TURKEY AND RUSSIA: MILITARY-TECHNICAL COOPERATION TODAY AND TOMORROW

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Introduction

In the last few years, relations between Turkey and Russia have acquired a new quality: the countries have complemented their political dialog at the top level with economic and energy cooperation, which at times comes close to strategic partnership.

In the military-technical sphere, Turkey maintains close relations with the U.S. and other NATO members; in the 1990s, it actively promoted its contacts with Israel, while recently it has been seeking closer military-technical and military-industrial cooperation with Russia.

To a certain extent, the interest of the Turkish political establishment in Russia's latest high-tech weapons and military equipment is associated with the much more pronounced "Russian trend" in Ankara's foreign policy. The Turks, who are seeking more balanced relations with the West (and the United States in particular), tend to look at Russia as an "alternative partner."

The Contractual-Legal Basis of Bilateral Cooperation in the Military-Technical Sphere

Early in the 1990s, the relations between the two countries could not be described as good-neighborly because of their geopolitical rivalry inherited from the past and mutually exclusive military-political interests. In 1992, however, they signed a Treaty on Principles of Relations between the Republic of Turkey and the Russian Federation.

In the latter half of the 1990s, the good-neighborly principle began moving closer to its true meaning: the two countries identified their common approaches and new elements of cooperation (primarily in the energy sphere and anti-terrorist struggle). In 1996-1997, the sides signed several cooperation agreements.[1] This pushed bilateral relations from opposition to cooperation: the two countries ceased to see one another as a threat.[2]

The Joint Action Plan on Cooperation in Eurasia the two countries signed in November 2001 opened a new page in the political relations between them; the document outlined the prospects and identified the sides' mutual interests in the sphere of cooperation.[3]

The Black Sea Naval Cooperation Task Group (Blackseafor) set up in 2001 on Turkey's initiative, which united six littoral states and in which Russia and Turkey occupied the leading positions, was an important step in the development Russian-Turkish military-political relations.[4] In 2003, the Document on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures in the Naval Field in the Black Sea was enacted. In 2006, for the first time, Russia and Turkey conducted naval exercises within the framework of Blackseafor, while Russian ships visited Istanbul.[5]

Turkey was the first NATO member to establish military-technical cooperation with Russia. Early in the 1990s, Russia sold Turkey about $110-million-worth of armaments, including 110 armored personnel carriers (BTR-60/80), several multi-purpose helicopters (Mi-8 and Mi-7), combat vehicles, night-vision goggles, light armaments, etc.[6]

According to Russian sources, in May 1992, the sides reached an agreement on selling Russian weapons and military vehicles (Mi-17 helicopters, armored personnel carriers, machine-guns, grenade launchers, and sniper rifles) to Turkey for a total of $300 million.[7] Turkey armed its Gendarme and SWAT (Special Weapons and Tactics) with small arms, sniper rifles, anti-tank rocket-launchers, and multiple-launch rocket systems produced in Russia.[8]

In April 1994, Russia and Turkey signed an intergovernmental agreement for military-technical and defense industry cooperation, the first such document between Moscow and a NATO country under which the Russian side was to supply and upgrade numerous weapons for the Turkish Armed Forces.[9]

Today, military-technical cooperation between Russia and Turkey is realized under several intergovernmental agreements related to the design, production, and supply of military products.

In May 2001, bilateral cooperation was further boosted by the joint Russian-Turkish commission on military-technical cooperation. So far, it has met twice: in September 2002 in Ankara and in November 2003 in Moscow.[10]

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[1] See: M. Ziganshin, *Rossia-Turtsia: ot dvustoronnego sotrudnichestva k mnogoplanovomu sotrudnichestvu,* Bishkek, 2007, p. 28.

[2] See: I. Torbakov, *Making Sense of the Current Phase of Turkish-Russian Relations*, The Jamestown Foundation, October 2007.

[3] See: M. Ziganshin, op. cit., pp. 31-32.

[4] Turkey initiated the group in 1998, but the agreement was not formalized until 2001. Its basic instruments envisaged search and rescue and humanitarian operation, environmental protection, mine clearing, joint exercises, etc. as its main functions (see: [http://www.blackseafor.org/english/operational.php]).

[5] See: M. Ziganshin, op. cit., pp. 54-56.

