

# NATO Expands South, Hindered by US-created Chaos

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Discreetly but progressively and confidently, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is expanding south and southeast almost uncontested — after the collapse of the former USSR-led Warsaw Pact — outside the mandate designated by its statute into the Arab Middle East as well as into the Caspian Sea regions.

However, the U.S. obsession with the Iranian threat and with finding an exit strategy from the Iraqi quagmire made Washington less attentive to Turkey's legitimate vital national interests, thus insensitively antagonizing the alliance's southern strong arm and alerting it into the defensive, not against enemies, but against its own allies. Turkey now stands in the eye of a storm created by this same ally, a storm threatening a geopolitical fall out between the two NATO allies since 1952.

NATO has already secured its presence on the middle tier between the two regions, in Turkey (a member), Afghanistan (where it has a 25,000-strong force) and to a lesser extent in Iraq where the western alliance is training the "new Iraqi army."

The contesting French influence had eased when former President Jacques Chirac near the end of his term shifted to coordinating with the United States in Lebanon; the French contest, particularly on the African theatre and especially on NATO's northern Arab tier seems to have been completely neutralized with the electoral victory of the new President Nicolas Sarkozy, who chose to engage Washington as a "friend" and decided to rejoin NATO's military structure.

The absence of any credible indigenous system rules out any worthwhile obstacles to NATO expansion from within the Arab Middle East region. The League of Arab States is practically no more than a fractured, division-burdened high level forum of a regional gathering structure with no teeth at all, threatened by the US-Israeli strategic alliance and the NATO with disintegration into an alternative wider "Greater Middle East" security structure that would embrace Israel as an integral leading partner.

The expansion southward was highlighted on October 9 with the signing of a treaty with Egypt at NATO's headquarters in Brussels, "in a move that opens the door for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to be involved in security matters along Egypt's border with Gaza (Strip)," according to the Jerusalem Post the next day, to possibly secure in particular the Salahuddin Passage (Philadelphi Route) according to Ynet. Egypt has become the second Middle Eastern country to sign a treaty with NATO after a similar treaty with Israel in 2006.

Both treaties with Egypt and Israel were initiated under the Individual Cooperation

Programmes (ICP), which aim at “promoting political and military ties with the Euro-Atlantic and the Mediterranean regions along with security cooperation with NATO and MD partners, in order to enhance Mediterranean regional security and stability,” NATO said in the statement.

The ICP was upgraded from the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI), which was adopted by the NATO summit in Istanbul on 28-29 June 2004 with an eye on the Arab states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to have priority in joining the alliance in partnership arrangements. Both the ICP and ICI were conceived as mechanisms to bypass the NATO statute, which confines its expansion to Europe and the North Atlantic regions.

The Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) was the vehicle the NATO used to approach partnership arrangements in the region. This dialogue was originally initiated by European founders of NATO to promote economic and political cooperation with the southern Arab neighbors; in 2002 the MD was upgraded to security matters of concern and in 2004 NATO elevated its dialogue status to conceived genuine partnerships and an expanded framework of cooperation. The MD branched off the much older European - Arab dialogue, which began in the last quarter of the 20th century as an economic, political and cultural forum that has nothing to do with NATO or military prospects.

The ICP produced the Egyptian and Israeli treaties; the ICI had earlier produced cooperation arrangements with seven MD countries, namely Israel, Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt and Jordan; similar cooperation was arranged with non-MD members of the GCC, namely Kuwait, Qatar, UAE, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia (which became an ICI partner in January). Since July 2005, the NATO has also provided air transport for peacekeeping forces in Sudan 's volatile Darfur region.

Areas of both ICP and ICI cooperation arrangements include joint military war games, military training, defense reform, war on terror, countering Islamist militancy, military and security intelligence sharing, control of borders, demilitarization of the surplus of old and obsolete ammunition stockpiles and Unexploded Ordnance (UXO), serving NATO ships at partners' seaports, hosting NATO-supported regional Security Cooperation Centre/s, providing logistical support to NATO's peacekeeping operations, helping NATO in patrolling the Mediterranean Sea and regional waters, countering the spread of weapons of mass destruction, “to get these states closer to NATO's way of thinking” according to a NATO official, opening NATO defense colleges to partners' military officers, and other mechanisms to enhance practical cooperation on regional stability and security.

Initially adopting a low-key approach, NATO now feels more confident to send its Secretary General, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, and his deputy on unprecedented public visits to Algeria and other ICP and ICI “partners.”

