

ANALYSIS

SEPTEMBER 2018 NO: 43

# THE CRISIS AND THE FUTURE OF NATO

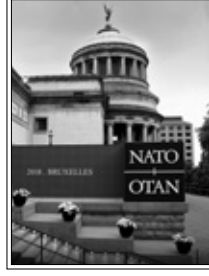
## THE INCREASING AUTONOMY OF TURKEY

HASAN BASRİ YALÇIN

2018 . BRUXELLES

NATO  
+  
OTAN





## **THE CRISIS AND THE FUTURE OF NATO** THE INCREASING AUTONOMY OF TURKEY

HASAN BASRİ YALÇIN

COPYRIGHT © 2018 by SETA

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reprinted or reproduced or utilized in any form or by any electronic, mechanical or other means, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Layout : Erkan Söğüt

Printed in Turkey, İstanbul by Turkuvaz Haberleşme ve Yayıncılık A.Ş., 2017

**SETA | FOUNDATION FOR POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RESEARCH**

Nenehatun Caddesi No: 66 GOP Çankaya 06700 Ankara TÜRKİYE

Phone:+90 312.551 21 00 | Fax :+90 312.551 21 90

www.setav.org | info@setav.org | @setavakfi

**SETA | İstanbul**

Defterdar Mh. Savaklar Cd. Ayvansaray Kavşağı No: 41-43

Eyüpsultan İstanbul TÜRKİYE

Phone: +90 212 315 11 00 | Fax: +90 212 315 11 11

**SETA | Washington D.C.**

1025 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Suite 410

Washington, D.C., 20036 USA

Phone: 202-223-9885 | Fax: 202-223-6099

www.setadc.org | info@setadc.org | @setadc

**SETA | Cairo**

21 Fahmi Street Bab al Luq Abdeen Flat No 19 Cairo EGYPT

Phone: 00202 279 56866 | 00202 279 56985 | @setakahire

## **CONTENTS**

<b>ABSTRACT</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>NATO'S CRISIS</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>NATO'S FUTURE</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>HOW ARE TURKEY'S RELATIONS WITH NATO SHAPED?</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>18</b>

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### **Hasan Basri YALÇIN**

Hasan Basri Yalçin is a faculty member of the Department of Politics and International Relations at Istanbul Commerce University, and the director of Strategic Research at SETA, Istanbul. His research interests include international relations theory, international security, strategy, NATO, and philosophy of social sciences. Yalçin is the author of the book entitled *National Security Strategy* (SETA, 2017). Together with Burhanettin Duran and Fahrettin Altun, he respectively compiled the books entitled *The Strategies of Regional and Global Actors in Syria* and *The Roots of Terror and the Counter-Terrorism Strategy*.

## ABSTRACT

is analysis is about the crisis that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is considered to have experienced recently. Allegedly, this crisis is a temporary situation the likes of which have been seen in the history of NATO and the alliance can survive it because the international system has not experienced any structural transformation. One of the points emphasized in the analysis is that Turkey's relations with NATO are, and will be, determined in accordance with these conditions. It can be said that Turkey is both the first country that has been affected by the current crisis and, at the same time, the first country that has shown a consistent reaction to this crisis. Although Turkey maintains NATO membership, it has returned to a strategy based on the rationale of cooperating with other international actors. This new multi-alliance strategy has resulted in Turkey becoming a more attractive partner for different actors. Thus, Turkey has acquired a more autonomous position in the field of foreign policy and security alliances with multiple systems. It can be expected that this policy will be maintained in the near and mid-term future

---

**The analysis will focus on whether there has actually been a crisis within NATO recently; if there has indeed been one, what kind of crisis it is, why it has occurred, and what kind of consequences there might be will be discussed.**

## INTRODUCTION

The analysis will focus on the crisis that is allegedly recently taking place in NATO. It is, in fact, debated whether there really is a crisis in NATO, what kind of a crisis this is, why it has occurred, and what kind of consequences it might cause.

Is the crisis in NATO the result of a structural transformation in the international system? Or is it the product of a brief and conjectural melee? How will NATO survive this crisis? Is there a possibility of collapse? What direction is this crisis heading? How will this affect member states? Moreover, of course, how will it affect Turkey? In the new period, how will Turkey's relations with NATO be shaped? The current analysis looks for answers to these questions and intends to make a timely general assessment of NATO.

It is possible to give reasonably positive answers, on behalf of NATO, to the questions mentioned above. The analysis acknowledges that the alliance is in a crisis. However, it argues that this crisis is not caused by the transformation of comprehensive and structural international relations, but rather by a conjunctural one similar to those experienced in the organization's history.

It is, therefore, more accurate to say that NATO is experiencing a periodic crisis and is not on the eve of a historic transformation.

NATO still is the most trustworthy, deterrent, and sustainable alliance institution in the world; it is unrivalled and has no alternative in this respect.

