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Turkish Perceptions and Nuclear Proliferation

by [Ibrahim Al-Marashi](#) and [Nilsu Goren](#)

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Introduction

Turkey is a “middle power” in Eurasia and in the Middle East aspiring to become a regional power. Due to the complexity of its security environment, Turkey seeks protection from weapons of mass destruction (WMD) threats, Islamic fundamentalism endangering the Republic’s secularism, and ethnic separatism. From a systemic perspective, Turkey plays the role of an “insulator” for the European Union (EU) by isolating the complexity of the Middle Eastern security environment. Turkey also has a crucial position in the regional balance as a transit country in the Caspian energy corridor. It is argued that Turkish membership to EU would enhance the European security structure, as it would benefit from Turkey’s geopolitical position and military capabilities as a NATO member. Turkey serves to enhance European security vis-à-vis global terrorism and transnational threats. Wood and Quaisser write that Turkey is “an irreplaceable southeast flanking power, without whom a forward defence or security sphere for Europe would not be possible in the Eastern Mediterranean or Black Sea, not to mention the Middle East.”^[1] At the same time, considering its regional security environment, Turkey’s *realpolitik* security characteristics are incompatible with European civilian-normative security measures based on soft power.^[2] This is the milieu in which the Turkish security policy community operates. The purpose of this article is to examine how Turkish state and societal actors address the evolving threat of nuclear proliferation in the Middle East.

U.S. efforts to prevent the development of a potential Iranian nuclear weapons program depend on Turkish cooperation. Turkey has expressed concern over Iran’s potential nuclear capabilities, as its neighbor would emerge as a regional hegemon, and spur various countries in the Middle East to develop nuclear deterrents of their own. The official Turkish state position on this potential threat is to pursue a diplomatic solution, and if need be, support coercive UN economic sanctions. A prevalent fear in Turkey is that military action against Iran could help consolidate the Iranian President’s political power, and could feed into his millenarian outlook, or in Ahmadinejad’s words as “the time for an apocalypse after which Islam will emerge triumphant.”^[3]

According to the official statements by the Turkish General Staff, in order to achieve the global nonproliferation of WMD, Turkey supports the creation of a “WMD free” Middle East. A similar concept such as Middle East nuclear weapons-free zone (MENFZ) was promoted by former Iranian President Khatami, and a Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone (WMDFZ) was promoted by Egypt. However, most of its neighboring countries in the region have extensive interests in WMD proliferation; i.e. noncompliance with the international nonproliferation regimes and organizations, transfer of dual-use technologies, looseness of export controls and thus, threatening Turkish regional security interests.^[4] The widespread acquisition of WMD in the Middle East has triggered and legitimized further nuclear aspirations. The Middle East has witnessed the militarization of its societies and economies, acquisition of massive conventional

weapons arsenals, proliferation of ballistic missiles and WMDs, growth of military research and development as well as production. The greatest challenge emerging from the Middle East region that threatens international nonproliferation regimes is non-participation: Israel is the only state in the region not to sign the NPT. Algeria, Israel, and the Sudan have not signed the BWC. Egypt, Eritrea, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, and Syria have failed to sign the CWC. No state in the region except Turkey is a formal member of the MTCR.[5] In addition to Iranian nuclear ambitions, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), namely Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, has recently announced the need to develop nuclear energy.[6]

This article examines the Turkish views and threat perceptions of WMDs, particularly Iran's potential to develop nuclear arms. The external actors include the United States and Iran, with a brief overview of relations with the EU. The domestic actors examined include the ruling AKP government, the various Turkish ministries and the military, and finally the secular and the pro-Islamist media. It will also analyze Turkish nuclear aspirations generated by its geopolitical position and examine the media coverage on Turkish perceptions of nuclear proliferation vis-à-vis U.S. relations and Iranian nuclear ambitions.

US Relations and Turkey's WMD Policy

Historically Turkey has been a strategic partner and an ally to United States. Turkey is a member to the international arrangements toward non-proliferation of nuclear weapons such as the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). American policy has consistently asked for Turkey's support against the potential of Iran's nuclear weapons capability. The United States has stressed that if Iran were to acquire nuclear weapons, it would threaten Turkey and the Middle East. The two countries, Turkey and the United States, have signed several cooperation agreements and protocols hindering the proliferation and trafficking of WMD.

Given that Turkey is situated as a geographical hub for the transit of dual usage materials, the United States sought to aid Turkish customs control. On June 14, 2005, an agreement was signed between Turkey and the United States known as *Export Control and Related Border Security Assistance* (EXBS) to provide expertise, training, and technological support for export controls, including deliverance of technical equipment that could identify materials that could have WMD applications.[7]

In December 2002 *The National Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction* was announced by George W. Bush, and was then followed by the inauguration of the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) on May 31, 2003. In 2005, the two countries signed a cooperation agreement under which Turkey agreed to join the PSI, a counter-proliferation global initiative to prevent the movement of WMDs, WMD materials and their delivery systems, and related materials. The PSI envisions intelligence, diplomatic, and law enforcement strategies to prevent transfers of these materials to countries and entities of concern. The United States was keen to have Turkey take part in this Initiative, as a means of reinforcing efforts to prevent shipments of missile and nuclear technology from reaching neighboring Iran. Under PSI, Turkey organized a series of exercises under the title "Anatolian Sun" in the Mediterranean in coordination with the United States, France and Portugal in May 2006.[8] Nevertheless, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs sought to allay fears of the exercise stating, "The Anatolian Sun 2006 military exercise does not target any specific country," most likely directed towards Syria and Iran.[9]

