

Center for American Progress



The Neglected Alliance

Restoring U.S.–Turkish Relations to Meet 21st Century Challenges

Spencer P. Boyer and Brian Katulis December 2008

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Executive Summary

The strategic relationship between the United States and Turkey—a decades-long partnership that has advanced both countries’ common interests—remains a key pillar in overall U.S. national security policy. Yet this vital alliance has suffered through serious strains in recent years, mostly due to ill will generated by the 2003 Iraq War. Today, this neglected alliance is in critical need of repair.

The incoming Obama administration has a unique opportunity to rebuild bilateral relations, but doing so will require significant steps by both Turkey and the United States. Repairing the relationship will necessitate closer coordination between the two governments on key policy questions directly related to Turkey’s geopolitical position astride Europe, the Middle East, and Central Asia.

Demonstrable U.S. actions are necessary to address the Turkish people’s deeply unfavorable views about the United States. According to recent public opinion polls, Turks today have a less favorable opinion of the United States than do Russians, Chinese, and Pakistanis. As Turkey becomes increasingly democratic, these views of the United States at the popular level will affect the Turkish leadership’s strategic calculations.

Indeed, any effort to strengthen U.S.-Turkish relations will come at a time when Turkey is undergoing significant domestic transformations and facing major foreign policy challenges. The lack of progress in Turkey’s efforts to join the European Union has contributed to the country’s sense of alienation from the West, and made real the possibility of Turkey forging an independent path that is less aligned with Western interests.

Turkey’s role in the Middle East and Central Asia has evolved substantially as the altered strategic landscape in those regions has changed. What’s more, Turkey is undergoing its own political evolution as it tries to reconcile its longtime secular traditions with the increasing influence of a new, conservative religious elite. Turkey also is experiencing the rise of a pro-capitalist, conservative business class that represents a new center of political power in Turkey.

The incoming Obama administration has a unique opportunity to forge a new partnership with Turkey’s leaders, and should do so on three key fronts: the Middle East; the energy crossroads that Turkey occupies astride the Caucasus nations of Central Asia; and Europe.

All three of these fronts present their own separate challenges for U.S.-Turkish relations, but also offer opportunities for mutually beneficial cooperation and progress.

In the Middle East, Turkey's leadership role has evolved on multiple fronts—Iraq, Iran, and the Arab-Israeli conflict. Key policy actions for the United States regarding Turkey's leadership role in the Middle East include:

- Establishing a strategic bilateral dialogue to formulate and advance a common set of interests and objectives for the Middle East, including those involving Iraq, Iran, and the Arab-Israeli conflict
- Continuing security cooperation with Turkey to address the threat posed by the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, which both the United States and Turkey consider a terrorist group. This should be done while also encouraging Turkey, Iraq, and officials in the Kurdistan Regional Government in northern Iraq to develop strong security, economic, and political ties that reaffirm the territorial integrity of Iraq and Turkey, and advance regional security
- Working more closely with Turkey in advancing multilateral and regional diplomatic and security initiatives aimed at stabilizing Iraq as the United States continues the redeployment of U.S. troops
- Encouraging Turkey and Israel to maintain their strong economic and military ties and offering support for Turkish efforts to facilitate dialogue between Israel and Syria
- Working closely with Turkey in an international effort to address Iran's nuclear program and Iran's evolving regional role, taking advantage of Turkey's unique position as a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and its ties to both Israel and Iran
- Supporting Turkey's continued contributions to stabilization and peacekeeping efforts in countries such as Lebanon and Afghanistan

As the United States works with Turkey in these key Middle Eastern arenas, the two countries also must keep a close eye on opportunities to advance bilateral cooperation in the energy crossroads of the Caucasus region. The war between Russia and Georgia in August 2008 underscored this area's strategic importance, and the incoming Obama administration should encourage Turkey to continue developing itself as an energy conduit. Turkey's location makes it a prime candidate for moving energy from the Caucasus and Central Asia while bypassing both Iran and Russia, both of whom may manipulate their control of supply routes. As it builds stronger cooperation on these fronts, the new administration should:

- Monitor historic tensions between Turkey and Armenia, calibrating its actions to acknowledge that Turkish and Armenian leadership have recently made moves to reconcile their differences
- Remain engaged with the oil- and natural gas-producing nations of Central Asia on the other side of the Caspian and Aral seas, which are seeking U.S. and Turkish help to export to Europe

Turkey's future role within Europe is also a critical issue that will affect U.S. security and economic interests. EU member states will ultimately decide whether Turkey becomes a member of the European Union, but the Obama administration should play an intermediary role and continue to push for Turkey's accession as past administrations have done. Key policy actions for the United States regarding Turkey's evolving position in Europe include:

- Making Turkey one of the first stops on President Obama's first European trip for face-to-face meetings with the Turkish prime minister and president. Our new president should make such a visit to Turkey within the context of a European as opposed to Middle Eastern trip to demonstrate that the United States considers Turkish membership in the EU and stronger ties to the West to be an important strategic objective
- Using diplomacy to persuade our European allies such as France and Germany to keep Turkey's EU accession process moving forward and to abandon rhetoric that gives the impression that Turkey is not a proper cultural or religious fit for the EU
- Encouraging Turkey to drop its objections to the 2002 Berlin Plus Agreement, which authorizes the EU to use NATO assets and capabilities to support the creation of an EU rapid reaction force as part of a European Security and Defense Policy
- Working with U.N., EU, and Turkish and Cypriot leaders to make sure that discussions to resolve the long-standing dispute over Cyprus stay on track
- Encouraging Turkey to hasten its development of democratic institutions, freedoms, and reforms, which may help lessen the antagonism between the ruling Justice and Development Party, or AKP (its Turkish acronym), and its adversaries in parliament, the military, and the courts. Such democratic progress also may help prevent further legal action against the AKP, which could damage Turkey's EU aspirations
- Increasing U.S. bilateral investment, business, educational, and cultural ties to the country regardless of Turkey's status in the EU accession process

Introduction

The strategic relationship between the United States and the Republic of Turkey has been an essential pillar of U.S. national security policy since the beginning of the Cold War. Turkey is a critical military ally of the United States through the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and an essential hub in a broad range of relationships with countries in several vital regions of the world.

Straddling Europe, the Middle East, Central Asia, and the Mediterranean, Turkey's central position makes it a crucial actor in each of these regions. Whether working with our European allies through NATO in Afghanistan and the Balkans, hosting peace talks between Israel and Syria, or serving as the critical transit point for oil and natural gas flowing from Central Asia to Europe and the Mediterranean Sea, Turkey is a pivotal power whose future will directly impact the United States. Notably, the United States currently has more than 1,500 troops permanently deployed in Turkey, nearly all of which are stationed at the strategically vital Incirlik Air Base in south-central Turkey.¹

While U.S.-Turkish military ties and cooperation in NATO are key aspects of the relationship, they are not the only ones. A close U.S. relationship with Turkey on multiple issues—economic, political, and diplomatic—is critical for America's overall Middle East and transatlantic strategy.

This important relationship, however, has suffered strains in recent years and is in need of repair. America's decision to launch the 2003 war in Iraq, and the resulting instability on Iraq's border with Turkey, particularly damaged America's standing in Turkey. The relationship started to improve after increased cooperation between the United States and Turkey, such as intelligence sharing between the two countries on addressing the threat of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK (its Kurdish acronym), a terrorist organization. But there is still a long way to go.

Recent Pew polling found that only one in 10 Turks, or 12 percent, have a positive opinion of the United States, which was less positive than other key countries, including Russia (46 percent of Russians had a favorable opinion of the United States), China (41 percent), and Pakistan (19 percent). In addition, seven in 10 Turks (70 percent) viewed the United States as more of an enemy than a friend.² Other polling indicates that only 8 percent of

those in Turkey view American leadership in world affairs as “desirable.”³ This represents a substantial decline since 1999 and 2000, when polls indicated that more than 60 percent of Turks held favorable opinions toward the United States.⁴

National security is not a global popularity contest, of course. But how people around the world view the United States matters much more in terms of policy outcomes today than public opinion did decades ago. As countries such as Turkey become more democratic, what the public thinks, and how they view relationships with other countries, has much greater influence on their leaders than before.⁵

The lack of progress in Turkey’s accession efforts to join the European Union has contributed to Turkey’s alienation from the West and made real the possibility of Turkey forging an independent path that is less aligned with Western interests. Turkey is undergoing its own political evolution as it tries to reconcile its longtime secular traditions with the increasing influence of a new, conservative religious elite. Furthermore, Turkey is adjusting to the growth of a pro-capitalist, socially and religiously conservative business class, which represents a new political power center in the country.

Many Turks view the agenda of the ruling Justice and Development Party, or AKP (its Turkish acronym), a moderate Islamist political party, with skepticism. A recent Constitutional Court decision penalizing the AKP for violating secular principles, coming one vote short of closing the party, shows how deep the fissures run.

The U.S.-Turkish relationship is at a pivotal juncture, and the new U.S. administration has a historic opening to put this vital relationship on more solid footing. The stakes for Turkey, the United States, and indeed the rest of the world, are high. Without proper leadership from the United States, this neglected relationship could falter.

The Obama administration has a prime opportunity in 2009 to revive the U.S.-Turkish strategic partnership and update it to reflect new challenges in the Middle East, Europe, and beyond. In the pages that follow, we will examine key opportunities awaiting an Obama administration, where closer relations with Turkey could result in critical diplomatic, security, and economic breakthroughs for both countries.

History of the U.S.-Turkish Alliance

The Turkish-American relationship is nearly two centuries old—originally focused on an assorted range of commercial concerns—with the strategic alliance beginning at the end of World War II and beginning of the Cold War.¹ Before 1945, U.S. policymakers viewed the eastern Mediterranean as more of a British strategic interest than an American one.² But following the 1947 declaration of the Truman doctrine, which stated that the United States would provide economic and military support to Turkey and Greece to prevent them from falling under control of the Soviet Union, America took a new interest in Turkey.

This Cold War tension between the United States and the Soviet Union led to Turkey's membership in North Atlantic Treaty Organization in 1952.³ Close cooperation between the United States and Turkey on a number of strategic matters continued throughout the Cold War era.

