

The Case for Cyprus Transforms as Turkey Abandons the West in Favor of an Alliance With Moscow

By Gregory R. Copley¹

The governments of the United States and the United Kingdom have, as yet, failed to come to terms with the reality — already recognized by France and other states — that Turkey has effectively abandoned its reliance on the West and is now entering into a fundamental strategic alliance with Russia.

This, ultimately, transforms how the European Union (EU) must deal with Turkey on the matter of the Turkish military occupation of Northern Cyprus, but it does not make the Cyprus situation any less complex. It also transforms the meaning and future viability of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

Turkey found itself in a position where it had no option but to ally itself with Russia, which now dominates the Eur-Asian energy marketplace. Absent an alliance with Moscow, Turkey's principal strategic asset, its position in the energy transportation marketplace linking Central Asia and the Caspian Basin with the Black Sea Basin and European and Mediterranean buyers, would have been lost, and Russia would have ensured that the key pipelines bypassed Turkey.

¹ Gregory Copley is Editor-in-Chief of *Defense & Foreign Affairs* publications, and the Director of Intelligence at the Global Information System (GIS), an on-line, encrypted-access, global intelligence service which provides strategic current intelligence to governments. He is also President of the International Strategic Studies Association, based in Washington, DC, and chairs its Balkan & Eastern Mediterranean Policy Council. He has served as an adviser on strategic issues to a number of governments and leaders. He is a founding Director (and until recently Chairman of the Research Committee) of Future Directions International (FDI), the Australian strategic research institution. In this capacity, he was principal author of the major study, *Such a Full Sea: Australia's Options in a Changing Indian Ocean Region*, launched in Canberra in April 2009, and *Australia 2050: An Examination of Australia's Condition, Outlook, and Options for the First Half of the 21st Century*, which was launched in the Australian Parliament in December 2007. As a result, he was a key delegate to the Australian Prime Minister's *Australia 2020 Summit* in Canberra in April 2008. He also authored the study, released in June 2008, entitled *Australia's National Security: Considerations for Planning Defence and Security Capabilities Well Into the 21st Century*. He was principal author of the FDI study, *Australia's Energy Options*, which was presented at Federal Parliament in August 2005. He is also President of the International Strategic Studies Association (ISSA), based in Washington, DC. Mr Copley is author of numerous books, and several thousand articles, papers, and lectures on strategic issues and history. One of his recent books, *The Art of Victory*, was published by Simon & Schuster's Threshold Editions in New York. Meanwhile, the 17th edition of his 2,600pp encyclopedia, the *Defense & Foreign Affairs Handbook*, was published in January 2009, and his *Defense & Foreign Affairs Handbook on Azerbaijan* was published in July 2006, with an expanded second edition in May 2007. He wrote, with co-author Purvis Hussain, the *Defense & Foreign Affairs Handbook on Pakistan*, which was published in November 2008, and the *Defense & Foreign Affairs Handbook on Egypt*, published in 1995. He has authored more than two dozen books on strategic issues, history, and aviation. His Washington-based institute has for more than three decades worked grand strategy issues, and he has advised a number of governments at head-of-state level. He has received a significant number of orders and decorations from governments, including, in 2007, being made a Member of the Order of Australia for his contributions to the international community in the field of strategic analysis. He can be reached at email: GRCopley@StrategicStudies.org or GRCopley@aol.com.

I highlighted this dramatic transformation in Eastern Mediterranean and Eur-Asian politics — a change which fundamentally ends some 150 years of British, US, and European strategic thinking toward Russia — in an article in *Defense & Foreign Affairs Special Analysis*, on February 27, 2009,² as Turkey moved toward local elections on March 29, 2009. Events since then have vindicated that assessment.

That report was followed by a further assessment in my journal on March 6, 2009, entitled “Turkey Makes its Strategic Choice: Russia”.³ There was no response from the US or UK governments. However, that report made it clear, noting:

“Turkey, moving rapidly toward isolation from its traditional Western allies, and strategically damaged by the failure of the US-supported military action by Georgia⁴ in August 2008 against South Ossetia and Abkhazia, has made a fundamental decision to move toward a strategic alliance with Russia.”

“Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan sees the great option open to him: transform Turkey’s relationship with Russia from historical foe to teaming partner. Turkish Pres. Abdullah Gül visited Moscow (and then Tartarstan) in late February 2009 at the invitation of the Russian Government, and embraced a wide-ranging engagement between the two states.”

“Bilateral Turkish-Russian trade in 2008 already had reached \$32-billion, making Russia Turkey’s biggest trading partner, and now Moscow and Ankara see a path to revitalize Turkish relevance to the regional energy pattern. Turkey, once the key to the West’s developing pipeline strategy to circumvent Russia’s stranglehold on the delivery of energy to Europe, is now part of the Russian circle.”

“This was, inevitably, the result of the collapse of US influence due to the failed military attack of August 2008 by Georgia against Abkhazia and South Ossetia, an affair which not only forced neighboring Azerbaijan to bow to the reality that the US could not support it, but also led to the inevitability of the Kyrgyz Republic’s decision to re-embrace relations with Russia at the expense of US access to the Manas air base in Kyrgyzstan. That move, essentially, also spelled the reality that the US/NATO ability to sustain a long-term military engagement in Afghanistan was now ended, especially given the logistical difficulties the US has had utilizing Pakistan as a support base for the Afghan war.”

² Copley, Gregory R.: “Turkey’s Strategic Options Shift as the Country Becomes Increasing Isolated”, in *Defense & Foreign Affairs Special Analysis*, February 27, 2009.

³ Copley, Gregory R.: “Turkey Makes its Strategic Choice: Russia”, in *Defense & Foreign Affairs Special Analysis*, March 6, 2009.

⁴ Clearly, not all US analysts agree that the US directly supported or encouraged Georgian Pres. Mikhail Saakashvili to attack the enclaves, resulting in Russian support for their subsequent independence. However, considerable evidence exists that Washington did nothing to discourage the Georgian moves and, at the very least, must have known about them. In any event, what is actually more important is the fact that leaders of the immediate regional states believe that the US was complicit in the attacks and — critically — that the US was, when Russian intervened, powerless to assist Georgia. Other regional states began immediately to reassess, negatively, their reliance on the US as a strategic partner and bulwark against Russia.

These changing strategic realities had a profound — and, as history will show, enduring — impact on the Turkey's direction, its political and security structures, and its relationships in the region.

Most particularly, the deepening global economic crisis will serve either to challenge the viability of the present Islamist-oriented Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*: AKP) Government of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, or — conversely — will see the populist appeal of the AKP used to further build the party's support base.⁵

Prime Minister Erdoğan in February 2009 — in the run-up to the municipal elections which at least temporarily consolidated the AKP's position tactically but reinforced the growing divide in Turkey — to inhibit press criticism of his Government — fined the powerful Doğan Media Group (DMG) a half-billion US dollars (826.3-million Turkish *lira*) for alleged tax evasion in a 2006 transaction. This attempt to subdue the freedom of expression which the EU had been pushing to Turkey to allow, exhibited either the Government's concern over its weak position, or its confidence that it could use such tactics with impunity; or possibly both.⁶ Significantly, the AKP Government has ensured — by deliberate action or by ineptitude — that a growing amount of the educated Turkish public, the Turkish media, and European and US political sentiment was working against it. At the same time it gave some leverage to the embattled Turkish General Staff (*Genelkurmay Başkanları:GB*) in its campaign to limit the drift by the Government toward Islamism and to constrain the powers of the Turkish Armed Forces.

The local elections were expected to be a significant bellweather for the Government, and were especially interesting because of the unpredictability of the overall political situation. Some 5.6-million more Turks were eligible to vote in the March 2009 local elections than in the 2007 Parliamentary elections, although all sources indicated that the voter rolls did not adequately reflect the changes. Given this situation, the fact that the European Union (EU) was *not* planning to send observers to the election is an indication of the declining sense of urgency which the EU feels about Turkish entry into the Union.

