NATO Enlargement and the South
A Turkish Perspective

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Introduction

THE DEBATE ON NATO enlargement has done surprisingly little to elucidate the possible implications for Europe’s southeastern periphery and adjacent regions such as the Balkans, the Caucasus, the Black Sea area, and the eastern Mediterranean. In this article, these regions will be called ‘the South’; they include two NATO members, Turkey and Greece.

On the one hand, the breakup of the Soviet Union and the emergence of new independent states have provided most countries of the South with a valuable opportunity to develop cooperative relationships with the West, as well as among themselves. On the other, the South is burdened with ethnic and religious conflicts, the threat of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, and organized crime. Amidst all these sources of instability, an expanding network of oil and gas pipelines and maritime routes from the Gulf, the Caucasus, and Central Asia stretches along and across the Black Sea and Mediterranean basins, adding to the geopolitical significance of that part of the globe.

This article contends that the expansion process, if unchecked after the first round, will have a harmful impact on security and stability in the South. It will unavoidably create new divisions, thereby complicating the security environment. More significantly, neither NATO nor regional states can effectively contribute to security and stability without the cooperation of Russia. NATO’s enlargement process, however, is not likely to encourage Moscow to adopt cooperative behavior. Moscow’s reaction to the first round of expansion has been relatively moderate. Today, Russia is too weak to respond to NATO expansion by taking coercive measures against the new members in Central Europe. Any such measures would involve the risk of a direct confrontation

with NATO and the United States. Instead, Moscow could indirectly and gradually react in the South, where it still has the means to damage Western interests despite its weakened condition. A more assertive Russian policy would probably not result in renewed Russian dominance in the region – but it would cause new instabilities and hinder cooperative efforts. It would also put considerable strain on Turkish–Russian relations.

At least two major policy moves would be necessary to reverse this trend. The first imperative would be to freeze for a long while any expansion of the NATO Alliance beyond the first round. Second, the European Union should accelerate its own expansion to southeastern Europe. Such a policy revision would give reassurance to Russia, without thwarting the regional states’ expectations regarding integration with Europe. It would also provide NATO with more time to reflect on the possible consequences of its open-door policy.

Indivisible Security and Enlargement Process

The enlargement policy raises a fundamental question: where to stop the expansion of NATO? It is generally recognized that enlargement should not lead to a new divided Europe or exacerbate instabilities. NATO documents often refer to the principle of ‘indivisible security in the Euro-Atlantic area’. Can NATO continue to expand without creating new divisions or zones of influence? The Alliance has not yet found a clear answer to that question.

NATO has adopted an open-door policy. The admission of Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic in 1999 is thus to be followed by several other enlargement rounds. NATO allies have kept the door open for considering the candidacies of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, and Slovenia in a second round. The Nordic countries – even Sweden and Finland, which are not yet NATO members – are pushing membership for the Baltic states, primarily in the belief that it will strengthen their own security positions. For similar motives, Turkey has become a strong supporter of the candidacies of Romania, Slovenia, and Bulgaria. France is also promoting Romanian membership. Turkey also believes that, if stability is an objective, then NATO enlargement should not exclude Albania, Macedonia, and Bosnia, even though these countries are far from fulfilling membership conditions.¹

Ankara believes that NATO membership for Romania and Bulgaria in particular would mean a major contribution, in military and geopolitical terms, to security in the Black Sea and Balkan areas – the two most unstable corners of Europe. Having Romania and Bulgaria within NATO would provide the Alliance with geostrategic continuity in the South. If the projection of stability is indeed the major purpose of NATO expansion – as has often been argued by its advocates – then the Baltic states, Romania, and Bulgaria, who all need
Western support and encouragement, have at least as much cause for worry as do Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic. Moreover, Ukraine, as a pivotal state for European and Black Sea security, has every reason to become another candidate. Kiev has never ruled out NATO membership, and it is not opposed to the Alliance’s plans to admit new members from the former Soviet bloc.2

Although Ankara supports enlargement in principle and has ratified the accession protocols of Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic, Turkish political leaders have often expressed disappointment that the former Warsaw Pact countries are to be admitted to NATO and the EU while Turkey, a staunch ally of the West, is still denied EU membership. The recent debate on NATO enlargement in the Parliamentary Foreign Relations Committee has shown that this sentiment has a measure of support in all political parties represented in the Parliament. Another Turkish concern has been the possibility that expanding NATO’s frontiers to Eastern Europe might reduce the significance of the Southern Flank and shrink Turkey’s role in the Alliance.3 Moreover, as a consequence of expansion, any NATO involvement with the southern region will have to compete with Central Europe, not only as a political priority, but also in terms of the allocation of limited resources.