On January 24, 2007 the Turkish Grand National Assembly accepted a bill related to the *Approval of the Agreement between Turkey and the United States on Enhancing Cooperation for the Facilitation of Assistance for Preventing the Spread of Weapons of Mass Destruction*. Mehmet Ali Sahin, deputy prime minister, defended the bill against criticisms in the parliament arguing that it was merely a "technical assistance agreement," preventing the illegal trade of nuclear, biological, chemical, and radiological weapons, in addition to missile launching systems, and enhancing

border security. The opposition Republican's People Party had called for a quorum to make a decision trying to prevent the enactment of the bill. Sahin of the AKP further defended the bill, arguing that the United States had also signed this agreement with other EU and NATO countries. During the heated debate, Sahin questioned the leader of the opposition, Oymen, saying:

Why are you misdirecting the public, honorable Oymen? You may be very meticulous regarding safeguarding the interests of this country, but we are twice as meticulous as you where this issue is concerned. This agreement does not run counter to Turkey's interests.

Sahin had argued that the opposition's criticism leveled against the bill was for essentially an attempt to criticize the AKP government. Oymen defended himself by saying: "The honorable minister has either not listened to my remarks, or has misunderstood them, or he is distorting my remarks. I am astonished. Please pull yourself together and respect the opposition."^[10] The Parliament eventually ratified the agreement a few days later.^[11]

Turkey's policy vis-à-vis WMDs and Iran in particular are summarized in the government's own words as follows:

1. We are following developments with great concern. Turkey does not want nuclear weapons in her region and believes that grave consequences could be faced at global level if the Middle East is not freed of weapons of mass destruction.
2. Nobody argues that you should be denied the right to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. Secrecy surrounding your nuclear activities, however, gives rise to anxieties and distrust. You are working against the expectations of the international community.
3. The process is not evolving in favor of Iran on the international stage. You should refrain from taking steps that could further escalate tension and rather take actions that you are asked to take.
4. Your political leaders should make decisions consistent with the interests of the Iranian people. Emphasis should be placed on efforts aimed at finding a solution through diplomatic channels.
5. Turkey is not considering playing a role as a mediator between the two sides. It could assume such a role only if all the parties ask it to do so.
6. Turkey does not want to see a second crisis in her region following the one witnessed in Iraq.
7. Turkey would comply with any decision that could be made by the UN Security Council regarding Iran and take the same stance as the international community should Iran refuse to cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) closely and in a transparent manner and to stop its uranium enrichment program.^[12]

Turkey has been actively mediating between the European Union and Iran, aiming at a multilateral solution that could curb Iranian nuclear efforts, thus ending the nuclear tensions between United States and Iran. Turkey has also professed an interest in a peaceful nuclear program, complementary to its efforts to build nuclear power plants to address growing energy consumption and dependency, inflating oil prices and lack of electricity production.

Turkish Diplomacy with Iran and Allaying Iranian Fears

Turkey's leaders have made efforts to communicate with both the United States and Iran over the nuclear issues, even though it declared that "Turkey is not considering playing a role as a mediator between the two." For example in May 2006, during the Developing Eight summit in Bali, Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan suggested to Ahmedinejad that he make an effort to defuse tensions on an international level. He reportedly said to the Iranian president, "You should convince the world, not me."^[13] President Sezer, speaking at the Turkish War Academies Command in Istanbul, stated that all countries had the right to use nuclear energy for peaceful

purposes, as long as it cooperates with the International Atomic Energy Agency and abides by the NPT. He said, "We call on Iran to cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency. We conveyed our views to Iranian authorities. Turkey does not want a new crisis in its region."^[14] Namik Tan spokesman for the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs also stressed the need for a diplomatic solution to the crisis: "Turkey defends the view that the problem stemming from the nuclear program of Iran should be sorted out through diplomatic ways. In that regard Turkey extended support to efforts of the EU Three."^[15]

Turkish leaders have also stated that they would not allow their territory be used for a possible strike against Iranian nuclear facilities. An interview by Sukru Kucuksahin and Ugur Ergan with Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul featured the headline, "We Would not Permit an Attack Against our Neighbor From our Soil" in the mass circulation newspaper *Hurriyet*. Gul was quoted as saying, "Our common border with Iran was drawn in 1639, long before the establishment of the United States and many European countries. We would not permit an armed attack against any of our neighbors from Turkey's territory."^[16] The invocation of a shared history was also employed by the Turkish ambassador to Tehran, Husun Gurcan Turkoglu. When he addressed the Iranian public in February 2007, stressing the historical relations between the two countries stating, "Iran and Turkey's relations close to 1000 years old, and their borders have remained constant for about 400 years." When asked about the influence of Turkish-Israeli relations, of obvious concern to Iran, Turkoglu stated that these relations had no effect on ties with Tehran. He also defended talks in Turkey about the nation developing nuclear energy as the country lacks natural resources, and that such plans do not mean that Turkey is encouraging a nuclear race in the region.^[17]

The Turkish government has also argued that Iran has a right to develop peaceful nuclear energy. In an interview in March 2006 with the Austrian daily, *Die Presse*, Gul was asked, "How would Iran's rise to become a nuclear power change the balance of power in the Middle East?" Gul replied:

Just a moment! The peaceful use of nuclear energy and weapons of mass destruction are two different subjects. Iran has the right to develop a nuclear program for peaceful purposes. Not a single country in the region should have weapons of mass destruction, however.