Certainly, the AKP felt that it has strong momentum in the local elections compared with the less-organized, less-focused, and possibly less-popular Turkish Republican People's Party (*Çumhuriyet Halk Partisi*: CHP), led by Deniz Baykal, and the AKP confidence was borne out by events. The other opposition parties were not a major concern to the AKP. Thus, absent the

⁵ Clearly, the AKP is not taking chances, and has used the machinery of the Turkish Government to hand out incentives to voters in poor areas. Turkey's High Board of Election on February 7, 2009, warned the Government and municipalities against giving handouts to the poor to attract votes in the local elections, and opposition parties accused the AKP of using Government funds to bribe voters. Turkish television has shown pictures of state officials distributing refrigerators, washing machines, and furniture to the poor in the Eastern region of the country.

⁶ Metin Munir, a columnist writing in the daily newspaper, *Milliyet*, recalled, in a column written in the newspaper's February 25, 2009, edition how, at the beginning, Prime Minister Erdoğan was widely supported by the West and Turkey's "white Turks" (the rich, educated, and secular elite). He was seen as a moderate and democratic Muslim, loyal to the United States and Israel, and aiming to join the EU, Munir remembers. Nevertheless, the columnist charges: "the leopard cannot change its spots", and the Prime Minister began to show his true colors. He gained control of almost all the organs of the state, and his self-confidence grew. He was now, the columnist said, not afraid of anything anymore. Munir warned that what was now to come was even more frightening because, as he predicted, the Justice and Development Party would gain more than 50 percent of the votes in the coming local elections, and Erdoğan would become a "combination of Ahmadinejad, Putin, and Chavez". "This is the end of the white Turks and of white Turkey," Munir warned, "and the adventure begins now."

Armed Forces, the AKP could feel confident about increasing its grasp on the electorate in the March 29, 2009, local elections. The only real concern for the AKP, then, was how strongly the Turkish General Staff worked in the background, or possibly the foreground, of Turkish politics in the election and beyond.

Turkey was, in early 2009, becoming strategically isolated from its traditional support base (Britain and the US) for the first time, quite apart from the nominal (although declining) support by the US and the UK for the continued Turkish occupation of Northern Cyprus.

Several significant factors are at play:

1. The Turkish economy is faring even worse than the general EU economy⁷: there was no economic growth in Turkey in 2008; there will be negative growth in 2009; unemployment was at 12.3 percent in November 2008, and will rise in 2009;
2. The EU is showing that it is increasingly disinclined to discuss expansion, and the overt trends within the EU are, for the first time, that Turkey will not gain admittance to the Union. This eventuality, once made public, would deny the AKP the protection of the EU, which has been the main lever by which the AKP Government has pressured the GB into acceding to the control of the military and the National Security Council (*Milli Güvenlik Kurulu*: MGK) by the elected Government;
3. Turkey's strategic position in the Black Sea energy trading system was weakened considerably — and changed, possibly irreversibly — by the failure of Georgian Pres. Mikhail Saakashvili to prevail in his attempted invasion of the two northern enclaves on the Georgian-Russian border, South Ossetia and Abkhazia, in August 2008. This has meant that Turkey's key regional ally, Azerbaijan, was forced into accommodations with the Russian Federation on the routing of oil and gas, giving Russia greater command of the energy flow from Central Asia to Europe via the Black Sea. The event also weakened the US' influence in the region, in effect, thereby weakening the ability of Turkey's principal strategic ally to be of assistance to Turkey itself. Furthermore, at a stroke, the US-supported military action by the Georgian President substantially reduced the rôle which Turkey had been playing to dominate the regional energy supply chain;
4. US-Turkish relations by early 2009 were at their lowest level for decades, despite the strength of the Turkish lobby in Washington, DC. This in part reflects the fact that the new US Administration of Pres. Barak Obama has placed foreign policy at a lower priority than in previous US administrations, despite Turkey's nexus rôle in the Eurasian energy process. For the first time, the US Government has taken a strong stand against Turkey on a key issue, and Turkish Government officials are uncertain how to treat the changes.⁸ This is likely to worsen still further, given the moment which now exists within

