

**Closed Session**

# **Turkey's Security Policy:**

## National Defence Industry and Cross Border Operations





**Closed Session**

# **Turkey's Security Policy: National Defence Industry and Cross Border Operations**

The TRT World Forum 2018, recognized as one of the most significant political events of the year, took place from October 3rd- 4th at the Swissotel in Istanbul gathering together over 600 esteemed guests and panellists. Consisting of 8 public sessions, 11 closed sessions and keynote speeches delivered by some of our most esteemed guests, this year's Forum succeeded in providing a platform for serious engagement with the most pressing challenges of our time. The themes of the sessions ranged from the future of the Middle East and the European Union to the growing trend of Islamophobia, refugees, Turkish foreign policy in an age of crisis, the crisis of new media and female leadership in a world of conflict. Uniting all of these themes was a focus on the fragmented state of today's world and a sincere desire to offer meaningful solutions.

This roundtable meeting was held in English under the Chatham House Rule. This rule stipulates that 'when a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed.'

**© TRT WORLD RESEARCH CENTRE**

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

**PUBLISHER**

TRT WORLD RESEARCH CENTRE

*January 2019*

**TRT WORLD İSTANBUL**

AHMET ADNAN SAYGUN STREET NO:83 34347

ULUS, BEŞİKTAŞ

İSTANBUL / TURKEY

**TRT WORLD LONDON**

PORTLAND HOUSE

4 GREAT PORTLAND STREET NO:4

LONDON / UNITED KINGDOM

**TRT WORLD WASHINGTON D.C.**

1819 L STREET NW SUITE 700 20036

WASHINGTON DC / UNITED STATES

[www.trtworld.com](http://www.trtworld.com)

[researchcentre.trtworld.com](http://researchcentre.trtworld.com)

**Disclaimer:** The views expressed in this document are the sole responsibility of the speaker(s) and participants, and do not necessarily reflect the view of TRT World Research Centre, its staff, associates or Council. This document is issued on the understanding that if any extract is used, TRT World Research Centre should be credited, preferably with the date of the publication or details of the event. Where this document refers to or reports statements made by speakers at an event every effort has been made to provide a fair representation of their views and opinions. The published text of speeches and presentations may differ from delivery.

## Background



On 4 October 2018, the TRT World Research Centre held a roundtable meeting on Turkey's Security Policy: National Defence Industry and Cross Border Operations. This was part of a series of roundtable meetings forming part of the two-day TRT World Forum 2018, which included eight public sessions and 11 closed sessions.

Turkey's security policy has been revised to strengthen the national defence industry and apply hard power in foreign policy. Primarily, historical experience had played a key role in the development of Turkey's defence industry when Turkey faced the US arms embargo

following the 1974 Turkish military operations in Cyprus and the conflict with the PKK which generated a need for effective weaponry. Turkey has invested tremendously in their national defence industry during the AK Party era for the sake of being self-sufficient and technologically advanced. Simultaneously, it has been necessary in protecting the country from the increasing terrorist threat by PKK and Daesh. Turkey has conducted two major operations, namely Operation Euphrates Shield and Operation Olive Branch, in 2016 and 2018 respectively. This session seeks to identify key elements of Turkey's evolving security policy through a discussion of the national defence industry and crossborder operations.

## Discussion themes of the session:

- Discuss Turkey's security policy in the national defence industry and cross-border operations.
- Explore the aim of Turkey's expanded National Defence Industry.
- Analyse the dynamics of Turkey's cross-border operations in Syria and Iraq.
- Question the possibility of clash between Turkey and some of its NATO allies with regards to security priorities.
- Discuss Turkey's strategy for the new type of terrorism as in the FETO case.

