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# Unblocking the Road to Zero

PERSPECTIVES OF ADVANCED NUCLEAR NATIONS



Turkey | Japan | Brazil

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Editor

# TURKEY'S PERSPECTIVES ON NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND DISARMAMENT

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In principle, Turkey would welcome the global elimination of nuclear weapons. For the current government, the possession of nuclear weapons by other states is a factor that, indirectly at least, reduces Turkey's regional (if not global) aspirations and power. However, in the medium term, it remains deeply ambivalent on the future of nuclear weapons and its own plans regarding nuclear energy and weapons development.

Turkey lacks a coherently articulated national policy vis-à-vis nuclear weapons. This is partly due to the fact that as a member of NATO it is a direct beneficiary of the US nuclear umbrella and because the United States maintains a number of nuclear weapons at the Incirlik Air Force base in southern Turkey.<sup>1</sup> The absence of such a policy is also the result of the unclear demarcation of lines of authority between civilian and military leaders on issues of national defense. While this may not have been a problem in the past, civil-military relations have been strained under the current ruling government, led by the Justice and Development Party (AKP). Until recently, when it came to setting national priorities, the military establishment's role could best be described as *primus inter pares*. The AKP's preoccupation with expanding Turkey's role in the region and its push to reform Turkish state structures, including the military's prerogatives, are radically challenging the military's control of the national security agenda.

## WHAT FACTORS MIGHT MOTIVATE TURKEY TO ACQUIRE NUCLEAR WEAPONS?

Any discussion of Turkey's approach to nuclear weapons—whether it is to support an initiative such as “Global Zero” or to acquire them—has to be studied in the context of the transformation it is undergoing: Turkey is not just a dynamic emerging market economy, but one that contains deep divisions among domestic political forces that are battling for the very essence of the country, its identity, and future direction. Aggravating the current divide between arch-secularists and a coalition of liberals and more religiously conservative groups is a deepening ethnic cleavage—Kurds against majority Turks. For some or all protagonists involved, the issues at hand are existential in nature and compromise is difficult to achieve.

Parallel to these is the fact that Turkey's immediate security environment has been, and continues to be, in a state of flux. The war in Iraq has had a direct impact on Turkey, in part due to Turkey's past policies with regards to its own Kurdish minority. Ankara feels threatened by the emergence of a federal (if not bi-national) Iraq that contains a robust Kurdish component. Most Turkish military thinking has been dominated by the threat posed by Kurdish developments and the domestic Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)-led insurgency

which, after 20 years, shows few signs of dying out. In fact, until a new foreign policy was formed by the AKP government, much of Turkey's foreign policy considerations were dominated by the Kurdish question and the need to combat the PKK.

Another important transformational development is Turkey's ongoing application to join the European Union (EU). The EU membership process has already forced Turkey to make significant changes to its domestic institutions, including on issues of the rule of law and minority rights. However, Ankara has a long road ahead to comply fully with EU requirements including, perhaps most importantly, far more sweeping changes to Turkey's organizational structure, including civil-military relations. The EU membership process, with close scrutiny of Ankara's behavior, is one of several factors acting as a constraint on potential Turkish nuclear ambitions.

### **Security Concerns**

As a NATO member and US ally, Turkey has enjoyed the protection extended by US nuclear guarantees—the so-called “nuclear umbrella.” Extended nuclear deterrence was primarily designed to protect Turkey from the Soviet Union, and with the collapse of the Soviet state, the nuclear issue lost its relevance. In fact, even before the end of the Soviet Union, the US had begun to progressively reduce its nuclear weaponry in Europe and to withdraw from installations that had housed these weapons. Turkey, along with four other European countries, maintain US nuclear weapons; some 90 tactical weapons are stored at the Incirlik Air Force base near the southern city of Adana pursuant to the 1999 NATO strategic concept that envisaged a “minimum level sufficient to preserve peace and stability.”<sup>2</sup>

How credible today are the US and NATO's nuclear guarantees to Ankara? After the demise of the Soviet Union, Turkey's security threat perceptions shifted away from the Cold War calculations of the threat posed by the Warsaw Pact to its immediate neighborhood and specifically the Middle East. Even Turkey's age-old conflict with Greece has eased as Athens made a strategic choice to support Turkey's EU application as a means to contain, if not eliminate, the perceived Turkish threat. Ironically, Ankara sees its primary threat to be an internal one with foreign linkages. The possibility of Kurdish secession, as difficult as this may be to imagine, is the primary threat that drives Turkey's security policies. This has become even more pronounced in the aftermath of the 2003 Iraq War, as Iraqi Kurds, who had already enjoyed a *de facto* quasi-independent status since the 1991 crisis with Iraq over Kuwait, gained official recognition within Iraq with the creation of a federal Iraqi state.

In recent years, some Turks have begun to question the effectiveness of the NATO/US security umbrella. In part, this is due to the reluctance and sluggishness with which some NATO members responded to Turkey's request for military deployments during the 1991 Iraq/Kuwait crisis. Then “some NATO allies questioned the need to deploy even token reinforcements to Turkey.”<sup>3</sup> Growing anti-Americanism in Turkey has also exacerbated the

general lack of confidence in Western (specifically American) security guarantees.\* Some leading Turkish military officials have even suggested that Turkey ought to rethink its alliance commitments.<sup>4</sup> Anti-Western sentiment is also reinforced by the constant drumbeat of reports that Europeans and Americans are not doing enough to combat the PKK.

