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The Real Plan B in AfPak: Keeping China Out, Bringing India In, Calming Turkey Down

by Tony Corn

In response to a charge of inconsistency, British economist John Maynard Keynes once famously replied: “When the facts change, I change my mind. What do you do, sir?”

Keynes’s remark comes to mind when trying to assess the change of heart of the Obama Administration regarding Afghanistan in the past twelve months. At the risk of caricaturing: in December 2009, the Plan was to start withdrawing by July 2011; by December 2010, the Plan seemed to have become, stay “well beyond 2014.” While critics were quick to accuse the Administration of inconsistency, a more judicious approach is to ask: What facts may have changed, that led the White House to change its mind?

In Afghanistan itself, not much appears to have changed. At the tactical level, to be sure, the counter-terrorism (CT) component is producing some results. At the operational level, General Caldwell’s inspired leadership and management of the security force assistance (SFA) program has led to unexpected progress in a remarkably short period of time. At the strategic level, though, there has not been any noticeable improvement in terms of development and/or governance, be it at the national or the local levels.

The main “fact” that seems to have changed is the realization, on the U.S. part, that a) given the shortage of trainers and infrastructure, the majority of Afghan forces won’t be ready to take over until 2014, and b) the majority of Taliban will never be weakened enough to be forced to the negotiating table so long as the AfPak border is not sealed, so long as Pakistan continues its double dealing, and so long as NATO’s logistical dependence deprives the U.S. of any significant leverage over Pakistani elites.

In the Afghan neighborhood, by contrast, what has profoundly changed in the past twelve months is the diplomatic dynamics. In such a rapidly changing environment, the “fog of diplomacy” can become thicker still than the proverbial “fog of war,” and military analysts will naturally be inclined to confine their assessments to the operational level. In fairness, based on open sources alone, it is often difficult to get more than a fragmentary picture of the moves and countermoves of the various players. Within these limits, though, it should be clear to military analysts that two ongoing developments deserve careful monitoring:

On the one hand, due to China’s increasing assertiveness in the region in general, and in India’s own backyard (Jammu & Kashmir and the Arabian Sea) in particular, New Delhi seems to have finally realized that the presence of NATO in the area (both on land and at sea) is all benefit to India, and that the time has come to dispense with the Nehruvian theology of “non-alignment.” On the other hand, due to Turkey’s increasing self-intoxication with the idea of a “Global Turkey” in general, and its assertiveness with regard to the Sino-Pakistani axis in particular, not only has India never been so threatened with marginalization over Afghanistan as today, but America itself is in danger of losing the diplomatic initiative.

To the extent that there is a Plan B for AfPak, then, one could argue it is aimed above all at preserving optimal flexibility for the U.S. in the next three years, while keeping China out, bringing India in, and calming Turkey down.

India and Global NATO

One can only assume that India's "agonizing re-appraisal" may have contributed to giving a new lease on life to the concept of a Global NATO first raised in 2006 by Ivo Daalder – the current U.S. Ambassador to NATO¹.

At the 2006 NATO Riga Summit, European allies had initially shown little enthusiasm for the concept of a Global NATO and, until recently, even NATO's would-be "Global Partners" did not seem to be that interested either. Nonetheless, in the past four years, NATO's diplomatic role has expanded to the point where the 28 member Atlantic Alliance today entertains diplomatic and military relations with over 30 non-members throughout the world.

At the February 2010 Munich Security Conference, NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen put forward what could be called a "Global NATO Lite" concept:

The Alliance should become the hub of a network of security partnerships and a centre for consultation on international security issues — even issues on which the Alliance might never take action. NATO can be the place where views, concerns and best practices on security are shared by NATO's global partners.²

For good measure, Rasmussen ostensibly extended an offer for greater cooperation with NATO to both India and China (though, one suspects, in the same spirit that, two generations ago, Washington ostensibly offered the Marshall Plan to both Western Europe and the Eastern bloc). Shortly after Rasmussen's statement, Michael Ruehle, the Deputy Head of NATO Policy Planning, made the case for the establishment of a NATO-India Council in these terms:

NATO's leadership of the UN-mandated International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) has not only brought the Alliance to China's borders, it has also created much greater interdependence between NATO and India (...). The case for closer cooperation between India and NATO does not rest solely on Afghanistan. Because there is a growing need for nations and organisations to cooperate more closely in many other areas, too. Much of the consultation will take place in the United Nations. But challenges such as energy security, nuclear proliferation, failing states and piracy all compel nations to look for additional frameworks which allow them not only to talk together, but also to work together, including militarily. NATO is one such framework – and the only one with six decades of experience in multinational military planning and cooperation. For the Alliance, sharing this unique experience more widely is both natural and inevitable. And in this respect,

¹ Ivo Daalder and James Goldgeier, "Global NATO," *Foreign Affairs*, 85, 5, September-October 2006, www.brookings.edu/views/articles/daalder/2006sept_oct.pdf, and Ivo Daalder and James Lindsay, "Democracies of the World, Unite," *The American Interest*, January-February 2007, www.the-american-interest.com/article.cfm?piece=220. On Global NATO, see also Tony Corn, "The Revolution in Transatlantic Affairs: Perils and Promises of a Global NATO," *web special, Policy Review*, August 2007, www.hoover.org/publications/policy-review/article/6032.

² Anders Fogh Rasmussen, Munich Security Conference, February 7, 2010, www.securityconference.de/Rasmussen-Anders-Fogh.576.0.html?&L=1).

