

The 'Peculiarity' of Turkey's Position on EU–NATO Military/Security Cooperation: A Rejoinder to Missiroli

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IN A RECENT ISSUE of *Security Dialogue*, Antonio Missiroli (2002) argued that Turkey's position regarding the issue of EU–NATO military/security cooperation is rather 'peculiar'. No other non-EU European ally, maintained the author, has offered as many forces as Turkey, 'yet nor have any of them tried to raise as many difficulties and as stubbornly as Turkey' (p. 18). Missiroli explained this 'peculiarity' by reference to domestic factors (such as the influence of the military in Turkish politics and security policymaking, and the financial crisis) and foreign policy concerns (namely the difficulties the country is having with its EU membership bid, the ongoing dispute with Greece and the Cyprus problem). The argument here is that the 'peculiarity' of Turkey's position on this issue could also be explained by reference to Turkey's quest for Western identity, which has coloured its foreign and security policies throughout the Republican period (from 1923 onwards).

Turkey's Quest for Western Identity

During the Republican era, the issue of membership of European institutions has provided occasions on which Turkish

actors have articulated Turkey's Western identity as well as its insecurities and interests. Throughout the Cold War, NATO was represented as the bastion of 'Western' identity. In the post-Cold War period, joining the European Union has come to symbolize being a part of 'the West'.¹ This is partly the reason why the issue of EU membership is held in such reverence in Turkish politics. Indeed, in the immediate aftermath of the EU's Helsinki summit in 1999 (where the decision to recognize Turkey's candidacy was made), Turkish dailies declared that Turkey was 'in Europe' (Göğüş, 2002: 22). In Turkey, then, becoming an EU member is viewed not only as joining another European institution, but also as bolstering Turkey's Western identity.

Similarly, any hurdle encountered on the way to EU membership is viewed through the lens of this quest for Western identity. For instance, the Turkish General Staff have interpreted the European Union's reservations regarding Turkish contributions to EU/NATO military/security cooperation as an indication that the EU is prioritizing Central Europe at the expense of its Cold War ally, Turkey. A 'Central Europe-oriented approach', argued the General Staff, 'may yield short-

¹ For further discussion, see Vardar (1994); Öniş (1999); Aybet & Müftüler-Baç (2000).

term results; however, its outcome in the mid-term could invite new divisions and groupings in Europe, perhaps this time as a "Western Curtain" instead of an "Iron Curtain" (Turkish General Staff, 2001), the implication being that Turkey could find itself located to the 'East' of this new curtain, which would constitute a setback for 'Turkey's Western vocation'.²

Taking a Shortcut to EU Membership?

Given the significance attached to the issue of EU membership, Turkey's policymakers have used a variety of means to ease their way into the Union. As a part of this effort, they have sought to use the 'military/security card' (i.e. Turkey's geographical position and military capability) to strengthen Turkey's position vis-à-vis the other candidates. Arguing along these lines, former ambassador Onur Oymen (2002: 23) has written that 'one could observe that Turkey's potential experience and real capabilities are well ahead, not only of the candidates, but practically all the EU member countries with the exception of . . . Britain and France'.

Turkish policymakers seem to expect that their EU counterparts will eventually recognize Turkey's potential contribution to (military) crisis management and become more forthcoming on the issue of EU membership. Indeed, the EU's 1999 decision to recognize Turkey's candidacy was viewed by some as evidence of its recognition of Turkey's potential contribution to the evolving Common Foreign and Security Policy.³ For instance, it was suggested that

an important reason behind the European Council decision to elevate Turkey's status to that of candidate country is the EU's evolving security role. In other words, the estimates of the potential benefits of Turkey's inclusion into the EU's Common European Security and Defence Policy (CESDP) and the costs entailed by its exclusion essentially shape the EU's policies towards Turkey (Müftüler-Baç, 2000: 489; see also Eralp, 2000 and Karaosmanoğlu, 2001).

The fact that the decisions on Turkey's candidacy and the constitution of an EU military force were made at the same summit (Helsinki 1999) seems to have helped to link these issues in the minds of Turkish actors. Accordingly, in the last few years, Turkey's policymakers have concentrated their efforts on reminding their EU counterparts of Turkey's potential contribution to EU (military) crisis management.

Turkey's Potential Contribution to EU (Military) Crisis Management

It is argued that a European Union that is interested in developing its own (military) crisis-management capability would need Turkey because

Turkey has become a large, effective and modern military power, both in its own region and in NATO. Furthermore, it has a well-trained army experienced in low-intensity warfare. This factor is particularly important for contributing to Petersburg-type operations.

Turkey's geographical location is adjacent to regions of critical importance to the EU's interests. Turkey's location, NATO-class military infrastructure and logistical means constitute an indispensable environment for EU military power projection (Karaosmanoğlu, 2001: 161).

² On Turkey's Western vocation and a succinct overview of post-Cold War debates on this issue, see Sezer (1993). See also Bilgin (forthcoming) for an account of the changing geopolitical images of Turkey and the EU in the post-Cold War era.