In contemplating conventionally armed foes, the Turkish armed forces are quite competent. For example, the first post-Cold War demonstration of Turkish military prowess occurred in 1998 when the Turks threatened Syria with military intervention unless it stopped providing the PKK's leader, Abdullah Öcalan, with refuge in Damascus and Syrian-controlled parts of Lebanon. With most of its divisions facing south against Israel, Syria quickly capitulated and sent Öcalan on his way—a decision that ended with his capture and imprisonment by Turkish officials. With the capture of Öcalan and further political changes in both Turkey and Syria, relations between the two governments have improved significantly.<sup>5</sup>

However, in the absence of any nuclear weapons of its own, when it comes to contemplating threats from nuclear-armed nations, Turkey has little else to rely on other than NATO's guarantees. This might be relevant in considering the possibility of a revanchist Russia, or scenarios in which Iran and/or Syria acquire nuclear weapons. Hence, despite the discordant voices emanating from various groups, Turks continue to rely on the American security umbrella. Ankara has always stressed the importance of its NATO commitments. Moreover, as will be discussed below, there is no easy way for Turkey to obtain such weapons, even assuming it was willing to forsake its alliance and treaty pledges. It currently has no nuclear power plants and only the beginnings of a research/technical infrastructure. What has made the Turkish military a potent force has been its NATO links. The combination of NATO, a robust army, and a willingness to take security seriously has served effectively as Turkey's primary form of deterrence.

In considering the possibility of a nuclear-armed Iran, Turkey has often stressed that it has enjoyed a peaceful border with Iran dating back to the Qasr-i Shirin Treaty of 1639. Although Ankara routinely complained in the 1990s that Tehran was aiding and abetting the PKK's activities in Turkey, the two nations actively collaborated politically to contain the *de facto* Kurdish entity in northern Iraq that the Gulf War allies protected. In more recent years, moreover, Turkey and Iran claim to have made common cause against both the PKK and its Iranian affiliate, The Party of Free Life of Iranian Kurdistan (PJAK), occasionally even coordinating artillery strikes.<sup>†</sup> Unlike Israel and Saudi Arabia, no one in Turkey perceives

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\* A Pew poll in 2007 had found that with only 12 percent of the respondents in favor, Turkish support for America was the lowest among most countries. <http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=252>.

<sup>†</sup> Turkey's willingness to acknowledge such cooperation publicly is designed to send Washington a message that even the military is willing to deal with the much-disliked regime in Tehran when it comes to the Kurdish question. The Turkish military had been frustrated until the end of 2007 by American unwillingness to allow Turkish forces to target PKK encampments in northern Iraq. The PKK has been fighting the Turkish authorities since 1984; it reached its zenith in 1991. Based initially in Syria, the PKK also established rear bases in Iran and Iraq. While its effectiveness has been severely curtailed by years of Turkish counterinsurgency operations, it remains a potent force able to harass security forces. PJAK, the Iranian offshoot of the PKK, is far smaller and extremely dependent on the PKK. It has benefited from the absence of other Kurdish insurgent groups in Iran, but it too has faced a growing Iranian military counterinsurgency campaign. For a detailed analysis of the Turkish-Kurdish relations please see

Iran as representing an existential threat to Turkey. As Turkish columnist Cüneyt Ülsever argued, Turkey and Iran are two imperial powers with leadership ambitions in the Middle East, but if they have not fought much between them, it is because neither can decisively defeat the other.<sup>6</sup>

Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons, of course, could alter this deterrent balance and the Turkish secular establishment harbors serious reservations about Iran's intentions. The 1979 Iranian Islamic Revolution was an eye opener for many in Turkey who feared that their own Islamists would emulate this path. Indeed, Turkish authorities accused Iran of trying to foment domestic unrest by encouraging Turkish Islamic groups to even engage in violent activities. The advent of AKP and the election of its leader, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, as Turkey's Prime Minister, however, have dramatically changed the relationship. The current government in Ankara, as opposed to establishment Turks, has a more benign view of Tehran. It has gone out of its way to accommodate Iranian concerns and sought to increase trade and deepen bilateral relations. As a result, Turkish-Iranian relations are enjoying their best period since 1979.<sup>7</sup> AKP's self-confidence has also manifested itself in a desire to become an intermediary between the West and Tehran on all matters, but especially on the nuclear file.<sup>‡</sup>

That said, Turkey is opposed to a nuclear Iran. A nuclear Iran would be likely to upset the regional balance of power. Already, by removing one of Tehran's most bitter enemies, Saddam Hussein, and by bringing to power a Sh'ia regime in Baghdad, the war in Iraq has drastically improved Iran's geopolitical standing in the region. Because Iran is a revisionist power, some Turks fear that its acquisition of nuclear weapons would be likely to make it far more self-confident and, therefore, adventurous in its regional relations.<sup>§</sup>

There is, however, a division between the government and the security establishment regarding Iranian intentions. The government and most of the Turkish public do not perceive the Iranian nuclear program as a serious threat to Turkey. This, in large measure, is due to the fact that the US has taken the lead in admonishing Iran and trying to force it to comply with IAEA regulations and NPT agreements. Both the government and public are completely opposed to an American (or possibly Israeli) strike on Iranian nuclear installations.\*\* One other factor bearing on Turkish decision-making and policy formulation is the absence of independent Turkish capabilities to collect, analyze, and assess intelligence

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Henri J. Barkey, *Preventing Conflict over Kurdistan* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2009).

