

Turkey's March Toward EU Membership May Create a Security Gap

MUSTAFA KIBAROGLU

kibar@bilkent.edu.tr

Turkey and the European Union: Internal Dynamics and External Challenges

JOSEPH S. JOSEPH (ed.)

2006

Turkey is on the verge of making difficult as well as risky decisions vis-à-vis its relations with its Middle Eastern neighbors Iran and Syria, its prospective membership in the European Union, and its strategic ally the United States. These decisions will affect the next generations of Turks. The results will depend on the sincerity of the involved parties toward Turkey and on Turkey's preparedness to deal politically, economically and militarily with changes in regional and global security.

Introduction

Contrary to what many believe, both inside and outside the country, Turkey's march toward membership in the European Union (EU) may cause serious deficiencies in its security. As a country, which has traditionally taken a hardliner stance on security and defense matters, Turkey now seems to be adopting the "soft security" approach of the EU.¹ Turkey's dramatic shift in its stance, however, occurs at a time when membership in the EU cannot be seen on the horizon. Even the most optimistic analysts suggest a minimum of 15 years for full membership after the start of accession negotiations; this could well turn out to be a never-ending process. During the long time before attaining full membership, most of Turkey's security concerns will persist, if not worsen. This is particularly true of the issues with its Middle Eastern neighbors such as Iran and Syria. But in

¹ For an elaborate discussion on how the Turkish military approaches security issues see Ali L. Karaosmanoglu, "The Evolution of the National Security Culture and the Military in Turkey," *Journal of International Affairs*, 2000, Vol. 54, No. 1, pp. 199-216.

its dealings with these countries, Turkey cannot rely on the “yet to be decided” security and defense policies of the EU; The Europeans themselves have not been able to put together a comprehensive document outlining their long term policy objectives or the mainstays of a security and defense strategy for the Union.² Moreover, the attitude of most EU member states toward Turkey’s southeastern neighbors have always been diametrically different from that of Turkey. Nor is there any sign of change today.

Unless the “EU-3”, namely the United Kingdom, France and Germany, is successful in finding a diplomatic solution regarding Iran’s nuclear program, their soft-security approach may well have allowed the latter enough time to develop nuclear weapons.³ In that case, the regional balance of power would be dramatically tipped in favor of this potential rival of Turkey.⁴ And the EU might do nothing substantial about it. With heightened tension between Iran and the United States following a possible failure of negotiations between Iran and the EU-3, Turkey might have to assume the pacifist European approach. A similar situation could apply to Turkey’s relations with Syria. The aggressive intentions and the increasing military capabilities of these two countries may constitute a bigger threat for Turkey than is the case today. It may then be to Turkey’s detriment to have taken the soft-security approach of the EU rather than the more confrontational US approach that might have thwarted the nuclear ambitions of the Iranian clergy.

Now, in the winter of 2005 it is difficult to foresee, what may take place in the political and military arenas of the Middle East. There is room for optimism about resolution of the conflict between Iran and the US over the nuclear aspirations of the former. Iran is putting forward proposals for expanding the scope of the IAEA inspections in the country to include measures that are more intrusive than the ones in force today. The “objective guarantees” put forth by Iranian officials, which include “permanent placement of IAEA inspectors as well as tamper-proof surveillance mechanisms in the nuclear facilities of Iran” are surely

² For a comprehensive discussion on this matter see, for instance, Julian Lindley-French, “The Revolution in Security Affairs: Hard and Soft Security Dynamics in the 21st Century,” *European Security* (Spring-Summer 2004), Vol. 13, No. 1-2, pp. 1-15.

³ The author is convinced that the efforts of the EU-3 that are directed at indefinitely halting Iran’s uranium enrichment activities will not prove successful. This conviction is strengthened following a series of conversations with European as well as Iranian officials and scholars in conferences in Berlin, Germany, entitled “Germany and Nuclear Nonproliferation” organized by the Aspen Institute and the Nonproliferation Education Center, on February 25-27, 2005, and in Tehran, Iran, entitled “Nuclear Technologies and Sustainable Development” organized by Iranian Center for Strategic Research, on March 5-7, 2005.

