



TURKEY AND BLACK SEA SECURITY

SIEMON T. WEZEMAN AND ALEXANDRA KUIMOVA*

The security environment in the wider Black Sea region—which brings together the six littoral states (Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine) and a hinterland including the South Caucasus and Moldova—is rapidly changing. It combines protracted conflicts with a significant conventional military build-up that intensified after the events of 2014: Russia's takeover of Crimea and the start of the internationalized civil war in eastern Ukraine.¹ Transnational connections between conflicts across the region and between the Black Sea and the Middle East add further dimensions of insecurity. As a result, there is a blurring of the conditions of peace, crisis and conflict in the region. This has led to an unpredictable and potentially high-risk environment in which military forces with advanced weapons, including nuclear-capable systems, are increasingly active in close proximity to each other.

In this context, there is an urgent need to develop a clearer understanding of the security dynamics and challenges facing the wider Black Sea region, and to explore opportunities for dialogue between the key regional security actors. This background paper on Turkey is part of the Black Sea Regional Security Initiative, a project launched by SIPRI in 2017 to provide independent data and analysis on security developments in the region and to promote transparency around military issues.² This paper continues by describing Turkey's situation on the Black Sea (section I), it then outlines recent trends in Turkey's defence policy, including an overview of Turkey's national documents (section II), the structure (section III) and deployment (section IV) of its armed forces, its military spending (section V), and its arms holdings and acquisitions (section VI), with a specific focus on their relations with

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¹ Russia gained control over Crimea in Mar. 2014 after a referendum in Crimea favoured secession from Ukraine to join Russia. Russia and a few other countries claim this to be a legal accession. However, Ukraine and most other countries call the referendum and accession to Russia an illegal annexation of Ukrainian territory. This paper uses the term 'takeover' to mark only the factual change of control of Crimea.

² As well as background papers mapping the developments in each of the 6 Black Sea littoral states, the project will publish a paper covering the various conflicts in the region: Klimenko, E., 'Protracted armed conflicts in the post-Soviet space and their impact on Black Sea security', SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security no. 2018/8, Dec. 2018, and a longer paper on the challenges in the region: Melvin, N. J., *Rebuilding Collective Security in the Black Sea Region*, SIPRI Policy Paper no. 50 (SIPRI: Stockholm, Dec. 2018). The Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs provided funding for the project.

SUMMARY

● The Black Sea region is experiencing a changing military balance. The six littoral states (Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine) intensified their efforts to build up their military potential after Russia's takeover of Crimea and the start of the internationalized civil war in eastern Ukraine in 2014.

Although security in the Black Sea region has always been and remains important for Turkey, the current Turkish defence policy seems to be largely directed southwards, towards the Middle East. Russian–Turkish relations have been ambiguous for some years. Turkey has openly expressed concern about perceived Russian ambitions in the Black Sea region and called for a greater North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) presence there. However, Turkey's relations with Russia have been improving since mid-2016 while its commitment to NATO appears to have weakened.



Figure 1. Map of Turkey

Credit: Ahlenius, H., Nordpil, 2018.

Black Sea security. Conclusions (section VII) summarize Turkey’s position on Black Sea issues.

I. Background

Turkey controls access by sea to and from the Black Sea and, with a long Black Sea coastline and a large exclusive economic zone (EEZ) claim, Black Sea security has been and remains important for Turkey. The end of the cold war gave Turkey opportunities to play a leading role in Black Sea security, but the initiatives it took fell apart from 2008. Moreover, security issues in other regions, including the Aegean Sea, the Middle East and internally with its Kurdish population, are generally more important in Turkey’s security policies.

Turkey’s relations with the other Black Sea states vary and have varied over time. To the west, long-standing disputes with Bulgaria were largely resolved in the early 1990s. To the east, relations with Georgia have developed and are now good. Relations with Russia have been erratic. They are partly formed by a long history of Russian–Turkish rivalry and wars in the Balkans, the Black Sea and the Caucasus. Turkey’s recent relations with



Russia have also been greatly affected by the two countries' roles in Syria, where both are actively involved in the civil war, but on opposing sides.

Turkey has been a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) since 1952. It also aims for membership of the European Union (EU): it first applied for membership of the EU's predecessor, the European Economic Community, in 1987, and full negotiations on EU membership began in 2005. However, the negotiations have been slow and they were suspended in 2016 due to the purges in Turkey after a failed coup attempt against President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in July 2016. This was one of the reasons for Turkey's recent reorientation from the West towards Russia.

Turkey lies in South Eastern Europe and the Middle East, bordering Bulgaria and Greece to the west, Iraq and Syria to the south, and Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Iran to the east (see figure 1). It has a coastline of 1700 kilometres along the Black Sea (see table 1).³ It claims 12 nautical miles of territorial waters and a 200-mile EEZ, both of which border with Bulgaria and Georgia. The Turkish EEZ also borders the EEZs of Romania, Russia and formerly (via Crimea) Ukraine.⁴ Economically, the Black Sea is not very important for Turkey, but it controls the exit and entrance to the sea through the Turkish Straits.