<sup>‡</sup> In seeking support for Turkish diplomatic overtures towards Iran, a high-ranking Turkish foreign policy official has often stressed in private communications to his American interlocutors that "no one knows Iran better than Turkey."

<sup>§</sup> Three Turkish parliamentarians told a Congressional staff delegation visiting Turkey that were Iran to go nuclear, Turkey would follow suit. How representative this sample might be, however, is debatable. See: *Chain Reaction: Avoiding a Nuclear Arms Race in the Middle East* (Washington, DC: Committee on the Foreign Relations of the United States, Senate, February 2008), page 41.

\*\* Interestingly, the Turkish government took a very low-key approach to the September 2007 Israeli raid on Syria's nuclear installation. In part because the Syrians decided to underplay the event themselves, and despite stories that Israeli jets had ditched their empty fuel tanks over Turkish territory, when asked about it Prime Minister Erdogan simply said, "we talked to both sides and they both denied that there was a violation of our airspace," *HaberX* (April 26, 2008).

on nuclear issues. As a result, Turkey is dependent on outside sources, namely the US, IAEA, and NATO for its information. This both helps and constrains US influence; to the degree that the US provides the information, Turks develop an aversion to the US agenda on the issue. Moreover, the United States' credibility problem following the WMD debacle in Iraq and the general lack of sympathy for the US in Turkey has made it difficult for the government, assuming it is alarmed by developments in Iran, to assume a vocal and pro-American stance in this issue.

The AKP and much of its leadership rose through the ranks of more hard-line Islamist movements. Even though Prime Minister Erdogan and company broke with the old guard, represented by Necmettin Erbakan, a former prime minister and father of the Islamist movement in Turkey, the current AKP leadership still perceives the world through a religiously tinted lens. Erbakan, during his short stint as prime minister, tried very hard to create a grouping of Islamic states, called the D-8, which was intended to rival the G-8 assemblage of economically advanced Western nations. Erbakan and his lieutenants extolled the virtues of an Islamic NATO and Islamic Union, complete with its own currency. Not surprisingly, Erbakan and his supporters, though much diminished in size and influence, fully support Iran's quest for nuclear power and weaponry. While this justification is couched in the form of Iran's need to deter the United States, underlying this wish is also their perception of a civilizational struggle between East and West.<sup>††</sup>

Current Turkish political leaders often respond to concerns expressed about Iran with a similar refrain: Iran has the right to access nuclear technology provided it is for peaceful purposes.<sup>‡‡</sup> Often, Turkish political leaders raise the issue of Israeli nuclear weapons; in 2006 then foreign and deputy prime minister, Abdullah Gül, in his party's annual meeting, argued that if Iranian nuclear weapons are dangerous, then so are the Israeli ones.<sup>8</sup> When asked about the Iranian nuclear effort, Prime Minister Erdogan, on a visit to Washington in late 2008, responded by being as critical of the United States as he was of Iran. He said that "those who counsel Iran not to acquire nuclear weapons, should themselves not have these weapons in the first place."<sup>9</sup>

On the other hand, Turkey wants a quiet and stable neighborhood in order to accomplish its developmental goals— after decades of economic ups and downs it has finally managed to put together a consistent record of economic growth—and EU accession. Turkey has tried hard to become an energy (especially gas) conduit between the energy-rich producers of Azerbaijan, Iran, Turkmenistan, and Russia, on the one hand, and an energy-hungry Europe, on the other. Its own domestic needs are being supplied in part by Iran.

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<sup>††</sup> The mouthpiece of the current party established by Erbakan, the Felicity party, is the daily *Milli Gazete*, which published a long analytical article supporting the Iranian quest for nuclear capabilities on November 24, 2005.

<sup>‡‡</sup> Occasionally, there are expressions to the contrary, as was the case with the AKP chairman of the parliamentary foreign policy committee, Murat Mercan, who on a trip to Israel suggested that Iran was first and foremost a threat to Turkey, *Haaretz* (December 12, 2008). Two days later, the Iranian News Agency, IRNA, posted a correction by Mercan on its Turkish website, <http://www1.irna.ir/tr/news/view/line-6/0812128992144327.htm>.

An Iranian nuclear weapons program might stand in the way of both Turkish economic development and EU accession if the Middle East were plunged into a serious arms competition. This is why the Turks have stated their support for the UN process and in August 2005 allowed Britain, speaking on behalf of the EU, to issue a statement for Turkey, as one of the prospective member countries, at the IAEA board of governors meeting supporting the EU diplomatic initiative to contain the Iranian uranium enrichment process, known as the E-3. Iran was quite displeased by Turkey's action.<sup>10</sup>

