

The Dynamics of Greek-Turkish Strategic Interaction

Charalambos Papasotiriou*

RÉSUMÉ

Le but de cet article est d'examiner le différend gréco-turc sous la perspective des facteurs dynamiques qui influencent l'interaction stratégique entre Athènes, Nicosie et Ankara. L'auteur se concentre sur deux aspects fondamentaux de cette interaction: d'une part l'équilibre entre les facteurs qui peuvent intensifier l'interaction stratégique et d'autre part sur les facteurs qui peuvent diminuer ladite interaction.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to examine the Greek-Turkish confrontation from the perspective of the dynamic factors that shape the strategic interaction between Athens, Nicosia and Ankara. The focus will be on the balance between factors that might escalate this strategic interaction towards armed conflict, and factors that have a de-escalatory influence.

Greek-Turkish relations in the second half of the 1990s are at their worst level since the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974. Armed conflict between Greece and Turkey nearly broke out in January 1996 during the Imia crisis. Thereafter, the possibility of a Greek-Turkish war has continued to preoccupy statesmen and strategic planners in Greece, Turkey and Cyprus.

The analytical framework of this paper derives from the Realist theory of international relations. Accordingly, the analysis will focus primarily on the distribution of power and on geopolitical factors. The influence of domestic politics will be taken into account, but as a subsidiary factor within the context of the regional geopolitics.

The first section of this paper will focus on trends in the Greek-Turkish strategic balance, and on their consequences in terms of strategic interaction. The second section will place Greek-Turkish relations within the broader contexts of Western policy, as well as the geopolitics of South-Eastern Europe, the Eastern Mediterranean and Western Asia. The third section will examine the relevance of the domestic politics of Greece and Turkey to the dynamics of Greek-Turkish strategic interaction.

*Institute of International Relations, Panteion University, Athens.

1. The Greek-Turkish Strategic Balance

Both Greece and Turkey have a strong interest in the prevention of armed conflict between them, since warfare would halt or even reverse the current Greek and Turkish economic modernization efforts. Greece is struggling to meet the macroeconomic convergence criteria that would permit it to participate in the European Union's monetary union (Greece has not met these criteria in time for 1999, but strives to meet them so as to be able to join the monetary union by 2001)¹. Turkey is consolidating its modernization leap of the 1980s, and seems determined to continue on the path towards becoming one of the world's major emerging markets. Both countries' modernization efforts, which deeply engage their respective business communities and other social forces, would be threatened or undermined by a Greco-Turkish armed conflict.

The question is whether the dynamics of the strategic interaction between Greece and Turkey are sufficiently strong in an escalatory direction to lead them towards conflict, in spite of the contrary dynamic of the imperatives of their modernization efforts.

The most consequential dynamic factor in Greek-Turkish relations is the steady change in the bilateral strategic balance in favour of Turkey. This is evident from long-term trends:

First, the population of Turkey has grown rapidly, from 31.1 million in 1964 to about 62 million in the mid-1990s. The Greek population grew slightly from 8.4 million in 1961 to 10.2 million in 1991.²

Second, from the mid-1970s onwards the Turkish GDP has been growing faster than the Greek thus reversing the trend in the 1960s and early 1970s when the Greek economy was growing faster than, and catching up in total size with the Turkish.

Table 1: Average annual GDP growth rates³

	1960-73	1973-79	1979-89	1989-94
Greece	7.7	3.7	1.8	0.7
Turkey	5.6	4.5	4.0	3.6

The result is a growing Turkish superiority in total GDP. Greek per capita GDP is about triple the Turkish, but since Turkey has approximately six times the population of Greece, Turkish total GDP is approximately twice the Greek GDP.

Table 2: Ratio of Greek/Turkish total GDP⁴

1980	1985	1990	1995
0.77	0.65	0.54	0.49

Third, Turkish military expenditures and armament acquisitions have exceeded the Greek since the mid-1980s, resulting in a growing Turkish military superiority over Greece.

Table 3: Ratio of Greek/Turkish military expenditures⁵

	1980-84	1987	1990	1995
Total Expenditures	1,0	0,89	0,73	0,61
Expenditures on Armaments	1,94	0,73	0,78	0,32

It must be stressed, that Turkish armaments are motivated in part by factors extraneous to Greek-Turkish relations and are largely aimed at deterring the Syrian threat to Turkey and at fighting the Kurdish insurrection in South-East Turkey. It is thus by no means the case, that the increasing Turkish military spending is exclusively motivated by the Greek-Turkish disputes. Greek military spending, by way of contrast, is primarily driven by the growth of Turkish armaments and the need to limit Turkish military superiority *vis-à-vis* Greece. The growing military strength of Turkey forces Greece to follow suit, resulting in a regional arms race. An economically burdensome consequence has been that Greece has spent a higher proportion of its GDP on defense than any other Western nation in the 1990s.

