

NOT QUITE ‘ZERO PROBLEMS’

ANKARA’S TROUBLES IN SYRIA

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The ongoing civil conflict in Syria – a significant external security threat for neighbouring Turkey – has found Ankara unable to formulate a fully successful response. Shashank Joshi and Aaron Stein argue that the recent deployment of NATO’s Patriot missile-defence system is a compromise solution that indicates how dependent Turkish defence and security policy still is on its Western allies.

In Syria’s two-year descent into civil war, Turkey’s ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) is facing one of the most significant external threats to the country since the end of the Cold War. Ankara has largely struggled to deal with the crisis: it has succeeded neither in preventing it from spilling over into Turkey, nor in persuading its NATO allies to recalibrate their divergent threat perceptions and intervene to topple the Assad regime. As such, NATO’s deployment of the Patriot missile-defence system to Turkey represents a compromise, intended by the Alliance to demonstrate solidarity while limiting exposure to the crisis. The terms of that compromise, falling so far short of Ankara’s earlier hopes for greater NATO involvement, also reflect the manner in which Turkey’s defence and security policies remain dependent on stronger allies, notably the United States, even as broader Turkish foreign policy grows more activist.

The Rise and Fall of Turkish-Syrian Rapprochement

Over the past decade, the Turkish government’s aspirations for regional leadership have driven extensive engagement with its neighbours, including Syria. The phrase ‘zero problems’ has sometimes been used as shorthand for this multidirectional activism, intended to deepen relations with leaders in the Middle East and

increase regional economic integration.¹ To this end, Turkey’s foreign minister reportedly made over sixty visits to Syria between 2008 and 2011.² During the 1990s, the two sides clashed over Syria’s provision of sanctuary to the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), a Kurdish rebel group, and nearly came to war over the issue in 1998 – with Turkey’s then-chief of staff, General Huseyin Kivrikoglu, acknowledging the ‘undeclared war between Turkey and Syria’, and the then-prime minister, Mesut Yilmaz, stating that ‘the military was waiting for the order’.³ Turkey’s coercive diplomacy led to the Adana Accord, which declared the PKK a terrorist organisation, expelled and banned its leader Abdullah Ocalan from Syria, and shut its camps. After Ocalan was captured in Kenya, the Turkish leadership set about engaging its Syrian counterpart.

While the AKP has come to symbolise Turkey’s diplomatic return to the Middle East, that policy in fact had antecedents in earlier efforts to co-opt and engage the leaderships in Damascus and Tehran. Those efforts were motivated by Turkey’s desire to isolate further the PKK, which had suffered considerably during a harsh crackdown in the 1990s.⁴ In the twelve years since Ocalan’s capture, and particularly after the ascendance of the politically and religiously conservative AKP in Ankara, the cross-border movement of goods, capital and people has rocketed.

Aggregate bilateral trade between Turkey and Syria increased from \$773 million in 2002 to \$2.5 billion in 2010, with a free-trade agreement (also incorporating Jordan and Lebanon) signed in 2011. Even joint military exercises between Turkey and Syria were held in 2009.

However, as the Syrian uprising began in early 2011, Turkish policy began to come under strain. Several months into the crisis, Turkey continued to hope that Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad would weather the storm, and even reportedly urged him to undertake ‘cosmetic reforms such as organising sham elections’.⁵ Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan had hoped that he could leverage his close relationship with Assad to persuade the latter to effect managed, top-down and at least pseudo-democratic reform. Gradually, however, as the conflict escalated, Turkey grew increasingly disillusioned by Syrian recalcitrance and concerned by its consequences for Turkey.

These can be grouped into three categories: Kurdish empowerment, refugee flows and regional instability.

Kurdish Empowerment

Turkey’s long-running conflict with the PKK, which it sees as a Kurdish secessionist-terrorist organisation, has escalated over the past two years. At least 870 people have been killed since June 2011 – 298 soldiers, police and village guards, 491 PKK fighters and



German military trucks carrying NATO's Patriot missile-defence system leave the port of Iskenderun, Turkey, January 2013. Courtesy of AP Photo/Burhan Ozbilici.

