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# **Turkey's Forward-Basing Posture**

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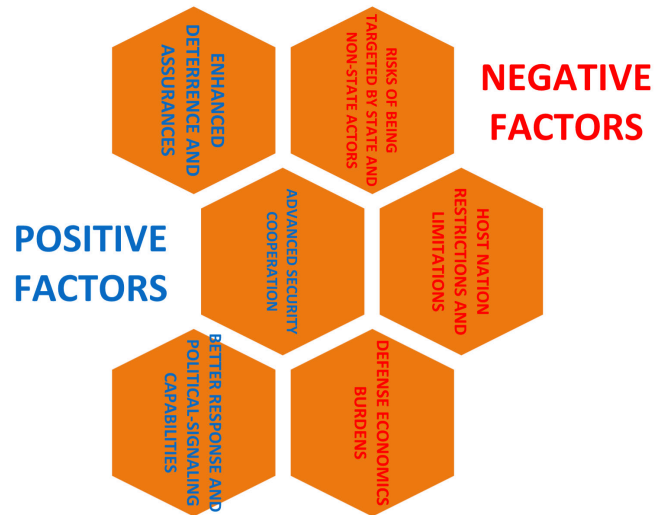
## INTRODUCTION: THE TURKISH FORWARD-BASING IN CONTEXT

Forward-basing has uncertain consequences for a nation's political-military status. On the positive side, it enables better contingency response capabilities by providing enhanced deterrence and assurance measures that would enable effective political signaling. It also develops robust security cooperation and partner capacity-building opportunities<sup>1</sup>.

On the other hand, forward-basing has risks as it is heavily dependent on bilateral ties with the host nation. In this respect, the host nation can exercise limitations (i.e. limitations on combat strike missions or the number of flights) and can even revoke basing rights<sup>2</sup>. For instance, back in 2003, the US military options in Iraq were mostly shaped by the limitations and restrictions in this respect. At the time, Turkey denied basing rights for the land incursion, which practically took out the US Army's 4th Infantry Division's engagement for a long time. Although Saudi Arabia allowed flights for tankers, combat search & rescue missions, suppression of enemy air defenses (SEAD), and surveillance missions from Prince Sultan Air Base, Riyadh closed its bases to strike aircraft that adversely affected the Pentagon's operational planning. Moreover, the United Arab Emirates only allowed surveillance flights from its territory. As a result, for-

ward-basing in Kuwait and Qatar was overwhelmed by intensive air traffic<sup>3</sup>.

Furthermore, bases offer attractive targets for hostile state and non-state actors<sup>4</sup>. For instance, in early 2017, al-Shabab militants attacked a Kenyan military base in Somalia which contributes to the African Union mission. While al-Shabab claimed that it killed more than 100 soldiers, actual casualties are still unknown<sup>5</sup>. And finally, forward-basing means a complex logistical network. Thus, running a permanent deployment abroad is far more expensive than establishing military facilities in the national territory<sup>6</sup>.



Recently, Turkey's forward-basing posture has started to draw more attention due to the parliament's fast-track legislation to ratify a bilateral defense treaty with Doha which allowed stationing Turkish troops on the Qatari soil. Notably, the timeline for deploying troops to Qatar overlapped with the forward-basing in Somalia, as well as the administration's plans to launch a light aircraft carrier. This analysis aims to provide a contextual framework for understanding of Ankara's military basing strategy beyond its borders.

3 Michael Knights, "Basing Restrictions Shape Concept and Conduct of War", Policy Watch 737, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, March 2003.

4 Michael J. Lostumbo, et.al., *Overseas Basing of U.S. Military Forces*, RAND Corporation, 2013.

5 BBC, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-38768453>, Accessed on: July 7, 2017.

6 Michael J. Lostumbo, et.al., *Overseas Basing of U.S. Military Forces*, RAND Corporation, 2013.

1 For a detailed assessment of forward and overseas basing, see: Michael J. Lostumbo, et.al., *Overseas Basing of U.S. Military Forces*, RAND Corporation, 2013.

2 Ibid.

This report concludes two major findings regarding Turkey's forward-basing posture. Firstly, it can be best depicted as a modular and complex adaptive system, with many individual working parts with their inherent parameters in non-linear interaction. Secondly, Turkey's forward-deployed contingents and bases differ in characteristics, political-military *raison d'être*, the way they serve Ankara's foreign and defense policies, and their resiliencies in the face of regional fluctuations. This study assesses that Turkish forward deployments in Somalia, Qatar, and Northern Cyprus, along with the forward operating bases in northern Iraq and the burgeoning contingent centered on al-Bab, Syria, are all built on different determinants.

Finally, this report presents a defense planning assessment of the light aircraft carrier –or landing helicopter dock– project, since the transforming naval capabilities will play an integral role in Turkey's forward-basing posture in the 2020s.

<b>BASING LOCATION / TYPE</b>	<b>PRIMARY POLITICAL–MILITARY FUNCTION</b>
<p><b>SOMALIA</b> (MILITARY TRAINING FACILITY)</p>	<p>PARTNER CAPACITY–BUILDING, POTENTIAL ROLE FOR FOREIGN INTERNAL DEFENSE MISSIONS, SECURITY ASSISTANCE, POTENTIAL ROLE FOR FOREIGN HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE</p>
<p><b>QATAR</b> (JOINT, BRIGADE–LEVEL MILITARY BASE AND TRAINING FACILITY, BATTALION – LEVEL DEPLOYMENTS ARE PLANNED TO BE COMPLETED WITHIN 2017)</p>	<p>SECURITY ASSISTANCE (<i>conventional and internal security forces</i>), ALLIANCE–BUILDING, POLITICAL SIGNALING, POWER PROJECTION</p>
<p><b>NORTHERN CYPRUS</b> (CORPS–LEVEL FORCE, ADDITIONAL DEPLOYMENTS WITHIN THE TURKISH CYPRIOT SECURITY FORCES’ STAFF, AND A REGIMENT–LEVEL CONTINGENT)</p>	<p>COLLECTIVE DEFENSE, INTERNATIONAL GUARANTEES, POLITICAL SIGNALING, POWER PROJECTION</p>
<p><b>NORTHERN IRAQ</b> (FORWARD OPERATING BASES IN MULTIPLE LOCATIONS)</p>	<p>COMBATting TERRORISM, UNCONVENTIONAL WARFARE, SPECIAL RECONNAISSANCE, PARTNER CAPACITY BUILDING* (BASHIQA*), FORCE PROTECTION</p>
<p><b>SYRIA</b> (FORWARD OPERATING BASES AND SOME TRAINING AREAS IN AL–BAB AND ADJACENT AREAS, POSSIBLE DEPLOYMENTS TO IDLIB)</p>	<p>MULTIPLE AND FOLLOW–ON MISSIONS, COMBATting TERRORISM, FORCE PROTECTION, SPECIAL RECONNAISSANCE</p>
<p><b>LIGHT AIRCRAFT CARRIER / LHD PROJECT</b></p>	<p>NAVAL DIPLOMACY, HUMANITARIAN OPERATIONS, FORCE PROJECTION, RAPID TRANSPORT, NON–COMBAT EVACUATION, NAVAL AVIATION</p>

## FORWARD-BASING IN QATAR: TURKISH PRESENCE IN THE GULF

To fully grasp Qatar's military geostrategic importance, one should develop a good understanding of the US defense posture. The US Armed Forces is designed to address the needs of a superpower that pursues global influence. Thus, under the Unified Command Plan, six of total nine US combatant commands are built on a geographic basis. One of the geographic combatant commands is the Central Command, widely known by its acronym, CENTCOM. CENTCOM's area of responsibility (AOR) ranges from the Middle East to Central Asia. The Command pioneered Operation Inherent Resolve to fight ISIL terrorism in Iraq and Syria. While CENTCOM has its headquarters in Florida, it operates through forward deployed component commands. Two of CENTCOM's five component commands, the one for the air force and the one for special operations forces, are based in Qatar<sup>7</sup>. From a strategic standpoint, these are the most critical assets in the fight against ISIL. In other words, Qatar comes into the picture as a key operational hub.