⁷ World Bank country director for Turkey, Ulrich Zachau, said on February 26, 2009, that Turkey's economic crisis was far worse than the 2001 crisis, and that Turkey should not expect to see a recovery in its economy any time soon. He said that unemployment would rise. One-quarter of young workers would lose their jobs, he said. The International Monetary Fund on February 26, 2009, also indicated that it saw Turkish inflation this year falling below the Central Bank's 7.5 percent inflation target, but expects the economy to contract by 1.5 percent in 2009.

⁸ The US State Department released its *Human Rights Report* on February 26, 2009, severely criticizing Turkey. Among other things, the report noted: "During the year human rights organizations documented a rise in cases of torture, beatings, and abuse by security forces. Security forces committed unlawful killings; the number of arrests and prosecutions in these cases was low compared with the number of incidents, and convictions

the US Congress for a resolution condemning Turkey for genocide against the Armenians in 1915, especially given the fact that the US Israel lobby is now reluctant to help the Turks stave off such a vote in the US Congress. Moreover, attempts by the Obama Administration to retrieve some of the US-Turkish relationship, with the visits first by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and then by President Obama, only served to further confirm to the Turkish leadership that Washington could offer little help to Turkey's long-term strategic position, and yet still Washington did not seem to perceive the Turkish rebuff;

5. Turkish-Israeli relations are at their lowest level for decades, following Prime Minister Erdoğan's anti-Israeli outburst at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, on January 29, 2009. The Erdoğan gesture at Davos, in which the Prime Minister insulted Israeli Pres. Shimon Peres and Israel over anti-HAMAS actions in Gaza in December 2008/January 2009, was seized, however, by the AKP which ensured that it was portrayed as a strong Islamist stand by the Turkish population, resulting in a mobilization of the AKP power base, favorable for the March 2009 elections;
6. Turkish-Azerbaijan relations are suffering, weakening ties with another of Turkey's vital regional allies (and the conduit for most of the energy which goes via the Baku-Tblisi-Ceyhan pipeline, among other routes, giving Turkey a key rôle in the Black/Caspian basins energy distribution patterns). Ankara, in late February 2009, virtually abandoned support for Azerbaijan's sovereignty position on the Nagorno-Karabakh territory as it attempted to build a new bridge to Armenia, in the hope of getting Yerevan to drop its claims that the 1915 affair (noted above) was "genocide". This move may ultimately damage Turkey's economy and the perception in international circles that it is the vital element in the regional energy trade. Significantly, Azerbaijan's response to this change has been to attack the Turkish AKP Government, not Turkey itself, a gesture which helps the position of the Turkish Armed Forces in the military-political struggle in Turkey. Azerbaijan is now in a difficult position, because — largely at the behest of Russia, and not as a result of the widespread Western campaign on the topic — Turkey has begun to soften its line toward neighboring Armenia, a vital element in Russia's plans for regional pipelines, including energy exports to Europe from Iran, which the US has been attempting to quarantine through embargoes. Azerbaijan may, in some respects, have now lost its significant ally in Turkey for the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute, although Azerbaijan and Turkey must continue to work closely, under Moscow's watchful eye, on all of the regional energy transportation initiatives. In this regard, however, Russia may now prove more helpful in negotiating a settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute on grounds more suited to Baku, and equally it may be in a greater

remained rare. Prison conditions remained poor, with chronic overcrowding and insufficient staff training. Law enforcement officials did not always provide detainees immediate access to attorneys as required by law." The State Department report also noted: "... there were several thousand political prisoners, including leftists, rightists, and Islamists, and contended that the government does not distinguish them as such. The government claimed that alleged political prisoners were in fact charged with being members of, or assisting, terrorist organizations. According to the government, 2,232 convicts and 2,017 pretrial detainees were being held in prison on terrorism charges through September 2007." The report also criticized Turkey's infringements against free speech. By comparison, the State Department's report on human rights in Greece was considerably more positive.