NATO's recent cooperation with the Indian navy in counter-piracy operations off the coast of Somalia will likely be followed by closer cooperation in other areas as well.³

In the lead to the November 2010 NATO Lisbon Summit, Secretary-General Rasmussen, in interviews with the India media, pointed out that 2014 was not so much a "deadline" as just a "goal" and that the timeline is something that NATO "would like to discuss with India."⁴ By the time of the November Lisbon summit, the once-reluctant European allies had agreed to sign on to a NATO-Afghanistan partnership extending "well beyond 2014" and which could include non-NATO members.

What kind of long-term commitment are we talking about? It's too early to tell, as diplomats like to say. But what needs to be understood is that, in the next three years, the diplomatic dynamics will play a more important role in the evolution of the Afghan question than at any time since 2001.

NATO-India and the Big Picture

As some non-Western observers have not failed to notice, the NATO-India relation has evolved in parallel to the U.S.-India relation. Writing in the aftermath of the quasi-simultaneous visits of President Obama, Secretary Clinton, Secretary Gates, and JCS Chairman Mullen, to the Asia-Pacific region in the fall of 2010, Russian analyst Vladimir Radyuhin put the NATO-India rapprochement in the broadest possible perspective:

During Clinton's visit to New Zealand, the U.S. effectively revived the Cold War-era Pacific Security Pact, ANZUS (Australia-New Zealand-U.S.), which lapsed into a coma after New Zealand, in 1984, banned U.S. nuclear powered warships from entering its harbours. The Wellington Declaration on a New Strategic Partnership between New Zealand and the U.S., which Clinton signed, paves the way for the full restoration of the tripartite defence pact. Four days later, Gates, in Melbourne, announced the establishment of a new bilateral working group that, according to the Pentagon's American Forces Press Service, will be tasked with facilitating "greater U.S. naval presence and port visits in the region."⁵

Commenting on the Lisbon Summit in general and the NATO-Afghanistan agreement in particular, former Indian Ambassador Bhadrakumar, an influential opinion-shaper with extensive experience in the Greater Middle East, offers an insightful Indian perspective:

The NATO summit in Lisbon at the end of November (...) came as an eye-opener for South Asians. Voices in the transatlantic space that questioned the continued the *raison d'etre* of the alliance have fallen completely silent.(...) As the biggest South Asian power, India seems to have been quietly preparing for this moment, backtracking gradually from its traditional stance of seeking a "neutral" Afghanistan free of foreign military presence. (...)

³ Michael Ruehle, "India and NATO," April 13, 2010, www.worldsecuritynetwork.com/showArticle3.cfm?article_id=18260

⁴ Pallavi Aiyar, "NATO asks for dialogue with India," Business Standard, November 24, 2010, www.business-standard.com/india/news/nato-asks-for-dialogueindia/415969/.

⁵ Vladimir Radyuhin, "India: Linchpin in U.S. Plans for Asia-Pacific NATO," Global Research, *The Hindu*, November 30, 2010, www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=22173.

Several considerations will influence the Indian approach in the coming period. One, India is a direct beneficiary of the U.S.'s "Greater Central Asia" strategy, which aims at drawing that region closer to South Asia by creating new linkages, especially economic. Second, India has no strong views regarding NATO's partnership programs in Central Asia - unlike Russia or China, which harbor disquiet over it. At a minimum, there is no conflict of interest between India and NATO on this score.(...)

Contacts with NATO at the level of the Indian military establishment have been unobtrusive but have also become a regular affair. NATO delegations have been regularly interacting with Indian think tanks and the defense and foreign policy establishment in Delhi. Unsurprisingly, much of this interaction remains sequestered from public view even as the Indian establishment continues to mouth for public consumption its traditional aversion toward military alliances and blocs.(...)

In the year ahead, the thing to watch will be any paradigm shift in the direction of a cooperative NATO outreach toward the Moscow-led Collective Security Treaty Organization [CSTO]. Russia has been assiduously cultivating a strand of thinking within the Alliance that joint security undertakings with CSTO could foster and even render optimal NATO's effectiveness on a trans-regional basis.⁶

The last point deserves particular attention. Given, on the one hand, the longstanding relations between Russia and India and, on the other hand, NATO's recent "reset" with Russia, the possible emergence of a NATO-India Council could indeed significantly affect, in turn, the evolution of the relations between NATO and the CSTO. In fact, if managed creatively by all parties, it could even mark the beginning of the end of the SCO.

U.S. - Pakistan: From Cooperative to Coercive Diplomacy?

One thing is sure: Once you keep in mind China's greater assertiveness in the region, India's emerging interest in NATO, Pakistan's continued mischief, and Afghanistan's never-ending quagmire, you begin to appreciate the at first-disconcerting plan for a de facto partition of Afghanistan put forward in July 2010 by former Deputy National Security Adviser (and former Ambassador to India) Robert Blackwill.⁷

While a more elaborate version of his plan appeared in January 2011 under the heading "A Plan B for Afghanistan,"⁸ Blackwill's plan appears to be not so much a Plan B as, so to speak, a Plan C, i.e. a strong signal aimed at concentrating the mind of Pakistani elites. Far from

⁶ MK Bhadrakumar, "NATO Weaves South Asian Web," *Asia Times online*, December 23, 2010, www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/LL23Df05.html

⁷ Robert Blackwill, "A de facto partition for Afghanistan," *Politico*, July 7, 2010, www.politico.com/news/stories/0710/39432.html. See also Council on Foreign Relations chairman Richard Haas, "Rethinking Afghanistan: We're not winning. It's not worth it. Here is how to draw down in Afghanistan," *Newsweek*, July 18, 2010, www.newsweek.com/2010/07/18/we-re-not-winning-it-s-not-worth-it.html, and Brian M. Downing, "Plan B for Afghanistan," *Asia Times online*, July 19, 2010, www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/LG29Df01.html).