The growing overall superiority of Turkey over Greece in the bilateral strategic balance is compounded by two geostrategic factors:

a) For geographic reasons Cyprus is strategically highly vulnerable to Turkey. The distance from Greece to Cyprus is so large, as to place the island only barely within the operational range of the Greek airforce. The Turkish mainland, by way of contrast, is only 90 miles from Cyprus. The geographic factor is augmented multifold, ever since 1974, by the presence on northern Cyprus of a Turkish army.

Turkey's dominant strategic position in Cyprus is relevant not only to the Cyprus problem, but also to the bilateral Greek-Turkish relations, since it adds a powerful instrument of pressure against Greece regarding the Greek-Turkish disputes in the Aegean. Holding Cyprus as a strategic hostage, Turkey can implicitly threaten to attack the remaining territories under the control of the Republic of Cyprus in the event that Greece moves

against Turkish interests in the Aegean. According to Mr. Sukru Elekdag, former Undersecretary of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and also former Turkish Ambassador to the United States, "Greeks are cognisant of the fact that in the event that they escalate the crisis in the Aegean to a hot conflict, this will force Turkey to take military measures in Cyprus. Greece is aware of her vulnerability in Cyprus. This assessment in turn leads Greece to be cautious in the Aegean".⁶

b) The geography of the Aegean also favours the Turkish side, from the perspective of strategy. Over twenty significant Greek islands are located near the Turkish mainland and are thus vulnerable to invasion in the case of a Greek-Turkish war. It would be difficult for Greek strategy to aim for the strong defence of all these islands, since this would mean the strategic dispersal of Greek forces. On the other hand, the Turkish side would be able to concentrate its forces on its chosen invasion target. Yet Turkish geography does not offer similar invasion targets for a prospective Greek counter-offensive. There are only two significant Turkish islands in the Aegean, Imvros and Tenedos, which can be strongly defended without a significant dispersal of the Turkish armed forces. A Greek invasion of the Turkish mainland would result in a Greek beachhead vulnerable to Turkish counter-attacks by land forces, whereas the recapture of a Greek island occupied by Turkish forces would require a difficult amphibious assault. *Ceteris paribus*, the consequence of this geostrategic asymmetry is that Turkey is likely to find it easier than Greece, in a Greek-Turkish war, to capture territory and thus enter the peace negotiations with a critical bargaining advantage.⁷

The growing Turkish superiority in the bilateral Greek-Turkish strategic balance, combined with Turkish strategic dominance in Cyprus and the geostrategic asymmetry in the Aegean, has several consequences that could result in escalation towards armed conflict.

Regarding Turkey, the possibility cannot be completely excluded that Ankara might deliberately seek to provoke a war with Greece, in order to use Turkey's strategic superiority to impose its will by force in the Greek-Turkish disputes. Even if one accepts as unlikely this scenario of a deliberate Turkish move to provoke war, the growing Turkish strategic superiority does affect Turkish policy in ways that make conflict escalation more likely.

First, in the last two years Turkish policy in the Aegean has widened the Greek-Turkish disputes, by questioning territorial boundaries in relation to uninhabited rocks (and even the inhabited island of Gavthos, south of Crete, though apparently this issue arose out of a bureaucratic mistake,

and has been quietly dropped by Ankara⁸). Thus, for the first time has Turkey questioned the territorial *status quo* in the Aegean, adding to the previous disputes over the demarkation of continental shelf, territorial waters, and air-space.

Second, Turkish governments can afford to commit acts of brinkmanship, without fear of risking strategic defeat in case of crisis escalation. The most dangerous incident was the landing of Turkish marines on one of the Imia rocks during the Clinton Administration's mediation effort at the height of the Imia crisis in January 1996. Such brinkmanship, which may result in uncontrolled conflict escalation, is usually more likely to be exhibited by the side which enjoys strategic superiority and thus has less to fear from escalation.

Regarding Greece, strategic inferiority has by no means produced a willingness to retreat from vital national interests in the Aegean and Cyprus. Greek politics remain under the heavy shadow of the 1974 Cyprus defeat, and the Greek public is likely to react very badly to a new humiliating national retreat.