II. Defence policy

Interest in defence issues among Turks is high. In a 2015 survey, 73 per cent of Turks were willing to fight for their country, ranking Turkey 12th of the 64 countries surveyed and by far the highest of the NATO member states.⁵ However, Turkey's defence policy is largely formed behind closed doors by the president, some ministers, the military and the intelligence services. Public debate on defence has been largely absent and few official documents giving details on threat perceptions have been published in the past 25 years. The most recent defence white paper was published as long ago as 2000.⁶ Like most such policy documents from European countries at that time, it emphasizes cooperation with or within NATO, the EU, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and other multilateral frameworks for security and economic cooperation as the basis of security in Europe. In the Black Sea region, it identifies economic cooperation, confidence- and security-building measures and naval cooperation as the way to make the Black Sea 'a sea of peace, stability and prosperity'.⁷ The white paper is positive about making this happen and does not mention Russia or any other Black Sea country as a potential threat or problem. Instead it presents instability in the Middle East, international terrorist networks and the

³ Stanchev, H. et al., 'Determination of the Black Sea area and coastline length using GIS methods and Landsat 7 satellite images', *Geo-Eco-Marina*, no. 17 (2011), p. 29. Turkey has also a 4380-km coastline with the Aegean and Mediterranean seas.

⁴ Saunders, S. (ed.), *IHS Jane's Fighting Ships 2016–2017* (IHS: Coulsdon, 2016), p. 851; and Seferoglu, S. S., 'Turkey at a glance', 7 May 1997.

⁵ Gallup International Association, 'WIN/Gallup International's global survey shows three in five willing to fight for their country', Press release, [Dec. 2015].

⁶ Turkish Ministry of National Defence (MND), *Defense White Paper 2000* (MND: Ankara, Aug. 2000).

⁷ Turkish Ministry of National Defence (note 6), p. 22.



Table 1. Basic facts about Turkey and the Black Sea

Area	783 356 km ²
Black Sea coastline ^a	1 700 km
Waters claimed in the Black Sea ^b	
Territorial waters	12 nautical miles (22 km)
Exclusive economic zone	200 nautical miles (370 km)
Neighbouring countries ^c	
Land borders ^c	Armenia, Azerbaijan (Nakhichevan exclave), Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Iran, Iraq, Syria
Maritime borders in the Black Sea ^d	Bulgaria, Georgia, Russia (EEZ only)
Population (2018) ^a	81.9 million
GDP (2017)	
Total (current US\$)	\$849 billion
Per capita	\$10 512
Membership	
NATO	Member since 1952
European Union	Candidate for membership since 2005 (but current status uncertain)
Military spending (2017)	
Total (current US\$)	\$18 190 million
As a share of GDP	2.2%

EEZ = exclusive economic zone; GDP = gross domestic product; NATO = North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

^a No final demarcation of these maritime claims has been made.

^b The border with the EEZ claimed by Russia is in waters surrounding Crimea.

Sources: International Monetary Fund, World Economic Outlook Database, Apr. 2018; SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, May 2018; Stanchev, H. et al., ‘Determination of the Black Sea area and coastline length using GIS methods and Landsat 7 satellite images’, *Geo-Eco-Marina*, no. 17 (2011); and Oral, N., ‘Summary of EEZ zones in the Black Sea’, Commission on the Protection of the Black Sea Against Pollution, [n.d.].

Kurdish Workers’ Party (Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan, PKK) as the threats to Turkish security.

After 2000 Turkey’s defence policy must be assessed based on statements by Turkey’s political and military leadership, in particular the president, and on actions by the Turkish armed forces. These all show in recent years how Turkey’s relations with its NATO partners, in particular the United States, have deteriorated while relations with Russia have swung from friendly, to near war and back to friendly. At the same time, Turkey tries to maintain a good relationship with Ukraine, supporting Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity including Crimea.⁸

Turkey is not in full agreement with the USA and other allies over support to rebel forces in Iraq and Syria, largely because the USA and other NATO countries have provided support for Kurdish groups in Iraq and Syria in the fight against the Islamic State. Turkey sees the Iraqi and Syrian Kurds as being linked to the PKK in Turkey and believes that any support for the former by way of equipment and training is likely to end up strengthening the latter.⁹ In turn, the USA and other NATO allies have heavily criticized Turkey’s decision to buy S-400 long-range surface-to-air (SAM) systems from Russia rather than systems from the USA or a European NATO country.¹⁰

⁸ Melvin (note 2).

⁹ Baron, K., ‘Turkey tells US to withdraw weapons, support for Syrian rebels’, *Defense One*, 8 Nov. 2017; and Zanotti, J. and Thomas, C., *Turkey: Background and US Relations in Brief*, Congressional Research Service (CRS) Report for Congress R44000 (US Congress, CRS: Washington, DC, 23 Mar. 2018).

