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IN THE MEDITERRANEAN: A TURKISH
PERSPECTIVE**

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The Mediterranean, together with its surrounding lands and sub-seas, constitutes a "geopolitical system"¹, although it is far from being a politically and culturally homogenous region. It is a semi-enclosed sea with three principal choke points: The Strait of Gibraltar, the Turkish Straits, and the Suez Canal. Through these bottlenecks the Mediterranean connects the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean, the Middle East and Eastern Europe. The Eastern Mediterranean opens into the Middle East and Persian Gulf area, and through the Aegean and the Black Sea, into the Don Basin, the Ukrainian Steppes, the Caucasus and the Lower Danube Basin,² which are considered as highly critical and unstable regions.

Moreover, the Mediterranean continues to be one of the principal sea routes linking Western Europe to the Far East, Southeast Asia, East Africa and the Persian Gulf. It is still the main route for Gulf oil. It is also a major outlet for the hinterlands of the Black Sea and the Aegean. Nearly 60 % of the CIS seaborne trade is carried out through the Mediterranean. It is a very busy sea, and "at any given time it is being traversed by about 1.500 large cargo ships and 5000 coasters".³

The Mediterranean has served as a link between geographically separated NATO theaters. The Sixth Fleet together with the navies of other NATO countries have always maintained an effective control of the sea. The introduction of the SOVMEDRON after 1967, whose primary mission was sea denial had only a marginal influence on the naval balance because of the lack of Soviet base facilities in the Mediterranean and the control of the Turkish Straits by a NATO member.

The main aspects of NATO's strategy of sea control can be summarized as follows:⁴ to assure timely reinforcement and resupply; to support amphibious operations in the Southern region; to maintain SLOCs; to protect NATO territory from attack from the sea; and to support allied ground operations in the Southern region.

Turkish naval forces have contributed to NATO's balance of power and conventional deterrence functions. Their wartime mission would primarily be to maintain the control of the Straits especially by preventing the Soviet/Pact amphibious operations against the area. Being the sole NATO naval force in the Black Sea, the Turkish Navy would challenge Soviet naval efforts for the control of that theater by employing hit and run tactics, along with extensive submarine and mining operations. While assisting to keep SLOCs in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean open, it would defend and keep the ports available for access.

However, with the collapse of communism and the demise of the Warsaw Pact, NATO's Cold War strategic posture and force structure have been called into

question. While it is argued that NATO's new strategy needs improved flexibility and mobility, it has become clear that its military posture should rest upon lower levels of forces. This situation has brought about a renewal of interest in naval arms control as well as other arms control measures.

In the Cold War period, the inclusion of naval forces and their activities in the CFE and CSCE negotiations was a contentious issue. While the USSR proposed talks on naval arms control, the West declined these calls. Moscow felt that the Western naval strategy was "aggressive" because it clearly threatened the Soviet homeland. The West's counter-argument was based on the notion of geographical asymmetry. NATO depended on exterior sea lines of communication, whereas the Soviets benefited from the advantage of shorter and more secure interior lines. Consequently NATO had to maintain adequate naval forces to deny the Soviet Union an effective sea denial strategy and to keep Western SLOCs open.

To what extent have these conditions changed? What are the prospects for structural and operational naval arms control arrangements in the Mediterranean? My answer to these questions from Turkey's standpoint depends on Turkish perception of naval missions in a changing strategic environment. Turkey considers the problem both from the NATO perspective and from the perspective of its own particular security interests.

NATO Missions

Recent changes in the Soviet Union have not only alleviated the Soviet pressure upon the region, but also encouraged the vision of regional cooperation with the former Soviet republics. All the political parties and the public opinion in Turkey think that the Soviet Union's transformation into the Commonwealth of Independent States together with the efforts of democratization and transition to market economy have substantially diminished the threat originating from the North, and have prepared the ground for improved economic relations. As a matter of fact, Turkish efforts to rapidly develop economic and cultural cooperation with the former Soviet republics and the idea of creating a Black Sea Cooperation Region are emblematic of this new state of mind. Despite these changes, however, in Turkey as well as in the West in general, there has remained a certain apprehension over the possibility of reversion. Consequently most NATO members regard their armed forces as well the Atlantic Alliance itself as a long-term insurance against such an eventuality. Although the North Atlantic Council, in its Rome meeting on 7-8 November 1991, recognizes the need to adopt a "New Strategic Concept" reflecting the changed conditions in Europe, it at the same time emphasizes the residual threat originating from a combination of lingering uncertainties and remaining formidable Soviet capabilities. The North Atlantic Council points out:

"In the particular case of the Soviet Union, the risks and uncertainties that accompany the process of change cannot be seen in isolation from the fact that its conventional forces are significantly larger than those of any other European State and its large nuclear arsenal comparable only with that of the United States. These capabilities have to be taken into account if stability and security in Europe are to be

preserved."⁵

The New Strategic Concept also points out risks of a wider nature, emanating from regional conflicts, proliferation of non conventional weapons, disruption of the flow of vital resources and actions of terrorism and sabotage. Moreover, the Rome document underlines the growing significance of crisis management in the new international environment. Accordingly, the function of maritime forces is described as follows:

"Maritime forces, which because of their inherent mobility, flexibility and endurance, make an important contribution to the Alliance's crisis response options. Their essential missions are to ensure sea control in order to safeguard the Allies' sea lines of communication, to support land and amphibious operation, and to protect the deployment of the Alliance's sea-based nuclear deterrent."⁶

From this assessment, various trends can be extrapolated:

- Reduction of conventional forces as a result of the CFE will increase reliance by NATO on reserve forces, and will emphasize the continuing importance of the transatlantic and Mediterranean links for seaborne reinforcements.⁷

- The Southern region is adjacent to the most critical areas of instability. An adequate reaction to regional conflicts requires mobility, flexibility and force projection capabilities. This implies a somewhat greater accent on maritime forces in the Mediterranean. Furthermore, Turkish experts view the Sixth Fleet as a factor contributing to regional stability, and they believe its presence "will continue to play a key role in times of tension and crisis".⁸

- During regional conflicts potential threats to SLOCs may be a major concern to the Alliance. In fact this was the case during the recent Gulf crisis and war. To cope with this challenge NATO took a variety of measures in the Mediterranean. Allied naval operations, which consisted of surveillance and patrolling the choke points, were undertaken against no specific adversary. Their purpose was to protect shipping against probable mining of the sea routes and terroristic activities.⁹ Turkish naval forces participated in these operations. Moreover, NATO has formed a new Standing Naval Force in the Mediterranean (STANAFORMED) which will be on constant patrol through the Mediterranean. Admiral Mike Boorda, Commander Allied Forces Southern Europe, says that it is "an instantly available rapid reaction force for SACEUR".¹⁰ Countries providing vessels (mainly destroyers and frigates) include Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States. NSF is presently active and is commanded by a Turkish Navy Captain. It is participating in the sea blockade against Serbia by patrolling the Adriatic coast of former Yugoslavia.

Other Security Needs

Beside the NATO missions, Turkey maintains a navy to fulfil its own particular security needs. First of all, Turkey is a peninsular country and the total length of its

coasts is 7000 kilometers. 85 per cent of its foreign trade is dependent on free and safe navigation in the neighbouring seas. Turkey also requires open SLOCs to transport crude oil to its refineries which are situated on eastern Mediterranean, Aegean and Marmara coasts.

The regional geography renders the sea control vital to permit amphibious operations for the purpose of supporting defensive land forces and to prevent amphibious landings of the invading enemy forces. This is viewed as particularly important for an adequate defense of the Thrace-Straits area. For instance, as the Thracian peninsula narrows towards the east, the last defensive position before reaching Istanbul and the Bosphorus is the Çatalca line, which extends between the shores of Marmara and the Black Sea. The defensibility of this position depends on the command of the coastal waters of both seas. In the Balkan War, Turkey's naval capability to control those coastal waters was the major reason for the failure of the final offensive of the Bulgarian army in November 1912.¹¹

The navy is a flexible tool of crisis management. Compared with the land and air forces, it is more easily controllable by the political and military decision-makers. This quality stems from three characteristics of the navies: their escalatory capabilities, their withdrawability and their endurance.¹² The sea power operates relatively slowly providing the conflicting parties with more time to diffuse crisis. The use of force may be more easily and clearly graduated at sea. Navies can effectively operate in order to demonstrate the political will to maintain the claims without causing undue escalation of the dispute.¹³ Furthermore, since they do not involve an invading force, they do not provoke the parties in crisis to hasty decisions of preemption. In such volatile regions as the eastern Mediterranean, navies might act as a factor of stability by facilitating the graduated use of force in times of regional crisis and tension. For example, in a crisis that might occur over the Aegean Sea, if Greece and Turkey give priority to the use of their naval forces rather than their air and land forces, they would certainly have a better chance to solve the crisis before its escalation to all-out war. Naval forces can be easily removed away from the spot of crisis but can still be kept committable without inciting hostility. There is no doubt that if they are used tactlessly they can be as provocative as any other armed force. The point, however, is that, as instruments of diplomacy, warships are more suitable than fighter aircraft or armored divisions especially when the crisis is a result of conflicting claims over maritime areas.