Turkey's entrance into NATO—the alliance's first expansion of significance—was designed as a buffer against Soviet expansion into the Persian Gulf region.⁴ At the time, Turkey's role was largely to maintain pressure on the Eastern Bloc's southern flank in the event of war with the Soviet Union.⁵ The Soviet threat also led to the United States basing nuclear weapons in Turkey in 1957.⁶

The U.S.-Turkish relationship grew closer during the Korean War, where 15,000 Turkish troops fought alongside U.S. military forces.⁷ During the Cold War, Turkey became a vital NATO member by maintaining the second largest military in the alliance and playing a major role in the overall defense of Europe.⁸

The first strains in the relationship, however, arose during the Cuban Missile Crisis. President John F. Kennedy's 1962 decision to dismantle the nuclear missiles based in Turkey—part of a deal with Russia to defuse nuclear tensions—infuriated Ankara, which felt that the United States had not properly consulted Turkey.⁹ Then, in 1964, came President Lyndon B. Johnson's threat to withhold U.S. support if Turkey became entangled in a conflict with the Soviet Union over Cyprus, which further strained the relationship.¹⁰ But perhaps the most difficult moment for U.S.-Turkish relations was in 1974, when Turkey invaded Cyprus, leading to a four-year arms embargo and congressional condemnation.¹¹

These episodes, however, as well as American discomfort with Turkey's poppy production in the 1960s and 1970s, did not fatally damage U.S.-Turkish relations. Soviet aggression toward Afghanistan in 1979 served as a reminder to the United States that it shared vital common interests

with Turkey in stabilizing and securing southwest Asia.¹² In addition, the 1979 Iranian revolution resulted in the loss of Iran as a key strategic ally of the United States in the region, which further bolstered the U.S.-Turkish strategic partnership.¹³

After the Cold War

The end of the Cold War and collapse of the Soviet Union opened the door to changes in the U.S.-Turkish relationship—the United States no longer primarily viewed Turkey as a buffer against possible Soviet aggression.¹⁴ Washington continued to see Turkey as an important stabilizing force in the region, with Turkey and the United States working closely together to help shape the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union.¹⁵

Turkey's strategic and operational support during the first Gulf War in response to Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait solidified the U.S.-Turkish partnership in addressing common security concerns in the Middle East. Turkey, which took a \$20-to-60 billion economic hit as a result of U.N. sanctions against Iraq,¹⁶ allowed U.S. fighter aircraft to use the base at Incirlik for attacks on Iraq. Overall, the 1991 Gulf War was only slightly less unpopular in Turkey than the 2003 Iraq War, but through the political leadership of former Turkish President Turgut Ozal, the United States was able to garner the necessary support.¹⁷

In particular, President Ozal deployed 100,000 Turkish troops along the border with Iraq. Turkey also closed down the Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline that brought oil from Iraq's northern oil fields onto the global market, helping isolate Saddam Hussein's regime even though the decision was economically damaging to Turkey.¹⁸ In addition, when nearly half a million Kurdish refugees fled to the Turkish border region after the U.S.-encouraged 1991 uprising against Saddam Hussein's regime, Turkey granted American troops access to Turkish air bases to enforce no-fly zones in these northern enclaves.¹⁹

Following the Gulf War, U.S.-Turkish cooperation increased on several fronts. Along with working together to protect Iraqi Kurds, the two countries combined efforts to battle the PKK, which is fighting for an independent Kurdish state. Both the United States and Turkey consider the PKK to be a terrorist organization. In particular, the United States provided intelligence on PKK actions, which led to the 1999 capture of PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan in Kenya.²⁰ In turn, Turkish forces participated with the U.S. military in NATO operations in the Balkans throughout the 1990s.

The United States improved its standing in the country after the 1999 earthquake in Izmit through public and private relief aid to victims.²¹ The United States also successfully used this period in the late 1990s and early 2000s to show its support for Turkey's bid for EU accession and for International Monetary Fund assistance for Turkey.²² In addition, the United States used its diplomatic clout to clear obstacles to the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline in the latter part of the decade.

Despite these areas of cooperation, U.S.-Turkish tensions surfaced during the Clinton administration. There were bilateral disagreements over the rules of engagement in military actions to defend Iraqi Kurds, as well as over human rights issues and the scope of operations against the PKK in southern Turkey and northern Iraq.²³ In addition, U.S. access to Turkish air space and military facilities became increasingly restricted over the course of the 1990s.

Turkey had hoped that its efforts during the Gulf War would strengthen its partnership with the United States and improve its prospects of being admitted to the European Community, the precursor to the European Union.²⁴ Unfortunately, a closer partnership with the United States did not develop and Turkey did not move appreciably closer to becoming a member of the EC. The loss of Iraq as a primary trading partner cost Turkey billions of dollars, and the creation of a de facto Kurdish state exacerbated Turkey's "Kurdish problem" by fueling Kurdish nationalism within its own borders.²⁵

The 2003 Iraq War

A major turn in U.S.-Turkish relations came during the lead-up to America's 2003 invasion of Iraq. The Turkish parliament unexpectedly rejected a measure that would have allowed for the transit of U.S. troops through Turkish territory into northern Iraq.²⁶ From the perspective of many Turks, Saddam Hussein, whom the United States deemed to be an unacceptable risk to international security, did not pose a real threat to Ankara. Furthermore, Turks largely had a negative impression of U.S. action in Iraq after the first Gulf War, which left Turkey with economic losses and greater tensions with the PKK in northern Iraq.²⁷

Many Turks also believed that an Iraq without a dictator would be a far more difficult country with which to interact.²⁸ Some Turks calculated that the lack of cooperation on the military front might actually prevent

the United States from invading Iraq in the first place. Turkish politicians feared the establishment of a federated or independent Kurdish state and were focused on maintaining the territorial integrity of Iraq.²⁹

Instead of heeding Turkey's warnings against invasion, the Bush administration pushed ahead with war. It later responded to Turkey's rejection of military cooperation by withdrawing an offer of aid to the country.³⁰ In general, Turkey's actions generated harsh feelings among U.S. policymakers who were shocked by the parliament's decision, and viewed Turkish actions as those of a disloyal ally. The United States even turned down a Turkish offer later in the year to deploy Turkish forces to Iraq to assist with reconstruction.³¹

Tensions between Turkey and the United States over Iraq were heightened in July 2003 when reports surfaced that 11 Turkish Special Forces officers and others were detained for allegedly attempting to assassinate Kurdish political figures.³² U.S. forces acted on what they believed to be compelling evidence that terrorists would attempt to assassinate the Kurdish Governor of Kirkuk (in order to weaken the Kurds in the north), and raided a Turkish liaison office in Sulaymaniyah in Northern Iraq where the operation was supposedly being planned.³³

International and Turkish press reports of the raid, which included handcuffs and sacks over the alleged perpetrators' heads, put the U.S. military on the defensive.³⁴ The Turkish government was outraged and demanded the release of the detained Special Forces personnel. Senior U.S. administration officials, including Vice President Richard Cheney and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, worked to calm the volatile situation.³⁵ After a joint investigation of the incident, both the United States and Turkey expressed regret over the situation.³⁶

This incident further damaged U.S.-Turkish relations. The humiliation of Turkish troops reinforced a perception among the Turkish people and military that the United States should not be counted on as a trusted friend.³⁷ In the end, the war in Iraq helped create a new breed of anti-American stereotypes in Turkey. Turks praised Prime Minister Erdogan for standing up to the "American bully," and supported his decision to keep Turkey out of Iraq once the United States became bogged down.³⁸ Ultimately, Turkey saw the war as a demonstration that the United States did not truly care about Turkey's security concerns, and was not willing to listen to Ankara's advice about the regional perils of invading Iraq.

Turkey's Internal Struggles

Turkey is experiencing major political and economic transformations that are reshaping the country's internal politics and strategic calculations. Turkish politics are currently evolving, driven by major questions that are directly tied to Turkish national identity, including tensions between secularism and Islamism. Rising economic concerns are also shaping policy decisions in Turkey, and the current global economic crisis is likely to play a major role in both shaping the future of Turkish politics and how Turkey's foreign policy evolves.

A History of Division

The tension between Turkey's long-ruling elite class and the more populist and religiously observant Justice and Development Party, or AKP, is in part a reflection of the modernizing mission of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, founder of the Turkish Republic in the aftermath of the First World War. From the founding of the state in 1923, Ataturk and his followers ruled by the slogan "For the people, despite the people," instituting major social, economic, and political reforms upon the country from the top down.

Ataturk abolished the Ottoman-era caliphate, Arabic script, and Islamic education in Turkey, embracing the French secular doctrine of *laicite* that sought to ban the presence of religion in education, the government, and politics as an impediment to modernity.¹ This strict construction of Turkish identity led to a centralized, bureaucratic state whose self-appointed guardians in academia, the military, judiciary, press, and some influential sectors of the business class have intervened regularly throughout the country's history to preserve the Kemalist project.

Turkey's courts have banned 24 parties in the past 50 years, including the AKP's two predecessors.² Since 1970, Turkish courts have closed down four Islamist parties, including the Welfare Party, which at the time claimed current Prime Minister Erdogan as a member.³

The gradual opening through the 1980s and 1990s of broader trade and diplomatic linkages with neighboring countries led to the development of a new business class in post-Cold War Turkey. These pro-capitalist, socially and religiously conservative entrepreneurs represent a new center of political power in Turkey, one distinct from the traditional Kemalist elites that had shaped the first 70 years of the country's history. This group represents a geographic shift in influence as well as a political one, coming from smaller, more conservative cities in the Anatolian interior of Turkey. It was with their support that the AKP won its initial 2002 victory on a platform that emphasized the growth potential of EU membership and the stabilizing values of a "conservative democracy."⁴

The pro-business orientation of the new AKP base has produced an equally new foreign policy framework described by some commentators as a form of "neo-Ottomanism," one that disavows imperial ambitions over the former empire but seeks for Turkey to assume a more prominent role as a regional broker and trade center, retaining traditional ties to the West but also expanding the country's economic and political influence into the Middle East and Central Asia.⁵

Even though the AKP disavows an explicitly Islamist agenda, members of the traditional secular order in Turkey still view the AKP with extreme suspicion. They see the AKP's expanding relations with Middle Eastern nations, which had been largely neglected during the Cold War, tentative efforts at resolving issues of Kurdish identity within a larger Turkish nation, and willingness to relax restrictions on public displays of religiosity as evidence of a plan to subvert Western-oriented Kemalist ideals.⁶ A recent court case against the AKP for violating secular principles is perhaps the most recent noteworthy example of this suspicion.

The AKP versus the Judiciary

In March 2008, Turkey's top prosecutor, Abdurrahman Yalcinkaya, filed an indictment for the closure of the AKP, which is allowed under the Turkish Constitution.⁷ In the case, heard by the country's Constitutional Court, the prosecutor claimed that the party had become the "focal point of anti-secular activities"⁸ and was intent on installing an Islamist regime in Turkey.⁹

The prosecutor argued that the AKP's move to end the ban on the Islamic-style headscarf in universities (which the Constitutional Court overturned in June 2008) and prohibiting alcohol sales in restaurants run by AKP municipalities, coupled with rhetoric favoring broader religious freedoms, indicated a hidden Islamist agenda, challenging *laicite*.¹⁰ Claiming the AKP represented a "multi-associated widespread danger,"¹¹ he called for a minimum of five years' banishment from political party activity for 71 AKP members, including Prime Minister Erdogan and President Abdullah Gul.¹²

The party firmly denied that it wanted to create an Islamic state, and considered the case to be an attempted judicial coup. The AKP did not help its cause with some, however, when it uncovered an alleged plot by militant Turkish nationalists to overthrow the government and arrested more than 20 persons, including two retired high-ranking generals.

While many Turks viewed this government action as a positive indication that the executive branch was willing to confront the military, some viewed the AKP move as retribution against its critics.