Nevertheless, these worries were not sufficient to induce the Parliament to block NATO enlargement. First of all, Turkish officials do not want to complicate their country’s position within NATO, which is Ankara’s most important institutional and functional link to Europe and the United States. Second, Turkey expects to play a growing role in a NATO that looks to cooperate with the Black Sea, Mediterranean, and Central Asian countries. Thus, Turkey is an enthusiastic participant in the NATO Partnership for Peace ( PfP) program, and strongly supports the candidacies of Romania and Bulgaria.

A purely southern enlargement, however, would create serious problems for the Alliance. It would have a disastrous impact on the rejected candidates, especially in the Baltic region. This would also trigger vehement opposition from such northern allies as Denmark, Norway, and probably Germany, weakening NATO solidarity and providing Russia with fertile ground for exploitation. A purely ‘northern’ round would cause similar problems in the South. On the other hand, simultaneous expansion to the Black Sea and to the Baltic would create a dangerous security dilemma for NATO – and Russia. Faced with new NATO members and allied military arrangements in both the Baltics and the Black Sea, Moscow would feel under pressure from the northern and southern peripheries by an antagonistic Western politico-military strategy of encirclement. Sooner or later, this would trigger a spiral of further military measures and countermeasures in both regions. No measure of reassurance, short of Russian membership in NATO, would suffice to thwart such a development. Russian membership, however, would imply abandoning NATO’s collective defense function and turning it into a purely collective security organization ‘with unclear function and effectiveness’.

1. Karasmanoglu, Ali L. 2. Ibid. 3. Ibid. 4. Ibid.
In the first view, selecting only Slovenia for the second round may seem the least problematic solution. However, this option also presents certain disadvantages. It would disappoint not only Romania, which was named by the Madrid Summit of July 1997 as a probable candidate for the second round, but also the two supporters of Romania, France and Turkey. Romania’s exclusion would complicate France’s relations with NATO even further.

**NATO Enlargement and Russia**

Prospects for sustained regional cooperation depend on the future of Russia more than anything else. Russia’s future will be determined by its internal developments. However, the policies of the West will definitely affect Moscow’s orientation in domestic as well as international arenas. NATO expansion, if continued, will contribute neither to the democratization of Russia nor to the moderation of its foreign policy. NATO expansion has already created grave apprehensions in the country, putting the pro-Western political movement on the defensive. Indeed, there is not much in the Russian political culture that could encourage public and elite opinion to perceive NATO enlargement as a peaceful act. Even Russia’s democrats feel the need to respond in one way or another to NATO’s eastward expansion. The Communists and nationalists perceive NATO expansion as a geopolitical disaster. Together with the economic crisis, it seems likely to create a new anti-Western Russia.

Such developments will probably not lead to a new Cold War – but they are likely to make Russia far less cooperative and far more assertive in its dealings with neighboring states in the South, compromising the newly established patterns of cooperation in the region. Feeling rebuffed by the West, Moscow will shift its attention to the CIS and the Middle East. Russia will probably not be able to regain its former dominance over all the former Soviet republics. However, Russia’s turning its back on Europe will lead to an escalation of existing differences as well as to the emergence of alliances and counter-alliances in the South – creating ‘a new East–West geopolitical fault line, running somewhere across Central Asia and the Caucasus’.

