

# Turkey-NATO Relations: Strained and Constrained

Turkey-NATO relations have a history of challenges more or less since Turkey's accession to NATO in 1952. Strained relations between Turkey and NATO have begun long before Turkey's alleged failed coup attempt on 15 July 2016. However, the failed coup attempt increased tensions further and it is fair to assume that these tense relations are likely to continue. At the same time, Turkey-NATO relations are constrained by a not yet amended North Atlantic Treaty of 4 April 1949. As long as the treaty remains not updated very little can be done to change the nature of Turkey-NATO relations.

Eugene Kogan

## Introduction

Military experts argue that geopolitically Turkey plays an extremely important role as it flanks the trouble spots in the Middle East and the Black Sea. However, the former Chairman of the NATO Military Committee, retired German General Harald Kujat, said on German public radio in August 2016: "Turkey's role should not be overstated and Turkey has always been an ally on which one cannot rely 100 per cent"<sup>1</sup>. Back in November 2009 the Justice and Development Party (known by its Turkish acronym as AKP or Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi) government was adamant that despite Turkish soldiers' participation in the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) missions, they

were not combat troops,<sup>2</sup> but rather troops used for training missions. This point has deeply irritated British and American military in particular because they wanted to have Turkish troops in the combat missions. Therefore, the author agrees with General Kujat that Turkey's role is important but should not be overstated. Thus, tensions between NATO allies have occurred even before Turkey's alleged failed coup attempt on 15 July 2016.

Back in November 2009 the Justice and Development Party government was adamant that despite Turkish soldiers' participation in the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) missions, they were not combat troops, but rather troops used for training missions.

<sup>1</sup> For the complete article, see Bernd Riegert, "NATO and Turkey: Allies, not Friends", see online at: <http://www.dw.com/en/nato-and-turkey-allies-not-friends/a-19444991> - online on 2 August 2016. Hereafter cited as Riegert, "NATO and Turkey". As for the strategic importance of Turkey, read the following text. During the 25 May 2017 NATO Summit in Brussels allied military officials admitted that Turkey's geographical position is too sensitive to allow the country to drift away on its own, whatever the direction. Erdogan is fully aware of this and can be expected to exploit his access to the maximum. For the complete article, see Brooks Tigner, "Turkey to be 'Elephant in the Room' at NATO Summit", see online at: <http://janes.ihs.com/Janes/Display/1805867> - online on 17 May 2017. Hereafter cited as Tigner, "Turkey to be 'Elephant'". Turkey's NATO membership and its strategic geographic position mean *that any covert NATO criticism of the country is unlikely* [author's italics]. For the complete article, see Tigner, "NATO Recalls Turkey's Failed Coup as Attack's on Democracy, Despite Claims of Contrary Evidence", see online at: <http://janes.ihs.com/Display/1812361> - online on 18 July 2017. Contrary to General Kujat's statement, the US Ambassador to NATO, Kay Bailey Hutchinson, stated on 17 November 2017: "Turkey is a very valuable ally in NATO. They have done their part. They are one of the four framework nations in Afghanistan right now and doing a very credible job. And they have answered the call every time NATO has made a call". For the complete article, see Valerie Insinna, "Ambassador to NATO Unsure if US Will Impose Sanctions on Turkey for S-400 Buy", see online at: <https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2017/11/18/ambassador-to-nato-unsure-if-us-will-impose-sanctions-on-turkey-for-s-400-buy/> - online on 17 November 2017. Ankara is a framework nation of the Alliance's Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) and has offered to lead the group in 2021. Aaron Stein, "The New Turkey: Making Sense of Turkish Decision-Making", Atlantic Council, Issue Brief (April 2018), 6. Hereafter cited as Stein, "The New Turkey".

Since 15 July 2016 in particular, relations between Turkey and its NATO allies have substantially deteriorated as will be discussed further below. Despite strains in relations NATO's Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has repeatedly said that Turkey "occupies a geographically stra-

<sup>2</sup> On 1 November 2009 parallel to the resumption of its ISAF command in Kabul, Turkey increased the number of Turkish non-combat troops there by nearly a thousand, bringing its total contribution to 1750. US Ambassador James Jeffrey and National Security Advisor James Jones made it clear after President Barack Obama's speech that the administration would welcome additional soldiers, preferably with "fewer caveats" relating to their mission. However, *Turkish civilian and military leaders have consistently opposed the idea of Turkish troops assuming a direct combat role. This was reaffirmed by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan immediately before his departure to Washington* (author's italics). Bulent Aliriza, "President Obama Meets With Prime Minister Erdogan", Center for Strategic and International Studies, see online at: <http://www.csis.org/publication/president-obama-meets-prime-minister-erdogan> - online on 7 December 2009.

tegic position”<sup>3</sup> and “Turkey is a key country for the security of Europe and without doubt, NATO would suffer from weakness without Turkey”<sup>4</sup>. Even after the delivery of the first S-400 components to Turkey and the US decision to halt Turkish participation in the multinational F-35 aircraft project, Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg seeks to assure Turkey that the scope of Turkey’s ties with the alliance is far beyond the F-35s.<sup>5</sup> Stoltenberg said on 17 July 2019 that no ally had raised the suggestion of pushing Turkey out of the alliance. “Turkey is an important NATO member and no ally has raised that issue [namely, of pushing Turkey out] at all, because we all see we are dependent on each other”<sup>6</sup>.

