

DRK Snapshot

Turkey – NATO Relations; Perspectives for the Future

Key Takeaway:

Recent adverse developments between Turkey and NATO have created worldwide debates as if that Turkey drifts away from Western norms and alignments. However, this situation shall be considered as a reaction of Turkey against some current western policies, especially along with their potential effects against long term vital national interests of Turkey. Against this background, DRK considers that the long-lasting and deep-seated relations are strong enough to overcome the fictitious problems.

Summary; Turkish – NATO Relations



Since the beginning of the Cold War, Turkey has become a significant member of NATO. During the course of the relations, sides experienced some impediments in their cooperation due to the changing security paradigms. Presently, Turkey and some western allies cannot comply with the methods of the fight with ISIL.

In this regard, Turkey and western allies developed different security conception on the matter, because both sides perceive different threats. For instance, Turkey considers the western support, mostly NATO members, to PKK as a threat to her existence and territorial integrity. However, the US and some other member states ignore Turkey's security concerns and underestimate Ankara's threat perceptions emancipating from the PYD in Syria. This situation turned into a **security dilemma** widening the rift between parties.

Noticeably, domestic developments in Turkey and some NATO member states also played a significant role in the deterioration of the relations. The rise of the right-sided extremism in Europe and anti-Islamic ideas as well as anti-Western discourse prevailing in Turkey poisoned the relations and led to open confrontation.¹

¹ European Parliament voted to suspend accession negotiations with Turkey in July.

Existing Problems and Prospects for the Future

Although parties had exercised different strategies to the ISIL threat and Syrian problem, they had not openly confronted until the impassive stance of NATO and allies during and after the coup attempt of the Fethullahist Terrorist Organization (FETO) in 2016. Turkey claimed that alliance did not show its support during and after the coup attempt which resented her deeply. Later, Turkey's decision to purchase a surface-to-air missile system from Russia amplified the existing tension further. Finally, the NATO exercise crisis of November 17, 2017,² strained the relations and led to a breakdown in cooperation.

As a natural outcome, Turkey and Russia gradually improved their political and economic relations and formed “*a positional alliance*” including Iran that was expressed through Sochi Meeting in November 2017.

Following these successive problems and triggering developments, the tension culminated and created a sense of mistrust between sides. The erosion of trust and generated myths³ nourish the security dilemma that serves to the estrangement of Turkey from NATO.⁴ Accordingly, Turkey tends to align with Russia to balance NATO due to the existential threats sensed from the Syrian policy of the US and EU's controversial policies.

However, Turkey will likely not have a keen approach to distant itself from NATO considering the further viable options. It is thus worth considering that Turkey's relationship with Russia rests on the short-term interests, born out of the controversial policies of the US and EU towards Turkey.

In this context, it is advisable that NATO and allies shall meet the security demands of Turkey either by political or military support to ensure the integrity and interoperability of NATO in the future.

² Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and President Erdogan were shown as enemy leaders during the NATO exercise held in Norway.

³ Disintegration of Turkey by the hand of the western countries.

⁴ Already, many incidents such as the ill-considered procurement decisions, disruptive rhetorics, annexation of Crimea and logistic support to PKK eroded alliance's cohesion.

Conclusion:

DRK considers that the security dilemma prevailing between Turkey and NATO is mostly caused by the internal/national security concerns of Turkey which are seemingly in contrast with those of the EU Countries and the USA. DRK also considers that long history of bilateral cooperation of Turkey with the western alliance will eventually create further solutions patterns to overcome mutual misperceptions.