¹⁰ Reuters, ‘Pompeo presses Turkey on S-400 missiles purchase from Russia’, 27 Apr. 2018; and Insinna, V., ‘Ambassador to NATO unsure if US will impose sanctions on Turkey for S-400 buy’,



By mid-2018 the USA had made veiled threats of sanctions on Turkey if the deal went ahead, to which Turkish officials responded that ‘any sanctions on Turkey will not be left unanswered’.¹¹ However, by that time NATO had acknowledged that the deal is a Turkish ‘national decision’ and tried to patch the rift by highlighting Turkey’s contribution to NATO in general and NATO operations in the Middle East in particular.¹² NATO’s website also paints a picture of the importance and loyalty of Turkey to NATO.¹³

Turkey’s relations with Russia have been complicated for some years. The events in Ukraine in 2014 coincided with developments in Iraq and Syria that were perceived by Turkey as a more important threat. Russia was seen as a problem in both the Black Sea and along Turkey’s southern border, and the good Russian–Turkish relations from earlier years changed dramatically. By early 2016 they were described as very tense and, according to one European official, ‘really incredibly serious’, with the same official saying that Russian President Vladimir Putin was ‘furious with Turkey’, while a German diplomat said that ‘Putin wants Erdogan out’.¹⁴ This was probably mostly due to rivalry in the Middle East and different opinions on how to deal with the Syrian conflict, where Russia and Turkey each support opposing sides.¹⁵ Several violations of Turkish airspace by Russian aircraft active in Syria and then the shooting down of a Russian combat aircraft by Turkey on 24 November 2015 intensified the tensions. By early 2016 the possibility of Russian and Turkish forces engaging each other in combat in Syria was seen as realistic.¹⁶ A Turkish public survey in 2016 found that 34.9 per cent of respondents viewed Russia as a threat.¹⁷

Turkey’s relations with its NATO partners have deteriorated while relations with Russia have swung from friendly, to near war and back to friendly

By that time, Turkey’s position on Black Sea security also seemed clear. President Erdoğan in May 2016 lamented the lack of a NATO force in the Black Sea and called for a greater NATO presence, saying that ‘The Black Sea has almost become a Russian lake’ and that ‘If we [NATO] don’t take action, history will not forgive us’.¹⁸ He supported a Romanian initiative to create a joint Bulgarian–Romanian–Turkish fleet in the Black Sea, but this fell through when Bulgaria rejected it in early 2017, after initially supporting the idea.¹⁹

Defense News, 17 Nov. 2017.

¹¹ Demirtaş, S., ‘Don’t use S-400s even if you buy them, US tells Turkey’, *Hürriyet Daily News*, 7 June 2018.

¹² Cetin, S., ‘NATO head: Turkey plan to buy S-400 “national decision”’, Anadolu Agency, 13 Mar. 2018.

¹³ NATO, ‘NATO support to Turkey’, NATO Multimedia Library, 7 June 2018.

¹⁴ Solomon, E. et al., ‘Tensions between Russia and Turkey reach new peak’, *Financial Times*, 15 Feb. 2016; and Jones, S. and Hille, K., ‘Russia’s military ambitions make waves in the Black Sea’, *Financial Times*, 13 May 2016.

¹⁵ Solomon et al. (note 14).

¹⁶ Solomon et al. (note 14).

¹⁷ Gurcan, M., ‘Russia’s winning the war for Turkish public’s trust’, *Al-Monitor*, 20 Nov. 2017. Kadir Has University, Istanbul, conducts the survey annually. Kadir Has University, ‘Khas Türk dış politikası kamuoyu algıları araştırması 2017 yılı sonuçları açıklandı’ [Results of the Kadir Has Turkish foreign policy opinion survey for 2017 announced], 21 July 2017.

¹⁸ Jones and Hille (note 14); RT, ‘“Almost a Russian lake”: Erdogan calls for greater NATO presence in Black Sea’, 11 May 2016; and Blank, S., ‘Putin’s dream of the Black Sea as a Russian lake’, *Newsweek*, 3 July 2016.

¹⁹ Defence24, ‘Ukrainian–Romanian–Bulgarian brigade to be formed?’, 30 Apr. 2016; Lupu, V., ‘Sofia opposes NATO fleet countering Russia, Bulgarian PM says. President Plevneliev had a dif-



The failed coup attempt of July 2016 became another turning point in Turkish defence and foreign policy. Erdoğan was heavily censured by the USA and the EU for his heavy-handed response to the coup, and the subsequent attempt to increase his control over Turkey through purges of government agencies, including the armed forces, the media and other groups and institutions. Turkey's allies viewed this as a move away from democracy, with the USA seeing it as a possible reason to review Turkey's NATO membership, and the EU treating it as a major obstacle to EU membership.²⁰ At the same time, the views of Turkey on how to deal with the conflicts in Syria and with Islamic State moved further away from those of the USA and its other NATO allies.²¹

In response Turkey has become more interested in developing good relations with Russia, and Russia has taken the opportunity to improve relations with Turkey, both in general terms and in regard to Syria in particular.²² In April 2017 two Turkish Navy ships made an 'unofficial' visit to Russia's naval base at Novorossiysk and conducted a bilateral exercise.²³ In May 2017 Iran, Russia and Turkey signed an agreement on de-escalation of the conflict in Syria, with the three states acting as guarantors for ceasefires in parts of Syria.²⁴ Then in September, as previously noted, Turkey signed an order for a key and expensive air defence system—the S-400—from Russia, despite protests from its NATO partners.²⁵ By October 2017 Erdoğan was describing Putin as 'a valuable friend'.²⁶