It can be thus argued that Turkey found its “advocate” in Secretary General Stoltenberg. Hence, it also appears that as long as Stoltenberg remains Secretary General President Erdogan and his administration will have an ally in NATO to count on.

### Turkey-(Bilateral) NATO Damaged Relations

It should be emphasised that bilateral relations between Turkey and the Netherlands, Turkey and Germany as well as Turkey and the United States in particular have seriously deteriorated in 2017 remaining strained until today. To remind the reader, German’s parliament, the Bundestag, in June 2017 backed the plan to move some 260 soldiers based at Incirlik Air Base to an air base in Jordan. Diplomatic sources claimed that Berlin’s potential move would have been the *first time* [author’s italics] in NATO’s history that a member state were to withdraw a military installation from another ally and to move it to a non-NATO country, noting that the move would have a negative effect on the alliance’s solidarity.<sup>7</sup> Another recent tension between Turkey and NATO was an incident during the Trident Javelin military exercise, held between 8 and 17 November 2017 at the NATO’s Joint Warfare Centre in Norway. A photo of Turkey’s founding leader Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, along with an image of President Erdogan were depicted as NATO’s enemies. Parties across the Turkish po-



Figure 1: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg are considered to get along quite well (NATO).

litical spectrum announced their distrust in the alliance.<sup>8</sup> As Metin Gurcan wrote in a recent article, a small-scale tremor shook relations between NATO and its increasingly rogue member Turkey on 3 May 2019 when a (Greek) Cyprus delegation was included on a ceremonial guest list. Military personnel and civilians from across NATO’s 29 allied nations and various partners attended the ceremony for US Air Force General Tod Wolters, who assumed his position as NATO’s new Supreme Allied Commander for Europe (SACEUR) with one exception: Turkey. According to Turkish diplomatic sources the “big mistake” over the invitation marred Wolters’ arrival and would result in a “confidence crisis” between Turkey and NATO’s military headquarters that would “take a long time to overcome.” Whether it was a blunder in good faith or a tacit rebuke to Ankara, the invitation incident at the military headquarters provides a road map of the bumpy relations awaiting Turkey and NATO currently and beyond.<sup>9</sup> As a result, further tensions between Turkey and NATO allies are likely to be expected.

... Berlin’s potential move would have been the *first time* in NATO’s history that a member state were to withdraw a military installation from another ally and to move it to a non-NATO country ...

An additional factor affecting relations between Turkey and the United States badly was the statement made by the Turkish Defence Minister, Fikri Isik, on 21 November 2016 that “Ankara begun negotiations with Moscow to purchase the S-400 air-defence system from Russia”<sup>10</sup>,

3 For the complete article, see Brooks Tigner, “NATO’s Silence on the Purge of Turkey’s Military Carries Risks For All”, see online at: <http://janes.ihs.com/Display/1791356> – online on 15 December 2016. Hereafter cited as Tigner, “NATO’s Silence”. See also Sevil Erkus, “NATO Chief Calls Turkey’s Bid For Russian S-400 Missile Systems a ‘Difficult Issue’”, see online at: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/nato-chief-calls-turkeys-bid-for-russian-s-400-missile-systems-a-difficult-issue-127711> – online on 22 February 2018.

4 For the complete article, see online at: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/nato-without-turkey-would-be-weak-alliance-chief-says--112586> – online on 30 April 2017.

5 For the complete article, see Serkan Demirtas, “How Will S-400s Affect Turkey’s Role in NATO?”, see online at: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/opinion/serkan-demirtas/how-will-s-400s-affect-turkeys-role-in-nato-145100> – online on 20 July 2019.

6 For the complete article, see online at: <https://bulgarianmilitary.com/2019/07/18/turkey-as-a-nato-member-is-much-more-than-s-400-jens-stoltenberg-said/>.