To the surprise of many, only six of the court's 11 judges voted to close the party—one fewer than the number required. Instead, the court decided to penalize the party for undermining secularism by cutting state funding in half for a year, with the court's chairman, Hasim Kilic, calling the action "a warning."¹³

While the party survived, the court's warning shot across the AKP's bow highlights the high tensions between the guardians of the secular state and the AKP. The prosecutor and courts will no doubt be monitoring the AKP closely. The AKP, for its part, has indicated that it may take action to limit the authority of the Constitutional Court.¹⁴

Ultimately, the case demonstrates not only the ongoing competition in Turkish society between those who seek secularism at any cost and those who wish to have a broader acceptance of religion in daily life, but also a struggle among parallel rival elites for power and influence.¹⁵

Economic Concerns Shape Turkey's Politics and Policies

Although Turkey's internal debates over its secular identity and the questions of Islamism have attracted a great deal of attention in recent years, the leading concerns among the Turkish people are economic and tied to basic needs. According to a recent public opinion poll, Turks are concerned with basic economic and security issues, like citizens in most countries around the world. When asked what the most important problem facing Turkey is, the leading responses were unemployment (34 percent), the economy (13 percent), and security and terror (10 percent).¹⁶

The contentious debate concerning Islamic-style headscarves in public places was much lower on the list. Even though the survey was conducted at a high point of attention on the court case against the AKP, only 4 percent raised it as a major problem.¹⁷ Furthermore, when asked about issues politicians discussed too often, the leading responses were the case against the AKP (48 percent) and the headscarf issue (32 percent). In response to a separate question, Turks named unemployment and economic problems as the top issues that do not get enough attention from politicians.

As in many countries around the world, worries about the economy are increasingly dominating internal debates in Turkey. This does not mean that the sensitive questions linked to Turkish identity are erased by these economic difficulties. But in the coming months and perhaps years, core economic issues will require more attention from the Turkish government.



Turkish university students, one of them wearing a head scarf, walk by the main campus of the Istanbul University, in February 2008.

Main Political Parties in Turkey

Justice and Development Party. The Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, or AKP, was founded by Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Abdullah Gul in 2001. The AKP is a moderately conservative, pro-Western party that was formed on the basis of bringing economic and democratic reform. Party leaders reject the Islamic label, portraying themselves as a pro-democratic party that supports religious secularism in Turkey. As the leader of the AKP, Erdogan has worked with members of other political parties to build a more unified, broad coalition and has advocated for Turkey's membership in the European Union. The AKP won significant victories in both the November 2002 and July 2007 parliamentary elections, which named Abdullah Gul as the Turkish Prime Minister in 2002 and the President of Turkey in 2007. Erdogan became the Prime Minister in 2003.

Republican People's Party. The Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, or CHP, is the oldest political organization in Turkey. Founded in 1923 by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the CHP was the major political party after the Turkish War of Independence in 1923 until 1946 when Ataturk's successor, General Ismet Inonu, introduced multiparty elections that eventually led to the defeat of the CHP. The party reestablished itself in 1992, under the leadership of Deniz Baykal, after being banned from using the party name as a result of the 1980 military coup. Baykal was blamed in part for the CHP's huge loss in the 1999 general elections and resigned his seat. He regained it, however, during the 2002 elections when the CHP became the second major political organization in Turkey and the major opposition party

in parliament to the AKP. In 2007, the CHP formed an alliance with the Democratic Left Party to garner 21 percent of the popular vote and retain its position as the main opposition party.

Nationalist Movement Party. The Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, or MHP, emphasizes Turkish nationalism and identity under the leadership of Devlet Bahçeli. Formed in 1969 by Alparslan Türkeş, the MHP was responsible for several assassination plots on left-leaning individuals in the late 1970s. The MHP and the party's youth organization, the Grey Wolves, are believed to have ties to Turkish intelligence agencies and the CIA. During the military coup of 1980, Türkeş and his party followers were convicted of political assassinations, and the MHP, along with other political organizations at the time, was banned. The party was re-established in 1983 and took on its original party name in 1992. After Türkeş's death, Bahçeli took over and has tried to present the MHP as a moderate, right-wing party. In 2007, MHP received 14 percent of the popular vote to gain 70 seats in Parliament.

Democratic Society Party. The Demokratik Toplum Partisi, or DTP, was founded in 2005 after merging with the Democratic People's Party and the Democratic Society Movement. With Ahmet Turk as its current party leader, the DTP is an ethnically based Kurdish party and is alleged to have ties with the Kurdistan Workers Party or PKK, a Kurdish terrorist organization. Despite pressure by EU and U.S. officials on the DTP to distance itself



from the PKK and denounce it as a terrorist organization, DTP officials declared the PKK's leader, Abdullah Ocalan, as the "leader of the people." Prosecutors have attempted to dissolve DTP for its PKK affiliations, which would relinquish the seats of DTP members in parliament. Despite these allegations, senior party leaders claim that the DTP supports a unified and democratic Turkish state.

Democratic Left Party. The Demokratik Sol Parti, or DSP, was formed by Rahsan Ecevit in 1985. Ecevit was the party chair while her husband, Bulent Ecevit, was banned from political office after the 1980 military coup. When the political ban was lifted, Bulent Ecevit became the party leader from 1987 to 2006 and Turkey's prime minister for the last time in 1999. The capture of PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan helped DSP win more seats in the 1999 elections, gaining 22 percent of the popular vote and becoming the majority party in the Turkish parliament. Tensions within the government and the party led to the party's collapse in 2002. DSP joined forces with CHP in the 2007 elections to help CHP win enough votes to become the main opposition party in parliament. After the election, several DSP members left the joint coalition to join their original party. Zeki Sezer is the current DSP chairman.

True Path Party. The Dogru Yol Partisi, or DYP, was established in 1983 by former members of the first Democratic Party and the Justice Party, which were dissolved as a result of military intervention. Former Turkish

Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel played a major role in establishing the party, despite being temporarily banned from political activity, and led the party to victory in the 1991 parliamentary elections. Upon the death of former Prime Minister Turgut Ozal in 1993, Demirel became the ninth Turkish president and Tansu Ciller became the country's first female prime minister. Throughout this period, the DYP formed coalitions with the Social Democratic People's Party and the Motherland Party, both of which ultimately collapsed. The DYP secured less than 10 percent of the popular vote in the 2002 general elections, failing to clear the minimum requirement for representation in the legislature. Prior to the 2007 elections, the DYP and the Motherland Party announced they would merge to form the Democratic Party, but the new party only garnered 6 percent of the vote.

Motherland Party. The Anavatan Partisi, or ANAP, was founded in 1983 by Turgut Ozal to support the principles of a free-market economy. The ANAP maintained a political majority from 1983 to 1991, but after Ozal's death in 1993 the party had a difficult time maintaining its majority-party status. In 1997, under the leadership of Mesut Yilmaz, the party regained power, but Yilmaz's corruption scandals and alleged ties to the Turkish mafia soon led to the party's decline. In 1999, the ANAP gained only 14 percent of the vote, and won even less in 2002, with only 5 percent. The ANAP has formed two coalitions with the DYP in the past, first in 1995 and again in 2007.



Turkey and the Middle East

From the 16th century until 1920, the Ottoman Empire controlled much of the territory that is today's Middle East. When the British moved against the Ottomans during World War I, they channeled the nascent forces of Arab nationalism into a campaign against their Turkish overlords. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the Great War, British and French colonial powers redrew the map of the Middle East. For the next 70 years the Middle East was dominated by a mixture of authoritarian leaders, monarchs, and outside interventions such as the 1956 Suez Crisis, a series of military deployments in Lebanon, the 1991 Gulf War, and the 2003 Iraq War.

Today, that post-Ottoman political order is collapsing, with the balance of power in the Middle East reshaped by an increasingly assertive Iran, the fallout from the Iraq War, and continued instability on the Arab-Israeli front. As Turkey looks to advance its interests in this evolving new order, it must come to grips with lingering regional sensitivities over Turkey's historical role in the Middle East.

Already a vital partner with key countries in the Middle East for decades, Turkey stepped up its engagement in the region on several fronts over the past five years. Turkey's main regional focus remains geared toward managing the Kurdish question, but the Turks are active in Arab-Israeli diplomacy, regional peacekeeping in Lebanon, and energy issues such as Iraq's oil exports.

In short, Turkey plays a pivotal role in the Middle East, and its engagement is bound to increase substantially over the next 10 years since it is one of the few countries in the world that has strong relations with all of the key powers in the region, including Egypt, Iran, Israel, and Saudi Arabia. The United States needs to build its partnership with Turkey to better manage the changes sweeping across the Middle East. The United States must also work with Turkey to formulate and advance a common set of interests and objectives for the entire region.



AP PHOTO/BURHAN N. BILICI

While security cooperation—the cornerstone of the U.S.-Turkey relationship—will remain important, the United States should look increasingly at political, diplomatic, and economic tools to alter the future of the Middle East to the benefit of the United States and the vast majority of the citizens of the region. Working to advance common interests in the Middle East and address common threats, the two countries can partner with others in the Middle East to advance stability and prosperity.

Ankara has been at the forefront of establishing economic relations with a variety of players in the Middle East, from Israel to Iraq. Any reinvigoration of the U.S.-Turkey relationship will necessarily include a closer focus on economic development and cooperation between Turkey and the Middle East. Only with active U.S. diplomatic engagement and political support, however, can Turkey resolve its outstanding regional issues and become a more influential partner for the United States in the region.

A healthy U.S.-Turkey relationship can help calm the Middle East, while continued drift and estrangement will leave the region and both Turkey and the United States worse off. The first priority, then, of the Obama administration should be to tackle the toughest problem in U.S.-Turkish relations—the Kurdish question. Only then can the two countries work more openly on the other important bilateral tasks before them.

Turkish Kurds, some of them holding flags of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, and posters of its jailed leader Abdullah Ocalan, chant support for a Kurdish rebel group in a challenge to the Turkish state.

Turkey, Iraq, and the Kurdish Challenge

Turkey's primary national security preoccupation in the Middle East is its battle with the PKK. This conflict is a central piece in Turkey's complex relationship with its own Kurdish population and Iraq's Kurdistan Regional Government, or KRG, the elected government of Iraq's three northernmost provinces. The Kurdish question not only affects Turkey's relationship with Iraq and the United States, but also Syria and Iran. How Turkey and the United States confront the PKK problem is critical for the future of Turkey's relationship with its preeminent ally and its nearest neighbors.

The PKK's base of support rests primarily among Turkey's Kurdish population. Kurds constitute between 15 and 20 percent of Turkey's total population, and are largely located in the southeastern quadrant of the country near its borders with Syria, Iraq, and Iran.⁶ The PKK was founded in the mid-1970s with Marxist-Leninist underpinnings and has been the primary belligerent in Turkish-Kurd fighting that has lasted more than three decades and left an estimated 37,000 dead.⁷

The capture of its leader, Abdullah Ocalan, in 1999 was a tremendous blow to the PKK, yet after his jailing the group attempted to retool itself as a peaceful political party, declaring a unilateral cease-fire. During this period, the position of Kurds in Turkey improved, partly due to the impact of reforms mandated by the EU accession process, such as legal and policy reforms aimed at offering more protections for Kurds.⁸

The PKK abandoned its self-imposed cease-fire in 2004 and began attacking targets in Turkey from bases within Turkey again in 2005.⁹ In 2006, the PKK began cross-border attacks from Iraq into southeastern Turkey. Turkey responded by conducting cross-border military strikes in retaliation. Following a series of particularly deadly raids by the PKK, in December 2007 Turkey began a bombing campaign (assisted by U.S. intelligence) against the group's bases in northern Iraq.