position to assist in helping resolve the Cyprus dispute in a manner more favorable to the Cypriots, rather than to Ankara;

7. Turkey has made little or no headway in suppressing the momentum of the PKK (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan*: Kurdistan Workers' Party), either inside Turkey or inside the Kurdish area of Northern Iraq, where PKK militia continue to find safe-haven. The failure of Turkish cross-border military actions against the PKK in Northern Iraq has led the Turkish Government to work with the Iraqi and US governments to form political actions to attack and suppress the PKK in such regions as Arbil, in Iraqi Kurdistan, where a tripartite command center against the PKK came into operation in late February 2009.

What, then, is the outlook for Turkey, and what are its options:

- (i) The enduring concerns of the Turkish military over the erosion of the Armed Forces' capabilities to sustain the values of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, and the secular concepts of Atatürkism, are now, once again, coming to a head, and the ruling AKP of Prime Minister Reçep Tayyip Erdoğan is aware of this, and seems in many respects to be precipitating a confrontation with the Armed Forces. The Armed Forces, however, have not yet shown that they are ready to respond as they did in the past, when they seized power from the elected Government as was the case, for example, in 1980, 1971, and 1960. Is Prime Minister Erdoğan comfortable that he can call the bluff of the GB at this point? Or does he feel that he has no other option? On the other hand, does the new Ankara-Moscow alliance mean that the GB and AKP can put aside some of their differences, with Moscow — rather than the EU — being now a key arbiter of political stability in Turkey?
- (ii) Turkey is becoming strategically isolated from the West and economically weakened at a critical time. As a result, the actions of political and military leaders will almost certainly be the result of short-term pressures and the prospect of short-term opportunities. It is possible that the Armed Forces could consider that they have no other option but to re-take the reins of government at this time, especially when their political relations with the US, the EU, Israel, and others may not be expected to substantially worsen as a result of such an action. The Armed Forces have, at a leadership level, appreciated the value of Turkish membership in the EU, but many senior officers have realistically assessed that this was an unlikely outcome, given that it would call for Turkey to compromise on many of its perceived national interests. In other words, if the comedy (of Turkey's EU candidature) is to end, then best to let it end now, before the country is irreparably harmed by Islamism and the destruction of Atatürkism. The question remains, however, as to whether the GB has the cohesion and will to act decisively at this time.
- (iii) Will the Turkish economic and political crisis impact defense spending and actions? If the General Staff fails to act against the AKP Government at this time, there is a strong likelihood that Turkish defense and security spending will decline, impacting major Turkish military programs in the near future. There is also a prospect that Turkey would face the need to curtail some of its military activities, including anti-PKK actions in Northern Iraq, and the maintenance of large garrison levels in Northern Cyprus. On the other hand, if the Armed Forces once again seize power in Turkey, the result is likely to be arms embargoes from both the US and EU, a formal

suspension of Turkey's EU candidature, and so on, although the Turkish Armed Forces could be expected to build up internal capacities to support security operations. This would benefit the large Turkish defense industry and force greater self-reliance on the country.

There are many more variables to the Turkish situation at present, but there is little question that this is a critical time for Turkey. It has the option to, for example, rebuild its alliance structure, with the US and Israel, but also with Greece, which is an essential component of the extended Black Sea basin energy supply network; and even with Serbia and other Balkan countries which have hitherto been the subject of antagonism because of deep-seated historical memories of Ottoman control of the region.

Turkey was, until it locked in its new alliance with Russia, faced with the loss of considerable wealth and influence over the coming few years unless it chose a new path to rebuild its importance to the energy network. The Russian alliance gave it a new, and possibly expanded, part of the Eur-Asian energy link-up. Abandoning its position against Armenia, in exchange for Armenia putting aside its claims of genocide by the Turks in 1915, highlights the fact that Ankara could also find a rationale to find an equitable and face-saving settlement in Cyprus. If that was to occur, the major barrier to Turkish entry into the EU would be removed, and Turkey could further integrate into the Eurasian trading pattern.