## Introduction

A strong national defence industry is necessary for a state to ensure the security of its citizens and policy objectives, domestic and foreign. However, within the international system, the acquisition and trading of weaponry has always created tensions and challenges stemming from contradicting security objectives. For instance, Turkey was subject to embargos during the 1970s and 1980s because of its intervention in Cyprus 1974. The lack of adequate instruments, weapon systems, communication systems and other mechanisms inhibited Turkey's capacity to combat PKK terrorism for many years. In light of these constraints, the necessity for Turkey to have an adequate and efficient defence industry became more and more critical. As a result,

the Undersecretariat of Defence Industries was established in the mid-1980s to achieve this objective.

In the session, our speakers and participants emphasised the need for a sovereign country to possess an independent national defence industry with its own command system.. They discussed various aspects of Turkey's national defence industry, including how the understanding of security has broadened since 2002 and the significance of cross-border operations in this regard. To understand the process until today, the first speaker highlighted the transformation in Turkey's defence industry and the importance of keeping it fully independent.

## Turkey's Transformation in the Defence Industry

In the 1940s and 1950s, in spite of the circumstances following the Second World War, Turkey made considerable efforts to produce weapons and improve its defence industry. However, this was followed by several years of stagnation and near-complete dependency on NATO. In that time, while Turkey benefited from the Marshall Plan and the Truman Doctrine, attempts to develop its own defence industry were pushed to the background. During the 1970s, especially after Turkey's intervention in Cyprus in 1974, the dependency continued in spite of intensive embargos. The establishment of the Undersecretariat of Defence Industries in 1985 was a turning point, and after 2002, Turkey's efforts to develop its own defence industry have been progressively increasing. The speaker stressed that effort was not merely about having better weapons, as better weapons alone do not make a country stronger. If the country is dependent on other states for weapons it will not be able to control the supply of that weaponry system. For example, Iran had strong weapons during the Iran-Iraqi war in 1980-88, but was incapable of using those weapons effectively, leading to a prolonged war which it was unable to win..

In this context, the first speaker stressed that the independence of a country is related to how independent its whole defence system is. Even if countries are freely acquiring and purchasing some types of equipment

today, it is not certain that they will be able to buy them tomorrow, since weapon systems are costly. For this reason, the first speaker reiterated the necessity of looking at the entire domain of the industrial zone, defence industry and future sectors. Within the context of defence, it is not only equipment which is critical, but also human resources, which Turkey, with its young population, is rich in. He stated that one of the first steps in developing an independent defence industry is to utilize that population. Otherwise, in the future, Turkey will not be able to make decisions independently and will always be subject to someone else's will.

The third speaker talked about the recent developments and transformations in Turkey's defence industry. As mentioned before, it began with smart procurement (especially after the 1974 crisis) which created tension between Turkey and the US. In the second era, Turkey began to receive some military technology under licenses, such as F-16 fighter jets. The third period in Turkey's defence industry is joint-production and technology transfer. Current examples of original design production by the Turkish military forces include, according to the speaker, the dronification of Turkey's counterterrorism strategy. In the future, it is suggested that Turkey should continue to invest in research and development in its technology model.

# From De-securitisation to Securitisation

The security policies of a state need to be responsive to projected and expected needs and necessities. The third speaker attributed the transformation of Turkish security policy over the past few decades to this process. Firstly, he argued that Turkey's changing security and defence policies during the last quarter of AK Party rule should be addressed within the context of the changing dynamics in regional and international security. In this regard, three basic arguments serve to explain the process:

1. Turkey's security and defence policy is undergoing fundamental transformation.
2. The fundamental transformation of Turkey's security and defence policy is the product of internal, regional and international dynamics.
3. Turkey's security and defence policy can be understood as a quest for strategic autonomy, which can also be defined as relative freedom from external dependency.

Strategic autonomy in international affairs has been described as the state's ability to maintain its national security interests with its own military and defence capability. With respect to Turkey's context and its understanding of strategic autonomy, Turkey's changing security and defence policy is composed of counter-terrorism activities (especially in the regional and international level), and the aim of contributing to regional and international peace. The third speaker pointed out that focusing solely on Turkey's counterterrorism operations will not help us understand the wider geopolitical picture in which Turkey changed its defence and security policy. As strategic autonomy also refers to Turkey's power projection, it is also a crucial aspect in understanding the changing dynamics of Turkey's defence and security policy.