As a result, Greece has attempted to counter growing Turkish strategic superiority in a number of ways. The most significant Greek strategic move has been the growing effort to strengthen the strategic capabilities of the Republic of Cyprus, and to coordinate Greek and Cypriot strategic planning, in order to reduce Cypriot vulnerability to Turkey. This linking of Greek and Cypriot defence planning constitutes a coherent bid to lend greater credibility to Greek extended deterrence regarding Cyprus. The Greek threat to declare war, should Turkey attack the remaining territories under the control of the Republic of Cyprus, is more credible as a deterrent if Cypriot defence capabilities are enhanced, and if Greek and Cypriot strategic planning is coordinated.⁹

Given the overall Turkish strategic superiority over Greece, and especially over Cyprus, Greek and Cypriot deterrence is based on the objective of inflicting unacceptably high losses on Turkey. More specifically, in case of a Greek-Turkish war the Greek objective is that, while the Greek armed forces will be fighting to hold their own in the direct Greek-Turkish fronts (Aegean and Thrace), the Turkish side will be unable to gain easy victories in Cyprus. If the Cypriot armed forces acquire capabilities strong enough to give a protracted fight against Turkey, then the Turkish armed forces will be confronted with a real two-front war.

The single most significant Turkish strategic advantage in Cyprus is the fact that Turkey dominates in the air. Given the large distance from Cyprus and the nearest Greek air bases, Greek airplanes can only operate in the

Cypriot skies for short periods. The proximity of the Turkish mainland provides the Turkish airforce the ability to establish command over Cyprus easily. To counter this Turkish superiority in the air, Cyprus has decided to acquire new surface-to air missile (SAM) capabilities.

The planned deployment by Cyprus of Russian S-300 SAMs, with a range long enough to enable attacks on aircraft flying over Turkish territory opposite Cyprus, has resulted in a situation with potentially grave escalatory consequences. Cyprus has declared that it will proceed with the deployment in 1998, and will not be intimidated to cancel the missile deal. Turkey has declared, that it will bombard the missile sites to eliminate what is perceived as a strategic threat to its air bases on the Turkish mainland opposite Cyprus. And Greece has declared, that any Turkish attack against Cyprus is *casus belli*). If the declared intentions of the governments of Cyprus, Turkey and Greece are to be taken at face value, then a war involving the three countries ought to break out during 1998. It will be interesting to observe, whether any of the three sides will fail to act upon its declared intentions, and risk losing credibility, or whether some mutually acceptable way out of this apparent war path will be found.

In the long run, Greece will only be able to defend her vital interests if it maintains a strategic balance with Turkey. But this presupposes high economic growth rates, to reduce the difference, in total size, between the Greek and the Turkish economies. High economic growth, in turn, presupposes radical economic reforms in the direction of down-sizing the enormous and unproductive Greek public sector, which has grown cancerously through the patronage system that dominated Greek politics until recently. Thus far, economic reforms have failed to deal with this central problem of Greek political economy. Privatisation and deregulation have been limited and have scarcely changed the conditions of economic stagnation that have plagued Greece since the late 1970s. As long as this Greek stagnation continues, and as long as the Turkish economy grows rapidly, the bilateral strategic balance will steadily tilt ever more in favour of Ankara.¹⁰

In conclusion, the growing bilateral strategic superiority of Turkey *vis-à-vis* Greece, which is augmented by Turkey's strategic dominance in Cyprus, and Greece's efforts to mitigate and counter the consequences of an inferior strategic position, threaten to result in an unplanned conflict escalation towards warfare. Neither Greece nor Turkey seem likely to put at risk their economic modernization efforts by deliberate steps towards armed conflagration. Yet their policies in the Greek-Turkish disputes cannot preclude the possibility of an unintended escalation with disastrous consequences for both.

2. The Wider Geopolitical Setting

The Greek-Turkish confrontation does not take place in a vacuum. The policies of the United States, the EU and NATO, as well as the geopolitics of SouthEast Europe, the Caucasus and the Middle East must be taken into consideration, to the extent that they affect the Greek-Turkish strategic interaction.

Both Greece and Turkey are to a large extent dependent on the West, strategically, politically and economically. Therefore, diplomacy and legitimacy, with regard to the West, necessarily figure very largely in Greek and Turkish policy. From the perspective of the West, both countries are important allies, so that Western powers avoid taking sides in the Greek-Turkish disputes and seek to prevent an armed conflict that would destroy NATO's southern flank. This Western position tends to favour Turkey, in the sense that Ankara can apply its strategic superiority to intimidating Greece and Cyprus without fear of a strong anti-Turkish reaction in the West. It does make less likely Turkey's using her strategic superiority to launch an aggressive war against Greece and Cyprus, which would completely discredit Turkish policy in the West.