89 civilians – and 490 of these within Turkey in the past year alone, according to an informal tally by the International Crisis Group.⁶ The Kurdish ethnic group straddles Turkey's borders with Iran, Iraq and Syria; but whereas Turkey's relationship with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Iraq has steadily improved, it is concerned over how the empowerment of Syria's Kurds – long politically and culturally repressed – might strengthen both armed Kurds and Kurdish political groups calling for more political autonomy on Turkey's side of the border. Indeed, Turkey has attributed the recent intensification of fighting with the PKK at least partly to events within Syria.⁷

The Democratic Union Party (PYD) in Syria, a decade-old group affiliated with the PKK, has been a beneficiary of Assad's weakened grip over the north of his country. It has reportedly formed three armed battalions – reflecting not just Syrian weakness, but also design on the part of the government.⁸ While Damascus does not control the PYD, it has assisted in its empowerment. The Assad government intentionally ceded key areas to Kurdish control so as to keep them out of the hands of the predominantly Sunni Arab rebels. In doing so, its aim was also to hit back at Turkey for its role in fashioning the rebel Free Syrian Army. That role, which Turkey denies, was allegedly built around enabling the establishment of a command centre in the southern

Turkish city of Adana and the provision of Russian-origin arms.⁹ For Turkey, the Syrian government's accommodation of the PYD for its own purposes compounds a problem caused by the reported truce between the Iranian government and an Iranian Kurdish group, the Party of Free Life of Kurdistan (PJAK), which has given the group more latitude to operate against Turkey at a time when Tehran and Ankara find themselves at odds on the question of Syria.¹⁰

If Syrian Kurds achieve either de facto or constitutional autonomy in a post-Assad Syria, Turkey fears that this would create cross-border sanctuaries for the PKK, facilitate a northward flow of arms, and encourage Turkish Kurds eager for their own cultural and political autonomy from Ankara. Such fears of pan-Kurdish mobilisation have been sharpened by the prospect that Iraqi Kurds, some of whom have trained their Syrian co-ethnics, could actively participate in fighting within Syria should an Arab-Kurdish confrontation develop.¹¹

Refugee Flows and Regional Instability

Separately, Turkey is also concerned about the financial and political cost of escalating refugee flows, and the impact of regional instability on its own growth. The Turkish government estimates that over 187,000 Syrians have entered Turkey since the start of the conflict, of which just over 54,000 have returned, contained in

thirteen refugee camps spread across the border.¹² Yet these camps are reaching capacity and refugees are being held up on the Syrian side of the border pending the construction of more accommodation.¹³ Moreover, certain areas at the heart of the refugee flow between the two countries, such as the border province of Hatay, contain a substantial number of Turkey's religious minorities, including Alevis.¹⁴ Turkish officials have alleged that militant groups in Hatay have sought to recruit Alevis to fight alongside the Syrian regime's largely Alawite forces,¹⁵ given that the two sects, although distinct, share some aspects of theology.¹⁶ Furthermore, Turkish Alevis have historically been repressed by the Turkish state, but are nevertheless strong supporters of the country's Kemalist, secular political movement.¹⁷ There are reports that Assad is seeking to take advantage of this historic antipathy to try and inflame mostly latent sectarian tensions within Turkey itself.¹⁸

Mass refugee flows are not only destabilising in themselves but can also become a *casus belli*, or be used as a pretext for overt or covert military intervention, as was, for instance, the case in the 1971 Indo-Pakistani and 1999 Kosovo Wars. As an American study demonstrates quantitatively, 'refugees significantly increase the probability of international conflict in a dyad'.¹⁹ This is a particular risk when the issue has high domestic political salience, as it increasingly does within Turkey.

These refugee flows certainly contribute to a broader pattern of regional instability, reinforced by the proliferation of cross-border smuggling networks affecting all of Syria's borders. The Syrian crisis has already spilled over into Lebanon, causing sectarian clashes and deepening political divisions between the Syria-aligned, Hizbullah-dominated ruling coalition and its Saudi-backed, anti-Assad opposition.²⁰ Towards the end of 2012, Jordan similarly began to experience greater political unrest, just as it prepared for elections.²¹ Iraq has also entered a new period of greater political volatility, with the government of Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki exhibiting increasingly autocratic tendencies and, more recently, widespread Sunni protests.²² Turkish tensions with Baghdad stem from Ankara's decision to support Iyad Allawi's secular Al-Iraqiya political coalition during the 2010 election. Ankara had hoped that the cross-sectarian and secular coalition, which had adopted an anti-Iranian platform, could defeat Prime Minister Maliki's Dawa Party.²³ However, after Maliki brokered a political deal that saw him retain his position as prime minister, Al-Iraqiya's influence has waned. Turkey has since worked to bolster ties with the KRG as a counterweight to Maliki's influence in Baghdad and Basra. Turkish-Iraqi relations suffered further after Maliki issued an arrest warrant for Vice President Tariq Al-Hashimi in December 2011.²⁴ Hashimi fled to Iraqi Kurdistan and was subsequently welcomed in Ankara as a visiting statesman and given refuge.²⁵ Ankara may be concerned that this volatility could produce a far-reaching, regional war that could destabilise Turkey itself.²⁶