Washington and Doha signed a defense cooperation agreement (DCA) back in 1992. Since then, bilateral defense ties have continued within a formal framework. The DCA was renewed in 2013. The agreement itself is a classified text, yet one can easily understand that it incorporates vital issues given the very fact that some 10,000 US troops are deployed to Qatar. The US forward military presence in this small Gulf nation is centered on a strong air force posture in the al-Udaid base which plays an essential role in Operation Inherent Resolve<sup>8</sup>. Furthermore, al-Udaid enjoys an excellent infrastructure that enables operating B-52 Stratofortress long-range strategic bombers. Finally, the US Army elements under CENTCOM have a

brigade-level deployment in As-Sayliyah Army Base<sup>9</sup>. All in all, Qatar hosts vital US assets for running the Pentagon's military strategy in the Middle East.

Doha has only modest defense capabilities. According to open-source estimates, the Qatari Armed Forces' entire active manpower is around 11,800 which is barely equivalent to a standard division<sup>10</sup>.

Since Qatar has a very small population, there are only two ways for enhancing national defense capacity: building military alliances and focusing on higher-end arms to equip the national forces. The aforementioned US forward deployments remain an essential pillar of Doha's military alliance policy. Now, the Turkish forward deployment is expected to diversify Qatar's capacity as a host-nation.

### Assessing the Burgeoning Turkish Deployments

On June 7, 2017, in a prioritized, fast-track legislation session, the Turkish Parliament ratified a bilateral defense bill previously signed with Qatar<sup>11</sup>. This was the most significant and tangible move made by Ankara amidst the Gulf crisis. Following the parliamentary vote, Ankara sent a high-level military mission to start preparations for the deployments<sup>12</sup>. The two most critical factors in Turkey's forward basing to the Gulf are the roadmap and the timing of the deployments. Simply put, the base is expected to reach the battalion level within 2017, and the end-state would probably be stationing a brigade-level joint force.

In fact, proceedings of the Turkish Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee suggest that the initial plan is to first establish a 500–600 strong contingent in Qatar (named as joint tactical division headquarters), which

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> IISS, *Military Balance 2017*, Routledge, London, 2017.

<sup>11</sup> Anadolu Agency, <http://aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/turkish-parliament-ratifies-qatar-military-deals/836771>, Accessed on: June 22, 2017.

<sup>12</sup> Hurriyet, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/katara-us-icin-ocnu-askeri-heyet-gitti-40489284>, Accessed on: July 12, 2017.

<sup>7</sup> For detailed info about the CENTCOM, see the official website, <http://www.centcom.mil>, Accessed in: July 10, 2017.

<sup>8</sup> For a detailed assessment, see: Kenneth Katzman. *Qatar: Governance Security and US Foreign Policy*, Congressional Research Service, 2017.

would be headed by a two-star Qatari general and a Turkish brigadier general as the deputy commander. It was also reported that some 90 Turkish troops, the equivalent of a company, has been stationed in the Gulf nation's territory since 2015<sup>13</sup>. At the time of writing, some press sources indicated that the initial batch of the planned deployments could be as high as 1,000 troops, suggesting a possible adjustment in the force generation due to the pressing situation of Qatar<sup>14</sup>. Furthermore, the Turkish media reported that training activities already began on June 19, 2017<sup>15</sup>. Lastly, the proceedings showed that Ankara is soon to finalize establishing a separate joint mission between the Turkish Gendarmerie and the Qatari internal security forces<sup>16</sup>.



*Turkish armored vehicles and troops being airlifted to the forward base in Qatar*<sup>17</sup>

13 The Turkish Parliament Foreign Affairs Committee, Proceedings, May 4, 2017.

14 Al Jazeera English, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/06/batch-turkish-troops-arrives-qatar-170630064312751.html>, Accessed on: July 12, 2017.

15 Daily Sabah, <https://www.dailysabah.com/mideast/2017/07/12/more-troops-arrive-at-turkish-military-base-in-qatar>, Accessed on: July 12, 2017.

16 Ibid.

17 Daily Sabah, [https://www.dailysabah.com/columns/yahya\\_bostan/2017/06/25/why-turkeys-military-base-will-remain-in-qatar](https://www.dailysabah.com/columns/yahya_bostan/2017/06/25/why-turkeys-military-base-will-remain-in-qatar), Accessed on: July 12, 2017.



*The Turkish contingent in al-Rayyan Base*<sup>18</sup>

Without a doubt, the most important article in the defense cooperation deal is the one that allows Turkish troops' stationing on the Qatari soil. However, contrary to speculations, the ratified treaty does not include a *casus foederis*<sup>19</sup>, a diplomatic clause determining under which circumstances the military alliance will be initiated, such as NATO's Article 5. Thus, Turkey is not legally committed to the national defense of Qatar. As a comparison, Turkish–Azerbaijani defense partnership, for example, does have open-ended clauses that can well be interpreted as *casus foederis* at times of war<sup>20</sup>. Turkey's forward basing in Qatar is also surely more than 'symbolic'<sup>21</sup>. Even the Turkish exclave in Syria, which is centered on the historical tomb of Suleiman Shah and has been guarded by a ceremonial watch squad for decades, led to complex issues including a Turkish evacuation and re-location

incursion<sup>22</sup>. In the case of Qatar, with thousands of men in uniform operating a joint forward base, the military investment is substantial and reflects Ankara's geopolitical prioritization and fundamental interests in the Gulf.

### **The Underlying Geopolitical Perspective of the Basing in Qatar**

The forward military deployments is an integral part of Turkey's strategic posture in the 21st century. With these more widespread positioning of its assets ranging from the Eastern Mediterranean to the Horn of Africa<sup>23</sup>, Turkey has been building its sphere of political-military influence. In this context, the Turkish forward presence in Qatar is a regional breakthrough. When first designed, it was about graduating Ankara to a whole new level of national capacity. Evidently, back in 2015, when the administration agreed with Doha for establishing a large base, some experts assessed that with this move Turkey was pursuing to augment its soft power-driven influence in the Gulf

18 Hurriyet, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/son-dakika-iste-turkiyenin-katardaki-askeri-ussu-40483254>, Accessed on: July 12, 2017.

19 For the full text of the treaty, see: <http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2015/06/20150608-1-1.pdf>, Accessed on: June 22, 2017.

20 ABC AZ, [http://abc.az/eng/news\\_22\\_12\\_2010\\_50349.html](http://abc.az/eng/news_22_12_2010_50349.html), Accessed on: June 22, 2017.

21 Al Jazeera, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/06/analysis-turkey-deploying-troops-qatar-170607174911372.html>, Accessed on: July 7, 2017.

22 CNN, <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/02/22/middleeast/turkey-syria-tomb-rescue/index.html>, Accessed on: July 7, 2017.

23 Anadolu Agency, <http://aa.com.tr/en/africa/details-emerge-of-turkish-military-base-in-somalia/664139>, Accessed on: June 22, 2017.

with hard power elements. Furthermore, according to this view, permanent basing would mean anchoring the Turkish–Qatari strategic partnership in an unpredictable and rapidly changing regional security environment<sup>24</sup>. Some Turkish outlets even portrayed the basing in the Gulf as returning to the Ottoman imperial territories that were lost following the First World War.<sup>25</sup>

If everything goes as planned, by the 2020s, a brigade–level joint force, which means a few thousand troops from all branches of the Turkish military, will be stationed in Qatar<sup>26</sup>. Indeed, that could be a regional game-changer. Although one brigade is a small contingent for Turkey given its armed forces’ extensive human resources, possible deployment of some 3,000 or even more Turkish troops would be tantamount to nearly one–third of the active Qatari military personnel, and alone exceeds this small Gulf nation’s Navy’s or the Air Force’s manpower<sup>27</sup>. Thus, within the limits of bilateral agreements between Ankara and Doha, the base could play a major role in Qatar’s defense planning, as well as the Emir’s regional affairs agenda.

