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by John Noble  
December, 2012



# POLICY UPDATE

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Last April, the Prime Minister of Turkey, Recep Erdoğan mused publicly that Turkey might consider invoking NATO's Article V to protect Turkish national security in the face of increasing tension along the Syrian border. Article V of the North Atlantic Treaty says that

“the Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognised by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area”.

The Article also obliges any NATO country suffering from an armed attack and all NATO members taking measures to respond to such an attack to immediately report their actions to the UN Security Council. As such Article V does not automatically bind all NATO countries to military action in response to an armed attack against one of its members.

Article V has only been invoked once in NATO's 63 year history after the terrorist attacks against the United States on September 11, 2001. Not all NATO countries participated in the war in Afghanistan that followed.

Last June Turkey did invoke Article IV of the NATO Charter which provides that “the Parties will consult together whenever, in the opinion of any of them, the territorial integrity, political independence or security of any of the Parties is threatened.” Turkey had invoked Article IV in 2003 during the Iraq War and NATO responded by deploying AWACs surveillance aircraft and Patriot defensive missiles on Turkish territory. Turkey also invoked Article IV in October after the shelling of Turkish territory by Syrian forces rather than appealing for an invocation of Article V which requires consensus of all 28 members. This was interpreted as a clear signal that Ankara was not interested in escalating tensions along its border with Syria. That is a concern shared by many NATO members, who regard any Turkish proposals for a militarily guaranteed buffer between Turkey and Syria and/or a no-fly zone as steps towards military involvement in the Syrian conflict. NATO Ambassador's held an emergency meeting to consider the Turkish request. NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen made clear that while NATO had no intention of intervening in Syria, it stood ready to defend Turkey if necessary.

Another emergency session of the North Atlantic Council took place in early October at Turkey's request following the shelling of a Turkish village that left five of its citizens dead. NATO ambassadors issued a statement following the meeting voicing their “greatest concern” and strong condemnation of the shelling. The NATO Secretary General again emphasized there was little prospect of NATO military intervention in Syria.

On November 21 Turkey formally asked NATO to deploy surface-to-air Patriot missiles along its border with Syria to guard against violence spilling over. The NATO Secretary General promised to discuss the request “without delay” and authorized the sending of an advance team to Turkey the following week to explore potential sites for the Patriot system. He also said it was up to the countries that have Patriot systems (Germany, the Netherlands and the US) to decide whether they could provide them. In 2003 the Patriots were provided by Germany and the Netherlands.



NATO Ministers meeting in Brussels on December 4 and 5 responded positively to the Turkish request:

We welcome the intention of Germany, the Netherlands and the United States to provide Patriot missile batteries, subject to their respective national procedures. These systems will be under the operational command of the Supreme Allied Commander Europe. Any deployment will be defensive only. It will in no way support a no-fly zone or any offensive operation<sup>1</sup>

A European diplomat told CNN that the approval of the deployment request is a "political decision, a sign of solidarity for Turkey".<sup>2</sup>

NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said he believes the "actual deployment will take place within weeks." He went on to say "we stand with Turkey in the spirit of strong solidarity...to anyone who would want to attack Turkey, we say, 'Don't even think about it!'"<sup>3</sup> Russia, a strong Syrian ally, has no interest in an escalation of tensions between Syria and Turkey. After the Syrian shellings in October, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said "we have spoken to the Syrian authorities who assured us ...that what happened at the border with Turkey was a tragic accident and that it will not happen again." The Russians also expressed serious reservations against the deployment of Patriot missiles as likely to add to the border tensions. NATO diplomats told the Russians that the deployment was defensive only and designed to de-escalate the crisis.

It is difficult to conceive that the level of Syrian aggression against Turkey to date would warrant invocation of Article V. Syria shot down a Turkish military jet last summer and more recently fired artillery and mortar shells from Syria into Turkish territory causing the death of Turkish nationals. Turkey immediately returned fire against Syrian positions and the shelling ceased. But that is hardly the type of armed attack envisaged under Article V. Turkey's President Abdullah Gul in a recent interview with the Toronto Star acknowledged as much by saying "it's very unlikely that Syria would directly target Turkey. They wouldn't dare do it. But madness might prevail."<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, the Turkish military is about twice the size of the Syrian military. Syria has 304,000 active military personnel, which is less than half of Turkey's 613,000; it has 1940 aircraft compared to Syria's 830; and its land-based weaponry stands at 69,770 items compared to Syria's 25,400<sup>5</sup>. Militarily, Turkey doesn't need any help to handle Syria. But it does need political support from its NATO allies, which is exactly what it got, (along with the Patriot missiles), at the Dec 4 and 5 NATO Ministerial.

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<sup>1</sup> NAC Communique December 4-5, 2012

<sup>2</sup> NATO Oks Turkey's request for Patriot Missiles, Joe Sterling, CNN December 4, 2012

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.cnn.com/2012/12/04/world/meast/syria-civil-war/?hpt=hp\\_c1](http://www.cnn.com/2012/12/04/world/meast/syria-civil-war/?hpt=hp_c1)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/nato-gives-go-ahead-to-send-patriot-missiles-to-turkey/article5957412/>

<sup>4</sup> Toronto Star November 28, 2012 <http://www.thestar.com/printarticle/1294652>

<sup>5</sup> Jiaa.janes.com "The Turkey-Syria military balance" May 2012

## ► About the Author

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**John J. Noble** is a Fellow of the Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute. He spent 35 years in the Canadian Foreign Service including stints as Ambassador to Greece, Minister to France and Ambassador to Switzerland and Liechtenstein, as well as prior postings to Senegal, Turkey, England and Geneva (UN/GATT). His Ottawa assignments included: Special Advisor Nuclear Safeguards; Deputy Director of the Commercial and Commodity Policy Division; Departmental and Ministerial Spokesman and Director of the Press Office; Director General of the United States Bureau; the International Security and Arms Control Bureau; and the International Organizations Bureau. He served as the External Affairs member of the Canada/US Permanent Joint Board of Defence and headed the Canadian delegation to the Open Skies Conferences in Ottawa and Budapest in 1990.

Educated at Acadia University, he is a Fellow of the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs at Harvard, a Senior Distinguished Fellow at the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs at Carleton and Senior Associate at the Centre for Trade Policy and Law at Carleton. After retiring from Foreign Affairs in 2001, he was named a Fulbright Scholar at Michigan State University in the fall of 2002, where he worked on the next steps in Canada/US economic relations. He recently completed a two year term as Director of Research at the Centre for Trade Policy and Law (CTPL) at Carleton. He has written extensively on Canada/US relations and is a regular contributor to Policy Options.



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