³ On the disagreements among the members of the European Union regarding Turkey's value for security-building in Europe, see Wood (1999).

Given the difficulties the European Union is likely to encounter when projecting and sustaining military power outside EU territory (Heisbourg, 2000; Shephard, 2000; Deighton, 2002), Turkey's military capabilities and geographical position could become significant assets. However, it is worth noting here that Turkey, like some EU member-states, has a conscript military. Although the Turkish military is experienced in low-intensity warfare and has proven itself valuable in post-Cold War peacekeeping operations, for Turkey to develop an edge over other EU candidates, its military would need to be trained for crisis-management operations in 'foreign' locations. On the other hand, many of the EU's crisis hot spots are located around Turkey's borders: Turkish forces would thus be operating in venues less 'foreign' to them than to their EU counterparts.

Some Turkish actors seem to hope that EU policymakers will eventually realize Turkey's potential contribution to (military) crisis management. For instance, former ambassador Öymen (2002: 23) has written that

while deciding on the enlargement, the EU should focus, in addition to the so-called Copenhagen criteria of political and economic nature, on the military capabilities of candidate countries and their possible contribution to the EU in this field. . . . Even at this stage, we have pledged one brigade with adequate sea and air components to the EU army, which represents a very high level of contribution, and is much more than what the other ten candidate countries would provide. After full membership, Turkey's contributions will be even greater.

The point here is that Turkey's policymakers, armed with the 'military/security card', have sought to bolster Turkey's EU candidacy and reaffirm the country's Western identity. However, their efforts have been based on a particular reading of

the process through which Turkey joined another Western institution, NATO.

Past Lessons

In the collective memory of Turkey's policymakers, the 'military/security card' served Turkey well during the Cold War. Indeed, it is considered to have played a major part in convincing the otherwise reluctant founders of NATO to admit Turkey into the organization in 1952 (Tamkoç, 1977; Kurat, 1984). Turkey's enthusiastic participation in the Korean intervention was intended to present Turkey as a 'dependable' ally and a crucial part of the US-led collective security effort, thereby strengthening Turkey's chances of being accepted as a NATO member. Indeed, as Tamkoç (1977: 29) notes,

the invasion of South Korea provided an opportunity for [President] Bayar to demonstrate his strong desire for solidarity within the West. He decided to send a contingent of 5,000 troops to Korea. The immediate dividend of his investment was the association of Turkey with NATO.

This particular reading of Cold War history considers Turkey's military capability and geopolitical location (i.e. the 'military/security card') as the most significant assets that helped the country join NATO and establish its 'Western' credentials. Arguably, on the basis of this, Turkey's policymakers maintain that as the EU becomes more interested in the military dimension of security, Turkey's relations with the EU are likely to improve.

Are Past Lessons Relevant?

The attempt to take a shortcut to EU membership by relying on the 'military/security card' is unlikely to be to the country's benefit in the long term, because the

conception of security that underlies this policy emphasizes the military dimension. The project of European integration, on the other hand, has emphasized non-military aspects of security (at least until recently).⁴

What is more, the context in which Turkey joined NATO is significantly different from the environment in which Turkey finds itself today. Hence the need to be cautious when drawing lessons from past experience. Having said that, it is also important for Turkish policymakers to ensure that the factors that enabled Turkey's NATO membership in the 1950s are well understood.

An Alternative Reading of the Past

An alternative approach that does not take identities and interests as given but looks at the relationship between security policymaking and identity construction (Campbell, 1992; McSweeney, 1999; Weldes et al., 1999) presents us with a different picture of the process through which Turkey became a NATO member. Such an account puts emphasis on *Turkey's contribution to the making of Western identity* during the Cold War. After all, Turkey's contribution to security in Europe was not limited to its military capability and geographical location. More specifically, Turkey's participa-

tion in the Korean War was instrumental in its joining NATO not only because of Turkish military contributions to the war effort but also because Turkey helped to constitute the West and strengthen Western solidarity at a time when these were rather fragile.⁵ Thus, a different lesson that could be drawn from the past is that Turkey helped to secure the Western identity through its security policies during the Cold War.⁶

Consequently, if it was not merely the military/security factor but also Turkey's contribution to the constitution and securing of a Western identity that enabled its membership of NATO (an institution of which it was initially considered an unlikely member), Turkish policymakers would do well to try to find Turkey a similar edge in strengthening their profile vis-à-vis the European Union – that is, by stressing the role Turkey could play in constituting a multicultural European identity that is not anti-Muslim. Arguably, this has become more crucial in post-9/11 world politics, where identity matters. If such a move were to be coupled with an emphasis on the use of non-military tools of security policymaking, this would improve Turkey's position with regard to joining the EU much more than the current policy that emphasizes Turkey's 'military/security card'.

⁴ The project of European integration has been from its very inception a 'security policy in response to a non-specific and non-military security problem', argues McSweeney (1999: 8).

⁵ Admittedly, this role was more crucial in the early years of the Cold War, especially during the 1950s and 1960s, than in the détente period.

⁶ For an extended discussion on this point, see Bilgin (2001: 38–41).

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