

**THE WASHINGTON INSTITUTE**

**POLICY FORUM LUNCHEON**

***BEYOND IRAN:  
THE RISK OF A NUCLEARIZING MIDDLE EAST***

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**12:00 to 2:00 p.m.**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honor for me to have the opportunity to address such a highly distinguished audience. I would, therefore, like to thank, first of all, Mr. Fred Lafer, President of the Washington Institute, and Mr. Robert Satloff, Executive Director, for inviting me here today. I would like to extend my special thanks to my fellow friend and colleague, Dr. Soner Cagaptay who, I believe, took the initiative for such a gathering. I would also like to thank Ms. Nazli Gencsoy for handling the logistical issues very smoothly.

Today, we are asked to address three issues with regard to the implications of Iran's nuclear program for its neighbors and for the region as a whole. I believe, these are very valid and legitimate issues to discuss. The first issue relates to the question as to "*what may lead Iran's neighbors to begin to assume Iran may have an undeclared nuclear weapon capability?*" Let me answer this question with an anecdote, which I believe is quite relevant, and one that may give you an idea as to how the perception of Iran's nuclear aspirations in Turkey has changed over the last decade.

Exactly ten years ago, while I was doing my PhD, I was a fellow at the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, namely UNIDIR in Geneva, Switzerland from February to May 1995. I was doing research on the modalities of establishing a Nuclear-Weapons-Free Zone in the Middle East.<sup>1</sup> That was the time when Iran signed a nuclear deal with Russia on January 8, 1995. I had a chance to see the text of the agreement and I started to examine it. As we know, according to the terms of Article 4 of the NPT, States parties to the Treaty have the right to enter in such cooperative agreements and to advance their nuclear capabilities, provided that they remain loyal to their solemn commitment under the same Treaty not to divert their capabilities from peaceful to military purposes.

As such, there was not much to argue against the deal between Iran and Russia, as both of them had declared that their intentions were entirely peaceful. However, one element in the Iran-Russia deal struck me. It was the agreement to enroll some 30 Iranian doctoral students, and as many masters students as well as technicians in Russian universities, institutes and labs, every year. To me, that was a clear indication of Iran's desire to build a long-term, self-sustainable nuclear weapons development capability.

I thought, a country like Iran, which is one of the richest in the world in terms of energy resources, would not necessarily need that many of highly educated nuclear scientists, engineers, physicists solely for peaceful applications of nuclear energy. The only reason, in my opinion, would be to achieve an indigenous and independent nuclear weapons development capability over time.

When I returned to Ankara from Geneva, I was asked by the Center for Strategic Research of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs to contribute to their academic journal (i.e., *Perceptions*) with an article. I wrote an article entitled "*Is Iran Going Nuclear?*" and submitted to the Center. A high-ranking diplomat from the Center, after reviewing my paper, said: "Mr. Kibaroglu, we truly respect your accumulation in the field, but I'm afraid, if we publish this article, it may deteriorate our relations with Iran. Could you please soften it a little bit?" I said, it was the softest article that I could write, and all I wanted to do was to

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<sup>1</sup> My work, which aimed to draw some conclusions on the EURATOM and ABACC experiences (the Argentine-Brazilian agreement to open their nuclear facilities to the IAEA inspections), was later on published by UNIDIR. See Mustafa Kibaroglu, "EURATOM & ABACC: Safeguard Models for the Middle East?" in Jan Prawitz and James F. Leonard (eds.), *A Zone Free of Weapons of Mass Destruction in the Middle East*, United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), 1996, New York & Geneva, pp. 93-123.

attract attention to the capabilities (technological as well as scientific) that Iran would acquire thanks to its cooperation with Russia, and that, it would then be a matter of political decision for the Iranian leadership to have the bomb in the future. Then, I withdrew my paper from that Center. It was soon published by the Foreign Policy Institute in Ankara.<sup>2</sup>

Since then, I'm trying to raise concerns about Iran's desire to become a nuclear weapons-capable state. I published other short or long pieces, both in Turkish and English, on this subject over the last ten years; I gave seminars, talked on TV and radio programs, etc.<sup>3</sup> Although my colleagues and other people who listened to me have always respected my expertise in the field of nuclear proliferation, many of them have also kindly criticized me for being a little bit under the influence of my readings that are published mostly by Israeli or Jewish American scholars. I indeed found these criticisms a bit insulting, as if I was not able to make my own judgments out of what I read. Moreover, it was quite normal for the Israeli and Jewish American researchers to explore this subject more than anybody else in the world, as the fundamentalist regime in Iran poses quiet a challenge to the survivability of Israel. Just like it was normal for the Turks to explore the PKK terrorism, more than any body else, as it was said to be the number one threat to the unity of Turkey.