There is no serious transformation in the international system based on the United States of America (USA). The U.S. is still the country with the highest capability in the system and is in a position to move according to this capability if necessary.

It is true that in recent years there has been a reluctant stance towards NATO initiated by the Barrack Obama administration and continued by the Donald Trump administration. The U.S. is investing less in the international system. In order to make itself profitable economically, it is pursuing isolation in political terms and cutting down expenses. Still, this does not mean that the U.S. does not have enough material capacity to maintain its central role. Washington remains in a position to maintain its central role but is reluctant in doing so.

However, it is possible for NATO to be more effective and play a leading role when the issues concern critical security and political themes. For this very reason, NATO is still the most trustworthy, deterrent and sustainable alliance institution in the world; NATO is unrivalled and has no real alternative in this respect.<sup>1</sup>

No international organization or alliance is comparable to NATO. As a result, member states have no intention of departing from the alliance despite its crisis. Today's debate is about economic priorities in an environment where security competition is loose.

If security competition toughens, the U.S. will return to its position of investing more in

---

1. Charles L. Glaser, "Why NATO Is Still Best: Future Security Arrangements for Europe", *International Security*, Vol.: 18, Issue: 1, (1993), pp. 5-50.



NATO, and other countries will begin to hold on to the alliance more tightly. In other words, NATO is never on the brink of collapse; to the contrary, it remains active as a useful organization, but it is experiencing crises. In this case, Turkey's relation to NATO will be shaped in accordance with these new conditions.

Turkey, for some time, has been trying to take a position as an actor that benefits from the alliance instead of a loyal NATO ally. The reason is that its allies have not displayed close cooperation with Turkey although Turkey remains unilaterally loyal to NATO. On the contrary, Turkey's allies have not only left Turkey to fend for itself in critical times, such as the Syrian civil war and the failed July 15, 2016 coup attempt, but have also accused Ankara and adopted a policy of cooperation with terrorist organizations against Turkey.

As of July 15, 2016, Turkey has restructured its strategic relation with the alliance which had become unsustainable for the former. Thus, Turkey launched negotiations with Russia without breaking its relations with NATO. Owing to this, Turkey launched the military operations of Euphrates Shield and Olive Branch.

As a consequence of these operations, Turkey has grown stronger and become a more independent actor and, therefore, an attractive partner for the USA.

Washington had to accept Turkey's demands regarding Manbij, which the United States had avoided for a long time. Turkey realized that as long as it continues with this strategy of multi-alliances, it will expand its maneuvering space. Following the Manbij deal with the USA, the Tal Rifat deal with Russia came to the fore. That is to say, as long as Turkey can succeed in negotiating with Russia without seceding from NATO, it will be more secure.

In the last two years, since this multi-allied game has been established, Turkey has not only achieved gains in Syria, but also prevented the

systemic terrorist attacks on its borders. It can be predicted that Turkey's relation with NATO will remain in this frame in the near term.

As Turkey turns this NATO crisis into an opportunity, it improves its relations with Russia and has a chance to become an even more independent actor. Thanks to a more flexible foreign policy, Turkey has become a safer country and gained maneuvering space. Since the multi-alliance strategy has provided Turkey with a significant increase in autonomy, it will maintain its presence in NATO and establish concrete relations with other international actors.

This analysis examines the topics above under three main headings: the NATO crisis and its nature, the future of the alliance and an explanation of why it will survive, and, finally, Turkey's view of and reaction to NATO and predictions about what kind of a relationship Ankara will establish with the alliance in the near future.

---

**NATO is still the most trustworthy, deterrent and sustainable alliance institution in the world; hence it is unrivalled and has no alternative in this respect.**

---

## **NATO'S CRISIS**

The fact that NATO is on the brink of cost-related discussions in recent days creates an impression of a crisis.<sup>2</sup> The direction the alliance is heading to arouses curiosity. To give a short and clear answer to this question, it is not plausible to claim that there is a structural or historical transformation of NATO, but it can be argued that a conjunctural crisis is taking place.

2. Hirschfeld Davis, "Trump Warns NATO Allies to Spend More on Defense, or Else", *New York Times*, July 2, 2018.

Significant changes have to be made in the international systemic conditions in order for them to be seen as a structural transformation. For example, the weakening of the United States to cover costs for NATO could have been the result of such a structural transformation. But today, it is not possible to say that Washington is deprived of this capacity.<sup>3</sup> There has not been a major collapse in the international structural power balance as of yet.

The U.S. has not been balanced by any actor or group of actors. Only the ascending powers can be mentioned, or numbers that show that the U.S. has periodically experienced a relative weakening of power. But it cannot be said that the balance of power centered in Washington has been transformed. It is not the case that the U.S. cannot afford the costs, but rather it would be more accurate to emphasize that Washington does not want to endure these costs alone.

