust and mutual recriminations. They differ with regard to the harshness of their criticisms and the way forward. Going beyond current differences, Turkish scholars expect that structural trends will impact on the US role in the crucial MENA region.

Regarding the current US–Turkish differences, researchers from liberal think tanks, such as IPC, criticize the »Western wobbling in backing the Syrian opposition« (Aras/Yorulmazlar 2016: 2265). In their view, this indecisiveness formed »the necessary vacuum for Russia to figure out a way for getting Assad off the hook« (ibid.). The United States and NATO partners such as France made an even greater mistake by arming the YPG as an ally in the war against ISIS. EDAM's Kasapoğlu remarks that »...the Obama era's yet another failure was its military policy of arming groups (the YPG) with organic ties to an organization designated as terrorist by the US – namely, the PKK – to fight another terrorist network, Daesh [ISIS]« (Kasapoğlu 2019a; see also Ülgen 2019). IPC's Keyman (2017: 459) agrees that US–Turkish relations have worsened because of misplaced US support for the YPG. At the same time, liberal researchers underline the importance of the bilateral relationship. Against the backdrop of the Turkish interventions in Syria (especially Operation Olive Branch) researchers warn against a confrontation with the United States and suggest that in order to avoid an open conflict, the United States and Turkey should »re-establish a reliable path to US–Turkey convergence« (Kasapoğlu and Ülgen 2018b: 14).

SETA's critique of the United States is even more uncompromising. In their view, the US fight against ISIS has been guided by a wrong strategy. This »ineffective« and even »dangerous« (Yeşiltaş 2016) strategy has »created a space for undesired actors such as the PKK and Russia in Syria« and »is creating new causes for new conflicts in the Middle East for years to come« (Yeşiltaş 2016). The US »denial of the PKK–YPG connection« (Köse 2019a) and its support for the YPG is short-sighted and completely detrimental to Turkey's interests and to stability in the region. By supporting the »PKK/YPG militants«, the United States has created a »monster« (Duran 2016). SETA scholars charge the United States with not taking Turkey's concerns into account (Ataman 2018; Köse 2019a; Yeşiltaş 2018) and the fact that the US administration did not »recognize its most valuable ally« (Kanat 2019). SETA scholars assume that the incoming Biden administration might show even less appreciation for Turkey's concerns (Ataman 2021; Duran 2021b; Yalçın 2021). In addition to criticizing US policy in Syria, SETA researchers allege that the delayed American condemnation of the attempted coup and the refusal to extradite Fethullah Gülen, its purported instigator, points to a »covert US leverage« with regards to the attempted coup d'état in 2016 (Özçelik 2017: 2; Yeşiltaş 2016). Some researchers go even further. They suspect that the United States, by harshly criticizing Turkey and the purchase of the S-400 air

defence system, aim to undermine Turkey's NATO membership (İnat 2019a). According to this view, the US (and French) policy is characterized by an »anti-Turkey attitude« (Kanat 2020). These states are set to punish Turkey (İnat 2020). Therefore Turkey should focus its diplomatic attention on those segments in Europe and the United States who value cooperation with Ankara and explain to them »the real aims of Turkey« (İnat 2020). In contrast, scholars perceive NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg's role more positively. In their view, he »aims to establish dialogue between the members and is against the »otherization« of Turkey« (Duran 2021a).

Looking into the future, researchers expect that structural trends are pulling the United States away from the region. EDAM's Ülgen observes that recent trends give reason to doubt the US »commitment to the security of its European allies, which undermines both the cohesion and the deterrence capability of the alliance« (Ülgen 2019). Evin and Gisclon (2019: 7), scholars at IPC, warn that the United States is retreating from Eurasia, while the EU »is preoccupied with its own issues« and China is one of the »leading players« in the region, especially with its Belt and Road Initiative. Scholars from the liberal Global Relations Forum speculate that the United States, no longer dependent on oil from the Middle East, will reduce its presence in the region »whereas China, now the world's largest energy consumer, can be expected to increase its regional involvement« (Çetin et.al. 2019: 15). This partial American retreat opens »a wider space for manoeuvre for Turkey«. However, it also enables actors like Russia to fill the »power vacuum left by the US« (Arisan-Eralp et al. 2020: 3).

RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA (AND CHINA)

While Turkish think tankers at SETA in particular accuse primarily the United States for its failed strategies in Syria and for its disrespect of Turkey's views and interests, NATO as such is also criticized for its lack of solidarity and support. This feeling of being left alone also impacts on Turkey's relations with Russia (and China). On one hand, Russia (and prospectively also China) is still regarded as a competitor in the MENA and Black Sea regions and a risk factor. Liberal scholars in particular are wary of Russia's assertiveness and growing presence, and point out that Russia and Turkey pursue different interests in Syria, Libya and the MENA region as such (Çelikkpala 2019: 3). On the other hand, Turkey regards the presence that Russia has established in Syria and the larger region in the wake of failed Western policies as permanent. Thus, Turkey, being increasingly left on its own, will have to compromise with Russia in bilateral settings. Moreover, Russia is perceived as an economic partner, particularly with regard to energy cooperation (Çelikkpala 2019). The resulting pattern of cooperation and competition is also noted by SETA researchers. While Yeşiltaş (2016) warns that Russia's and Iran's offensive intervention in Syria caused a serious security threat for Turkey, Duran speculates about a Turkish–Russian rapprochement: »As the new balance of power emerges, Turkish–Russian ties could be

reshaped within the context of Middle Eastern, NATO and European politics» (Duran 2017). Thus, the United States and NATO constitute just one vector of Turkey's policy in its neighbourhood, while Russia (and in the future also China) are other important vectors.

A CASE STUDY OF TURKEY'S MULTI-VECTOR POLICY: THE PURCHASE OF THE S-400 SYSTEM

The mistrust of America and the assessment of Russia as a competitor and partner formed the background against which the Turkish government decided to purchase the Russian S-400 air defence system. The attempted coup in 2016 changed the Turkish government's security perceptions and paved the way for the S-400 deal, which was a »top-down process: decision made first, and justifications generated afterward« (Egeli 2019: 13–14, 17). In the face of missile programmes in Iran and other neighbouring states, Turkey had for quite a while felt the need for an advanced long-range air and missile defence system and had negotiated with the United States, a French-Italian consortium and China (Egeli 2019). The rash decision to purchase the Russian system deepened the differences with NATO and plunged Turkey into a conflict with the United States. Suspecting that the S-400 radar will allow Russia to spy on the newest American F-35 fighter jet, the US government excluded Turkey from the programme and imposed sanctions.

Think tanks in Turkey agree that the perceived missile threat is real and that Turkey needs a defence system (see, for example, Kasapoğlu 2019b; Yalçın, Alptekin, and Bayraklı 2019; Yeşiltaş 2017). They disagree in their assessments of the motives and merits of the S-400 decision and the way forward. Scholars assume that the decision to buy the S-400 was motivated by a combination of mistrust in Western governments, and according to one interviewee, a felt need to compensate for the previous Turkish downing of a Russian airplane.¹⁰ Tuygan from EDAM describes the situation similarly: »one cannot but conclude that S-400 contract was the price Turkey had to pay to put behind the downing of the Su-24, the murder of the Ambassador¹¹ and thus restore its cooperation with Moscow« (Tuygan 2019b). Concerning the military value of the system, they point to the contradiction that NATO will not allow integration of the S-400 into NATO's radar infrastructure and that as a stand-alone system, the S-400 has only limited military effectiveness (Kasapoğlu 2019b; Kasapoğlu and Ülgen 2018a).¹² Moreover, scholars doubt that the deal included

the technology transfer package that Turkey sought during its previous negotiations (ibid.). Regarding the way forward, liberal scholars acknowledge the difficulty of undoing the deal. One expert stated that the only way out of the conflict is either that the system will not be activated, or that NATO (or the United States) will be given the opportunity to observe the system in order to prevent a data leakage.¹³

In contrast, researchers at SETA defend the purchase and deployment of the S-400 on grounds of national sovereignty (Alabarda 2019; Yalçın 2017). The system will »give Turkey superiority in deterrence« (Yeşiltaş 2017). Another SETA fellow claims that NATO, too, would benefit from a stronger Turkish air defence capability: Any policy that successfully addresses Turkey's national security concerns would only strengthen NATO (Duran 2021b). Still others support the arms deal on the ground that Turkey »does not have to make a choice between two blocs« (Altun 2017).