Turkish Strategy

Deterrence, Defence and Regime Change

In response to this set of threats in the region, Ankara formulated a three-track policy of conventional deterrence, border defence and, by August 2011, outright regime change – with Turkish President Abdullah Gul declaring starkly that 'today in the world there is no

place for authoritarian administrations, one-party rule, closed regimes. Those ... will be replaced by force.'²⁷ In an abrupt departure from the AKP's traditional insistence that sanctions are detrimental to diplomacy, Ankara imposed financial sanctions against Syria in November 2011. At the same time, while Turkey remained against external military intervention, it let it be known that it was studying the idea of establishing a buffer zone to help contain any mass influx of refugees.²⁸

Turkey's objective is to ensure Syria maintains its territorial integrity

This last point speaks to Turkey's principal objective, which has been to ensure that Syria maintains its territorial integrity.²⁹ Partly for fear of the potential effect on Kurdish groups, Turkey opposes the break-up of the Syrian state. Ankara's policy mirrors its approach to reconciliation in Iraq after the US invasion, which emphasised national unity, as well as territorial integrity.³⁰ It first allowed various anti-Assad groups to meet on Turkish soil and, having abandoned state-to-state diplomacy, worked to unify the fragmented rebels under the banner of the Syrian National Council (SNC), which established offices in Istanbul at the end of 2011.³¹ The SNC has since been subsumed into a broader coalition, the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces (NCSROF), formed in November 2012. This has probably reduced Turkish influence over the opposition and increased that of Qatar.³² Qatar has financed the Syrian opposition movement and played a key role in the creation of the NCSROF.³³ However, a new source of influence on the part of the Turkish government recently emerged, given that two-thirds of the members of a new coalition of armed rebels formed in December 2012, distinct from the political opposition, are affiliated with the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood (SMB). Although Qatar also has strong relations with the SMB, the group has functioned in exile from Turkey for decades, shares

a certain degree of ideological affinity with the Turkish AKP, and retains a strong presence inside the new NCSROF. Nonetheless, Turkish influence over the Syrian opposition at the turn of 2013 remains tied to its control of the supply routes to rebel strongholds in the north.

Separately, as described above, Turkey, along with Qatar, has invested greatly in the Free Syrian Army – a loose network of fighters, initially structured around defecting Syrian troops, but now encompassing a wide variety of local units across Syria – and hosted the group in refugee camps on the Turkish side of the border. It is also widely understood that Saudi Arabia and Qatar both use Turkey as a transit point for arms shipments to the Free Syrian Army and other rebel factions.³⁴ Moreover, from Turkey's perspective, the Free Syrian Army is intended to serve as a counterweight to Kurdish groups. Recently, the Free Syrian Army and PYD militias have been battling for control of the town of Ra's Al-Ayn. The uptick in violence has led the Kurdish militias to accuse the Turkish side of co-ordinating the Free Syrian Army's attacks on Kurdish-held territory, and Turkey to accuse the PYD of moving into towns liberated by the Free Syrian Army to try and assert political control.³⁵ Although the Free Syrian Army was the most prominent rebel entity in the early part of 2012, since then its salience and influence have declined, particularly in the face of operational successes by jihadist factions, a development which may have further decreased Turkey's influence over the situation in Syria.³⁶

The Possibility of Escalation

Turkey shifted from support for the opposition to advocacy of outright intervention after the Syrian downing of a Turkish F-4 Phantom reconnaissance plane in June 2012.³⁷ While Turkish authorities maintain that the jet was on a routine mission to test the coverage of local radars, there are reports that the Israeli-upgraded jet was spying on Syrian territory.³⁸ Nevertheless, in the wake of the incident, Turkey began to move more military units and equipment to the Turkish-Syrian border and announced

that it was changing its military's rules of engagement.

Ankara, however, never actually defined the changes made to the rules, choosing only to signal that 'every military element that approaches the Turkish border from Syria in a manner that constitutes a security risk or danger would be considered as a threat and would be treated as a military target'.³⁹ This qualified threat notwithstanding, Turkey's refusal to declare that it would intercept or engage Syrian military targets coming close to the border reflected its underlying risk aversion and its defensive strategy.

Turkey's policy ultimately reflected a response based on qualified proportionality

Similarly, Turkey was not ready to commit to the unilateral establishment of a safe zone on Syrian soil, which would have posed tremendous difficulties, despite Turkey's position as the stronger of the two countries. The safe zone would not have needed to be a contiguous area, cleared entirely of Syrian military units. Instead, it could have comprised pockets carved out along the border, specifically along likely evacuation routes and congregation points. However, given that the purpose of this safe zone would be to provide refugees with protection from the Syrian military, Turkey would have had to ensure that Syrian military units could not access these 'safe' enclaves.