When asked, "Including Israel?" Gul stated, "Not a single country. The entire Middle East should be free of nuclear weapons. As a member of the International Atomic Energy Agency and the NPT, Iran is obligated to complete transparency. Iran lacks this transparency."^[18] Gul had called for turning the region into a WMD free-zone in the past, stating that these weapons cause damage to environment, as well as overspending on defense opposed to economic development.^[19]

Turkish Security Concerns

Turkey has articulated its fears that it would feel threatened by an Iran with nuclear weapons. It would seem that some Turkish officials have tried to downplay the Iranian threat. For example, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan was asked in an interview with an Austrian newspaper, "Mr. Prime Minister, is Turkey also afraid of an Iranian nuclear bomb?" Erdogan replied, "It would be wrong to see that as a threat. But we are against weapons of mass destruction, wherever they may be located."^[20] However there have been expressed fears in the Turkish governing and security establishment of an Iranian nuclear weapons program. Such sentiments can be attributed to media reports, where one unnamed senior Turkish diplomat said, "We definitely do not want an Iran that has atomic bombs. We do not want nuclear weapons in our region," or to Defense Minister Vecdi Gonul who said weapons of mass destruction in the hands of neighbors would be a "threat for Turkey."^[21] Turkey's Deputy Chief of General Staff, General Ergin Saygun also announced the threat Turkey perceived from "the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in the region," during talks with Israeli officials in Tel Aviv.^[22]

Turkey has declared that it is protected under NATO's common security umbrella, hence its national security and defense doctrine does not include deterrence based on weapons of mass destruction.[23] However, there is still some unease in Turkey over Iran's armament program. TUSAM, the Turkish acronym for National Security Strategies Research Center, in its "Geopolitical and Strategic Analyses" series, also published in the Turkish daily newspaper *Cumhuriyet*, represents the typical Turkish nationalist perspective on the significance of Turkey's geopolitical position as a determining factor of the new world order, especially in the Middle East.[24] TUSAM claims that Turkey is surrounded by hostile neighbors that eventually aim to divide Turkey, in order to exploit its natural resources like "vultures." Thus, Turkey should inescapably develop national defense strategies centered on the neighboring threats. TUSAM also points to the inadequacy of confronting unconventional threats, i.e. weapons of mass destruction, by conventional means, hence referring to the need of nuclear power and ballistic missiles acquisition in order to even the nuclear asymmetries.

Gul had stated his displeasure over Iran's missile capability: "The presence of long-range missiles raises the question as to whether they contain nuclear warheads." [25] One report in the Turkish daily *Yeni Safak*, with the headline, "Nuclear Shahab Causes Concerns," states how Iranian missiles such as the Shahab 3 and Shahab 4 could reach Turkey, where the Shahab 3 has an estimated range of 1,300 to 1,500 kilometers, while the Shahab 4 has a range up to 6,000 kilometers. The writer also noted the concern over Iran's claim that it has launched a missile into space and plans to put a satellite into orbit.[26] In response to such fears, Gul suggested to Iran, "It would, therefore, be in Iran's best interest to demonstrate that it is not trying to acquire such weapons and that its program is transparent." [27]

Turkish Media Debates on WMDs

Writers in the Turkish Islamist press frame U.S. policy to Iran as part of establishing a "new Middle East order." They have defended Iran, and its right to pursue a nuclear program, with some arguing that Iran should have the right to develop nuclear weapons. Others criticize American "double standards" with regards to allowing Israel to possess nuclear weapons. These media have called upon the government not to support an attack on Iran, and work to prevent U.S. "aggression." The papers that will be examined in this section include the three dailies, *Yeni Safak*, *Milli Gazete*, and *Zaman*. *Yeni Safak's* audience includes Islamist reformists and the paper tends to be supportive of the AKP government. *Milli Gazete*, is a paper associated with the Saadet Partisi (Felicity Party), affiliated with ousted Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan, while *Zaman* is a moderate pro-Islamist paper that was founded by Fethullah Gulen.