The EU constitutes the forum in which Greece enjoys its most significant advantage over Turkey. As an EU member, Greece can veto any further steps in the relations between Turkey and the EU. Given that the Turkish Kemalist élite seeks to anchor Turkey firmly in the West by accession to the EU, Greece has some leverage and might extract some Turkish accommodation in the Aegean and Cyprus. It must be stressed, though, that Greece is not the only EU factor blocking Turkish accession. The Luxembourg summit of mid-December 1997, in which the EU heads of government refused to include Turkey in the list of prospective EU members, revealed that other EU members consider Turkey ineligible in the foreseeable future on account of poor domestic conditions (human rights abuses, partial underdevelopment, the ongoing Kurdish insurrection). On the conference sidelines, Chancellor Kohl indicated that a Muslim nation with a population of over 60 million cannot, in the foreseeable future, become a full member of the EU with unrestricted immigration rights.¹¹ Already Western European societies are strained by the presence of large Muslim immigrant communities that have not always integrated well with the indigenous population, causing "Le Penstyle racist backlashes". If Turkey is to be excluded from the EU for such intrinsic reasons, rather than merely on account of policies in Cyprus and the Aegean, then the Turkish leadership has no incentive to moderate its positions in these Greek-Turkish issues. Thus from the perspective of Greece, leverage over Turkey is diminished by the latter's exclusion from the future prospect of accession in the EU. This factor accounts for the failure of Greek maneuvers in the EU to moderate Turkish policy thus far.

Greece has been more successful in promoting the accession of Cyprus to the EU, which is likely to take place with the first wave of EU enlargement in Central and Eastern Europe. Nonetheless, Turkey's threat to annex northern Cyprus in case of the accession of the Republic of Cyprus to the EU prior to Turkey's own accession is a factor that would complicate the Cyprus problem enormously, unless the Cyprus problem is resolved prior to the entry of the island republic in the EU. In response to this situation, the EU is pursuing a particularly fine balancing act, involving apparently contradictory tendencies. On the one hand, it seeks to give Cyprus the impression, that her accession to the EU is unlikely prior to a solution of the Cyprus problem. On the other hand, it seeks to give Turkey the impression, that Ankara will not be permitted to veto Cyprus' accession through obstinacy in the Cyprus problem. Behind these apparently contradictory positions, one can discern the deep-felt desire of the EU, with United States backing, to convince both sides that they stand to lose more through intransigence than through mutual accommodation. Yet this stance does not mean, that the prospect of Cyprus' accession will moderate Turkish policy. It seems possible, that Cyprus will accede in its present condition, with Turkey occupying the northern part of the island, which would increase the security of the Republic from further Turkish attacks, but would also deepen and perpetuate the island's current division.

Overall, the West is a major factor in the dynamics of Greek-Turkish strategic interaction that makes less likely a full Greek-Turkish war. This limits Turkey's ability directly to use her strategic superiority against Greece and Cyprus. On the other hand, the Western position of not taking sides allows Turkey to continue to occupy northern Cyprus and to intimidate Greece in the Aegean without incurring significant costs in her relations with the West.

The geopolitics of the Balkans, the Caucasus and the Middle East also affect the dynamics of Greek-Turkish strategic interaction. The following analysis will examine a) the regional third-party threats to Greece or Turkey, and b) regional opportunities for Greece and Turkey of increasing their power or influence in a manner that might affect the Greek-Turkish strategic interaction.

For geographic reasons, Greece is more deeply involved in Balkan geopolitics than Turkey. The long Greek borders with Albania, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Bulgaria would pose a defence nightmare for Greek strategic planners, if Greece were to face powerful enemies from that direction. Yet such a possibility is very remote in the foreseeable future. All former Communist states in the Balkans are economically prostrate and strategically weak. As an indication, Greek

defence spending is half the Bulgarian GDP. Greek GDP is by some measures equal to the total of the GDPs of all former Communist states in the Balkans put together, including Romania and all former Yugoslav republics.

Table 4: GDP and population, Balkans. ¹²

	GDP 1995, \$ billions	Population, millions
Yugoslavia (new)	14	11.3
Croatia	15	4.6
Slovenia	19	2
FYROM	1.5	2.2
Bosnia-Herzegovina	d.u*	3.5
Rumania	28	22.8
Bulgaria	11.7	8.4
Albania	1.7	3.6
Greece	99	10.5

* d.u.=data unavailable after 1991

Consequently, Greece faces no strategic threat from the Balkans. On the contrary, Greek economic and military superiority, combined with Greece's status as the only Balkan state in the EU, have created an opportunity for Greece to become the center and the paramount regional factor in Balkan economics and politics. Such a development is bound to increase the influence - currently meager - that Greece wields in NATO and the EU.