The security establishment, by contrast, has a more jaundiced view of Iran. In 2005, as he was about to leave his post as Turkish Ambassador to Washington, Faruk Logoglu, a former Ministry of Foreign Affairs undersecretary, pointedly argued that Iran is inexorably moving towards the acquisition of nuclear weapons and that the European efforts at containing this development would fail.<sup>11</sup> Turkish military officials have also been blunt about their concerns regarding the Iranian nuclear program. The Turkish General Staff perceives Iran as an ideological enemy; a theocratic state bent on undermining the secular basis of Turkey and of the region. In a speech in Washington, given while he was deputy chief of staff, the current chief of the armed forces, General Ilker Basbug, argued that Turkey, just as the United States, was following Iran's nuclear activities with apprehension.<sup>12</sup> In his departure speech, a former chief of staff, General Hilmi Özkök, without mentioning Iran by name, warned that "unless the crisis over nuclear weapons is not resolved diplomatically, [Turkey] would soon be faced with important strategic choices. Otherwise, we would be faced with the possibility of losing our strategic superiority in the region."<sup>13</sup> This sentiment is echoed by voices associated with the nationalist camp in Turkey who fret about Iran's increased influence, not only in the Middle East but also in Central Asia and the Caucasus, and especially in Azerbaijan.<sup>14</sup>

Like the politicians, though, the security establishment opposes any military action to forcibly eliminate Iran's nuclear weapons. Of most concern to them is the possibility of a repeat of the after-effects of the Iraq War, which completely undermined the status quo in the region and gave further momentum to the Kurdish issue. Similarly, a US strike against Iranian installations is likely to upset domestic balances in Iran and unleash a series of unpredictable consequences that would likely further undermine regional stability. Hence, the Turkish military is caught between its desire to see a diplomatic initiative succeed and the very real prospect that such an endeavor will fail and Iran will ultimately achieve nuclear weapons status.

This may also explain why Turkey has not experienced the public debates on the removal of nuclear weapons from its territory. Of the four other non-nuclear European states—Italy, Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands—that continue to store US nuclear weapons, only Belgium and Germany have had extensive parliamentary debates on the pros and cons of maintaining them.<sup>15</sup>

The advent of an Iranian nuclear device would not automatically change Turkey's approach to nuclear weapons. However, it would certainly unleash a brand new debate in the country

because, to date, the discussion in Turkey has remained conjectural and, with few real specialists on the subject, has had a somewhat unreal quality to it. Two factors will determine the future course of action: first, regional development pursuant to Iran's nuclearization and, second, which of Turkey's domestic political parties is in power at the time.

Turkey's reaction would not be solely contingent on Iran's behavior. After all, Turkey benefits—and presumably will continue to do so for some time in the future—from the nuclear umbrella offered by the United States. However, there are indications that an Iranian bomb would lead to a regional nuclear arms race, which could trigger a Turkish nuclear program.

The Saudis, who feel the most threatened by Iran's nuclear, conventional, and revolutionary ambitions, are likely to try to follow Iran if it develops nuclear weapons. Saudi Arabia has already intimated that it would seek its own warheads in the event Iran goes nuclear.<sup>16</sup> Turkey could also be encouraged by the Saudis to seek its own path to nuclear weaponry. Even though Turkey has recently sided with the more radical elements in the region over Gaza, the Turks would also be worried about the burgeoning 'Shia Crescent,' stretching from the Palestinian territories to Pakistan. Turkey considers such a division dangerous for the security and stability of the region as a whole, and aims to bridge the gap between Sunni Arab states and Iran.<sup>17</sup>

Moreover, an Iranian bomb may compel Israel to come out of its nuclear closet to deter Iran. In turn, as Robert Einhorn has argued, such a development would undermine the unspoken arrangement that has ruled the Egyptian-Israeli relationship to date. Despite its boisterous denunciations of the Israeli nuclear program, Egypt has put its nuclear ambitions on a backburner as long as Israel maintains its ambiguous stand about its program. If Israel were to go public with its arsenal in response to an Iranian bomb, it would risk reigniting Egypt's nuclear effort.<sup>18</sup> An Iranian nuclear weapon would certainly set back the cause of creating a Nuclear Weapon Free Zone in the Middle East for decades and might even trigger a rush to emulate Tehran. Even in the event of a Palestinian-Israeli peace agreement, Iran's quest would represent a sufficient shock to the system to engender such a reaction.

The likelihood that Turkey would seek its own path to a nuclear capability, however long this might take, would increase in the event of such a regional nuclear arms race. Domestic political pressure and the region's anarchic character would be sufficient to propel any Turkish government to begin its own program. In the meantime, the presence of US weapons on its soil would serve as a security bridge.

On the other hand, were the United States to remove its nuclear weapons from Europe altogether, Turkish calculations would be altered drastically. Their presence, as David Yost points out, has helped Europe, especially Turkey, to connect to NATO strategy and contribute to collective decision-making.<sup>19</sup> Their removal therefore could severely shake confidence in the concept of extended deterrence. In the eyes of experts and European

security officials, weapons based in Europe are considered far more important to maintaining a deterrent posture than weapons on US soil or at sea.<sup>20</sup>

The second factor that could encourage Turkey to develop a nuclear capability would be its domestic politics. The AKP has tried hard to position itself as a regional leader; it takes pride in its ability to intervene in regional conflicts and offer its services as a state imbued with soft power to help resolve them. It has even offered its services to the United States and Iran. AKP's bid for regional influence has struck a chord with the Turkish public. Prime Minister Erdogan has been its primary beneficiary and has carefully tailored these diplomatic initiatives to a rise in Turkish nationalism. He and his current government have done much to stoke and ride the nationalist wave. This was most evident in the dramatic theater he engineered over Israel's Gaza incursion.