The editorials in the paper *Yeni Safak* have defended not only Iran's right to pursue a peaceful nuclear program, but to develop its own nuclear bomb. In an opinion piece published on December 25, 2006 Hayrettin Karaman argued that it was an "inalienable right and means of self-defense" for Iran and other Muslim countries to develop nuclear weapons. He declared that it was "an insult to the people of Islam" that only Muslim countries were forbidden from possessing nuclear weapons. A commentary published on January 18, 2007 stated if Ankara endorsed a military strike against Iran, Turkey would "pay a price incomparably greater than that extracted by the occupation of Iraq." On January 20, Fehmi Koru charged that the United States sought to foment regime change in Iran and Syria to establish a "new Middle East order." He also wrote that America's claim that "Iran's nuclear activities are not peaceful is based entirely on interpretation." On March 10, he wrote that the United States pursued "obvious double standards" in its nuclear diplomacy, cooperating with India's nuclear program while condemning Iran's.[28]

The *Yeni Safak* columnist Ibrahim Karagul has written several articles in the same vein. In his July 21, 2006 article "US-British-Israeli Axis' Waging War on Syria, Iran in Lebanon" he writes: "Despite the fact that everyone knows about how Israel turned the Middle East into a nuclear weapon warehouse, they are making preparations for attacking Iran on grounds of its nuclear efforts!" He states that America's policy in the region has deceived the international community:

“They are taking the entire world for a fool. They are taking all of us for fools...” Another of his articles published on January 26, 2007 argued that Turkish-Iranian relations would determine the future of Middle East. He wrote:

Jordan says it will acquire nuclear weapons. Egypt says it will acquire nuclear weapons. Saudi Arabia says it will acquire nuclear weapons. Gulf countries want nuclear technology. The United States has not raised any objections to these countries. Why? Why would the aspirations of a country like Jordan for nuclear weapons not attract any attention at a time when Iran’s ambitions for nuclear arms is creating a global crisis, when there is talk of a U.S.-Israeli attack on Iran, and when it is known that such a war would plunge the region into chaos for decades?

Karagul argues that preparations are underway for an American attack against Iran. He refers to the cooperation agreement signed between Turkey and the United States on June 14, 2005 on the preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and which “was hastily put on the agenda of the National Assembly and was ratified on January 24,” referring to the 2007 *Agreement between Turkey and the United States on Enhancing Cooperation for the Facilitation of Assistance for Preventing the Spread of Weapons of Mass Destruction*. He then asks in this context, “Is Iran the aim of that action as well as the aid the United States will give to Turkey on this issue and the measures taken in the border area?” His recommendation is that Turkey and Iran cooperate to prevent the United States, “the intervenors in the region,” from allowing the Middle East to slide further into chaos.^[29]

The paper *Milli Gazete* also echoes the themes of *Yeni Safak*, emphasizing American double standards in the region, criticizing a possible Turkish role in a military strike against Iran, and calls for Islamic unity in the face of threats from further regional intervention. For example, an editorial from the paper on January 15, 2006 urged the Turkish government to “set up a joint force that will stop U.S. aggression and ensure that Islamic countries act in unity and solidarity.” Another editorial on January 21 warned that a Turkish role in a military strike against Iran would “alienate it from the Muslim world.”^[30] The paper on the following day also criticized the United States for pursuing double standards in “turning a blind eye to the fact that Israel owns nuclear weapons.”

Iran has conducted its own diplomacy campaign to win over Turkey to its side, or at least to get the Turkish public to understand its view. Such efforts are enhanced by an atmosphere of growing anti-Americanism in Turkey after the 2003 Iraq war. For example, Ali Cura and Ferhat Koc of *Milli Gazete* conducted an interview with the Iranian Ambassador to Turkey, Fayruz Dawlatabadi. The headline of the interview summarizes the Iranian ambassador’s position on Iran-Turkish relations: “They Are Trying to Spoil Our Relations: The Zionists Are Trying to Spoil our Friendship with Turkey.” There is a pro-Iranian bias during the interview as Cura asks, “Under such circumstances it is possible to say that efforts are being made to cause tension in the relations between Turkey and Iran—*relations that have a rooted history*.” (emphasis added by author). Dawlatabadi replied:

I agree with you. We are talking about efforts that are being made from the outside. We can clearly see that the Zionists and the Americans are behind these efforts. Despite this however, we fully trust the Turkish people and Turkish statesmen because we have been conducting relations with each other on the basis of love and compassion for centuries. We believe that this will have an impact. We should take this historical fact into consideration. The colonialists and the Zionists have been trying to obstruct the development of the relations between the two countries for many centuries.

The interviewer also gives the opportunity for Iran to address the Turkish public, when Cura asks, “Would you like to convey a message to the Turkish people via our newspaper?” The ambassador responded:

In my message to all the Turkish people and the Turkish officials, I would like to thank them. I want them to be sure that the Iran Islamic Republic will always be by their side. We see Turkey's security as our security. We are certain that the Turkish people and Turkish statesmen share this view. They view Iran's security as their security. They should not have any doubts that statements that aim to spoil the relations of the two countries are actually the lies of the United States and the Zionists. Let them be certain that we are not trying to produce weapons of mass destruction. I would like to emphasize however, that we will not stop developing nuclear technology for peaceful purposes. This is our right. I want Turkey and the Turkish people to extend us support in this regard.

In the interview, we can discern the Iranian themes towards the Turkish public. Dawlatabadi called upon Turkey to prevent the United States from disrupting the historic ties the two countries shared. He emphasized this notion by stating, "We see Turkey's security as our security. We are certain that the Turkish people and Turkish statesmen share this view."^[31] The lengthy quotations in the previous interview are used to demonstrate the differences in the Turkish media. *Milli Gazete* has Islamist sympathies and allows a representative of Islamist Iran to use their paper to defend Iran's position at length. The questions are indirectly supportive of the Iranian position.