⁸ Robert Blackwill, "A Plan B for Afghanistan," *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2011, www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/67026/robert-d-blackwill/plan-b-in-afghanistan

showing a “lack of understanding of war,” as one U.S. retired flag officer recently claimed, the Blackwill Plan can only be perceived by seasoned diplomats in the region as a fine example of “coercive diplomacy” in action.⁹

The best way to understand the difference between “coercive diplomacy” (vis-à-vis Pakistan) and “cooperative diplomacy” (vis-a-vis India) is to put Blackwill’s Plan B in parallel with the speech on “The Obama Administration’s Priorities for South and Central Asia” delivered the same month by Assistant Secretary of State Robert Blake, in which the latter declares:

For many Americans this part of the world is primarily defined by the challenges we face in Afghanistan and Pakistan, but it is also marked by great promise and opportunity. Central Asia lies at a critical strategic crossroads, bordering Afghanistan, China, Russia and Iran, which is why the United States wants to continue to expand our engagement and our cooperation with this critical region. And South Asia, with India as its thriving anchor, is a region of growing strategic and commercial importance to the United States in the critical Indian Ocean area.(...) Given this dynamic regional context, we have three primary objectives in the South and Central Asia region: Support international efforts in Afghanistan; Build a strategic partnership with India; and Develop more durable and stable relations with the Central Asian countries.¹⁰

While China’s assertiveness has led to a significant rapprochement between India and NATO, a more recent development has singularly complicated the dynamics and accelerated a general re-alignment: namely, the spectacular rapprochement between China and Turkey in the Fall of 2010. Just as India appeared to be getting on board the NATO ship, Turkey, for its part, seemed on the verge of jumping ship.

Turkey: from NATO to the SCO?

Since strategic intelligence has all but disappeared in the Beltway in the past twenty years, Washington’s surprise at the emergence of a Turkey-China axis is not surprising in itself. How bad is strategic intelligence these days, you ask? So bad that even a seasoned intelligence professional like Defense Secretary Robert Gates (the former head of the CIA) appears to have bought into the fanciful, anti-EU “victimization narrative” peddled by a formidable army of Turkish lobbyists in Washington.¹¹ It is no exaggeration to say that, until the summer of 2010, official Washington was in fact fully ten years behind the Turkish curve.

⁹ See for instance former Indian Ambassador Bhadrakumar, “An Afghan Bone for Obama to Chew on,” *Asia Times online*, September 18, 2010, www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/LI18Df02.html. For obvious reasons, NATO was quick to dissociate itself from the Blackwill Plan.

¹⁰ Assistant Secretary Robert Blake, “The Obama Administration’s Priorities for South and Central Asia,” January 19, 2011 www.america.gov/st/texttrans-english/2011/January/20110120174241su0.76255.html#.

¹¹ “I personally think that if there is anything to the notion that Turkey is, if you will, moving eastward, it is, in my view, in no small part because it was pushed, and pushed by some in Europe refusing to give Turkey the kind of organic link to the West that Turkey sought.” Quoted in “U.S. Defense Secretary Gates blames EU for Turkey Drift”, BBC News, June 9, 2010, www.bbc.co.uk/news/10275379. On the decline of strategic intelligence in the post-Cold War era, see John Heidenrich, “The State of Strategic Intelligence: the Intelligence Community’s Neglect of Strategic Intelligence,” *Studies in Intelligence*, Central Intelligence Agency, 51,2,2007, <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/vol51no2/the-state-of-strategic-intelligence.html>.

This is not the place for a comprehensive deconstruction of the Turkish narrative. Suffice it to say that U.S. policy-makers would be well advised to get the historical record straight and assume, from now on, that Turkey's geopolitical reorientation to the East will continue to unfold irrespective of what the EU does or does not do. To recap the evolution of the past decade in a few paragraphs:

In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries began to withdraw their money from the U.S. and to reinvest it not only in the Turkish economy, but in Turkish politics as well. Hence the spectacular victory a year later of the Islamist AK Party.¹²

In 2003, Turkey refused to allow U.S. troops to transit on their way to Iraq¹³, but this anti-U.S. position was quickly forgotten in view of the loud, pro-EU rhetoric on the part of the AK Party. The reason? As longtime observer Amir Taheri pointed out in a blunt deconstruction of the AKP strategy in 2007:

For the past three years, AKP has been engaged in a creeping coup d'etat, designed to destroy the Kemalist republic, which it hates, and replace it with an Islamist creature dressed in EU colors. In other words, a wolf disguised as a sheep... Most Turks, including AKP leaders, know that Turkey's prospects for EU membership are iffy at best. At least five EU members, including France and Germany, oppose Turkish membership under any conditions. In the best-case scenario, Turkey wouldn't be able to join the EU for at least another 15 years.

Thus, it costs AKP nothing in political terms to champion EU membership. At the same time, EU rules and culture could be used to end state control of the mosques, diminish the army's influence in politics and lift restrictions on religious propaganda and ceremonies in the name of a Western-style respect for freedom of conscience. AKP has also played the European card in an effort to reduce the secularists' influence on the judiciary [and] privatized scores of government-owned businesses - providing businessmen close to AKP with new sources of wealth, economic influence and, ultimately, political power. .. AKP wants to wrest control of mosques, religious shrines and endowment businesses from the state, and transfer these assets to private foundations controlled by Islamists. If such a scheme succeeds, AKP would secure a permanent base from which to challenge the state when other parties are in power."¹⁴

Because of this ubiquitous pro-EU rhetoric, Washington utterly failed to notice the most important event of the decade: the January 2005 election of the once-secular Turkey to the head of the 57-member Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), an organization created by fundamentalist Saudi Arabia in 1969.