A nuclear arms race in the region in which Turkey remained on the sidelines, lost influence, and relied on American security guarantees raises the prospect of a strong nationalist backlash. If this were coupled with disillusionment over the prospects for membership in the European Union, the government might be unable to withstand a groundswell for nuclearization. Fundamentally, predicting how Turkey would react to a future Iranian nuclear weapon depends in part in the direction Turkey takes in the near future: Will it endure the difficult transition to a modern European-like state while getting ever so close to membership in the EU, or will it be tempted by opportunities to make a bid for regional leadership? As an EU member it would have much less reason to worry about the changing regional balance of power—and the powerful constraints on its ability to break current commitments in the NPT and other agreements to remain non-nuclear.

Were Iran to cross the nuclear threshold one day, what would Turkey do? On the assumption that it cannot stand still and do nothing, it has three choices:

1. Multilateral defense option: It could strengthen its ties with the US. Turkey is already part of the NATO alliance and therefore Ankara benefits from the US nuclear umbrella and already has nuclear weapons on its soil.<sup>21</sup> In order to improve its deterrent capacities, it might seek to reinforce these ties, seeking extra diplomatic and political assurances and asking for more advanced weaponry from the US, including state-of-the-art anti-missile technology and advanced aircraft. It might also appeal to the EU to strengthen its defense-related institutions and even speed up the accession negotiations. In other words, under this option, Turkey would seek to bolster its existing defense agreements and might even push the US to declare publicly and officially the presence of nuclear weapons on Turkish soil.
2. Go nuclear option: This could not be achieved quickly. As will be described below, Turkey does not have the technical wherewithal to produce nuclear weapons anytime soon. It can decide to make the necessary investments, but it would take time and resources to reach fruition. Moreover, Turkey does not have the possibility of pursuing this option clandestinely because of the close relationships it

has developed with the United States and Europe over the years, making the country fairly transparent. An open nuclear endeavor would risk alienating the Europeans and Americans, but a covert program would do so even more. During the Reagan Administration, the United States was very concerned about the existence of a nuclear supply relationship between Pakistan and Turkey. President Reagan and his aides warned the Turks in a number of different settings about this relationship until means for greater cooperation between the two countries were instituted.<sup>22</sup> Ankara is intent on being far more cautious on this front; in June 2008, Turkish officials met a visiting Syrian energy minister's suggestion for nuclear cooperation between Turkey and Syria with silence.<sup>23</sup>

3. Regional diplomatic attack option: The Turkish ruling party has a great deal of confidence in its own standing in the region. Hence, it may choose to pursue an active diplomatic route designed to isolate Iran. This could be done in concert with the first option. The desired goal of isolating Iran would be to help trigger a change in regime or orientation that would reverse the nuclear decision.

None of these choices are particularly appealing or realistic, which suggest that the best outcome for Turkey would be for the current multilateral effort under UN auspices aimed at convincing Iran not to proceed with nuclearization to succeed.

## **Regional and Global Ambitions**

Turkey has been experiencing a wave of nationalism and prickliness. The public has become more xenophobic. The call for Turkey to be an unrivalled power in the region and beyond is often heard. An Iranian bomb is likely to galvanize and mobilize those who would like to see Turkey go nuclear.

The AKP government came to power arguing that Turkey punched far below its weight in international affairs. Previous governments (with the notable exception of Prime Minister, and later President, Turgut Özal) had avoided engagement with its immediate region assiduously. The AKP, by contrast, trading on its more pious roots and opposition to Turkey's secular establishment, decided to engage the region. While it took care to maintain good relations with Israel, a fact that provided it with clout both in the immediate region and in Europe and America, the AKP government also signaled that its foreign policy approach would be more encompassing and that it expected to have a seat at the table. Among its goals was greater representation in international institutions, including the UN Security Council, where for the first time since the early 1960s, it gained the chance to occupy one of the non-permanent seats for the two-year term.

Under Prime Minister Erdogan, Turkey has had several recent diplomatic ventures. The prime minister invited himself into the Russian-Georgian crisis without any consultations with the NATO allies or the EU. Following the 2006 Lebanon war, he also convinced Turkey's military to send troops to Lebanon as part of a UN monitoring mission. Finally, Turkey became an important intermediary between Israel and Syria at a time when the Bush

Administration seemed to have created a vacuum through its refusal to forcefully engage in the region. Underlying the AKP approach is a conceptualization of Turkey's role as gateway between East and West. Ahmet Davutoglu, the eminence grise behind this approach, who until his recent elevation to Minister of Foreign Affairs served as an advisor to both the prime minister and the president, formulated a vision for Turkey that has its two legs anchored in Europe and America, while reaching over to Asia and beyond as a means of balancing its traditional alliances. In his vision, Turkey deserves to be, and ought to be, a global player.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, Davutoglu has also pushed for a policy of "zero problems" with neighbors that commits Turkey to maintaining good relations at the highest levels with neighboring states. In fact, Turkey was one of the few countries to immediately congratulate Iranian President Ahmedinejad following his disputed 2009 reelection "victory." This may prove to be a problematic relationship for Turkey if the Iranian leadership, anxious to buttress its domestic base after these tainted elections, were to decide to harden its position on the nuclear question triggering an even deeper crisis with the international community. Ironically, it is Prime Minister Erdogan's criticisms of Israel, especially following the January 2009 Gaza operation, which elicited the greatest acclaim in the Arab street. While he and Turkey have achieved greater visibility as a result, it is not altogether clear that Turkey has limitless possibilities and that it does not make mistakes that can be costly over time.