⁴ See Mustafa Kibaroglu, “Iran’s Nuclear Ambitions May Trigger the Young Turks to Think Nuclear”, *Carnegie Analysis*, December 20, 2004, available on www.ceip.org.

worth considering, at least for the sake of giving a chance to non-confrontational solutions.⁵

However, there is always the risk that Iran is buying time: that their diplomats are debating such ostensibly reasonable proposals while the radical clerical leaders are intensifying their clandestine efforts to surprise the world by suddenly walking out of the NPT with a couple of bombs in the basement. Given the depth and extent in the nuclear program of Iran, such an eventuality can by no means be discounted as being mere speculation or an intellectual exercise. An Iranian diplomat has said that with its “capability to detonate a nuclear device” Iran “wants to join the Nuclear Club”.⁶ Whether this is going to be as a *de facto* nuclear-weapons state, or as a major supplier of civilian nuclear fuel cycles will depend on the decision which is “yet to be taken by the Iranian leadership.” This decision “will greatly depend on the outcome of the negotiations between the European Union (i.e., EU-3) and Iran, and more importantly, on how the United States (US) will deal with Iran”.⁷ The countries concerned, such as Turkey, should have contingency plans against this possibility.

A similar worse case scenario may apply to the future of Turkey’s relations with Syria. The relationship apparently reached its zenith with President Ahmet Necdet Sezer’s official visit to Damascus in April 2005 at a time when both countries had troubled relations with the United States, albeit for different reasons and to different degrees. The passing of Syrian President Hafez Al Assad, and his son Bashar’s ascent to power paved the way for historic developments in Turkish-Syrian relations. The attendance of Turkish President Sezer at Assad’s funeral, created some controversy in Turkey, but this courtesy was soon reciprocated by Bashar Assad’s official visit to Turkey in 2004. The favorable climate continues. Perhaps Turkish authorities are trying to Turkey’s fundamental foreign policy principle once laid out by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the founder and first President of the modern Turkish Republic: “peace at home, peace in the world.”

Taking into consideration the fundamental changes in the regional and global security environments over the last decade, Turkish authorities may simply be looking forward to improving relations with their immediate neighbor, who, however, had long waged a war by proxy against Turkey by providing support to the separatist Kurdish terrorist organization, namely the PKK. This may be quite understandable from the political, economic and security standpoints. However, just as with the Iranian situation, a ‘soft-security’ attitude may well be giving time

⁵ See Kaveh L. Afrasiabi, "The Peace Pipe's on the Table", *Asia Times*, March 01, 2005. Full text is available online www.atimes.com.

⁶ Interview with Dr. Saeed Khatipzadeh, a career diplomat from the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tehran, Iran, December 27, 2004.

⁷ *Ibid.*,

to the Syrian leadership, which is still fragile at home and wounded abroad. As this government consolidates and strengthens, it may come up with a more demanding attitude toward Turkey on traditionally controversial issues like the waters of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers, as well as Turkey's annexation of the Hatay district in 1939.

Against this background, this paper aims at discussing the risk to Turkey of incautiously adopting European approach. There are two main reasons for this risk: First is that Turkey may not ever join the EU; if it does happen, this event is at least 10 years in the future. Second, if Turkey were to join, the EU has no common foreign and security policy, or a European security and defense identity (ESDI), currently or on the horizon.⁸ This paper will adopt a cautious stance vis-à-vis the pace of possible developments in relations between Turkey and its principal Middle Eastern neighbors; it will criticize the foreign policy decisions of the political party in power in Turkey, the Justice and Development Party (AKP).

The Long Road Ahead Toward EU Membership

Membership in the EU has long been a state policy in Turkey though not much had been specifically accomplished to that extent. Successive governments had undertaken cosmetic initiatives particularly at election time. More than four decades after the signing of the 1963 Ankara Agreement with the then European Economic Community, Turkey was finally deemed eligible in October 2004 to begin the accession negotiations. Over the last couple of years Turkey strove to comply with the Copenhagen political criteria that were designed to guide the former Eastern Block countries toward full membership. All of them have become members over the last several years.