¹² Michael Rubin's eye-opening "Green Money, Islamist Politics in Turkey," *Middle East Quarterly*, XII, 1, Winter 2005, www.meforum.org/684/green-money-islamist-politics-in-turkey

¹³ For interesting details on this tenebrous affair, see Zeyno Baran, "Turkish Bravado versus American Bullying: A Clash of Civilizations?," *In the National Interest*, March 12, 2003, and "Turkey's Difficult Balancing Act," *In the National Interest*, January 29, 2003.

¹⁴ Amir Taheri, "Turkey's Creeping Coup d'Etat," *New York Post*, May 3, 2007, www.nypost.com/p/news/opinion/opedcolumnists/item_cuJ9LBh6pY4fg4UkxalEiM

In the past five years, official rhetoric about being a civilizational “bridge” notwithstanding, Ankara has sought, with the proverbial zeal of late converts, to burnish its credentials in the eyes of the OIC at the expense of the West. Once the spokesman of the secular West in the Muslim world, Turkey is now the advocate of the Islamic world in Western organizations.

Today, the Erdogan government has all but abandoned the idea of implementing the reforms required of *all* applicants for EU membership, and has chosen instead to launch a propaganda campaign against an alleged “discrimination” of Turkey by the EU. Meanwhile, while Turkey’s appalling Middle East Policy has attracted much attention from the Western media lately, its low-key Central Asia policy may prove to be more decisive in the long-term. Turkey’s grand strategy, aptly described by some observers as “Econo-Islamism,”¹⁵ is best defined as consisting of three concentric circles symbolically associated with three non-Western organizations: ECO, OIC, SCO.

- **Turkey-ECO:** The first circle is represented by Turkey’s desire to become a regional economic leader by revitalizing the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), an organization initially created in 1985 by Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan, and which has since expanded to include all the “Stans” plus Azerbaijan (Iraq is reportedly scheduled to join in 2011). By the same token, Turkey seeks to become the main transit hub between the European Union and Central Asian energy superpowers.

Washington has yet to realize that, for Ankara, complying with the requirements for EU membership has now taken a backseat to the more important goal of reviving the ECO – and rightly so, one might add, if only because the under-development of the region is largely due to the lack of economic integration. As the 17th largest economy in the world, Turkey can indeed play the role of the much-needed regional locomotive. It therefore made all the sense in the world for ECO members, during their December 2010 summit, to elect Turkish President Abdullah Gul president of the ECO.¹⁶ Get used to it, then: Turkey’s future is clearly with the ECO, the EU is only Turkey’s past.

From the Treaty of Rome (1957) to the Treaty of Maastricht (1991), European integration was essentially an *economic* affair, and Turkey’s application for membership in 1987 in what was then just a customs union made all the sense in the world.¹⁷ Then came the unexpected reunification of Germany. From the Maastricht Treaty to the Lisbon Treaty (2007) and beyond, European integration, for better and for worse, became essentially a *political* affair, complete with executive, legislative and judiciary institutions.

¹⁵ On Econo-Islamism, see Soner Cagaptay, “As Turkey Pulls Away,” *RealClearWorld*, December 6, 2009, www.realclearworld.com/articles/2009/12/06/as_turkey_pulls_away_97412.html, and “Turkey’s Clash of Civilizations,” *Wall Street Journal*, June 8, 2010, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703303904575292534241628418.html>

¹⁶ “Turkey displays its soft power through key international posts,” *Today’s Zaman*, December 28, 2010, www.todayszaman.com/news-230837-turkey-displays-its-soft-power-through-key-intl-posts.html. Turkey is also a the founder member of the more global “D-8”, an economic Muslim club launched by Turkish Prime-Minister Erbakan in Istanbul in 1997, which includes Pakistan, Iran, Egypt, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nigeria and Bangladesh. On the D-8, see Berdal Aral, “An Inquiry into the D-8 Experiment: An Incipient Model of an Islamic Common Market,” *Alternatives – Turkish Journal of International Relations*, vol4. n1&2 spring-summer 2005, www.alternativesjournal.net/volume4/number1/baral2.pdf

¹⁷ Washington policy-makers are apparently unaware that, since December 1995, there is indeed a European Union-Turkey Customs Union, and that the 1963 EU promise to Turkey has therefore been fulfilled.

Unlike Washington elites, Turkish elites have all along been fully aware of the radical change in the nature of EU integration. That is why, as early as 1992, Turkey implemented Plan B, i.e. an enlargement of the ECO from three to ten countries, representing a potential market the same size as the European Union today (400 million people). Since his re-election in 2007, PM Erdogan has abandoned any genuine commitment to the reforms required for EU membership, while multiplying inflammatory statements during his visits to European capitals. On the Turkish side, the most sensible pronouncement to date has come from Turkish President Gul's advocacy of a "Norwegian solution" (i.e. adopting EU standards but opting not to join). On the EU side, Germany and France for their part, have come up with an equally sensible alternative: namely, an EU-Turkey "privileged partnership," still to be defined, but presumably similar to the partnership that already exists, to everyone's satisfaction, between the EU and Russia.¹⁸

Just as well: given demographic trends, Turkey, by the time of a hypothetical integration in the EU, would be so over-represented in all branches that, politically, Europe would become de facto a Greater Turkey. Not to make too fine a point, then: the idea of Turkey's membership in the European Union is today for Europeans as absurd as would be, for Americans, the idea of having Mexico become the 51st state of the Union.

