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Clement, Victoria; Gingeras, Ryan

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# U.S.-Turkey Strategic Dialogue



Victoria Clement and Ryan Gingeras  
Naval Postgraduate School

November 2012

# **U.S. Turkey Strategic Dialogue**

Victoria Clement, Ph.D.  
*Naval Postgraduate School*

and

Ryan Gingeras, Ph.D.  
*Naval Postgraduate School*

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For further information, please contact:

**The Center on Contemporary Conflict**

Naval Postgraduate School  
1411 Cunningham Road  
Monterey, CA 93943

[ccc@nps.edu](mailto:ccc@nps.edu)

or

[OSRDInfo@dtra.mil](mailto:OSRDInfo@dtra.mil)

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) hosted a Track II dialogue on weapons of mass destruction and regional security in Istanbul from October 31 to November 2, 2012. This event was supported and executed by the Project on Advanced Systems and Concepts for Countering WMD (PASCC) of the Center on Contemporary Conflict. PASCC is sponsored by the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA).

The participants included four main presenters from both Turkey and U.S. who specialize in security, global proliferation, disarmament, and weapons of mass destruction policy. Also present were observers from the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, DTRA, the U.S. Department of State, United States Institute of Peace, the U.S. Embassy in Ankara and the U.S. Consulate in Istanbul.

The dialogue was structured like an academic seminar with multiple sessions during which each panelist had the opportunity to deliver 20 minutes of prepared remarks. Each session provided a period for open discussion among all the participants. At the end of the three-day event, there was a "Ways Forward" session involving all participants in a frank review of all topics that had been addressed as well as consideration of points for further discussion.

The overall tenor of the dialogue was forthright and free-flowing. U.S. and Turkish participants, including observers, stressed how much they had learned from the exchange. Participants noted that there are only a handful of experts in Turkey who specialize in nuclear security. Track II dialogues, such as this, are an ideal venue to bring nuclear experts together with members of Turkey's nascent civil society, government and other local sectors.

The following sections describe major themes of discussion at the dialogue.

## **AMERICAN AND TURKISH PERSPECTIVES ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION**

During an overview of challenges and opportunities in regional security, U.S. participants determined several key objectives in the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean that

are crucial to U.S. well-being and the protection of U.S. allies. These included: promoting security among American allies (Israel, Turkey, Gulf States, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Egypt); assuring the free flow of resources, especially oil and natural gas, and access to those resources; preventing Middle Eastern states from acquiring nuclear weapons; promoting human rights; aiding in the development of stable democracies; and, persuading groups to eschew violent extremism and confront the causes of terrorism.

Turkey's principal foreign policy and security challenges, as one Turkish participant noted, are numerous. In addition to long-standing internal security concerns related to the country's restive Kurdish population, Ankara continues to struggle to address the implications of the violence in Syria and the uncertainties left by the Arab Spring. American participants added that there were additional issues that concerned Turkish policymakers, such as access to sources of energy and maintaining good relations with Iran, Iraq, and the Kurdish Regional Government. In considering Turkey's rise as a regional power, Turkish participants also noted regional suspicions towards Ankara's new hegemonic status (often referred to as Turkey's "neo-Ottoman" foreign policy).

In considering these challenges, one Turkish participant suggested that greater regional economic integration with the Arab world may lead to greater stability and peace. In the last ten years, Turkey has emerged as a hub for trade in the greater Middle East, a status that has already led to greater economic and political interdependence in the region. Considering the positive impact cooperation within the European Union has had upon resolving conflict among its members, Turkish participants advocate the need to broaden regional Middle Eastern security diplomatic approaches to include economic integration as a means to promote Turkish and collective security. Participants admitted that an economically central and politically vibrant Turkey may not be able to coordinate solutions to all problems facing the region. However, improved economic integration, as means of securing peace and stability in the greater Middle East, in the estimate of Turkish participants, remains a "long-term project" that requires close collaboration with the United States and the European Union.

American participants acknowledged that Turkey was increasingly important to resolving several important regional security challenges, and that Turkey's role would grow stronger in the years ahead. The United States and Turkey do not need to agree on everything; allies do not always agree (as seen in Franco-American relations). During the dialogue for example, Turkish and American panelists differed in their interpretation of the Montreux Convention and the rise of American military interests in the Black Sea. Considering the durability of Turkish-American relations since World War II, both Turkish and American panelists agreed that Ankara and Washington are capable of meeting future challenges in cooperative and constructive ways.