The usual process for full membership requires the national legislative bodies of each member state to approve admission after the completion of negotiations. But, in the case of Turkey, unlike any other candidate referendums may be called particularly in countries like Greece, Cyprus and France, where

⁸ For a detailed discussion on how to strengthen the ESDI, see Adrian Hyde-Price, "European Security, Strategic Culture, and the Use of Force," *European Security* (Winter 2004), Vol. 13, No. 4, pp. 323-344.

opposition to Turkey's membership is strongest.⁹ This kind of challenge will make Turkey's membership all the more difficult, if not impossible.¹⁰

There are several issues that make Europeans feel very uneasy about Turkey's membership. These may be categorized under four broad headings: political, economic, cultural and military. With regard to political issues, Europeans are primarily concerned with the decision-making process in the EU that will certainly become further complicated with the inclusion of Turkey. Because of its population of 70 million and high birth rate, the number of seats that Turkey will occupy in the European Parliament will equal those of the leading members of the Union such as Germany, France, Britain and Italy. Most Europeans see such an eventuality as a nightmare, particularly in view of their concerns about the level of democratic culture in Turkey, which they see as inadequate to meet the European standards.¹¹

Economic issues are no less frightening for the Europeans, again primarily due to Turkey's population, which is more than the total of the ten new members; even the biggest, Poland, has only half of Turkey's population. While the EU is undergoing economic and financial difficulties in digesting the ten new members, it has serious concerns about Turkey's economic infrastructure, which is underdeveloped by European standards and less competitive in world markets. And upgrading the industrial and service sectors in Turkey may require a lot of investment. However, the greatest difficulty may be the Turkish agricultural sector, which will certainly need huge subsidies that the EU cannot afford. Added to these is a worry that the Euro will be negatively affected by Turkey's persisting fragile financial system.

However, most analysts argue that, neither the political nor economic problems constitute the major stumbling blocks for Turkey's eventual membership in the EU. To them, cultural issues are more sensitive problems, as they pertain to religious and traditional differences between Turkey and the rest of Europe. They may not be resolved in the foreseeable future. In the post-9/11 world, differences over cultural issues have sharpened and moved to the point of confrontation.

⁹ Mr. Alain Juppé, the former Prime Minister of France, expressed his concerns about Turkey's eventual membership and argued, "the EU then will not be the EU of [their] dreams." He went on to say that "if and when Turkey becomes a member of the EU, [they] should rethink about the future of Europe and a new architecture with the EU will emerge". Mr. Juppé made these remarks during an international conference on "The US and Europe: Partnership or Competition" held at Boston University on November 16, 2004 in Boston, Massachusetts.

¹⁰ For an account of the difficulties that Turkey faces in its relations with the EU see Mohammed Ayoob, "Turkey's Multiple Paradoxes", *Orbis* (Summer 2004), Vol. 48, No. 3, pp. 451-463.

¹¹ This view, which is common to most European elite, was reiterated by Mr. Giorgios Dimitrakopoulos, a Greek member of the European Parliament, during a private conversation at Harvard University on March 22, 2005. Mr. Dimitrakopoulos also added that, based on his personal observations, the Europeans most fear migration of Turks in large numbers.

Europeans are getting more and more religious and more fearful and intolerant of Muslims as a reaction to some of the crimes committed by Islamic figures in the Middle East, such as the beheading of European aid workers or businessmen in Iraq, or the slaughter of Theo van Gogh, the Dutch filmmaker, in the streets of Amsterdam. These events and others will most certainly add further to anti-Islamic sentiments in Europe; that may well have a direct bearing on Turkey, whose population is predominantly Muslim.¹² In addition, bad memoirs of the past since the Ottoman times still resonate within European society and contribute to the negative image of Turks and Turkey.