Zaman also tends to be critical of American foreign policy in the region, and its policy to Iran. An April 2006 column by Ali Aslan entitled, "Is Washington Bluffing?" doubts that the United States has the capability to strike Iran while it is embroiled in Iraq:

After the Iraq experience, many people in Washington realized that the United States' military powers have a limit and that not everything could be achieved through the use of force. Could the United States, which has failed to break even Iraq's local resistance, break what would probably be global resistance from Iran in the event of a campaign against this country? Seeing that it cannot even swim in the Euphrates, could it pass the Straits of Hormuz without drowning? I think that these are critical questions on which even the most hard-line hawks are brooding unhappily.

The themes in the Turkish secular media are that a nuclear Iran poses a threat to national security, while at the same time criticizes America's "double standard" regarding nuclear proliferation in the region. For the most part, these papers have called for a diplomatic solution. The dailies examined in this section include *Bugun*, *Cumhuriyet*, a pro-left daily, defensive of the ideals of Kemalism, and targets social-democratic audience Turkish, *Milliyet*, a mass-appeal paper owned by the Dogan Media Group conglomeration, *The Turkish Daily News*, an English paper also owned by Dogan, and *The New Anatolian*, a daily owned by the Cevik family, the former editors of *The Turkish Daily News*.

In *The New Anatolian* for example, the themes of American "double standards" particularly towards Israel emerge. Inur Cevik, owner and chief editor of the paper on January 16, 2006 empathizes with Iran by writing, "the Iranians want to know why other countries, especially their archenemy Israel, have the right to become nuclear powers," while that right is "being denied to them." He also argues that Turks sympathize with the Iranian people, and thus "the Turkish Government is facing a dilemma," similar to that it faced with the Iraq war of 2003. In other words, the Government does not want another confrontation with the United States, yet at the same time it does not want to upset Turkish public opinion. In the same paper, a January 24, 2006 editorial argues that "it is in Turkey's interest to join Western pressure against Iran's nuclear program." It also states that Iran's potential development of nuclear weapons would be a "serious security concern for Turkey."

An editorial in the March 8, 2006 issue of *Milliyet* states: "Turkey shares the world's concern" over Iran's nuclear program. It raises the fears of clerics in Iran, referred to pejoratively in this article as "mullahs" would possess a nuclear weapon. Nevertheless, the article calls for a diplomatic

solution action, as an attack on Iran would foment an international crisis, only strengthening the Iranian government and its regional ambitions.

On January 18, 2006 *The Turkish Daily News* featured an opinion piece that also stated that Turkey fears a nuclear threat in the region, but at the same time invokes the double standard frame by writing one “cannot remain deaf” as to whether Iran’s denial of uranium enrichment is only a right reserved “for some first-league countries.”^[32] Yusuf Kanli, a columnist for this paper views this crisis as the “Iran Headache” as evidenced from the headline of his article. He writes of Iran, “Although it thus far has been unable to be verified, ‘there is no doubt’ that Iran has been trying to acquire nuclear arms technology. Furthermore, it considers acquiring that technology to be a God-given duty for spreading the message of God.” In this instance, this author uses religious connotations to frame Iran, just as the “mullah” term depicts Iran as an unstable, if not messianic country with dangerous potential if in possession of a nuclear weapon. Kanli also fears that Iran’s nuclear program is controlled by the Revolutionary Guard, which he describes as “the backbone of the Islamic revolution.” While he doubts that Iran’s government would deliver WMDs to terrorists, he does not rule out the possibility of Revolutionary Guard “getting involved in such a heinous adventure.” While the Turkish media had demonstrated fear mongering in the past over Iran’s ballistic missile program, suggesting that they could be fitted with nuclear warheads, Kanli informs his audience that Iran has not mastered this capability yet.

Kanli also brings up the issue of anti-missile defense systems, rarely discussed in the Turkish media and WMD threat perceptions. He states that Turkey will be a missile defense shield based on PAC3s (new-generation Patriot system) or the Russian-made S300s, but does not mention the Arrow defense system made in Israel. However, he questions the effectiveness of such a shield and the exorbitant cost of \$1 billion for its implementation.^[33]

Cengiz Candar, a writer for the daily *Bugun* wrote in September 2006 that an Iranian nuclear arms program would lead to the similar programs in countries like Saudi Arabia. He doubts that Turkey can rely on a collective security system, especially after the Cold War. If Iran were to acquire nuclear weapons, it would expand its power via Syria and Hizballah, weakening Turkey’s strategic position in the region. Nevertheless, while seeing Iran as a threat, he still insists that Turkey seek a diplomatic solution for the Iran crisis.^[34]

Cumhuriyet’s interview with the Iranian ambassador, Dawlatabadi entitled, “The United States Cannot Attack Iran,” differs significantly from *Yeni Safak’s* article. The interviewers from this paper, Selim Dilek and Mahmut Gurer, offered more critical questions over Iran’s WMD program, and less time and subsequent newspaper space for the ambassador’s answers. Dawlatabadi stressed that while the US was an ally of Turkey, “there are no guarantees that it will not stand against it tomorrow,” suggesting that if Turkey were develop a nuclear program, there would be a possibility of America turning against Ankara.

