



Meanwhile, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) security environment and threat landscape witnessed, or have still been witnessing to be precise, major fluctuation and destabilization times.

Future MENA Threat Landscape and Turkey's Defense Posture*

Geleceğin ODKA'sında Tehdit manzaraları ve Türkiye'nin Savunma Duruşu

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Özet

2000'li yıllarla birlikte Orta Doğu ve Kuzey Afrika (MENA – İng.) güvenlik ortamı bir yandan stratejik silah sistemleri, diğer yandan da melez savaşlar tarafından şekillendirilmektedir. Stratejik silahlar hususunda, özellikle İran'ın agresif çabaları göz önünde bulundurulduğunda, füze sistemlerinin yayılmasının önemli bir yer tuttuğu görülmektedir. MENA güvenlik ortamının diğer ucunda bulunan melez savaşlar ise evrilmeye devam etmektedir. 2006 Lübnan Savaşı'nı müteakip, askeri analistler melez savaşların yükselişini "keşfetmişlerdir"; öte yandan söz konusu trendin 1990'lı yıllarda vuku bulan Birinci ve İkinci Rus – Çeçen Savaşlarının tetkik edilmesi suretiyle daha erken keşfedilmesi mümkün olabilirdi. Bir Batı demokrasisi ve NATO üyesi olan Türkiye, sözü edilen güvenlik ortamı ile karşı karşıyadır ve yüksek bir adaptasyon kapasitesine gereksinim duymaktadır. Şimdiye dek, AK Parti yönetimi Türk sivil-asker ilişkilerinin demokratik bir çerçevede normalleştirilmesinden ve cumhuriyet tarihinin en başarılı askeri modernizasyonlarından birinin yürütülmesinden dolayı çok önemli adımlar atmaktadır.

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Abstract

By the 2000s, the MENA security environment is being shaped by strategic weapon systems on one hand, and also by hybrid warfare on the other hand. On strategic weapon systems angle, missile proliferation holds a crucial place and the trend is likely to continue, especially given Iran’s aggressive push. The “other extreme” in the MENA security environment is the rise of asymmetric threats, especially in evolving forms of hybrid warfare. Since 2006 the Second Lebanon War experience, military analysts have “discovered” the rise of hybrid threats, something that they should have anticipated due to the lessons learned from the 1st and the 2nd Ruso-Chechen wars in the 1990s. Turkey, as a Western democracy and a NATO nation in the Middle East, is to face this emerging regional threat landscape that necessitates high adaptability. So far, AK Party administration has taken important steps in defense affairs by normalizing Turkish civil – military relations in a democratic context, and also by running one of the most successful military modernizations and defense policies in the republic’s history.

Keywords: *MENA, Strategic Weapons, Hybrid Wars, Turkish Defense Modernization*

Introduction

Slightly more than a decade under AK Party government, Turkey’s military trends have been showing some distinctive characteristics that are pretty promising for the future strategic posture of the nation. The first and foremost development is a drastic shift in civil-military relations

towards a democratic civilian oversight over the armed forces that ended the country’s decades-long fragmented decision-making system which resulted from military guardianship over domestic politics. Thereby, now Turkish Armed Forces has been turned into a true national defense body that is distanced from involving domestic politics. Second, in parallel with the democratization of Turkish civil-military relations, Ankara managed to run a successful military modernization program that is promising to match Turkey’s defense needs, as well as its regional assertions.

Meanwhile, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) security environment and threat landscape witnessed, or have still been witnessing to be precise, major fluctuation and destabilization times. Notably, the MENA military trends tend to move towards the two extremes of “conflicts scale”. Clearly, on one hand, we have a menacing strategic weapons proliferation, which has been resulting from missile environment and WMDs; and on the other hand, we have the dramatic rise of asymmetric threats and hybrid wars. Furthermore, some game-changer weapon systems, such as MANPADs, ballistic missiles, drones, and WMD assets are being introduced to several MENA battlegrounds in an intensifying fashion. In such a complicated overall picture, in which state-led conventional warfare threats are on decline while low and high intensity ones tend to mount, it is important to assess Turkey’s near future defense posture with regard to the regional military trends.