It must be added, that Turkey has failed, for a number of structural reasons, to become a strong enough factor in the Balkans to threaten the predominance of Greece. First, Turkey is a Muslim nation, while major Balkan powers such as Bulgaria and (new) Yugoslavia face potentially disastrous problems with their Muslim minorities. Thus, Turkish influence in the Balkans depends on the ability of Turkish foreign policy to distance itself from religious considerations. But the Bosnian War led Turkish foreign policy to identification with the Muslims in Bosnia.¹³ Thereafter, Turkey lost credibility as a potential leader in this region. As long as the secular Kemalist regime in Turkey is challenged domestically, as long as the Islamist political forces gain popular ground, Turkish foreign policy in the Balkans will remain severely handicapped.¹⁴

Second, geography and economic factors work against Turkish influence in the Balkans. Turkey occupies a tiny corner at the south-eastern end of the Balkan peninsula, bordering on one Balkan state -Bulgaria- apart from Greece. This presents inherent barriers to any prospect of the Turkish

economy becoming the core of the regional economic system. This factor is compounded by the relative underdevelopment of the Turkish economy, compared to the Greek.

Third, Turkey since the end of the Cold War has become deeply involved in areas away from the Balkans, which will be examined immediately below. Here it will suffice to note, that the Turkish confrontations with Russia, Syria, and the Kurdish insurgents, in addition to the Greek-Turkish disputes, have absorbed the main resources of Turkish grand strategy, leaving little for Turkish efforts in the Balkans.

While Greece is likely to remain the leading regional actor in the Balkans, Turkey is geopolitically well-placed to play a major role in the Caucasus and the Middle East, areas in which vital Western interests are at stake relating to the world's oil supplies. Indeed, this is the main reason why Turkey is so highly valued as an ally by Western powers in the post-Cold War era. By way of comparison, Greece's role in the Balkans does not carry anywhere near the same weight in global politics. This Turkish advantage, in terms of geopolitical significance, works in favour of Turkey in terms of the reluctance of the West to take one-sided pro-Greek positions in the Greek-Turkish disputes.

Yet Turkish engagement in the Caucasus and the Middle East also has its disadvantages for Turkey. Unlike Greece in the Balkans, Turkey faces considerable actual or potential strategic threats in these regions, which diminish the ability of Turkey's strategic planners to concentrate their armed forces in the direction of Greece and Cyprus. This factor reduces to some extent the efficacy of Turkish strategic superiority *vis-à-vis* Greece and Cyprus.

Turkish efforts to gain influence in the Muslim former Soviet Republics in the Caucasus and Central Asia have resulted in a political Turkish-Russian confrontation, in which Russia has the upper hand. By involvement in civil wars or through other forms of indirect intervention, Russia has become the dominant foreign factor in Georgia and Azerbaijan, while she can count Armenia on her side in any confrontation with Turkey. So long as Turkish influence in these three Caucasus republics in Turkey's immediate vicinity is weakened, Ankara's ability to wield influence in the more distant Central Asian republics will be severely handicapped.¹⁵

Thus far, Russia has not posed an actual strategic threat to Turkey. Yet if the competition between these two states for influence in the Caucasus intensifies, Russia may well adopt a more menacing posture *vis-à-vis* Turkey. Evidence of Turkish paramilitary engagement on the side of the separatist Chechens during the Chechenya warfare shows the extent to

which Russo-Turkish relations are becoming strained.¹⁶ If they become still more strained, Turkey will be forced to readjust the order of battle of its armed forces to cover more fully the front towards Russia, thereby weakening the forces facing Greece and Cyprus.

In the Middle East, Turkey faces the enmity of Syria, which demands a return of the Hatay province that was transferred from Syria to Turkey in 1939 (Syria was governed by France at the time, by League of Nations Mandate). Syria has indirectly backed the Kurdish insurrection that has been festering in Turkey's south-eastern provinces since the mid-1980s.¹⁷ As a result, leading Turkish analysts take the possibility of a war with Syria quite seriously. Ambassador Sukru Elekdag, for example, has proposed a "two-and-a-half war strategy" to enable Turkey to win a simultaneous war against both Greece and Syria, while keeping down the Kurdish insurrection.¹⁸

In the mid-1990s, Turkey counter-balanced the Syrian threat by reviving and deepening her strategic cooperation with Israel. This move has earned Turkey considerable dissatisfaction in the Arab world. Yet the benefits are tangible and significant. Ankara has implicitly secured Israeli cooperation, should Syria ever attack Turkey. Moreover, the Turkish armed forces are also benefiting from the sharing of Israeli intelligence and from the upgrading of some of their weapons systems by the Israelis.¹⁹

