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# Security of Turkey with Respect to the Middle East

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## Abstract

*In this paper the security of Turkey with respect to Syria, Iraq and Iran is examined. A theoretical model is presented for analyzing the security of Turkey. This model emphasizes the power and in particular the military power for interpreting and predicting the security of a state. Consistent with the theoretical framework that the security model provides, developments in the military power, population and economic power of Turkey in relation to Syria, Iraq, and Iran are discussed.*

## Key Words

Security, Turkey, Middle East, military power, economic power, population.

## Introduction

The security of Turkey with respect to Syria, Iraq and Iran is examined in this paper. No attempt is made to assess the security of Turkey with respect to other

states in the Middle East. The reason for concentrating on Syria, Iraq and Iran is the fact that these states share a common border with Turkey and security developments in these neighboring states can have immediate and direct effect on Turkey's security.

Although in recent years Turkey had stable and fruitful security relations with Syria, Iraq and Iran, the conditions in the Middle East can change rapidly and accordingly there is a need for assessing the security of Turkey with respect to its three Middle Eastern neighbors. The developments in the Middle East during recent years have demonstrated how quickly security conditions in this volatile and unpredictable part of the world can change.

For example, there was a shift in the alliance structure of the Middle East. In recent years Syria, Iraq, and Iran are pursuing accommodative policies towards Turkey's objective of eliminating the PKK. This has led Turkey to move away from the alliance with Israel and closer to its southern neighbors. The cooperation of Syria, Iraq, and

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Iran against the PKK appears to be more beneficial to Turkey compared to sacrifices of political support and military-technology-intelligence benefits they were getting from Israel while being allies.

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In recent years Syria is cooperating with Turkey against the PKK and no longer makes territorial claims from Turkey. But, as recently as in 1998, Turkey threatened Syria with war. Syria accommodated the Turkish demands requiring the expulsion of the PKK leader and the liquidation of PKK training camps after the Turkish threat of military invasion. Despite the recent influx of refugees to Turkey as a result of instability in Syria, there is no fundamental security issue with Syria.

The security challenge from Iraq concerns the integrity of Iraq as a state. Planned departure of US forces from Iraq is likely to result in a security vacuum and an armed conflict may develop between the Arabs and the Kurds in Northern Iraq. Instability could reduce the security of Turkey, especially if the PKK can take advantage of the security vacuum and project terrorist attacks against Turkey from its bases in Northern Iraq.

Turkey benefits from cooperation with Iran in diffusing and eliminating PKK threats and importing energy products from Iran. But, if Iran is to succeed in developing nuclear weapon systems, this development will lead to a decline in the security of Turkey by raising the military power of Iran with respect to Turkey. This adverse security development would result in a nuclear security gap favoring Iran and may lead to a nuclear security dilemma.

The theoretical model used for analyzing the security of Turkey with regard to Syria, Iraq and Iran is presented in the following section. This model emphasizes the power and in particular the military power for interpreting and predicting the security of a state.

In the subsequent section, consistent with the theoretical framework that the security model provides, developments in military power, population and economic power of Turkey with respect to Syria, Iraq, and Iran will be discussed.<sup>1</sup> How effectively Turkey may be able to respond to future security threats that may originate from its Middle Eastern neighbors will be examined in the conclusion of this article.

## A Model of International Security for Turkey

The security of a state depends foremost on its military power. A state has a direct control over its military force and can employ it, as it deems

appropriate. The security of a state also depends adversely on the military power of its competition. The more militarily intense the competition is, the less secure a state will be. A state's military power and the military power of the competition are the primary determinants of security.

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In addition to these variables, other factors such as the military power of allies or diplomacy can be a significant determinant of the security of a state during certain periods. However, compared to the military power and the military power of the competition, these variables do not have general validity, i.e., they don't hold true for most states most of the time as determinants of security.

The security of a state can be threatened by non-state actors such as militant groups and terrorists. However, a state with strong military power is better endowed with instruments for eliminating these asymmetric threats. A state with a powerful military would pose professional special forces trained for defusing asymmetric threats such as terrorists, rely on superior intelligence based on advanced technology, and can project force rapidly and effectively for this purpose.