This article will firstly elaborate strategic weapons trend in the MENA with a focus on Iran.

Subsequently, hybrid warfare trends will be assessed in the light of some key conflicts that took place in the recent years. Finally, Turkey's defense posture in the forthcoming years will be discussed with regard to the MENA military trends and possible trajectory of the regional security environment. The article will conclude by presenting key findings in the last part.

Key Trends in the Mena Security Environment

As military historian and strategist Azar Gat stated:

“Contrary to the Rousseauite imagination, the evidence of historically observed hunter-gatherers and, more dimly but increasingly, that of palaeo-archaeology shows that humans have been fighting among themselves throughout the history of our species and genus, during the human ‘evolutionary state of nature’.”¹

In the light of the Clausewitzian approach, the “real war”, as the Prussian theorist depicted, is constrained by the very parameters of the “real world” which makes the phenomenon of war itself pretty uncertain and unpredictable; without a doubt, the MENA region is no exception to this fact.

By the 2000s, the MENA security environment is being shaped by strategic weapon systems, particularly missile proliferation; and also by evolving low intensity conflicts that has come into prominence in different forms of hybrid warfare.

This complicated picture, in which conventional military thinking is challenged to a certain extent, results from the tendency towards “quick-fix” solutions that would compensate for austerity conditions and also for an increasing gap between the technologically and economically superiors and inferiors. In other words, recalling Gat's statement referred above, human nature, be it in the contemporary MENA or in the Medieval Europe, carries on finding new and effective ways to wage wars.

Missile Proliferation and Iranian Threat

On the strategic weapon systems angle of the emerging MENA military balance, missile proliferation holds a crucial place and the trend is likely to continue, especially given Iran's aggressive push for both enhancing its own inventory, as well as those of its proxies in the region.

Tehran's menacing missile program should be addressed regarding “going nuclear” and “remaining non-nuclear” scenarios at the same time.

Even without reaching nuclear WMD capacity, Iran's missile proliferation trends pose a significant threat to the GCC states, Israel, and Turkey regarding Tehran's efforts to improve precision guidance and warheads.² In case the Iranian missile capabilities reach a certain level of precision, then we will be talking about an advanced destructive capacity against strategic targets such as oil infrastructure, desalination plants, and key military units and facilities.³

Along with the precision and warhead improvements in the Iranian missile trend, the quantity, namely dramatically rising numbers in Tehran's strategic and tactical inventories, also pose threat to missile defense balances in the region. The Iranians' numerical advantage with respect to *Shahab – 1,2,3*, *Fateh – 110*, and *Zelzal* missiles brings about a potential “saturation” of neighboring countries missile defenses that could render anti-ballistic missile systems abortive to a considerable extent.⁴ In case of an intensive salvo conducted by the Iranian missile forces against one of Tehran's neighbors, and assuming a scenario in which effective warheads could be used with low *circular error probability (CEP)* assets, then it would be accurate to take catastrophic results into consideration.

In addition to the missile proliferation, should Tehran succeeds to go nuclear unstopped, then it would increase its destructive capabilities from “strategic” level to “existential”, at least for some of its neighbors with fragile strategic depths, and inadequate missile defenses and second strike capabilities.

In a broader context, nuclear arms and a possible nuclear arms race in the Middle East has a particular military context due to some “practical” reasons. As the *Strategic Studies Institute* of the US Army stressed in its “Next Arms Race” monograph:

*“While Iran’s pursuit of nuclear weapons is a key determinate of the looming Middle East nuclear arms race, it is not the only one. There are five overarching key determinants fueling the Middle East appetite for nuclear weapons. These determinants are the desire for nuclear weapons to deter adversaries, compensate for conventional weapons shortcomings, fight wars, garner domestic political power, and win international political power...”*⁵

At this point, one should not naïvely reduce Iran’s nuclear ambitions into “simply deterrence” or “regime security” functions that are static in essence. Per contra, recent trends suggest that nuclear assets, especially tactical nuclear weapons (TNW), might be used in conventional wars indeed. For instance, Pakistani military doctrine grants TNW option against a successful conventional incursion by India due to New Delhi’s *Cold Start* strategy. Likewise, the modern Russian military thought considers TNWs as means of compensating for Moscow’s conventional handicaps in Europe, a response to NATO’s increasing ballistic missile defence capabilities, as well as a reliable asset in a possible military buildup *vis-à-vis* the Chinese; as outnumbered Russian troops in the Far East struggle to balance the People’s Liberation Army elements in a large frontier area.