Only more so. For unlike Mexico, Turkey is not exactly "Western": 63 percent of the population think it is perfectly acceptable for a man to have more than one wife, 60 percent say they would refuse to let their daughters marry non-Muslims, 46 per cent favor religious over secular schools, and 76 and 74 percent respectively hold unfavorable views of Jews and Christians. So much for Turkey's alleged eagerness to *integrate*. In the end, it would appear that the main reason for EU membership is that, thanks to the EU nanny state, Turkey would stand to get up to 28 billion euros (34 billion dollars) *per year* as part of the structural fund programs¹⁹.

Now, then: can we dispense with the EU-Turkey kabuki play and get back to real-life issues?

- **Turkey-OIC:** The second circle of Turkey's grand strategy is represented by the 57-members of the OIC galaxy. Turkey's rapprochement with the OIC began in 1993 over the question (interestingly enough) of sending an OIC army of peace-keepers in the Balkans. A decade later, for the first time ever, a Turkish national, Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, was elected as Secretary-General of the OIC. In exchange for peddling the OIC agenda, Ankara has received the OIC's support on issues like Cyprus, thus aggravating further the tension between Turkey and Europe. For the foreseeable future, Turkey will continue to be more interested in burnishing its image in the Muslim world at large (from the Balkans to Pakistan) than in playing the role of "honest broker" between the West and Islam.²⁰

¹⁸ On the Norwegian solution, see Robert Ellis, "Turkey's EU accession: the Norwegian solution," *The Guardian*, October 5, 2010. For a concrete example of 'privileged partnership', see for instance the 2004 proposal by Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg, "Preserving Europe: Offer Turkey a 'Privileged Partnership' instead," *New York Times*, December 15, 2004, www.nytimes.com/2004/12/15/opinion/15iht-edgutten_ed3.html?_r=1. Guttenberg is today Germany's defense minister.

¹⁹ Matthew Campbell, "One Wife or Two? A New Turkish Divide," *The Sunday Times*, October 03, 2004; Sebnem Arsu, "Knocking on Europe's Door, Turkey Shows Growing Conservatism," *New York Times*, July 28, 2006; The Pew Global Project Attitudes, *Unfavorable Views of Jews and Muslims on the Increase in Europe*, September 17, 2008; Honor Mahony, "Turkish EU membership to cost up to 28 billion per year," *Euobserver*, October 1, 2004, <http://euobserver.com/?sid=9&aid=17422>

²⁰ On the relations between the ECO and the OIC, see Ishtiaq Ahmad, "The Organization of the Islamic Conference: From Ceremonial Politics toward Politicization?," in Cilja Hardez, ed. *Beyond Regionalism? Regional Cooperation, Regionalism, and Regionalization in the Middle East*, Ashgate, 2008, www.ishtiaqahmad.com/downloads/Beyond_Regionalism.pdf. The core of the global agenda of the OIC seems to boil down to this: politically, the silencing of criticism of Islam in general, and of sharia law in particular, through "lawfare"; economically, the promotion of financial Jihad in the form of sharia finance. See

In fairness, not all Turkish initiatives undertaken in that spirit should be seen by the West in terms of zero-sum game. When it comes to the global “battle for ideas,” for instance, Ankara’s export of Turkish Islam remains the most effective way of countering the spread of fundamentalist Wahhabi Islam and Khomeinist Islam. In Afghanistan and Pakistan in particular, the opening of dozens of Turkish schools is unanimously recognized by Western experts as a positive development.²¹

Still, Turkey’s obsession with courting the Muslim world does have some negative effects that the West ignores at its own peril. Case in point: Afghanistan itself. As a country of 74 million people possessing the Alliance’s second largest land army, Turkey, the only Muslim member of NATO, was ideally positioned to take the lead in Afghanistan. Instead, Turkey’s troop contribution has remained ridiculously low, oscillating between the equivalent of the contribution of Denmark (6 million people) and of Romania (22 million people).

But while it has managed to keep its military commitment to a minimum, Ankara is increasingly intent on maximizing its political role. In early 2007, Turkey created a Turkey-Afghanistan-Pakistan trilateral group, ostensibly to mediate between the Afghan government and the Taliban, but mostly to marginalize (at Pakistan’s urging) the role of India in the political future of Afghanistan. As Indian analyst Saurav Jah recently pointed out:

Turkey was one of Pakistan's most-consistent allies throughout the Cold War, both ideologically and militarily. Military-to-military contacts remain as strong as ever, with the two countries now seriously exploring the coproduction of weapons ranging from armored vehicles to new-generation corvettes. Importantly, both sides also wish to boost defense exports to Islamic countries as an alternative to "expensive" Western weapons.(...)

Pakistan is also attractively positioned as a facilitator for greater Sino-Turkish cooperation. Turkey's rising profile in Afghanistan comes at a time when China is beginning to seriously enter Afghanistan's resource-mining sector. China is also likely to seek Turkish help in dealing with the insurgency in Xinjiang on the basis of ethnic ties between Turks and Uighurs.(...)