For example, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of the USA as the sole superpower constitute structural transformations which have had profound effects on NATO.<sup>4</sup> These events resulted in the spread and deepen-

ing of the alliance<sup>5</sup> and led to the search for new task fields.<sup>6</sup> As a result of this radical structural transformation, NATO gained a new meaning and became an alliance of forces around the USA beyond being just an anti-Soviet organization.<sup>7</sup> The tension that is experienced today - between the USA and its European allies in particular - is a temporary political crisis similar to those experienced in the 60s and 70s.<sup>8</sup>

In the history of NATO such cyclical crises have occurred. This cyclical crisis is characteristically not significantly different from the previous ones although it appears deeper and more shocking. In the 1960s and the 1970s, there was a period of long-term crisis in NATO which lasted for about 20 years. The most prominent indicators of the crisis were the examples of France and Greece. France withdrew from NATO's military

3. For state-of-the-art measurement techniques about the USA being the sole superpower of the international system, see Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, *America Abroad: The United States' Global Role in the 21st Century*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

4. For the well-known examples of the NATO debates in the post-Cold War, see Robert J. Art, "Creating a Disaster: NATO's Open Door Policy", *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol.: 113, Issue: 3, (1998); Christopher L. Ball, "Nattering NATO Negativism? Reasons Why Expansion May Be a Good Thing", *Review of International Studies*, Vol.: 24, Issue: 1, (1998); Jonathan Eyal, "NATO's Enlargement: Anatomy of a Decision", *International Affairs*, Vol.: 73, Issue: 4, (1997); John Gaddis, "History, Grand Strategy and NATO Enlargement", *Survival*, Vol.: 40, Issue: 1, (1998); Glaser, "Why NATO Is Still Best: Future Security Arrangements for Europe"; Celeste A. Wallender, "Institutional Assets and Adaptability: NATO after the Cold War", *International Organization*, Vol.: 54, Issue: 4, (2000); Michael C. Williams and Neumann B. Iver, "From Alliance to Security Community: NATO, Russia, and the Power of Identity", *Millennium-Journal of International Studies*, Vol.: 29, Issue: 2, (2000).

5. Frank Schimmelfennig, "NATO Enlargement: A Constructivist Explanation", *Security Studies*, Vol.: 8, Issue: 2-3, (1998); Galia Press-Barnathan, "Managing the Hegemon: NATO under Unipolarity", *Security Studies*, Vol.: 15, Issue: 2, (2006); Eyal, "NATO's Enlargement: Anatomy of a Decision"; Rachel A. Epstein, "NATO Enlargement and the Spread of Democracy: Evidence and Expectations", *Security Studies*, Vol.: 14, Issue: 1, (2005); Dan Reiter, "Why NATO Enlargement Does Not Spread Democracy", *International Security*, Vol.: 25, Issue: 4, (2001).

6. John Baylis, "NATO Strategy: The Case for a New Strategic Concept", *International Affairs*, Vol.: 64, Issue: 1, (1987-1988); Richard K. Betts, "NATO's Mid-Life Crisis", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol.: 68, Issue: 2, (1989); Douglas M. Gibler and A. Jamil Sewell, "External Threat and Democracy: The Role of NATO Revisited", *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol.: 43, Issue: 4, (2006); Gülnur Aybet, "The Evolution of NATO's Three Phases and Turkey's Transatlantic Relationship", *Perceptions*, Vol.: 17, Issue: 1, (2012).

7. Williams and Iver, "From Alliance to Security Community", pp. 357-387

8. For the NATO crises that occurred in the 1960s and the 1970s, see Christian Nuenlist, "Into the 1960s: NATO's Role in East-West Relations, 1958-63", *Transforming NATO in the Cold War: Challenges Beyond Deterrence in the 1960s*, ed. Andreas Wegner, Christian Nuenlist and Anna Locher, (New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 67-88; Michael Spirtas, "French Twist: French and British NATO Policies from 1949 to 1966", *Security Studies*, Vol.: 8, Issue: 2-3, (1998); Lawrence S. Kaplan, *NATO Divided, NATO United: Evolution of an Alliance*, (London: Praeger, 2004); Robert E. Osgood, *NATO: The Entangling Alliance*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962); Alastair Buchan, *NATO in the 1960s: The Implications of Interdependence*, (New York: Praeger, 1963).

wing in search of a more autonomous foreign policy, citing problems with the United States in 1966.<sup>9</sup> In this period, France pursued a closer relationship with the Soviet Union.<sup>10</sup>

Similarly, after the 1974 Cyprus Peace Operation, Greece decided to leave NATO. The Greek side, thinking that Washington turned a blind eye on Turkey's military operation in Cyprus, showed its reaction to the USA by withdrawing from the NATO alliance. The weakening NATO presence created by the same conjunctural conditions can be recognized in almost all country cases.<sup>11</sup>

Turkey has been known for many years as one of NATO's most loyal allies. However, after the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, the Turkish authorities felt a terrible sense of insecurity when they found out that their U.S. allies had made vital decisions without consulting them: the nuclear weapons deployed to protect Turkey were withdrawn as a result of negotiations with the Soviets without consulting Ankara.