As for the security and defense issues, there are already problems between Turkey and some of the EU members such as Greece and Cyprus. Neither the Aegean problems with Greece nor the Cyprus issue have been resolved, even after the powerful intervention of UN Secretary General Kofi Annan with a plan for the creation of a federal state on the island. Turkey's recognition of the whole island of Cyprus remains a problem; this would entail abandoning the self-proclaimed Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, which is recognized only by Turkey. Likewise, there is strong reaction within Turkish society to the normalization of relations with Armenia. Even though Turkey formally recognized Armenia after the break up of the Soviet Union, diplomatic relations have not yet been established. In other arenas, the Europeans are critical of Turkey's relations with the US and Israel. There is fear that Turkey will be the Trojan horse of the US, while its relations with Israel are seriously criticized especially since the military cooperation agreement of 1996.¹³ In addition to all of these problems, Turkey's relations with its Middle Eastern neighbors like Syria, Iraq and Iran are seen as problematic; Europeans worry about upsetting whatever level of harmony they have achieved with these countries.

Taking all these into account, it could be argued that, in the words of Zbigniew Brzezinski, "the European Union will delay for as long as it can a clear-cut commitment to open its doors to Turkey".¹⁴ Even if a certain degree of loose commitment can be achieved on some of Turkey's security concerns, it is unlikely that Turkey and the EU will see eye-to-eye when it comes to dealing with the problems emanating from Turkey's Middle Eastern neighbors.

¹² For a comprehensive coverage of a wide range of issues pertaining to Turkey's relations with the European Union see Michael Bonner, "Turkey, The European Union and Paradigm Shifts," *Middle East Policy* (Spring 2005), Vol. XII, No. 1, pp. 44-71.

¹³ See Mustafa Kibaroglu, "Turkey and Israel Strategize" *The Middle East Quarterly* (Winter 2002), Vol. 9, No. 1, pp. 6-65.

¹⁴ See Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Hegemonic Quicksand", *The National Interest* (Winter 2003/04), No. 74, p. 7.

Different Threat Perceptions in Turkey and the EU

For some considerable time, Turkey has differed from Europe regarding the threat posed by the Middle East. During the Cold War years the Middle East was considered to be “out-of-area” by Turkey’s Western European allies within NATO. First, Syria, Iraq and Iran (after the Islamic revolution in 1979) were not seen as posing a noteworthy threat to the Western European members of NATO, even though they developed strong relations with the Soviet Union. Second, these countries were current or potential trading partners of the Western European nations. The third factor was the degree of historical relations between the key European allies and Middle Eastern countries in general, and Syria and Iraq in particular.

The European members of NATO had no desire to be placed in a quandary because their ally Turkey was involved in a conflict with its southern neighbors: a conflict which could eventually escalate into a superpower rivalry and nuclear exchange that would devastate all of Europe. Therefore, in informal discussions, leading European members of NATO repeatedly made it clear to their Turkish counterparts that their loyalty to Article 5 (i.e., alliance solidarity) of the Washington Treaty would only cover situations where Turkey had to be defended against its northeastern neighbor, the Soviet Union.¹⁵ In that case, defending Turkey would be vitally important for the Europeans as Turkey’s capability to resist would retard or even prevent a powerful Soviet assault on Western Europe.¹⁶

Dramatic changes have occurred since the end of East-West tension. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, concerns increased with the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; large quantities of nuclear weapons and their component materials are stored in the former Soviet Union, often in conditions of inadequate safety and security. Europeans still do not think that Syria and Iran pose a threat even though these countries have tried to gain access to the arsenal of the former Soviet military. Since ‘threat’ is a combination of the capabilities and intentions of other states, Europeans consider that they are far beyond the military range of Iran and Syria, nor do they think that either of them would strike any European nation in the foreseeable future.

Clearly for Turkey and the EU to agree on this, one of them had to change their stance. It was essentially impossible for the EU to adjust its threat perceptions and security policies to match Turkey’s. Thus, the other option became imperative for the current government in Turkey if it wanted to begin accession negotiations

¹⁵ Gen. Cevik Bir (Ret.), Second Chief of Turkish General Staff, January 19, 2005, Istanbul, Turkey.

¹⁶ See Mustafa Kibaroglu, “La Turquie, les États-Unis et l’OTAN: une alliance dans l’Alliance” (Turkey, US, and NATO: an alliance within the Alliance), *Questions Internationales* (Mars-Avril 2005), No. 12, pp. 30-32.

with the Union. Therefore, the Turkish government apparently decided to adjust its foreign and security policies to those of the EU; these policies are, however, still in the making and are far from meeting Turkey's needs.