Notably, given the TNWs’ situation elaborated above, one should comprehend the correlation between Iran’s missile proliferation and its nuclear ambitions. Clearly, Tehran, most probably, is working on missile technology with regard to future delivery means for its nuclear program. In fact, a CSIS report indicates that:

“Iran’s growing inventory of ballistic missiles and its acquisition and indigenous production of anti-ship cruise missiles (ASCMs) provide capabilities

*to enhance its power projection. Tehran views its conventionally armed missiles as an integral part of its strategy to deter—and if necessary retaliate against—forces in the region, including US forces. Its ballistic missiles are inherently capable of delivering WMD, and if so armed, would fit into this same strategy”*⁶

Apart from the nuclear arms, we should also draw attention to chemical and biological weapons as important WMD assets, especially in combination with surface to surface missiles (SSM). In this regard, Syrian Baathist dictatorship’s arsenal poses the first and foremost threat trend in the MENA region. Assad’s tyranny holds a notorious chemical weapons inventory and allegedly biological agents. Syrian WMDs include sarin and tabun nerve gasses and VX, along with mustard blister agents. Furthermore, Syria’s delivery capability poses a serious threat too. Along with aerial bombs and artillery; ballistic missiles and chemical warheads provides Assad’s forces the ability to threaten its neighbors from deep territory.⁷ The Syrian Missile Command possess three SSM brigades of which, at least one of them, is capable of launching SCUD types and variants short-range ballistic missiles (SRBM). The Baathist regime’s SRBMs are capable of hitting a wide area from 300kms (*via SCUD B*) to 700-800 kms (*via SCUD C about 500-600kms, and via SCUD D –North Korean No Dong– variant up to 700-800kms*).⁸

The missile trends in the emerging MENA security environment are not limited to state-led threats. In the contemporary “military reality” of the region, SRBMs, large caliber rockets and even some cruise missiles present asymmetric threats to missile defense.⁹ Notably, in the recent years, non-state actors like Hezbollah and Hamas have achieved critical improvements with respect to their missile / rocket inventories as well as their operational records. Lessons learned from the 2006 Lebanon War showed that non-state missile / rocket threat could reach formidable levels that can force a military machine like the Israel Defense Forces to “failure to win”, if not a defeat. For instance, until the UN cease-fire in August 14th, the Lebanese Hezbollah managed to launch about 3,790 rockets into the Israeli territory and



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managed to achieve some 901 hits that injured over 4,500 and killed 42.¹⁰ More importantly, despite the Israelis' reliance on air superiority and standoff strikes, which combined with ground incursion in the subsequent stages of the conflict, Hezbollah managed to fire rockets for 34 days, namely until the last day of the war. Since the 2nd Lebanon War, Hassan Nasrallah's paramilitary organization is believed to carry on its significant uptrend in rocket and missile inventory. Furthermore, as a result of the Syrian civil war, now Hezbollah may have greater access to the Baathist dictatorship's arsenal that could mean advanced systems such as Scud-C and Scud-D with WMD-warhead capabilities, and Fateh – 110 with a higher precision.

In parallel with the Hezbollah case, the most recent military conflict between the IDF and

Hamas, namely the Operation Pillar of Defense that took place in late 2012, once again proved the very fact that non-state actors in proxy wars can be well augmented by rocket capabilities, so that they can reach formidable threat levels, even against major military powers with limited strategic depth. During the Operation Pillar of Defense (OPD), within a time period slightly more than a week to be precise, Gazan groups, particularly Hamas, fired more than 1,500 rockets and projectiles.