After all of these years of neglect, if not anything else, I received an invitation from the same Center of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in October 2003, to join a roundtable discussion with an Iranian delegation, to talk, among others, about nuclear issues for the first time. However, I would like to remind you that the roundtable discussion was held after the revelations about Iran's undeclared nuclear facilities in Natanz and its clandestine efforts to enrich uranium. More recently, I'm invited to join the Turkish delegation again for the third round of the discussions, this time in Tehran, in last December. All I can tell you at this stage is that, all what I have argued for so many years about Iran's desire to become a "nuclear weapons-capable state" are confirmed by the Iranian scholars, scientists and officials with whom I had a chance to discuss these issues at length in Tehran.

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<sup>2</sup> See Mustafa Kibaroglu "Is Iran Going Nuclear?" *Foreign Policy*, December 1996, Vol. 20, No. 3 - 4, Foreign Policy Institute, Ankara, pp. 35-55.

<sup>3</sup> See Mustafa Kibaroglu, "An Assessment of Iran's Nuclear Program" *The Review of International and Strategic Affairs*, Spring 2002, Vol. 1. No. 3, ASAM-Frank Cass, Ankara & London, pp. 33-48; Also see Mustafa Kibaroglu, "Iran Nükleer Bir Güç mü Olmak İstiyor ?" (Does Iran Want to Become a Nuclear Power?), *Avrasya Dosyası - İran Özel (Eurasian Files - Special Issue on Iran)*, Fall 1999, Vol. 5, No. 3, ASAM, Ankara, pp. 271-282.

Since recently, I observe a great deal of change in the attitude of Turkish officials, both from civilian and military ranks, in taking Iran's engagements in the nuclear field much more seriously. I think, the statements made by the Director General of the IAEA, Mr. Mohammed El Baradei, served as an eye opener for many of them. I'm glad to see the degree of interest in what is going on in the neighbor. It would be absurd to think anyway that Turkey would still remain aloof to Iran's increasing capabilities in the nuclear field after all these revelations and official statements. But, in the past, it seems to me that, Turkish officials gave more credit to what was told by their Iranian counterparts, than the reports coming from academic circles suggesting that Iran was going nuclear.

Now, many more Turks are more seriously concerned with the possibility that Iran may develop nuclear weapons capability. They are concerned because, such an eventuality may upset the long-established parity between the two countries since ages. Turkey and Iran did not have even a border dispute since the Kasr-i Shirin Treaty signed in 1638, more than some 360 years ago. But, the mere fact the two countries did not have a dispute, should not necessarily suggest that they had always very friendly relations during all these centuries. The parity that existed between the two countries in terms of geographical locations, demographic structures and military capabilities made both sides exercise restraint, even though they may have had ambitions to attack each other. However, should Iran develop nuclear weapons capability, this may dramatically tip the balance in favor of Iran. Such a development may also negatively affect Turkey's relations with Syria, which is a close ally of Iran in the region.

This brings me to the second issue that we are asked to discuss today as to "*under what circumstances might some important regional states reconsider whether they should explore nuclear options?*" Let me first of all state here that, developing nuclear weapons has never been a state policy in Turkey, nor will it be in the foreseeable future so long as the government and the military are in responsible hands. Turkey is a State party to the NPT, and it is one of the very few states that voluntarily ratified the Additional Protocol of the IAEA, not to mention its membership in the international nonproliferation initiatives such as the Nuclear Suppliers Group. There is, therefore, good reason to believe that Turkey will not be next proliferator.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See Mustafa Kibaroglu, "Turkey," in Harald Müller (ed.), *Europe and Nuclear Disarmament*, 1998, Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (PRIF), European Interuniversity Press, Brussels, pp. 161-193.

However, the loyalty of an increasing number of Turks, especially from the younger generations, be they in politics, in academia, in the military or in state bureaucracy, to the norms of the nonproliferation regimes cannot be taken for granted indefinitely, if the United States and the European Union fail to convince Iran to forego the nuclear weapons option. Otherwise, Iran's nuclear ambitions may trigger young Turks to *think nuclear* more seriously.