Moreover, there are limits to Turkish influence deriving from its own domestic inconsistencies and clashing ideas regarding its identity and place in the world. These will undoubtedly be accentuated both physically and psychologically by Iran becoming a nuclear power. Iran's achievement on the nuclear front, it must be remembered, comes with a whole panoply of other military-industrial accoutrements. For the Iranian nuclear deterrent or threat to be effective, the weapon has to be accompanied by a delivery infrastructure. When it comes to long-range missiles, the Iranians, with North Korean support and advice from Russian engineers, have already built an impressive array of potential delivery means. This was demonstrated recently by Iran's successful launch of a satellite into space. Turkey is far from achieving such capabilities.

All of these developments have catapulted Iran into the forefront of a regional balance of power game. Iran's progress on these fronts has made up for its relative weakness in the conventional weapons arena. By contrast, the Turks have no indigenous capability to manufacture missiles, much less launch satellites. For both of these, Ankara relies on the United States or the European Ariane program.

One of the consequences of the Iranian nuclear program has been an increased interest in nuclear power. Although Turkey has no nuclear power plants, global concerns over climate change and the growing realization of Turkey's dependence on imported hydrocarbons to satisfy its growing energy demands has spurred the government to seek tenders to build the first nuclear power plants. As Ilter Türkmen, a former foreign minister, pointed out, Turkey has fallen behind in nuclear knowledge and technical expertise. This, he argued, "was incompatible with Turkey's geopolitical standing and economic potential. If neighbors were

intent on developing nuclear weapon technology, it behooved Turkey, at the very least, to acquire peaceful forms of nuclear technology.<sup>25</sup> In March 2007, the government passed legislation approving the construction and operation of nuclear power plants. Strong opposition to such plants exists, however, which makes it difficult politically for the government to go forward without paying a high political price.

## TURKEY'S NUCLEAR INFRASTRUCTURE

Turkey is a signatory to the NPT and signed on to the Additional Protocol in 2006. Turkey has one research and two small experimental nuclear facilities. The main such installation is on the outskirts of Istanbul at Küçük Çekmece. Built in 1962 and upgraded subsequently to a 5 megawatt research reactor, it provides isotopes and other services to the medical industry. The other two experimental facilities are situated near Ankara are straightforward research laboratories.<sup>26</sup>

However, Turkey has no nuclear power plants, despite studies that were started as early as 1965 to explore building one such plant.<sup>27</sup> Turkey has in the past expressed interest in developing a nuclear industry, but despite discussions with a variety of countries to forge a way to collaborate, it has never managed to translate these efforts into concrete action. Nuclear energy is an attractive source for Turkey given that it has to import almost all of its energy needs from abroad. It has a tiny amount of oil and can rely on hydropower for some of its needs. However, both the discussion of climate change and the potential unreliability of its energy partners, including Iraq, Russia, Azerbaijan and Iran, have spurred Turkey to take a new look at nuclear power. In 2006, the Turkish Prime Minister announced that Turkey would soon start building three nuclear plants that would become fully operational by 2015. However, these hopes are unlikely to materialize because of domestic opposition; the costs are high and there seems to be a lack of interest on the part of would-be investors. In September 2008, the government received only one bid for its Akkuyu tender on the Mediterranean coast. The one bid, from a Russian company undermined the very notion of reducing Ankara's energy dependence on Russia from which it purchases most of its gas.<sup>28</sup> The government subsequently decided to postpone its decision to whether to cancel the tender until after the March 2009 local elections. The AKP is nonetheless determined to go ahead with nuclear energy because, as Prime Minister Erdogan has argued, this is vital for Turkey's industrial competitiveness.<sup>29</sup> The government took a modest step in that direction in August 2009. As part of a broader set of agreements on energy projects, Turkey and Russia agreed to reopen talks on civilian nuclear cooperation.

The nuclear cooperation agreement Turkey signed with the United States on June 2, 2008 is designed to enhance the exchange of information, technology, research, and nuclear power production and could give a boost to Ankara's nascent efforts.<sup>30</sup> President George W. Bush, when sending the bill to Congress, commented that the agreement would "serve as a strong incentive for Turkey to continue its support for nonproliferation objectives and enact future sound nonproliferation policies and practices. It will also promote closer political and economic ties with a NATO ally, and provide the necessary legal framework for US industry

to make nuclear exports to Turkey's planned civil nuclear sector.”<sup>31</sup> President Bill Clinton had initiated this deal; however, its consideration had been delayed by proliferation concerns. Its reemergence may be due to American concerns that Turkey, pressured by growing domestic energy demand, will increasingly be tempted to seek Iranian gas sources.

## **TURKISH ATTITUDES TOWARD NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT**

There is not enough public information to evaluate Turkey's likely stance if there were a serious effort by the United States and other nuclear weapon states to eliminate all nuclear weapons on a global basis. However, what can be surmised from the discussion above is that Turkey would welcome such an initiative precisely because, in the absence of nuclear-armed countries, its industrial and conventional military prowess would help increase its influence in its immediate region and beyond. The Turkish political leadership—as distinct from its military leadership—is far more at ease with what it perceives to be Turkey's “soft power.” Much of Turkey's opening to the region and its attempt at mediating international disputes comes from its conviction that it can tap its “soft power” reservoir. Provided that all countries embark on such an initiative, Turkey can rightfully calculate that it stands to benefit, especially if Iran and Israel are de-nuclearized.