Moreover, defense partnerships are not only about military hardware transfers and troop numbers, but they also have the potential to build political–psychological and strategic cultural bindings. The content of the Turkish – Qatari defense partnership covers comprehensive training projects. These efforts could translate into the rise of a new military generation among the Qatari Armed Forces’ ranks that will have a strong familiarity with the Turkish strategic culture. In this respect, there is a good possibility that by the 2030s, a substantial number of Qatari generals and

officers could be fluent Turkish speakers and operators of Turkey -manufactured platforms.

Thirdly, the profile of the base itself is critically essential. Once completed, it will include elements from all branches of the Turkish military, as well as Turkey’s elite Special Forces, the Maroon Berets. In other words, the Turkish base in Qatar will provide Ankara with several political-military options ranging from forward-homeporting for its navy, to deploying tanker or AWACS aircraft, or managing special operations in the region.

### Political Drawbacks

The fast-track parliamentary ratification has certainly transformed Turkey’s role in the Gulf crisis from a potential mediator into a stakeholder<sup>28</sup>. It showed that Ankara saw its burgeoning strategic ties with Doha as an indispensable part of Turkey’s geopolitical agenda. Turkey’s decision to ratify the treaty and then rapidly deploying troops to Qatar was not an anti-Saudi move, rather a pro-Qatari one. This is a complex but an important nuance to understand Ankara’s perspective. In this respect, the Turkish Foreign Office’s official statement on the Gulf crisis conveyed Turkey’s “sincere wishes to the Gulf Cooperation Council members to solve their differences of opinion and approach through dialogue”<sup>29</sup>. However, a key question arises at this point: can Turkey pursue a pro-Qatari but not anti-Saudi stance should the situation further escalates? After all, it was seen that removal of the Turkish base was among the Gulf Arab nations’ demands from Qatar, which shows the uneasiness among the GCC circles about Turkey’s military presence in the region. So far, Ankara’s harsh rhetoric focused on the UAE rather than Saudi Arabia. In fact, while President Erdogan called for the Saudi mediation to the crisis as

24 Galip, Dalay. “Türkiye Neden Katar’a Askeri Üs Kuruyor?”, Al Jazeera Turk, <http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/gorus/turkiye-neden-katarda-askeri-us-kuruyor>, Accessed on: June 22, 2017.

25 TRT Avaz, <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=u2eGigAVeRU>, Accessed on: July 9, 2017.

26 Olivier Decottignies and Soner Cagaptay. “Turkey’s New Base in Qatar”, Policy Watch 2545, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, January 2016.

27 For detailed data, see: IISS, *Military Balance 2017*, Routledge, London, 2017.

28 The New York Times, [https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/07/world/europe/turkey-qatar-support.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/07/world/europe/turkey-qatar-support.html?_r=0), Accessed on: June 22, 2017.

29 For the press release, see: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [http://www.mfa.gov.tr/no\\_-175\\_-5-june-2017\\_press-release-regarding-the-developments-among-saudi-arabia\\_-united-arab-emirates\\_-bahrain\\_-egypt-and-qatar.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-175_-5-june-2017_press-release-regarding-the-developments-among-saudi-arabia_-united-arab-emirates_-bahrain_-egypt-and-qatar.en.mfa), Accessed on: June 22, 2017.



the biggest Gulf nation<sup>30</sup>, the Turkish administration and press sources even implied the UAE's alleged support to the failed coup attempt in Turkey in July 2016 by funneling \$3 billion<sup>31</sup>. Thus, just like the basing in Somalia, forward-deployments in Qatar are likely to bring more competition and strain to the Turkish-UAE relations. Nevertheless, as long as Ankara can compartmentalize its relations with the GCC, first and foremost with Saudi Arabia, a political dispute with the UAE would be manageable.

## FORWARD-BASING IN SOMALIA: TURKISH MILITARY PRESENCE IN THE HORN OF AFRICA

The Turkish forward-basing in Somalia is an integral part of Ankara's Africa initiative that is intended to boost Turkey's smart power capacity throughout the continent. As highlighted in President Erdogan's op-ed for Al Jazeera, Turkey aims to become a "friend, compatriot, and partner of Africa" which reflects a broader focus ranging from soft power initiatives to economic and security partnerships<sup>32</sup>. Somalia has been at the epicenter of Turkey's geopolitical perspective in the continent in the 2010s. In fact, President Erdogan's –at the time Prime Minister– 2011 visit to this country marked a turning point for the burgeoning bilateral ties between Ankara and Mogadishu.

According to the Turkish news agency, the new military base enjoys a key location in very close proximity to the Mogadishu Airport, the Mogadishu Port, and

the hospital<sup>33</sup> which was built by Turkey in 2013<sup>34</sup>. The base will occupy 400 hectares with several training grounds that would cost around 50 million USD<sup>35</sup>. While it was initially reported to be able to train 500 Somali troops at a time<sup>36</sup> –a battalion-level force–, recent news suggests that 1,500 host nation personnel and a 200-strong Turkish forward-deployed force will serve in the facility. Turkish officials reported that the contingent's main objective would be partner capacity-building amidst Somalia's troublesome security environment dominated by the al-Shabab threat<sup>37</sup>. In an interview with the CNN Turk outlet, the Turkish Ambassador to Mogadishu underlined that the base was designed to function solely as a training facility that would boost the capabilities of the Somali military, and carries no expansionist agenda<sup>38</sup>. Nevertheless, it is assessed that under renewed rules of engagement, the mission could extend to cover foreign internal defense if needed.

According to Turkey's Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu, Somali troops to be trained in the Turkish base will form the muscles of the Mogadishu government to defeat al-Shabab terrorism<sup>39</sup>. This rhetoric confirms the partner capacity-building perspective, and puts the focus on the al-Shabab threat. Furthermore, the Foreign Minister drew attention to the fact that the Turkish Airlines has been the only non-African airline "regularly connecting Mogadishu to the

30 Daily Sabah, <https://www.dailysabah.com/diplomacy/2017/06/22/president-erdogan-saudi-king-salman-agree-to-increase-efforts-to-end-tension-in-gulf>, Accessed on: July 10, 2017.

31 Daily Sabah, <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/2017/06/13/uae-allegedly-funneled-3b-to-topple-erdogan-turkish-government>, Accessed on: July 10, 2017.

32 Recep Tayyip Erdogan, "Turkey : Africa's Friend, Compatriot and Partner", Al Jazeera English, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2016/06/turkey-africa-friend-compatriot-partner-160601070207148.html>, Accessed on : July 4, 2017.

33 Anadolu Agency, <http://aa.com.tr/en/africa/details-emerge-of-turkish-military-base-in-somalia/664139>, Accessed on: July 4, 2017.

34 For the details of the hospital, see: <http://somaliturkishhospital.gov.tr/s/1/tarihcemiz>, Accessed on: July 4, 2017.

35 Anadolu Agency, <http://aa.com.tr/en/africa/details-emerge-of-turkish-military-base-in-somalia/664139>, Accessed on: July 4, 2017.

36 Ibid.

37 TRT World, <http://www.trtworld.com/mea/why-is-turkey-launching-a-new-military-training-camp-in-somalia-326407>, Accessed on: July 4, 2017.

38 For the CNN Turk documentary, see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zDumRXNdy5g>, Accessed on: July 4, 2017.

39 Mevlut Cavusoglu, "An enterprising and humanitarian policy for Somalia", Daily Sabah, <https://www.dailysabah.com/op-ed/2017/05/11/an-enterprising-and-humanitarian-policy-for-somalia>, Accessed on: July 4, 2017.

world<sup>40</sup>. Although the commercial flights to Somalia might seem like an economic and prestige-building issue, maintaining logistics would be an integral part of sustaining the contingent.

Another key aspect of the Turkish forward-basing in Somalia is the Turkish Armed Forces' unblemished record in its missions abroad. This is of utmost importance in the Horn of Africa given the abuse and human rights violation accusations about the African Union Forces<sup>41</sup>.