[6] See: "Weapons Transfers and Violations of Laws of War in Turkey," Human Rights Watch Arms Project, USA, 1995, pp. 36-37; S. Kandaurov, "Russian Arms Exports to Greece, Cyprus and Turkey," *Moscow Defense Brief*, available at [http://mdb.cast.ru/mdb/2-2001/at/raegct/].

[7] [http://www.itartass.ur.ru/details/rossiya_turtsiya_ot_postavok_gaza_do_voenno_tekhnicheskogo_sotrudnichestva_spravka.html], 15 March, 2011.

[8] See: V. Litovkin, "The Future of Russian-Turkish Military-Technical Cooperation," *RIA Novosti*, 26 June, 2006.

[9] Ibidem.

[10] See: S.M. Zadonskiy, "Sostoyanie i perspektivy voenno-tekhnicheskogo sotrudnichestva Rossii i Turtsii," *IIIiBV*, 26 September, 2008.

In January 2002, during Chief of General Staff of the RF AF Anatoly Kvashnin's visit to Turkey, the sides signed a Framework Agreement on Cooperation in the Military Sphere and the Russian-Turkish Treaty on Cooperation in Training Military Contingents. Later the same year, Chief of General Staff of the Turkish AF Hüseyn Kivrikoğlu paid a reciprocal visit to Moscow.[11]

In December 2004, during President Putin's first official visit to Turkey, the sides moved further toward a wider contractual base of bilateral military-technical cooperation: the two countries signed documents on the protection of intellectual property related to military technology and classified information.

The visits of top officials from both sides did a lot to promote cooperation in the military sphere. In June 2007, Commander of the Turkish Air Force Faruk Cömert visited Russia; in November 2008, RF Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov visited Turkey; in 2009, Director of the Federal Border Guard Service of Russia, Commander of the border guards of the CIS countries (First Deputy of FSB RF Director) Vladimir Pronichev and in July 2010 Russian Navy Commander-in-Chief Admiral Vladimir Vysotsky paid official visits to Turkey.

On 13 February, 2009, during President of Turkey Abdullah Gül's official visit to Russia, the sides signed a Joint Declaration on Progress toward a New Stage in Relations and Further Deepening of Friendship and Multidimensional Partnership which said in part, "The Parties emphasize the special importance they attach to the fruitful work being carried out by the Turkish-Russian Intergovernmental Joint Commission on the Military, Technical, and Defense Industry, and to enhance bilateral cooperation in the field of military, technical, and defense industry in line with common interests. The Parties note that solving pending issues within the context of military-technical cooperation will pave the way for further cooperation in this field."[12]

Achievements, Possibilities, and Prospects of Russian-Turkish Military-Technical Cooperation

In June 2006, the Defense Industry Executive Committee (SSIK) of Turkey passed a decision on large-scale overhaul of the country's air defenses. America with its Patriot system, Russia with S-300 PMU-2 Favorit, and America and Israel with their joint Arrow-2 took part in the tender.[13] The tender was postponed; two years later, in 2008, the General Directorate of the Defense Industry reconfirmed the country's intention to buy air defense systems. CPMIEC of China with HQ-9 (or FD-2000), copies of Russia's S-300 PMU-2 Favorit, joined the group; a year later French-Italian Eurosam with SAMP-T did the same.[14]

Today, Turkey faces a far from easy choice between the American and Russian complexes. According to Turkish sources, the Russian systems fare slightly better, but a choice has not yet been made. The Russian Federation relies on its latest weapons to pose as Turkey's reliable partner, while

[11] See: "Rusya ile askeri anlaşma yapıldı," available at [http://gbulten.ssm.gov.tr/arsiv/2002/01/15/01_2.htm].

[12] [http://www.mfa.gov.tr/joint-declaration-between-the-republic-of-turkey-and-the-russian-federation-on-progress-towards-a-new-stage-in-relations-and-further-deepening-of-friendship-and-multidimentional-partnership_-moscow_-13-february-2009.en.mfa].

[13] So far, the Turkish Air Force has no long-range air defense complexes; Turkey's air space is protected by close-range surface-to-air missile systems (Rapier, Stinger, Atılgan) and modernized medium-range I-Hawk.