7 For the complete article, see online at: <https://www.dw.com/en/german-parliament-votes-to-withdraw-troops-from-turkey/a-39356874> – online on 2 June 2017. For the complete article, see Sevil Erkus, “Germany to Vote on Withdrawal From Incirlik in Two Weeks”, see online at: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/germany-to-vote-on-withdrawal-from-incirlik-in-two-weeks-time-113225> – online on 18 May 2017. See also Aaron Stein, “The New Turkey”, 3 and Sebastian Sprenger, “Turkey Defiant on Purchase of Russian S-400 Anti-Missile Weapon”, see online at: <https://www.defensenews.com/smr/nato-priorities/2018/07/11/turkey-defiant-on-purchase-of-russian-s-400-anti-missile-weapon/> – online on 11 July 2018.

8 For the complete article including Turkish reaction and an official apology issued by Secretary General Stoltenberg, see Semih Idiz, “NATO Blunder Ignites Calls to Leave Alliance”, see online at: <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/11/turkey-nato-blunder-ignites-calls-to-leave.html> – online on 21 November 2017.

9 For the complete article, see “Turkey Sticks to Its Guns on Russian Missile-Defense Deal”, see online at: <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2019/05/turkey-nato-incident-blunder-or-tacit-rebuke-of-ankara.print.html> – online on 13 May 2019.

10 For the complete article, see online at: <http://kommersant.ru/doc/3148901> – online on 21 November 2016. Isik announced on 22 February 2017 that Ankara was progressing in talks with Russia on the purchase of S-400s. For the complete article, see Bruce Jones, “Putin Backs Ankara-Moscow S-400 Sales Negotiations”, see online at: <http://janes.ihs.com/Janes/Display/1808346> – online on 6 June 2017. President Erdogan first discussed with Russia in August 2016 what would ultimately become a US\$2.5 billion agreement to procure four S-400 systems. See Thomas Karako, “Coup-proofing? Making Sense of Turkey’s S-400 Decision”, Center for Strategic and International Studies, see online at: <https://www.csis.org/analysis/coup-proofing-making-sense-turkeys-s-400-decision> – online on 15 July 2019. Hereafter cited as Karako, “Coup-proofing?”



**Figure 2:** The first shipment of Russian S-400 systems arrived in Turkey in July 2019 (Yahoo News).

NATO's adversary. The issue of the ultimate delivery of S-400 is discussed below. Turkish statement has undoubtedly contributed to the US and NATO allies uneasy position towards warming relations between Turkey and Russia. Jill Aitoro, correspondent of "Defense News", noted that in early 2016 she asked Turkey's Undersecretary of Defence Industries, Ismail Demir, whether Turkey would ultimately need to choose sides, Russia or NATO. Demir answer was that: "Turkey's situation cannot be compared to any NATO country that does not have a border of Russia or [is not] a conflict zone. Therefore we must be within a different parameter, and our relations must always be on good terms with the people and countries in the region". Such good terms, he argued, would be good for NATO. Others might argue that such an argument conflicts with the underpinning of the alliance, depending how far concessions go.<sup>11</sup> Demir's argument can be easily refuted by saying that the Baltic States as NATO members are directly facing Russia and can become a conflict zone at any moment. Therefore, Demir's application of different parameters for Turkey lacks both validity and credibility. There is

no doubt whatsoever that the delivery of the S-400 components to Turkey dealt a serious damage not just to Turkish-American relations but also to Turkey-NATO relations since the Allies committed themselves to phase out Soviet-built systems delivered to the former Warsaw Pact countries. Furthermore, interoperability is crucial for the NATO's collective defence and decision of Turkey to purchase S-400 dealt a serious damage to building NATO's collective air-defence.

... the delivery of the S-400 components to Turkey dealt a serious damage not just to Turkish-American relations but also to Turkey-NATO relations since the Allies committed themselves to phase out Soviet-built systems delivered to the former Warsaw Pact countries.

<sup>11</sup> For the complete article, see "Reluctant Allies and What That Means for the Future of NATO", see online at: <https://www.defensenews.com/opinion/commentary/2017/05/15/reliant-allies-and-what-that-means-for-the-future-of-nato-editorial/>. On the issue of choosing sides US Vice President Mike Pence tweeted on 3 April 2019: "Turkey must choose. Does it want to remain a critical partner in the most successful military alliance in history or does it want to risk the security of that partnership by making such reckless decision [purchasing the S-400 from Russia] that undermine our NATO alliance?" For the complete article, see Soner Cagaptay, "The Turkish Rupture Could Cause a Fissure in NATO", see online at: <https://thehill.com/opinion/international/438868-the-turkish-rupture-could-cause-a-fissure-in-nato> – online on 16 April 2019. For a good and plausible explanation what motivated President Erdogan to purchase the S-400 and his willingness to endure considerable US and NATO pressure to acquire it, see Karako, op.cit. In support of Karako's explanation, see also Kerim Has, "Turkey, Russia, and the Looming S-400 Crisis", Middle East Institute (MEI), see online at: <https://www.mei.edu/publications/turkey-russia-and-looming-s-400-crisis> – online on 10 July 2019.