In other words, the United States had traded off Turkey with Cuba. Thus, the Turkish authorities began to question the reliability of the American nuclear umbrella. Not many, but three or four years later, Ankara lost confidence in the United States because of the Johnson Letter sent within the frame of the Cyprus issue. In the letter, then U.S. president Lyndon Johnson implied that the USA would not protect Turkey against the Soviets during a possible crisis because of Cyprus. It is possible to enumerate many similar examples.

9. For the withdrawal of France from NATO's military wing, see Mahan Erin, "Through the Looking Glass: The Berlin Crisis and Franco-American Perceptions of NATO, 1961-63", *Transforming NATO in the Cold War*, ed. Andreas Wenger, Christian Nuenlist and Anna Locher, (New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 89-106.

10. Edgar S. Furniss Jr., "De Gaulle's France and NATO: An Interpretation", *International Organization*, Vol.: 15, Issue: 3, (1961), pp. 349-365.

11. George McGhee, *The US-Turkish-NATO-Middle East Connection*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990).

In those days, even a country like Turkey known to be very loyal to NATO encountered serious problems about the alliance's guarantees. Aside from Turkey, England suffered a crisis with the USA and NATO during the same days. The British realized that the USA could easily disregard the promises given to them about the Skybolt missiles.<sup>12</sup>

It was not just U.S. partners disheartened by NATO at the time. The USA, as well, began to attribute less importance to the alliance it led. The issue of NATO costs was voiced for the first time in those days. Such discussions were immediately taken up in academic literature. For instance, Mancur, with the cooperation of Olson, brought up the problem of free riding for the first time. In the book entitled *The Logic of Collective Action*, Olson showed how partners could be on each other's back,<sup>13</sup> and explained that this makes it difficult to form and maintain an alliance. Later, an intense literature emerged on the subject and until the 1980s many – particularly from the U.S. bureaucracy – addressed this issue. Over the course of this period, it was claimed that other actors in NATO did not sufficiently contribute to the budget.

From the 1980s onwards, however, these discussions dwindled down. Just as in the 1950s, NATO became a very useful structure again. In the 1980s, the Cold War competition toughened and the period that was described as the Second Cold War began. In the new era, when actors such as Greece were hastily trying to return to NATO, the United States, the alliance leader, never brought the cost-sharing issue forward.

Instead, the USA gave more importance to the expectations of other partners in the alliance, such as granting concessions to Turkey in order to ensure Greece's return to NATO. In fact, all allies were returning to NATO. This process con-

12. Spirtas, "French Twist: French and British NATO Policies from 1949 to 1966", pp. 302-346.

13. Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965).

tinued until the end of the Cold War. The acceleration of competition in the 1980s had made NATO valuable again and everyone put aside their differences and protected it.

The post-Cold War era witnessed the fastest expansion and the search for meaning in NATO's history. Of course, the cost debates resumed at the same time.<sup>14</sup> The structural transformation that eliminated the Soviet threat created new areas of interest for NATO and the alliance was not dissolved as expected by some.

On the contrary, both enlargement and the search for new meaning made NATO more active. The alliance, which had become a center of attraction throughout the 1990s, was not afraid to gain on Russia.<sup>15</sup> Despite the serious criticism of neorealists at that time,<sup>16</sup> liberals argued that NATO should expand steadily and identify new areas of duty.<sup>17</sup> The United States - during the reign of democrats in particular - sped up this expansion and enlargement so that almost all the Balkan and Baltic countries were taken into NATO in batches.

In fact, the alliance extended to the borders of Ukraine and Georgia, and, for the first time, invoked Article 5 against Afghanistan in 2001. NATO united against the September 11 attacks on the United States. At that time, it appeared that Washington increased control over NATO and managed to use the alliance at its discretion.

This ended when the USA adopted a new strategic view – in particular, during the Obama

period. Washington was disturbed by NATO, the organization which it had expanded and extended in the 1990s. As Obama adopted a policy called “positioning,” a kind of “new isolationism” in an effort to reduce U.S. military and political activity in the world in order to achieve domestic economic growth, the USA began to show less interest in NATO and its allies.<sup>18</sup> This U.S. tendency is exemplified in the cases of Ukraine and Syria. In the context of this trend, the alliance has become increasingly insignificant. With his arrival to the office after Obama, Trump's view of NATO together with the rage accumulated in American society appear to be directed at the alliance.

However, an agreement on the costs of NATO was reached at the 2014 Welsh Summit.<sup>19</sup> According to this agreement made during the Obama period, NATO allies pledged to use at least 2 percent of their budgets on the alliance by 2024. Today, Trump is still pursuing the same policy.