Dawlatabadi also emphasized that Ayatollah Khamenei, the supreme religious authority in Iran, had announced that nuclear weapons were forbidden in Islam, and that in itself should serve as a guarantee for the world. Afterwards the ambassador was asked by the paper, “There are rumors to the effect that Iran may use the Shahab missiles with nuclear warheads. The fact that Turkey intends to purchase air defense missiles is reportedly linked to this.” Dawlatabadi replied, “The Shahab missiles were developed for defense purposes. They are being used as a deterrent factor. Turkish military experts know this better than anyone else. Iran has never adopted an aggressive approach against Turkey during the past 400 years. Israel and the United States may attack us. As you can also see from their statements, we are constantly facing this threat.”^[35]

In an article on March 26, 2007 Mumtaz Soysal, a columnist for *Cumhuriyet*, criticized U.S. policy to Iran and insisted that Turkey’s best policy was to ensure that Iran’s nuclear program is a peaceful one without resorting to punitive sanctions. He draws an analogy with Iraq: “One cannot help discerning an intention to use accusations against Iran on the grounds that it is posing a

nuclear threat as a pretext just like allegations about weapons of mass destruction which were used as a pretext for attacking Saddam's Iraq."[\[36\]](#)

Implementing Counter-proliferation

Turkey expressed its support for the Global Initiative on Fight against Nuclear Terrorism, launched in July 2006 by the United States and Russia. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs declared, "Turkey supports all initiatives in the struggle against nuclear terrorism. Turkey had welcomed a UN Security Council resolution (No. 1540) that aims to prevent terrorists from utilizing weapons of mass destruction. Turkey signed last year a United Nations Treaty aiming to prevent Nuclear Terrorism."[\[37\]](#) The Initiative envisions intelligence sharing and technological cooperation in the areas of securing radioactive sources, deterring nuclear smuggling, and improving law enforcement actions to prevent proliferation of nuclear weapons. Out of the Middle Eastern countries, only Morocco joined the Initiative as did only Kazakhstan in Central Asia. This support was followed up in February 2007 when Turkey hosted a conference on "Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism" in Ankara.[\[38\]](#) While Ankara insisted that the conference did not target any country, particularly Iran, U.S. Undersecretary of State Robert Joseph said at the venue that Iran would not participate in the Initiative: "Joseph said that Iran is under the sanction of UN Security Council, adding that countries which want to work under the initiative should combat nuclear terrorism, not support it."[\[39\]](#)

Turkish firms, or firms based in Turkey have been linked to the nuclear smuggling ring operated by Pakistani nuclear scientist AQ Khan and have been implicated in supplying Iran's suspect nuclear program.[\[40\]](#) The United States is working with the Turkish government to end such trafficking and the two countries' intelligence agencies have collaborated to block at least one nuclear smuggling operation.[\[41\]](#)

According to an investigation by the Turkish Customs Directorate, released on May 12, 2006, Step, S.A., an Istanbul trading firm, served as the hub of a smuggling network that procured internationally controlled dual-use equipment for Iran's nuclear and missile programs. The equipment, said to have included massive heat-resistant aluminum containers for nuclear materials and components for missile guidance systems, was manufactured in Western Europe, in some cases by subsidiaries of U.S. companies. Step, S.A., which was established and operated by Iranian nationals, was said by the report to have obtained the controlled goods by falsifying export license end-user certificates to state that the commodities were to be used in Turkey; it then illicitly exported them from Turkey to Iran, again falsifying export control documents.[\[42\]](#)

On November 12, 2005, one of the firm's smuggling efforts was the target of a joint operation by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency and Turkish National Intelligence Organization, which seized three containers made from heat-resistant aluminum, each weighing more than 30 tons, at the Gurbulak border crossing, on Turkey's border with Iran. The containers had been fabricated by the Italian firm Fond S.P.A. and were sent from Milan in two trucks operated by the Turkish transportation company Coban Tur. At the border, customs documents stated that the items were destined for Shadi Oil Industries in Iran, thought to be a front for the Iranian nuclear program.[\[43\]](#)

The Turkish Atomic Energy Agency subsequently classified the containers as dual-use items used in uranium enrichment. Although it is difficult to be certain in the absence of additional information, it appears that they may have been part of a system to manage the introduction of unenriched uranium in gaseous form into a gas centrifuge enrichment plant or to hold enriched uranium gas as it was produced at the facility. Uranium enrichment can be employed to improve natural uranium to make it suitable for use as fuel in modern nuclear power plants, but can also be used to upgrade the uranium further to make it suitable for nuclear weapons. Iran is developing a uranium enrichment capability, which it asserts is intended to produce nuclear

power plant fuel. However, Iran has created suspicions about its intentions because it kept this program hidden from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) for 18 years, in violation of Iran's obligations under the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty to permit the agency to monitor all nuclear activities within its borders. On September 24, 2005, the IAEA determined that Iran was in non-compliance with its IAEA inspection obligations and, on February 4, 2006, the agency referred the matter to the UN Security Council.