One of Turkey's foremost researchers on the nuclear question has even suggested that the time had come for Turkey to rethink the presence of American nuclear weapons on Turkish soil. Mustafa Kibaroglu argues that the benefits derived from these weapons (deterrence and, more importantly, the traditional argument that they represent an investment in good relations with the United States) would be exceeded by the benefits of their removal. The weapons not only represent a hazard, he maintains, and represent a roadblock to a greater, region-wide nuclear free zone initiative, but more importantly permit the Iranian regime to use the nuclear weapons stored at the Incirlik base as a justification for their own program.<sup>32</sup>

Furthermore, in the absence of a genuine disarmament agreement, should Iran develop nuclear weapons and Turkey decided that it had to follow suit, it would face significant obstacles in the pursuit of nuclear capabilities. It not only would jeopardize relations with the United States, but it would also have a negative impact on its NATO links. Moreover, such a decision would almost certainly deal a fatal blow to Turkey's aspirations to join the European Union. Olivier Roy argued that were Iran to go nuclear, Turkey would face a hard choice: It can either rely on the EU and NATO nuclear umbrella or go for its own nuclear weapons. However, were it not to trust the Europeans, then it would also forsake its place within Europe.<sup>33</sup>

Finally, there is the question of domestic opposition. Turkish civil society groups have expanded dramatically in recent years. Many of them work in the environmental arena. Opposition to nuclear power plants has already led to the cancellation of one proposed project. The fact that Turkey spans an earthquake prone zone adds further momentum to these groups' efforts and there is no question that they have been influential in this regard. A PIPA poll conducted in December 2008 found that in Turkey, 55 percent of the population

was strongly in favor of eliminating nuclear weapons and another 10 percent somewhat in favor of this proposition. Comparable figures for Egypt are 39 and 43 percent; Iran has 50 and 18 percent; and a world-wide average of 50 and 26 percent respectively. While these figures for Turkey are above the mean, interestingly, the percentage of the Turkish population who are in strongly opposed to a treaty abolishing nuclear weapons (5 percent) are among the lowest in the world.<sup>34</sup>

The growing momentum around the world towards eliminating nuclear weapons is overshadowed in Turkey by the perception of declining American influence in Turkey's immediate region. As a result, it is not evident what consequences there will be if additional countries are willing to make their own deals on nuclear power and weapons, as suggested by James Russell.<sup>35</sup> It could prove to be an impetus for nuclearization. Turkey might also interpret the waning of American power as a reason to pursue a nuclear option, particularly in the face of an Iranian bomb and additional proliferation in the Middle East. For now, however, Turkey's commitments to the EU and NATO and the long and costly gestation period necessary to develop nuclear technologies and related weapons, are likely to incline Turkey to favor a disarmament agreement. How long that sentiment will last remains to be seen.

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Hans M. Kristensen, *US Nuclear Weapons in Europe* (Washington, D.C. Natural Resources Defense Council, February 2005).
- <sup>2</sup> Of these 90 weapons, 50 are to be delivered by the American and 40 by the Turkish air forces, Kristensen, *US Nuclear Weapons in Europe*, page 9.
- <sup>3</sup> F. Stephen Larrabee and Ian O. Lesser, *Turkish Foreign Policy in an Age of Uncertainty* (Santa Monica, CA.: RAND, 2003), page 150.
- <sup>4</sup> Mustafa Kibaroglu and Baris Çağlar, "Implications of a Nuclear Iran for Turkey," *Middle East Policy*, XV: 4 (Winter 2008), pages 68-69.
- <sup>5</sup> Melek Fırat and Ömer Kürkçüoğlu, "Orta Dogu'yla İlişkiler" in Baskın Oran (ed.) *Türk Dis Politikası: Kurtulus Savasından Bugüne Olgular, Belgeler, Yorumlar* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2002), Volume II, pages 565-567.
- <sup>6</sup> Cüneyt Ülsever, "Ahmedinejad ne Yapmak İstiyor?" *Hürriyet* (February 8, 2006).
- <sup>7</sup> Gökhan Çetinsaya "Nükleer Kriz Eşiğinde İran ve Türkiye," *Cumhuriyet Strateji* (June 5, 2006).
- <sup>8</sup> *Hürriyet* (March 13, 2006).
- <sup>9</sup> *Radikal* (November 15, 2008).
- <sup>10</sup> For the UK statement, please see <http://www.iaea.org/About/Policy/GC/GC49/Statements/UKforEU.pdf>.
- <sup>11</sup> "Logoglu: İran Nükleer Silah Yolunda," *NTV* television channel, Istanbul (December 20, 2005).
- <sup>12</sup> Fikret Bila, "Org. Basbug'un ABD'ye verdigi mesajlar," *Milliyet* (June 8, 2008). The full text of his comments can be found at [http://www.tsk.mil.tr/10\\_ARSIV/10\\_1\\_Basin\\_Yayin\\_Faaliyetleri/10\\_1\\_7\\_Konusmalar/2005/gnkurIncibs\\_k\\_atckonusmasi\\_060605.html](http://www.tsk.mil.tr/10_ARSIV/10_1_Basin_Yayin_Faaliyetleri/10_1_7_Konusmalar/2005/gnkurIncibs_k_atckonusmasi_060605.html).
- <sup>13</sup> Author's translation. "Genelkurmay Başkanı Hilmi Özkök'ün Devir-Teslim Töreni Konuşması," (August 28, 2006), [http://www.tsk.mil.tr/10\\_ARSIV/10\\_1\\_Basin\\_Yayin\\_Faaliyetleri/10\\_1\\_7\\_Konusmalar/2006/orghilmiozko\\_kdvrtslkonusmasi\\_28082006.html](http://www.tsk.mil.tr/10_ARSIV/10_1_Basin_Yayin_Faaliyetleri/10_1_7_Konusmalar/2006/orghilmiozko_kdvrtslkonusmasi_28082006.html).
- <sup>14</sup> Ümit Özdamak, "İran Nükleer Silah Sahibi Olmalı mı?" *Aksam* (March 7, 2005).
- <sup>15</sup> Lale Sariibrahimoglu, "İncirlik'teki Nükleer Silahlar Yine Gündemde," *Taraf* (May 6, 2009).
- <sup>16</sup> Thomas W. Lippman, "Saudi Arabia: The Calculations of Uncertainty," in Kurt Campbell, Robert J. Einhorn and Mitchell B. Reis (eds.), *The Nuclear Tipping Point: Why States Reconsider their Nuclear Choices* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 2004), page 129.
- <sup>17</sup> Hakkı Uygur, "İran's Nuclear Ambitions and Turkey," *SETA Policy Brief* (February 2008, No. 7), page 5.
- <sup>18</sup> Robert J. Einhorn, "Egypt: Frustrated but still on a Non-Nuclear Course," in Campbell, Einhorn and Reiss, *op. cit.* pages 73-74.
- <sup>19</sup> David S. Yost, "Assurance and US Extended Deterrence," *International Affairs* 85:4 (2009), page 770.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, page 764.