Scheffer may be officially warmly or cordially welcomed, but on the popular level NATO is conceived as a U.S. tool to prolong both American grip on Arab oil and Israeli grab of Arab land. Accordingly its presence in the region is abhorred and is fomenting further deep-seated anti-Americanism because of the U.S. invasion and military occupation of Iraq and the U.S. limitless support to the Israeli occupation in Palestine , Syria and Lebanon .

Specifically, NATO's treaties with Egypt and Israel, its cooperation with Jordan, with Lebanon falling within its mandate and the around the clock NATO patrols in the Mediterranean is in practice creating an external NATO wall that reinforces the internal military occupation walls

Israel is erecting to tighten the siege it imposes on the Palestinian people.

### **Interrupting, Disrupting Kurdish - Turkish Crisis**

However, "Just as the White House claims it has finally turned the corner in what it defines as the 'central front' in the 'war on terror' - Iraq - it has found itself desperately trying to contain new crises on the war's periphery stretching east to Pakistan, west to Turkey and south to the Horn of Africa," Jim Lobe wrote in Asia Times on November 10.

To prove his point, Lobe cited Pakistani President General Pervez Musharraf's latest "coup," the continuing threat of a Turkish invasion of Iraqi Kurdistan, the looming probability of war between U.S.-backed Ethiopia and Eritrea, "amid a lack of concrete progress on the Israel-Palestinian peace process, the ongoing political impasse in Lebanon, and still-mounting tensions between Iran and the U.S." and amid an anti-Americanism that now pervades the entire region.

This is for sure an unwelcoming environment for NATO, but at the same time an environment that the U.S. leading NATO player will use as the *raison d'être* for dragging the North Atlantic Alliance into even more expanded role in the region.

"The situation along the border between Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan most directly threatens the administration's efforts to stabilize Iraq," said Lobe, but this is exactly where the NATO's gradual, confident and successful expansion south could be curtailed, hindered and face problems because the US double-standard policies vis-à-vis what Washington herself list as "terrorist organizations" as well as her regional hegemonic plans pit the alliance against its Turkish founding member or at least create an environment conducive to a collision course between the two allies.

In October, Turkey 's parliament overwhelmingly voted 507 to 19 in favor of ordering the army to launch an offensive across Turkey 's south-eastern border in search of P.K.K. Turkish-Kurd rebels hiding in Iraqi Kurdistan. The Turks made no less than 24 attacks into Iraqi Kurdistan since 1984, but without effect. The P.K.K. guerrillas could easily disappear in the rugged mountain terrain of the Qandil Mountains .

Now the Turks are after their "terrorist-harboring" Iraqi-Kurdish hosts as well, who were securing a safe haven for Kurdish rebels, demanding their extradition, a demand that the U.S.-allied Kurdish Iraqi President, Jalal Talibani, and the President of the Kurdistan Regional Government, Masoud Barzani, had categorically rejected and, motivated by seemingly Pan-Kurdish loyalties, announced their readiness to fight back any Turkish military incursion into their territories.

The prospect of a Turkish - Kurdish war that could embroil the Iraqi Kurds, the only trusted Iraqi ally supporting the U.S. occupation, and destabilize the only stable Iraqi region of Kurdistan to open a new front with a potential new flood of Iraqi refugees, this time Kurds, is a nightmare for the U.S. Washington can ill-afford to lose the support of either the Iraqi Kurds or that of the Turkish government across the border; both play a vital role in supporting the U.S. war effort in Iraq.

"With American troops already stretched thin and U.S. military leaders not trusting most Arab-dominated units of the Iraqi armed forces, the United States has relied extensively on Kurdish forces for counter-insurgency operations throughout Iraq," Stephen Zunes wrote in

the “Foreign Policy in Focus” on October 25.

## **US Double-standards**

Meanwhile Washington has turned her eyes away from the fact that Iraqi Kurdistan has become a safe haven for organizations outlawed by the US as “terrorist” groups. The U.S.-backed Iraqi Kurds were honest to their rhetoric of Pan-Kurdish nationalism and turned their U.S.-protected region into a base for Kurdish rebels from and against neighboring countries. The U.S.-outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (P.K.K.) took on Turkey ; but a U.S.-sponsored Iranian Kurdish group known as PEJAK took on Iran .

Washington also turned a blind eye to the fact that P.K.K. since two years has become the mother organization of four splinter groups each of them working separately but in coordination in Turkey , Iran , Syria and Iraq .