#### **A New Peak in Turkey-NATO Worsening Relations: Delivery of the S-400 Components to Turkey**

The first delivery of the Russian-built S-400 components to Turkey took place on 12 July 2019. As a result, we can expect what Simon Waldman, a Visiting Research Fellow at King's College, London, said: "Upon receipt of the S-400, Turkey will no doubt find itself increasingly isolated inside NATO's civilian and military structures". He went on to underline that Turkey could end up being a member of the alliance in name only. Retired Ambassador Suha Umar agrees that the S-400 purchase is likely to create



**Figure 3:** Senior Military Officers, particularly with experience of NATO assignments, have been significantly affected by the purges in the wake of the July 2016 coup attempt in Turkey (NATO).

problems for Turkey in NATO as he argues: “There is no one in NATO who shares our views on this matter. One For All And All For One Article 5 of the NATO Treaty could be watered down in Turkey’s case over the S-400 affair.”<sup>12</sup> Ian Lesser, Director of the German Marshall Fund (GMF) in Brussels, stated that “the political ramifications of the S-400 delivery are very serious, because the delivery confirms to many the idea that Turkey is *drifting off* [author’s italics] into a non-Western alternative. This will create a lot of anxiety and bad feelings inside NATO – it will clearly further poison sentiment for Turkey inside the alliance”.<sup>13</sup> Thus, it can be said that the estrangement between Turkey and NATO continues and it appears that President Erdogan’s administration tends to play down the signifi-

cance of the S-400 delivery to Turkey with the hope that NATO allies would accept the S-400 deal as a *fait accompli*.

... it appears that President Erdogan’s administration tends to play down the significance of the S-400 delivery to Turkey with the hope that NATO allies would accept the S-400 deal as a *fait accompli*.

#### Purges, Brainwash and Brain Drain within the Turkish Military

The additional factor that contributes to Turkey-NATO strained relations pertained to the massive purge of the Turkish military high command and brainwashing campaign of the Turkish junior and senior military officers to be loyal to President Erdogan and distrustful of NATO in general and the United States in particular. It needs to be emphasised that the newly established National Defence University in Istanbul took a leading role in educating and training Turkish military in a post failed coup attempt on 15 July 2016. Some 500 officers and 3000 non-commissioned officers (NCOs) will be trained at the National Defence University and the Gendarmerie and Coast Guard Academy. The newly established university is to fulfil the requirements of the military following the closure of military high schools after the failed coup attempt.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Semih Idiz, “How Will S-400 Affair Affect Turkish-NATO Ties?”, see online at: <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2019/06/turkey-usa-russia-how-s400-affair-affected-turkish-nato-ties.html> – online on 20 June 2019. Hereafter cited as Idiz, “How Will S-400”. See also a very interesting assessment and the potential way out for Turkey out of the impasse offered by Jim Townsend, former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Europe currently with the Center for a New American Security. Aaron Mehta, “Turkey Has the S-400. The Trump’s Administration is Silent”, see online at: <https://www.defensenews.com/pentagon/2019/07/12/turkey-has-the-s-400-the-trump-administration-is-silent/>. Jim Townsend’s proposed way out of the impasse is unlikely to happen since President Erdogan determined to have the S-400 operational and not kept in crates. See also three suggestions made by the US Navy Admiral (retired) James Stavridis in his article “Kicking Turkey Out of NATO Would Be a Gift to Putin”, see online at: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/07/19/kicking-turkey-out-of-nato-would-be-a-gift-to-putin-a66484>. The third suggestion offered by Admiral Stavridis namely, to encourage the Turks to keep the S-400 in mothballs, and then selling them another high-tech-end air-defence system is unlikely to be accepted by President Erdogan. Hereafter cited as Stavridis, “Kicking Turkey”. President Erdogan made up his mind and remained steadfast in his approach to have the S-400 operational. And it should not be forgotten that the US offered Turkey Patriot air-defence system back in 2013 and France jointly with Italy offered SAMP/T air-defence system in 2014. For the recent article on President Donald Trump’s suggestion to Turkey not to activate the S-400, see online at: <https://bulgarianmilitary.com/2019/07/26/donald-trump-pleads-turkey-not-to-activate-the-s-400-missile-defence-system/>. Such suggestions are likely to fall on deaf ears of President Erdogan and his government.

<sup>13</sup> For the complete article, see Carlotta Gall, “Turkey Gets Shipment of Russian Missile System, Defying US”, see online at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/12/world/europe/turkey-russia-missiles.html>.

<sup>14</sup> For the complete article, see online at: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-to-train-3500-officers-in-national-defense-university-103193-on-line-on-24-August-2016>.

