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## Conference Report

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# NATO's Southern Flank depends on modernizing Turkey's armed forces

by Scott Thompson

Will the Mediterranean become a Soviet Lake? This was the question asked at a NATO seminar sponsored by the American Friends of Turkey, in Crystal City, Virginia on Feb. 13. The speakers addressed the urgent need for modernization of the Turkish military to fulfill its strategic role as "the anchor" of NATO's Southern Flank. New vulnerabilities because of a burgeoning Warsaw Pact land, air, and naval threat have made this task even more urgent.

Although Turkey has the second-largest military force in NATO, second only to the United States, its forces are hopelessly antiquated. As a result, Maj.-Gen. Sadi Erguvenç told the conference, there is "no functional area where Turkish NATO forces can satisfactorily meet the challenge." If the Soviet Union were to carry out a "smash and grab" operation against eastern Turkey, he reported, NATO forces would be forced to stand by impotently (see *Documentation*). Major-General Erguvenç is Chief of Plans and Policy and Chief of Strategy and Force Planning Division with the Turkish General Staff.

Turkey shares the longest border area of any NATO country with Russia, against which it has waged seven centuries of intermittent warfare. To the West, Turkey guards the Strait of Bosphorus, the Sea of Marmara, and the Strait of the Dardanelles, which connect the Russian "lake," the Black Sea, with the Mediterranean. To the west, abutting the Caucasus, it guards a narrow land corridor from the Soviet Union into the Middle East, while to the south it borders Syria and Iran.

Since the days of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881-1938), Turkey has been a republican power. Not only does 75% of all of Western Europe's international commercial traffic travel through an area of the Mediterranean guarded by Turkey, but the very lifeblood of the European economy—oil from the Middle East—passes through this area, which it is Turkey's NATO-assigned role to protect. Whoever controls this region of the Mediterranean, controls the most efficiently centralized internal lines of communication for the amassing of troops and their resupply, for the entirety of Western Europe.

Several speakers discussed the increase in U.S. military assistance from \$200 million in 1980 to \$600 million in 1985.

Unfortunately, this three-fold increase in aid may be "too little, too late," when compared with the \$1.2-1.5 billion Ankara estimates it needs for a bootstrap modernization program.

Turkey is outgunned two-to-one in planes, four-to-one in tanks, and three-to-one in artillery by the 35 Soviet Army divisions deployed against it. Ten more divisions of Warsaw Pact forces are contributed by Bulgaria.

Its present forces are not only outgunned numerically, but they are obsolescent:

- Turkey's tanks (500 M-47s, 2,775 M-48 A1s, 160 West German-donated Leopards) are largely Korean War-vintage "steel coffins." Not only does Turkey only have two mechanized divisions, but Major-General Erguvenç said that contrasted with the Soviet T-72s and T-80s which this armor must fight, Turkish tanks presently must stop before firing and have limited firing range. They also lack modern fire control and night fighting capability.

- Turkey's planes (40 F-100Ds, 80 F-4Es, and 113 F-104 Gs) are "widow makers"—older in many instances than the pilots who fly them. Compared with the latest Soviet MiGs, this air force has little deterrence value, while its logistical support is based on fixed, easy to hit, and easy to jam radars. Turkey has asked the United States to give it used F-4 "Phantoms," whose production line has been closed down.

- Turkey's navy is based largely upon 40-year-old frigates. With the exception of a handful of new guided missile patrol boats, the Turkish navy must guard the Straits against a modern blue-water Soviet fleet with conventional guns and weapons.

- Turkey's artillery is even more obsolescent, and the armed forces lack a modern, missile-based, anti-aircraft system. When President John F. Kennedy capitulated in the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, intermediate range ballistic missiles were withdrawn from Turkey.

These equipment problems are compounded by the political crisis on the Southern Flank: the threat from Soviet satrap Andreas Papandreou, the Greek prime minister, to use his guns against his erstwhile NATO-ally, Turkey.

Glenn A. Rudd, deputy director of the Defense Security Assistance Agency, reported to the conference that the Reagan administration will request another \$200 million increment in aid for Turkey for Fiscal Year 1987, for a total of \$820 million—making Turkey the third-largest aid recipient. But Rudd warned that the present “Gramm-Rudman environment” in Congress made receipt of such funds unlikely; aid requests had been slashed by \$200 million the previous year.