Trump will be seen as successful and will present himself as such if he can realize the 2 percent commitments made by the country's allies - in the meantime, he is sending his voters such signals. With Trump, an obscure arrangement made very quietly during the Obama period is now being turned into a show accompanied by a rhetorical fight. In particular due to the U.S. media's anti-Trump attitude, the tendency to exaggerate these fights draws attention. Instead of parlaying the consensus and the reality in NATO, there is a common notion that NATO is being dragged into a historical crisis as news about who is insulted or praised by Trump and how he upsets Western values makes the headlines. Whereas, if we look at the outcome,

14. John R. Oneal, “The Theory of Collective Action and Burden Sharing in NATO”, *International Organization*, Vol.: 44, Issue: 3, (1990), pp. 379-402.

15. Martin A. Smith, *Russia and NATO since 1991: From Cold War through Cold Peace to Partnership*, (New York: Routledge, 2006); Sarwar A. Kashmeri, *NATO 2.0: Reboot or Delete?*, (Washington D.C.: Potomac Books, 2011).

16. Art, “Creating a Disaster: NATO's Open Door Policy”, pp. 383-403.

17. Ronald D. Asmus, *Opening NATO's Door: How the Alliance Remade Itself for a New Era*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

18. For the positioning strategy, see Colin Dueck, *The Obama Doctrine: American Grand Strategy Today*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

19. “Wales Summit Declaration”, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, September 5, 2014, [www.nato.int/cps/ic/natohq/official\\_texts\\_112964.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/ic/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm), (Access date: July 26, 2018).

it is clear that there is not much change in the alliance, and that Trump used this meeting as a show of strength to his *vox populi*, while, in fact, Obama's politics continue.

There was also a NATO declaration made during this brawl. When one looks at its content, one can almost get the impression that there is no crisis in the alliance. If one does not know the stories and tension in the news and only reads the document, he will be left with the impression of a well-functioning alliance.

First one encounters a general emphasis on the necessity for NATO, then a list of the threats as usual, and how the alliance is prepared for them.<sup>20</sup> In fact, it is obvious that the declaration's content is entirely in line with the tradition of statements that have been issued by the alliance so far. In the document, terrorism comes right after Russia, as the top threat. Then, from long-range missiles to cyber-attacks, from Syria to Iran, many issues are presented one by one, and NATO is hailed as having the power and intent to decisively intervene in all.

It is also stated in the document that all the previous agreements will be honored. Again, in the same declaration, the demands of various countries are also in place. First of all, the document discusses the issue of cost-sharing, brought forth by Trump. In general, an optimistic picture is drawn in this regard. It is stated that other member countries have a tendency to increase their contribution to share costs and that it has been determined that this contribution should be further increased.

In other words, the U.S. president appears to have obtained a trump card to brag about to his voters when he returns home. How much this reflects the truth is another topic of discussion, but for the time being, Trump managed to create the image that he cornered European leaders. On

the other hand, for example, Britain seems to take home the lion's share of NATO support. .

Russia has been blamed for the chemical attack carried out in London, and all the allies have declared their support to the British conviction. Similarly, the wishes of Ankara have found a place in the document. It is justified in the blueprint that Turkey has legitimate concerns about its southern border, and that NATO has reassured Turkey in this regard. Similarly, the priority issues of all the allied countries are addressed one by one.

---

**There is a common notion that NATO is being dragged into a historical crisis as news about who is insulted or praised by Trump and how he upsets Western values makes the headlines.**

---

This is NATO in any case. An institution for which deterrence is its most important function issues such declarations. It reassures friends and warns enemies. Nobody discusses whether the measures mentioned in this declaration will take place. The most important issue is making these commitments.

Since these commitments have been made, countries outside NATO use them as sanctioned foreign policy. For example, Russia carefully examines the document, takes the issued statements seriously, and pays attention not to cross the lines.

Russia does not think, "This document will not be put into practice anyhow; these countries are in conflict themselves." The reason is that NATO is still the world's most powerful deterrent organization.<sup>21</sup> In this respect, it is claimed that the alliance remains firmly intact and that no structural crisis exists despite all claims to the contrary.

20. "Brussels Summit Declaration", North Atlantic Treaty Organization, July 11, 2018, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_156624.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_156624.htm), (Access date: July 26, 2018).

21. Arnold Wolfers, "Europe and the NATO Shield", *International Organization*, Vol.: 12, Issue: 4, (1958), pp. 425-439.



## NATO'S FUTURE

If the above assessment is true, and if NATO is experiencing a cyclical crisis and not a structural one, assessments on the alliance's collapse do not make much sense. The dissolution of a highly institutionalized organization based on a robust structural ground such as NATO is not as easy as it is supposed to be. However, many people who are caught up in the rhetoric of everyday politics repeatedly come up with similar claims.<sup>22</sup> According to this mindset, institutions immediately collapse and new ones are readily established in their place.