The changes were also reflected in a Turkish public survey in mid-2017. This found that only 18.5 per cent of respondents viewed Russia as a threat, just over half the level of 2016. The survey also found that 27.6 per cent saw cooperation with Russia as an alternative to EU membership, almost twice as many as in 2016. Similarly, the number of respondents that viewed the USA as the worst threat to Turkey increased from 33.1 per cent in 2016 to 66.5 per cent in 2017, while support for NATO membership dropped to 61.8 per cent, the lowest level since 2011.²⁷ By early 2018, following the launch by Turkey of Operation Olive Branch in Syria—a military action against Syrian Kurdish rebel groups—a Turkish military confrontation with US

ferent stance during the visit of President Iohannis', Romania Journal, 16 June 2016; and Romania Insider, 'NATO strengthens naval presence in the Black Sea', 16 Feb. 2017.

²⁰ Schultz, T., 'Turkey once again warms to EU accession', Deutsche Welle, 11 May 2017; and Bertrand, N., 'The US just issued a "remarkable" warning to Turkey amid its post-coup crackdown', Business Insider, 18 July 2016.

²¹ Yildiz, G., Aydıntaşbaş A. and Barnes-Dacey, J., 'Three views on Turkey's Syria intervention', European Council of Foreign Relations, 25 Jan. 2018.

²² Jacinto, L., 'Turkey's post-coup purge and Erdogan's private army', *Foreign Policy*, 13 July 2017.

²³ Pravda, 'Russian warships return to Mediterranean Sea', 8 Apr. 2017; Bosphorus Naval News, 'Turkish Navy conducting simultaneous port visits in 5 countries', 4 Apr. 2017; and Majumdar, D., 'Why are Russia and Turkey holding joint naval exercises in the Black Sea?', *National Interest*, 5 Apr. 2017.

²⁴ TASS, 'Russia, Turkey register four ceasefire violations in Syria', 3 Dec. 2017.

²⁵ Gall, C. and Higgins, A., 'Turkey signs Russian missile deal, pivoting from NATO', *New York Times*, 12 Sep. 2017.

²⁶ Jones, D., 'Growing use of Turkish military stokes fears of foreign policy shift', *Voice of America*, 2 Oct. 2017.

²⁷ Gurcan (note 17); and Aydin, M., 'Quo vadis Turkish foreign policy?', *Hürriyet Daily News*, 27 July 2017.

The failed coup attempt of July 2016 was a turning point in Turkish defence and foreign policy



forces seemed possible, just two years after a Russian–Turkish confrontation was a similar possibility.²⁸

It is unclear how significant the ups and downs in Turkey's recent relations with NATO allies, Russia or any Middle Eastern country are. Turkey has its own foreign policy agenda and seems to develop relations with whichever country fits that agenda best at a specific time. This has already in the past led to serious disagreements with NATO or individual NATO partners (e.g. over Cyprus in 1974 or the conflict with the PKK), but these have always been resolved. Relations with and views of Russia may have improved, but in the 2016 and 2017 surveys a relatively high proportion of respondents, 17–23 per cent, believed that Turkey does not have friends.²⁹ Indeed, the vast majority of those who named Turkey's closest friend chose Azerbaijan—which is in conflict with Russian-supported Armenia—undermining the view that Russia is becoming a friend or long-term ally of Turkey.³⁰ While disagreements with NATO allies have grown, Turkey continued to take part in NATO exercises in the Black Sea and elsewhere, including hosting some of them as before, and NATO (but not yet the USA) is doing its best to repair relations damaged by the S-400 dispute.³¹

Up to one-third of Turkish military personnel were dismissed after the July 2016 coup attempt

III. Armed forces structure

There was a considerable reduction in the Turkish armed forces just after the end of the cold war, but numbers then remained stable at about 500 000 from the 1990s until 2016 (see table 2). The Turkish Army and Navy still rely heavily on conscription: 81 per cent of army personnel and 71 per cent of navy personnel were conscripts in 2015.³²

After the July 2016 coup attempt the military was rapidly purged: up to one-third of personnel were dismissed, including a high proportion of officers.³³ By 2017 the armed forces had been reduced to about 350 000 military personnel, including about 200 000 conscripts. Reported long-term plans foresee this downsizing of the armed forces to be permanent or continuing, especially in the number of conscripts.³⁴ This will reduce personnel costs, which absorb 70–75 per cent of the military budget, and allow higher spending on equipment.³⁵ Reducing the number of less well trained conscripts will make the armed forces more professional, effective and better

²⁸ Finkelstein, C. and Saidel, N., 'The US is drifting toward war with a NATO ally', *Defense One*, 14 Feb. 2018.

²⁹ Aydın (note 27).

³⁰ Nazarli, A., 'Azerbaijan and Turkey ties: all-weather friends', *Azernews*, 13 Jan. 2017; and Trend News Agency, '[Turkey and Azerbaijan will always support each other: Turkish MP]', 28 May 2018 (in Russian).