Until recently, it was the widespread belief among the Turks that Iran would not be able to materialize its desire to develop a sophisticated nuclear capability anyway because of the strong opposition of the United States and Israel. In addition, Iran's obligations under the NPT, and its comprehensive safeguards agreement with the IAEA were also thought to be real impediments. Moreover, it was believed that, even if Iran did develop such a capability, Turkey's NATO membership and the considerable might of the Turkish Armed Forces would be powerful deterrents against that country. But, when it became clear in the early 2003 that some activities of Iran would be in violation with its safeguards agreement, voices are started to be heard from within Turkish society promoting the idea of going nuclear. There are a number of reasons for this:

First of all, Turks have seen that the much-publicized opposition of the US to North Korea's nuclear weapons program did not prevent that country from advancing its capabilities. It is believed by many experts that North Korea has either already manufactured several nuclear weapons or is able to do so on a very short notice. The concerned body of intellectuals in Turkey think this is because of a lack of commitment of the US to uphold the principles of the nuclear nonproliferation regime due to its excessive engagement in the "war against terror" sending wrong signals to the aspiring states.

Strengthening the nonproliferation regimes, however, has been the key issue in Turkey's official stance toward the spread of weapons of mass destruction. Therefore, the possibility of the NPT becoming an ineffective treaty, stands out as the second reason why some in Turkey espouse the idea of having at least the basic infrastructure for nuclear weapons capability. These people quickly come to the conclusion that no international treaty should constrain Turkey anymore if Iran follows the example after North Korea in evading its obligations under the NPT by simply walking out with a unilateral declaration.

A third reason is the perceived weakness of NATO, which is seen as being in a “protracted process of soul searching” since the end of the Cold War. Moreover, NATO, which used to be the most trusted international organization by the Turks, has turned down Turkey’s request to enact Article 4 of the North Atlantic Treaty in the days leading up to the US war on Iraq. Enacting Article 4 would have paved the way to taking necessary measures in case Article 5 (i.e., Alliance solidarity) had to be put in operation against a possible Iraqi aggression. Almost the same happened back in 1991 during Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait. Hence, for many Turks, NATO’s credibility as an effective deterrent against a nuclear weapons capable Iran is seriously called into question.

A fourth reason is that, a huge number of Turks are unhappy with the policies of the United States toward the Kurdish groups in northern Iraq, a region that was ruled by the Turks for centuries and then lost to the British after the demise of the Ottoman Empire. Many believe that the US is helping the Kurds to build an independent state, regardless of what the American diplomats are asserting publicly. Some even argue that a confrontation with the US over northern Iraq is not a far-fetched scenario. Having heard what was said and written in the US media after the failure of the troop basing resolution in the Turkish Parliament on March 1, 2003, many Turks maintain that Turkey must be powerful against the US.<sup>5</sup>

Last but not least, the unlucky incident on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July in 2003 in the northern Iraqi city of Suleymaniyah when the US troops detained Turkish Special Forces, who were there for more than a decade with the knowledge of successive US administrations, created an outburst in the public domain and among the political and military elite alike. The degree of popular reaction was unprecedented in the recent history of the Turkish-American relations.<sup>6</sup> “Had we had nuclear weapons, Americans could not have treated our brave soldiers like that,” said many Turks from all walks of life. It seems that the very basic cause of going nuclear, namely prestige and national pride, has already surfaced in Turkey, too. Therefore, this issue must be tackled seriously.

At this point, let me put it straight forward that I’m categorically against the idea of going nuclear basically for two reasons. First, I do not consider at all, nuclear weapons as

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<sup>5</sup> See Mustafa Kibaroglu, "Turkey Says No," *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, July/August 2003, Vol. 59, No. 4, Chicago, Illinois, pp. 22-25.

<sup>6</sup> See Mustafa Kibaroglu, "Missing Bill Clinton," *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, March/April 2004, Vol. 60, No. 2, Chicago, Illinois, pp. 30-32.

“weapons” *per se*. I believe, nuclear weapons as well as other weapons of mass destruction can only be labeled as slaughtering devices. To me, war, which is merely “*a continuation of state policy by other means*” as very wisely defined by Clausewitz, may have logic and reason, even though I would certainly do my best to exploit every chances to avoid it. However, there may be times when war may be unavoidable. Even then, there is the principle of “just war” and the “ethics of war” that must apply. Nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction do unquestionably override these principles.

Having said that, I must also say that I’m realistic enough to acknowledge that nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction will stay with us for a long time. There are immense difficulties in getting the countries to agree to bring their nuclear stockpiles down to very low levels, not to mention the technical difficulties in getting rid of the excess fissile material (i.e., HEU and Plutonium) coming out of the arms control and disarmament agreements. I must also add that, I’m a student of the deterrence school and I believe the second-strike capabilities of the two superpowers have been highly instrumental in keeping security and stability in the world during the Cold War years. However, that was made possible only thanks to a number of conditions that were met by them. I don’t think the world may be a safer place with more nuclear weapons-capable states popping up every day.