It was stated that strategic autonomy is not about bilateral or multilateral military and political engagement with the outside world or international actors. Rather, it is about reformulating the military dimensions of foreign policy projections to protect Turkey's primary national security interests in its immediate neighborhood, especially in the Middle East. This does not mean that Turkey's security strategy is militarised and unilateral, but rather that its security strategy is being reformulated to enhance its offensive potential.

The speaker problematised two basic questions:

1. How Turkey will be able to deliver its strategic objectives in

a very hostile region and international environment?

2. What kind of challenges Turkey might be facing in delivering strategic objectives?

It has been underlined that Turkey wants to become a strategically autonomous power in the region, as well as in the international setting. According to the speaker, it is first of all necessary to understand the changing dynamics and fundamental transformation in Turkey's defence and security policy in response to the reasons behind the fundamental transformations in Turkish security and defence policy.

In fact, a transformation in Turkey's security and defence policy was already under way when the AK Party came to power in 2002. However, the understanding of security in the early AK Party era was not understood in a militaristic way, but rather as a holistic function involving dimensions such as the economy, diplomacy, trade and so on. However, the post Arab Spring period was crucial in changing the dynamics of Turkey's security landscape and security paradigm. Turkish security concerns evolved, which led to security becoming a very central component of Turkey's internal and international affairs.

The third speaker pointed out three robust developments in the post-Arab spring landscape of Turkey. The first one is the national security architecture and how it was shaken up by the failed 15 July military coup attempt, which left a huge impact on Turkey's security perception and security institutions. Turkey had to reformulate its security doctrine and reshape the security apparatus to cope with the dynamics of the new political atmosphere after the coup. The second development is the destabilization of the national security environment by the PKK and the rise of ISIS. Thirdly, the regional security landscape was disrupted by the Syrian civil war, especially in terms of the spill-over effect of the war into Turkey. In that context, the proliferation of violent armed groups, the decline of state sovereignty, the questioning of borders in terms of their function and meaning, and increasing geopolitical competition among regional powers affected this process. In addition to these three developments, Russia as well as US became politically, militarily and strategically involved in the Syrian Civil War. By backing PKK's Syrian offshoot PYD/YPG in the region US helped the terrorist organisation to create a territorial zone in Syria.



Hence, Turkey had to deal with a diverse range of security threats in this period. PKK, Daesh, and foreign terrorist fighters all constituted newly emerging security threats (especially for border security), while the protection of Syrian refugees, and overall defence capability all became part of Turkey's security concerns. The third speaker underlined the significance of the post Arab-spring era, in attempting to understand why Turkey needed a sophisticated defence policy different from its defence policies over the three last decades. Turkey responded promptly to potential institutional weaknesses in the post-15 July era, particularly in terms of rehabilitating the Turkish military and by increasing its capacity. Turkey's response to all the aforementioned threats helped reformulate its external security understanding. Concerning its counter-terrorism strategy, Operation Euphrates Shield and Operation Olive Branch were one of the important parts of Turkey's changing security policy, especially towards external threats. The third speaker asserted that cross-border operations are actually a rupture rather than a transformation, and that this new foreign policy involved maintaining military engagement outside Turkish territory.

Turkey sought to address multiple threats through these cross-border military operations: firstly, to de-territorialise the PKK in the Syrian context and to eliminate its military capacity- including manpower. Secondly, it is to prevent the PKK from cooperating with other countries- especially ones who had given them military and financial support. Following domestic counter-terrorism operations, Turkey started to expand its action towards the PKK in Syria in the context of Operation Olive Branch. Now, Turkey's security policy in Iraq and Syria is totally different from the previous understanding of counter-terrorism operations in Turkey's near abroad. Military activism and fighting against a terrorist threat at any place and at any given time was one of the principal dimensions.