Such an effort, while theoretically less demanding than the imposition of a comprehensive no-fly zone across all of Syria, would still necessitate the establishment of air dominance over the protected areas. The Turkish air force would realistically have had to engage Syrian surface-to-air missile sites, destroyed Syrian aircraft, and put in place the infrastructure to continue to monitor and defend the established zones.⁴⁰ Moreover, it would also have been necessary to target Syrian artillery,

pushing it sufficiently out of range from the safe zone, thus requiring the identification of targets by ground troops operating in Syria.

Aware of these difficulties, and given that Turkey has only a limited supply of precision-guided munitions and has never unilaterally undertaken such a task, Ankara convened a meeting, in June 2012, of its NATO allies under Article IV of the Washington Treaty – a provision that allowed only for mutual consultation and resulted in generic NATO commitments to defend Turkey.⁴¹ Two months later, Turkey intensified this strategy of seeking outside assistance, and declared that it would ask the UN Security Council to establish a safe zone.⁴² Erdogan, while announcing that Turkey had made plans for just such a zone, insisted he would not 'take such a step without any [Security Council] resolution', something he knew would not be forthcoming owing to Russian and Chinese opposition.⁴³

Even when errant Syrian artillery shells struck a Turkish border town and killed five Turkish citizens in October 2012, Ankara's policy shifted only incrementally: Erdogan sought and received parliamentary authorisation to conduct cross-border raids and announced that Turkey would henceforth retaliate with mortar fire, as it did for some days.⁴⁴

Yet, despite another NATO meeting and further threats of unilateral action, Turkey eventually settled on a policy of only firing on Syrian targets when artillery shells strayed over the border, reflecting a response based on qualified proportionality, rather than decisive action. However, such attempts at deterrence failed to dissuade Syria from conducting air and ground operations on or near the border. In early December, Syrian jets bombed the border town of Ra's Al-Ayn, leaving Turkey to scramble jets hurriedly to its side of the border after the fact. There was no further sign of systematic, intensified patrolling to deter further such airstrikes, suggesting that Ankara was simply responding to Syrian provocations, rather than proactively signalling that it would be prepared to escalate the conflict.⁴⁵

Alliance-Invocation as a Strategy
Concurrently, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, in a speech to the UN General Assembly, persistently invoked the doctrine of the Responsibility to Protect, placing that responsibility in the hands of the international community rather than Turkey alone.⁴⁶ Indeed, the repeated reference to this doctrine by Turkish political elites suggests that the concept is being used at least in part as political rhetoric aimed at Turkish domestic audiences, designed to articulate Turkey's regional aspirations but avoid an escalation that most Turks oppose.⁴⁷

Davutoglu persistently invoked the doctrine of the Responsibility to Protect

The AKP's foreign policy, with its focus on soft power, has always been presented as a reflection of its domestic efforts to deepen and strengthen Turkish democracy. As the crisis in Syria has progressed, the Foreign Ministry has set out a purportedly 'humanitarian foreign policy', aimed at 'improving peoples' lives, [taking] action in crisis regions and cultivating humanitarian sensibilities within the UN system, regardless of national interest'.⁴⁸ The new policy is an extension of Davutoglu's 'zero problems' approach, but includes themes that reflect Ankara's embrace of the Responsibility to Protect, as well as the need for collective action. The emphasis on humanitarianism also fits with Erdogan's broader focus on themes of global justice, such as criticism of the UN Security Council, the problem of global Islamophobia, and the imperative to reform international institutions.⁴⁹

Turkey's successful efforts to secure NATO Patriot missile batteries, capable of intercepting missiles and aircraft, to be placed along the Turkish-Syrian border, also combines two strands of Turkey's strategy: it sends modest deterrent signals on the one hand, and invokes the Atlantic Alliance on the other. Turkey's Foreign Ministry intentionally and misleadingly leaked the news that the Patriots were part of a broader plan

to enforce a no-fly zone, partly to deter Syrian military action near the border by generating further ambiguity over the status of Turkish airspace and the risk of escalation, but also to force NATO's hand by creating a diplomatic *fait accompli*.⁵⁰ Turkey's efforts to portray a no-fly zone as inevitable and forthcoming were therefore part of its diplomatic strategy to bind its allies closer, an effort that has been only partially successful.

NATO's Strategy

Turkey's Place in NATO

NATO's cautious response to Turkey's overtures is important in two respects. First, considered in the wider context of Turkey-NATO relations, it invokes and reinforces Ankara's historical fear of abandonment by its Europe-focused allies.