Although terrorism at sea is rare, terrorists (or guerrillas) may use the sea to infiltrate a target country.¹⁴ Recent examples of such attempts of infiltration suggest that naval forces may be useful in counter-terrorist operation. A conspicuous example is provided by the Israeli naval patrols to counter PLO infiltrators. Turkey, as a country which has long been a major target of terrorism supported from abroad, may also be subject to seaborne terrorist infiltrations and may have to take naval counter-measures to stop them. Terrorists often make use of the SLOCs to acquire and transport weapons. So the naval forces can also be employed for the prevention of such activities.

In the post-Cold War era, Turkey continues to face serious security challenges emanating from the residual uncertainties of systemic transformation and inherent

instabilities of the regions surrounding the country. Its southern neighbours and its disputes with Greece over the Aegean and Cyprus also create concrete security problems. Moreover, although the threat stemming from Moscow has lessened considerably, Russia will remain very powerful, and Ankara will have to continue to consider Russian military capabilities in formulating foreign and security policies. These factors indicate that modernization of Turkey's armed forces should continue. Consequently, contrary to most of the other NATO allies, Turkey's military expenditures will not decrease in the short run. Similarly, maritime operational requirements will not be diminished in the post-Cold War era. On the contrary, new missions such as crisis management and counter-terrorism will emerge, and the budget allocation to maritime forces will have to follow this trend.

To increase their survivability and their peacetime and crisis time capabilities, Turkish naval forces particularly need:

To improve command control and communications;

To provide ships with modern electronic warfare capabilities and smart precision weapons;

To improve mine warfare capability through modernizing mining and mine sweeping weapons and means;

To modernize and maintain an effective maritime air capability;

To increase logistical capabilities; and

To continue with the successful programmes of building fast patrol boats, frigates and submarines.

The Straits and the Black Sea

Many provisions of the Montreux Convention of 1936 constitute an early example of naval arms control measures.¹⁵ The convention imposes limitations on the passage of warships through the Turkish straits. It also limits the presence of the non-Black Sea states' warships in that sea.

One major concern of Turkey's strategic planners has been the defense of the Straits. "Given the lack of strategic depth, Turkey has had to maintain in Thrace a level of force which would have been able to defend the region against attacks coming from land, amphibious and airborne units far superior in strength and structure."¹⁶

On the other hand, Ankara has always been extremely sensitive about the security concerns of the other Black Sea riparian states, especially those of Russia. The Turkish decision-makers are acutely aware that the Straits and the Black Sea are very important strategic approaches to the Russian homeland. therefore they

believe that any non-Black Sea naval power concentration in the Black Sea during peacetime would create apprehensions and dangerously disturb regional stability.

The Montreux convention of 1936 continues to serve these interests. One of its principal purposes is to allow Turkey to militarize the Straits, something which was prohibited under the 1923 Lausanne Convention. Secondly, by virtue of the Montreux Convention, "should Turkey consider herself to be threatened with imminent danger of war", the passage of warships through the Straits "shall be left entirely to the discretion of the Turkish Government".

The Montreux Convention clearly favors the Black Sea countries. While it imposes heavy restrictions upon the non-Black Sea powers, it recognizes a much greater freedom of movement to the Black Sea navies. In practice, however, this freedom of movement has been increased even further as regards the passage of Soviet aircraft carriers. Neither Turkey nor the other signatories have challenged the Soviet classification of these ships and their transit rights. So it may well be argued in the absence of any objection over the years the practice has been based on an extensive interpretation of the Montreux Convention in order to provide for the transit of the Soviet Kiev and Admiral Kuznetsov class aircraft carriers.¹⁷

The Montreux Convention's adaptability to changing circumstances has recently been a matter of public debate in Turkey. A considerable number of experts continue to support the official position which opposes any modification of the Convention. They believe that its major provisions continue to be quite satisfactory from the standpoint of Ankara's interests, and that even the discussion of its minor provisions might open the Pandora's box and bring about undesirable results. For this reason, although they admit the necessity of a certain degree of adaptation, they argue that it could be done through an evolutionary process of interpretation.¹⁸

Some of the experts, on the other hand, emphasize the need for a revision of the Convention.¹⁹ They argue that the Convention as it applies today considerably limits the powers of the Turkish government. Turkish authorities should be given the necessary powers to regulate the passage of the ships, to take measures for the protection of the environment, to stop and search the vessels for security reasons. Moreover they insist that pilotage should be obligatory for the merchant vessels.