The threat Posed to Turkey by Iran and Syria

Notwithstanding Turkey's attempt to adjust its stance to that of the EU, the threat posed to Turkey by Iran and Syria is real; their military capabilities include missiles that can hit strategic targets within Turkish territory. Also, these states have problems with Turkey. Syria, for instance, has longstanding claims on the waters of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers that originate mostly in Turkey and flow down to Syria and Iraq. Whereas Turkey suggests the allocation of the waters of this river basin according to the calculated needs of each riparians, Syria demands an arithmetic share of the waters, disregarding the many factors that may further worsen the water shortage in the region.¹⁷

Another potentially volatile and serious issue is Syria's persistent denunciation of the joining of Hatay province to Turkey in 1939 as the result of a referendum following the termination of the French mandate in Syria. Official Syrian maps persist in showing Hatay province within the boundaries of that country. There has been no change in the position or the rhetoric of the Syrian leadership even after the signing of the 1998 Adana Protocol between the two countries following a short-lived crisis over the accommodation of the leader of the Kurdish separatist organization (PKK) Ocalan in Damascus. Neither did the official visit of the Syrian President Bashar Essad to Turkey in early 2004 have any positive impact on the position of Syria. When asked to comment on the water issue as well as the Hatay issue, Essad made oblique statements suggesting the resolution of these problems be left to the future.

On the other hand, post-revolution Iran has serious concerns with the democratic principles and Western-style reforms in Turkey, which is a secular state by its Constitution. The Iranian media incessantly curses Ataturk for having abolished the Caliphate as well as the Sharia rule that was in force during the Ottoman Empire. In its stance toward Turkey, Iran has seemingly adopted an "offense is the best defense" principle especially in the 1980s and early 1990s. In order to prevent the potential penetration of Turkey's secular principles into Iran, clandestine Islamic fundamentalist propaganda directed at Turkish youth has become a major policy tool. Moreover, a series of assassinations of prominent secular Turkish intellectuals in the first half of the 1990s caused much deterioration of relations and showed how quickly the two countries could

¹⁷ See Aysegul Kibaroglu, *Building a Regime for the Waters of the Euphrates-Tigris River Basin*, 2002, The Hague: Kluwer Law International.

approach the brink of a hot confrontation had there been no parity in their military capabilities that forced them to exercise restraint.¹⁸

These brief examples indicate that both Iran and Syria are fertile ground for increasingly hostile attitudes to Turkey. If this hostility were paired with superior military capability, the threat would be much greater. For the time being, Turkey can deal with these threats, one at a time, and with the help of NATO (probably without the European allies being on board). However, dealing with a combined threat from Iran and Syria may go beyond Turkey's capabilities. Furthermore, a nuclear-weapons capable Iran would constitute a much bigger threat to Turkey and could have repercussions for its relations with Syria, who may want to use its strategic relationship with Iran as leverage against Turkey.

Relations with the United States and Israel

The pace of recent developments suggests that Iran is determined to acquire nuclear weapons manufacturing capability. Some Iranian hardliners propose that even in the face of UN sanctions they should continue the nuclear program.¹⁹ Many scholars and official figures from the Non Aligned Movement (NAM) countries as well as Islamic and Arab states are encouraging Iran to go ahead with developing nuclear weapons and to resist to the pressures of the US and Europeans.²⁰ While they seem to consider that Iran's defiance of the US balances the hegemonic behavior and self-complacent attitudes of the American administration, they also do not wish Iran to set a bad example by giving up under pressure.

With so much of encouragement from many parts of the world, and with the example of North Korea, which had evaded all sanctions and international inspections, Iran may also follow the same path.²¹ The Iranian leadership may

¹⁸ The climate between the two countries improved toward the end of the 1990s and in the early 2000s. However, it is too early to predict to whether the current mood will survive, especially if the clerics manage to build nuclear weapons.