[14] See: "Türkiye'nin füzesi hangisi olacak," *Hürriyet*, 15 February, 2010; "F-35'te aslan payi Türk şirketlerinin," 2 February, 2010, available at [http://www.ihlas.net.tr].

Turkey, by talking to Russia, is trying to trim its dependence on the United States in the sphere of military technology.

Late in 2008, during Russian Defense Minister Serdyukov's visit to Turkey, the sides discussed some of the issues related to bilateral military cooperation. They agreed to realize several military-technical projects, including those related to the Turkish air defense. In 2008, Russia supplied about $200 million-worth of armaments and military vehicles (ammunition, as well as components and spare parts). There is the opinion that cooperation in space research can move to the fore as part of military-technical cooperation between the two countries.[15]

According to Russian and Turkish sources, Russia and Turkey are negotiating the sale of Russian S-400 air defense complexes; an official representative of Rosoboroneksport confirmed this information. According to the Russian media, in April 2009, Head of the Russian Military Delegation Anatoly Aksenov and Head of the Undersecretariat for Defense Industries Murad Bayar met at the IDEF 2009 arms show to discuss possible deliveries of S-400 air defense complexes; Russia exhibited 120 types of weaponry.[16]

I have already written above that Turkey, which prefers Russian equipment, has not yet decided which air defense/missile defense complexes it should buy.

In January 2007, the SSIK opened a tender on long-range anti-tank rocket launchers (to fortify its land forces), which attracted both local and foreign companies (including American Lockheed Martin/Rayteon and Rafael of Israel). The Turks bought 80 units of Kornet-E long-range antitank system from Russia complete with 800 missiles.[17]

Delivery started in 2009; by the end of the year, Turkey received 40 units; the deal between the Turkish Defense Ministry and the Tula Design Bureau amounted to $100 million.[18] According to Russian sources, the document allowed Turkey to buy another 72 units.[19]

Sergey Khalyapin, an expert on military cooperation, points out that granting an anti-tank contract to Russia opens a new phase in Russo-Turkish relations and adds, "Intermediate and high altitude air defense systems may follow the anti-tank project… There is fear that S-400 does not comply with NATO standards. However, similar systems are used in Greece and Greece is a NATO member."

He made an interesting suggestion that Moscow would be ready to help Turkey master production of Russian tanks T-80 and T-90 at specially built industrial facilities in Turkish territory.[20] This possibility fully fits Turkey's military-industrial strategy.

Turkey is prepared to buy at least 12 Mi-28 attack helicopters from Russia; in 2009, a military delegation was expected in Moscow to discuss conditions[21] when the United States refused to sell Turkey its Cobra and Super Cobra helicopters that Ankara intended to use against the Kurdish armed groups in the eastern parts of the country and in northern Iraq.

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[15] [http://www.itartass.ur.ru/details/rossiya_turtsiya_ot_postavok_gaza_do_voenno_tekhnicheskogo_sotrudnichestva_spravka.html], 15 March, 2011.

[16] See: "Turkey Hopes to Buy S-400 Air Defense Systems from Russia," *RIA Novosti*, 27 April, 2009.

[17] See: "İsrail yerine Ruslardan füze alıyoruz," *Hürriyet*, 11 April, 2008; "Türk Silahlı Kuvvetlerinde Rus silahları dönemi," available at [http://www.nethaber.com], 11 April, 2008. Kornet-E rockets proved efficient against Israeli Merkava Mk4 tanks and against American M1 Abrams tanks (used by Hezbollah and Iraqis).

[18] See: "'Kornet-E' Rus füze kompleksi Türk askerleri tarafından teslim alındı," available at [http://turkish.ruvr.ru/2009/12/17/3155702.html].

[19] See: T. Kerimov, "Russia Eyes Turkish Arms Market," available at [http://english.ruvr.ru/2010/07/15/12424622.html], 15 July, 2010.

[20] See: O. Cetinkaya, "Russia and Turkey: Military Aspects of a Joint Responsibility for the Region," available at [http://www.eurasiacritic.com/articles/russia-and-turkey-military-aspects-joint-responsibility-region], July 2009.

[21] See: L. Sariibrahimoğlu, "Turkey Sends Delegation to Russia for Mi-28 Attack Helicopters," *Today's Zaman*, 8 June, 2009.