TURKEY AND THE FUTURE OF NATO

The Turkish debate on the future of NATO and Turkey's place therein is determined by this mix of Turkey's particular threat perceptions and the logic of its bilateral relations with the United States and Russia.

In light of the numerous bilateral conflicts with other NATO states, the most important finding is the consensus among think tanks concerning NATO's enduring importance for Turkey. In fact, only a few voices propose Turkey's exit from NATO.¹⁴ While SETA scholars refer to an instrumental logic and the advantages of being a member of still the »strongest, most institutional, and most deterrent alliance institution« (Yalçın 2018: 18), scholars from liberal think tanks refer to the importance of shared norms as well. One interviewee pointed out that Turkey's importance for NATO cannot be ignored.¹⁵ Another expert stated that it is »impossible that Turkey would leave NATO«¹⁶; and emphasized Turkey's connection with the West: »It is difficult to separate Turkey from the West«, and it cannot be expected that Turkey would turn its back to NATO.¹⁷ In the same vein, a paper co-authored by former NATO representatives of Turkey and a current EDAM associate underlines the importance of NATO and transatlantic relations for Turkey. According to them, Turkey possesses a range of instruments and opportunities to pursue its foreign policy. However, »NATO comes first amongst these opportunities and

¹⁰ Interview with an expert, 25.01.2021

¹¹ On 19 December 2016, the Russian ambassador to Turkey, Andrei Karlov, was shot at a public event by a Turkish off-duty police officer.

¹² »[I]ntegrating the S-400s into the Turkish national command and control, early warning and sensors networks by totally excluding the NATO infrastructure would be extremely demanding. For one, NATO contribution to Turkey's overall radar capabilities remains crucial. Secondly, Turkish systems' interfaces to external (NATO-compatible) systems (i.e. via Link16) make the situation more complicated. Thirdly, even if everything goes as planned in the S-400's

integration into national capabilities, as mentioned earlier, an effective ballistic missile defense requisites detecting and tracking the missile starting from the launch with real-time, precise information cueing between many components of an architecture« (Kasapoğlu and Ülgen 2018a: 7).

¹³ Interview with expert, 25.01.2021.

¹⁴ See, for example, Dr Nejat Tarakçı from TASAM: https://tasam.org/tr-TR/Icerik/51399/turkiye_nato_kartini_masaya_yatirmalidir.

¹⁵ Interview with an expert, 25.01.2021.

¹⁶ Interview with an expert, 29.01.2021.

¹⁷ Interview with an expert, 29.01.2021.

instruments« (Üzümçü/İldem/Ceylan 2021: 5). NATO is not only seen as a military organization, »it is rather a political-military organization« (ibid.). In that sense, becoming a member also necessitates accepting common values, such as democracy, individual freedoms and the rule of law, and, as the authors state, Turkey's NATO membership reflects the country's conscious choice towards Western values, which was in line with the Republic's establishing principles (ibid.). Overall, liberal scholars and think tanks point out the benefits of the alliance for Turkey and state the importance of re-establishing better relations with traditional allies.