¹⁹ Conversations with Iranian scholars and officials during two consecutive conferences in Tehran in early March 2005. The first of these conferences was on "Persian Gulf Security" on March 1-3, 2005 organized by the Iranian Institute of Political and International Studies (IPIS). The second conference on "Nuclear Technologies and Sustainable Development" was cited earlier in this paper.

²⁰ There were some 90 non-Iranian participants from 32 countries all over the world in the "Persian Gulf Security" conference in Tehran on March 1-3, 2005 where the above-cited views were openly and forcefully declared repeatedly.

²¹ Ayetollah Hassan Rohani, Secretary of the Iranian Supreme National Security Council, clearly stated in his opening remarks at the conference on "Nuclear Technologies and Sustainable Development" on March 5, 2005 that should the Iran dossier be passed on to the United Nations Security Council by the Board of the IAEA, Iran would immediately withdraw from negotiations with the Europeans and would also reconsider its membership status in the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), hinting at the possibility of withdrawing from the Treaty.

imitate the North Korean nuclear weapons program as they did their ballistic missile program. European countries would probably be unable to find a way to ensure that Iran's nuclear capability remain peaceful. At that point, the only countries both willing and capable of dealing with Iran's nuclear weapons ambitions would be the United States and Israel. Turkey should then carefully consider collaborating with the US in its policies aimed at increasing pressure on Iran. This would be separate from the diplomatic initiatives of the EU that are unlikely to yield a trustable *modus operandi* with that country.

Iran's gains in the nuclear field will be Turkey's net loss in the strategic balance that has existed between the two countries for centuries. Therefore, Turkey must do its utmost to stop Iran from weaponizing its nuclear program. However, it cannot act alone. Nor with the Europeans, who are not only reluctant to deal seriously with Iran's nuclear ambitions, but also incapable of doing anything concrete, such as persuading Iran to ratify the Additional Protocol of the IAEA that it had signed in November 2003 only after the long deliberations and the threat of use of force by the US. The Protocol, if ratified, would authorize the Agency to inspect "any location" within the territory of Iran without exception.

Another "No" Crisis with the US is on the Horizon

However, the possibility of collaboration between Turkey and the US seems remote due to a number of reasons. First, the current Turkish government is trying to adjust itself to EU standards in all areas including foreign and security policy; this requires adopting the soft security approach of the Europeans, such as the exhaustion of diplomatic processes again and again. Second, prominent figures from the ruling AKP (political party in power in Turkey, namely the Justice and Development Party), have repeatedly used religious overtones in their rhetoric with respect to the Palestine issue, the US Iraqi offensive and Iran's nuclear program.²² Third, those Turks who could be most critical of the AKP's foreign policy approach, the so-called secular nationalists ("*ulusalci*"), have become extremely wary of the intentions of the US and Israel vis-à-vis Iraq, particularly regarding the Kurds in northern Iraq.²³ This group of people believe that the US and Israel have secret plans to create an independent Kurdish state in Iraq that would lead to the

²² One Deputy from the AKP, namely Mehmet Elkatmis, asserted that the American troops used atomic bomb against the Iraqi insurgents and committed genocide during the Fallujah offensive in November 2004. See Turkish media, November 27, 2004.

²³ For an detailed account of the impact of the US and Israeli policies toward the Kurds of Iraq on Turkish-Israeli relations see Mustafa Kibaroglu, "Clash of Interest Over Northern Iraq Drives Turkish-Israeli Alliance to a Crossroads" *The Middle East Journal* (Spring 2005), Vol. 59, No. 2 (forthcoming).

disintegration of.²⁴ As such, anti-American and anti-Israeli feelings gain more and more ground. While the “ulusalci” seem to be totally opposed to what they call the “Islamists” in the government of Turkey, they in fact hold similar views to the Islamists in opposing the foreign policies of the US and Israel.

Against this background, Turkey’s potential contribution to a hardline US policy toward Iran will be very limited, if not nil; this was also the case in Iraq in March 2003.²⁵ Because of their anti-American attitude, those secular nationalists in Turkey who would have otherwise been at the forefront of helping out the US in its dealings with Iran’s nuclear weapons program will most likely oppose collaboration between Turkey and the US. Yet this same group holds Iran responsible for the serial assassinations of Turkish secular nationalist intellectuals, as part of the Mullahs’ desire to destabilize the regime in Turkey.