The third speaker also discussed the relationship between security policy and defence policy, which is one of the crucial dimensions of Turkey's whole strategy in the region. Moreover, according to the speaker, looking at this relationship help one answer how Turkey is able to deliver on its objective of being a strategically autonomous power in the region. It is not only related to strategy but also related to Turkey's military capacity -which it has been trying to build in the past decades. Concerning this relationship, one of the main questions can be: is there a gap between Turkey's security requirements and defence policy and its actual capability - since there are always differences between policy and capacity? The

speaker said that if a country aims to develop a suitable strategy in its defence planning, it has to also improve its defence capability for the long-term. There is a mutually constitutive relationship between security and defence policy, and without relative autonomy in the defence industry, it is difficult for Turkey to achieve its security priorities, especially in the Middle East. Therefore, since 2002, the Turkish defence industry has been designed to become autonomous and independent. To comprehend this process, another critical question is what the main driving factors behind these changes are.

Firstly, the speaker emphasized the increasing uncertainty in Turkey's relations with the US, European and Western countries. From Turkey's perspective, S400's do not pose a problem to Turkey's relations with the NATO. Greece, also a NATO member, has S300 systems since a long time and this was never debated by NATO members. It is the US opposing that is opposing Turkey's purchase of S400's. Secondly, another factor that is changing is the nature of warfare at the regional level and the various actors, namely state and non-state actors, especially with the proliferation of violent non-state armed groups. This is also linked to the increasing capacity of the non-state actors in terms of military capacity.

Thirdly, the regional arms race is another factor. This is particularly critical for Turkey's defence and security strategy because the arms race is not limited to the Middle East region. There is also increasing movement in terms of military capacity when one looks at the Black Sea region or the Mediterranean region, especially after the annexation of Crimea by Russia. Since the balance of power in the Black Sea region has transformed totally against Turkey, it must be aware of Russia's growing military capacity.

The third speaker highlighted that Turkey is in the middle of a very significant stage to reach strategically autonomous power in the defence industry. It has been suggested that there are three models Turkey can or should adopt. The first one is: an autonomous and independent model (which is already underway). The second one is: the bilateral model, which is also important for Turkey, as it is an integral part of Western security institution and architecture. The third one is: the multilateral model that Turkey has adopted since the 1990s; this is also important for Turkey so as to adapt to the rapid transformation of the nature of warfare in the Middle East.



## Innovations in Technology: New Era for National Defence Industry

The fourth speaker pointed out that realist geopolitical theory will continue to be a valuable tool for understanding and formulating the structure and direction of the world system. Accordingly, geopolitical structures are shaped by two forces - the centrifugal and the centripetal. He described that the centrifugal forces drive for separation by nature while the centripetal forces drive for unity. At the national level, both are linked to the psychobiological sense of territoriality and are intertwined, but they are not always in balance. It has been also underlined that Turkey's security policy has been strategically oriented in such a region that its homeland and surrounding sub-regions are both deeply divided internally and caught up in the competition between great powers of the geostrategic realms since at least the last two centuries.

Turkey has paid particular attention to the development of a specific technology: UAVs, which are unmanned aerial technology within the context of border security. The second speaker emphasised that a conceptual change has occurred in the defence industry in the past 15 years, whereby UAVs became one of the success stories for the defence industry. That success story exhibited how a decision taken 15 years ago meant Turkey would no longer be dependent on direct procurement and would rather focus on some key technologies which are crucial in order to develop the Turkish defence industry.

The process by which Turkey reached this point was discussed in detail. Turkey started with a small UAV system, then moved towards larger platforms as time passed. To understand the procedure clearly, the second speaker discussed Turkey's previous experiences in this domain. Before 2004, Turkey was directly procuring this system - starting with the US system (called GINA) which was the previous version of the current Predator system of the US. Turkey acquired about ten of these, and was one of the first users of this platform. Technically, the average flight hour of each platform was about 100 hours (while now UAVs can fly for thousands of hours). The average of those that Turkey procured was about 100-150 hours, and they were out of their inventory by 2008. The biggest problem was the dependence on the US for this system. Therefore, in 2007, Turkey made a deal with Israel to buy UAVs (ten platforms), but it took five years

to deliver them; they were late because of technical and especially political problems. The other development was in 2008, when Turkey wanted to acquire Predator AQ1 and AQ9 systems from the US, but the export licenses were not released. Thus, Turkey was not able to complete the purchase even though it was ready to pay.