This reading is extremely inaccurate. NATO will not collapse unless the aforementioned structural transformation occurs. Crises may occur and they may seem quite deep, but the alliance can overcome all these as it did in the 1960s and the 1970s. Yet, it should not be expected in the near future for NATO to become very effective in international politics since what makes the alliance really effective is the USA - no matter what anyone says. When you remove this leadership from NATO, nothing remains.<sup>23</sup>

During the meetings, Trump does not hesitate to play this leadership card using an arrogant language. He declares that the USA will leave NATO if his budgetary demands are not met. For this, institutional arrangements such as senate approval are necessary, but it is needless to dive in too deep. Even Trump, himself, does not probably believe this as he says it out loud. He may feel how much the alliance means to the USA even if he does not understand it.

This is because NATO is still the most reliable military organization in the world. With its 29 members and the large contribution by the

USA, there is not a second system of alliances close to NATO. Owing to Article 5 in particular, the organization has a very strong deterrence against non-NATO countries. Member states use this situation to the full extent.<sup>24</sup>

The abolishment of NATO will mean a terrible power vacuum in the international system. Not only in Europe and the Atlantic, but in Asia, and in Africa, it will cause serious repercussions in the entire international system. The security scheme provided by NATO is still very valuable for the USA. It is even more important than its economic contributions. On the other hand, the United States is not only a part of this order but also its founding leader.

NATO is valuable for all of its members, but it is beneficial mostly for Washington. For example, it is not a coincidence that Article 5 has been invoked only once and in favor of the USA. Washington, again, has made NATO available not only in the Atlantic and Europe, but also throughout the world.

One might as well say that almost no objection to this has been raised from within the alliance. It is true that each of the NATO members has the right to veto and that the veto right grants substantial authority to its allies.<sup>25</sup> But so far, there is nothing in the history of the alliance that the United States has demanded and not achieved. Washington should not be expected to leave this leadership position and put the usefulness of NATO aside just because of economic costs. From this angle, it is evident that NATO is too important an organization to be abandoned and that it is very beneficial to the USA.

However, it has also been seen in recent years that Washington acts extremely reluctantly in similar situations due to its attitude in the in-

22. There exists an exaggerated literature constantly generated about NATO's being in crisis. For details see Wallis J. Thies, *Why NATO Endures*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2009).

23. Robert J. Art, "Why Western Europe Needs the United States and NATO", *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol.: 11, Issue: 1, (1996), pp. 1-39.

24. Steve Weber, "Shaping the Postwar Balance of Power: Multilateralism in NATO", *International Organization*, Vol.: 46, Issue: 3, (1992), pp. 633-680.

25. Ibid.

ternational system. In general, it can be said that the USA has brought down the institutions it has itself established from World War II to date. To increase protectionism more every day, the USA drags all countries, especially China, into this trend. Besides, the beginning of trade wars has already been declared.

Trends that can undermine the USA-centered liberal regime, such as xenophobia and nationalism, are becoming widespread across the world, and it can be argued that this is the result of Washington's reluctance. Even an international institution functioning highly in favor of the USA, such as NAFTA, has been turned into a problem.

Meanwhile the United States, as the principal partner, makes the highest total profit in this regional business association. However, because of the misguided and brazen perception in the U.S. public opinion, Trump is even dragging the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) into a crisis.

With all this in mind, can it be expected of the USA to act so unconcerned about NATO? Of course, it can be expected. Recent developments are the result of this nonchalance. However, nobody should expect such reluctance to reach a level that will dissolve the alliance. As other international organizations, NATO is not just an organization that yields profit to the United States.

The alliance is the foundation of the security and the order that Washington wishes to realize beyond profit. States may sacrifice their economic gains, but they will not be so arrogant about their security. One should not be deceived by the economic loss the USA brings forward because of the situation it is in today.

From the moment that the competition accelerates, Washington will not hesitate to leave all of its economic demands aside, do its best to defend the security order it has established, and undertake the required expenses.

The approach of the member states and the USA towards the alliance is incomparable to that towards economic organizations. Washington's attitude stands a much better chance of being careless when it comes to economic organizations, because economic losses can be compensated. However, once security threats make themselves evident, all whims are pushed aside and the organization returns to its key function.

It is not possible to say that there is a structural or historical transformation in NATO, but it can be claimed that a conjunctural crisis currently exists.

## **HOW ARE TURKEY'S RELATIONS WITH NATO SHAPED?**

It is inconceivable that the crisis in NATO will not affect Turkey.

Of course, Turkey was one of the first countries affected and it seems that it will continue to be affected by this crisis. Unfortunately, extremely meaningless and impossible to realize comments that Turkey should be removed from NATO are made in many circles whose task, in reality, is to attack Turkey under the guise of so-called analysis. This group of professionals who are based in Washington and whose job is to stand against Turkey act on such nonsensical grounds that they overlook the fact that there exists no process to remove Turkey from NATO. If we leave aside this senselessness, we can still predict that the crisis in the Turkey-NATO relations will continue.

