
Defense Report

AUSA



Modernizing Turkey's Army—Protecting a Vulnerable Flank

Among the multiple problems which have plagued the three-and-a-half decades of the Atlantic Alliance, one of the most vexing is the long simmering Graeco-Turkish dispute which frequently threatens to boil over and rupture NATO's southern flank from within.

Greece and Turkey occupy critical positions at the east end of the Mediterranean, astride traditional invasion routes into Europe, Asia and the Middle East. Both are our allies in NATO, and their armed forces anchor western defenses against any expansionist moves by the Soviet Union. They are the kind of allies we need in that area.

Unfortunately, Greece and Turkey have been traditional adversaries since the fall of Constantinople in 1453. In 1974, the Turks invaded the island of Cyprus to protect a minority of Turkish residents from harassment by the Greek majority. During the ensuing decade, they have stationed a 20,000-man occupation force on the predominantly Greek (77 percent) island, and last November the Turkish northern one third of Cyprus declared its independence from the rest of Cyprus in a widely condemned secessionist move.

The resolution of the Cyprus conflict has been rightfully placed in the hands of UN secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar, who is currently laying the groundwork for new negotiations on the situation.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Congress, pressured by what has been called "the Greek lobby," is moving to slash badly needed military assistance to Turkey or to withhold military aid until Turkey makes certain concessions on Cyprus. Such measures completely disregard the strategic importance of Turkey, which has both land and sea frontiers with the USSR and Bulgaria and shares borders with Iran, Iraq and Syria, and the fact that the Turkish Army lacks adequate modern weapons and equipment to meet the requirements of today's battlefield.

Having made its point, Congress should let reason prevail over emotion by backing the United Nations' efforts to secure peace on Cyprus and should permit the flow of arms and ammunition to one of the staunchest members of the alliance in order to bolster our own U.S. national security interests by making it more effective.