At this point, missile defense systems in various altitudes come into the picture. During the OPD, Israel's Iron Dome system destroyed 421 incoming rockets by using 500 interceptors which means an impressive 84% interception rate along with a 1,2 ratio between the used interceptors and the number of engaged rockets. (152 rockets did

not reach Israel and some 875 were not engaged due to their trajectories; so the Iron Dome system engaged in interception of some 479, about 32% of the total rockets fired).¹¹ On the other hand, some Israeli military experts criticized the Iron Dome system, not because of its performance, but because its strategic outcomes that, the critiques claim, reduced the IDF's deterrence by the utilization of static systems instead of more aggressive incursions.¹²

To sum up, rising missile & rocket threat at the hands of both state and non-state actors is likely to make the MENA security environment more complicated in the near future. One of the most striking results of this military trend is the dramatically increasing need for missile defense systems all over the region. For instance, during the OPD Israel had to speed up its Iron Dome deployments by acquiring the 5th battery; and now is pursuing the *David's Sling* system in order to intercept medium tier threats that fall under the gap between the lower range Iron Dome and the higher range / altitude Arrow system. Another example is the NATO Patriot systems deployment on Turkish soil due to the Syrian Baathist tyranny's chemical (and allegedly biological)-warhead ballistic missile inventory. In addition to the pressing need for missile defenses and non-proliferation measures, increasing range of the existing inventories is challenging the conventional strategic depth paradigm of war studies. As a matter of fact, IISS' recent *Military Balance* annual report draws attention to the fact that the Israeli home front might turn into a "front line" due to the mounting missile and rocket proliferation.¹³ Without a doubt, given the Iranian missile proliferation trends, which even succeeded to cover Turkey's Sea of Marmara region by the solid-propellant & multi-stage Sejil-2 test in 2009, a broad territory in the MENA might soon lack "home fronts" at all.

Rise of Hybrid Wars: The Threat at Turkey's Doorstep

As indicated, the "other extreme" in Turkey's security environment is the rise of asymmetric threats, especially in evolving forms of hybrid warfare.

Theoretically speaking, hybrid warfare can be defined as combination of irregular and conventional capabilities within meaningful operational integrity. In a broader military extent, hybrid warfare is a "multi-modal" form of fighting battles through systematic incorporation of a wide-array of military and paramilitary concepts.¹⁴ To be precise, one should not reduce the hybrid warfare concept into a simpler "regular and irregular forces on the same battleground" formula. In a more complicated fashion, hybrid warfare does not occur from the overlap of regular and irregular concepts, but integrates them in a systematically designed strategic context for adopting a new military paradigm.¹⁵

Since 2006 Lebanon War experience, military analysts have discovered the rise of hybrid threats, something that they should have anticipated due to the lessons learned from the 1st and the 2nd Russo-Chechen wars in the 1990s. In 2006, Nasrallah's fighters did not only act as "simply irregulars as usual", but managed to fight in moderate-sized units (up to a battalion sometimes) with standoff capabilities and disruptive assets through MANPAD & ATGM weapons in order to deny the IDF armor and mechanized maneuver capabilities. For instance, as Matthews reveals in his military analysis on the Second Lebanese War;

"...of the 114 IDF personnel killed during the war, 30 were tank crewmen. Out of the 400 tanks involved in the fighting in southern Lebanon, 48 were hit, 40 were damaged, and 20 penetrated. It is believed that five Merkavas were completely destroyed. Clearly, Hezbollah has mastered the art of light infantry/ATGM tactics against heavy mechanized forces".¹⁶

Moreover, during the war, Hezbollah even showed its abilities to threaten Israeli naval assets through hitting *INS Hanit*, an advanced Sa'ar 5 class corvette, probably by firing a C-802 missile from coastal launchers. Likewise, during the Operation Cast Lead and the Operation Pillar of Defense in 2008 and in 2012 respectively, we saw Gazan groups altering their concepts by adopting more of a hybrid warfare-type strategy. Currently, another hybrid warfare case, the Syr-

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ian Civil War, is ongoing right at Turkey's doorstep. Furthermore, not only the armed opposition has been conducting hybrid concepts, but also the Baathist dictatorship has shaped its violent strategy by utilizing a wide-array of means ranging from indiscriminate shelling and air force bombardments in combination with Shabiha paramilitaries within operational integrity.¹⁷

The more non-state actors' access to game-changer weapons increases, the more likely it is that hybrid conflicts will spread in Turkey's hinterland. Besides, weakening state capacity in several nations following the "Arab spring" would possibly augment this menacing development.