³¹ See e.g. NATO, Allied Maritime Command, '2017 exercises', various dates; NATO, Allied Maritime Command, '2018', various dates; News.am, 'Turkey will take part in NATO exercises in Aegean Sea', 14 Nov. 2017; Wyland, S., 'NATO exercise seeks to display unity amid increasing US–Turkey tensions', *Stars and Stripes*, 16 Nov. 2017; and NATO, Allied Maritime Command, 'NATO ships exercise with allies in the Black Sea', 8 Feb. 2018.

³² International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2016* (Routledge: Abingdon, 2016), p. 148.

³³ Emmott, R., 'Turkey's purge cuts military by a third: Council of Europe', *Reuters*, 19 Dec. 2016.

³⁴ Gurcan, M., 'Turkey targets 30% hike in military spending next year', *Al-Monitor*, 18 Oct. 2017.

³⁵ Gurcan (note 34); and Kobal, M., 'Askerin payı düşüyor, yerlileşme artıyor' [The share of the military is decreasing, the domestication is increasing], *Al Jazeera*, 13 Nov. 2014.

Table 2. Turkish armed forces, selected years 1987–2017

	1987	1992	2002	2007	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
<i>Personnel</i>									
Active personnel	654 400	560 300	514 850	510 600	510 600	510 600	510 600	355 800	355 800
Army	542 000	450 000	402 000	402 000	402 000	402 000	402 000	260 200	260 200
Air Force	57 400	58 000	60 100	60 000	60 000	60 000	60 000	50 000	50 000
Navy	55 000	52 300	52 750	48 600	48 600	48 600	48 600	45 600	45 600
Reserves	951 000	1 107 000	378 700	378 700	378 700	378 700	378 700	378 700	378 700
Paramilitary ^a	126 100	121 100	152 200	102 200	150 800	152 200	201 200	156 800	156 800
<i>Equipment</i>									
Tanks	3 777	3 403	4 205	4 205	4 504	4 504	4 504	4 494	4 485
Other armour	3 450	2 840	5 078	5 468	5 700	6 000	6 000	6 300	6 120
Artillery over 100 mm	1 419	4 235 ^b	2 990	4 652	4 030	4 045	4 060	4 003	4 003
Combat aircraft	412	596	485	441	352	335	364	364	333
Helicopters	271	383	372	384	416	427	433	422	465
Major warships ^b	33	32	32	37	39	38	37	37	36
Minor warships ^b	20	18	21	24	27	25	21	21	21

Notes: Definitions and available information may not be consistent for all years—changes may be partly due to differences in definition or available information. Equipment in storage is included but not all equipment may be operational.

^a Paramilitary forces include the gendarmerie (under the Ministry of Interior in peacetime and the Ministry of National Defence in wartime) and the Coast Guard.

^b A different definition of artillery over 100 millimetres is used in 1992.

^c Major warships are combat ships of 1250 tonnes or more standard displacement; minor warships are combat ships of less than 1250 tonnes standard displacement.

Sources: International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance*, various editions; Turkish Ministry of National Defence; and media sources.

equipped.³⁶ However, the sudden dismissals after the coup attempt, and especially the dismissal of many experienced soldiers, has left Turkey's armed forces much weakened in the short term.³⁷

IV. Armed forces deployment

Almost all Turkish armed forces are deployed at home and organized, trained and equipped for conventional military operations in defence of national territory. The large paramilitary gendarmerie is also partly trained and equipped for conventional military operations. While the gendarmerie and the national police are responsible for most internal security, the armed forces also have an important role, especially in operations against the PKK and in patrolling the borders.

Members of the Turkish armed forces regularly participate in United Nations peace operations, often with combat troops, and in EU- and NATO-led missions. Turkey has participated in the NATO missions in Afghanistan since 2002 and by 2018 still took part in NATO's Resolute Support mission there.³⁸

For the Turkish Army, deployment within Turkey is partly dictated by its involvement in operations against the PKK in the east and south-east and by the troubled borders with Iraq and Syria. The Syrian conflict and Turkish

³⁶ Gurcan (note 34).

³⁷ Emmott (note 33); and Krever, M. and Shubert, A., 'Turkish purge leave armed forces weak, dismissed officer warns', CNN, 1 Feb. 2017.

³⁸ Turkish Armed Forces General Staff, 'Contribution of the TAF to peace support operations', [n.d.].



involvement in it have required additional forces in this area. The Turkish Air Force has bases throughout the country, but they are concentrated somewhat in the centre, south and south-west.

The Turkish Navy has 14 bases, 4 of which are on the Black Sea and 3 a short distance away, on the Sea of Marmara.³⁹ The main ships and aircraft are under the central Fleet Command. It also has two regional headquarters: the Northern Sea Area Command, covering the Black Sea and the Turkish Straits, and the Southern Sea Area Command, covering the Aegean and Mediterranean seas. These area commands have no large forces structurally linked to them; instead they play a more logistic role and can accept responsibility for Fleet Command units when needed.⁴⁰

There is no indication that the armed forces have shifted towards the Black Sea in recent years. However, given the location of the existing bases, they can easily be used for Black Sea operations without major basing changes.