The security of a state ultimately depends on the size of its population and its economic power, since the

military power of a state is constrained by these two factors. Factors other than population and economic power, such as intensity of security competition, can affect the military power of a state. But, these factors do not have general relevance for the majority of states as determinants of military power and thereby of their security.

The security model presented in detail below is a general model designed for interpreting and predicting the security of Turkey with respect to other states. In this paper it is applied to Syria, Iraq, and Iran. However, it can be applied for assessing developments in the security of Turkey with regard to Greece, Russia, or others.<sup>2</sup>

First, the basic form of the security model is discussed. The basic model is detailed below in *Equation (1)*. In this basic model, security is assumed to depend on military power and the military power of the competition, and other factors that may be significant during certain periods;

$$(1) S = f[M, M^C, X],$$

Here S is for security, M is for military power,  $M^C$  is the military power of another state in the security competition, and X is for other factors which could affect security. It is assumed that security is a positive function of military power and a negative function of military power of the competition, and security can be a positive or a negative function of other factors. In the basic model, the

military power of allies, diplomacy, and asymmetric threats such as terrorism are represented by variable  $X$ .

The key variable in the basic security model is military power. Military power should be taken as an all encompassing concept including various aspects. These elements of military power are: conventional military power, nuclear military power, military intelligence, and the combat effectiveness of the military forces and other dimensions of military power such as leadership, training and military tradition.

The basic security model is simple, yet yields interesting predictions, and is also helpful for recognizing the relative nature of security. For example, if there is an increase in  $M$ , and if  $M^C$  and  $X$  are constant, then  $S$  will increase, the security of the state will improve. However, if the increase in  $M$  is matched by an increase in  $M^C$ , there will be no improvement in the security of the state,  $S$ .

In addition to the above predictions, the model predicts a “security dilemma” if a state and its competition systematically react to each other. If there is an increase in  $M$  and if this is matched by an increase in  $M^C$  there will be no change in  $S$ , the security of the state. If the state further increases  $M$  and this is again matched by an increase in  $M^C$ , the state and the competition are joined in an unproductive security competition that does not improve the security of the state or of the competition.

The basic security model, *Equation (1)*, provides an explanation of security and yields predictions indicating changes in security with respect to changes in  $M$ ,  $M^C$ , and  $X$ . It should be noted that in the basic model values of  $M$  and  $M^C$  are determined exogenously. The model does not provide an explanation of changes in the military power of the state or its competition. The complete security model detailed below provides an explanation for changes in  $M$  and  $M^C$ .

*Equation (2)* is a component of the complete model of international security, it is a model of the military power of a state, and gives an account of military power;

$$(2) M = f[E, P, Z]$$

where  $E$  is for economic power,  $P$  is for population, and  $Z$  is for other factors that can affect military power. It is assumed that the military power is a positive function of economic power and population, and it can be a positive or a negative function of other factors.

In the complete model of security, economic power is presented as an encompassing variable. It represents various dimensions of economic power: wealth-stock of capital such as buildings, roads, non-renewable resources such as oil, international monetary reserves-quantity and quality of the labor force, technological know-how, and productivity of the state. The population variable is also an encompassing variable. In addition to representing the size of the population, it includes other aspects of

population, such as age distribution—a proportionately younger population is a more suitable source for a military force compared to an aging population.

*Equation (3)* below is similar to *Equation (2)*; it is another component of the complete security model. *Equation (3)* is a model of the military power of the competition;

$$(3) M^C = f[E^C, P^C, Z^C],$$

here,  $M^C$  is for the military power of the competition,  $E^C$  is for its economic power,  $P^C$  is for the competition's population, and  $Z^C$  is for other variables that can affect the military power of the competition. It is assumed that the military power of the competition is a positive function of economic power and population, and their military power can be a positive or a negative function of other factors.

In the military power models, *Equations (2) and (3)*, economic power and population are the main determinants of military power. Other factors such as intensity of security competition, represented by  $Z$  and  $Z^C$ , can be important for a particular nation at times but they do not have general validity.