According to former SACEUR, Admiral (ret) James Stavridis, “the importance and service capability of the Turkish armed forces in NATO is likely to decrease. Unfortunately, it is likely that the military in the wake of the coup will be laser-focused on internal controversy, endless investigations, and loyalty checks – and simply surviving as an institution. This will have a chilling effect on military readiness and performance. While some operations have resumed at the crucial Incirlik Air Base, co-operation is already frozen across many US and NATO channels”<sup>15</sup>. Sources within the alliance state that Turkey’s massive purge of its military since 15 July 2016 has undermined NATO’s integrated military command (IMC) and increased tensions within the alliance. Two Turkish officers previously attached to NATO and now seeking political asylum in Europe are said that 42 of the 53 Turkish officers posted within NATO’s headquarters in Brussels have been removed in the purge, with two-thirds of the 600 Turkish postings across the NATO’s command having suffered the same fate.

General Curtis Scaparrotti, Supreme Allied Commander Europe of NATO until summer 2019, mentioned that the purge of Turkish staff “does have an impact [on NATO’s IMC] because it was largely very senior personnel, and you lose a good deal of experience. I had talented, capable people here and I am taking a degradation on my staff for the skill, the expertise and the work that they produced”<sup>16</sup>. According to General Scaparrotti, Ankara has filled about half of the NATO’s command posts vacated and promised to accelerate replacement of the rest. According to the above mentioned officers, NATO “will feel the *difference* [author’s italics] between us and our successors soon. Some of them belong to Turkey’s ultra-nationalist groups, while others have dubious background”<sup>17</sup>.

General Scaparrotti claimed that the purge has also affected Turkey’s military readiness. “One of the areas is their air force. Those [removed] were their senior pilots, so they are working now to train younger pilots. It had an impact. I would not say it was serious but I would say it is noticeable.”<sup>18</sup> It should be emphasised that training younger pilots takes four to five years to accomplish. And in the meantime, the Turkish Air Force faces a lack of trained pilots that adversely affects its performance in Syria.

### General Scaparrotti claimed that the purge has also affected Turkey’s military readiness.

<sup>15</sup> Riegert, “NATO and Turkey”, op.cit.

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2016/12/07/nato-commander-says-150-turkish-officers-have-left-post-coup/>

<sup>17</sup> For the complete article, see Tigner, “NATO’s Silence.” [In the days after the coup attempt, the Turkish Air Force purged more than 300 F-16 pilots, most of which had years of experience. The result: The cockpit to pilot ratio dropped from over 1.25 pilots per one aircraft to 0.8. This ratio is important to ensure that pilots get enough rest between flights without impacting the Air Force’s operational tempo. See Aaron Stein, “Turkey’s Fighter Pilot Problems”, Atlantic Council, MENASource, see online at: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/turkey-s-fighter-pilot-problems/> – online on 8 September 2017.]

<sup>18</sup> Tigner, op.cit.

In March 2017 it was reported that the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) have been hit the hardest by the massive post-coup purge. Several thousand military personnel have been dismissed from their posts, and 40 per cent of the TSK’s generals have been replaced with new officers deemed loyal to President Erdogan. According to Marc Pierini, former EU Ambassador to Turkey and now a Visiting Scholar at Brussels-based Carnegie Europe, “there is a distinct malaise in Turkey, because so many of its officers have been removed, while all of the personal connections [between them and NATO’s command structure] have been lost.” Brooks Tigner concludes that Erdogan’s purge of the Turkish military will continue unhindered.<sup>19</sup> Unfortunately for Turkey’s military, the purge is likely to continue unabated and hence, the strength of the TSK continuing to be undermined. In addition to those imprisoned several high-ranking officers asked for political asylum after the failed coup in the U.S. and elsewhere. According to undisclosed sources, the number of asylum seekers in the U.S. varies between several dozen and up to 100-150, most of them being senior officers.<sup>20</sup>

There is no doubt that abovementioned loss of the personnel connections, ongoing purge of officers of the Turkish armed forces, President Erdogan’s and his political partners distrust in NATO in general and the United States in particular as well as the fragile relations between Turkey and NATO undermine strength and cohesion of the alliance. Against that bleak background, three options of future Turkey-NATO relations might be considered:

**There is no doubt that abovementioned loss of the personnel connections, ongoing purge of officers of the Turkish armed forces, President Erdogan’s and his political partners distrust in NATO in general and the United States in particular as well as the fragile relations between Turkey and NATO undermine strength and cohesion of the alliance.**

<sup>19</sup> For the complete article, see Tigner, “Turkey to be ‘Elephant!’”. According to the data gathered by the state-run Anadolu Agency, the number of generals and admirals in the TSK has decreased by 40 per cent due to the dismissals after the failed coup. The number of generals and admirals has decreased from 326 to 196 after the failed coup. For the rest of the collected data, see online at: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/number-of-turkish-generals-decreases-40-percent-with-post-coup-attempt-dismissals--115852> – online on 23 July 2017.