Armed forces operations and major exercises

The Turkish armed forces have long experience in actual warfare. For decades the Turkish Army and Air Force have been active, alongside the gendarmerie, against the PKK in eastern Turkey and against PKK bases in northern Iraq. The Turkish Navy and Air Force have also been on continuous alert for just as long in the Aegean Sea, where Turkey and Greece are in near-constant stand-off and are sometimes involved in shooting incidents.

The armed forces exercise regularly and are often involved in major NATO exercises, including far away from home bases. For example, Turkish Navy ships participate in NATO exercises in the Atlantic Ocean and Turkish combat aircraft take part in the large multinational Red Flag exercise in the USA and the NATO Tiger Meet exercise.⁴¹ Despite the recent difficult relations with the USA and other NATO allies (see section II), Turkey continues to participate in and host NATO exercises.

Foreign forces deployed in Turkey

Several NATO countries have substantial deployments in Turkey. The USA, mainly the US Air Force, has used bases in Turkey for decades, first as part of cold war deployments and then mainly for operations in the Middle East. The USA also has nuclear weapons stored in Turkey for use by US or Turkish aircraft.⁴² Other NATO members have operated from Turkish bases against Islamic State in Iraq and Syria.

With the change in Turkey's relations with its NATO partners since 2016, the stationing of forces in Turkey has become a point of serious disagreement between Turkey and some NATO allies. As a result, Germany decided in May 2017 to move its air force units from Turkey to Jordan, which was

³⁹ Saunders, ed. (note 4), p. 851.

⁴⁰ Turkish Naval Forces, 'Organization', [n.d.]; Saunders, ed. (note 4), p. 851; Global Security, 'Türk Deniz Kuvvetleri Turkish Naval Forces', [n.d.]; and Daly, J. C. K., 'The rise of Turkey: the Mediterranean's new regional naval power', 22 Nov. 2013.

⁴¹ Turkish Armed Forces General Staff, 'Exercises and shows', [n.d.].

⁴² Özdemir, C., 'What is Turkey's Incirlik air base?', *Deutsche Welle*, 17 May 2017; and Zanotti and Thomas (note 9), pp. 8–10.

Table 3. Turkish military expenditure, 2007–17

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017 ^a
In national currency (current lira m.)	19 960	22 292	25 345	26 960	28 985	32 253	35 529	38 895	43 196	53 932	65 566
Annual change (%)	4.6	11.7	13.7	6.4	7.5	11.3	10.2	9.5	11.1	24.9	21.6
In US dollars (constant 2016 US\$ m.)	13 252	13 401	14 340	14 050	14 187	14 498	14 857	14 942	15 412	17 854	19 580
Annual real-terms change (%)	-3.9	1.1	7.0	-2.0	1.0	2.2	2.5	0.6	3.1	15.8	9.7
As a share of GDP (%)	2.3	2.2	2.5	2.3	2.1	2.1	2.0	1.9	1.8	2.1	2.2
Per capita (current US\$)	220	243	229	248	236	241	246	231	203	225	225
As a share of total government spending (%)	6.7	6.5	6.6	6.4	6.3	6.0	5.7	5.7	5.5	5.9	6.4

GDP = gross domestic product.

^a Data for 2017 is for budgeted spending; for all other years data is actual spending.

Source: SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, May 2018.

completed in September 2017.⁴³ Other NATO allies continue to use Turkish bases for operations against Islamic State, and both Italy and Spain maintain an air defence unit in southern Turkey as part of a NATO deployment.⁴⁴

V. Military spending

Between 2007 and 2017 Turkish military expenditure increased by 48 per cent in real terms (see table 3), and by 2017 Turkey was the 16th largest spender globally.⁴⁵ Spending grew annually every year in nominal terms and, with the exception of 2007 and 2010, also in real terms. While the original 2017 budget of the Ministry of National Defence (MND) was lower than in 2016, actual MND spending increased during the year by almost 50 per cent to pay for military operations along the Iraqi and Syrian borders and for arms acquisitions.⁴⁶

The MND budget for 2018 is 40 per cent higher than in 2017, including a substantial extra amount for the acquisition of new equipment.⁴⁷ Large increases are also budgeted for other security agencies: the gendarmerie, the national police, the Ministry of Interior and the National Intelligence Organization. With this, total spending on defence and security will increase by over 30 per cent in 2018 compared with 2017. The increase is mainly seen as a reaction to growing threats and perceived threats along Turkey's southern border with Iraq and Syria and to pay for Turkish military operations in Syria.⁴⁸

Like other NATO members, Turkey has agreed to spend at least 2 per cent of its gross domestic product (GDP) on defence. Turkey is one of the few NATO members that have already reached that goal. In 9 of the 11 years in the period 2007–17 Turkey spent 2 per cent of GDP or more on the military.

⁴³ Deutsche Welle, 'Germany's Gabriel warns Turkey against "blackmail" over Incirlik base', 17 May 2017; and Deutsche Welle, 'German military leaves Turkey's Incirlik Airbase', 28 Sep. 2017.