By this time, Turkish forces regularly clashed with the PKK.¹⁰ The Turkish bombing campaign was followed in February 2008 by a ground incursion, again assisted by U.S. intelligence, involving roughly 10,000 Turkish troops. After the end of the ground campaign on February 29, Turkish officials held their first official meeting with representatives of the Kurdistan Regional Government on March 28, 2008 to discuss joint cooperation on security issues.¹¹

Despite the PKK problem, Turkey's relationship with Iraq's Kurds has more than a strictly security or military orientation. The KRG is dependent on Turkey for economic growth: by late 2007 as much as 80 percent of foreign investment into the KRG came from Turkey.¹² This Turkish investment amounts to \$8 billion since the 2003 invasion.¹³ Indeed, Turkey maintains an economic interest in the KRG as the portal between northern Iraq and the rest of the world. As Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan put it, "We are the most important door for northern Iraq to open up the world. We are the healthiest door."¹⁴

These common economic interests of the KRG and Turkey have propelled them to ease back from confrontation and move toward cooperation. Today, a co-dependent relationship exists between Turkey and the KRG: Turkey cannot eliminate the threat posed by the PKK without the active involvement of the KRG, while the KRG cannot sustain itself economically without Turkey as its door to the wider world. Turkey's security problems and the KRG's economic success will, in the long run, depend upon a functional relationship between the two parties.

During the 1990s, the United States played a critical role in forming a trilateral relationship whereby it provided military protection for Iraq's Kurds, the Kurds cracked down on the PKK, and Turkey provided bases for the U.S. military. The Obama administration should make it a priority to build upon the foundations of this new relationship based on Turkish security and Kurdish economic needs while reaffirming the territorial integrity of Iraq and working closely with the government of Iraq.

Specifically, U.S. diplomats should make clear to the KRG that continued U.S. support is heavily dependent on a real crackdown on the PKK. The United States must then urge Turkey to offer a substantial investment package to the KRG. The United States should be prepared to match this package with one of its own. Furthermore, the United States should do all it can to encourage Turkey and Iraq, particularly the KRG, to build on their already substantial economic ties.

Turkey should be encouraged to recognize the KRG's autonomous status within Iraq's political system and sign economic cooperation and trade deals with it in exchange for harsher action by the KRG against the PKK and its front organizations. Acknowledging the status of the KRG in Iraq's federal system while reaffirming the territorial integrity of Iraq will leave Turkey in a better position to influence events in Iraq as U.S. troops continue their redeployment from Iraq in the coming months and years. At the same time, the United States needs to recognize that it has more leverage over the KRG than it does over Turkey—with or without U.S. troops in Iraq.

As the Obama administration continues troop redeployments from Iraq that began in 2008, the United States should strengthen its cooperation with Turkey on regional security and diplomatic initiatives aimed at stabilizing Iraq and its neighbors. Before the start of the Iraq War in 2003, Turkey assumed a leadership role in organizing the so-called First Neighbors conferences of countries bordering Iraq, and it has periodically hosted and organized similar gatherings as the Iraq War has continued for more than five years. Working with such international organizations as the United Nations and through the forum of the International Compact with Iraq, Turkey can continue to play a pivotal role in organizing multilateral initiatives aimed at stabilizing Iraq and minimizing the fallout from Iraq's internal tensions.

The United States should strengthen its cooperation with Turkey on regional security and diplomatic initiatives aimed at stabilizing Iraq and its neighbors.

Turkey and Israel

Turkey is one of three major Muslim-majority states with which Israel has full diplomatic relations.¹⁵ Unlike the “cold peace” with Egypt, Turkey and Israel cooperate on a wide range of issues, including military matters. Israeli-Turkish relations seem to be on a solid foundation. Given its close ties with both Israel and Arab states, Turkey can serve as an important vehicle for Arab-Israeli diplomacy.

Israeli-Turkish cooperation in the military sphere has been strong for several years. These relations go back to 1992, when Israeli and Turkish defense ministries signed principles for cooperation on regional threats such as terrorism and approaches to states such as Syria, Iraq, and Iran. The next year, the two states agreed to share intelligence and cooperate on terrorism. Since 1992, Turkey has availed itself of Israel’s high-tech military industry, upgrading F-4 and F-5 fighters and M-60 tanks. In addition, Israeli and Turkish air and naval forces regularly visit and train with each other, and engage in naval rescue exercises with the United States.¹⁶

Turkey and Israel also enjoy strong economic relations. Shortly after exchanging ambassadors in late 1991, the two countries signed a treaty enabling tourism. By 2003, 320,000 Israeli tourists had visited Turkey. A free trade agreement would follow in 1996, coming into effect in 2000.¹⁷ Economic cooperation paid off: By 2005, Israel was a substantial trading partner for Turkey, which imported \$900 million worth of Israeli products and exported \$1.2 billion to Israel.¹⁸ Israel and Turkey also cooperated briefly on water projects, with Israel agreeing to import 50 million cubic meters of water worth nearly \$1 billion from Turkey in 2004—before both countries agreed to suspend the deal two years later as Turkey’s water resources shrank.¹⁹

Notwithstanding these strong military and economic ties, Turkish-Israeli relations during the most recent round of Arab-Israeli violence have been turbulent. From 2000 onward, Turkish prime ministers Bulent Ecevit and Erdogan repeatedly denounced Israel’s policies in the Palestinian territories in inflammatory terms. Erdogan angered Israel by allowing Turkish officials to meet with Hamas for the first time in Ankara in February 2006, while the Israeli-Hezbollah conflict later that year further inflamed anti-Israel sentiment in Turkey.²⁰

Anti-Semitic sentiments among some segments of the Turkish public, perhaps linked to anti-Americanism, have eroded public support for the Turkish-Israeli relationship.²¹ Nevertheless, practical military and economic relationships held up. By July 2007 Turkey’s ambassador to Tel Aviv characterized “Israel as our number one country that we can trust.”²²

Recently, Turkey has used its relations with both Israel and Arab states to facilitate negotiations between Syria and Israel. Using the Turks as intermediaries, Israeli and Syrian officials have conducted on-and-off negotiations in Istanbul since May 2008.²³ The United

States should support and aid Turkey in its endeavors to facilitate this dialogue, and both should coordinate their efforts as much as possible. Israeli-Syrian talks provide an opportunity for the United States to achieve multiple regional objectives and strengthen ties with Ankara through increased coordination. At the same time, the United States should encourage Turkey and Israel to maintain and strengthen their already deep economic and military ties. Continuing and expanding joint U.S.-Israel-Turkey military training exercises is an important step the United States can propose immediately.

Turkey and Iran

Iran and Turkey share growing energy ties, as well as concern over Kurdish militancy on the Iraqi border. Like Turkey, Iran faces a Kurdish separatist guerrilla group, the Party for a Free Life in Kurdistan, or PJAK, which is closely allied with the PKK. The perception of a common threat has brought Turkey and Iran dangerously close together in the realm of military and intelligence cooperation. The Turkish-Iranian cooperation on the PKK-PJAK front presents some additional complications that require special management—no other NATO ally works as closely with Iran on security issues.

Turkey and Iran formed a High Security Commission in 1988, but only recently has Turkish-Iranian military and intelligence cooperation reached its peak. Turkey's ground force commander recently revealed that Turkey and Iran had been sharing intelligence and coordinating operations against the PKK and PJAK during the recent 2007-2008 fighting.²⁴ Moreover, in April 2008, Turkey and Iran signed a memorandum of understanding, agreeing to increase cooperation on security matters.²⁵

Turkish-Iranian relations are perhaps the strongest in the realm of economics. Bilateral trade between the two nations reached its zenith in 2007, when more than \$8 billion in goods were exchanged. This represents a 19.5 percent increase from 2006. If current trends continue—trade in January 2008 increased by 32 percent over January 2007²⁶—stronger ties between the two nations should be expected.

Turkey and Iran also have become increasingly close on matters of energy. After Russia, Iran is Turkey's second-largest supplier of natural gas, shipping 6.2 billion cubic meters to Turkey in 2007.²⁷ In July 2007, Turkey and Iran signed a memorandum of understanding related to oil and gas transit as well as joint energy investments.²⁸ The MOU allowed the Turkish Petroleum Company (TPAO) to extract and export natural gas through Turkey from Iran's South Pars field. While this deal remains on the table, Turkey and Iran have thus far failed to finalize the \$3.5 billion deal.²⁹ If this project eventually goes through, however, it would raise concerns in the United States,³⁰ which outlines punitive measures for entities investing more than \$20 million in the Iranian oil and gas sectors in the Iran Sanctions Act.³¹

Despite continued efforts to advance their bilateral relations, Turkey and Iran have not made substantial strides in deepening their ties. In August 2008, Ahmadinejad visited the Turkish leadership in Istanbul. Ahmadinejad's trip was controversial, however, because he refused to visit the mausoleum of Kemal Ataturk in Ankara. Turkish leaders accommodated him accordingly, changing the summit location to Istanbul and downgrading it from an official state visit to a "working visit."³²

That inauspicious start to the visit defined the rest of the meeting. Turkey and Iran accomplished little of substance. Expected energy deals did not materialize, and Turkey did not make any headway on the Iranian nuclear dispute. Turkish leaders such as President Abdullah Gul have voiced support for Iran's nuclear program as long as it is for peaceful means, and have argued that Iran must demonstrate to the international community that it is not pursuing a nuclear weapons program. Ahmadinejad, however, capitalized on the symbolism of the occasion to portray Iran as not isolated in the world.³³

This episode shows the need for closer Turkish-American cooperation on Iran so that Turkey's economic needs and the world's security interests do not continue to conflict with one another. Simultaneously, however, the United States does not want Turkey to tilt too closely to Tehran. The simplest way to square the policy circle here is to engage in a robust effort to normalize Turkish-KRG relations and de-escalate the Turkish-Kurd conflict. Neutralizing the PKK and PJAK and removing the perception of a common threat between Iran and Turkey will serve to remove a point of common interest between Tehran and Ankara.

Turkey and Middle East Peacekeeping

Turkey is taking an increasingly active role in peacekeeping operations to the country's south and east. In Afghanistan, Turkey was the second nation after Great Britain to command the International Security and Assistance Force. As of September 2008, Turkey has 725 military personnel deployed to Afghanistan and commands the Provincial Reconstruction Team in Wardak province, in central Afghanistan.³⁴

Closer to home, Turkey participated in the bolstered United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon following the 2006 war. A Turkish engineering company of 261 personnel deployed to Lebanon, and a Turkish frigate now patrols the coast with the European-led naval task force. In all, Turkey contributes close to 1,000 people to U.N. forces in Lebanon.³⁵

Turkey's motivations to help police Lebanon's fragile sovereignty were expressed by then-Foreign Minister and current President Abdullah Gul, who said in September 2006 that "the Lebanese crisis fully exposed Turkey's strategic position where East and West meet

and clearly highlighted the Mediterranean dimension of our identity.”³⁶ Moreover, Gul argued, participation in U.N. Interim Force in Lebanon would bolster Turkey’s prospects of entering the EU accession process.