The expected debut of the Turkish basing remains uncertain. Press sources initially claimed that the base was to reach full capacity by early 2017<sup>42</sup>. In June 2017, during his visit to Ankara, the Somali Foreign Minister Yusuf Garaad Omar told that the facility was expected to be fully operational "in coming months"<sup>43</sup>. Finally, the Turkish ambassador to Mogadishu stated that the base is to kick off by early September 2017<sup>44</sup>. Notably, at the time of writing, some sources reported that the initial batch of Turkish troops was already being sent to Somalia<sup>45</sup>.

### Potential Drawbacks

The most important drawback for the Turkish forward-deployments in the Horn of Africa would be the al-Shabab threat. The terrorist group has directly threatened Ankara and openly labeled Turkey as an 'enemy'<sup>46</sup>. Furthermore, the group's menacing stance

40 Ibid.

41 Human Rights Watch, *The Power These Men Have Over Us: Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by African Union Forces in Somalia*, September 2014. For the full text, see: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/09/08/power-these-men-have-over-us/sexual-exploitation-and-abuse-african-union-forces>, Accessed on: July 13, 2017.

42 Anadolu Agency, <http://aa.com.tr/en/africa/details-emerge-of-turkish-military-base-in-somalia/664139>, Accessed on: July 4, 2017.

43 Anadolu Agency, <http://aa.com.tr/tr/turkiye/yusuf-garaad-turkiyenin-somalideki-askeri-egitim-kampi-birkac-ay-icinde-acilacak/847618>, Accessed on: July 4, 2017.

44 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zDumRXNdy5g>, Accessed on: July 4, 2017.

45 <https://twitter.com/search?q=%23somalia>, Accessed on: July 7, 2017.

46 Anadolu Agency, <http://aa.com.tr/en/africa/al-shabaab-labels-turkey-enemy-of-somalia/606862>, Accessed on: July 13, 2017.

went beyond the words, since they targeted Turkish medics before, and even detonated a vehicle-borne IED near a hotel where Turkish delegates were working before President Erdogan's visit in 2015<sup>47</sup>. Al-Shabab is still a potent terrorist entity in Somalia, and they could pose serious risks to the Turkish military training facility.

Furthermore, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Ankara's primary competitor in the ongoing Qatar crisis, have been trying to expand its presence in the country through deals with Somaliland (a self-declared state internationally recognized as an autonomous region) for using Berbera Port in return for training local security forces, since the port could be a boost for the UAE's operations in Yemen<sup>48</sup>. The UAE's move drew harsh reactions from the Mogadishu government, which saw the deals with the breakaway Somaliland as illegal and in violation of Somalia's sovereignty<sup>49</sup>. In other words, Turkey and the Emirates would engage in yet another competition in Africa following their political clash in the Gulf.

Nevertheless, the forward-basing in Somalia remains a true opportunity for Ankara in case the security risks could be managed smoothly. The Mogadishu government's reliance on Turkey has been growing over time, which brings about additional opportunities as well as key responsibilities. In this respect, the base is expected to play a significant role in promoting Turkey's strategic posture in the continent.

## TURKISH FORWARD - BASING IN NORTHERN CYPRUS

Turkey is one of the three nations that run forward-basing on the island of Cyprus. The United Kingdom

47 Ibid.

48 BBC, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-38956093>, Accessed on: July 13, 2017.

49 VOA News, <https://www.voanews.com/a/somali-official-says-somaliland-deal-with-uae-corrupt-illegal/3724682.html>, Accessed on: July 13, 2017.

has Sovereign Base Areas in Akrotiri and Dhekelia<sup>50</sup>, while Greece has a contingent in the Greek Cypriot ruled south part of the island<sup>51</sup>.

Turkey's military presence in Northern Cyprus manifests through a corps-level deployment (Baris Kuvvetleri Komutanligi – the Peace Forces Command, KTBK) with subordinate mechanized infantry divisions, an armored brigade, commando and special operations regiments, and support units<sup>52</sup>. Furthermore, due to the exceptional defense and security arrangements between the Turkish Cypriot administration – recognized as Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus by Ankara (TRNC)– and Turkey, a number of posts in the Turkish Cypriot Security Forces Command (Güvenlik Kuvvetleri Komutanligi – GKK) is filled by the Turkish Armed Forces personnel, including a two-star general commanding the unit. The GKK has several subordinate institutions ranging from the local police to coast guard and even firefighters<sup>53</sup>. In 2005, for the first time, a Turkish Cypriot officer was promoted to the brigadier general rank and was appointed as the deputy commander of the Security Forces Command<sup>54</sup>. Since then, this practice has been kept<sup>55</sup>. Apart from the aforementioned units, Turkey has a regiment deployed in Nicosia depending on the guarantee system in the island established through the 1959–1960 Zurich – London Agreements.

Turkey's forward basing in Northern Cyprus is the oldest in the republic's history. Geopolitically, it gives Ankara an important lever in the Eastern Mediterranean military balance. Regardless of ideological differences, almost all Turkish administrations have

been so careful to protect this upper hand. In fact, 'the S-300 missile crisis' in the 1990s is a good example to explain Turkey's position. Briefly, in 1997, the Greek Cypriots attempted to procure S-300 PMU-1 air defense systems from the Russian Federation, which could have rendered the Turkish Air Force's supremacy abortive. This decision sparked serious escalatory responses by Turkey. At the time, the Turkish administration even hinted at the possibilities of a preventive strike to destroy the batteries if the procurement went ahead<sup>56</sup>. As a tangible deterrent, Turkey temporarily stationed some F-16s to the Gecitkale Airport in Northern Cyprus with full combat payloads including the Israeli-made Popeye air-to-ground missiles<sup>57</sup>. Consequently, the batteries were transferred to Greece before ever being shipped to Cyprus, and are now deployed on the Aegean island of Crete<sup>58</sup>.

Along with the expulsion of PKK terrorist organization's leader Abdullah Ocalan from Syria in 1998 – upon the Turkish gunboat diplomacy over the Hafez al-Assad administration– the S-300 crisis was one of the two significant intentional escalation policies conducted, and in fact succeeded, by Ankara. But why its military superiority in the island of Cyprus was so important to Turkey?

The term 'geopolitical importance of Cyprus' has always been a cliché for the Turkish strategic community. At present, the island remains at the epicenter of energy geopolitics in the Eastern Mediterranean due to the discovery of lucrative hydrocarbon resources<sup>59</sup>. Yet, Ankara attached utmost importance to Cyprus well before the emergence of this hydrocarbon agenda.

50 For detailed info, see: Sovereign Base Areas official website, <http://www.sbaadministration.org/>, Accessed on: July 13, 2017.

51 IISS, *Military Balance 2017*, Routledge, London, 2017.

52 IISS, *Military Balance 2017*, Routledge, London, 2017.

53 Güvenlik Kuvvetleri Komutanligi, <http://www.mucahit.net/Komutanlarimiz.aspx>, Accessed on: July 7, 2017.

54 Hurriyet, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/kktc-nin-ilk-pasasi-346041>, Accessed on: July 7, 2017.

55 <http://www.kibrispostasi.com/index.php/cat/35/news/111528>, Accessed on: July 7, 2017.

56 Independent, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/turkey-hints-at-strike-on-cypriot-missiles-1282572.html>, Accessed on: July 10, 2017.

57 Hurriyet, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/turk-f-16-lari-kuzey-kibris-ta-39024559>, Accessed on: July 10, 2017.

58 The Aviationist, <https://theaviationist.com/2014/01/12/greece-fires-s300/>, Accessed on: July 10, 2017.

59 For an overview, see: Michael Ratner, *Natural Gas Discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean*, Congressional Research Service, 2016; Patrick Nopens, *Geopolitical Shifts in the Eastern Mediterranean*, Egmont Royal Institute for International Relations, 2013.