Moscow possesses considerable residual power to exert political and military influence in the South, inflicting harm on regional stability. First, despite its current economic weakness, Moscow can use its residual economic, political, military, and demographic clout to delay the consolidation of newly independent republics and hinder their integration into the Western economic system. Second, Russia has the capacity to affect delicate regional balances of power, through military redeployments and arms and military technology transfers. Third, Russia is one of the two greatest nuclear powers in the world.
It still enjoys considerable leverage regarding arms control issues and proliferation, in which regional as well as global security interests are involved.

Russia could use its potential either to re-establish its domination, a policy very likely to create new instabilities, or to develop a new environment of cooperation in the Euro-Atlantic area. At present, Russian attitudes toward the former Soviet republics seem to have two different facets. Political parties, business leaders, social groups, and bureaucratic-military elites vary widely in their views. Although pragmatic and businesslike approaches occasionally inspire Russia’s behavior, Moscow’s diplomatic-strategic conduct still carries the imprint of Soviet-era habits. If Russia feels itself cut off from Europe as a result of NATO expansion, it may not have much choice but to pursue a more assertive policy in its historical sphere of influence in the South.

Since the breakup of the Soviet Union, it has been an almost regular practice of Russian policy to bring political, economic, and even military pressure to bear on the newly independent republics, for cooperation in security matters and for exploitation and control of their natural resources. For instance, under the pressure of Abkhazian secessionism, instigated and supported by Moscow, Georgia was obliged in 1994 to conclude an agreement giving Russia the right to maintain three military bases and two storage sites and to deploy troops on Georgian territory. Since then, the Russian military presence and the influence it represents have become a major national problem in Georgia, so the agreement has not yet been ratified by the Georgian Parliament. In the case of Armenia, Russian pressure was less relevant than in the Georgian case. The result, however, was the same: Moscow acquired military bases and border control rights. Similarly, Russia’s military presence in Moldova gives the Black Sea states, especially Ukraine and Romania, cause for concern about Moscow’s political objectives in the region.

Ukraine contributes greatly to the security of the region as a whole. Any change in Ukraine’s independent status would affect the security of not only Western and Central Europe but also the Black Sea region. The Charter on a Distinctive Partnership between NATO and Ukraine, signed at the Madrid Summit of July 1997, demonstrates the Alliance’s support for Ukraine. Moscow, however, still has considerable leverage there. Ukraine’s energy dependence on Russia and the presence of 11 million ethnic Russians within its borders can easily be used by Moscow to limit Kiev’s freedom of action.

The Russian–Ukrainian Friendship and Partnership Treaty, together with the three Black Sea Fleet agreements, all reached in Kiev in late May 1997, have temporarily eased the tension between the two countries, but only by suspending the dispute over the Black Sea Fleet and its base at Sevastopol. Although the treaty and the agreements provided the parties with a cooling-off period, Moscow did not relinquish its territorial claims to Sevastopol. NATO’s enlargement to the Black Sea, in the second round, would possibly make both countries more adamant on the Sevastopol issue and cause new
tensions. On the one hand, this would involve NATO more deeply in the Crimean dispute. On the other, NATO’s involvement would encourage Moscow to block the Alliance’s actions and to further its own influence in the region. The PfP exercises in the Black Sea already disturb Russia. In August 1997, the inclusion of the Ukrainian territory of Crimea in the scenario of a PfP naval exercise brought about a strong protest from Moscow. Consequently, NATO allies gave in to Russian pressure, and landings for humanitarian and peacekeeping purposes on the Crimean coast were carried out only by Ukrainian and US troops, with other participants (Bulgarians, Georgians, Romanians, and Turks) remaining offshore.

Similarly, during the Kosovo crisis in 1998–99, Russia continuously opposed any NATO military intervention to stop fighting and rescue ethnic Albanian refugees. Moscow also strongly opposed NATO’s air exercises over Yugoslavia in June 1998, meant to deter Serbian forces from launching artillery-backed attacks on Kosovo’s insurgents and civilians. After the launching of NATO air strikes on Yugoslavia in March 1999, Moscow immediately suspended all its relations with NATO. There are two major reasons why the Russians oppose the PfP exercises in the Black Sea and NATO’s peace operation in Kosovo. First, Moscow fears that intervention could set a precedent for outside involvement in Russia’s own regions of ethnic tension and its ‘near abroad’. Second, Moscow seeks to diminish NATO’s influence in the South, which it believes has been increasing as a result of the Alliance’s functional and geographical enlargement process. Russia’s repeated opposition in similar situations will certainly further complicate NATO’s decisionmaking process concerning peace operations and conflict resolution in the South, as has been the case in Bosnia.