Despite the general commitment to NATO, the Turkish discourse on the future of NATO shows interesting differences compared with other countries. **Russian threats** to the territorial integrity of NATO's (Eastern) members, hybrid threats or China play a secondary role in the Turkish discourse. Russia's regional »conventional ground forces superiority in the Western Military District over NATO ground forces deployed in the eastern flank« is mentioned in EDAM studies (Kasapoğlu 2019c: 13). However, most scholars propose a more conciliatory NATO approach towards Russia. EDAM's Ceylan proposes pursuing dialogue with Russia: »Open channels of communication with Russia should be sustained with a view to maintaining and reinforcing the deterrence and defence posture of the Alliance« (Ceylan 2020a). Tarık Oğuzlu from Antalya Bilim University adds that »... Turkey holds the view that Russia's concerns should be given more priority while elaborating NATO's policies on enlargement, military deployments in Eastern Europe and the missile defence system«. ¹⁸ Turkish think tanks also discuss NATO's role in securing the cyber space in light of Russian (and Chinese) threats (Köse 2019b; Kanat 2021). For example, Kasapoğlu and Kirdemir (2019) support a collective initiative against such threats and suggest establishing an AI task force by the Alliance.

China is perceived by the Turkish government as a partner rather than a competitor, and President Erdogan is on record of having said that instead of striving for EU membership, Turkey might join the Russia and China-dominated Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).¹⁹ As already mentioned, Turkey mulled the acquisition of a Chinese missile defence system and is unlikely to follow a NATO line on restricting technological and economic interaction with China. This uncritical attitude, however, is not shared by liberal think tanks. EDAM's Tuygan (2019c), for example, refers to China as »a new factor collectively to reckon with« by the Alliance.

As we have seen, NATO is valued for its military strength and its ability to »harness technology and innovation to stay ahead« (Coşkun 2021: 3). Arms control issues are also discussed. The future of the US nuclear weapons deployed in

Turkey and Turkey's participation in NATO's nuclear sharing arrangement figures in Turkish expert discourses. The United States still stores approximately 50 B-61 nuclear weapons at the NATO section of Incirlik air force base.²⁰ After the attempted coup and against the backdrop of deteriorating bilateral relations, the United States had considered withdrawing the bombs. US State and Energy Department officials actually reviewed plans for their evacuation in 2019.²¹ Apparently, the US hesitated on the grounds that a unilateral removal would further undermine relations and spur what outside observers describe as Turkey's nuclear ambitions. Turkish think tankers differ in their assessment of NATO's arrangement. Former EDAM scholar Mustafa Kibaroglu, Turkey's foremost researcher on nuclear arms control, has argued for quite a while that these weapons present a hazard far greater than their potential benefits and should be removed (Kibaroglu 2005; Kibaroglu/Sauer 2017). Others tend to perceive removal at this point in time as an expression of American mistrust. Scholars from SETA in particular reproach the American discourse on the security of these weapons as an expression of a general American mistrust and disrespect of Turkey.²²

Turkish scholars across all camps support **burden-sharing** and NATO's 2 per cent goal. This is not surprising given the fact that Turkey's defence expenditures easily surpass this threshold. On **NATO-EU relations**, the debate is less clear-cut, as might be expected, given Turkey's traditional reservations against formalizing relations between the alliance and the EU. While most pundits are rather critical of a European role in security and defence, EDAM scholar Kürşat Kaya hopes that the EU will facilitate the participation of non-EU NATO partners in armament projects co-financed by the European Defence Fund (Kürşat Kaya 2019). IPC scholars Aydın-Düzgüt et al. (2020: 13) suggest that »the EU and NATO should invoke the Berlin Plus agreement to assist Turkey directly in responding to the Idlib crisis«.

Most researchers, even from liberal think tanks, emphasize NATO's character as an interest-based organization. EDAM's Kasapoğlu (2019a) and Ülgen (2019) point out Turkey's argument: NATO should support the security interests of all member states. Some voices, such as IPC's Keyman (2017) and Gürçan/Gisclon (2016) link respect for democratic values at home with Turkey's credibility abroad. Scholars across different camps agree that **collective defence remains**

¹⁸ See: <https://www.dailysabah.com/op-ed/2019/04/27/natos-image-in-the-eyes-of-turkey>.

¹⁹ See: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-europe-erdogan-idUSKBN13F0CY>.