Turkish contingent in Cyprus has for instance been viewed as an offensive deterrent in the military balance between Greece and Turkey<sup>60</sup>. Within this context, it is argued that militarization of the Aegean islands by the Greek Air Force provides Athens with an invaluable advantage in conducting surprise deep strike capabilities. Yet, the Turkish Air Force lacks a reactive deterrent due to its air-bases' geostrategic posture, which cannot rapidly generate enough sorties over the Greek mainland. Furthermore, the Thracian corridor is both too narrow and too distant from strategic Greek targets, which rules out a decisive land incursion by Turkey in response to a surprise air attack. Besides, the Turkish–Greek naval balance, as well as the geographical features of the Aegean, don't allow conducting full sea-control by the Turkish Navy<sup>61</sup>. Therefore, the Turkish deployments in Cyprus are regarded as a way of establishing a clear offensive superiority through fielding a massive numerical advantage over the Greek forces<sup>62</sup>.

In the wake of the recent failure of the UN sponsored talks, it would be fair to conclude that the Turkish forward deployments in Northern Cyprus will remain unaltered for the foreseeable future. In the meanwhile, Turkey's naval strategic posture in the 2020s will gain additional importance. Next section assesses the issue in detail.

## TURKEY'S NAVAL POWER PROJECTION VISION : THE 'FLOATING BASE' CONCEPT

A new normal has been shaping the Eastern Mediterranean on the basis of energy geopolitics competition by the littoral states, coupled with the Russian Navy's return to the region and the ongoing Syrian civil war. Growing submarine activity, more assertive naval

modernizations, and combat missions have dominated the Levant's agenda in the 2010s<sup>63</sup>. Ankara has been following the suit by boosting its naval capabilities.

Turkey's assertive defense modernization in the 2000s manifests its geopolitical understanding. Ankara has been transforming its coastal navy into a blue-water one. The crown jewels of the Turkish naval strategic posture in the 2020s will be the forthcoming Landing Helicopter Dock (LHD), *TCG Anadolu*<sup>64</sup>. During the launching ceremony of TCG Kinaliada, the fourth vessel of Turkey's indigenous MILGEM-class corvettes batch, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan stated that the Turkish Navy would soon operate an aircraft carrier<sup>65</sup>. Recent news about Turkey's Landing Helicopter Dock project suggested that Ankara has been planning to build a ski-jump for its future LHD, which will enable her to operate F-35B short takeoff and vertical landing (STOVL) multirole fighters<sup>66</sup>. Such a decision to operate the future flagship as an amphibious assault platform or a light aircraft carrier will determine the Turkish naval strategic posture in the 2020s and beyond.

### The Juan Carlos-1 class Landing Helicopter Dock

Based on the Spanish Juan Carlos-1 class produced by Navantia<sup>67</sup>, the Turkish Navy's future flagship is designed to embark a battalion-level marine unit, tanks, and armored vehicles along with an air wing composed of various type of helicopters<sup>68</sup>. Turning Turkey's forthcoming LHD into a light aircraft carrier

63 For a detailed assessment, see: Can Kasapoglu, *Naval Balance of Power in the Mediterranean and Political-Military Trends*, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2017.

64 Navantia, [http://www.navantia.es/noticia.php?id\\_noti=291](http://www.navantia.es/noticia.php?id_noti=291), Accessed on: June 22, 2017.

65 Anadolu Agency, <http://aa.com.tr/en/todays-headlines/we-will-build-our-own-aircraft-carriers-erdogan/853272>, Accessed on: July 6, 2017.

66 Dave Majumdar, "Turkey's Jump-Jet Carrying Amphibious Assault Carrier", *The National Interest*, January 2017, <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/exposed-turkeys-jump-jet-carrying-amphibious-assault-carrier-14832>, Accessed on: July 6, 2017.

67 Navantia, [http://www.navantia.es/noticia.php?id\\_noti=291](http://www.navantia.es/noticia.php?id_noti=291), Accessed on: July 6, 2017.

68 IHS Jane's, *Jane's Fighting Ships – Juan Carlos 1 Class*, February 2017.

60 Mustafa Kibaroglu, "Ege – Doğu Akdeniz Denklemi Kibris'in Stratejik Konumu ve Annan Planı", *Mülkiye Dergisi*, February 2004.

61 Ibid.

62 Ibid.

would not be ‘simply’ about deploying a few F-35B STOVL aircraft on the deck before it sets sail. Rather, deciding whether TCG Anadolu would serve as an amphibious asset or a carrier-based operations platform is a major decision that would not only shape the vessel’s primary role but also the Navy’s core missions, as well as Turkey’s defense economics outlook.

Although the Spanish Navy uses the class as a light aircraft carrier substitute, the Australian navy kept the vessel limited with its amphibious and power projection roles. Juan Carlos-1 class amphibious assault ships are not built to function effectively as light aircraft carriers. This fact is not solely about the vessel’s 27,500 tons displacement, which is nowhere near the US super-carriers, but its design and characteristics. Light aircraft carriers have air-traffic control components, munitions and fuel storage facilities, and modified flight decks for operating STOVL aircraft<sup>69</sup>. For instance, while the French Navy’s 42,000 tons Charles de Gaulle or the Italian Navy’ 30,000 tons Cavour meet the requirements of light aircraft carrier operations, many other amphibious vessels of similar displacements are not able to conduct carrier-based missions efficiently.<sup>70</sup>

Spanish sources call the Juan Carlos 1–class as a “Strategic Projection Ship” which marks the biggest warship built in Spain. In fact, the underlying reason for building the Juan Carlos 1–class was associated with the Petersberg tasks<sup>71</sup> –at the time– incorporated within the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP), which was then transformed into the Common Security and Defense Policy of the European Union. The ship was designed to contribute to humanitarian assistance, peacekeeping, and combat duties at times of crisis<sup>72</sup>. Spanish experts indicate that this class

could cover light aircraft carrier and amphibious assault tasks. In fact, the initial aim was to combine the characteristics of the Principe de Asturias–class aircraft carrier and the Galicia–class amphibious ships in the Spanish Armada at the time.



*Juan Carlos 1 – class vessel with the launched bow and ski-jump<sup>73</sup>*

According to the Spanish assessments, the Juan Carlos 1–class is designed to perform four categorical missions for the Armada Española as follows<sup>74</sup>:

- Amphibious Operations,
- Deployment of Army Units (it is reported that the vessel could embark large platforms of army arsenals, such as the Leopard-2 main battle tanks and the CH-47 Chinook airlift helicopters),
- Integrated Projection Actions with the Fleet; substituting or complementing light aircraft carriers,
- Humanitarian Assistance Operations.

69 Richard Brabin-Smith and Benjamin Schreer, “Jump Jets for the ADF”, Strategic Insights, ASPI, November 2014.

70 Ibid.

71 IDS, Amphibious Warfare Ships: The Navantia Achievements Juan Carlos 1 Class Galicia Class and Athlas Family, Sponsored by Navantia, 2011, p.57.

72 Ibid.

73 Ibid. p.56.

74 IDS, Amphibious Warfare Ships: The Navantia Achievements Juan Carlos 1 Class Galicia Class and Athlas Family, Sponsored by Navantia, 2011, p. 60.