Based on findings in the May 12, 2006 investigation by Turkish customs officials, it appears that at the time of the November 12 seizure, U.S. and Turkish officials did not understand the full extent of Step's activities, and on November 29, Step was able to import into Turkey, through the Ambarli border crossing, at least one additional aluminum container of the type seized in Gurbulak. This vessel was manufactured in Hungary by a subsidiary of the U.S. firm ALCOA, the May 12 report states, and was fabricated in four sections. Sometime between December 2005 and February 2006, Step successfully exported one of the four sections to Iran, via the Derince Customs Port in Izmit.[\[44\]](#)

On February 10, however, the Turkish daily Milliyet broke the story of the November 12, 2005 seizure. The disclosure led the Turkish Foreign Ministry to open an investigation of Step, and, as a new target of Turkish authorities, the company chose not to complete the export of the ALCOA aluminum container.[\[45\]](#) In the course of the investigation, papers seized from Step disclosed a pattern of procurement and re-export of metal and electronic parts using falsified end-user certificates that listed Turkey as the ultimate destination of the commodities. Among other items obtained for Iran were precision ball-bearing units, known as "Bearing SP3181," acquired from the Italian firm, Frusca, SRL, which, in turn, had ordered the parts from France's ADR Company, another manufacturer of advanced bearing systems. According to the Customs Directorate report, the parts are used in missile guidance units, which calculate the missile's flight path. After the components were received by Step in Turkey, it re-exported them to Iran, to the ANA Trading Company. The investigation noted that the export had not been authorized by the Turkish Ministry of Defense, the relevant Turkish licensing authority.[\[46\]](#)

The investigation also revealed that Step had set up a firm known as the Multimat Trading Company, which purchased parts from the U.S.-based All Nations Biz, Inc., as well as from the Dutch subsidiary of the U.S. Fluke Corporation, and sent them on to Iran.[\[47\]](#)

As a member of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), and the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), as well as NATO, Turkey is subject to more lenient export licensing rules than Iran. Exports of nuclear dual-use items to Turkey from the other 44 members of the NSG, for example, do not require export licenses, and, while all dual-use missile-related exports from the other 33 MTCR member states do require licenses, they are far more likely to be granted in the case of Turkey than Iran, for which licenses are subject to especially strict scrutiny (and, in the case of the United States, are banned altogether).

While all the details have yet to be published, it appears that Step exploited this more lenient treatment of Turkey to facilitate the importation of the dual-use items described above into that country. Among other questions raised by the investigation is why European exporters (including subsidiaries of U.S. firms) did not scrutinize more carefully the credentials of the purported Turkish end-user for these transactions.

Once the goods were received in Turkey, Step apparently anticipated that it could defeat Turkey's export controls to move these goods to Iran, and it experienced considerable success in doing so, according to the report of the Customs Directorate. This apparent weakness in Turkish licensing and customs capabilities highlights a further challenge confronting the international network of nonproliferation export controls.

In recent years, Pakistan has also exploited the lenient treatment of exports among NSG and MTCR members to procure items illegally for its nuclear and missile programs. The network established by Asher Karni and Humayan Khan relied on the lenient treatment of exports to South Africa, a member of both groups, in much the same way that Step exploited Turkey's membership in these organizations. The Karni/Khan network also enjoyed considerable success defeating South African export controls in re-exporting dual-use commodities to Pakistan (often using an intermediate stop in Dubai).[48]

The November 12, 2005 seizure in Gurbulak and the subsequent investigation by Turkish authorities took place in the midst of intensified international efforts to curb Iran's uranium enrichment program, coming less than two months after Iran was found by the IAEA to be in non-compliance with its IAEA inspection obligations. The fact that Iran continued its illicit procurement efforts in support of this program even after the IAEA's noncompliance finding might be taken as further evidence of its intent to use its enrichment program for other than peaceful purposes. On February 4, when the IAEA Board of Governors voted to refer the Iran dossier to the UN Security Council, this episode was known to the United States, although not yet made public, and may well have been shared with other governments on the board as they reached a decision on referring the matter to the UN.

In early June 2006, Turkish prosecutors in Istanbul indicted the Iranian partners of Step, Milad Jafari, his brother Mani Jafari, and their father Mohammed Javad Jafari. The three were charged with violating the Turkish Anti-Smuggling Law by engaging in organized nuclear smuggling and with violating the Turkish Penal Code by engaging in fraud.[49]

Turkey's Nuclear Future?

By 2015, Turkey expects to complete the construction of three nuclear power stations based on energy needs, being subject to International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguard measures and inspections. These plans have generated controversy within the country among anti-nuclear activists and opposition members of the Turkish parliament.[50]

As official state policy, Turkey complies with the Nonproliferation Treaty, Biological and Chemical Weapons Conventions, Comprehensive test-ban Treaty (CTBT), and Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR). Even if Turkey were to build a nuclear arsenal it would not be able to deploy nuclear weapons without disrespecting the rule of international law, i.e. noncompliance with the international regimes it has adhered to. In this case, the benefits of acquiring nuclear weapons do not outweigh the costs of economic and political sanctions that the country would face leaving the NATO umbrella and breaking its strategic alliance with United States.