As it stands, its dreams of pan-Turkist revival of influence in Central Asia have been thwarted by the return of Russian influence in the region, and by the joint Russo-PRC domination of the region with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). So that door, too, has been closed to some extent to Ankara. Pan-Islamism, on which the AKP Government of Turkey had counted as a means to revived Turkish wealth and influence, has also not been the economic panacea which Ankara sought, something the Turkish Armed Forces knew would be the case.

What, then, remains for Ankara? True integration with Europe, which would mean abandoning its position in Northern Cyprus, is no longer an option in the way that it was once considered: membership of the EU. Despite this, Turkey, through its alliance with Moscow, is now more central than ever to the European Union.

Indeed, with Moscow now controlling literally all the key avenues for the transportation of energy from the Caspian, Central Asia, and the Russian Federation itself, to the EU — and with the prospect of new technologies allowing efficient electricity transmission via powerlines from even as far away as the Kyrgyz Republic to the EU, via Russia — the EU needs Russia more than ever. At the same time, the fear of Russia which Washington continues to emphasize to the Europeans is not felt in European capitals, save, perhaps, London. The EU message to the US is now, in effect: Russia is no longer a military threat to us, given our overwhelming numbers and wealth; on the other hand, Russia is vital to our economic and political stability as the source of much of our energy. The sub-text of this message from the EU to Washington is this: Do not try to get between the EU and Russia.

Thus, the new strategic situation is this: the EU effectively no longer needs the US in NATO. True, Greece may still need its bilateral relationship with the US more as a safeguard against possible Turkish aggression (and the US will need Greece more as one of its few allies in the Eastern Mediterranean). But even Greece now has the ability, through its good relationship with Moscow and through Moscow's other allies in South-Eastern Europe (such as Bulgaria and

Serbia, both of which value Greece's friendship), to help constrain Turkey and to bring about a resolution of the Cyprus issue.

The Sofia Energy Summit on Natural Gas for Europe, Security and Partnership which took place on April 24-25, 2009, in the Bulgarian capital, Sofia, absolutely confirmed the vital importance of South-Eastern Europe and Russia in Europe's energy future. It also confirmed that a new reality was emerging in East-West relations.

In conclusion, it is worth re-stating that the Turkish move to embrace partnership with Russia now begins to unravel British (and subsequently US) strategic policy which has been in place since the Crimean War (1853-56; the Oriental War, as it is known in Russia), and which engaged Western and Turkish interests in containing Russia — and subsequently the Soviet Union — into the Eurasian hinterland and the Black Sea.

Turkey's new move, as yet still unrecognized in Washington and London, represents, indeed, the first great geopolitical break in NATO's unity, other than the recruitment of new Eastern European members, since the end of the Cold War.

There is no indication at this time that the Turkish General Staff will accept such a dramatic change in Turkey's fundamental alliance position, although Pres. Gül's visit to Moscow did address — with Russian support — Turkey's interest in sustaining its pan-Turkism in Russian-dominated Central Asia. In essence, to make the Turkish-Russian alliance work, Russia has taken Turkey as a partner in developing Central Asia, further removing the US from influence in that region.

In essence, then, Turkey has effectively transformed the global strategic balance, and must force a re-examination of the efficacy of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). And yet NATO and its principal powers have not recognized the change, especially as Turkey worked to support France's re-entry into NATO's operational structure. This, in some respects, helped Ankara to neutralize some of France's antagonism toward Turkey's entry into the EU — even though such membership is now regarded not only as unlikely but even unimportant for Turkey — and reinforced Turkish strategic power in the Eastern Mediterranean/Eurasian nexus.

Given this, will the US and UK re-think their traditional pattern of favoritism of Turkey over Greece and their tacit support for Turkish occupation of the Northern one-third of the territory of the Republic of Cyprus?