⁴⁴ Özdemir (note 42); and Zanotti and Thomas (note 9), p. 9.

⁴⁵ SIPRI's military expenditure figures for Turkey include the budgets for the Ministry of National Defence, arms acquisitions and the gendarmerie.

⁴⁶ TRT World, 'Turkey's defence budget raised by nearly 50 per cent', 6 Oct. 2017.

⁴⁷ Gurcan (note 34); and TRT World (note 46).

⁴⁸ Gurcan (note 34).



With the budgeted increase in 2018, the share of GDP will be higher than at any time in 2007–17, probably close to 3 per cent.

VI. Arms holdings and acquisitions

There was less of a ‘peace dividend’ for Turkey at the end of the cold war than for many other NATO members. Military spending continued to rise in real terms almost every year and Turkey continuously acquired large volumes of new major weapons to replace older systems. Over the period 1991–2017 Turkey was the fifth largest importer of major weapons globally.⁴⁹ In addition, Turkey has developed a substantial domestic arms industry and has a policy to expand its output significantly in quantitative and qualitative terms.⁵⁰ Both independence from foreign suppliers and commercial earnings from arms exports have been mentioned as aims for this policy.⁵¹ According to Turkish military sources, more than 60 per cent of ‘equipment and supplies’ is currently acquired from the national industry, and this is to increase to 70 per cent by 2020.⁵² However, Turkey still depends on foreign suppliers of major equipment and many components and will continue to do so.

At the end of the cold war the Turkish armed forces still used relatively old and often outdated equipment, typically acquired second-hand from other NATO members, but Turkey had started a substantial modernization programme.⁵³ The Turkish armed forces continue to use some less advanced older weapons, but most of the equipment in use compares favourably with that of most other NATO member states or Russia and is generally qualitatively ahead of that of the other NATO states on the Black Sea. All three services have benefited more or less equally from the acquisitions.

Turkish arms acquisition plans remain ambitious. They include more air and naval assets with power-projection capabilities, an advanced long-range air and missile defence network, a large number of new combat aircraft incorporating the latest technology and weapons, and the latest types of armoured vehicle.⁵⁴ While much of this will come from foreign suppliers, a growing part is to come from Turkey’s own industry. However, as with the force structure, basing and budget, the types of acquisition give no indication of whether they are linked to the Black Sea. The new equipment and power-projection capabilities could be equally useful in a Black Sea context and a Middle Eastern context.

Over the period 1991–2017 Turkey was the fifth largest importer of major weapons globally

Air Force

The Turkish Air Force is acquiring large numbers of advanced weapons, including 100 F-35A combat aircraft, the first batch of which is to be delivered in 2018. In addition, it has started development of an advanced combat

⁴⁹ SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, Mar. 2018.

⁵⁰ Tekinguduz, A., ‘Turkey’s growing defence industry’, TRT World, 4 May 2018.

⁵¹ Tekinguduz (note 50).

⁵² Gurcan (note 34); and Kobal (note 35). This probably includes logistic supplies and perhaps also weapons and other equipment of foreign design produced in Turkey.

⁵³ Tekinguduz (note 50).

⁵⁴ SIPRI Arms Transfers Database (note 49).



aircraft to replace the current holding of over 200 F-16s from 2030. The air force modernized 163 of its F-16s between 2005 and 2017.

Four airborne early-warning aircraft were delivered in 2014–15 and six new anti-submarine warfare aircraft are on order for delivery in 2019–20.⁵⁵ Turkey has also started to take delivery of unmanned aerial vehicles (armed with missiles) and of surveillance satellites, all locally developed as a result of investment in the domestic arms industry.⁵⁶

Navy

The Turkish Navy was the second largest navy in the Black Sea during the cold war period, after that of the Soviet Union.⁵⁷ Due to the limitations imposed by the 1936 Montreux Convention and the small size of the other two Black Sea states, there was no danger of Turkey and the Soviet Union losing those relative positions.⁵⁸ After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Turkey rapidly gained naval superiority in the Black Sea. By 2013 the Turkish fleet (counting all ships, not only those based in the Black Sea) was 4.7 times larger than the combined fleets of Russia and Ukraine in the Black Sea.⁵⁹ While Russia's Black Sea Fleet has been reinforced since then, so has the Turkish fleet. Thus although the balance (at least when measured in equipment) has shifted somewhat towards Russia, the Turkish fleet remains superior in strength to the Black Sea Fleet and, based on the known Russian and Turkish naval acquisition plans, it will remain so.⁶⁰

Turkey's naval acquisitions include many weapons that have increased Turkish power-projection capabilities, including large surface combat ships and submarines, amphibious ships and support ships. For example, in 2015 Turkey ordered a large amphibious assault ship with full-length flight deck from Spain.⁶¹ The ship is to be delivered in 2021 and Turkey plans to operate helicopters and vertical/short take-off and landing (V/STOL) combat aircraft from it: it plans to acquire 16–20 F-35B combat aircraft from the USA as well as a number of former US AV-8B combat aircraft as an interim solution.⁶² The first of two new smaller Turkish-designed landing ships was delivered in 2017.⁶³ In 2017 Turkey also showed an interest in acquiring a large second-

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Turkey rapidly gained naval superiority in the Black Sea

⁵⁵ SIPRI Arms Transfers Database (note 49).