Critical Decisions Ahead

It seems that Iran has two windows of opportunity in the next couple of years, in exactly opposite directions. One is to quit nuclear ambitions and normalize relations with the US. The second is to accelerate the and pass the crucial threshold enabling them to assemble a nuclear warhead. As for the first option, Iran knows that even if it abandons its nuclear ambitions, its relations with the US will not be significantly improved because of Israel’s influence on US foreign policy. As long as Iran remains an Islamic fundamentalist state, its hostility towards the Jewish state of Israel will probably continue.²⁶ Some Iranians also believe that the US would still threaten them with regime change even if they quit their nuclear aspirations; after all, they did this to Saddam in Iraq. Added to these, are issues of national pride and prestige.²⁷ Because the Iranian leadership has

²⁴ A quick look at the Turkish press in 2004 and early 2005 may demonstrate the sentiment of the Turks toward the US and Israel. See for example, “Israil devlet teroru yapiliyor” (Israel commits state terrorism) *Hurriyet*, June 5, 2004 (www.hurriyetim.com.tr). Similarly, account see Abdullah Karakus, “Israil’in yaptigi teror” (Israel is terrorizing), April 14, 2004, *Milliyet*, (www.milliyet.com.tr).

²⁵ See Mustafa Kibaroglu, “Turkey Says No,” *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* (July/August 2003), Vol. 59, No. 4, pp. 22-25.

²⁶ An Iranian scholar who wished not to be cited, said during a private conversation at the “Nuclear Technologies and Sustainable Development” conference in Tehran on March 6, 2005 that the impossibility of destroying Israel is now being acknowledged by many more Iranians. But it would be premature to conclude that the Iranian leadership might consider recognizing Israel even if such a development would considerably improve its relations with the US. One has to bear in mind that, during the Cold War period when Iran was one of the “three pillars” (together with Israel and Egypt) of the United States in the Middle East, the Iranian Shah Reza Pahlavi couldn’t dare recognizing the State of Israel.

²⁷ Conversations with Iranian scholars and officials during the “Persian Gulf Security” and the “Nuclear Technologies” conferences in the first week of March 2005.

difficulties arising from the public desire for more freedom, the government wants a strong issue for satisfying the demands to mobilize popular support. The nuclear row with the US has served two purposes: it has consolidated public support, and it has given Iran time to prepare.

For all these reasons, Iranian analysts believe that giving up the nuclear program is not a good idea. As happened with North Korea, Iran may also benefit from developments that keep the US busy: the Iraq issue; polarization of domestic politics in the US; or new shocking attacks from El Qaeda perhaps on prominent individuals. Should Iran as expected choose this path, it will use European diplomacy as an armor and Turkey as a shield to protect it from a possible US military operation. As elaborated above, the current government in Turkey may serve Iran's purposes for two reasons. First, the emerging anti-American and anti-Israeli feelings in the Turkish public domain both propagated and exploited by the politicians. And, second, the adoption of European soft-security approach in defense matters at a premature stage.

Conclusion

If Iran cannot be bound by stringent measures that would assure the international community that it is not developing nuclear weapons, Turkey's interest would then lie in helping the US to deal with the clerical regime. If Iran developed nuclear weapons, Turkey might be second on the hit-list, after Israel. Therefore, policy-makers and security analysts in Turkey should not be confused with the ongoing Europeanization debate or the role of Islam in foreign policy matters, neither of which will solve Turkey's on going security problems. Politicians should take a longer, broader perspective in security and defense and give serious thoughts to where Turkey's national interests lie. Mistakes committed at this stage in halting Iran's nuclear weapons ambitions may have negative repercussions for the security of Turkey in the longer term.

About the Author

Mustafa Kibaroglu teaches courses on the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, arms control and disarmament in the Department of International Relations at Bilkent University in Ankara (kibar@bilkent.edu.tr). This paper was written during the author's sabbatical fellowship at the Belfer Center in Harvard University during the 2004-2005 academic year.