Turkey, especially in recent years, has substantially lost confidence in the alliance due to two serious events: the Syrian issue and the failed July 15 coup attempt. NATO allies, including the USA, not only left Turkey on its own in Syria but unjustly accused the country and supported terrorist organizations against it. The July 15 coup attempt followed in the same period.

As almost everyone in Turkey had the suspicion that the USA was involved in this coup attempt, Washington and other allies issued statements neither against the attempted coup nor in support of Turkey. Moreover, after the coup attempt, both the USA and European countries did not hand over to Turkey the senior executives of the FETÖ terrorist organization, but provided them a safe harbor.

Neither the USA nor its European allies supported Turkey on the Syrian issue. Ankara was left by its allies to fend for itself on all critical agenda headlines, including the no-flight-zone, the safe-zone, refugees, the fight against DAESH, and the issue of the PYD. Initially Western countries - mainly the USA – had decided to support the democratization in Syria and the Arab world. They accused Turkey of being slow to respond in this respect.

---

**Turkey has gained enough experience not to confine itself to a single alliance in the system of alliances. Turkey will be part of every alliance, but will not remain dependent on any single alliance.**

---

However, Ankara thought that the transition (to democracy in Syria) should be peaceful. The idea that such a severe transformation may yield unexpected results and they may harm Turkey had gained importance. However, its allies accused Ankara of not taking sufficient responsibility. Later, as Turkey began to support democratization efforts, its allies were afraid of the possibility of the realization of democratization and left Ankara to act alone. Turkey simultaneously became the target of both DAESH and PKK attacks. In the meantime, talks were held with the USA on the no-flight zone and the safe-zone.

Washington chose to stall Ankara on every occasion; it helped the PYD walk to Man-

bij, and on top of this, the international media pressured Turkey for not adequately fighting against DAESH and increased black propaganda through their extensions in the Turkish press along the lines that Ankara supports DAESH. The propaganda revolving around MIT trucks forced Turkey to remain on the defense. In the meantime, 4 million Syrian refugees fled to Turkey. Turkey's European allies, who have become completely ineffective in any political or military matter, have not taken a meaningful step forward in terms of the refugee issue. Economic contributions that were promised to Turkey have never been delivered. Efforts were made to turn Turkey into a "prison" for refugees.

Throughout the course of these events, Turkey lived through a step-by-step comprehensive transformation of its understanding of NATO and its allies. The July 15 coup attempt, however, finalized this process. Since the night of the attempted coup, none of Turkey's NATO allies, starting with the USA and Germany in particular, supported the elected government of Turkey in the face of the attempt. This attitude was perceived by the majority of the country's population as hostility towards Turkey. The current undisturbed residing of FETÖ's leader in the United States is one of the most disturbing issues for both Turkish politicians and citizens. Meanwhile, a large number of the coup plotters today live in various cities of Europe, especially in Germany. Turkey does not receive affirmative answers to any of its extradition requests.

In addition, Washington continued to deliver to the PYD thousands of trucks loaded with military aid. Encouraged by the USA, the PYD was trying to encircle Turkey's southern border. Under such circumstances, any country can see that it can no longer trust its allies. Immediately after the July 15 coup attempt, Turkey reevaluated its foreign and security policies, and was flexible enough to sit at the table with Russia and Iran - although Turkey has experienced very



serious problems with both of them. Turkey successfully carried out the Euphrates Shield and the Olive Branch Operations in Northern Syria despite all the efforts of its NATO allies to block them. Turkey took matters into its own hands; it negotiated its safety not with NATO but with Russia.

Anyone who listens to this story might ask, “How is it that Turkey is still in such an alliance (NATO)?” This is an extremely legitimate question. But Ankara's view of NATO should not be considered emotionally.

Turkey knows that it cannot trust its allies, but it is also aware that being in the alliance provides the country security. NATO, as the most effective deterrent power in the world, still offers opportunity to Ankara, and protects Turkey not only against its enemies but also against its friends. Because of its membership in the alliance, Turkey is seen as an attractive negotiating partner for Russia, and Moscow could not retaliate militarily against Ankara when Turkey shot down the Russian war plane.

For example, the world witnessed very closely what can happen when Georgia exhibited similar behavior in 2009. Hitting a Russian war plane can create very dire consequences for a country such as Georgia. But Russia could not take any steps against Turkey except applying economic and diplomatic pressure. This is how Turkey benefits from NATO. This is why the alliance is still a valuable agent for Ankara.

Turkey has been seen for many years as a loyal partner of NATO. But in the new era, we will witness more of the instrumentalization of the alliance by Ankara. Turkey's relationship with the alliance is moving on an extremely rational ground – just as it should be. Turkey is not only a loyal ally but also an actor benefitting from NATO.