<sup>20</sup> Eugene Kogan, “US-Turkish Relations in Crisis”, European Security and Defence (February 2019), 34. See also Tom Bowman, “Growing Number of Turkish Military Officers Seek Asylum in the US”, see online at: <https://www.npr.org/2019/05/29/727796635/growing-number-of-turkish-military-officers-are-requesting-asylum-in-the-u-s>. For the Turkish military officers asking for asylum in the EU NATO member states, see Manolis Kostidis, “Turkish Military Officers Are Requesting Asylum All Over Europe”, Independent Balkan News Agency (IBNA), see online at: <https://balkaneye.com/turkish-military-officers-are-requesting-asylum-all-over-europe/> – online on 15 February 2017. See also online at: <https://www.thelocal.no/20170322/norway-grants-asylum-to-torture-threatened-turkish-officers> – online on 22 March 2017 and Mark Lewis, “Purged From Turkish Army, NATO Officers Granted Asylum in Norway”, Atlantic Council, online at: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/natosource/purged-from-turkish-army-nato-officers-granted-asylum-in-norway> – online on 10 April 2017.

### Option 1: Turkey Remains In and Behaves Like a Mole

This is indeed a nightmarish option for NATO, if one of its members remains in the alliance, pursues its own agenda and influences NATO's decision from within. NATO's military command would realise that Turkey were to consider a rogue state and unreliable partner and, as a result, Turkish military within NATO would be hindered from participating in the alliance discussions on intelligence and other security-related issues. Nevertheless, the Turkish military might participate in the alliance military exercises but at rather insignificant numbers. In case of military conflict breaking out in for instance, the Black Sea region involving Bulgaria and Romania, Turkey would remain neutral with all its ramifications for the famous Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty.

Former NATO senior military commanders will dismiss this option out of hand. However, we need to remember that they are probably continuing to see Turkey through rose-tinted spectacles and remain nostalgic about a Turkey that increasingly does no longer exist.<sup>21</sup> They tend to see what has happened in Turkey since the failed coup attempt as aberration and cling to the hope that things will get better in the foreseeable future. They argue that the Turkish-Russian rapprochement is a temporarily phenomena and there is more divergence between Turkey and Russia and more convergence between Turkey and NATO. This is considered a quite plausible scenario and President Erdogan might be interested in pursuing it.

### Option 2: Waiting for a Miracle or rather "Waiting for Godot"

This assumes that NATO is not willing to give up on Turkey despite continuing tensions between NATO and some of its member states with Turkey. There is a saying that hope dies last and that summarise the state of relations between Turkey and NATO. As mentioned before, there is a hope that President Erdogan as a result of Turkey's military isolation and marginalisation within NATO might use Article 13<sup>22</sup> and leave NATO's military command structure<sup>23</sup> but will remain in NATO's political structure. In that case, the famous Article 5 will not cover Turkey in case of [external] armed attack.

<sup>21</sup> To counter the author's assertion that Turkey as an important NATO ally is continuing to exist, see Peter Roberts and Seth Newkirk, "Turkey, the US and the S-400: A Counter-Narrative", Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) Commentary, see online at: <https://rusi.org/commentary/turkey-us-and-s-400-counter-narrative> – online on 15 August 2019.

<sup>22</sup> For the complete article, see online at: [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official\\_texts\\_17120.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm)

<sup>23</sup> Francesco Bongiovanni presents a very lucid analysis of what is likely to happen if Turkey decides to formally exit NATO. "Turkey: The NATO Alliance's Wild Card", Turkish Policy Quarterly, 17:2 (Summer 2018), see online at: <http://turkishpolicy.com/article/919/turkey-the-nato-alliances-wild-card> – online on 28 September 2018, 7–8. Hereafter cited as Bongiovanni, "Turkey". What he however fails to say is that Turkey might formally decide to exit both, military and political structures of NATO. As precedents, in 1966 President Charles De Gaulle left the military command structure but France remained in the political structure. In 1974 Greece exited military command structure but remained in the political structure. For the complete article, see online at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_NATO](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_NATO). For the potential Turkey exit from NATO, see Omer Taspinar and Michael O'Hanlon, "A Gaullist Option for Turkey in NATO", see online at: <https://www.berggruen.org/the-world-post/articles/a-gaullist-option-for-turkey-in-nato/> – online on 18 June 2019. Hereafter cited as Taspinar and O'Hanlon, "A Gaullist Option." See also Idiz, "How Will S-400."

... there is a hope that President Erdogan as a result of Turkey's military isolation and marginalisation within NATO might use Article 13 and leave NATO's military command structure but will remain in NATO's political structure.