On Oct. 28, the [turkishweekly.net](http://turkishweekly.net) quoted the author of the forthcoming book “The Iran Agenda: the Real Story of U.S. Policy and the Middle East Crisis,” Reese Erlich, as saying that, “Kurdish and American sources say the United States has been supporting guerilla raids against Iran, channeling the money through organizations in Iraqi Kurdistan.” Writing in the latest issue of Mother Jones, Erlich reported that the P.K.K., which is listed on the United States State Department List of Terrorist Organizations, “about two years ago split into four parties in each of the countries where the Kurds live” in Syria, Iraq, Turkey and Iran. “So the P.J.A.K. is the Iranian affiliate. Basically they’re still part of the same organization.” He added that the United States accommodates the presence of the P.K.K. in Iraq , but opposes its actions in Turkey , while on the other hand it supports attacks by P.K.K.’s splinter group on Iran .

Osman Ocalan, brother of the imprisoned P.K.K. leader Abdullah Ocalan, told AP last week that some fighters had moved toward Iran, and that there were now more P.K.K. fighters there than in northern Iraq. “P.K.K. forces are split into three parts situated in Turkey , Iraq and Iran ,” Ocalan said. “If there is Turkish pressure on our forces in Iraq , the fighters will head toward Iran .” How could this free movement on Iraqi soil be possible without accommodation by the US occupying power and their Iraqi Kurdish arms?

Iraqi Kurds’ Pan-Kurdish “solidarity” with their Turkish, Iranian and Syrian compatriots is undercutting U.S. efforts to contain further deterioration in its ties with Turkey . Two weeks ago, Iraq ’s Kurdish President, Jalal Talabani, said that Iraq could not solve Turkey ’s problems. “The handing over of P.K.K. leaders to Turkey is a dream that will never be realized,” he said.

Washington seems caught between Iraq and a hard Turkish place, with whom relations are already thinly stretched by the recent U.S. Congress resolution declaring the mass killing of Armenians by Ottoman Turks 90 years ago a Turkish “genocide.” A recent German Marshall Fund poll found that only 11 percent of Turks have positive views of the United States . One of the main factors in the extraordinary growth of anti-U.S. sentiment among the Turks was the U.S. unwillingness to pressure its ally Barzani to stop the P.K.K. from crossing into Turkey .

President George W. Bush spelled out U.S. opposition to a Turkish invasion of northern Iraq . Turkey ’s Prime Minister Recep Tayyep Erdogan was infuriated to declare that the future of bilateral ties with the U.S. will be determined by Washington ’s active involvement against

the P.K.K., without “double-standards,” in accordance with U.S. law that labels it as a terrorist organization. Erdogan returned disappointed from his November 5 summit with Bush in Washington ; the crisis lingers on as Bush could not assure the Turkish leader enough for Ankara to rule out the military option.

“This crisis was predictable and predicted. U.S. officials have long known that a Turkish incursion was just one terrorist event away. As tensions mounted, the administration had numerous opportunities to engage in preventive diplomacy. A combination of lack of imagination, incompetence and sheer lack of knowledge at the State Department has caused this impasse,” Henri J. Barkey wrote in the Washington Post on October 27.

The New York Times on Oct. 22 reported that “American officials acknowledged that neither the United States nor Iraq had done much recently to constrain” the P.K.K. Current and former Bush administration officials said a special envoy appointed by the Bush administration in 2006, Gen. Joseph W. Ralston, “had recently stepped down in frustration over Iraqi and American inaction.”

Ahead of their summit Bush sent his Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to Ankara and to the meeting of Iraq neighbors in Istanbul with a “diplomatic” proposal to diffuse the crisis based on hitting at the heart of the Pan-Kurdish declared loyalties of the Iraqi Kurds’ leaders, Talbani and Barzani, by splitting the Kurds into a terrorist camp, which Rice declared in Ankara as the “common enemy” of her country, Turkey and Iraq and a non-terrorist camp which both men represent.

During their summit on Nov. 5, Bush promised Erdogan that Turkey would be furnished with U.S. intelligence on the camps and movements of the P.K.K. The Turkish press reported this as a “green light for military strikes.” For the U.S. , the main issue now is that “Turkish military action is limited and strictly controlled,” commented Spiegel on-line. “Where possible,” the publication added, “military action should be coordinated with the (Iraqi) Kurdish regional government so as to avoid clashes between the Turkish army and the northern Iraqi Kurdish militias.”

NATO had earlier expressed its solidarity with Turkey . On October 24, NATO defense ministers meeting in The Netherlands said the 26 allies expressed solidarity with Turkey in the face of the attacks. P.K.K. rebels have killed more than 40 Turks in hit-and-run attacks over the past month. “I think the Turkish government is showing restraint, remarkable restraint under current conditions,” NATO chief Hoop Scheffer told a news conference.