Turkey began its drift towards European security partners even before the Second World War concluded, joining the Allied war effort in February 1945, having remained neutral until that time. This alignment, motivated largely by fear of Russian designs on the Bosphorus Strait and the Balkans, carried over into the post-war period and outset of the Cold War. However, Turkish overtures were resisted owing to European and American fears of over-extension.⁵¹ At first, Turkey was invited only to co-ordinate its armed forces with those of NATO's member states rather than join the Alliance itself. However, fears that Turkey would opt for neutrality in the emerging Cold War, along with the growing importance of the Mediterranean in the East-West confrontation, led to the decision to invite Turkey to join the Alliance in May 1951. Yet, despite Washington's strong support, many of the Western European allies remained wary of Turkish membership, arguing against the expansion of NATO's defence commitments to include the Middle East.⁵²

These difficulties, combined with lingering and persistent doubts about the willingness of the allies to come to its defence should it be attacked by a country in the Middle East, made Turkey's leadership sceptical of external security guarantees. These doubts were

reinforced after the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, when Turkey initially resisted the withdrawal of the obsolete but symbolic US Jupiter missiles from its territory.⁵³

Ankara's discomfort was further exacerbated in 1964, after a Turkish threat against Cyprus led the US to warn that NATO might not step in should this result in intervention by the Soviet Union. The US also made it clear that Turkey was not to use American weapons for the invasion.⁵⁴ When Turkey did eventually invade the island in 1974, the US imposed an arms embargo that lasted for the next four years. Ankara, in retaliation, stopped US U-2 reconnaissance planes from using Turkish bases for flights over the Soviet Union and closed every US military base on Turkish soil bar one.⁵⁵ Even in the post-Cold War era, Turkey requested deployments of NATO Patriot missile-defence systems in 1991 and again in 2003 only to encounter opposition from some of its European allies; Ankara's deep-rooted fear of abandonment lingered on.⁵⁶ In recent years, this fear has been compounded by the hostility shown towards Turkey's bid for EU membership by some NATO members, principally France.

Divergent Threat Perceptions

Second, and more recently, NATO itself has grown increasingly concerned about what might be called the 'bilateralisation' of the Alliance – in other words, a fear that the NATO-Turkey relationship will deteriorate into a US-Turkey relationship, compounding NATO's marginalisation in an age characterised by the US 'pivot' to Asia, shrinking European military capabilities and declining threats to Europe.

An underlying factor which may compound this bilateralisation is a difference between NATO and Turkey in terms of threat perception: most NATO members are largely unaffected by Kurdish empowerment or refugee flows from Syria, for example. While they are concerned about regional instability, given its proximity to Europe, this is not to the same degree as Turkey. They mostly view Syria as a humanitarian issue, a source of conventional and chemical weapon proliferation, and an incubator for transnational terrorist threats – none

of which would necessarily be mitigated, at an acceptable cost, by overt military intervention of the sort that Turkey has demanded.

Although the US strategic community has come to see regime change in Syria as part of wider efforts to limit Iran's influence, and therefore wishes to see the collapse of the Assad regime as earnestly as Turkey, this motivation has not thus far outweighed the administration's fears of entanglement. As one senior American defence official put it, 'the Russians understood this [potential use of chemical weapons] is the one thing that could get us to intervene in the war', thereby acknowledging that the US would not intervene simply to topple Assad or on humanitarian grounds.⁵⁷ France, perhaps owing to its historical role in Syria and defence relationship with Qatar, has been the most hawkish European state – the first to recognise the Syrian opposition as a government-in-waiting and the first to advocate the arming of Syrian rebels (a stance it later reversed).⁵⁸ The UK, though not quite as assertive, has also considered the provision of arms and urged the EU to reassess its arms embargo accordingly.⁵⁹

Yet neither Paris nor London has advocated the use of conventional force, and they are unlikely to do so without US backing. As NATO's war in Libya demonstrated, even the two most potent European military powers remain dependent on American logistics, refuelling, and intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities.⁶⁰ Germany, which abstained from voting for the UN Security Council resolution that authorised intervention in Libya, has no desire for any military involvement.⁶¹

Most NATO members view Syria as a humanitarian issue

One further difference between Turkey and its NATO allies is that, whereas the US and many of its European allies are concerned about the political disorder and long-term commitment that might follow military intervention, Turkey's fear

is that inaction will produce an even more disordered post-Assad landscape than would otherwise be the case.