Turkey and Russia

In the past, Turkey and Russia fought more than they cooperated. During the Cold War, their relationship was considered in terms of the East–West confrontation. Today, it has a character of its own and, despite acute rivalry on issues such as the oil pipeline and the status of the Turkish Straits, is marked by cooperative efforts to their mutual advantage. The leaders of both countries are becoming increasingly careful in their rhetoric. They play down their differences and emphasize mutual benefits derived from cooperation.

After Germany, Turkey is Russia’s second-largest trading partner. Between 1992 and 1995, the trade volume between the two countries increased from $1.4 billion to $3.3 billion, and the total value of construction projects carried out by Turkish firms in Russia exceeded $6 billion. Russia is one of Turkey’s leading energy suppliers. Turkish exports to the Black Sea region are supple-
mented by unregistered 'luggage trade', estimated at $11 billion. Approximately half of this trade is with Russia.\textsuperscript{11} There is also a growing tourism trade between the two countries. The present economic crisis in Russia has adversely affected Turkish–Russian trade relations and Turkish investment in Russia. However, Turkish business leaders, referring to Russia’s vast resources and its industrial infrastructure, believe that in the long run a collapse of the Russian economy is out of the question. This sanguine view is shared by Turkish officials who report from Moscow that Turkish business in Russia has not been affected as much as bilateral trade.\textsuperscript{12}

In addition to bilateral economic relations, the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) initiative, albeit beset with difficulties, has demonstrated its potential for serving as an effective economic, social, and political facilitator. Its members, including Russia, view it as a valuable contribution to the construction of a new integrated Europe.\textsuperscript{13} It offers a sense of common purpose by encouraging a European orientation toward economic issues. The possibility of multiple pipelines, transporting Caspian oil across various countries in the region, also opens new avenues for regional cooperation. All of these states are aware of the political and economic advantages of bilateral as well as multilateral cooperation. They believe that regional cooperation is a way of consolidating their independence and their opening-up to the West. However, NATO’s ongoing process of expansion is likely to thwart this cooperative trend, which the regional states are beginning to enjoy.

**Military Issues**

Russia’s reaction to NATO enlargement will also occur on the military level. First of all, Russia, because of the weakness of its conventional forces, will have to opt for the cheapest way of counter-balancing an expanding NATO, through an increased reliance on tactical nuclear weapons. This policy will lower the nuclear threshold. Any minor conflict could go nuclear too fast to allow time for conflict management.\textsuperscript{14} A report by the Russian Institute for Defense Studies (INOBIS), commissioned by the Ministry of Defense in 1995, identifies Crimea, Georgia, and Armenia among the locations where tactical nuclear weapons should be deployed.\textsuperscript{15} Russia’s efforts to bolster its defense by re-deploying nuclear weapons would create a serious security problem in the South.

Second, NATO expansion gives Moscow reason to undermine Western policies in the South. On different occasions, Moscow has already shown how it can upset critical balances of power by transferring arms and technology. In 1997, Russia deployed as many as 32 Scud-B missiles and 8 associated launchers on Armenian territory.\textsuperscript{16} It concluded an agreement with the Republic of
Cyprus to supply S-300 surface-to-air missiles. The deal provoked a fierce protest from Ankara and appeared likely to complicate the Greek–Turkish problems even further. The dispute was eventually eased when the Greek side decided to deploy the missiles somewhere in Greece (possibly Crete), but not in Cyprus. A war between Greece and Turkey would create grave tensions in NATO and would hardly conform with Western interests. On another front, in 1996, Moscow sold Iran two nuclear reactors capable of generating enriched uranium and plutonium. Russia continues to supply Iran with technology that will help make Iran a nuclear power. Tehran also received a large number of weapons systems, including battle tanks and submarines capable of interrupting oil shipments in the Gulf.\textsuperscript{17}