Equations (1) to (3) constitute the complete security model, combining the basic security model with models of military power. This international security model yields interesting predictions. For example, a decrease in  $P^C$ , the population of the competition, will lead to an improvement in the

security of a state ( $S$ ) by lowering the military power of the competition,  $M^C$ . Another interesting prediction is the effect of a rise in the economic growth of the competition. An increase in economic growth will result in a rise in  $E^C$ , thereby raising the military power of the competition, and will result in a decline of  $S$ . These examples explain and demonstrate the interdependence of a state's security to its competition's economic power and population in addition to its own economic power and population.

## Security of Turkey with Respect to Syria, Iraq and Iran

The basic security model, *Equation (1)*, suggests examination of the military power of Turkey with regard to the military power of Syria, Iraq and Iran for assessing the security of Turkey. A widely used measure of military power is military expenditure. Annual data in coherent form for recent years is available for military spending for those states under consideration in this paper. However, it should be noted that military power is a stock variable whereas military spending is a flow variable. For measuring the stock of military power at a given time, military spending as a flow variable measured per unit of time can be considered only as a crude proxy variable. Considering that a weapons system is usually employed for many years after it is acquired, it could

be suggested that cumulative military spending is a more appropriate proxy measure of military power.<sup>3</sup> Specifically, a useful proxy variable for military power is the cumulative value of military spending over a long period of time such as a decade

or preferably two decades. Accordingly, in this paper cumulative military spending during the last two decades, for which data is available, is used as a proxy measure of military power.

**Table 1: Military spending of Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran (Total for the period)**

Period	<u>Billions of US Dollars</u>				<u>Ratio of TRM to</u>		
	TRM	SYRM	IRQM*	IRNM	SYRM	IRQM	IRNM
1989-1998	118.66	42.49	NA	17.21	2.79	NA	6.89
1999-2008	136.99	60.79	7.10	55.09	2.25	19.29	2.49
<b>1989-2008</b>	<b>255.65</b>	<b>103.28</b>	<b>7.10</b>	<b>72.30</b>	<b>2.48</b>	<b>36.00</b>	<b>3.54</b>

Note: Military Spending, in US dollars, at constant (2005) prices and exchange rates, source: *SIPRI Military Expenditures Database. March 2010*. TRM: Military Spending of Turkey; SYRM: Military Spending of Syria; IRQM: Military Spending of Iraq; IRNM: Military Spending of Iran. \*Figures for Iraq are for 2005-2008.

In Table 1 the cumulative military spending for Turkey and Syria, Iraq, and Iran are presented for the 1989-1998, 1999-2008, and 1989-2008 periods. During the last two decades, Turkey spent about 250 billion US Dollars while Syria spent about \$100 billion and Iran about \$70 billion US Dollars. Iraq’s military spending of about \$7 billion covers only the 2005-2008 period due to the unavailability of data for earlier years.

A comparison of Turkish military spending during each decade, the 1989-1998 and 1999-2008 periods, with those

of Syria and Iran indicate that there has been a relative gain in the military spending of Syria and Iran, as measured by ratios for each decade. This gain is especially pronounced in the case of Iran. Nevertheless, for the 1989-2008 period Turkish military spending was nearly two and a half times greater than Syria’s and about three and a half times larger than that of Iran. These observations on the two decades suggest that Turkish military power remains significantly superior to that of Syria and Iran and the security of Turkey with regard to these states has been maintained.

The observation for Turkey and Iraq in Table 1 indicates that Turkish military power is substantially larger than that of Iraq. However it should be noted that the observations for Iraq are only for the last few years and Iraq's military is in its early development stage.

The complete security model suggests examination of the population and economic power of Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran. According to the complete model, and in particular *Equations (2) and (3)*, the developments in population and economic power could lead to changes in the military power of Turkey and its neighbors and thereby, through *Equation (1)*, in the security of Turkey.

In Table 2, the population for each state is tabulated for periods comparable to those in Table 1 above. In 2008 Turkey's population was about seventy

million, compared to Syria (19.88 million), Iraq (30.41 million), and Iran (72.87 million).