During an interview on the *Al-Jazeera Satellite Channel's* program "Today's Encounter" in February 2006 the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan was asked: "Regarding the Iranian nuclear file, we know that the issue is now heading toward escalation, but we also know that Turkey is preparing to launch a nuclear energy program. What are the limits of this nuclear program?" Erdogan responded that: "We have not announced our nuclear program yet, but it is designed for peaceful and humanitarian purposes." He emphasized that the program was designed for Turkey to secure an energy source without depending on its neighbors.[51]

Proving the energy dependency, on January 3, 2007, Iran cut off the natural gas flow, constituting the one third of Turkish gas imports, to Turkey, based on its high domestic demands.[52] Turkish officials announced that this situation wouldn't affect Turkey drastically due to its access to the Russian Blue Stream and other Western pipelines. Still, the questionable cut and Turkish energy dependency stirred a lot of debate and concerns on electricity shortage. After Ankara's contacts with Iranian officials, on January 8, Tehran apologized for "the inconvenience" and resumed pumping gas, claiming that a newly-established Iranian refinery had resolved the issue.[53]

Based on these developments, Turkish Ministry of Energy decided to accelerate the nuclear plant project.

The proposal to build one of Turkey's three planned nuclear power reactors in Sinop, for example, a scenic town on the Black Sea, has elicited strong opposition from Turkish environmentalists, as well from the opposition party in the Turkish parliament, which opposes the efforts of the governing Justice and Development Party (known as the "AK Party" in Turkish) to import nuclear technology. For its part, the AK Party has justified these efforts on the ground that Turkey's demand for energy is growing but the country lacks natural energy resources to meet these needs.

A February 2006 report on the private Turkish news channel *NTV* quoted Engin Altay, a member of the parliamentary opposition as stating: "Construction of a nuclear plant is a catastrophic project with zero safety." The lawmaker expressed concern that Turkey would become a "dumping ground" for third-rate nuclear technology that the United States and European countries had already abandoned. He accused the current government of giving in to "nuclear lobbies" and claimed that Turkey could increase electricity supplies by reducing unregistered electricity consumption.[\[54\]](#)

A U.S.-Turkey nuclear agreement was signed on July 26, 2000, and approved by the Turkish parliament on January 14, 2005. On July 9, 2006, the Government of Turkey formally adopted the instrument of ratification for the U.S.-Turkey Agreement for Cooperation in the Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy.[\[55\]](#) The underlying purpose of the agreement was to authorize and set the conditions for transfers to Turkey of U.S. civil nuclear technology, equipment, components, and material, including nuclear power reactors and their low enriched uranium fuel.[\[56\]](#)

The U.S.-Turkey deal received little attention elsewhere in the Middle East, overshadowed by other developments in July 2006, including the conflict in southern Lebanon, Iraq, and growing international concern over the course of the Iranian nuclear program. However, the Qatar-based *Al-Jazeera* television station, which promotes "Arab nationalist" views, was critical of the agreement, declaring: "The Agreement is seen as a diplomatic triumph for the U.S., which seeks to bring Turkey's nuclear program under its direct control and influence, whereas, for Turkey, it's nothing but a weak attempt to develop civilian nuclear capabilities."[\[57\]](#)

The *Al-Jazeera* report also quoted two opposing viewpoints within Turkey on the issue of Turkey's future nuclear program. One source, Inci Gokmen, a chemistry professor at Ankara's Middle East Technical University, was quoted as saying, "Except for Finland, no Western countries have established nuclear power plants since 1978." She continued, "Nuclear plants contain extremely complicated technologies. Also, Turkey will have to import fuel for those power plants... We should benefit from domestic and renewable energy sources instead."[\[58\]](#) *Al-Jazeera* also quoted Zafer Caglayan, Chairman of the Ankara Chamber of Industry, who supported a future nuclear program stating: "Those who oppose the establishment of nuclear power plants in Turkey should not forget that there have already been plants (established) in neighboring countries... Nuclear power plants in Turkey will create a great atmosphere for investments."[\[59\]](#)

Within Turkey, the agreement fanned debate over the future of nuclear energy in the country. So far, that debate has been framed in terms of the country's energy needs and safety and environmental concerns. It is possible, however, that national security issues will also become a factor in the discussion, with some elements in Turkey arguing that mastering nuclear technology through a peaceful nuclear power program will provide an essential foundation upon which Turkey could build, if at some future time it became necessary for it to develop an independent deterrent to counter a nuclear-armed Iran. Such national security considerations, it may be noted, appear to be a factor motivating Egypt's recently announced plans to restart its nuclear power program.[\[60\]](#)

Conclusion

The government of Turkey, at the time of this article, led by the ruling AK Party has been responsible for a consistent strategy of pressuring Iran to cooperate fully with the IAEA and the EU-3. At the same time, the Turkish government has defended Iran's right to develop nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, as long as there is transparency in the process. The state, and the secular media have advocated a diplomatic solution, opposed to economic sanctions, which would hurt Turkey's trade with Iran. On the other hand, the pro-Islamist press not only condemns sanction, but argues that Iran has a right to develop its nuclear program and even nuclear weapons. The Islamist media has also consistently stressed that Turkey should not allow its territory to be used in a military strike against Iran. While the secular media generally acknowledges a threat from a nuclear armed Iran, it also criticizes the United States for its double standards in the region, in particular its "turning a blind eye" to the Israeli program.

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