The Turkish-Israeli strategic cooperation constitutes a formidable factor in the geopolitics of the Middle East. In strategic terms, it is virtually unbeatable. Only if Syria, Iraq and Iran combine forces, will a potent strategic counterbalancing alliance be possible. All three have expressed their deep antipathy to the Turkish- Israeli joint venture, yet they are divided amongst themselves by very deep fissures. In the 1980s Iran and Iraq fought the bloodiest Middle-Eastern war of the twentieth century. Syria participated in the UN alliance against Iraq in the Gulf War of 1991. These recent conflicts are likely to prove effective barriers to the formation of a tri-partite group coherent enough to threaten Turkey and Israel. Consequently, Turkey is unlikely in the foreseeable future to face a military attack from the Middle East. But when it comes to indirect threats, such as external support for the Kurdish insurrection in Turkey, the picture is different. It is at this lower level of conflict intensity that Turkey is likely to continue to face active threats from the Middle East, which constitute a notable but not decisive strategic diversion from her confrontation with Greece and Cyprus.

In conclusion, Greece is effectively free from strategic threats on the Balkan flanks, and can thus concentrate its strategic effort on the

Greek-Turkish confrontation. Turkey, by way of contrast, is engaged in a political struggle with Russia over influence in the Caucasus. Turkey also faces hostility from Syria, which constitutes an indirect strategic threat in the Kurdish insurrection. Turkey's strategic cooperation with Israel secures the country from more serious threats in the Middle East. On the whole, Turkey is unable to concentrate all its strategic assets against Greece and Cyprus, yet even if one takes into account the other fronts, these do not at this time amount to diversions decisive enough to undermine Turkish strategic superiority *vis-à-vis* Greece and Cyprus.

3. Domestic politics

The purpose of this section is to examine whether major political and institutional forces in Greece and Turkey have an interest in policies that make conflict escalation more likely, or whether they have an interest in policies that make economic modernization more likely and hence would be apt to favour conflict de-escalation. As will be seen, there are some similarities between the two countries, but also significant differences, regarding the domestic configuration of forces pushing towards either conflict mitigation or conflict escalation.

In general terms, public opinion in each of the two nations tends to be a very negative of the other nation, though this does not extend to private individuals (in other words, the mutually antagonistic nationalistic images are not racist). As a result of the mutually negative national images, the mass media of both countries stand to gain, in terms of short-term increases in viewers or readers, by presenting any Greek-Turkish crisis in a hyperbolic way (hype). The escalatory potential of the editorial policy of the mass media was amply demonstrated in the Imia crisis of January 1996, which was largely a creation of the media of the two sides interacting with one another in an escalation of mutually hostile images. In times of relative calm in Greek-Turkish relations, the mass media are more varied in their presentations, though a mutually antagonistic nationalistic mode tends to prevail, reflecting the underlying tendencies of public opinion. It is only in op-ed pieces in the more sophisticated newspapers that one may find a more balanced and less hostile presentation of the Greek-Turkish disputes.²⁰

The domestic politics of Turkey form a complex configuration of forces with a bearing on Greek-Turkish relations. The business community and growing middle class, which is located mainly in the western provinces of Turkey, constitute the main beneficiaries of Turkish economic modernization. They are represented by the current Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz' Motherland Party, and to a lesser extent by Mrs Tansu Ciller's True Path Party, which support Turkey's entry into the EU.

Opposing their Western and secular orientation is the Islamist Welfare Party, which has gained enough support among the lower classes across Turkey to come first, with 21%, in the most recent Turkish elections. The Welfare Party favours an islamization of the Turkish state, and a foreign orientation closer to the Islamic powers of the Middle East and North Africa, including Iran and Libya.

The armed forces have an institutional and constitutional position in the Turkish political system more paramount than is the case in any other Western nation, which they use to uphold Turkey's secular Kemalist state and Western international orientation.²² But being engaged in the decade-and-a-half old armed struggle against the Kurdish insurrection in South-East Turkey, the armed forces have become accustomed to violent policies in a manner that might have a deliterious influence on the prospects of conflict prevention in Greek-Turkish relations.