There is no doubt that the Montreux Convention has so far successfully served the interests of the Black Sea powers including Turkey. However, the time has come to regard the matter from a different perspective. Under the post-Cold War conditions, the concept of security has acquired a different and broader connotation. The limitations imposed upon the non-Black Sea navies have lost much of their strategic significance. The same could be said in respect of the obligation to inform the signatories about the passage of warships. But, on the other hand the pressing problems such as environmental pollution, terrorism and the increasing probability of proliferation of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons constitute new security risks. The risk is magnified in the Bosphorus flowing through a huge city of nearly ten million people which is Istanbul the risks are also high in the Black Sea, a semi-enclosed sea that is increasingly polluted and bordering highly unstable regions. These considerations make the views advocating revision more

convincing than ever.

The strategic landscape in the Black Sea has radically changed after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The control of the Soviet Black Sea Fleet, with 28 submarines, 46 major surface ships, 150 combat aircraft and a ship-building industry at Nikolayev,²⁰ is being disputed between Russia and Ukraine which wants to establish its own armed forces. If, in demanding to take control of a portion of the former Soviet Black Sea Fleet, Ukraine's purpose is to balance the Russian naval power in the region, then Ukraine may be prone to negotiate certain regional arms control measures. If, on the other hand, Ukraine's objective is to become a major naval power in the region, it may be very difficult to reach a regional agreement on naval arms control.

Structural Arms Control

During the Cold War years, the aim of structural arms control was to discourage the two major blocs to initiate a war against each other. For instance, the objective of the CFE negotiations was to decrease the surprise attack and sustained operational capabilities of Soviet/WP conventional forces so that Moscow's incentive to launch an armed attack against NATO territory would be substantially reduced. It was, however, hard to put forward a similar argument as regards naval arms control. On the one hand, sea power was not a suitable instrument for the initiation of war. On the other hand, naval arms reductions might produce a reverse effect. Any substantial reduction in NATO navies would reduce Alliance's logistical and reinforcement capability, leaving its conventional forces in Central Europe and Southern region at the mercy of far superior Soviet/WP forces.

Notwithstanding continuing uncertainties, the Soviet/WP threat has ceased to exist. Can we then argue that structural naval arms control negotiations are today more promising than before? Although this question deserves to some extent an affirmative answer, it should be kept in mind that, in the Mediterranean, navies by themselves can hardly create an incentive to initiate war. First of all, they mainly function as a supportive element of the other services. Secondly, they defend the SLOCs. This function is still very important as it became evident during the Gulf War when NATO ships patrolled the Mediterranean SLOCs. Thirdly, they may be used as a crisis-management and peacekeeping tool, and this function is becoming increasingly significant in the new international environment. NATO's center of gravity has shifted from Central Europe to the South, and the Alliance has a palpable tendency to assume new tasks in out-of-area and peacekeeping. These new tasks require mobility and force projection capability. These trends are limiting the areas where structural naval arms control may be plausible.

Turkey would be in favor of the creation of a nuclear weapon free zone in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. Elimination of all the nuclear warheads and SSBNs from the region would not hamper performance of the above-mentioned missions required by the new strategic conditions. However, the dual-function (nuclear and conventional) delivery vehicles such as cruise missiles may be problematic since their military usefulness became apparent during the recent Gulf

War.

The PGMs also constitute a difficult case. The present trend is to acquire more PGMs. For instance, the improvement of firepower and precision of the naval weapon systems is an important aspect of Turkey's modernization program. But the acquisition of the anti-ship PGMs by radical regimes and terrorist groups would constitute a serious danger for the SLOCs. It would then be necessary to take effective measures to prevent their proliferation.

Similarly, submarines (conventionally armed) may be both offensive and defensive. On the one hand they constitute a major threat to the SLOCs, and on the other, they are quite useful for the protection of the SLOCs. Moreover they are suitable to perform valuable functions in crisis-management and peacekeeping such as observation, blockade, escort and coastal defense. Like PGMs, however, their proliferation might increase risks to the security of SLOCs.

Operational Arms Control

It is necessary to be selective in operational arms control measures as well. Certain measures may be irreconcilable with the new naval missions required by the new security challenges. From this point of view the first thing we should keep in mind is that the operational arms control measures should not curb the mobility and power projection capability of NATO navies.

In respect of the CSBMs, Greece and Turkey have made a certain progress within the framework of the Davos process. In 1988, by signing two documents, they decided to apply, on a bilateral bases, the following measures:

1. In conducting national military activities in the high seas and the international airspace, they shall endeavour to avoid interfering with smooth shipping and air traffic.

