

PAPER DETAILS

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Promises and Perils: Exploring the Turkish Defense Industry

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First of all, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Center for Strategic Research (SAM) and the editorial board of *Perceptions: Journal of International Affairs* for the privilege of being the guest editor for this volume. The five articles of this issue are devoted to the Turkish defense industry, which has been attracting worldwide attention due to the great leap forward Turkey has achieved in this sphere over the last two decades. In fact, many people from academic, bureaucratic, industrial and commercial circles around the world question the reasons, motivations and objectives behind Turkey's increasing interest and investment in the military and defense industry.

Today, Turkey is considered to be among the most promising exporters in the defense market; the country has acquired a worldwide reputation due to its impressive progress and the high operational performance of its combat-proven defense systems and weapons. However, the upward trend in Turkey's national military-industrial complex and the acceleration of its defense capability enhancement has raised the concerns of a wide range of state and non-state actors on a global scale.

The ongoing debate about Turkey's defense industry focuses on two main points. The first has to do with the changing character of Turkey's foreign and security policy and revolves around the question as to whether Ankara is trying to free itself from the U.S.-led and NATO-dominated political roadmap that has long shaped its decisions and strategies with respect to its regional and international engagements. The second point is about Turkey's new military and defense strategy and revolves around the question as to whether Turkey's military operations, plans and doctrinal changes indicate a shift from a defensive to a more offensive approach.

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On the one hand, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's inheritance is being preserved, since the central principle of Turkey's foreign and security policy remains strictly in accordance with the official motto, 'peace at home, peace in the world'. This means that Turkey continues to maintain its military rationality and inspiration with the goal of building and sustaining peace at all levels—from the local to the global. Contrary to the allegations that Turkey is developing a more independent and assertive foreign and defense policy in a way that alienates its traditional allies, Ankara's defense discourse is actually quite well-maintained, since the degree of convergence of security interests between Turkey and NATO is much higher compared to their degree of divergence.

On the other hand, in light of means and ends, particularly at a time when Turkey's struggle to mitigate the risks and threats emanating from its changing regional security environment urges it to make more vital choices and take more rapid actions, Ankara is favoring a more flexible, adaptive and resilient defense posture that is consistent with its actual and potential core interests. In this regard, Turkey's military and defense policy reflects its quest to become a more deterrent power while adopting a proactive and integrated approach to realizing the new parameters of its grand strategy.

From this perspective, the five distinguished authors who contribute to this issue have been specifically chosen because of their decades-long experience in the Turkish defense bureaucracy and security sector. In addition, they each have different areas of expertise and different academic backgrounds. Hence, all five authors make comparative, critical and insightful analyses about the promise and perils of the Turkish defense industry with respect to doctrinal and institutional change and operational performance.

It should be noted that Turkey's defense policy and industrial development strategy encompass a wide range of subjects, such as force projection, military diplomacy, management of production, logistics and procurement, R&D and innovation investments, prime contractors and subcontractors, intellectual property rights, export regime, offset trade, financial and budgetary policies, etc. In this regard, the process of selecting articles for this issue was quite challenging, particularly since there is a large research agenda that is still underexplored in the literature on the Turkish defense industry.

Ultimately, the five articles contributing to this issue are especially chosen as a response to the aforementioned debate points that explore Ankara's will and enthusiasm to initiate bureaucratic and industrial transformation. Therefore, the articles are expected to stimulate further academic debate on mapping Turkey's future national defense industrial ecosystem in terms of the country's ambition to realize self-sufficiency, emerge as a leading exporter in the arms market and earn the technological knowledge, breadth and depth to consolidate its position as a stronger security and defense actor on the global stage.

In his article, Hüsnü Özlü sheds light on the evolution of the Turkish defense industry from the early Republican period to the contemporary era. In addition to examining deep-rooted historical, socio-political and economic factors, he explores the changing security environment and conditions in Turkey that have triggered the transformation process in the defense industry that began in the 1980s and led to the adaptation of a new national defense industry strategy in the early 2000s.

Given the complexity of contemporary defense systems, the ever-changing dynamic conditions in which security is conceptualized, the interconnected agents and variety of fragmented and interactive domains in which security is enacted, the defense industry has become one of the most challenging topics for academics, decisionmakers and other officials to study and analyze. The article by Mehmet Hilmi Özdemir and Gökhan Özkan is the outcome of their efforts to initiate a new methodology to address new questions by adopting an innovative and holistic approach for the comprehension of the interconnectedness and interrelatedness among all the parts that make up the whole system. The authors highlight how a systems-thinking approach, together with the Viable System Model (VSM) and system dynamics methodologies, can introduce various benefits such as decision support, and provide accurate evaluations, successful judgements and strategic foresights.

Turkey's cyber awareness and readiness level also require more academic attention. In their article, A. Burak Darıcılı and Soner Çelik explore the benefits and costs of technological developments by focusing on both the advantages of cyberspace and the vulnerabilities of cybersecurity. The authors emphasize the need for and significance of preparing cyber strategies, engaging in long-term planning, establishing special institutional structures, undertaking cyber reforms, developing an international cybersecurity alliance and engaging in cooperation in order to improve cyber defense and attack capacities, since the issue is critical for survival.

Özden Özben's article discusses conceptualizations of border security and integrated border management under the rubric of homeland security, and explores the definition and reinterpretation of 'borders', which have long been analyzed within the scope of physical and technical dimensions. The author argues that today's borders are not the same as the boundaries drawn in the past; rather, they have become much broader due to multidimensional, multi-stage and multi-pronged risks and threats. Özben emphasizes the necessity of adopting 'integrated' border management in the fullest sense which requires the national defense industry to develop a more proactive approach and reach a higher level of industrial competence.

The article by Ufuk Sözübir touches upon the issue of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs)—probably the hottest topic of the debate regarding Turkey's defense industry in the last decade. Not only have Turkish-made UAVs become the most cited success story in the Turkish defense industry discourse,

they are also considered game changers, since they have provided Turkey with greater diplomatic and operational maneuverability in foreign and security policy. They have also boosted Turkey's confidence in meeting its objective of localization and nationalization, and of achieving strategic autonomy as part of the Turkish national security strategy. Sözübir's article focuses on both the promise and the perils facing the Turkish defense industry, and discusses the advantages and disadvantages of UAV systems in terms of technological opportunities, technical risks and threats and ethical challenges with respect to international humanitarian law.

In addition to these articles, which explore various aspects of the Turkish defense industry, the current issue also includes the commentary by Ömer Kocaman, Deputy Secretary General of the Organization of Turkic States, who discusses the evolution of the role of this important international organization in the post-Covid-19 world, and the article by Sujata Ashwarya, who seeks to reveal the main dynamics that shape Israel's renewable energy strategy in light of its stated goals.