⁵⁶ Herschelman, K. and Sariibrahimoglu, L., 'Aiming high: Turkey's aerospace ambitions make progress', *IHS Jane's Defence Weekly*, 12 Apr. 2017, pp. 26–31.

⁵⁷ See e.g. various editions of *Jane's Fighting Ships* and *The Military Balance* from the cold war period.

⁵⁸ The convention prohibits naval ships from countries outside the Black Sea from staying longer than 21 days in the Black Sea and puts limits on the type and maximum tonnage of any naval ships temporarily deployed. Convention Regarding the Régime of the Straits, signed at Montreux 20 July 1936, entered into force 9 Nov. 1936, *League of Nations Treaty Series*, vol. 173, nos 4001–32 (1936–37), Article 18(2).

⁵⁹ Global Security (note 40).

⁶⁰ Global Security (note 40).

⁶¹ SIPRI Arms Transfers Database (note 49).

⁶² Herschelman, K., 'Interim Harrier buy sought by Turkey', *IHS Jane's Defence Weekly*, 13 Dec. 2017, p. 6; and Groizeleau, V., 'La Turquie lance la construction de son premier porte-aéronefs' [Turkey launches the construction of its first aircraft carrier], *Mer et Marine*, 9 May 2016.

⁶³ Naval Today, 'Turkish Navy commissions first Byraktar-class landing ship', 17 Apr. 2017; and Saunders, ed. (note 4), p. 861.



hand helicopter carrier from the United Kingdom, but the ship was sold to Brazil instead.⁶⁴

VII. Conclusions

Turkey's security policy is not very transparent as it does not publish comprehensive documents on it. However, from various sources it is clear that Turkey recognizes many potential threats to its security, both direct and indirect, and sees the total threat as growing in recent years. Turkey has a strong perception that anything to do with the PKK is a major threat. However, other threat perceptions and focuses of policy have been less stable.

While relations with Russia have been tense for some years and Turkey has openly expressed concern about perceived Russian ambitions in the Black Sea region, the situation has changed significantly since the July 2016 coup attempt.

Since the coup attempt, Turkey has clashed with several large NATO allies, including the USA and Germany, and its commitment to the alliance now looks weaker. Relations with Russia have improved, as indicated by Turkey's decision to buy S-400 long-range air-defence systems from Russia against the express wishes of other NATO members. This has coincided with stronger Turkish security concerns about what is happening along its southern border, in Iraq and Syria. After almost coming into open conflict with Russia over the civil war in Syria in 2015–16, Turkey has started to cooperate with Russia there.

Turkish defence policy, posture and spending now seem to be largely directed southwards, towards the Middle East, with Russia, NATO and the Black Sea to the north becoming secondary issues. However, as Turkish policy towards its neighbours has altered rapidly in the past few years its current focus may well change again, as may its current warm relations with Russia.

Whatever Turkey's policy aims, the capabilities of the Turkish armed forces are developing quickly. Military spending has been increasing for years and is set to increase significantly in 2018, and a wide range of new advanced equipment has been ordered or is planned. However, the structure, basing and equipment of the armed forces show no real indication of what Turkey sees as specific foreign threats. Nonetheless, Turkey has shown that it is willing to use its military force to protect its interests beyond its national borders, but until now such operations have taken place only over its southern border.

Turkish defence policy, posture and spending now seem to be largely directed towards the Middle East

⁶⁴ Naval Today, 'Turkey emerges as potential buyer of UK helicopter carrier HMS Ocean', 15 Nov. 2017.



Abbreviations

EEZ	Exclusive economic zone
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross domestic product
MND	Ministry of National Defence
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PKK	Kurdish Workers' Party (Partiya Karkeren Kurdistanê, PKK)
SAM	Surface-to-air missile
V/STOL	Vertical/short take-off and landing



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STOCKHOLM INTERNATIONAL PEACE RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Signalistgatan 9
SE-169 72 Solna, Sweden
Telephone: +46 8 655 97 00
Email: sipri@sipri.org
Internet: www.sipri.org

SIPRI BACKGROUND PAPER

TURKEY AND BLACK SEA SECURITY

SIEMON T. WEZEMAN AND ALEXANDRA KUIMOVA

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Siemon T. Wezeman (Netherlands) is a Senior Researcher with the SIPRI Arms Transfers and Military Expenditure Programme. His areas of research include the monitoring of arms transfers, with particular focus on the Asia–Pacific region and former Soviet Union, and the use of weapons in conflicts.

Alexandra Kuimova (Russia) is a Research Assistant with the SIPRI Arms Transfers and Military Expenditure Programme. Working with the SIPRI Military Expenditure, Arms Industry and Arms Transfers databases, she focuses on developments in the Middle East and North Africa region, and post-Soviet states.