
Defense Report

AUSA



If the Turks Are Our Allies, Let's Treat Them That Way

Turkey occupies a critical position at the east end of the Mediterranean, astride traditional invasion routes into Europe, Asia and the Mid East. The Turkish armed forces are the eastern anchor of NATO's defenses against any acquisitive moves by the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies. The Turks are ferocious fighters who have hated the Russians for centuries. Given their strategic location and their other attributes they would seem to be just the kind of ally we need in that area.

But, as a U.S. State Department official said recently, "The Turks are their own worst enemy. They have an unbelievable capacity for saying or doing the wrong thing at the wrong time." When Turkey invaded the island of Cyprus in 1974 to protect a minority of Turkish residents from harassment by the Greek majority few members of the U.S. Congress questioned their right to intervene but many objected to their use of U.S.-supplied weapons in an action that could have led to war with Greece, another NATO member. In 1975 Congress, reacting to pressure from what has been called "the Greek lobby," imposed an embargo on further arms shipments to Turkey.

The Turks responded by placing severe limitations on the movements of U.S. personnel stationed there and even suspended the delivery of package mail—a suspension that has since been lifted each Christmas season. President Ford convinced Congress to make an insignificant exception to the embargo during one year but the Congressional action has effectively cut Turkey off from any sources of military supplies. Since it is in the midst of a grave economic crisis the nation cannot afford to buy weapons from Western European manufacturers. The Turks must get grant-in-aid help from the United States or turn to the Soviet Union, which is known to be ready to help after getting the proper kind of concessions from the Turks.

In the meantime the Turkish armed forces are making do with U.S. weaponry that dates back to World War II and Korea and are critically short of spare parts and ammunition. The Turkish ground forces are the largest in NATO but their effectiveness is severely hamstrung, particularly in the context of a possible confrontation with the Soviet Army, by grossly inadequate equipment.

Despite the apparent rashness of their actions there is no substantial question of the friendly relationship between the United States and Turkey. What is needed here is the application of more reason and less emotion. Congress has made its point. It does not approve of U.S.-supplied weapons being used as they were on Cyprus four years ago and the Turks must be abundantly aware of that disapproval by now.

But having made its point Congress should show its collective wisdom by permitting the flow of modern equipment, spare parts and ammunition to a valuable, if sometimes brash, ally.