The second reason why I’m against the idea that Turkey should develop nuclear weapons capability is that, I don’t think Turkey needs to possess nuclear weapons to protect itself from its rivals. Not only will this lead to the closure of NATO’s nuclear umbrella, which is, to me, still a credible deterrent, but also, such an eventuality can cause a spiral effect in the region and bring a lot more trouble to Turkey in the future rather than solutions to its problems.<sup>7</sup> I can discuss this issue at length during the Q&A session.

I want to conclude by discussing the third issue that we are asked to comment on today as to “*what actions by outside powers, such as the United States, might influence the thinking in these regional states?*” I will answer this question a bit differently. I think both sides of the coin must be discussed here. I mean, the outside powers may have either a positive or a negative impact on Turkey so long as the nuclear issues are concerned. Should Turkey decide,

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<sup>7</sup> See Mustafa Kibaroglu, "Kitle Imha Silahlarının Yayılması Sorunu ve Türkiye" (Proliferation of WMD and Turkey), *Dogu Bati*, August-October 2003, Ankara, pp. 122-142; Also see Mustafa Kibaroglu, Nükleer Silahlar ve Türkiye" (Nuclear Weapons and Turkey), *Görüş*, June/July 2004, Ankara, pp. 24-31.

at some point in the future to go nuclear, the outside powers, the United States in particular, may exploit every opportunity to stop Turkey going down that road. Many analysts argue that the strategic value of Turkey for the US is diminishing since the end of the Cold War. Hence, the US administrations may put an unbearable strain on their relations with Turkey in every field, extending from economic to military and political issues. There are examples of such an attitude, even during the Cold War years, when Turkey was considered to be a “staunch ally” of the US. I’m talking about the letter by President Lyndon Johnson sent to Ankara in June 1964, and also the arms embargo from 1975 to 1979 imposed by President Jimmy Carter, both because of Turkey using its legitimate right to intervene in Cyprus to protect the Turks from the atrocities of the Greek Cypriots.

Moreover, in the nuclear field, over the last four decades, successive US administrations have done their best to blockade Turkey’s attempts to establish nuclear power plants, because of their fear of alleged illicit cooperation between Turkey and Pakistan.<sup>8</sup> I can see that some concerns do still exist. Therefore, even the smallest sign of thinking of nuclear weapons option may again prevent Turkey from enjoying the peaceful applications of nuclear energy in the future.

Added to these, even the mere rumors that Turkey might be developing nuclear weapons may make Turkey a target of the war by proxy tactics of its neighbors, as they used to do so until recently. Bearing in mind that Turkey has signed as well as ratified the Additional Protocol, which gives extended rights to the IAEA to conduct thorough inspections in “any location” in the country, it would be only a wishful thinking to conceal clandestine activities from international inspections. Should Turkey defies its solemn obligations to provide full transparency, it may well be taken to the United Nations Security Council and become subject to comprehensive sanctions, including economic as well as military measures. The glorious history of the Turks, and Turkey, which has always been loyal to its international obligations, would not deserve such a treatment by the international community. Therefore, I would recommend to those in Turkey who may have ambitions to develop a nuclear weapons

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<sup>8</sup> See Mustafa Kibaroglu, "Turkey's Quest for Peaceful Nuclear Power," *The Nonproliferation Review*, Spring-Summer 1997, Vol. 4, No. 3, Center for Nonproliferation Studies (CNS), Monterey Institute of International Studies (MIIS), Monterey, California, pp. 33-44. Also see Mustafa Kibaroglu "'İki Yüzlü' Enerji, 'İki Yüzlü' Bati" (Janus Face Energy, Janus Face West), *Enerji Dergisi (Journal of Energy)*, December 1999, Vol. 4, No: 12, Istanbul, pp. 48-49; And. Mustafa Kibaroglu, "Candu Kadük mü Oluyor?" (Will Candu Be Caduque?), *Enerji Dergisi (Journal of Energy)*, February 2000, Vol. 5, No: 2, Istanbul, pp. 26- 27.



capability, to forget about them. As such, they will serve our country better by using Turkey's resources more wisely and more efficiently in other fields that our people would really need.

On the other side, the very same outside powers like to United States and the leading European countries may lend more support to Turkey economically and politically and the Europeans may accelerate the pace of accession negotiations with the Union with a view to become a full member at an early date. The Turks, who will believe that there is a future in the European Union as an honorable member, will certainly feel more confident about the future and they will put aside whatever nuclear ambitions they may have.

Thank you for your attention. I'm looking forward to your questions.