In sum, the security environment and military trends surrounding Turkey are complicated and pose threats in different levels and strategic contexts. Meanwhile, Turkey is showing a promising military profile under AK Party management of defense affairs which will be elaborated by the next section.

Turkey's Defense Modernization Trajectory and Future MENA Security Environment

As the last decade's conflicts and military trends in the Middle East showed, Turkey, an important NATO nation bordering a dangerous region, should prepare for the next decade's MENA threat landscape. In conjunction with the normalization of civil – military relations in Turkish domestic politics and due to the increasing democratic civilian oversight of military affairs, AK Party government has asserted greater control over Turkey's military procurement and devel-

opment projects. *Undersecretariat for Defense Industries (UDI)*, the top military procurement body chaired by PM Erdogan as head of the Executive Committee, is primarily responsible for shaping the country's defense modernization.

According to the *UDI's* open-source reports, Turkish military modernization record showed a crucial improvement, and Ankara needs to keep up the successful momentum in order to meet its defense needs.¹⁸ In this respect, Turkey's anti –ballistic missile systems procurement & co-development project and the F-35 deal, which is expected to increase stealth standoff capabilities, would hold a central role in shaping the nation's military posture. Especially, given the strategic weapons trend in the Middle East, Turkey's ballistic missile defense project (LORAMIDS) would be a key issue, and it is argued that Ankara's scope when aiming effective missile defense capacity results from the regional leadership objective.¹⁹ As a matter of fact, in 2002 Turkey has altered its "Turkish Armed Forces Air Concept", and adopted "Aerospace and Missile Defense Concept" which commissions the air force to secure overall air defense of the country.²⁰

In that sense, integration of Turkey's national drone, *Anka*, to other weapon systems (probably in 2014) is expected to improve the network centric warfare capacity. Besides, Ankara's decision to arm the *Anka* with *Cirit*-type laser guided missile might be a critical move that would augment the Turkish military's strike capacity against moving targets and light armor, in addition to classic surveillance functions of UAVs.²¹ Should the *Anka* project be completed success-

fully, including the drone's integration with other systems and also by accomplishing the armed-drone upgrade, then Turkey's capability to confront hybrid threats is believed to be fostered to a certain extent.

Moreover, Turkey's armor and close air support trends through national main battle tank (*Altay*) and attack helicopter (*T-129*) projects, which would be augmented with other key procurements such as the CH-47 Chinook, would significantly improve Ankara's air-land warfare capabilities and maneuverability. On the naval warfare cannon, developments in the *Milgem Project*, as well as in submarine inventory, and in amphibious warfare capabilities offer a pretty optimistic future.

More importantly, by the 2000s Turkish defense modernization is now being undertaken through democratically shaped civil-military relations and also through promoting a more effective defense industry. What is more, the political context of Turkey's military march is Western-minded and in favor of liberal - democratic values so that Turkish - American partnership is essential to Ankara's best interests; and as Turkish - Israeli relations normalize, fruitful military cooperation between the two Middle Eastern democracies can be resumed. However, there is still room for improvement for Ankara's impressive up-trend. For one, this paper argues, although Turkey reached an enormous competitiveness with respect to procurements and inventory vis-à-vis most European states, it still lacks Western style *war studies* knowledge in the Turkish academia, as well as military-scoped think-tanks such as *Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments* or *Institute for the Study of War*.

Finally, NATO's TNW deployment in Turkey is an important factor that would play a key role in Turkish defense posture in the near future, especially given the strategic weapons trend in the MENA threat landscape and the Iranian nuclear program.