This is all the more evident in regard to shady paramilitary forces which have grown in the context of the darker side of the struggle in South-East Turkey. These groups are linked to organised crime and have tended recently to join the ranks of Mrs Ciller's True Path Party.²³ These forces, and Mrs Ciller herself, constitute the most militant anti-Greek nationalistic faction in Turkish politics. One alarming example of how they might harm Greek-Turkish relations was provided by the boast of the True Path MP Mr. Sedat Bucak, on Turkish television, that paramilitary forces accused of organised crime should be praised for their patriotic acts such as forest arson on Greek tourist resort islands opposite Turkey.²⁴

Thus the business community and other pro-modernization and pro-Western forces in Turkey have to confront two separate opposing groups of forces in Turkish politics. The first is the Islamic movement, which in the Welfare Party has found the best grass-roots organization in Turkish politics. While not belonging to the more militant anti-Greek nationalistic forces, the Welfare Party would not be inhibited in an escalation of Greek-Turkish tensions by concerns over the progress of Turkey's modernization or her European prospects. The second is the growth of shady paramilitary forces which have sprung from the conflict in South-East Turkey, which have grown financially strong through organised crime, which have introduced violent, illegal methods to Turkish politics, and which support a militant and even violent approach to Greek-Turkish relations, at the expense if necessary of Turkey's relations with the EU.

The domestic politics of Greece are less complex. The armed forces ceased to interfere in Greek politics with the fall of the military dictatorship of 1967-74. The paramilitary forces which sprang from the Greek civil war

in the 1940s, and which acted in a militant direction in the early phases of the Cyprus problem, also disappeared by 1974. The anti-Western nationalism of the late Andreas Papandreou had become bad politics by 1990, if not earlier, leading to his wholeheartedly embracing the goal of Greek participation in the EU's monetary union during his last premiership (1993-1996). His successor, the current Socialist Prime Minister Simitis, is among the most pro-European politicians in Greece. Currently, all major Greek political forces support Greek participation in the EU's monetary union, with the economic modernization and fiscal discipline agenda that it entails, which would be undermined by a Greek-Turkish war.

Nonetheless, any Greek-Turkish agreement, either on bilateral issues or on Cyprus, that is perceived by Greek public opinion as a humiliating retreat ("surrender"), is likely to be politically unacceptable within Greece. This factor forces the Simitis government to be cautious in its efforts to prevent Greek-Turkish relations from escalating towards a serious crisis.

In comparison with their Greek counterparts, the pro-Western and pro-European groups in Turkey face a far more formidable array of domestic political forces that do not share their modernization agenda, and that might opt for nationalistic inflexibility, even at the risk of conflict escalation at the expense of economic modernization. In Greece, on the other hand, the humiliation of the 1974 defeat in Cyprus makes public opinion extremely sensitive to any perceived further retreats, so that anti-Turkish feeling is likely to grip public opinion whenever Greek-Turkish tensions rise. Domestic politics in both countries force their respective governments to avoid any agreement that involves "losing face", and nationalistic factions are apt to present any steps back from the brink of confrontation in the least favourable light possible.

Conclusions

In the case of the Greek-Turkish disputes, it seems likely that neither side desires deliberately to provoke armed confrontation. Nonetheless, the growing bilateral strategic imbalance in favour of Turkey, which derives from long-term increases in the Turkish factors of power (population, total GDP, armed forces) relative to the Greek, lends to Greek-Turkish strategic interaction dynamic elements that entail significant risks of unintended escalation to warfare.

Western policy exerts a de-escalatory influence, in the sense that it constrains Turkey from actually using its bilateral strategic superiority through armed conflict to impose its will on Greece and Cyprus. Yet the West refuses to take sides in the Greek-Turkish disputes, in order to avoid alienating either side. The result is that Turkey can intimidate Greece and

Cyprus, without fearing a strong anti-Turkish backlash in the West, by displays of force just short of war, which nonetheless increase the risk of unintended escalation towards warfare.

The geopolitics of the Balkans, the Caucasus and the Middle East have an asymmetric effect on Greece and Turkey. On the one hand, they provide for Turkey a far more important role in global politics than for Greece, making an anti-Turkish stand by the West in Greek-Turkish disputes less likely. On the other hand, they also create significant strategic threats on Turkey's flanks, whereas this is not the case for Greece. Thus the Greek side can concentrate strategically on the Greek-Turkish confrontation without diversions, whereas the Turkish side must divert considerable strategic resources in fronts away from Greece and Cyprus. Yet this factor is thus far inadequate in terms of counter-balancing Turkey's strategic superiority in the Greek-Turkish confrontation.

In terms of the domestic political configurations, in both countries, but more notably in Turkey, the political and societal forces that strongly support economic modernization are faced by opposing forces that are more likely to support inflexible positions and brinkmanship in Greek-Turkish relations, even if thereby they increase the risk of unintended war which would set back these modernization efforts.