Apart from the abovementioned duties specifically for the Spanish Armada, the Juan Carlos 1 – class is reported to be able to conduct the entire mission portfolio of contemporary large amphibious ships:

- M** Force Projection
- M** Presence
- M** Operations Command
- M** Logistics Support
- M** Rapid Transport
- M** V/STOL Aircraft Carrier Operations
- M** Non-Combatant Evacuation Operations
- A** Support Ship Duties
- A** Training Ship Duties
- C** Humanitarian Aid Operations
- C** Disaster Relief Operations

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**M:** *Military Missions,*  
**A:** *Auxiliary Missions,*  
**C:** *Civilian Missions, for detailed assessment*<sup>75</sup>

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*Juan Carlos 1 approaching to her homeport, Rota Naval Base in Spain*<sup>76</sup>

### Turkey's Critical Decision between LHD and Light Aircraft Carrier

The Turkish Navy has not operated a carrier-based naval aviation before. If TCG Anadolu is to be modified as a light aircraft carrier, this would be the first time that Turkey will run a 'floating base' in blue waters. On the other hand, the Turkish Navy has robust

amphibious capabilities and even a successful combat record. Ankara started to build amphibious capacity in the 1960s at battalion-level amidst the escalating situation in Cyprus. Before the 1974 military intervention, Turkey managed to generate an amphibious infantry regiment that took part in the campaign. At present, the Turkish Navy has a brigade-level amphibious force along with elite marine commando units<sup>77</sup>. Detachments from this brigade have been commissioned in counter-terrorism operations against the PKK since the 1990s. Furthermore, during Turkey's recent Euphrates Shield campaign in Syria, the Navy's elite commandos were deployed in the area of operations, close to al-Bab<sup>78</sup>. Thus, the Turkish Navy's marine forces have been fighting the nation's wars for more than four decades, and already gained good experience in unconventional operations and urban warfare. Thus, designing Turkey's future flagship as an amphibious assault vessel or a light aircraft carrier will be about deciding between boosting an already existing capability and military strategic culture, and building a new role for the Navy. If the first option is to be preferred, then Turkey might promote its marines brigade to a division with expeditionary components.

In case Ankara opts for the latter option, operating a light aircraft carrier would provide flexible military options to the Turkish government in pursuing a strategic overseas agenda. If Turkey manages to build some fixed-wing naval aviation capabilities, then it won't be limited to relying on the homeland airbases. At present, without aerial refueling, the combat radius of the Turkish Air Force's platforms –mostly F-16 variants– can support operations a few hundred kilometers away from Turkey's borders. Forward-basing might be an alternative to extend the reach. Yet, this option depends on political agreements with prospective host nations, such as Qatar. In fact, the ongoing Gulf crisis revealed the vulnerability of forward-basing options in Turkey's neighborhood, especially when the

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75 Ibid. P.14.

76 IDS, Ambhigious Warfare Ships: The Navantia Achievements Juan Carlos 1 Class Galicia Class and Athlas Family, Sponsored by Navantia, 2011, p.76.

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77 For detailed info, see: IISS, Military Balance 2017, Routledge, London, 2017.

78 Daily Sabah, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2017/03/01/turkey-deploys-elite-commando-units-in-syria>, Accessed on: July 6, 2017.

GCC countries demanded Qatar to close the Turkish base<sup>79</sup>. Thus, Ankara may opt for having a ‘floating air base’ to be relieved from diplomatic considerations.

However, operating TCG Anadolu as a light aircraft carrier would have its drawbacks too. Australian strategic community published illuminating analyses on the issue a few years ago when equipping their Canberra-class LHDs, which are based on the Juan Carlos 1-class, with F-35B STOVL aircraft was debated. Assessments suggested that modifying Juan Carlos 1-class LHDs into light aircraft carriers could cost 500 million \$ per unit<sup>80</sup>. Furthermore, such a modification would necessitate procuring F-35B variants, coupled with life-cycle costs<sup>81</sup>. Such a shift could mean an additional burden for the Turkish defense economics, which might be the alternative cost of procuring the second Juan Carlos 1-class LHD.

### How to Ensure Sustainable Power Projection Capabilities?

Be it a light aircraft carrier or an amphibious power projection vessel; there might be an additional problem regarding the sustainability of Turkey’s future naval power projection capabilities. The nation’s primary procurement body, the Undersecretariat for Defense Industries, reports that the project is planned for acquiring only one platform<sup>82</sup>. This decision raises concerns about how the Turkish Navy can sustain its capabilities when *TCG Anadolu* is homeported for maintenance. Simply put, in doctrine and practice, carrier strike groups and amphibious ready groups are operated on a rotational basis. For instance, the Australian Navy plans to operate two Canberra-class

79 The Guardian, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/23/close-al-jazeera-saudi-arabia-issues-qatar-with-13-demands-to-end-blockade>, Accessed on: July 6, 2017.

80 Richard Brabin-Smith and Benjamin Schreer, “Jump Jets for the ADF”, Strategic Insights, ASPI, November 2014.

81 Ibid.

82 Undersecretariat for Defense Industries, <http://www.ssm.gov.tr/home/projects/Sayfalar/proje.aspx?projelD=30>, Accessed on: July 6, 2017.

LHDs<sup>83</sup>, *HMAS Canberra* and *HMAS Adelaide*, for ensuring sustainability of its amphibious outreach. Likewise, the British Royal Navy will operate two aircraft carriers of the Queen Elizabeth-class<sup>84</sup>, *HMS Queen Elizabeth* and *HMS Prince of Wales*, to maintain its naval strategic posture. On the other hand, the Russian Navy lost almost all of its naval aviation capabilities in Syria when *Admiral Kuznetsov* aircraft-carrying cruiser was homeported for a major overhaul following its three-month deployment off the Syrian waters<sup>85</sup>. Likewise, the French Navy could not sustain anti-ISIL naval aviation operations when its sole aircraft carrier, *Charles de Gaulle*, underwent midlife maintenance<sup>86</sup>. Therefore, if Turkey actually plans to become a power-projecting actor, it has to ensure some rotational deployment capability by having a second vessel to operate when the first one is homeported.

### Gaining More than Military Capabilities: The Naval Diplomacy Aspect

Without a doubt, operating either a (mini)carrier strike group or an amphibious ready group would provide Turkey with significant political signaling and military muscle-flexing advantages. Sending TCG Anadolu and her naval battle group to a crisis zone would enable Turkey to combine hard power with its diplomatic rhetoric. Furthermore, gaining such a blue-waters capability would also mark enhanced naval diplomacy capacity for Ankara. Naval diplomacy enjoys a broad-spectrum of missions ranging from port visits and exercises for building partnerships, to conducting patrols and even coercive efforts<sup>87</sup>. In brief,

83 For detailed info, see: Australian Government – Department of Defence, White Paper 2016.

84 The Royal Navy, <http://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/news-and-latest-activity/features/equipped-for-the-future>, Accessed on: July 6, 2017.

85 Sputnik, <https://sputniknews.com/russia/201704241052924773-russia-carrier-overhaul/>, Accessed on: July 6, 2017.

86 UPI, <http://www.upi.com/Defense-News/2017/02/08/Carrier-Charles-de-Gaulle-undergoing-refit-and-upgrade/5721486576719/>, Accessed on: July 6, 2017.

87 For a detailed assessment of naval diplomacy, see : Matthew Scarlet. Coercive Naval Diplomacy, US Naval War College, 2009.

TCG Anadolu could become an essential component of Turkish diplomacy, in addition to its combat role.

In sum, the Turkish Navy's flagship will be either a modified light aircraft carrier or an LHD in the 2020s. The ideal option would be operating at least two power projection-capable ships on rotation for ensuring sustainability. Nevertheless, defense economics outlook will be the primary determinant in deciding on the number and type of the vessels.

## FORWARD OPERATING BASES (FOB) NORTHERN IRAQ AND SYRIA

The Turkish forward operating bases (FOB) in northern Iraq and Syria are very tangible and deterrent manifestations of Ankara's security concerns beyond its immediate borders. Furthermore, although these contingents are not military-balance changers on their own, they can function as spearheads for a large, follow-on force's incursion.

Turkey's FOB in Syria is centered on formations (both the Turkish military and friendly indigenous groups) in al-Bab and adjacent areas following Operation Euphrates Shield. Thus, it is a new basing, and its destiny remains to be seen as the Syrian civil war unfolds. On the other hand, the FOB in Northern Iraq has been operational for about two decades.

### Background of Turkish FOB in Northern Iraq: Cross-Border Operations of the 1990s

At the peak of the PKK violence in the early 1990s, the Turkish Armed Forces still had its Cold War remnant doctrinal order of battle. It was a division-based, bulky structure which was designed for confronting a Soviet invasion as a NATO flank nation, rather than fighting a low intensity conflict to defeat a transnational terrorist threat like the PKK. In the absence of advanced intelligence-surveillance-reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities at Turkish security forces' disposal,

the PKK militants were based in the mountainous Turkish – Iraqi frontier areas. They were relocating by long nighttime marches as a natural camouflage. On the other hand, the Turkish outposts at the time had adopted a defensive mindset<sup>88</sup>. Furthermore, most of these small military facilities were built to confront smugglers, thereby, they were frequently being targeted by the PKK's outpost raids.