The moment NATO left Turkey to fend for itself, Ankara negotiated with Moscow and cleared the terrorist corridor in the west of the Euphrates. That is to say, the distance between

the two actors has made Turkey safer. There was even more to come. Although it never came near the negotiations, the USA, this time, conceded to return to negotiations (for Manbij) after Turkey managed to negotiate with Russia. The Manbij consensus is the exact result of this. As Turkey gets closer to Russia, the USA has to approach Turkey. Had Turkey continued to stay with the USA unconditionally, neither the Euphrates Shield nor the Olive Branch Operations would have been possible.

At the same time, it should be noted that Ankara will not completely break ties with the USA and NATO because, in this case, it becomes dependent on Russia. For this reason, Ankara has accepted new negotiation proposals from Washington, and now the Manbij issue is being resolved. As Turkey approaches the USA in Manbij, Russia gets closer to Turkey in Tal Rifat.

A model similar to the one between the USA and Turkey in Manbij will be practiced by Turkey and Russia in Tal Rifat. Turkey will be safer as long as it conducts business with the one who approaches it, and manages to benefit from the competition between the two great powers rather than being dependent on only one of them.

Thus, it is unlikely to expect Turkey to become dependent on any actors, such as Russia and the USA in the near future. On the contrary, Ankara will negotiate with all possible actors in search of a more independent foreign policy. For example, if the European Union (EU) becomes a real actor, Turkey will be pleased with this and negotiate with the EU, too.

However, both the EU and member states are far from being real and effective actors. This also reduces the alternatives for Turkey. On the other hand, for example, if an actor, such as China, makes its presence felt effectively in political and diplomatic issues, Turkey will be delighted to improve its relations with such an actor. But China seems almost non-existent apart from the economic arena.

Turkey, from time to time, voices its interest in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Various steps have been, and apparently will be, taken in this context. However, unless the SCO becomes sufficiently active, it is still a weak alternative for Turkey. On the other hand, it can be clearly stated that even if Turkey comes close to an organization, such as the SCO, this will not be an alternative organization to NATO. Ankara has gained enough experience not to confine itself to a single alliance in the system of alliances. Therefore, Turkey will be part of every alliance, but will not remain dependent on any single alliance. In this respect, it can be said that Turkey will continue to be present in NATO. But, it is better for everyone to get used to a Turkey that is not abused by the alliance, but to a Turkey that actually uses NATO.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis examined the issue of NATO under three headings. The idea that the alliance is in a crisis has been accepted, but it has been voiced that the crisis is temporary and has a conjunctural quality and that it shows similarities to the crises of previous periods. Hence, it can be said that NATO is still the strongest, most institutional, and most deterrent alliance institution with no possibility of collapse in the near future. The crisis of NATO is a result of a loose security environment and of the American nonchalance. As the international system strengthens, it may be expected that all other members, particularly

the USA, will turn the alliance back into a more central entity for themselves.<sup>26</sup>

Turkey's relations with NATO are not independent of this context. Turkey takes the lead among the countries which felt the alliance's crisis in the most shocking way. Since the attitude of NATO and member countries was extremely disturbing during the civil war in Syria, during the systematic terrorist attacks against Turkey, and the July 15 failed coup attempt against Turkey, Ankara has adopted a new security and foreign policy perspective. Accordingly, Turkey does not view itself and does not wish to be seen as a loyal ally of the alliance only.

On the contrary, Turkey adopts a balanced political posture and has connections with non-NATO international actors as it proceeds to become a more independent international actor and makes itself a safer country owing to its extended maneuvering space.

Therefore, it is predicted that Turkey will maintain its relations with NATO from a distance and that it is unlikely for Turkey to depart from the alliance. In the meantime, Ankara will continue to have a balanced relationship with all possible international actors. Turkey's new attitude cannot be designated a "non-alignment movement." On the contrary, Turkey will continue to increase its autonomy by setting up a system of multi-alliances in the new period.

---

26. Paul Cornish, *Partnership in Crisis: The US, Europe, and the Fall and Rise of NATO*, (London: Chatham House Papers, 1997), p. 6.



---

**T**his analysis is about the crisis that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is believed to have experienced recently. Allegedly, this crisis is a temporary situation the likes of which have been seen in its history and NATO will survive because the international system has not experienced any structural transformation. One of the points emphasized in the current analysis is that Turkey's relations with NATO are, and will be, determined in accordance with these conditions.

It can be said that Turkey is both the first country that has been affected by the current crisis and, at the same time, the first country to have shown a consistent reaction to this crisis. Although Turkey maintains NATO membership, it has returned to a strategy based on the rationale of cooperating with other international actors. This new multi-alliance strategy has resulted in the fact that Turkey is a more attractive partner for different actors. Thus, Turkey has acquired a more autonomous position in the field of foreign policy and security alliances with multiple systems. It can be expected that this policy will be maintained in the near and mid-term future.



---

ANKARA • İSTANBUL • WASHINGTON D.C. • KAHİRE

---

[www.setav.org](http://www.setav.org)