## **TURKEY, THE UNITED STATES, AND EXTENDED DETERRENCE**

The dialogue set out to examine, among other things, the respective U.S. and Turkish understandings of extended deterrence and how this may have changed in the post-Cold War environment. Overall the dialogue's participants recognized that, while there is a great deal of confluence between U.S. and Turkish perceptions of the emerging security challenges in the region, Turkey is currently satisfied with the status of nuclear burden-sharing within the NATO context. There are a number of variables that could change the situation: a change in Turkish leadership, an American lapse into isolationism, a collapse of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), a change in threat perception, or possibly some combination of these variables.

Panelists felt that the United States and Turkey had a strong relationship in part due to their work with NATO. Evidence demonstrating Turkey's full support for bilateral and NATO commitments include the NATO missile defense arrangements and the continued deployment of U.S. non-strategic nuclear weapons at Incirlik Air Base in Turkey. Yet with NATO's failure to respond to Turkish requests for military help in 1991 and 2003, there remain lingering doubts about whether the United States would be willing to assist Turkey if called upon under Article V. From the perspective of some Turkish panelists, "the credibility" of NATO and the U.S. support of Turkey's security interests is further complicated by problems such as terrorism (Turkey's long-standing fight with the PKK);



Turkey's new oil deal with Kurdistan; Cyprus; questions over Iran's efforts to gain nuclear capabilities; and stability in the Middle East.

Given the possibility that some NATO members (Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands) might decide to unilaterally ask for the removal of nuclear weapons from their territories, participants questioned how Ankara would react if Turkey became the only NATO member to host nuclear weapons. There was disagreement among participants over NATO's future as a nuclear alliance and its perpetuation on the merits of its nuclear capabilities. Turkish participants believed their country would not remain the only NATO member to retain nuclear weapons because it would create the image of Turkey as an American puppet. One participant suggested returning the nuclear weapons before they are rescinded; this would allow Turkey to maintain Ankara's highly regarded regional nuclear non-proliferation leadership position.

Some participants argued that nuclear weapons are an essential part of NATO's defense and deterrence posture and that this debate is officially closed for the next ten years; however, there was not universal agreement on this point. Nevertheless, burden sharing is essential to the effectiveness of the alliance's nuclear policy and Turkey fully understands this role. Despite the many future temptations that may make Turkey consider developing its own nuclear program, there will be no desire for Turkey to have its own nuclear capacity as long as burden sharing and the nuclear regime remain strong.

Several participants acknowledged the difficulty of Turkey's situation: it has to promote non-proliferation while continuing to host U.S. nuclear weapons. Moreover, the present consensus deems NATO's conventional and nuclear capabilities sufficient. Yet, one American participant claimed that Turkey is establishing a ballistic missile program. While one participant posed that this ballistic missile program is under development to help Turkey "feel safe," others suggested that there was a residual lack of confidence in U.S. and NATO security assurances. As evidence, Turkish participants pointed out that NATO nuclear weapons presently deployed in Turkey are not readily available for military usage. U.S. participants agreed in principle, explaining that they instead serve a political purpose: they primarily act as a glue to reinforce NATO's strength and burden sharing, while allowing for a prominent or dominant U.S. role.

NATO's "missile shield" adds another dimension of deterrence and "assurances" shared between Turkey and the alliance. Like the placement of nuclear weapons within Turkish territory, one Turkish participant suggested that Ankara does consider the missile defense to be a "highly valuable strategic asset" for Turkey's protection. Nonetheless, according to Turkish participants, several reservations and concerns have accompanied Ankara's participation in hosting the system's radar facilities. First, Turkey wants the missile shield to be seen as a NATO project rather than a U.S. endeavor. Turkish memories of the Cuban Missile Crisis (which entailed the unilateral withdrawal of Jupiter missiles from the country) have led to some apprehension towards complete American control over the project. Second, Ankara has expressed concern in regards to the degree to which the shield is designed to protect the entirety of Turkey's territory. They worry that it would be used to defend Israel against attacks. Third, Ankara remains adamant that no state (particularly Iran) should be named the target of the system's defensive posturing. Turkish participants underscored that Turkey's warm relations with Iran, as well as fears that Iran would exploit such a declaration in order to advance their own military capabilities, were the two factors influencing the AKP's position on NATO's missile defense system.