The abovementioned military understanding, both at unit formations and strategic thinking, was replaced with a mobile, rapidly deployable, brigade-based doctrinal order of battle throughout the 1990s. In this respect, the Turkish military boosted its army aviation capabilities with a comprehensive attack and utility helicopters procurement program. These platforms were also upgraded with night vision capabilities. As a result, the army and gendarmerie units gained air-assault commando operations capabilities, and they became able to call-in close air-support during engagements. Turkish military planners also replaced the defensive outpost formations with an active search & destroy strategy. In doing so, area control by elite commando units was an indispensable concept. Even a battalion from the Turkish Navy's amphibious brigade was assigned to counterterrorism missions in the southeastern part of the country<sup>89</sup>.

However, despite the aforementioned successful military transformation, PKK's transnational characteristics and its safe havens in Northern Iraq are still posing a threat to Turkey. Especially the power vacuum in the region following the First Gulf War was augmenting the problematic security environment. Although the PKK's top leadership were harbored in Syria, as well as the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon since the early 1980s as a part of Hafez al-Assad regime's proxy war against Ankara, Iraqi territory was more convenient for the terrorist organization. Firstly, Turkish – Syrian frontier, which has primarily lowland landscape,

88 Can Kasapoglu and Soner Cagaptay, "Turkey's Military Presence in Iraq: A Complex Strategic Deterrent", Policy Watch 2538, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, December 2015.

89 Ibid.



was not offering topographical advantages. Secondly, at the time, Turkey was not a party to the Ottawa Convention, and the border areas with Syria were mostly mined. As a result, the PKK preferred to use Iraqi territory as a jump-off point for staging raids<sup>90</sup>.

In response to the PKK's transnational terrorism characteristics, Ankara had to alter its geopolitical approach to the conflict. Thus, the Turkish political-military elite at the time had decided to extend counterterrorism operations into Northern Iraq. In 1992, the Turkish military launched its first massive incursion. Some 15,000 troops from the air force, army, and gendarmerie took place in the joint operation, which marked Turkey's second largest military endeavor abroad after the 1974 military intervention in Cyprus. The 1992 operation caught PKK off-guard and inflicted heavy casualties to the terrorist organization. In 1995, Turkey initiated a massive cross-border campaign, known as Celik-1 Harekati – the Operation Steel-1–. The Celik-1 deployed some 35,000 troops which pushed into some 60km deep Iraqi territory with substantial support from the Air Force bases in the southeastern city of Diyarbakir. Turkish Special Operations Forces, known as the maroon berets, penetrated even deeper behind the enemy lines. Operation Celik-1 might be even larger than Turkey's intervention in Cyprus<sup>91</sup>.

The 1992 and 1995 operations culminated in 1997, which ended up with a brigade-level persistent deployment in Northern Iraq. By this forward operational basing, Ankara aimed to deny PKK's tactical depth and regeneration capabilities. Besides, under the shadow of the Iraqi Kurdish civil war of the 1990s between the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), Turkey's secondary aim was to prevent the PUK's domination due

90 Ibid.

91 For Turkey's cross-border counter-terrorism operations in the 1990s, see: Can Kasapoglu, "Assessing the Role of Cross-Border Military Operations in Confronting Transnational Violent Non-State Groups: 1992–1998 Turkish Armed Forces Case", *Defence Against Terrorism Review*, Vol.4 N.1, Spring – Fall 2012.

to its alignment with the PKK, as well as the group's pro-Iranian stance.

### Current Force Posture in Northern Iraq

Current Turkish forward military basing in Northern Iraq is centered on a reinforced battalion-level armored unit in the Bamerni Airport. Elite commando units are also stationed in Kanimasi and a few villages (i.e. Begova) to prevent terrorist infiltrations into the Turkish territory.<sup>92</sup> In addition to these deployments and their surrounding detachments, the Turkish Special Operations Command has a liaison missions in Iraq for a long time.



*One of the rare media footages of the Turkish contingent in Bamerni Airport*<sup>93</sup>

In 2015, Ankara sent a battalion-level force, probably from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Commando Brigade<sup>94</sup> along with the Special Forces elements and a detachment of 25 tanks to the Iraqi town of Bashiqa near Mosul. One of these main battle tanks, an M-60T, was even hit by a guided anti-tank missile fired by ISIL elements in April 2016. The tank survived the attack thanks to its Israeli-modernized reactive armor, yet, the incident showed the actual dangers of a hybrid warfare environment<sup>95</sup>.

92 CNNTurk, <http://www.cnntrk.com/2008/turkiye/02/22/tsknin.kuzey.irakta.6.ussu.var/431089.0/index.html>, Accessed on: July 6, 2017.

93 Milliyet, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/uslerinizi-kaptin-askeri-cekin-gudem-1605850/>, Accessed on: July 5, 2017.

94 Hurriyet, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/basikada-kampa-sizmaya-calisan-18-isisli-olduruldu-puskurttuler-40037958>, Accessed on: July 6, 2017.

95 Milliyet, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/basika-da-turk-tanki-fuzyle-gudem-2230237/>, Accessed on: July 6, 2017.

Although the Turkish government stated that the deployment was conducted upon the demand from the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq for an anti-ISIL training mission, Baghdad reacted strongly indicating that its sovereignty was being violated<sup>96</sup>. Following the tensions, Ankara relocated its contingent in Bashiqa to the KRG controlled territory<sup>97</sup>. In January 2017, the Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim met his Iraqi counterpart Haider al-Abadi in Baghdad to resolve the issue. It was reported that an agreement was reached to honor Iraq's sovereignty rights and to address Turkey's security concerns at the same time<sup>98</sup>. Still, by the last deployments, Turkish troop number in Iraq is estimated to be "a few thousands".



*Turkish forward operating and training base in Bashiqa, 2016<sup>99</sup>.*

## Turkish FOBs in Syria

Following the seven months-long Operation Euphrates Shield, Turkey managed to clear some 30km deep territory in the northern plains of Syria from ISIS ele-

96 Reuters, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-turkey-abadi-idUSKBN14R0D4>, Accessed on: July 6, 2017.

97 TRT World, <http://www.trtworld.com/turkey/turkey-relocates-some-troops-from-bashiqa-in-northern-iraq-12869>, Accessed on: July 6, 2017.

98 Reuters, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-turkey-abadi-idUSKBN14R0D4>, Accessed on: July 6, 2017.

99 Hurriyet, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/iste-basikadaki-turk-us-su-40132255>, Accessed on: July 6, 2017.

ments. Since then, the Turkish Armed Forces' elite formations have been stationed in these areas including the town of al-Bab. The key facilitating factor in Turkey's forward operating bases in Syria is the maroon berets. Notably, the commander of this elite war-fighter unit himself was in charge of the Euphrates Shield, sometimes even commanding the operations from al-Bab<sup>100</sup>. Following the accomplishment of the cross-border campaign, the Special Forces have kept being active in the area. According to Turkish press sources, the maroon berets' chief visited the forward-deployed units and addressed them following the prayers during the recent Eid al-Fitr (late June 2017)<sup>101</sup>.

Although there is little open-source information about the al-Bab basing, publicly available evidence suggests that the number of Turkish troops might be reduced to some 1,500 from 8,000 which marked the peak of the Euphrates Shield incursion<sup>102</sup>. Some press sources hint at additional Turkish forward deployments close to Azaz<sup>103</sup>. In May 2017, Turkey's Deputy Prime Minister Veysi Kaynak told that Turkey has already been operating a base close to the Ayn al-Arab (Kobani) area, and Ankara is to build a gendarmerie and a general-purpose military base centered on the Aqil Mountain where the fiercest clashes for al-Bab took place<sup>104</sup>. As EDAM's defense research extensively analyzed in the Euphrates Shield publications, Aqil Mountain remains the most important geostrategic high-ground watching over al-Bab. Besides, the dichotomous basing strategy for the gendarmerie and

100 Haberturk, <http://www.haberturk.com/gundem/haber/1376565-zekai-aksakalli-el-babda-firat-kalkanini-boyle-yurutuyor>, Accessed on: July 12, 2017.