China has added Turkey to the list of regional countries with which it is engaged in strategic missile cooperation -- the other chief recipients being Pakistan and Iran. In a move that shows that Turkey may be adopting an unconventional deterrence posture, the Turkish army obtained the technology for the short-range J-600T Yildirim ballistic missile from China. Moreover, the Chinese air force was a surprise participant in last year's annual Anatolian Eagle air exercise, in lieu of the Israelis or the Americans. This could well be a prelude to closer aerospace cooperation among

respectively Elizabeth Samson, “Warfare through misuse of international law,” *Viewpoints*, Winter 2009, (www.hudson.org/files/publications/WarfarethroughMisuseofIntlLaw09.pdf), and Rachel Ehrenfeld, “The Fifth Generation Warfare,” *Front Page Magazine*, June 20, 2008, (<http://archive.frontpagemag.com/readArticle.aspx?ARTID=31374>).

²¹ Sabrina Tavernise, “Turkish Schools Offer Pakistan a Gentler vision of Islam,” *New York Times*, May 4, 2008, www.nytimes.com/2008/05/04/world/asia/04islam.html?_r=1&pagewanted=print.

China, Turkey and Pakistan, especially given China's development of various fourth- and fifth-generation fighter aircraft.²²

Today, it would be no exaggeration to describe the Turkey-Pakistan relation in the same way as the Pakistani Foreign Minister describes the China-Pakistan relation: “It is higher than the mountains, deeper than the oceans, sweeter than honey, stronger than steel, all-weather and time-tested.”²³ Just as well since, for Ankara today, the road to Beijing runs through Islamabad and vice-versa.

- **Turkey-SCO:** The third circle of Turkey’s grand strategy goes beyond the ECO and the OIC, and reaches out all the way to the SCO (i.e. for all practical purposes, China and Russia, who both have a significant Muslim street).

Back in 2001 (the very year that saw the transformation of the Shanghai Five into the SCO), an obscure academic named Ahmed Davutoglu published a best selling geopolitical manifesto called *Strategic Depth*. A year later, Davutoglu became the grey eminence of the AK Party, and while his book has since gone through 41 printings and has been translated into Arabic, it has yet to be translated by the U.S. intelligence community. But if we are to believe former chairman of the National Intelligence Council Graham Fuller, “in Davutoglu’s view, it entirely behooves Turkey today to seek membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which, under Russian and Chinese direction, seeks to guide the security and development of the Central Asian region.”²⁴ It is no coincidence if, under Turkish leadership, the OIC has built closer ties with the SCO.²⁵

Fast forward a decade later. In January 2009, Turkey, for the first time since 1961, was elected as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for a two-year term, and one can only assume that this enhanced (if temporary) status turned a few diplomatic heads in Ankara. In an attempt to re-position itself as a “Global Turkey,” Ankara began to consider a strategic partnership with China. In April 2009, President Obama had gone out of his way to signal the importance of Turkey to America; by September 2010, though, it had become clear that the flavor of the year in Turkey was not America, but China.

Turkey-China: A Bridge Too Far?

In truth, though largely unreported by the Western media, the military and economic developments of September-October 2010 represent a watershed event in Turkish history.

²² Saurav Jah, “Turkey-Pakistan Ties: India’s Loss is China’s Gain,” *World Politics Review*, January 14, 2011, www.defence.pk/forums/world-affairs/89021-turkey-pakistan-ties-indias-loss-chinas-gain.html.

²³ Makhdoom Shah Mahmood Qureshi, Address to the Shanghai Institute for International Studies, 24 February 2010, www.mofa.gov.pk/fm_speeches/24_2_10.htm.

²⁴ Graham E. Fuller, *The New Turkish Republic: Turkey as a Pivotal State in the Muslim World*, Washington: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2008, p.169.

²⁵ On the relations between the OIC and the two leading countries of the SCO, see for instance MK Bhadrakumar, “Russia challenges US in the Islamic world,” *Asia Times online*, March 29, 2008, www.atimes.com/atimes/Central_Asia/JC29Ag01.html, and Abdul Ghafour, “OIC to expand cooperation with China,” *Arab News*, June 23, 2010, <http://arabnews.com/saudiArabia/article71443.ece>

Ever since its inauguration in 2001, Turkey's annual "Anatolian Eagle" military exercise was meant to enhance cooperation between the air forces of NATO. During the September 2010 edition, though, the guest of honor was China.

As one Western analyst pointed out, what makes China's participation in Anatolian Eagle 2010 all the more interesting is that, first, "it occurred on the heels of its participation in "Peace Mission 2010." A 16-day drill aimed at combating what Beijing refers to as the "three evil forces" of terrorism, separatism and extremism in the region, "Peace Mission 2010" included forces from Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan held under the auspices of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)."²⁶ Second, the "Anatolian Eagle" exercise was immediately followed by a three-day visit of Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao to Turkey, during which the two countries launched a strategic partnership, pledged to increase bilateral trade from the current \$17 billion to \$ 100 billion by 2020 and, in a highly symbolic gesture, decided to switch from dollars to their own currencies for their bilateral trade.

The Turkey-China Axis is not a passing fancy. Already, the Turkish Government has declared 2011 "the year of China," while the Chinese Government has reciprocated by declaring 2012 "the Year of Turkey." At the level of public opinion as well, the same reorientation away from NATO and the EU and toward ECO, OIC and SCO has been visible for the past two years. As the Transatlantic Trends 2010 survey showed, only one Turk in three today values NATO as something important for Turkish security.