The dynamics of Greek-Turkish strategic interaction are driven by the central factor of the growing Turkish strategic superiority, which makes escalation towards warfare, even if unintended, all the more likely. Other factors, which work in a de-escalatory direction, are not potent enough to guarantee avoidance or prevention of conflict escalation. Thus in the long run, the normalisation of Greek-Turkish relations seems unlikely, and the risk of warfare will remain significant, unless Greece succeeds in restoring strategic equilibrium with Turkey.

ENDNOTES

1. The criteria for participation in the European monetary union are a) budget deficit no more than 3% of GDP, b) inflation and nominal interest rates no higher than 1.5% from the EU average, and c) public debt moving towards 60% or less of GDP. In 1997, Greece met none of these criteria.
2. Panayiotis Kondylis, *Theoria tou Polemou*, Athens: Themelio, 1997, pp. 387.
3. *Historical Statistics. 1960-1994*, OECD, 1996, p. 50.
4. Platias, A., "Skepsis gia tin Elliniki Ipsili Stratigiki", *Yearbook, Institute of International Relations*, 1997, Athens: I. Sideris, 1997, p. 29.
5. Stavrinou, V., "Sigritiki Analisi ton Stratiotikon Dapanon Elladas-Tourkias", *Yearbook, Institute of International Relations*. 1997, Athens: I. Sideris, 1997, p. 74.

6. Elekdag, Sukru, "Two-and-a-Half War Strategy", *Perceptions*, May 1996, p. 44.
7. Panayiotis Kondylis, *Theoria tou Polemou*, Athens: Themelio, 1997, pp. 392-95.
8. A. Kourkoulas, *Imia: Kritiki Prosegisi tou Tourkikou Paragonta*, Athens: I. Sideris, 1997, pp. 113-116.
9. P. Ifestos & A. Platias, *Elliniki Apotreptiki Stratigiki*, Athens: Papazisis, 1992.
10. C. Papatiriu, "Oi Prokliseis tis Ellinikis Ipsilis Stratigikis Pros ton 21o Aiona", *Meleti EKOME*, 19 June 1997.
11. "Turkey Responds Angrily to EU Exclusion", *Wall Street Journal-Europe*, 15 December 1997.
12. The source is *Military Balance 1996/7*, London: The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1996. Other sources of economic data present a very similar picture, especially in regard to the overwhelming predominance of the Greek GDP.
13. Papatiriu, C., *Ta Valkania Meta to Telos tou Psichrou Polemou*, Athens: Papazisis, 1994, p. 257-59.
14. Landau, J. M., *Pan-Turkism: From Irredentism to Cooperation*, London: Hurst & Co., 1995. See chapter 7, "From Irredentism to Solidarity", added in the 1995 edition to the text of the older 1981 edition, which deals specifically with post-Cold War Turkish identification with Muslim groups in the Balkans, as well as the Caucasus and Central Asia.
15. Papatiriu, C., *Ta Valkania Meta to Telos tou Psichrou Polemou*, Athens: Papazisis, 1994, p. 253-57.
16. T. Tsakiris, "I Geostratigiki Sigkrousi Rosias-Tourkias stin Yperkaukasia kai ton Rosiko Kaukaso" *Meleti EKOME*, M 972 - 10 April 1997.
17. G. E. Fuller, "Turkey's New Eastern Orientation", in Fuller et al, *Turkey's New Geopolitics: From the Balkans to Western China*, Westview Press/A RAND Study, 1993, pp. 54-57.
18. Elekdag, Sukru, "Two-and-a-Half War Strategy", *Perceptions*, May 1996.
19. M. Evriviades, "I Prosfati Simfonia Israil-Turkias: Politiko-stratitiki Simasia kai Epiptosis", *Ereuna EKOME*, EP 962 - 11 July 1996.
20. C. Giallourides, *I Ellinoturkiki Sygkrousi apo tin Kypro sta Imia: I Optiki tou Typou*, Athens: I. Sideris, 1997.
21. "Can the West Still Count on Turkey?", *Wall Street Journal-Europe*, 4 September 1996.
22. Paul Henze, "Turkey: Towards the Twenty-First Century", in Fuller et al, *Turkey's New Geopolitics: From the Balkans to Western China*, Westview Press/A RAND Study, 1993, pp. 8-11.
23. "Turkish Leaders Find Ties to Tribal Chieftains Strained by Scandal: Allegations Have Put Spotlight on Feudalism and Warlords Controlling the Southeast", *Wall Street Journal-Europe*, 6 March 1997.
24. A. Kourkoulas, *Imia: Kritiki Prosegisi tou Tourkikou Paragonta*, Athens: I. Sideris, 1997, pp. 129.