This difference in interpretation of the risks inherent in the prevailing situation in Syria might be connected to these countries' differing levels of comfort with Islamist political leadership of the sort that is likely to emerge in a democratic or politically competitive post-Assad Syria. Turkey's government, itself led by a religiously and politically conservative party, historically persecuted by an autocratic secular elite, is naturally more amenable to Islamist actors in Syria. The US, by contrast, is less sanguine, having seen the loose, yet worrying, ideological and practical ties between moderate and more extreme Islamist actors, exemplified by the AKP's own opening to Hamas. It is also concerned that Western intervention might encourage Syrian jihadists further, rather than elevate moderate forces.

In short, and barring particular contingencies involving chemical weapons, NATO sees the imposition of a no-fly zone or deeper intervention as neither necessary nor prudent, and wishes to avoid entanglement in a complex civil war. It is neither ruling out options nor issuing Turkey a blank cheque.

Patriot Games

Despite the differences in opinion amongst the NATO member states about how best to respond to the civil war in Syria, the Alliance understands the importance of demonstrating solidarity. It is in this context that the deployment of Patriot missiles should be interpreted. They represent both effective protection against genuine ballistic-missile threats and, just as importantly, symbolic gestures of reassurance that minimise NATO's exposure to the crisis while assuaging, at least to a large extent, Turkish concerns. Turkey has always been committed to promoting Alliance-wide burden sharing, believing that the security of the Alliance is enhanced when all of its members are meeting their commitments. Therefore, the Patriot deployment is seen as an important symbol of collective defence and

provides a psychological reassurance to help placate a Turkish leadership wary of accepting merely verbal commitments to the defence of Turkey.

Nonetheless, the system has a tightly circumscribed military role, and is ill-suited for the expansive military intervention of the sort originally sought by Turkey, whether centred on no-fly or buffer zones.

The system is comprised of a ground-based radar and three generations of interceptor missiles, two of which – the PAC-2 GEM and more advanced PAC-3 – are still in service for missile-defence roles. Turkey is reported to have requested twenty batteries so as to ensure complete territorial coverage.⁶² NATO officials, however, deemed the request excessive and have sent six batteries: two each from Germany and the Netherlands, and an additional two from the United States.⁶³ The PAC-3 battery can hold up to sixteen interceptors, while the PAC-2 can hold up to four. The Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), and not the Turkish government, will be in control of the missiles and will frame the rules of engagement.⁶⁴

The Patriot system can provide more than missile defence

The Patriot system can provide for more than missile defence. Both generations of interceptor missiles can also effectively engage jets and, depending on their altitude and speed, low-flying helicopters.⁶⁵ However, the older and cheaper PAC-2 is better suited to the anti-aircraft role.⁶⁶ As such, a typical Patriot battery includes both types of missiles, with the fire-control system deciding which to fire based on the target.⁶⁷

Depending on the placement of the radar and the location of the interceptor sites, the system is capable of covering a territory of roughly 50–100 km into Syrian territory.⁶⁸ Therefore, apart from protecting Turkish population centres, the Patriot – and specifically the US batteries deployed to Gaziantep

– could bring into range the airspace above key battlegrounds in the civil war, such as the city of Aleppo. This means that the system could theoretically contribute to a no-fly zone; however, as explained below, this presents a number of problems.

Air Defence versus No-Fly Zones

It is important to understand what these batteries can and cannot realistically accomplish. The Patriot's limited range and the small number of batteries being deployed mean that this deployment is incapable of creating a comprehensive no-fly zone that covers all of Syria. It could contribute to a partial no-fly zone, but this would be problematic. Even partial no-fly zones require the establishment of robust and capable command-and-control arrangements and the careful de-confliction of airspace, particularly if Turkish or allied aircraft continue to conduct other operations – such as close air support of ground forces – within that airspace. As such, no-fly zones have historically been handled through the use of aircraft, rather than ground-based missiles.⁶⁹ However, in order to put the enforcing aircraft beyond the reach of surface-to-air missiles, it would be necessary to suppress, degrade or destroy Syrian air defences. Turkey's air force, despite having participated in NATO's efforts in Bosnia, is not capable of independently conducting this set of tasks.

Furthermore, it is unlikely that the Patriot can create a partial no-fly zone by itself. Its coverage would be limited in range and implausibly expensive. A single PAC-3 missile costs between \$3 and \$4 million, which represents a high proportion of the unit cost of the aircraft it would be targeting.⁷⁰ Moreover, the batteries being deployed in Turkey can hold only a limited number of interceptors (between twenty-four and ninety-six, depending on the mixture of interceptor missiles). Even if one accepts that Turkey may be sent additional, spare interceptors, expending this limited stockpile on Syrian aircraft might leave Turkey vulnerable to ballistic-missile salvos, something that would defeat the primary purpose of the Patriot deployment.