Major-General Erguvenç noted that since most aid has been in the form of Foreign Military Sales credits, within two years, Turkey will be paying back more in interest than it receives.

In cooperation with the Pentagon, Turkey has worked out the following modernization program, requiring \$1.2-1.5 billion in credits annually over a 10-year period:

- A program for the F-16, which would begin with the purchase of eight “flyouts,” building toward co-assembly, then co-production of 150 others;

- Tank modernization, through conversion of existing M-48s to M-48A5s, which substitute a 105 mm gun and a new diesel engine;

- Frigate production, to end the policy of closing the Straits with “hand-me-downs”;

- Obtaining the Rapier air defense missile, as well as modern artillery.

Robert Strausz-Hupe, the U.S. ambassador to Turkey, told the conference of the need for new sources of long-term, low-interest credits from European NATO countries to help build a modern Turkish defense industry. Unless major new sources of aid are discovered, Warsaw Pact forces may indeed shortly turn the Mediterranean into a Soviet lake.

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## Documentation

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*From the speech to the conference by Adm. William J. Crowe, Jr., chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff:*

. . . In the immediate post-World War II period, America’s principal strategic concern was the security of Western Europe. . . . The Truman Doctrine elevated the brave anti-communist struggle of the Turks . . . to a matter of Free World concern, and in February 1952 Turkey became a partner in the NATO alliance. . . . The West’s domination of the Mediterranean was undisputed. . . .

In the intervening years, however, dramatic political and military changes have played havoc with that picture.

First, the Soviets through steady and consistent investment, have drastically increased their military power. . . . The overall result was that today Warsaw Pact ground and air forces pose a significant threat to every land front in the Southern region. By the early 1980s NATO control of the Mediterranean was no longer uncontested.

Modern Russian naval power and long-range air capabilities out of the Crimea presented a grave threat to our sea

lines of communication and forced the West to attend to preparations for both the sea and land battles. In turn, the Black Sea, the Bosphorus Straits, the Dardanelles, and the Aegean Islands assumed a new significance in allied strategic calculations. . . .

*From the speech by Maj.-Gen. Sadi Erguvenç, Chief of Plans and Policy and Chief of Strategy and Force Planning Division, Turkish General Staff:*

. . . Turkey guards the outermost post of the Alliance. . . . But the conventional disparity in our region is overwhelmingly in our disfavor. The trend is in the negative, as the front line Warsaw Pact forces are modernized with new generation weapons systems, the Turkish (NATO)-Warsaw Pact balance deteriorates further.

To the East, the Iran-Iraq War is in its sixth year. . . . The general and persistent instabilities in the Middle East, largely due to the unresolved issue of Palestine, coupled with closer Soviet-Syrian relations and a consequential Syrian military build-up, altogether increases Turkey’s vulnerability.

To the West, Greece is becoming more difficult every day, and it is hardly possible to call them an ally. The present Greek government does not only disclaim the Warsaw Pact threat, but, based on a fictitious perception, it chooses to organize Greece’s defenses against Turkey. . . . Greece is indeed trying to isolate Turkey from the rest of the Alliance.

Under these worrying conditions . . . modernization of the Turkish armed forces surfaces as an urgent requirement. . . .

Let us review the requirements in major mission areas of the Turkish NATO forces against the Warsaw Pact. The Turkish Straits, the bottleneck which controls the access to the Mediterranean, is a well-known vital area of Allied Command Europe. The defense of Turkish Thrace and the Straits are crucial for the defense of NATO Europe. . . . This challenging mission requires an effective defense against attacks coming from land, sea, and air, which we think would be all combined. . . . To the East, facing the Caucasus, Turkish NATO forces are tasked with blocking the adversary’s access to the Mediterranean and to the Middle East, through a land corridor. . . .

I am not particularly trying to draw a discouraging picture. But, the requirements I have stated so far do not leave a functional area where Turkish NATO forces can satisfactorily meet the challenge. . . .

Recent intelligence findings released by U.S. authorities indicate that the Soviets are inclined to think that if they were to attack eastern Turkey, NATO would not react. If this were the case, then they might find Turkey as a lucrative target. Considering also its weaknesses, they might feel tempted to do so. The stakes involved in the Middle East might well trigger this temptation. Then, sheer determination of the Turks alone to fight may not be just enough.