As with Turkey’s efforts at regional diplomacy, the United States should encourage Turkey to get more involved in regional peacekeeping and coordinate joint U.S.-Turkish action where possible. Certainly the United States should provide logistical support (such as the United States’ unique strategic sea and airlift capabilities) to Turkish peacekeeping efforts if and when they are necessary. Financial assistance to help defray the cost of Turkish deployments should generally be on the table as well.

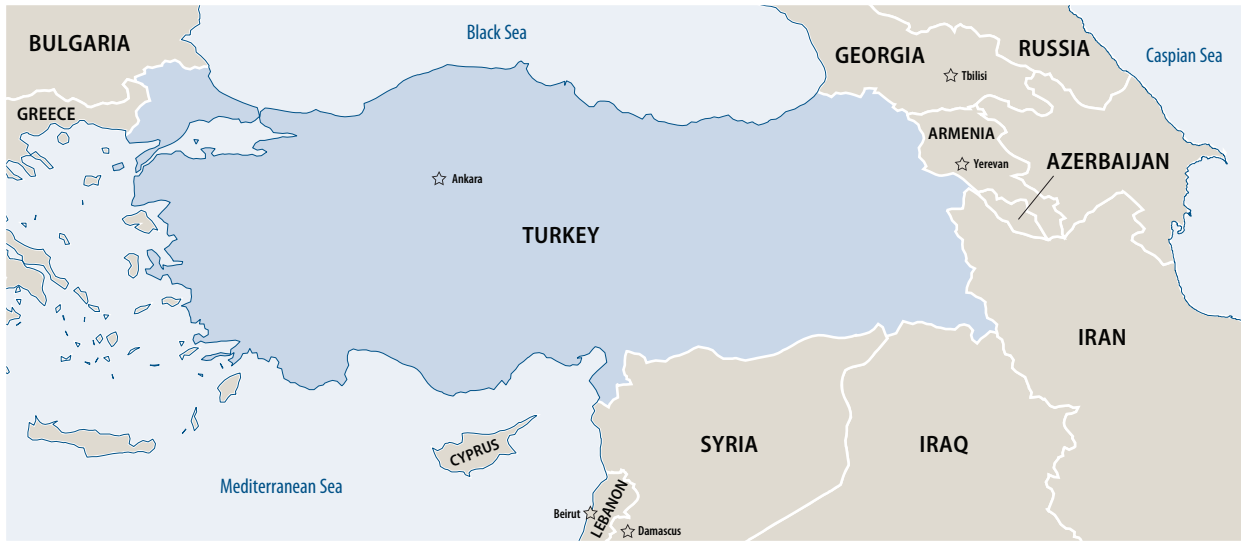
Supporting Turkey’s Reemerging Leadership Role in the Middle East

The past seven years in the Middle East have been a period of historic and often traumatic transformations, with escalating conflict in Iraq, Lebanon, and the Palestinian territories. The United States should support Turkey’s efforts to play a larger diplomatic, economic, and peacekeeping role in the Middle East. With good relations with all major regional players, and a desire to maintain them, Turkey is in a unique diplomatic position and can be a key intermediary between antagonistic parties in the Middle East’s multiple conflicts. The United States should coordinate its regional diplomatic efforts with Turkey in order to ensure that both countries are working constructively and not echoing or canceling each other out.

Yet Turkey remains party to a particularly thorny and enduring regional conflict with the Kurds. Here the United States can and should serve as a facilitator for better relations between its allies in Turkey and the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq. Recently, Turkey’s special envoy to northern Iraq, Murat Ozcelik, met with KRG President Massoud Barzani—the first time Turkish officials have met with Barzani. The meeting opens the door to further cooperation on the PKK and other issues, such as economic cooperation.

The United States should be prepared to play a supporting role in any arrangement between the KRG and Turkey, including the deployment of a limited number of forces for a limited duration to the Kurdistan region (with the concurrence of both Turkey and the KRG) to facilitate implementation of any Turkey-KRG agreement. The United States also should encourage the economic integration of Turkey with its neighbors, especially Israel and the KRG. New pipeline arrangements with the KRG and Israel will require high-level U.S. backing, but will facilitate Turkey’s economic integration with its neighbors and reduce its dependence on Russian energy.

Map of Turkey and region



Above all, the United States should seek to leverage Turkey's increasing involvement in the Middle East toward mutually acceptable ends. First and foremost, this means closer coordination with Turkey and integrating it into America's policy framework for the region. The United States should not seek to make Turkey simply a subcontractor for aspects of its Middle East policy. Rather, the Obama administration should undertake the hard diplomatic work of rebuilding and strengthening the relationship so that it is on a more solid foundation, based on common interests. Where differences in policy exist, they should be aired while areas of cooperation are explored.

By broadening and deepening bilateral ties and cooperation with Turkey in the Middle East, the United States can send an important message to its European allies regarding Turkey's vital role as a central hub for the interconnected web of relationships spanning several important regions and continents. Upgrading its bilateral ties with Turkey could send a signal to key European allies regarding the prospects for Turkey's formal membership in the European Union in the long run.

Turkey, Energy, and the Caucasus Region

Turkey sits at a critical energy crossroads. To the northeast lies Russia and the energy-rich former Soviet republics in the Caucasus and Central Asia, while to the west lie the energy-hungry economies of Europe and the Mediterranean. Turkish leaders recognize this, and have sought to make their country a crucial component of the emerging energy infrastructure of the region. Indeed, Turkey today is fast becoming a transit and terminal hub for oil and gas. By helping Europe with its energy needs, it hopes to increase its attractiveness as an EU member.³⁷ Recent tensions between Russia and the NATO alliance over the conflict in Georgia, and a desire by the United States to isolate Iran, however, complicate Turkey's fulcrum position between East and West.

After decades in which their interactions were heavily shaped by Turkey's status as a NATO bulwark against the Soviet Union, Turkish-Russian relations experienced a cautious warming in the past decade as economic opportunities lead to a marked increase in trade and investment. Turkey currently imports 90 percent of its energy needs,³⁸ with Russia serving as Turkey's primary source of oil and gas. Turkey's largest trading partner today is Russia.³⁹

Both countries also take part in the BLACKSEAFOR multinational naval task force, independent of NATO. Despite this, Russia's support of Armenia and the Republic of Cyprus against Turkish allies Azerbaijan and the "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus", or TRNC, together with Turkey's continuing membership in NATO and prospective entry in the European Union, prevent a full rapprochement between Turkey and Russia.

Nor is Russia pleased with Turkey's role in an energy pipeline project stretching across the Caucasus and Central Asia without ever traversing Russian soil. Turkey is heavily involved in the construction of pipelines connecting oil- and natural gas-rich neighbors to the east and southeast with its main energy terminals of Ceyhan and Erzurum. The inauguration of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, which links Azerbaijan on the Caspian Sea to the eastern Mediterranean via Georgia, took place on July 13, 2006. This is one of the world's longest pipelines, costing \$4 billion to build. Currently, the Turkish port city of Ceyhan is the daily destination of 1 million barrels of Azerbaijani oil,⁴⁰ and brings Turkey \$2 billion in annual transit fees.⁴¹

In a move to further reduce dependence on Russia, Turkey agreed to construct the Tabriz-Erzurum Pipeline, which carries natural gas from Iran (Turkey's second-largest source of energy) to Turkey.⁴² Another important energy initiative is the nascent Nabucco natural gas pipeline project, which would transport 30 billion cubic meters of natural gas per year from Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, and Iran to Erzurum.⁴³ From there, it would be distributed throughout Western Europe. Construction of the 3,300-kilometer-long pipeline is expected to begin next year and be finished by 2011.

One challenge for the Nabucco pipeline is developing sufficient guaranteed supply to allay investors' concerns about its viability. Russia's competing pipeline aimed at the EU market raises questions about whether the Nabucco pipeline is financially feasible.

Turkey is, however, currently considered a thorn in the side of the project, which has stalled since February 2008. The reason: Turkey takes the stance that it should be allowed to purchase the gas from Azerbaijan and then resell it at a profit to Europe, which is in violation of EU policies on energy transit.⁴⁴ The European Union has countered that Turkey should be allowed to collect transmission fees.⁴⁵

Seeking to maintain a precarious balance between all its energy partners, Turkey's response to Russia's incursion into the breakaway Georgian territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia in August 2008 has been cautious. Despite its trade links to Georgia and status as a regional power, Turkey has thus far refrained from issuing any official government statements against Russia's actions there. Instead, Prime Minister Erdogan has proposed the establishment of a "Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform," a forum for regional security discussions that would include Russia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and potentially Armenia.⁴⁶

Although Turkey views Russian activism in Central Asia with apprehension, it has in the past been a "status quo" power on the issue of NATO enlargement, and has been hesitant to embrace a rapid aid program for Georgia that might further antagonize Russia. If the United States attempts to pressure Ankara to adopt a more confrontational stance toward Russia, then it risks alienating Turkey. It is better for the Obama administration to look to Turkey to serve a more valuable role for the United States as a potential regional intermediary.

The recent war in Georgia also underscored the vulnerability of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline. Just prior to the war's start, global energy company BP shut down the pipeline due to a PKK attack on it in Turkey.⁴⁷ Then, during the Georgia conflict, the pipeline remained south of the conflict zone, but Georgian government officials accused Russia of targeting the pipeline for air strikes.⁴⁸ Less than a week into the war, BP shut down its remaining two pipelines as a precautionary measure.⁴⁹

Making matters worse, the war exposed Georgia as the weak link in U.S. and Turkish efforts to expand the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline west to Europe via the Nabucco pipeline and east to Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. (The only other possible country the pipe-

line could pass through is Armenia, with which Turkey has poor relations.) With Russia reasserting its hegemony over the Caucasus, support for expanding the pipeline will likely be limited without U.S. leadership. Turkey's long-term ambition to become the terminal for Caspian energy resources may now be far more difficult to realize.

Ceyhan is also the endpoint of the Kirkuk-Ceyhan Oil Pipeline linking Turkey and Iraq to the south.⁵⁰ As a result of supporting U.S. and U.N. sanctions and policies against Iraq, Ankara claims to have lost about \$80 billion in oil revenues and increased energy costs between Desert Storm and the U.S. invasion in 2003.⁵¹ Since 2003, however, the Iraqi government has pre-approved more than three dozen companies, including Turkish oil company TPAO, to bid on oil and gas development deals.

In the context of these regional energy dynamics, Turkey holds a negotiating chip that the others do not: Its 600-mile, 40-inch Kirkuk-Ceyhan export pipeline has a capacity to pump 1.6 million barrels per day, though the current output varies and fluctuates significantly because overall production in Iraq is vulnerable to repeated attacks that shut down the flow of oil through the pipeline.⁵² Current output is only 600,000 bpd.⁵³ At the moment, Iraqi production stands at 2.5 million bpd, which makes Turkey a possible transit route for the majority of its exported oil.⁵⁴ Iraq currently sends 250,000 to 300,000 barrels per day to Ceyhan, with a short-term goal of 500,000 bpd.