The most common explanation of arms transfers by Russia is economic, and there is no doubt that this factor weighs heavily. However, Russia’s arms and technology transfers also have a politico-military dimension, and this is particularly relevant for transfers to countries in the South. To the extent that Russia is alienated from the West as a result of NATO’s expansion policy, it will seek new allies among the more radical states of the South and will increase transfers of not only conventional weapon systems but also advanced technologies for the development of weapons of mass destruction and missiles. The proliferation of such weapons would seriously limit NATO actions in the region by putting pressure on allies or members exposed to such weapons, and would have a detrimental effect on its cohesion in any joint action planned in the region.

A third risk is that conventional arms control is likely to remain hostage to Moscow’s concerns about NATO expansion, as well as to its ambitions in the South. Denouncing or, at best, revising the provisions of the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty will remain at the top of Moscow’s security policy agenda as long as NATO continues to expand. A second adaptation of the CFE Treaty has become a necessity because of NATO’s eastward expansion. In fact, the NATO–Russia Founding Act formally recognizes ‘the importance of the adaptation of the CFE’.\textsuperscript{18} In February 1997, to reduce Russia’s anxieties about NATO enlargement, NATO presented Moscow with proposals for revising the CFE Treaty a second time.\textsuperscript{19} During the first revision, the issue of Russian flank limits had been highly divisive within the Alliance. Despite the allied consensus not to reopen this issue in the second revision talks, it is being brought up again by the Russians, who want a complete elimination of the flank zones. Moscow also demands the broadening of the combat aircraft category to include electronic warfare, refueling, and transport aircraft. If agreed, such limitations would curtail NATO’s force projection capability, which is crucial for the credibility of allied commitments to the flanks, as well as to the new members. Such restrictions would also affect NATO’s non–Article 5 missions in the South.
Combined with Moscow’s present military arrangements with Armenia and Georgia, a new flexibility in the flank provisions of the CFE Treaty would make Turkey a frontline NATO country once again, as it was during the Cold War. This eventuality would complicate Ankara’s friendly relations with Georgia and worsen its existing problems with Armenia. As a Turkish strategic expert has insightfully commented, Moscow, through its strategy of forward defense in Transcaucasia, may be pursuing two objectives: ‘to acquire a position of regional dominance and to signal to the West that Russia is inclined to assess its enhanced power position in the geopolitical space from the Black Sea to China as a trade-off against NATO’s eastward expansion’.

How to Reverse the Trend

NATO expansion has set a trend that is likely to have dire consequences for the Euro-Atlantic area in general and the South in particular. Nonetheless, it may not be too late to reverse that trend. The first imperative would be to slow down the process of enlargement, after the admission of Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic. A long pause following the first round would give considerable reassurance to Russia and would help alleviate many uncertainties in the South. Moreover, this would give Moscow an opportunity to clarify its policies. Russia’s uneasiness about NATO would probably not fade away quickly. However, Russian opposition to the first round of expansion was much more moderate and ephemeral than its opposition to a second round would be. Given Russia’s present weakness, the Alliance would have ample time to resume its policy of expansion if Russia became a threat to Western interests.

Second, it is essential to involve Russia in regional cooperation as much as possible. Russia will certainly remain a very important actor in the region. Its role and influence will grow to the extent that its economic and financial possibilities increase. A powerful Russia will be a stabilizing factor – if it can overcome its imperialistic tendencies and heavy-handed tactics, and if it agrees to play its role in a truly competitive economic environment. Russia can never be a fully credible partner for the West and regional states if it persists in its present ambivalent behavior. The best way to influence Russian behavior in a constructive direction is to encourage Russia to enter into cooperative relationships, at governmental as well as private levels. A policy of enhanced cooperation, combined with a policy of reassurance based on slowing down NATO enlargement after the first round, would make it clear to Moscow that cooperation, rather than confrontation, will benefit Russia as much as any other country in the Euro-Atlantic region. It is true that the weakness of Russia’s democratic tradition and its severe economic problems may reduce its
chances for a smooth transformation. The West, however, has been given a valuable opportunity to help secure Russia for democracy and development. It should not waste this opportunity by discouraging the democratic forces in the country.