Additionally, supporters of Turkish NATO membership would argue that the purchase of the Russian S-400 was a single deal and Turkey will not activate the system and return to the fold of NATO as the Prodigal Son. This option is less likely to happen because President Erdogan is interested to activate the S-400 for the defence of Turkey and not keep the system in the crates, mothball it or transport the system to Azerbaijan. However, waiting for a miracle gives President Erdogan extra time to play a game of potential purchase of SAMP/T air-defence systems that has been on the cards for the last five years. As for the Patriot air-defence system potential purchase the Trump administration rescinded a US\$ 3.5 billion deal to sell Patriot system to Turkey after it received the Russian S-400 system in July 2019.<sup>24</sup> Each time two sides were close to sign the contract but for President Erdogan and his administration financial incentives pertained to the deal were not good enough and the issue of transfer of technology (ToT) hindered the signature of the contract. Still, NATO contemplates every potential venue to keep Turkey anchored in the alliance as Hans Binnendijk is arguing in his article supporting this option.<sup>25</sup> Thus, this option is considered to have a 50:50 chance to be materialised.

### Option 3: Shaking Up the Alliance

Three major changes would need to happen in order to shake the alliance:

1. The decision-making process pursued by consensus would have be changed into decision-making pursued by a qualified (e. g. two-third) majority;
2. The de facto veto power of individual member states would have to be abolished, thus no member can block the first change and finally,
3. a new article related to suspension and ultimately expulsion of a NATO member state from the alliance would have to be inserted into the updated/amended North Atlantic Treaty.

This however would require an immense political will of the NATO political leadership, its current Secretary General, and particularly of its individual member states, including Turkey. Hence, this option is pretty unlikely to happen, not least to the fact that Secretary General Stoltenberg as a consensus-builder is averse to revolutionary de-

<sup>24</sup> For the complete article, see John Deutsch, "Turkey's Patriot Offer Dead After S-400 Delivery," see online at: <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2019/08/turkey-patriot-offer-dead-s400-delivery.html> – online on 22 August 2019.

<sup>25</sup> "A Last Chance for Turkey? There Could Still be Time to Fix the S-400 Issue," see online at: <https://www.defensenews.com/opinion/commentary/2019/07/29/a-last-chance-for-turkey-there-could-still-be-time-to-fix-the-s-400-issue/>.



**Figure 4:** Strained relations between NATO and Turkey are affecting military co-operation in quantity and quality (NATO).

velopments and prefers a policy of calming tense relations and political disagreements occasionally happening in the alliance. In other words, all is well that ends well.

## Conclusion

As long as President Erdogan governs Turkey and NATO's Secretary General Stoltenberg remains at the helm of the alliance, Turkey-NATO relations are likely to remain strained and constrained by the not-updated/amended North Atlantic Treaty. Furthermore, since Secretary General Stoltenberg is known as consensus-builder, President Erdogan is likely to assume that Turkey will not be suspended and ultimately expelled from the alliance since the North Atlantic Treaty lacks a chapter related to suspension and expulsion of the NATO member state. As long as each and every member of NATO possesses a de facto veto right on formulating significant amendments to the North Atlantic Treaty and implementing its content in particular would be mission impossible since some NATO member states would veto it. There might be a solution to this vicious circle spelled above but this solution is not going to be implemented.

As a result, we are likely to see that Turkey will consistently be isolated and shun from the decision-making process of the alliance. President Erdogan understands this point but is not ready to leave the military command and political structure of the Alliance on its own according to Article 13 of the North Atlantic Treaty. He knows that Turkey despite isolation and marginalisation is better off inside NATO than outside of it. Therefore, suggestions made by Omer Taspinar and Michael O'Hanlon, that if Turkey insists on pursuing military and technological co-operation with Russia, Washington should encourage Turkey to consider this Gaullist option<sup>26</sup> and announce that Turkey leaves the alliance on its own, is not going to be taken by President Erdogan. He knows that being member comes with benefits, while being out means to be under a sort of President Putin's patronage. Furthermore, it should be re-



**Figure 5:** The deployment of Russian S-400 may eliminate Turkey as partner of the F-35 program (Defense News).

peatedly emphasised that Russia and Turkey were not and are not equal partners. In case, President Putin would lead, while President Erdogan would follow, a consequence that Erdogan is definitely not willing to accept. Furthermore, President Putin will be cooperating with Turkey as long as it suits Russia's interests. He would be ending it quickly if Turkey would turn on him. In that case he might subsequently impose crippling economic sanctions on Turkey.