- <sup>21</sup> Sariibrahimoglu, *op.cit.*
- <sup>22</sup> Leon Fuerth, “Turkey: Nuclear Choices amongst Dangerous Neighbors,” in Campbell, Einhorn and Reiss, *op. cit.*, pages 160-162.
- <sup>23</sup> Gareth Jenkins, “Syria Proposes Nuclear Cooperation with Turkey,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor* (Jamestown Foundation), June 16, 2008.
- <sup>24</sup> Ahmet Davutoglu has put forward what has become AKP’s vision foreign policy vision in *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye’nin Uluslararası Konumu* (Istanbul: Küre Yayinlari, 2001). See also Philip H. Gordon and Omer Taspinar, *Winning Turkey* (Washington, DC: Brookings, 2008).
- <sup>25</sup> Ilter Türkmen, “Nükleer Santrallar Meselesi,” *Hürriyet* (July 31, 2004).
- <sup>26</sup> Mustafa Kibaroglu, “Turkey’s Quest for Peaceful Nuclear Power,” *Nonproliferation Review* (Spring-Summer 1997), pages 33-44.
- <sup>27</sup> Erkan Erdogan, “Nuclear Power in Open Energy markets: A Case Study of Turkey,” *Energy Policy* 37 (2007), page 3069.
- <sup>28</sup> Gareth Jenkins, “More Speed, Less Haste Results in Turkish Nuclear Tender Fiasco,” *Eurasian Daily Monitor* (Jamestown Foundation), September 28, 2008.
- <sup>29</sup> *Milliyet*, (May 21, 2006).
- <sup>30</sup> *Zaman*, (June 4, 2006).
- <sup>31</sup> “Bush pushes US-Turkey nuclear cooperation,” *Reuters*, January 23, 2008.
- <sup>32</sup> Mustafa Kibaroglu, “Isn’t it Time to Say farewell to Nukes in Turkey?” *European Security* 14:4 (December 2005), pages 450-53.
- <sup>33</sup> *HaberX*, (September 3, 2006).
- <sup>34</sup> World Public Opinion Poll Organization, “Publics around the World Favor International Agreement To Eliminate All Nuclear Weapons,” [http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/international\\_security\\_bt/577.php?nid=&id=&pnt=577&lb=btis](http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/international_security_bt/577.php?nid=&id=&pnt=577&lb=btis).
- <sup>35</sup> James A. Russell, “A Tipping Point Realized? Nuclear Proliferation in the Persian Gulf and the Middle East,” *Contemporary Security Policy* 29:3 (December 2008), pages 521-537.

In addition to the nuclear weapon states, two other categories of nations must be persuaded that the elimination of nuclear weapons from all countries is a good idea. First, countries with advanced civilian nuclear technologies that have foresworn acquiring nuclear weapons, like Japan and Brazil, would doubtlessly be pleased if the nuclear-armed nations fulfilled their commitment in the Non-proliferation Treaty and eliminated their weapons. Ensuring the permanent abolition of nuclear weapons, however, requires placing tighter controls on civilian nuclear facilities to avoid the surreptitious diversions of nuclear materials into weapon programs. Given their stake in these arrangements, the advanced civilian nuclear nations will have to be in the forefront of negotiating and implementing such controls. Second, countries depending on the nuclear guarantees of the United States as part of their security policies like Japan and Turkey will also need persuasion that global nuclear disarmament will strengthen, rather than weaken, their security posture. Both of these issues are addressed in the three papers in this volume – Brazil, Japan, and Turkey. All three authors make clear that overcoming these obstacles should not be difficult if the concerns of these nations are addressed in a forthright and pre-emptive manner.



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