This pipeline has been largely offline due to insurgent attacks and smuggling, but began to increase its output after a new security initiative began in late summer 2007.⁵⁵ Likewise, a recent "strategic and economic integration agreement" between Turkey and Iraq will see an increase from 800,000 barrels of oil a day to 1 million barrels flowing through this oil pipeline.⁵⁶

TPAO is calling for \$87 billion in investments in the Turkish petroleum industry between 2007 and 2012,⁵⁷ with the Black Sea seen as another potential route for Turkey in its quest for energy independence. Black Sea oil exploration has already begun and so far \$500 million has been spent on drilling. Black Sea oil could account for an estimated 10 billion barrels, which would provide Turkey with half of its oil demand by 2015 and make it energy independent by 2023.⁵⁸

TPAO currently only produces 90,000 bpd of oil; Turkey consumes 600,000 a day.⁵⁹ Black Sea oil might mitigate this issue while freeing Turkey from its dependence on its neighbors in the future. The interim period, however, will likely see a continuation of the status quo, with Turkey looking to exploit gas relations with Iran while the exploration of joint oil and perhaps nuclear ventures with Syria become a distinct possibility.

Syria and Turkey recently announced they were planning to create a joint oil company, with nuclear cooperation a potential outcome down the road.⁶⁰ These developments are likely to exacerbate already strained relations between Turkey and the United States as Turkey looks to fuel its economic growth and concurrent energy needs while the United

The Obama administration should assist Turkey in regaining its momentum as a crossroads of energy in a manner that furthers U.S. interests in the region.

States seeks to stanch Iranian and Syrian influence in the region and limit the spread of nuclear technology to Syria.

The Obama administration should assist Turkey in regaining its momentum as a crossroads of energy in a manner that furthers U.S. interests in the region. Turkey's location makes it a prime candidate for moving energy from the Caucasus and Central Asia while bypassing Iran and Russia, both of whom may manipulate their control of supply routes. Since Turkey is much more reliable and friendly to both Europe and the United States, the United States should encourage Turkey to continue developing itself as an energy conduit.

Turkey and Armenia

The ongoing dispute between Turkey and Armenia on how to classify the mass killing of Armenians by Ottoman Turks during World War I remains an explosive issue, which the new administration will likely have no choice but to address. President Obama could play a crucial role in working with Congress to ensure that any future congressional action regarding these historical events does not undermine the current U.S.-Turkish relationship. While deep grievances on both sides will make any reconciliation difficult, recent moves by the Turkish and Armenian leadership toward engagement offer the potential for real progress in the relationship.

There are few who deny that hundreds of thousands of Armenians were massacred during the First World War. Armenia contends, however, that Turks committed genocide, killing 1.5 million Armenians between 1915 and 1916.⁶¹ Turkey, on the other hand, submits that the deaths resulted from widespread fighting and forced relocations when the Ottoman Empire collapsed, not from a concerted genocidal campaign.⁶² Turkish officials estimate that the death toll was closer to 300,000.⁶³

Many in Turkey also argue that hundreds of thousands of Turks died in the same region during that time period.⁶⁴ The debate has gathered steam in the United States recently, as Armenian communities and other groups have pushed for an official U.S. recognition of genocide. While more than 20 countries and the EU Parliament have called the killings "genocide," the United States, United Kingdom, and Israel are among the countries that use different terminology to describe the events of that time.⁶⁵

On October 10, 2007, the House Foreign Affairs committee approved, by a 27-21 vote, H. Res 106, the "Affirmation of the United States Record on the Armenian Genocide Resolution," for a full House vote. The resolution initially gained 225 co-sponsors in the House, enough to ensure passage. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, a supporter of the legislation, initially indicated she would bring the matter to a vote quickly.

The White House and the Turkish government, however, strongly opposed the sensitive

legislation. In a statement, President Bush said that “Congress has more important work to do than antagonizing a democratic ally in the Muslim world, especially one that’s providing vital support for our military every day.”⁶⁶

In addition, eight former secretaries of state wrote a letter warning that the legislation “would endanger our national security interests,” and in a separate letter three former U.S. defense secretaries warned that Turkey would likely restrict access to air bases for Iraq operations in response to the resolution.⁶⁷

For its part, Turkey withdrew its ambassador for consultation and engaged in a \$300,000 lobbying campaign against the bill.⁶⁸ Turkey’s top general, Yasar Buyukanit, told a Turkish newspaper that if the United States passed the legislation, “Our military relations with the United States can never be the same.”⁶⁹

Citing the military risk in Iraq, co-sponsors began to abandon the bill. U.S. Rep. John Murtha (D-PA), a key Pelosi ally, was among those who spoke out against it based on the military ramifications. On October 25, 2007, the four chief sponsors of the legislation acknowledged defeat, saying in a letter to Pelosi that “we believe that a large majority of our colleagues want to support a resolution recognizing the genocide on the House floor and that they will do so, provided the timing is more favorable.”⁷⁰

No action has been taken on the legislation since, although in mid-June 2008, Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-CA) did place a one-month hold on President Bush’s choice for ambassador to Armenia on grounds that the nominee, Marie Yovanovitch, declined to characterize the post-World War I situation in Armenia as a genocide.⁷¹

Recently, however, Turkey and Armenia have indicated a willingness to work toward ending their standoff, suggesting potential for forward progress. In early July 2008, Turkish and Armenian officials held secret meetings in Switzerland with the aim of normalizing relations and opening the border between the two countries.⁷² In early September 2008, the Armenian president, Serzh Sarkisian, publicly invited President Gul to attend a match between the Armenian and Turkish national soccer teams in a qualifying round for the 2010 World Cup.



Turkey’s Gokhan Gonul, left, vies for a ball with Armenia’s Aghvan Mkrtchyan during their September 2008 World Cup qualifying soccer match in Yerevan, Armenia. The soccer game, attended by Turkish President Abdullah Gul, fostered hope that Turkey and Armenia could overcome decades of antagonism rooted in Ottoman-era massacres of Armenians that many historians have called a genocide. Gul is the first Turkish leader to set foot in Armenia since the ex-Soviet nation declared independence in 1991.

President Gul's groundbreaking visit was followed by several meetings on the sidelines of the 64th General Assembly meeting of the United Nations in New York City in late September 2008. At the same time, Armenia dropped its opposition to the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development's investment in Turkey.⁷³ During his speech to the Assembly, President Sarkisian said that "the time has come" to solve Turkish-Armenian problems, and President Gul expressed optimism that relations would ultimately be normalized.⁷⁴ The foreign ministers of Turkey, Armenia, and Azerbaijan held tripartite meetings to discuss relations among the three countries, potentially setting the stage for presidential-level talks.⁷⁵ Turkey's president held open the possibility of opening border crossings if problems between the two countries were resolved.⁷⁶

Bilateral overtures are an important start to improving the relationship. But regional forums and multilateral support for improved ties between Turkey and Armenia also will be critical for ensuring long-term successful engagement. Turkey has proposed the creation of a Caucasus Regional Stability and Cooperation Platform as a forum for addressing Turkey-Armenia, Azerbaijan-Armenia, and Russia-Georgia regional tensions.⁷⁷ In early October 2008, Europe's commissioner for enlargement stressed Turkey's potential as a force for stability in the region and as a guarantor of energy security for Europe. He also complimented Turkey's role as a mediator in the Middle East and its new stance towards Armenia.⁷⁸ The United States should support Turkey in this stability effort.

Even though more Turks favored Barack Obama over John McCain in the November 2008 elections⁷⁹, there is deep concern in Turkey about the prospect of a new genocide resolution arising in the U.S. Congress that the Obama administration might support. Many Turkish officials and analysts believe that a revived resolution would greatly hamper the U.S.-Turkish relationship for the foreseeable future, and could doom the Turkish-Armenian rapprochement. In addition, a resolution at this juncture has the potential of upending trilateral talks between Turkey, Armenia, and Azerbaijan over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region and other contentious matters.

The Obama administration should urge Congress to hold off on any congressional action on the matter for the time being while Turkey and Armenia are working toward reconciliation. While noting the strong feeling Armenians have regarding what took place during the First World War, Armenia's foreign minister, Eduard Nalbandian, recently noted that focusing on this issue would do nothing to ease tensions between Turkey and Armenia and stressed the need for friendly relations between the two countries.⁸⁰ Both Turkish and Armenian leaders are taking major political risks by opening up the possibility of diplomatic relations between Turkey and Armenia. They deserve American and European support in their effort to move toward a new relationship defined by shared opportunity rather than a painful past.

Turkey and Europe

Since the early 19th century and founding of the modern Turkish Republic, Turkey's ruling elite has identified with the West for strategic, economic, and cultural reasons.⁸¹ While Turkey has been a critical ally in European security affairs for more than half a century, its quest to become a full member of the European club has been an ongoing struggle, with the end result still unclear. Hot-button issues involving Turkey's relationship with its European neighbors, internal battles pitting the ruling AKP against the country's judiciary, and European anxieties regarding the absorption of a large Muslim country all have hindered its drive to join the European Union.

While the decision as to whether Turkey becomes a member of the European Union will ultimately be decided by EU member states, the next administration should play an intermediary role, and continue to push for Turkey's accession as past administrations have done. Overall, it is in America's short- and long-term interests for Turkey to strengthen its connection to Europe, and the rest of the West, through EU membership, and for the United States to be seen as championing Turkey's cause. In addition, the United States must work to ensure that strong bilateral ties between the United States and Turkey, as well as close European-Turkish cooperation, remain even if accession talks falter in the coming months and years.

The Struggle for EU Membership

Over the past several years, Turkey has grown increasingly frustrated by the lack of progress toward EU accession. The 2002 election of the AKP, which expressed its commitment to undertake the necessary reforms to make Turkey successful in its EU bid, seemed to be a strong signal that the path to membership might be fairly straightforward. The road to accession, however, has become less, not more, clear.