This was a short-time intermediary decision: in 2013, Turkey will be armed with T-129 Attack and Tactical Reconnaissance helicopter of joint Italian-Turkish production.[22]

Late in 1997, Turkey opened a tender for the ATAK program totaling $2 billion, which presupposes the joint production and purchase of 145 attack and reconnaissance helicopters.

Bell Textron (producer of Super Cobra), Russia's Rosoboroneksport enterprises, and the Kamov plant (its Ka-50-2 Erdogan helicopters are supplied with Israeli avionics) applied. The Russian side offered much better conditions for the production of helicopters in Turkey and their export to third countries.

In May 2004, Turkey suspended the tender; after a lot of procrastination the Franco-German Eurocopter (Tiger) and Russian Ka-50-2 withdrew.[23]

It should be said that, despite the obvious positive trends in military-technical cooperation between the two countries, Turkey has not yet decided how to develop its air defenses. The Russian side has been taking part in Turkish air-defense related tenders for several years now with no real results. Turkey negotiates with the United States; its tenders should probably be interpreted as an effort to identify the most advantageous (politically and military-technical) options.

Turkey expects the United States to act resolutely and unambiguously to help resolve the Kurdish problem and to continue deliveries of latest weapons. Cooperation with Russia is intended for the most effective joint production programs in some very important military-technical spheres. I have already written that the side which puts the "most effective" offer on the table will prove the winner.

The Lisbon NATO Summit of 19-10 November, 2010 adopted a new NATO strategy which envisaged a united missile defense capability to protect the members against ballistic missile attacks.[24]

Despite its objections to some of the points, Turkey joined the project; however, it might continue to buy Russian air defense systems.

There is another very important fact. To protect its entire territory, Turkey needs at least 10-15 long-range air defense complexes; it may buy several Russian complexes for political reasons. Greece did precisely this: after buying a few complexes from Russia, it went to the United States for a much larger number.

In the next few years, Turkey will buy 100 to 120 American F-35 fighters[25]; incorporated into the country's integrated air and missile defense system, they might affect Turkey's decision on air defense complexes.

Conclusion

Revision of Turkey's military-political strategy launched in the 2000s was intended to achieve at least relative military-technical self-sufficiency and to demonstrate its independence from the Alliance's common strategy.

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[22] See: "ATAK Projesi nadir," available at [http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/9263677.asp?gid=233&sz=31569], 24 June, 2008.

[23] See: "Turkey Shortlists 2 Attack Helicopters," available at [http://www.xairforces.com/newsd.asp?newsid=236&newst=4].

[24] See: "Allied Leaders Agree on NATO Missile Defense System," available at [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_68439.htm], 20 November, 2010.

[25] Turkey will buy 100-120 F-35 aircraft totaling $10-12 billion. The first aircraft will be delivered in 2014 to replace the obsolete F-16 and fighter-bomber F-4 which fought in Vietnam (see: "Turkey to Possibly Buy 20 More F-35 Fighters," *Hürriyet Daily News*, 7 October, 2009).

Today Turkey is consistently upgrading its military-industrial complex by expanding the range of locally produced weaponry, mastering the latest foreign and devising its own military technologies in an effort to decrease its dependence on foreign suppliers. The target figure for 2010 of 50 percent of local products covering the Armed Forces' requirements in armaments, military vehicles, and equipment was achieved. According to Turkish official sources, the country's military-industrial complex covered 52.1 percent of the home demand.[26]

Turkey is trying to diversify its cooperation in the military-technical sphere with new partners and better deals. Russia looks like one of the best options and one of the best substitutes for the West, at least in some respects, something which Turkey wants to demonstrate to its Western partners.

Russia, in turn, attaches great political and economic importance to its presence in the Turkish market, a very desirable goal for military-technical reasons as well.

So far, the dynamics of military-technical cooperation between Russia and Turkey leaves much to be desired; its future depends, in many respects, on the dynamics of the cooperation between the two countries in the economic and energy spheres.

[26] See: "Savunma sanayinde hedefler aşıldı," 26 Nisan, 2011, available at [http://ekonomi.milliyet.com.tr/savunma-sanayinde-hedefler-asildi/ekonomi/ekonomidetay/26.04.2011/1382547/default.htm; http://www.sasad.org.tr/en/turkiye-savunma-sanayiinin-2010-yili-verileri-aciklandi.html].