## **IRAN AND THE NON-PROLIFERATION TREATY**

In general, American participants underscored the dire implications of Iran's potential nuclear weapons program. An Iranian nuclear bomb was characterized as a potentially "devastating blow" to the NPT. While there was some reason for optimism regarding rumors of direct talks between Washington and Tehran, one American participant asserted that there was a "shared sense" in both Turkey and the United States that the Obama administration's policies towards Iran "had not succeeded to date." In the words of one American participant, Turkey's "unique and complicated" relationship with Iran, as well as Washington's weakened diplomatic posture (due to the Arab Spring) further complicated counter-proliferation efforts. In order to overcome these potential roadblocks, "new strategic commitments" could be made to Turkey and the Gulf states, as well as the construction of an expanded cooperative effort on missile defense.

Turkish participants raised a number of strategies whereby Turkey can play a role in helping to uphold and enforce the current non-proliferation regime. As of now, it does not appear that Ankara can play a direct diplomatic role in diffusing the situation with Iran, particularly due to the current row between Ankara and Tehran over Syria. Placing conditions or restraints upon the nuclear fuel cycle would have a high impact upon proliferation; however, there is much apprehension internationally about the question of establishing an international fuel bank. During the discussions, participants recommended a U.S.-Turkey dialogue focusing specifically on the fuel cycle. Importantly, the aim of the dialogue should not be for the United States to convince Turkish policymakers to accept a UAE-type constraint on the establishment of domestic fuel cycle capabilities.

One Turkish participant spoke favorably about the benefits of export controls for maintaining the NPT, an option that would have greater likelihood of success. Turkey's current approach to export controls is very much in line with international standards. However, participants were reminded that greater intelligence sharing is critical to the future of export controls.

Turkish participants cited the possible creation of a "Nuclear Weapons Free Zone" (NWFZ) in the Middle East as a means of enforcing the NPT. Turkey has recently changed its stance from a non-interested observer to an active player championing such a zone. Ankara's change in policy on the NWFZ is seen in part as a means to realign Turkey into a negotiating position on Iran's own nuclear ambitions as well as a way to pressure Israel on its nuclear program.

## **THE NPT AND U.S.-TURKISH RELATIONS**

Turkey's rise in international stature, as well as changes in approach towards foreign relations, has led to a desire in Ankara to mediate between nuclear "haves" and "have-nots." Turkey and the United States do see eye-to-eye on many issues related to the NPT. Strain or disagreement between Washington and Ankara is most visible with respect to peaceful use of nuclear materials. "For the AKP," in the panelist's estimation, "an NPT-based 'fundamental right to enrichment' is embraced as an inalienable fact of the treaty. By

contrast, the United States interprets Article IV more restrictively, viewing it as affording compliant non-nuclear weapon states a right to nuclear power, but not the full nuclear fuel cycle with all its dual-use risks.” Turkey finds this stance hypocritical.

Panelists spoke at great length about structural impediments confronting U.S.-Turkish relations on the NPT. Changes in the nature of decision-making and review in Turkey, due in large measure to changes in civil-military relations and the rise of the AKP, have created new obstacles in U.S.-Turkish relations. Changes and complications are also evident within U.S. decision-making within the Pentagon and the State Department. “Asymmetries in assets and interests” are also important structural factors in bilateral U.S.-Turkish nonproliferation cooperation. Turkey has more finite personnel, expertise, and financial resources available to advance its security and economic interests on the world stage. There is also some degree of distrust regarding U.S-Turkish intelligence sharing on nuclear issues, stemming in part from the intelligence failures that occurred during the Iraq War. Lastly, given the recent establishment of the think tank sector in Ankara, governmental expertise in Turkey receives only modest support from civilian think tanks.

Panelists actively discussed actionable opportunities in improving bilateral cooperation on proliferation issues. One American participant proposed that U.S.-Turkish strategic dialogues may help build trust between institutions and individuals in the long term and contribute to capacity building in Turkey, particularly in the realm of expertise and engagement. Mechanisms such as student exchanges may have a particularly positive effect on amassing greater technical and political expertise in both countries as well as help improve upon cultural and personal trust.