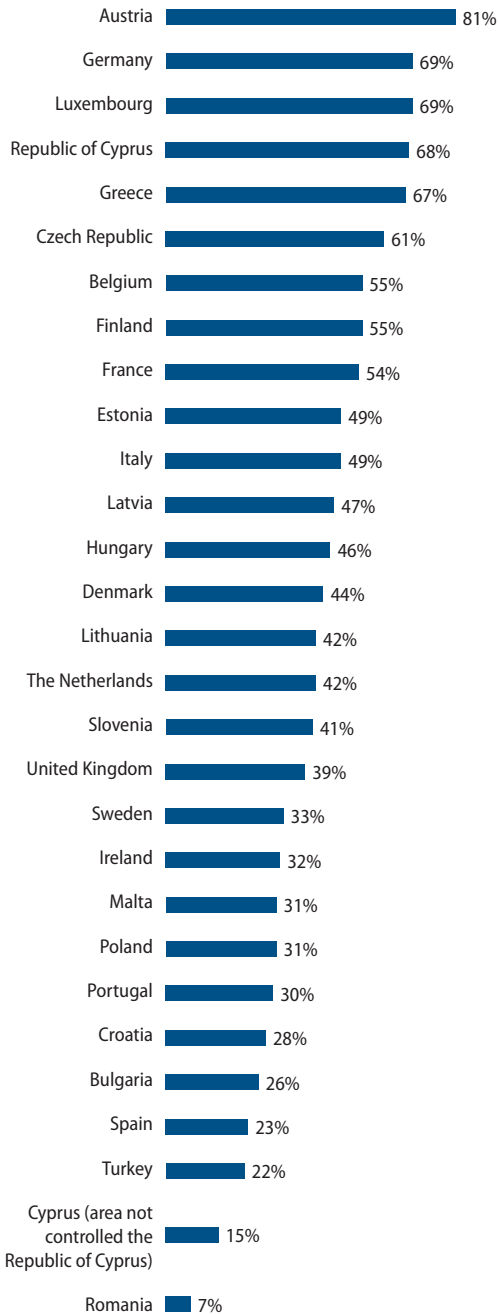
Turkey first applied for associate membership in the European Economic Community in 1959, and received it in 1963.⁸² In 1987, Turkey formally applied for membership in the European Community, one of the "three pillars" that form the European Union under the Treaty of Maastricht, and in 1995 entered into a customs union with the EU. In 1999, the European Commission indicated that negotiations for full membership could be opened provided Turkey fulfilled the "Copenhagen criteria," which require:

It is in America's short- and long-term interests for Turkey to strengthen its connection to Europe, and the rest of the West, through EU membership, and for the United States to be seen as championing Turkey's cause.

No welcome mat

Citizens of the EU are mostly opposed to Turkey becoming a member

Percentage opposed



Source: Eurobarometer, "Attitudes towards European Union Enlargement" (European Commission, July 2006).

- Stable institutions that guarantee democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and respect for and protection of minorities
- A functioning market economy, as well as the ability to cope with the pressure of competition and the market forces at work inside the Union
- The ability to assume the obligations of membership, in particular adherence to the objectives of political, economic, and monetary union⁸³

Formal talks between Turkey and the EU for full membership began six years later.⁸⁴

Almost immediately after formal talks began, European concerns about a range of issues put a damper on the talks. The French and the Dutch votes against the European constitution in 2005, for example, were in part driven by concern over potential Turkish membership in the European Union.⁸⁵ Other European states also have expressed strong doubts as to the wisdom of allowing Turkey into the Union.

European skeptics repeatedly state that their objections are based on economic and political concerns, and assert that a "privileged partnership," as opposed to full EU admission, would better suit Turkey.⁸⁶ While Germany, for example, has officially been a supporter of Turkish accession efforts, Chancellor Angela Merkel has been among the European leaders who have expressed interest in a special status for Turkey within Europe in lieu of full EU membership. The EU public is largely on the side of the skeptics (see table on the left).

Many EU member states have argued that Turkey's democratic practices are not adequate, pointing to unreasonable limits on freedom of expression and human rights abuses in Turkish prisons and police stations.⁸⁷ Brussels also has pointed to the intrusive role the military and courts play in Turkey's political system, punctuated by the chief prosecutor's case against the ruling party for violating secular laws, as well as the limited cultural rights Kurds enjoy within Turkey.

In addition, Turkey is primarily a rural country with a purchasing power-adjusted per capita GDP estimated in 2007 at \$12,900, less than half of the average for EU countries as a whole, at \$32,300.⁸⁸ Such economic disparity alongside Turkey's large and growing population creates fears that there will be heavy waves of Turks migrating into the existing European Union if Turkey is granted EU admission.⁸⁹

Then there is the issue of Cyprus, which has been the primary stumbling block in the accession process.⁹⁰ The Turkish military has maintained a strong presence in Cyprus since it invaded 34 years ago in response to a Greek-led coup on the island. The establishment of the “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus”, or TRNC, in 1983, which only Turkey recognizes, has hindered diplomatic efforts to reunify Greek and Turkish Cypriots.⁹¹ There currently are more than 30,000 Turkish troops providing security for the TRNC and U.N. peacekeeping forces maintain a buffer zone between the Greek and Turkish sides of the island.⁹²

Relations between Turkey and Greece, however, have improved somewhat over the past several years, due largely to mutual assistance after the 1999 earthquakes that struck both Turkey and Greece, and the election of the AKP, which understood that resolution of the Cyprus issue was essential to future EU membership for the country. Still, tensions have remained high between the two countries over the future status of the island.⁹³

Among the 35 chapters of *acquis*, or accumulated European Union law,⁹⁴ which Turkey needs to adhere to for the EU accession process to be completed, Turkey has closed only the science and research chapter thus far.⁹⁵ Most estimates maintain that Turkey will not likely be ready to become a full member until 2015 at the earliest. (see table on Page 36.)

Turkey’s Point of View

Many in Turkey feel that the country is being held to a double standard on both the domestic and foreign policy fronts, and view the idea of a “privileged partnership”—which in many respects already exists—to be somewhat of an insult. Prime Minister Erdogan has explicitly rejected the idea of a privileged partnership in lieu of EU membership.⁹⁶

Upon coming to power, the AKP instituted a series of reforms in order to bring it closer to the European Union. Initially, the AKP garnered much praise from the EU for efforts that led to guarantees of individual freedom, the abolishment of the death penalty, the creation of education and broadcasting in minority languages, and the reformation of the judiciary, which ensured better transparency in public administration.⁹⁷ In addition, though grass-roots efforts, the AKP was able to make much progress in areas relating to health care, housing, and food distribution.⁹⁸

The new ruling party also put the Turkish economy back on the proper track after an economic crisis in 2001.⁹⁹ The Turkish economy grew by an average of over 7 percent, domestic consumption rose due to lower interest rates and lower inflation, and the average per capita income nearly doubled.¹⁰⁰ Turkey’s economy and workforce demographic trends are among the most promising in Europe, with some projections suggesting that it could become the third-largest economy in Europe by 2050, after Russia and the United Kingdom.¹⁰¹

The EU Approval List is Long

Turkey has cleared one hurdle so far, with 34 more to go

EU Chapters of Acquis Accession Status	
Status	Chapter
Chapter Negotiations Opened, and Provisionally Closed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Science and Research (25)
Chapter Negotiations Opened	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Company Law (6) • Intellectual Property Law (7) • Statistics (18) • Enterprise and Industrial Policy (20) • Trans-European Networks (21) • Consumer and Health Protection (28) • Financial Control (32)
Screening Reports Approved, and Chapter Negotiations to be Opened	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic and Monetary Policy (17) • Education and Culture (26)
Screening Reports Approved with Benchmarks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free Movement of Capital (4) • Public Procurement (5) • Competition Policy (8) • Information Society and Media (10) • Food Safety, Veterinary and Phytosanitary Policy (12) • Taxation (16) • Social Policy and Employment (19) • Environment (27)
Screening Reports Approved, but Chapter Negotiations Frozen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free Movement of Goods (1) • Right of Establishment for Companies and Freedom to Provide Services (3) • Financial Services (9) • Agricultural and Rural Development (11) • Customs Union (29)
Draft Screening Reports to be Approved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freedom of Movement of Workers (2) • Energy (15) • Regional Policy and Coordination of Structural Instruments (22) • Judiciary and Fundamental Rights (23) • Justice, Freedom and Security (24) • Financial and Budgetary Provisions (33)
Draft Screening Reports to be Approved, but Chapter Negotiations Frozen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fisheries (13) • Transport Policy (14) • External Relations (30)
Screening Reports to be Drafted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foreign, Security, and Defense Policy (31) • Institutions (34) • Other Issues (35)

Source: Turkey Secretariat General For EU Affairs, "Current Situation in Accession Negotiations," available at: <http://www.abgs.gov.tr/index.php?p=65&l=2>; for in-depth progress reports, see also <http://www.abgs.gov.tr/index.php?p=42148&l=2>.

The Turkish government argues that its strong political and economic growth since 2002 is discounted by the EU while other countries recently granted EU admission, such as Poland, Hungary, Lithuania, Romania, and Bulgaria, essentially had state-run economies that until recently posted negative economic indicators or had other black marks on the checklist of criteria that the European Union supposedly uses.¹⁰² Indeed, analysts predict that Turkish per capita income standards will reach the level of most of these new EU member states within the next 15 years, even without the benefits of membership.

By 2050, Turkey is projected to be a \$6 trillion economy with per capita GDP levels at 75 percent of the projected EU average.¹⁰³ Given that its economic growth has Turkey on a path to reach relative parity with the rest of Europe, Turkish leaders are suspicious that the economic and political reasons given for resistance to its EU accession are merely a smoke-screen for the real concern: allowing a Muslim nation of more than 72 million inhabitants into what has been a traditionally Christian-based political union.

The cases of Romania and Bulgaria are particularly irksome to some Turks, given that officials in both of these countries have been under scrutiny by the European Commission for corruption and the misappropriation of funds since joining the EU in January 2007. In fact, the Commission recently suspended EU aid to Bulgaria, worth hundreds of millions of euros, because of concerns related to organized crime and corruption, and is withdrawing the authority of two Bulgarian agencies to manage EU funds.¹⁰⁴

Regarding the Cyprus issue, Turks generally feel that they have been willing to make concessions to end the standoff, while the Greek Cypriots have been the obstructionists. The United Nations, under then Secretary-General Kofi Annan, attempted to broker a deal between the two sides after the AKP's election in 2002. "The Basis for Agreement on a Comprehensive Settlement of the Cyprus Problem," often referred to as the Annan Plan, envisioned a Cyprus with two politically equal component states with a single legal identity, similar to Switzerland.¹⁰⁵ It also offered population relocation and territorial changes, which would benefit the Greek Cypriots.¹⁰⁶

When the plan was put to a referendum in 2004, after extensive negotiations under the auspices of the United Nations, European Union, United States, Turkey, and Greece, 65 percent of Turkish Cypriots voted for it while 76 percent of Greek Cypriots rejected it.¹⁰⁷ Yet, there has been progress since this time, giving the international community hope that a solution can be found. Demetris Christofias, President of the Republic of Cyprus, and Mehmet Ali Talat, leader of the TRNC, are viewed as highly amenable to the negotiation process.¹⁰⁸

At their behest, technical committees and working groups were created in March 2008 in order to lay the foundation for further reunification negotiations, and in May, the two leaders came together and issued a Joint Statement, which broadly outlined a plan for a reunited Cyprus. The April 3, 2008 opening of a new border crossing in the city center of

the divided capital of Nicosia raised hopes for increased trade and cooperation between the two communities.¹⁰⁹ The two leaders agreed in late July to begin talks, under the good offices of the U.N. Secretary General, aimed at reunifying the island.

The first round of talks, which began September 3, 2008, was praised as “productive and fruitful,”¹¹⁰ but the ongoing subsequent rounds (the most recent of which was held in late October¹¹¹) have stalled under mutual reports that the other side was unwilling to make concessions.¹¹² In early October 2008, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe released a report on Cyprus urging the Greek Cypriot authorities to implement the European Commission’s Direct Trade Regulation, allowing direct trade between the EU and the Turkish Cypriot community; Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots expressed disappointment, however, for what they said was a failure of the report to acknowledge the need for political equality between the two sides.¹¹³ Many in Turkey still believe that an unequal approach to the standoff in Cyprus has unfairly harmed Turkey’s accession efforts.