There are also other problems with configuring the Patriot to deal with aircraft rather than just missiles. During the First Gulf War, for instance, the destruction of the Iraqi air force and absence of cruise-missile threats allowed the coalition to 'shut down Patriot batteries against everything but ballistic missiles with steep trajectories'.⁷¹ By 2003, the rise of Iraqi cruise-missile and UAV threats forced a change in tactics. However, that shift came at a serious cost in terms of friendly fire. During the 2003 Iraq War, an American Patriot battery downed a British Tornado jet, killing its crew; a US Navy F/A-18 was also shot down, and a US F-16 was forced to destroy a ground-based radar that had 'painted' the jet (that is, locked on to the jet to target interceptor missiles).⁷²

If Turkish aircraft are not fully conversant with units operated and commanded by non-Turkish personnel, it would be safer to configure the Patriot system for 'high-angle' ballistic-missile threats (that is, those with steep trajectories and which are therefore likely only to be ballistic missiles), rather than have the system cope with a greater variety of targets (such as aircraft and cruise missiles) and therefore risk accidents. However, the unavoidable cost of making the airspace safer for Turkish jets would, of course, be to reduce the threat to Syrian jets.

The Patriot cannot create a comprehensive no-fly zone

In all likelihood, Patriot will not be 'shut down' to deal with just ballistic missiles (that is, configured to screen out other threats), in part because Syria – like Iraq in 2003 – possesses Russian-supplied cruise missiles.⁷³ As such, the Patriot deployment will be accompanied by the establishment of strict air corridors for Turkish jets operating on or close to the border. The restrictive rules will likely include specific no-fly areas within Turkish territory, lest human error result in friendly fire. This means that Turkish F-16s may not be able to continue their

routine intercepts of Syrian aircraft approaching the border. Therefore, in deploying Patriots, Turkey appears to have indicated that it is prepared to rely heavily on the NATO-controlled missiles for its border security.

At the same time, the deployment of Patriot missiles does address some important problems. First, a collapsing Assad regime might lash out. In 1991, Saddam Hussein fired eighty-eight Scuds at Israel and coalition forces during the First Gulf War;⁷⁴ in 2011, Colonel Qadhafi fired a Scud-B at rebels in eastern Libya just one week before his regime was deposed; and, beginning in December 2012, the Assad regime has also fired multiple Scud missiles, with the first salvo from An Nasiriyah air base north of Damascus aimed at the rebel-held Sheikh Suleiman base north of Aleppo.⁷⁵ Turkey, having hosted and helped to arm the Syrian opposition on its soil, is a prime target for future Syrian missile attacks.

Second, Ankara may be concerned that conventional or chemical-armed Syrian ballistic missiles aimed at rebel-held positions near the northern border could overfly their targets and strike Turkish territory, even if Turkey is not targeted intentionally. The Turkish leadership therefore views the Patriot as an important tool with which to defend border towns and cities within range of Syrian Scuds. Syria's longest-range ballistic missile, the road-mobile Scud-D, is capable of flying up to 700 km.⁷⁶ Even if launching points in northern Syria fall out of the hands of the Assad regime, this would still leave most of Turkish territory, including Ankara, within range of launch points in western Syria. Parts of that territory, such as the mountainous areas behind Latakia and the coastal province of Tartous, are seen as belonging to an 'Alawite heartland' more sympathetic to Assad's rule.⁷⁷

The Patriot, however, should not be treated as a panacea. First, it does not intercept artillery shells – the only projectiles that have actually crossed the border thus far. Second, the older interceptor missile has well-documented flaws that could limit its effectiveness against a Syrian Scud attack, especially if they were operating to the limit of their range. During the

First Gulf War, the irregular ballistic trajectories and mid-flight break-up of Iraqi Scuds, caused in part by their over-extended range, confused the PAC-2 interceptor. Some studies found that, during the Gulf War, 'Patriot's intercept rate could be much lower than 10 percent, possibly even zero'.⁷⁸ Although low hit-rates are undesirable under ordinary circumstances, they are especially worrying in the context of WMD warheads. A very small number of successful strikes by WMD-armed warheads can have a disproportionate strategic effect.

Syrian Scuds may not, however, present the same problems to the new PAC-3 missile. First, they would not necessarily be operating at over-extended ranges, and mid-air break-up of chemical-armed warheads would also likely destroy the weapon's crucial dispersal mechanism. Second, the guided hit-to-kill technology of the PAC-3 interceptor would allow it to generate explosive power equivalent to several hundred kilograms of TNT in a collision with Syria's most sophisticated Scud missile, which in turn would mean that any WMD agent would be vaporised and rendered harmless.⁷⁹ Third, the PAC-3 represents a major improvement on its predecessor, and it was successfully combat-tested against certain tactical ballistic missiles during the 2003 Iraq War – although not Scuds. Notwithstanding these advantages, the limited operational history of the new missile should demand caution in assessing its effectiveness.