Although the Turkish population has increased by about ten million in each decade, the ratio of Turkish to Syrian population declined in 1999 and 2008 compared to the 1989 level. The ratio of Turkish population with respect to Iran has been stable. Despite favorable developments in the population of Syria, the Turkish population in 2008 is still three and a half times larger than that of Syria. The population of Turkey and Iran are about the same size in 2008 while it is more than two times larger than that of Iraq. The observations in Table 2 do not indicate any large structural changes in population among Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran, and thereby do not suggest a change in the military power of Turkey.

**Table 2: Population of Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran**

Year	Millions				Ratio of TRP to		
	TRP	SYRP	IRQP*	IRNP	SYRP	IRQP	IRNP
1989	51.25	11.72	NA	53.19	4.37	NA	0.96
1999	59.91	16.11	NA	62.51	3.01	NA	0.96
<b>2008</b>	<b>69.64</b>	<b>19.88</b>	<b>30.41</b>	<b>72.87</b>	<b>3.50</b>	<b>2.29</b>	<b>0.96</b>

Note: TRP: Population of Turkey; SYRP: Population of Syria; IRQP: Population of Iraq; IRNP: Population of Iran. \*Figures for Iraq are for 2004-2008. Source: IMF World Economic Outlook Data Base, March 2010.

In order to examine the economic power of Turkey with regard to its neighbors, two economic indicators are analyzed, namely; Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and GDP per capita.

In Table 3, cumulative GDP for the 1989-1998, 1999-2008, and 1989-2008 periods are presented. Cumulative rather than annual GDP values are detailed for each period. This approach avoids misleading signals that can be generated by fluctuations in the annual flow of goods and services produced. The cumulative GDP values are a better proxy for economic power, a stock variable measuring accumulated goods and services produced not only in a year but also in earlier years.

Two decades considered together, the 1989-2008 period, indicate that the Turkish GDP was about nine times larger than Syria's, and slightly larger than that of Iran. The figures for Iraq are for the 2004-2008 period and not readily comparable to that of Turkey. The GDP observations for each decade indicate that there has been a small rise in the economic power of Turkey relative to that of Syria. The observations with respect to Iran for each decade indicate a slight fall in the economic power of Turkey with regard to Iran. However, relative developments in GDP among Turkey and its southern neighbors over two decades are not substantial and do not predict a change in the military power of Turkey.

**Table 3: Gross Domestic Product of Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran (Total for the period)**

Period	<u>Billions of US Dollars</u>				<u>Ratio of TRE to</u>		
	TRE	SYRE	IRQE*	IRNE	SYRE	IRQE	IRNE
1989-1998	3644.07	408.13	NA	3096.54	8.93	NA	1.18
1999-2008	6618.17	702.75	440.43	5838.58	9.42	15.03	1.13
<b>1989-2008</b>	<b>10262.24</b>	<b>1110.88</b>	<b>440.43</b>	<b>8935.12</b>	<b>9.24</b>	<b>23.30</b>	<b>1.15</b>

Note: Gross Domestic Product based on purchasing-power-parity, current international US Dollar. Source: IMF World Economic Outlook Data Base, March 2010. TRE: Gross Domestic Product of Turkey; SYRE: Gross Domestic Product of Syria; IRQE: Gross Domestic Product of Iraq; IRNE: Gross Domestic Product of Iran. \*Figures for Iraq are for 2004-2008.

While the GDP observations discussed above can be taken as a measure of the absolute economic powers of a state, GDP Per Capita values reflect economic productivity and efficiency of a state and provide useful additional information about the economic power of a state. GDP per capita data for Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran are presented In Table 4; GDP per capita observations are average values for the 1989-1998, 1999-2008, and 1989-2008 periods in this table. For each period the average values rather than annual GDP per capita values are reported in order to filter misleading signals annual fluctuations in GDP per capita figures can indicate. The average values of it for long periods of time are more reliable proxy variables for measuring economic power.