101 CNNTurk, <http://www.cnntrk.com/turkiye/korg-aksakalli-el-babda-askerlerle-bayram-namazi-kildi?page=2>, Accessed on: July 11, 2017.

102 Russia Today, <https://www.rt.com/news/388437-turkey-albab-base-syria/>, Accessed on: July 11, 2017; Hurriyet Daily News, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-forces-offered-truce-monitoring-mission-in-idlib-turkish-deputy-pm.aspx?pageID=238&nID=113082&NewsCatID=341>, Accessed on: July 11, 2017.

103 Sputnik, <https://sputniknews.com/middleeast/201703021051201589-turkey-syria-military-bases/>, Accessed on: July 12, 2017.

104 Daily Sabah, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2017/05/15/turkish-military-considering-bases-in-syrias-al-bab-says-deputy-pm>, Accessed on: July 11, 2017.

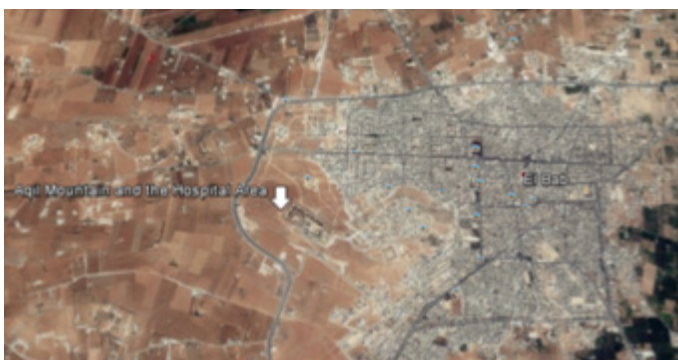
the conventional forces resembles Turkey's burgeoning contingent in Qatar. In Northern Cyprus, for example, Turkey does not deploy gendarmerie forces. One explanation for that could be internal security priorities. The Turkish Gendarmerie is an expert internal security force which performs a wide array of missions ranging from law enforcement to counter-terrorism. For some time, Ankara has been building Jarablus as a stable and governable area in northern Syria, which could absorb Turkey's refugee burden to some extent. It is reported that around 66,000 local children are being educated in the schools built by Turkey, and Ankara is trying to turn Jarablus into an attractive settlement option for the displaced Syrians<sup>105</sup>. Thus, the gendarmerie units will probably run partner capacity building and assistance missions to train the locals in maintaining public order and preventing terrorist infiltrations into the cleared areas. In fact, according to the Deputy PM, the Turkish bases will train and equip the local partners<sup>106</sup>, probably within the context of the abovementioned partner capacity-building activities. Notably, in May 2017, Turkey's Anadolu Agency reported that the Turkish Armed Forces has been running an intensive training program since late March 2017 to boost the Free Syrian Army's combat capabilities<sup>107</sup>.



*Turkish official news agency posted some pictures from the Free Syrian Army (FSA) training*<sup>108</sup>

### **Next Step: Another Forward Operating Base in Idlib?**

Another location for Turkey's forward basing might be Idlib. The Turkish President's spokesperson hinted at this possibility in late June 2017 within the context of the de-escalation agreement brokered by Turkey and Russia<sup>109</sup>. In fact, Turkish press sources even published the photos of a hill in Idlib where the troops will be stationed<sup>110</sup>. Open-source geolocating analyses suggest that the location was Sheikh Barakat Mountain, a tactically valuable position in the vicinity of Reyhanli<sup>111</sup>. If the high-ground becomes a forward operating base,



*Aqil Mountain remains the most significant high-ground around al-Bab*

105 Hurriyet Daily News, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-forces-offered-truce-monitoring-mission-in-idlib-turkish-deputy-pm.aspx?pageID=238&nid=113082&NewsCatID=341>, Accessed on: July 11, 2017.

106 Daily Sabah, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2017/05/15/turkish-military-considering-bases-in-syrias-al-bab-says-deputy-pm>, Accessed on: July 11, 2017.

107 Anadolu Agency, <http://aa.com.tr/tr/dunya/osoya-tsk-destekli-egitim-/822073>, Accessed on: July 12, 2017.

108 For the pictures, see: <http://aa.com.tr/tr/pg/foto-galeri/osoya-tsk-destekli-egitim/0/355952>, Accessed on: July 12, 2017.

109 Reuters, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-turkey-russia-idUSKBN19D1WI>, Accessed on: July 12, 2017.

110 Sabah, <http://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2017/06/28/tsk-idlib-ussunu-buraya-kuracak>, Accessed on: July 12, 2017.

111 Christian Triebert, "Is this Site a Future Turkish Base in Syria?", Bellingcat, <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/mena/2017/07/02/future-turkish-base/>, Accessed on: July 12, 2017.

this would provide the Turkish Armed Forces with very important geostrategic advantages against the PKK-affiliated YPG elements in Afrin<sup>112</sup>.



*Possible geo-location of the Turkey's basing in Idlib according to the Turkish daily Sabah<sup>113</sup>*

## CONCLUSION

Ankara does not have a single, standard forward basing model. Each contingent, major base, training facility, and forward operating base has its own political–military agenda. Basing in Somalia, for example, perfectly reflects partner capacity– building efforts to capture a beachhead for Turkey's Africa opening. In essence, it is based on more security and charm offensive purposes than military tasks. Forward-deployed forces in Northern Cyprus are playing a conventional deterrent role within the broader Turkish–Greek military balance. The light aircraft carrier project will boost Turkey's influence in the Mediterranean by marking a turning point in the Navy's history. The burgeoning basing activities in Qatar are designed to provide Ankara with a substantial leverage in the Gulf region.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Sabah, <http://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2017/06/28/tsk-idlib-ussunu-buraya-kuracak>, Accessed on: July 12, 2017.

Besides, as of now, this reflects Ankara's perspective, or a shift in its traditional perspective, in handling intra–Arab disputes. Forward operating bases in northern Iraq are almost the antithesis of the basing in Somalia, since these contingents were built to pursue almost only military purposes with little soft power concerns. Yet, the forward operating basing in Syria does not imitate those in Iraq, as they serve both military and partner capacity–building needs. As mentioned earlier, the Turkish forward basing posture is more of a 'complex adaptive system' with many individual parts not always fitting in the whole system's behavior.

Turkey's regional aspirations are likely to grow in the 2020s through deployments abroad. This brings about several advantages and handicaps for Ankara. On the positive side, forward basing is likely to build robust strategic cultural ties with the host nations. Furthermore, forward operating bases in Iraq and Syria have

already provided Ankara with tactical depth and a critical lever in its cross-border operations. Without these assets, the Turkish Second Field Army's area of responsibility –Iraq, Iran, and Syria frontier– would remain extremely vulnerable to asymmetric and hybrid threats. In the absence of viable and friendly central authorities in Syria and Iraq, there is almost no possibility of withdrawal from the forward operating bases in these countries. Last but not least, forward basing serves as the embodiment of national pride for Turkey.

On the negative side, firstly, forward basing offers a lucrative target for terrorist groups. Bashiqa is a notorious example of that. Without a doubt, Turkey's expanding contingents in Syria would mark the riskiest locations in this respect. Somalia might be another matter of concern due to the al-Shabab threat in the country. Secondly, running expeditionary missions means additional burdens on defense economics. Simply put, strategic airlifting to Somalia and Qatar on a regular basis, and at the same time operating a light aircraft carrier strike group miles away from the homeport could bring about significant costs. Nevertheless, this report concludes that a carefully-planned forward basing strategy is a need for Ankara despite possible drawbacks.



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