As Western military planners are already aware, Turkey has become an uncertain ally. As even the most indulgent civilian observers have to concede: "American use of Turkish bases, particularly Incirlik air base, is likely to remain a sensitive issue. Turkey has allowed the United States to use Incirlik to transport men and materiel to Iraq and Afghanistan. Given its expanded interests in the Middle East, however, Turkey is likely to be cautious about allowing the United States to use its bases to conduct combat operations in the region unless these are clearly perceived by Turkish leaders to be in Turkey's national interest. As a result, the United States cannot automatically assume it will have access to Turkish facilities in future Middle East contingencies."²⁷

Though Turkey's attendance at the 2009 SCO summit in Russia raised a few eyebrows in the West, Turkey is not about to switch allegiance from NATO to the SCO anytime soon, if only because Ankara is fully aware that membership in the latter would give Turkey much less clout than in the former (unlike the U.S. and the EU, China and Russia would have little patience with Turkey's inflated sense of its own importance). For now, only the Turkish Foreign Ministry seems to have realized that the West is beginning to have serious doubts about Turkey.²⁸ That said, if the 2009 elections are any indication, the appeal of the AK Party seems to be on the wane. And the two-year stint at the UNSC is now over. It cannot be ruled out that cooler heads might prevail by the time of the June 2011 general elections.

²⁶ Chris Zambelis, "Turkey sacrifices Uighurs for trade," *Asia Times online*, January 19, 2011, www.atimes.com/atimes/China/MA19Ad02.html.

²⁷ Stephen F. Larrabee, "Turkey's New Geopolitics," *Survival*, 52, 2, April-May 2010.

²⁸ In a recent article, the MFA official responsible for relations with Washington was quoted as saying: "We're getting a lot of flak from the Hill. We used to get hit by the Greek lobby and the Armenian lobby, but we were protected by the Jewish lobby. Now the Jewish lobby is coming after us as well." James Traub, "Turkey's Rules," *New York Times*, January 20, 2011. See also Maximilian Pop, "America's Dark View of Turkish Premier Erdogan," *Spiegel online* (English edition), November 11, 2010.

Be that as it may, Western foreign policy-makers would do well to keep in mind that 1) for the foreseeable future, Turkey's overall priority in the region will not be "Global NATO" so much as "Global Turkey;" 2) Turkey's Afghan agenda in particular is closer to that of China and Pakistan than to the agenda of America and India. Turkey's offer last December to open a Taliban office in Ankara (an initiative quickly welcomed by Karzai) was nothing but a not-too-subtle attempt to hijack the political process. If you like Turkish "mediation" with Iran, chances are you will love Turkish "mediation" with the Taliban.

Blaming Europe, Israel, and America for Turkey's re-orientation toward the ECO, OIC, and SCO is an exercise in futility. At the end of the day, it's not about "us," it's about "them." The fundamental truth is that, during the fifty years of the Cold War, Turkey was nothing more than an "accidental ally" of the West. With the Soviet threat gone, Turkey is recovering a more genuine identity - that of the heir to an Ottoman empire that lasted for five centuries. What Lucien Pye famously said of China applies (if on a much smaller scale) to Turkey as well: it is "a civilization masquerading as a nation."

Reduced to its most basic expression, then, the real problem with Turkey is not its turn to the East as such but the fact that, under the leadership of PM Erdogan, this turn does not take the form of a moderate "Neo-Ottomanism," but a more radical "Econo-Islamism." Contrary to what his supporters claim, Erdogan is not a Turkish De Gaulle - he is an Islamist Nasser.²⁹ In both style and substance, De Gaulle had a sense of proportion; Nasser did not. Like Nasser, Erdogan is bound to over-reach and self-destruct. But while Erdogan comes across as increasingly addicted to rhetorical self-intoxication, President Gul is more of a statesman. Since he appears to be the OIC candidate for the post of UN Secretary-General in 2016³⁰, he is also unlikely to rock too many boats in the near future. In that respect, Gul could conceivably preside over the advent of a "Gaullism with Turkish characteristics." So - *Gullism* anyone?

Karzai at the Crossroads

The overall Chinese challenge is not going to disappear anytime soon. In the case of Afghanistan in particular, it might in fact become more acute: in a much-discussed article in December 2010, *Aviation Week* reported that "Chinese advisers are believed to be working with Afghan Taliban groups who are now in combat with NATO forces, prompting concerns that

²⁹ Erdogan's image as a new Nasser is already well-established in the Arab world. As of this writing (February 1), Erdogan is trying to boost this image further by encouraging both Washington and the Egyptian street to dump President Mubarak and hold "democratic" elections. Interestingly, 82 percent of Egyptians support stoning for adultery, 77 percent support cutting off hands for theft, and 84 percent support death penalty for people who leave Muslim religion - while only 16, 13, and 5 percent of Turks share these "values." (Pew Global Attitudes Project, *Most Embrace a Role for Islam in Politics*, December 2, 2010, <http://pewglobal.org/2010/12/02/muslims-around-the-world-divided-on-hamas-and-hezbollah/>). From the standpoint of realpolitik, though, Erdogan has a lot to gain by doing so. Should Mubarak - America's best ally in the region - leave the scene and the Muslim Brotherhood take over, Turkey would then become the "indispensable nation" for America, and Ankara's leverage on Washington would be spectacularly increased. As it happens, six weeks ago, Erdogan authored a manifesto calling for Turkey to become "the new indispensable nation." Recep Erdogan, "Turkey: The New Indispensable Nation," *Hurriyet Daily News*, December 20, 2010, www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=turkey-the-new-indispensable-nation-2010-12-15

³⁰ Mehmet Kalyoncu, "Turkey's Abdullah Gul should run for the UN Secretary-General," *Foreign Policy*, October 20, 2010, http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/10/20/turkeys_abdullah_gul_should_run_for_the_un_secretary_general?hidecomments=yes. The author is an advisor to the OIC Ambassador to the UN.