During the last two decades, the 1989-2008 period, the GDP per capita

of Turkey was about two and a half times larger than that of Syria and slightly larger than that of Iran. The observations for Iraq are only for the 2004-2008 period, and not directly comparable to those of Turkey. The relative developments in GDP per capita across two decades, 1989-1998 and 1999-2008, suggest that the economic power of Turkey has improved compared to that of Syria and has declined slightly with regard to Iran. The decline however is not due to a fall in Turkish performance but rather due to the significant rise in GDP per capita of Iran during the latter decade. It should be noted that the developments across decades in GDP per capita among Turkey, Syria, and Iran are not significant and do not predict a change in the military power of Turkey.

**Table 4: GDP Per Capita, of Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran (Average for the Period)**

Period	<u>US Dollars</u>				<u>Ratio of TREP to</u>		
	TREP	SYREP	IRQEP*	IRNEP	SYREP	IRQEP	IRNEP
1989-1998	6501.48	2963.99	NA	5154.89	2.19	NA	1.26
1999-2008	9967.72	3906.23	3050.73	8588.34	2.55	3.26	1.16
<b>1989-2008</b>	<b>8234.60</b>	<b>3435.11</b>	<b>3050.73</b>	<b>6871.62</b>	<b>2.40</b>	<b>2.70</b>	<b>1.20</b>

Note: Gross domestic product Based on purchasing-power-parity, Current international dollar, source: IMF World Economic Outlook Data Base, March 2010. TREP: Per Capita Gross Domestic Product of Turkey; SYREP: Per Capita Gross Domestic Product of Syria; IRQEP: Per Capita Gross Domestic Product of Iraq; IRNEP: Per Capita Gross Domestic Product of Iran. Figures for Iraq are for 2004-2008.

The GDP and GDP per capita observations listed in Tables 3 and 4, suggest that the economic power of Turkey is substantially larger than Syria and Iraq, and slightly larger than Iran. However, the economic power of Turkey may be significantly larger than that of Iran due to the fact that a significant portion of Iran's GDP, unlike Turkey's, originates from oil production.

## Conclusion

Examination of the fundamental determinants of security-military power of Turkey relative to Syria, Iraq, and Iran-revealed that Turkey is secure with respect to its Middle Eastern neighbors. The revealed superior economic power of Turkey compared to these states indicates that, if necessary, Turkey can augment its military power rapidly and more effectively. Analysis of the developments in population and economic power of Turkey and its neighbors in the Middle East does not suggest changes in distribution of military power among Turkey and its neighbors, and thereby the security of Turkey. However, there are potential security developments that may prove to be difficult to resolve despite the revealed superiority of Turkey relative to its Middle Eastern neighbors.

Although there is no fundamental security issue with Syria, recent instability in Syria may prove to be persistent and develop into a security challenge for Turkey. Further undesirable developments and the influx of refugees may force Turkey to intervene and project force into northern Syria in order to stabilize the border area. A limited Turkish military intervention, however, may not contribute to the improvement of stability in Syria.

A potential and difficult security challenge from Iraq concerns the planned departure of US forces from the country.

The departure of US forces is likely to result in a security vacuum, which could lead to an armed conflict between the Arabs and the Kurds in Northern Iraq.<sup>4</sup> The resulting instability would reduce the security of Turkey and allow the PKK to conduct terrorist attacks against Turkey from their bases in Northern Iraq. This development could force Turkey to invade northern Iraq to eradicate the PKK elements. Turkey, with its superior military power, is well equipped with special instruments to counter asymmetric threats resulting from Iraq.

Another potential difficult security challenge is the possibility of Iran to develop nuclear weapon systems. If Iran develops a nuclear weapons system,

this would result in a nuclear security gap in favour of Iran. Superior military and economic power of Turkey with respect to Iran should enable Turkey to offset the nuclear security gap. There are various policy options available to Turkey for deterring a potential nuclear threat. One is to enlarge and enhance NATO/US nuclear deterrent deployed in Turkey and increase significantly the Turkish participation in the NATO/US deterrent.<sup>5</sup> This policy would be consistent with the Turkish strategy of refraining from developing nuclear

weapons systems. The enhanced NATO/US deterrent system for Turkey could be configured around F-35 fighter aircrafts that will be acquired by the Turkish Air Force.<sup>6</sup> However, for this option to succeed, the resulting enhanced NATO/US deterrent should be considered as credible and reliable by Turkey as a nuclear deterrent against nuclear powers in the region. If an effective and dependable NATO/US deterrent is not available, Turkish nuclear strategy may change and Turkey may choose to develop its own nuclear weapons system.