TNW existence in Turkey is a result of the Cold War balance of power. By the mid 1980s, Washington deployed some 500 warheads in Turkey,

at four air bases. At that time, Turkish military capabilities were designed to play active roles in NATO nuclear missions through F-104, F-4, and F-100 fixed-wing assets, as well as via some land forces units. Despite the Cold War ended, Turkey, along with Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Belgium, still continues to host B-61 type TNWs; yet, the Turkish Air Force no longer conduct nuclear exercises.²² Regardless of TNWs' practical role in NATO's defense posture, Turkish decision-makers have long seen B-61s as strong ties to the Western security umbrella.²³

However, it is ambiguous whether the North Atlantic Alliance would keep deploying tac-nukes or not. For instance, unlike the former two strategic concepts (1991 and 1999), the most recent strategic concept of the North Atlantic Alliance (2010) did not mention "sub-strategic nuclear weapons in Europe" openly, something happened for the first time up until now.²⁴

Conclusion

In sum, the MENA security environment is getting complicated due to the rising military trends of strategic weapon systems and hybrid warfare. Notably, the Syrian civil war is the most recent concrete example of this fact, as we see the Baathist dictatorship's WMD and missile arsenal as a pressing threat on one hand; along with the mounting asymmetric conflict which integrates irregular and conventional concepts and assets on the other hand.

At this point, Iran appears to be the most important actor of the next MENA threat landscape due to its defense trends which this paper prefers to depict as "aggressive adaptation". First, Tehran possesses the largest ballistic missile inventory in the region and this aggressive push is likely to continue. Second, via its notorious Quds Forces, Iran carries on prompting proxy wars all around the region from Gaza to Syria, and Lebanon. In this respect, Iran's role in Assad's violent crackdown is meaningful. Thirdly and more importantly, Tehran is integrating its high and low intensity conflict concepts under the oversight of the IRGC which controls Quds Forces and Ba-

sij militia, along with missile systems and naval asymmetric warfare units.

Confronting multi-modal threats in a broad context is one of the hardest tasks in defense issues. For one, a country needs pretty diverse military measures to cope with strategic weapons and hybrid warfare at the same time. Besides, such a military strategic posture would add additional burden on defense budgets.

Turkey, as a Western democracy in the troublesome Middle East, is likely to face this emerging regional threat landscape that necessitates high adaptability. So far, the Turkish government has been doing well to address the nation's defense needs and to democratize Ankara's decision-making processes. The future Turkish military posture, if the current projects could be successfully completed, would be promising by the integration of modern naval, air force, UAV, missile defense, and air-land mechanized and armor warfare assets. As a country with 10 – 15 billion USD defense budget range, Turkey's strategic imperative is to reach a sustainable and effective procurement & development level that would meet the demands of being a regional power. To do so, Turkey has to render strategic threats abortive and project power simultaneously with a very cost-effective resource allocation and budget management. Furthermore, the geopolitical imperatives of the nation necessitate diverse military strategic capabilities. Put simply, Turkey

has to possess powerful naval and amphibious capabilities due to its peninsula location that adjoins three sea basins and straits, effective missile defenses due to its neighbors' missile proliferation, mobile and elastic land forces units supported by powerful artillery assets for keeping conventional upper hand, and a formidable air force for different missions.

The 2nd Lebanon War, the Israelis' endeavors in Gaza in 2008 and 2012 respectively, the Iranian's drills and tests in the recent years, and finally the Syrian civil war have been offering valuable lessons-learned potential for shaping Turkey's future defense posture with respect to the MENA regional military balance. For instance, the recent MANPAD trends should be monitored and analyzed closely in order to keep the future flight missions of the *Anka* drone and *T-129* Attack Helicopter as safest as possible; and Hezbollah's tactical approach against the Israeli *Merkavas* could be a good lessons-learned for protecting *Altay* main battle tanks against possible irregulars. This check-list can, and should, be modified with regard to further perspectives that would be raised by Turkish strategic community. Thereby, Ankara should consolidate its successful defense modernization with a broad military thinking for promoting Western values of peace and democracy in a region of violent tyrannies, as surfaced in the Baathist dictatorship of Syria example recently.

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