It was stated that Turkey is currently totally independent in this technology and in servicing the military and police, both within the border and in beyond-border operations. The second speaker emphasised this is not only at an assembly-level of development because Turkey is actually going to the deepest level of software, guidance, and control system. Turkey is not purchasing all of those single items - even export control items from the US. It was also highlighted that Turkey utilised an approach - a top-down approach - that came up with technologies from the platform level to the current level. The second speaker said that if Turkey decided to buy pre-equipment directly, there would be no UAV facilities research centres at this deep level.

The second speaker also addressed another dimension of the story, which is about the economic side of this system. While Turkey was advancing, people would usually assume in a case like this that the share of defence budget within GDP would increase- but in reality that wasn't the case. In fact, 15 years ago its share was 3.5% to 4% while the current share is about 2.2%-2.5% percentage of GDP. So, it's actually decreasing. Additionally, the level of defence spending with respect to GDP per capita is actually very low in comparison to other countries. Turkey's UAV systems are currently used and designed for security operations against terrorist organisations. It has been asserted that, in the near future, this platform can be used for a conventional war environment as well. The progress thus far signals that it is going to reach that level.

# Operation Olive Branch and Operation Euphrates Shield: Turkey's Experiment in Cross Border Operations

In January, Turkey began Operation Olive Branch, also known as the Afrin Operation, and ended it in March, after 57 days. Turkey's main goal was to eliminate the terrorist threats of the PKK, its Syrian offshoot PYD/YPG and Daesh to protect its national security. At the end of the operation, Afrin district was taken over from terrorist organisations by Turkish Armed Forces and the Free Syrian Army.

Throughout the whole operation the UAV system was a key mechanism in detecting terrorists and providing surveillance, communication and support. UAVs achieved about 5000 flight hours, which meant that at least 4 UAV's were always on the air during the operation. Moreover, about 450 targets were directly neutralised by either direct or indirect support of the UAVs and its capabilities. With UAVs, the Turkish army in Afrin conducted very effective operations with zero civilian

casualties. Another advantage of the UAVs Turkey produced is their adaptability to unfavorable weather conditions. During 45 days of the operation, the weather was quite bad: cloudy, snowy and rainy. However, Turkey took the risk and flew them in those weather conditions because they were confident in the UAVs' ability to operate in even harsh weather conditions.

The fourth speaker stressed that the two cross-border military operations displayed two important factors to the world. Firstly, the Turkish government demonstrated its political will and control over its armed forces (first operation was right after 15 July coup attempt) with the cross-border operations' planning, organising and executing stages. The second factor was that the military machine was able to show off its strength and how it had the operational capabilities to carry out cross-border operations with joint forces.

## Conclusion

Turkey's security policy has been revised to bolster the national defence industry and apply more hard power in foreign policy. Historical experience played a key role in shaping the development of Turkey's defence industry, like when Turkey faced the US embargo following the 1974 Turkish military operations in Cyprus and the long-lasting conflicts with the PKK. Similarly, Turkey invested immensely in its national defence industry, since the AK Party era, with the aim of becoming self-sufficient and technologically advanced and to counter the increasing terrorist threat to Turkey by PKK and Daesh. Moreover Operation Euphrates Shield and Operation Olive Branch reflected the increasingly assertive nature of Turkish foreign policy, and the simultaneous improvements in military technology were essential in ensuring the military capabilities of the country developed to respond to the new threats. Overall, this session identified key elements of Turkey's changing security policy through a discussion of cross-border operations and future of the national defence industry.

*Turkey's main goal was to eliminate the terrorist threats of the PKK, its Syrian offshoot PYD/YPG and Daesh to protect its national security.*