## Endnotes

- 1 The model can be considered as a realist type. For a discussion of realism, see, for example, John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, New York, W.W. Norton, 2001. The model is consistent with the traditional rather than the expanded approaches to security. For a discussion of alternative security concepts, see, Benjamin Miller, “The Concept of Security: Should it be Redefined?”, *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol.24, No.2 (June 2001), pp.11-42.
- 2 For a discussion of security of Turkey with respect to Greece, see, H. Sönmez Ateşoğlu, “Mediterranean Fault Line- The Future of Greece and Turkey”, in Nurşin Ateşoğlu Güney (ed.), *Contentious Issues of Security and the Future of Turkey*, Aldershot Burlington VT, Ashgate Publishing Company, 2007, pp. 151-158; with respect to Russia, see, H. Sönmez Ateşoğlu, “National Power of Turkey and Other Powers in the Region”, *European Security*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (March 2008), pp. 33-45. For a discussion on the evaluation of Turkish national security strategy in recent years, see, H. Sönmez Ateşoğlu, “Turkish National Security Strategy and Military Modernization”, *Strategic Review*, Vol.29, No.1 (Winter 2001), pp.26-32; Edward, J. Erickson, “Turkey as Regional Hegemon 2014: Strategic Implications for the United States”, *Turkish Studies*, Vol.5, No.3 (Autumn 2004), pp. 25-45.
- 3 Although useful cumulative measure remains a proxy variable for military power-it has various limitations as a measure of military power. For example it includes annual operational expenses and salaries that are not passed from one year to the next like weapons and ordnance and buildings. It also does not measure differences among each states military power due to differences in leadership, military tradition and training. The significant differences that these factors can make in measuring military power are discussed by James F. Dunning, *How to Make War*, New York, William Morrow and Co., 1993. A RAND study provides a detailed and realistic approach for assessing military power, however application of this approach to a particular state is not readily feasible due extensive data and resources requirements, see; *Measuring National Power of Nations*, Santa Monica, CA, RAND, 2000.
- 4 See, Stephen F. Larrabee, *Troubled Partnership, U.S. – Turkish Relations in an Era of Global Geopolitical Change*, Santa Monica, CA., RAND, 2010; a further discussion of this view available at <http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG899/> [last visited 25 April 2011].
- 5 Following Kristensen, it is assumed that there is a NATO/US nuclear deterrent deployed in Turkey, see, Hans Kristensen, “U.S. Nuclear Weapons in Europe”, *The Nuclear Information Project*, at <http://www.nukestrat.com/pubs/EuroBombs.pdf> [last visited 12 March 2011]; Hans Kristensen, “United States Removes Nuclear Weapons from German Base, Documents Indicate”, *Strategic Security Blog*, at [http://www.fas.org/blog/ssp/2007/07/united\\_states\\_removes\\_nuclear.php](http://www.fas.org/blog/ssp/2007/07/united_states_removes_nuclear.php) [last visited 12 February 2011]; Hans Kristensen, “U.S. Nuclear Weapons Withdrawn From the United Kingdom”, *Strategic Security Blog*, at <http://www.fas.org/blog/ssp/2008/06/us-nuclear-weapons-withdrawn-from-the-united-kingdom.php> and [http://www.fas.org/programs/ssp/nukes/\\_images/EuroNukes.pdf](http://www.fas.org/programs/ssp/nukes/_images/EuroNukes.pdf) [last visited 5 January 2011]; Hans Kristensen, “The Nuclear Posture Review”, *Strategic Security Blog*, at <http://www.fas.org/blog/ssp/2010/04/npr2010.php#more-2908> [last visited 10 January 2011].
- 6 For the potential role of the F-35 for the NATO/US deterrent, see, *Nuclear Posture Review Report*, US Department of Defense, (April 2010).