Participants generally agreed that Turkey has no current plans to develop an indigenous nuclear weapons capability. As one participant pointed out, although Turkey will pursue the peaceful use of atomic energy, it is unlikely to pursue nuclear weapons even if Iran were to acquire nuclear capabilities. In other words, a cascade effect starting from Iran and spreading through Turkey and throughout the region was seen as an improbable scenario. Nonetheless, considering Ankara's plans to build nuclear power plants in Akkuyu and Sinop, there is reason to continue the discussion of Turkey's nuclear aspirations at future dialogues.

One American participant advocated that the U.S. government should embrace the cooperation opportunities that will emerge as Ankara begins to establish its own nuclear power program. U.S. industry may play a particularly positive and constructive role (as opposed to Russian companies) in engaging civilian nuclear development. This involvement would not only add a greater quality control, but also greater levels of trust between Turkey and the United States.

## **COUNTERING PROLIFERATION**

Turkish and American participants came to agreement on a number of key points. Turkey is indeed a natural geographic and strategic chokepoint in the greater Middle East and therefore constitutes a vital region in guarding against violations of the NPT. American and Turkish participants also affirmed that Turkey has been a party to multiple multinational agreements on proliferation that have been enacted under a number of auspices.

Turkish participants further clarified which government ministries are responsible for overseeing licensing of various dual use components manufactured in and transferred through the country. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Economy, the Turkish Atomic Energy Agency, and other groups each play a role in overseeing production and trade in products related to the nuclear industry. In addition to this, various laws have been enacted domestically that are in accordance with the international regime. Turkish participants also asserted that border security has been improved upon and modernized over recent years. These improvements comprise both the implementation and use of new forms of technology as well as an expansion of training among Turkish personnel. One Turkish participant emphasized that U.S. cooperation in these reforms, as well as intelligence sharing, has been critical to the success achieved in recent years.

Other Turkish participants asserted that cooperation between the United States could be further augmented. An important obstacle, some Turkish participants contended, was continued lack of trust between various Turkish agencies and ministries as well as

with U.S. representatives. Participants identified that the United States could improve relations with the Turkish Interior Ministry and the Ministry of Customs and Trade.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The dialogue delivered a number of important findings:

- Turkey and the United States possess a strong, multifaceted relationship that has withstood serious challenges and disagreements. There is mutual consensus on the two countries' security interests even though there is some level of disagreement regarding the nature and urgency of certain issues. Turkish and American participants acknowledged that an undercurrent of distrust, specifically with reference to perceived threats to Turkey's sovereignty, did plague bilateral relations.
- The United States and Turkey are in strong agreement on the need to maintain NATO's guarantees of extended deterrence. Both countries view NATO's nuclear deterrent as an essential component in maintaining the cohesion of the alliance. Although Ankara contends that Iran should not be explicitly labeled the focal point of that defense, both countries agree that NATO's missile defense system may be useful as a deterrent.
- There is some disagreement between the United States and Turkey on the meaning and implementation of the NPT. While both states remain committed to the NPT, disagreement exists over the meaning of a state's "inalienable" right to peaceful nuclear development. Moreover, there is a great deal of uncertainty as to how the NPT should be enforced with respect to Iran's nascent nuclear program.
- Despite some initial American misgivings to the contrary, Turkish participants avowed that Ankara possesses no interest in developing a nuclear weapons program. Most American and Turkish participants agreed that the proliferation of illicit nuclear programs in the greater Middle East is not inevitable should Iran develop a nuclear weapon.

- Due to the country's unique geographic location, counter-proliferation efforts in Turkey are deemed essential to upholding the NPT. Turkey and the United States have worked closely on reforming and expanding Turkey's capacity to monitor illicit trafficking at its borders. Nevertheless, American and Turkish officials must continue to further breakdown mutual distrust and bureaucratic resistance within Turkey.

In summary, a number of Turkish and American participants advocated the use of strategic dialogues as a means of furthering discussing issues beset by mistrust. This is applicable when Turkish sovereignty, American national interests, and intelligence sharing are seen at stake. Participants generally agreed that much work remains in developing and expanding Turkey's capacity to confront challenges related to nuclear proliferation. Track II dialogues, as well as greater civil and academic engagement, may be helpful in building upon the expertise and interest that currently exists in Turkey.