Given these limitations and advantages, the Patriot deployment should be viewed first as a defensive move, aimed at protecting Turkish territory, and, second, as a political signal by NATO that provides Turkey with reassurance in material form. In short, both Turkey and NATO are eager to maintain flexibility. Neither has been willing to make the political decision to engage Syrian targets in Syrian airspace or territory, other than in sporadic time- and space-limited retaliatory salvos. Rather than putting in place the architecture to intervene, Turkey and NATO have compromised on a cautious, defensive and largely reactive strategy that addresses some of the concerns of each side.

Broader Lessons for Turkish Security Policy

As the international debate over intervention in Syria continues without resolution, some lessons emerging both from Turkey's travails over Syria and the course of Turkey-NATO interaction can be discerned.

First, NATO remains the ultimate backstop for Turkish security. In some respects, it is entirely unsurprising that a middle power should seek to entangle more powerful allies in its security affairs: this is true of any military alliance. At the same time, this underscores that Turkey's broader security policy must ultimately operate within the parameters of what the Alliance is willing to accept. Turkey's declaratory posture, its rhetoric and its foreign policy discourse all suggest a strong desire for political influence and control over events in Syria. However, NATO has been less willing to pursue a high degree of control over the situation, and has shrunk from helping Turkey to do so. A different Turkish government, one with either lesser regional ambitions or a more sober appraisal of NATO's willingness to step in, might have proceeded with greater reticence in pushing for multilateral intervention.

In many respects, this is an echo of a broader problem. Although this article has focused on Turkey's defence and security policies, there are parallels with Turkey's wider foreign policy. Ankara has attempted to craft ambitious and activist policies towards Gaza, Israel, Iran and elsewhere, and it has overplayed its hand in each. In Gaza, both Egypt, led by the Muslim Brotherhood, and Qatar have played a far more important role in mediating with Hamas; in Israel, Tel Aviv has been far less willing to repair frayed relations than Ankara had anticipated;

and, since the failure of Turkey's nuclear diplomacy with Iran in 2010, Ankara has been marginalised in the negotiations with Tehran.⁸⁰

Second, it is important to understand that Turkey's security policy is also directed towards domestic politics. The government has incorporated the Responsibility to Protect concept into its narrative of the crisis due to a sense of obligation on the part of the Turkish leadership: Erdogan claims that his own political leadership has strengthened Turkish democratic institutions and, therefore, the Turkish state now has an obligation to help foster further democratic change in the region.⁸¹

Third, even as Turkey remains committed to an alliance it sees as critical to its national security, Ankara has, on many occasions, indicated that it would like to pursue a more independent foreign policy that rests heavily on the idea of Turkish 'soft power'.⁸² This includes efforts to expand the Turkish foreign ministry and modernise the country's armed forces.⁸³ Historically, major crises frequently serve as catalysts to military build-ups.⁸⁴ Turkey has not spent more than 3 per cent of its GDP on defence for a decade (largely owing to its economic expansion, rather than defence cutbacks), but that may begin to change should the country continue to face a turbulent regional environment.⁸⁵ NATO is a military alliance and cannot dictate a country's foreign policy. Nonetheless, NATO's willingness to assist Turkey in different regional contingencies will affect how assertive Turkish policy can be and the risks that Turkey will bear. Ankara is therefore currently pursuing a pragmatic policy aimed at giving the Turkish leadership more flexibility in its foreign policy in cases where

its interests diverge from those of its Western allies, as well as in cases where such a foreign policy may generate military risks that are not adequately hedged by its allies.

In the interim, however, there is a further lesson: that just as Turkey remains reliant on NATO, NATO in turn remains reliant on the United States. In this sense, the Obama administration is correct in its perception of the US as the world's 'indispensable catalyst'.⁸⁶ For this reason, the deep-seated ambivalence to intervention in Syria on the part of the US underpins the cautious policies towards the embattled nation held by many NATO allies.

The Syrian crisis will not stop Turkey from seeking a more prominent role in regional events; however, for much of the near future, its rise will be affected by the preference of its allies, particularly where Turkish security is directly at stake. Ankara's recent decisions and actions suggest that it remains comfortable with this status quo and underscores just how valuable, differences notwithstanding, the Alliance's collective security guarantee remains. As Turkey seeks to continue its efforts to carve out a greater role for itself regionally, its security policies are likely to remain firmly tied to its participation in the NATO Alliance. ■

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