But for how long could Turkey practice restraint before her NATO allies translate their so far verbal solidarity into deeds?

Scot Sullivan, writing in The Conservative Voice on Nov. 9, had a different interpretation of the results of the Bush-Erdogan summit: “The U.S. is appeasing Iran and Iran ’s P.K.K. allies while preparing to confront Turkey . Such is the inescapable conclusion following Erdogan-Bush Summit. A careful assessment of the Erdogan-Bush summit indicates that Bush remains hostile to Turkey and sympathetic to the P.K.K.-Iran Axis that seeks to partition Iraq . Bush made only two modest assistance offers to Turkey . Each offer raised more questions than answers.”

First, Bush’s offer to share intelligence with Turkey implies that the U.S. has been withholding such intelligence from Turkey until now despite U.S. obligations within NATO

and despite bilateral counterterrorism agreements. Second, the establishment of coordinating mechanism between the U.S. and Turkey for conducting joint operations against the P.K.K. is in reality “no more than a hotline, or more accurately a US phone number.”

To add insult to injury, the “ U.S. brush-off of Turkey became evident, according to Sullivan, when “General Petraeus was named as the U.S. point of contact. For the Turkish military, GEN Petraeus is pro-Kurdish. He approved without question the P.K.K. military buildup in northern Iraq . He also approved granting the Kurdish peshmerga the status of an independent military force that is answerable only to Kurdish president Barzani.”

### **Wider Strategic Envelopment of Turkey**

Turkey is a close NATO ally; she contributes troops to NATO’s operation in Afghanistan and provides access to Incirlik air base for heavy U.S. military logistical support and supply to its forces in Iraq , where NATO is training the new Iraqi army. However, more importantly Turkey sits astride the cross roads of the huge oil reserves in the Caspian and Gulf regions.

The Caspian Sea region is gradually emerging as one of the most explosive parts of the world and the US and NATO involvement is linking it inextricably to the already war-torn Middle East region. This NATO-US involvement is alerting the five Caspian states – Azerbaijan , Iran , Kazakhstan , Russia , and Turkmenistan – to be on guard; in the past decade, the number of warships on the Caspian has almost doubled, while coastal infrastructure is also being rapidly reinforced, Vasilina Vasilyeva reported in Moscow News on Nov. 8.

On a wider scale the NATO-U.S. heavy and aggressive involvement in both regions is strategically invoking defensive responses by China and Russia, which geopolitically consider both regions, but the Caspian in particular, their backyards; hence their evolving bilateral strategic coordination as well as their growing closer ties with Iran, the regional major player targeted by the NATO-U.S. involvement.

“The North Atlantic Treaty Organization is considering the possibility of providing security for the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline,” Vasilyeva quoted Robert Simmons, the NATO secretary general’s special representative for the Caucasus and Central Asia , as saying. “The Baku-Ceyhan oil pipeline runs to Turkey , a NATO country, and passes through the territory of Azerbaijan , a NATO partner. The protection of energy infrastructure includes the security of this oil pipeline in addition to other energy infrastructure facilities.” NATO has also finalized a long term program to provide military support for all pipelines along the Caspian-Turkey-Balkans route. Vasilyeva added that terrorism is the biggest threat to the pipeline.

On October 16, Russian President Vladimir Putin told Iranian media in Tehran that “international terrorism cannot be dealt with by expanding a military-political organization that was originally set up to counteract the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union . There is no Soviet Union and no Warsaw Pact today, while NATO not only exists but is expanding.”

Counterproductive US policies is antagonizing Turkey , which is indigenously deeply involved in both regions with vast strategic, economic and political interests, and consequently threatening to disrupt a successful NATO expansion south, invoking cracks within the NATO membership, and creating a pragmatic possibility for potential Turkish strategic shifts.

Under the headline, "Turkey Rediscovered the Middle East," the July/August edition of the magazine Foreign Affairs wrote, "a significant shift in the country's foreign policy has gone largely unnoticed: after decades of passivity, Turkey is now emerging as an important diplomatic actor in the Middle East." Within this context Turkey's pragmatic evolving ties with Iran and Syria, both condemned by Bush as two pillars of a world's "axis of evil," is an indication.

Similar pragmatic evolution of ties and coordination with the two major obstacles to NATO's expansion south and southeast, namely Russia and China, could not be ruled out should the United States, the backbone of the alliance, persist with its political and military insensitivity to the strategic interests of her allies.

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