2. The planning and the conduct of national military exercises in the high seas and the international airspace should be carried out in such a way as to avoid the isolation of certain areas, the blocking of exercise areas for long periods of time, the tourist peak period (1 July - 1 September), and main national and religious holidays.

3. The naval and airforce units in conducting military activities will act in conformity with international law as well as military custom and courtesy.

4. The naval units will refrain from acts of harrasment of each other. When they are engaged in the surveillance of ships of the other party during military activities, they shall maintain a position which would not hamper their smooth conduct.

5. Pilots shall display utmost caution when in proximity of aircraft of the other party and shall not manoeuver or react in a manner that would be hazardous to the safety of the flight and/or affect the conduvt of the mission of the aircraft.

6. To promote the climate of confidence, whenever there are claims of acts contrary to the above measures, the parties will refrain from releasing official statements. They will in the first place inform each other through diplomatic channels.

7. It is also agreed, as a crisis-management measure, to set up a direct telephone line between the prime ministers of both countries.

Although these measures are not comprehensive and are violated from time to time, they may be regarded as a useful step forward in regional CSBM experience.

A second Turkish experience was with Bulgaria. The Chiefs of General Staffs of the two states met in Sofia on 16-20 December 1991, and signed a document with a view to initiate a bilateral process aimed at enhancing confidence and security in the region. The "transparency" measures provided by this agreement covered certain naval activities such as "naval visits, visits at flag and staff officer levels", and training cooperation (exchange of cadets, exchange of officers for on the job training, and reciprocal attendance to conferences and symposia by officers from high level headquarters and staff colleges).

It is noteworthy that the Turco-Bulgarian agreement includes more extensive measures as far as the land forces are concerned. These measures also consist of the geographic limitation of military exercises, their observation and the inspection of military installations. Contrary to the naval CSBMs in the Aegean, all the measures agreed upon between Turkey and Bulgaria are being satisfactorily applied, and they have greatly contributed to the easing of tension between the two states.

Turkey favors naval CSBMs provided that the freedom of navigation of NATO countries, including its own ships are not hampered by such arms control measures. Although the CSBMs agreed upon between Turkey and Greece, and between Turkey and Bulgaria are not comprehensive, their improvement and their extension to the whole Mediterranean area including the Black Sea would contribute to regional security. It is also necessary to take urgent measures for the protection of the marine environment in the maritime areas that are increasingly polluted such as the Black Sea. By the same token, the navigation of the nuclear propulsion vessels through densely populated areas such as the Turkish Straits should be limited and strictly controlled, if not totally prohibited.

Conclusion

There is today a general consensus that arms control measures in general are quite useful to create global and regional stability. There is also a growing tendency to include naval forces in future arms control negotiations. At the regional level, the Italian-Spanish proposal for initiating a Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean refers to the importance of confidence-building "through increased transparency and information exchange".²¹ The Turkish-Bulgarian agreement is a successful example of this kind of effort.

It is equally true that "the ultimate objective of arms control should not be merely military stability, but political stability".²² This last point is particularly relevant for such an unstable region as the Mediterranean where the crisis-management, peacekeeping and the protection of the SLOCs have become more important than ever. Consequently, any naval arms control negotiation in the Mediterranean will have to take into consideration the conditions of the new strategic environment and its military requirements. The post-Cold War security challenges seem to favor a considerable variety of operational arms control measures while inhibiting substantial efforts of structural naval arms control.

Finally, the delimitation of the geographical area of naval arms control is problematic. The former Soviet maritime power has global dimensions and as such, it is not amenable to regional structural arms control if the attempts are confined to the Mediterranean. Any reduction in the Mediterranean would create additional security problems in the Baltic and further north unless the ships and their weapon systems subject to reduction are not destroyed.

Notes

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3. Hugh Faringdon, Strategic Geography, p. 197.
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7. James Eberle, "Global Security and Naval Arms control", p. 328.
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13. D.P.O' Connell, The Influence of Law on Sea Power (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1975), p. 56.
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15. See the chapter by Natalino Ronzitti, p. 11 and 14-15.
16. Statement by the Turkish Chief of General Staff General Necip Torumtay at the CSBM Military Doctrine Seminar, Vienna, 19 January 1990.
17. For a similar argument, see Charles Maechling Jr. "Crisis at the Turkish Straits", US Naval Institute Proceedings (August 1988), p. 63-71, cited by Douglas L. Clarke, "The Soviet Navy's First Aircraft Carrier", RFE/RL Report on the USSR (August 16, 1991), p. 15.
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