China might become the conduit for shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles, improved communications and additional small arms to the fundamentalist Muslim fighters.”³¹

While NATO has welcomed a greater (civilian) role in Afghanistan for Russia and China *as individual countries*, and while the four Muslim members of the SCO are also members of NATO’s Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, NATO has nothing to gain by giving legitimacy to the SCO *as such*³². At any rate, NATO should make sure that it does not find itself in a position in which all the costs of the Afghan venture fall on NATO, while all the benefits flow to the SCO.

The man to watch is obviously Afghan President Karzai, whose second (and non-renewable) term expires in 2014. Since the 2009 election campaign, Karzai has taken for granted that the U.S. is unlikely to support a constitutional change that would allow him to run for a third time. Unsurprisingly, Karzai has therefore embarked on high-visibility trips to China (March 2010) and Russia (January 2011), during which both Beijing and Moscow re-affirmed the need for a greater SCO role beyond the existing SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group (created in 2005). It is safe to assume that, in the next three years, Karzai will be tempted to make himself indispensable in the eyes of the SCO, in order to mitigate the fact that, once the SOFA is signed, he risks becoming expendable in the eyes of NATO.

The surprise visit of Vice President Biden to Kabul and Islamabad in January 2011 was interpreted in the region as an attempt to re-claim a political initiative that was on the verge of being hijacked by both Karzai, Turkey and Pakistan. But one can easily read too much in the Biden visit:

Obama's choice of Biden makes careful study. Put simply, Biden has been arguing that the Taliban do not pose any real threat to the US national security interests as such and a deal with them makes it possible to bring the war to an end. Petraeus, on the other hand, hopes to intensify the military operations to degrade the Taliban to a point that they will crawl on their knees and sue for peace on U.S.' terms. Petraeus is in it for the long haul whereas Biden is in a great hurry. There is widespread skepticism within the US security establishment over Petraeus's claim that his strategy is beginning to work. By nominating Biden to lead the mission to Islamabad, Obama seems to indicate he keeps an open mind.³³

For once, Ambassador Bhadrakumar’s considerable analytical powers seem to have failed him. For one thing, Biden’s visit was more likely intended to gently remind Kabul and Islamabad that there already is a U.S.-Afghanistan-Pakistan trilateral framework, and that there is no need for Turkish “mediation.” For another, Petraeus is way too politically savvy to imagine that the political process could be “frozen” until the insurgents are weakened and brought to the negotiating table. Afghanistan is not an island, nor is ISAF the main political player. For all practical purposes, “freezing” the political process would only amount to surrendering the

31 David A. Fulghum and Robert Wall, “Weapons Migrate from China to Afghanistan,” *Aviation Week*, December 13, 2010, www.aviationweek.com/aw/jsp_includes/articlePrint.jsp?storyID=news/awst/2010/12/13/AW_12_13_2010_p25-275120.xml&headline=Weapons%20Migrate%20From%20China%20to%20Afghanistan

32 Though a possible NATO-CSTO cooperation would be worth examining, it is doubtful Western diplomats could ever take seriously the idea of an Australian mediator between NATO and SCO put forward by Colonel Matt Hall, *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: A Partner for Stabilizing Afghanistan?*, Australian Defence College, September 2009, www.apo.org.au/research/shanghai-cooperation-organisation-partner-stabilising-afghanistan.

33 MK Bhadrakumar, “US Bends to Pakistan’s Wish,” *Asia Times online*, January 11, 2011, www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/MA11Df01.html.

political initiative to other stakeholders (be it outside players or the host-nation government) who have their own timetables and their own agendas.

Be that as it may, many in Washington are already preparing for the post-Karzai era: “The first imperative is to make sure that Mr. Karzai relinquishes power in 2014, when he reaches the constitutional limit of two full presidential terms.(...) Prudence requires that we assume Mr. Karzai will seek to change the constitution or otherwise manipulate the electoral and legal process to stay in office. He could declare martial law and suspend future elections. He could seek a peace deal with insurgents that happen to choose him as the compromise candidate under a future modified constitution. He could even consider a military coup. Any of these options would badly harm Afghanistan.(...) It's time to strongly support the activities of new political movements, be they called parties or something else. We should encourage and fund Afghans as they hold policy conferences, create research institutes, do grass-roots political organizing, and talk policy and politics in print, on television and on the radio.”³⁴

In and of itself, though, supporting “civil society” does not amount to a political *strategy*. Worse still, the call to support new players overlooks the fact that what is needed first of all are new institutions. If thirty years of academic research on democratic transition has proved anything, it is that 1) a parliamentary regime is more conducive to democracy than a presidential regime, and 2) the politics of constitution-making matters as much as the final product itself.³⁵ Like it or not, *the current constitution will have to be changed at some point between now and 2014, or else Afghanistan will continue to go nowhere fast, with or without Karzai.*

If Karzai is smart enough, he will try to have Washington agree to drop its opposition to a third mandate in exchange for his active support for a constitutional devolution toward both greater parliamentarization and decentralization, along the lines of the 1978 Spanish constitution. Surprising as it may seem, then, it is still not too late for Karzai to go down in history as the “Juan Carlos of Afghanistan.”

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³⁴ Michael O'Hanlon, “Preparing for the Post-Karzai future,” *Wall Street Journal*, December 13, 2010.

³⁵ Tony Corn, “Toward a Kilcullen-Biden Plan?: Bounding Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan,” *Small Wars Journal*, October 2009, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/journal/docs-temp/312-corn.pdf>