**They must understand that irreparable damage applied by Turkey to the cohesion, unity and strength of the Alliance is also in the interest of President Vladimir Putin.**

However, it needs to be emphasised that despite being isolated and marginalised Turkey can do significant damage to the Alliance from inside. The impression is that President Erdogan is to inflict as much damage as possible to the alliance from inside, though this assessment would be dismissed out of hand by President Erdogan and his administration. This point should however be fully understood by each and every member of the Alliance. They must understand that irreparable damage applied by Turkey to the cohesion, unity and strength of the Alliance is also in the interest of President Vladimir Putin. On this point Putin and Erdogan not just tacitly agree but also see eye to eye.

EU and NATO allies are deeply divided when it comes to what needs to be done with regard to Turkey. This lack of coherence suits the Turkish government perfectly. The impotence of the EU NATO member states to reach decision on how to hedge or even punish Turkey politically and economically is clearly understood by President Erdogan, who scorns them and is exploiting this weakness. It would definitely need U.S. leadership to initiate an update/amendment of the North Atlantic Treaty. It would be a great exaggeration to say that punitive measures by NATO on its member Turkey would drive Turkey into the arms of Russia. President Erdogan set his agenda moving closer to Russia back in 2016 and not after the first deliv-

<sup>26</sup> "A Gaullist Option." For a plea to keep Turkey in the Alliance, see also Stavridis, "Kicking Turkey".

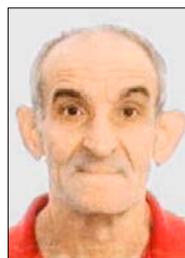
ery of the Russian-built S-400 components to Turkey on 12 July 2019. Deliveries are set to continue through April 2020. Therefore, a full inclusion of Turkey in NATO is no longer a best option for all concerned parties. In that regard, the author disagrees with Bongiovanni's conclusion that despite the apparent increase in grievances and in the fragmentation of the alliance, the odds are that the Americans, Europeans, and Turks understand that NATO works for all of them and that their world would be far less secure without it.<sup>27</sup> NATO without Turkey would not only survive but would be more resilient and cohesive against common threats. Turkey without NATO would be weaker and likely become a prey to Russia and neighbouring Iran. Whether the Turkish government is willing and able to understand the consequences of their decisions is beyond the scope of this article. From the outside, it appears that the Erdogan administration tends to misread signals coming from Washington and is scorning EU and NATO members due to their perceived impotence to reach a common position.

**Turkey without NATO would be weaker and likely become a prey to Russia and neighbouring Iran.**

### Way Ahead

Strained relations between Turkey and NATO are likely to continue as long as Recep Tayyip Erdogan presides over Turkey. However, even after President Erdogan's term is expired there is no guarantee that his successor would change the nature of strained relations. Turkey's veering towards Russia and Turkey's purchase of the S-400 air-defence system from Russia should be seen in an overall context of distrustful relations between Turkey and NATO developed over the last several years. Turkey's improved relations with Russia will continue in the foreseeable future to the chagrin of the NATO allies. At the same time, Turkey-NATO relations are constrained by not updated/amended yet North Atlantic Treaty signed on 4 April 1949. As long as Turkey remains a NATO member and hold a power of veto in the alliance it can for instance block inclusion of Greek Cyprus in the alliance or block co-operation with EU but not NATO member states like Austria. An additional factor needs to be brought into Turkey-NATO relations, namely a continued purge of the NATO-trained officers of the Turkish armed forces and a brainwash trend to make a new generation of military officers loyal to President Erdogan as commander-in-chief. This new officer generation has a Muslim identity and mistrusts NATO in general and the United States in particular. The latter factor will have a long-term consequences on the strength and

quality of the Turkish military and its contribution to the alliance. Turkey with the second largest military in NATO has been seriously damaged in qualitative terms by the ongoing purges. As a result, it can be expected that Turkish military contribution to NATO activities in for instance the Black Sea region is likely to be minimal since Turkey is not interested to irritate Russia. Finally, as long as Jens Stoltenberg remains NATO's Secretary General he will do his utmost to keep Turkey in the alliance even to the detriment of the alliance and despite NATO's military command unease with Turkey.



**Eugene Kogan**

Ph. D., defence and security expert, Tbilisi, Georgia.

E-Mail: [eugene1kogan@gmail.com](mailto:eugene1kogan@gmail.com)

<sup>27</sup> Bongiovanni, "Turkey", 14. The same conclusions are expressed in an article by Lieutenant-General (retired) Ben Hodges, "Time for Turkey-USA 2.0", in Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA), see online at: <https://www.cepa.org/time-for-turkey-usa-2> – online on 26 July 2019. For the earlier statement that Turkey's inclusion in NATO is surely the best option for all concerned parties, see Mustafa Aydın, "Turkey's Western Connection", see online at: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/opinion/mustafa-aydin/turkeys-western-connection-122890> – online on 23 November 2017.