Third, it is important for the PfP to reassure the non-NATO member-states. An enhanced PfP would be a very useful instrument to link those states to the Alliance and prepare them to act in cooperation with NATO in future. A long pause after the first round of expansion would facilitate the effective participation of Russia, Ukraine, and all the other regional states, and would give the PfP a proper role in the overall post-Cold War revitalization process of NATO. Through the enhanced PfP, NATO can give its partner countries a sense of security and belonging and involve them in NATO’s decisionmaking process.

Fourth, the development and implementation of programs to promote independent statehood and free-market economy in the region require an enhanced and sustained US engagement. Today there is a palpable growth of US interest in Transcaucasia and Central Asia. This will help ensure open access to the energy resources of the Caspian. Moreover, the United States’ support of multiple transit routes for the export of oil would contribute to regional stability by promoting interdependence among regional states and by helping them to avoid dependence on any one country for their energy supplies. Restrictions imposed by the US Congress on aid to Azerbaijan, under Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act, should be lifted. The provision limits the Administration’s ability to exert influence on the development of Azerbaijan’s oil sector, as well as on the conflict resolution process in Nagorno-Karabakh.21

Fifth, the European Union should also assume its share of responsibility by accelerating its own expansion to central-eastern and southeastern Europe. The European Union is much better positioned than NATO to deal with the political and economic roots and adverse consequences of ethnic tensions. EU membership would also satisfy the European vocation of those countries without threatening Russia. If NATO’s enlargement process slows down, some of the disappointed countries, such as Slovenia and Romania, could find in the European integration process a direct gateway to Europe. Expanding European integration is a vital pillar of the Euro-Atlantic security system. NATO enlargement cannot be considered in isolation from the other major European developments. As NATO’s Enlargement Study of September 1995 points out, the EU and NATO enlargement processes should be mutually supportive and parallel. NATO members’ readiness to make collective assets of the Alliance available for WEU operations is a natural consequence of this parallelism. The linkage is also essential because of the cumulative effect of the security commitments of Article 5 of the modified Brussels Treaty and of Article 5 of the Washington Treaty.
EU membership for the Black Sea countries would promote a concept of Europe linked to the geopolitical concept of Eurasia. Europe cannot play a significant role in the international system by confining itself to a limited geographical setting. The growing importance of peacekeeping, peace enforcement, and crisis management all add to the weight of such factors as geostrategic location, manpower, regional influence, and economic potential. The Black Sea countries are in a position to enrich Western Europe in all these respects. The EU's adoption of a more flexible membership policy, based on the idea of differentiated integration, would avoid alienating southeastern countries from Europe and facilitate the sharing of responsibilities on the trans-Atlantic level by adding to Europe's resources and possibilities.

NATO enlargement should not be the cover for further delays in the EU's own reluctant opening to the East. Before initiating its second round of expansion, NATO should await the EU membership of Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and at least one Black Sea country. NATO expansion to Central and Eastern Europe was not an urgent issue in determining the return of the former Soviet bloc countries to the European system. Nor was it a critical element to secure a stable order in the Euro-Atlantic area. NATO enlargement has overshadowed more urgent policy issues, such as NATO's purpose and role in the post–Cold War era. By slowing down NATO expansion after the first round, the allies could reserve more energy, more time, and more money to broaden the horizon of the trans-Atlantic security partnership beyond territorial defense and promote a functional revitalization of the Alliance.22

NOTES AND REFERENCES

* Prof. Ali L. Karaosmanoglu is Chairman of International Relations Department at Bilkent University, Ankara. On 24 April 1998, the author presented a version of this article at a seminar under the Research Program in International Security, directed by Prof. Richard H. Ullman, at the Center of International Studies of Princeton University, where he was a Fulbright Visiting Research Fellow. The author thanks Pál Dunay for his comments on an early version of the article.


2 ‘NATO Enlargement and Ukraine’, Basic Papers, no. 16, 11 April 1996.