²⁰ The current nuclear deployment pattern and Turkey's participation in NATO's nuclear sharing arrangement differs from the situation in other NATO countries and is another expression of Turkey's liminality. The B-61s in Incirlik are not earmarked for use by Turkish jets. Another batch of 40 nuclear weapons which had been stored at two other airbases and had been earmarked for deployment by Turkish F-16s were withdrawn long ago. And as Turkey has never approved the permanent deployment of US fighter jets in Incirlik, the installation at Incirlik has the character of a storage site and not a fighter-bomber base (Kristensen 2019).

²¹ See: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/14/world/middleeast/trump-turkey-syria.html>.

²² See: <https://www.setav.org/en/turkey-safer-today-than-it-was-yesterday>.

NATO's important task²³. They emphasize that Turkey is committed to Article 5 which is of particular importance for Turkey given its unstable neighbourhood.²⁴

Going beyond collective defence, Turkish scholars from all camps state necessity for acknowledging Turkey's interests and concerns regarding security issues. Especially, in the view of SETA scholars, the **fight against terrorism** should be one of NATO's priorities. Turkish NATO diplomats have been rather successful in inserting language on terrorism into NATO documents²⁵. However, given the vast differences in interests and threat perceptions among member states, scholars acknowledge that support from allies will remain limited and that in many cases Turkey, instead of seeking compromises with its allies, should go it alone. SETA scholars in particular emphasize the importance of national interests (Duran 2017; Köse 2020).

This perception of fundamentally different interests also motivates proposals for the restructuring of NATO's institutional form and cohesion. With varying degrees, scholars propose a future for NATO in which the alliance becomes more flexible and less restrictive. According to SETA's Inat (2019b) Turkey's role has changed from being a consumer of security during the Cold War to being a provider of security for its friends and allies in other countries. In the past, according to SETA's Yalçın, Turkey, by being a member of NATO, traded protection for autonomy (Yalçın 2019a). Today, Turkey aims to restore this autonomy by reducing its dependency on NATO and by making NATO more flexible (Yalçın 2019a). NATO needs to reform in ways that allow Turkey more freedom of manoeuvre and even the possibility to cooperate within the frameworks of several multilateral alliances (Yalçın 2018: 18).

Scholars from liberal think tanks are less uncompromising. Some even see a need for NATO's »internal cohesion and unity« and its »ability to take time sensitive, consensus-based decisions« (Coşkun 2021: 3). EDAM's Kasapoğlu notes that »if the member states were to project their national agendas onto broader NATO affairs, then an alliance of nation-states could easily find itself helplessly struggling with an avalanche of paralyzing troubles« (Kasapoğlu 2019a). However, he too recommends that if NATO wants to remain effective in the future, it should »grasp the uniqueness of each member's geopolitical imperatives, while bearing in mind that no ally's national security concerns are less crucial than those of the others« (Kasapoğlu 2019a).

Overall, although Turkey's liminal position within NATO has been reinforced by developments in Syria, President Erdoğan's authoritarian turn and Turkey's nationalistic foreign policy, the importance of NATO for Turkey and, vice versa, Turkey's importance for NATO are still generally accepted in Turkey and among the other NATO states. The challenge will therefore be to find a place for Turkey within NATO without undermining NATO's cohesion and normative profile.

²³ For example, EDAM's Ceylan defines collective defence as »the backbone of the Alliance« (Ceylan 2020a). He also points out Turkey's contribution to collective defence (Ceylan 2020b). Moreover, Kasapoğlu and Kırdemir (2019) suggest a collective initiative regarding cyber security. SETA's Duran (2019) criticizes Macron, because »he raised questions about the collective defense clause«.

²⁴ Çelikpala (2019: 18), for example, notes that when Turkish relations with Russia were strained in 2015, Ankara called for a NATO meeting to discuss Russian air strikes in Syria. In his view this suggests »that, when vital interests are concerned, Turkey prioritized its traditional alliance relations«.

²⁵ Interview with a member of NATO's International Secretariat.

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