Overall, the resistance Turkey has experienced concerning its membership into the European Union has negatively affected Turkish attitudes towards both EU accession and Turkey’s role in NATO. The percentage of Turks who see membership in the European Union as a “good thing” dropped from 73 percent in 2004 to 54 percent in 2006.¹¹⁴ A 2008 German Marshall Fund poll had that figure at 42 percent.¹¹⁵ In addition, only 22 percent of Turks now view EU leadership as desirable.¹¹⁶

Similarly, Turks who believe that NATO is essential for Turkish security fell from 53 percent in 2004 to 44 percent two years later.¹¹⁷ Only 38 percent of Turks see NATO as being essential in today.¹¹⁸ Clearly, European foot-dragging on Turkey’s application for EU membership is increasingly frustrating to more and more Turks.

Why Turkey’s Accession Matters

Rejection of Turkey as a EU member could have lasting negative consequences for both the United States and Europe. Turkey, as well as much of the Muslim world, remains skeptical as to whether Europe is willing to embrace a large Islamic country, and suspects that Europe may wish to maintain a “Christian-only” club.¹¹⁹ While Europe would obviously not cite a fear of Islam as a reason for denying Turkey membership, if the reasons for delay or opposition by certain EU members appear dishonest, the impression will be that Europe is indeed hostile to Islam.¹²⁰

Such an impression could drive Turkey inward and/or eastward and stoke nationalist sentiments harmful to U.S. interests. In particular, it could lead to Turkey becoming a less robust member of NATO, where its contributions have been invaluable. In addition, Turkey’s reform efforts over the past several years have been driven in large part by the incentive of EU membership.

While reform efforts have stalled somewhat since accession negotiations were first opened in October 2005, the prospect of EU membership has proven to be an effective carrot in encouraging Turkey to liberalize its economic and political systems. When Turkey entered into a customs union agreement with the EU a full decade before accession talks opened, it harmonized its tariff system with that of Europe and removed barriers to trade in industrial goods.¹²¹

From 2002 to 2005, the government abolished the death penalty, ratified Protocols 6 and 13 of the European Convention on Human Rights, and took steps to curb police and military abuses of power. Extensive economic reforms cut away at some public-sector excesses and the government pension system, reducing inflation to all-time lows.¹²² Concessions were even made on Kurdish-language media and education (although the latter only in private schools).¹²³

Without the prospect of eventual EU accession, Turkey's drive toward developing stronger democratic institutions, a vigorous rule of law, and more dynamic economy could potentially be stunted, which would make Turkey a less effective partner for the United States and Europe.¹²⁴

European attitudes towards Turkish accession to the EU are affected, often negatively, by the large number of Turkish immigrants already within the EU, and concerns among many EU citizens about how to effectively integrate them into their societies. There currently are nearly 4 million Turks who live within the EU, of whom 1.3 million are citizens.¹²⁵ The largest number of Turks live in Germany (2.6 million), which accepted hundreds of thousands of Turkish guest workers in the 1960s and 1970s, followed by France, the Netherlands, Austria, Belgium, the United Kingdom, and Scandinavia.¹²⁶

Turks living in Europe often have tremendous difficulty being accepted in social, educational, and professional spheres within many European countries, which have only recently started devoting more time, attention, and resources to integration problems within the EU. According to a recent poll, more Europeans view Turkish membership as a "bad thing" (31 percent) than as a "good thing" (22 percent).¹²⁷ France and Germany had the highest percentage of respondents who saw potential EU membership for Turkey as a bad thing (49 percent and 43 percent respectively).¹²⁸

These dreary poll results belie statistics that demonstrate the Turkish community's labor productivity has contributed significantly to the EU economy.¹²⁹ More than 1 million Turks have contributed twice as much money to the EU's gross national product as Luxembourg, and a more than half as much as Greece.¹³⁰ The Turkish entrepreneurial class in the EU is growing, and the amount of cash repatriated back to Turkey by Turks has decreased over the years.¹³¹ This is particularly true among the younger generation of Turks in the EU who have weaker ties to the homeland.¹³² In short, the process of moving Turkey closer to Europe has benefited both Turkey's political and economic development as well as the EU's economy.

Supporting Turkey's Integration with the West

The United States has been supportive of Turkey's bid to join the EU over the years, and the Obama administration should continue to help Turkey "sell itself" to Europe. Turkey may not be ready to become a member of the European Union immediately, but it is in the West's best interest for Turkey to continue on a course for membership in the coming decade. And whatever happens between Turkey and the EU, the Obama administration must also work aggressively to build closer Turkish-American ties.

For starters, President Obama should make Turkey one of his first stops on a European trip after inauguration for face-to-face meetings with the Turkish prime minister and president. Given the harsh feelings between the United States and Turkey generated by the Iraq War and slow but steady improvement in relations over the past year, an early presidential trip to Turkey would be an effective way to emphasize that Turkey is a vital strategic partner for the United States.

It would also be wise to make a visit to Turkey within the context of a European as opposed to a Middle Eastern trip. While it makes sense to emphasize the important role Turkey plays as a bridge to the East, many Turks, especially the Kemalist secularists, bristle at being considered a Middle Eastern ally as opposed to a European one. Visiting Turkey within a European context would also demonstrate that the United States considers EU accession and stronger ties to the West to be an important strategic objective.

The Obama administration should also work more diligently to convince its European allies that moving Turkey down the path of EU accession is a priority for the United States, and should be one for Europe. While European countries correctly maintain that it is Europe's decision as to whether Turkey eventually becomes an EU member, the United States can do more, publicly and privately, to encourage its skeptical European allies—especially France—to keep the process moving forward and to abandon rhetoric that gives the impression that Turkey is not a proper cultural or religious fit for the EU.

Germany also can play a special role, given its close cultural, political, and economic connection to Turkey over the years, and the large Turkish community within Germany's borders.¹³³ The United States should encourage political leaders within Germany to partner with the United States in advocating for Turkish membership in the EU, and use aggressive public diplomacy efforts to demonstrate how important Turkish membership is for both Europe and the United States.

The United States also could play a positive role in fostering closer cooperation between Turkey and the West in the defense arena by encouraging Turkey to drop its objections to the 2002 Berlin Plus Agreement, which authorizes the EU to use NATO assets and capabilities to support the creation of its own rapid reaction force as part of a European Security and Defense Policy. As part of the Berlin Plus Agreement, Turkey agreed to allocate a brigade toward the ESDP effort. In June 2007, however, it withdrew, blaming the

Europeans for failing to consult with Turkey when drafting plans for joint operations and deployment of the rapid reaction force, and for including Cyprus and Malta in EU discussions over Turkish objections.¹³⁴ In the 2007 Progress Report on Turkey, issued in June 2008, the European Parliament called on Turkey to lift those objections.¹³⁵ An Obama administration could potentially play an important mediating role on this issue.

On the domestic front, the Constitutional Court case against the AKP shows why it is critical for the United States to continue supporting the development of democratic institutions in Turkey, as well as the effect Western pressure might have on political development in the country. The Turkish chief prosecutor's case against the AKP for violating secular laws in the country was perhaps the biggest potential roadblock to Turkey's EU bid.

Given that many in Europe consider the AKP to be the most modern and pro-Western Islamist party currently operating, opponents of Turkish membership would almost certainly have pointed to an AKP closure as a reason to suspend membership negotiations and move towards an alternate arrangement.¹³⁶ Furthermore, it might have been more difficult for the United States to be a convincing advocate for Turkish inclusion in the EU if Turkey appeared to be moving in an undemocratic direction. Fortunately for Turkey and its EU aspirations, the country's high court chose a less draconian outcome than the prosecutor sought.

The negative international response to the prospect of party closure seems to have overridden secular concern about the AKP's motives and to have had a role in the outcome.¹³⁷ In other words, Turkey's desire to avoid political crisis and to keep EU, regional, and transatlantic relations on track was likely a powerful motivator for the court to arrive at a more measured decision vis-à-vis the AKP.¹³⁸ While civil and military tensions are still present, the lack of intervention by the military gives an indication that the days of military coups might be over in Turkey.

While the United States must be cautious about appearing too meddlesome in Turkey's internal affairs, the Obama administration should continue to encourage, perhaps privately, Turkish leaders to avoid introducing legislation on contentious issues likely to raise the ire of the secular establishment. The United States also should encourage Turkey to hasten its development of democratic institutions and reforms, which may help lessen the antagonism between the AKP and its adversaries and prevent further legal action against the party that could damage Turkey's EU aspirations.

In particular, the Obama administration should encourage more freedom of the press, the development of effective opposition parties, and amendments to Turkey's constitution and laws (currently being considered), which would overhaul the process for party closures and make the drama that unfolded this past spring less likely in the future.¹³⁹ Furthermore, the new administration would be well advised to encourage the Turkish government to more fully address the concerns of Kurds in Turkey, which also is a crucial element in the accession process.

Fortunately, though, the longstanding roadblock to Turkish integration with the West—resolution of the Cyprus issue—finally seems to be movable. Although Europe, not the United States, is now the central front for Cyprus diplomacy, one of President Obama’s top priorities should be to work with U.N., EU, and Turkish and Cypriot leaders to make sure that discussions stay on track.

To that end, the United States should work to ease the economic isolation of the Turkish community in northern Cyprus by ending restrictions on trade and investment in the TRNC, which would benefit overall U.S.-Turkish relations.¹⁴⁰ Such a move might also motivate the Greek Cypriots, who benefit from the status quo more than the Turks, to work diligently toward a lasting solution to this frozen conflict. Ideally, this would be done in conjunction with action from the European Union.¹⁴¹

Finally, the United States should avoid tying the fate of U.S.-Turkish relations entirely to the future of Europe’s relationship with Turkey, given the uncertainty of Turkey’s EU accession. In addition to championing Turkey’s EU cause, President Obama should work aggressively to encourage the growth of a pro-American business lobby in Turkey, and to increase America’s bilateral investment, business, educational, and cultural ties to the country. This will require the combined work of the public, private, and non-profit sectors, with the new administration playing its part through the U.S. departments of State, Treasury, and Education, to increase trade delegations, promote public and private direct investment, and streamline work and educational opportunities for Turks who wish to come to the United States.¹⁴²

Indeed, working to win over the next generation of Turkish leaders should be among the highest priorities of the new administration. More than 3,000 Turkish and American scholars have participated in Fulbright exchange programs over the past 50 years, and recent new efforts like the Youth Exchange and Study program offer Turkish students at the high school level opportunities to participate in exchange programs with American schools.

In addition, the Legislative Education and Practice program hosts 20 young professionals annually from Georgia, Russia, Turkey, and Ukraine in fellowships with state-level government non-governmental organizations.¹⁴³ These programs, administered under the Department of State’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, help build constituencies for stronger U.S.-Turkish relations and should be supported and expanded by the Obama administration, working collaboratively with Congress.

Conclusion

U.S.-Turkish relations are at an important crossroads. Both the United States and Turkey should seize this moment of great opportunity to place their bilateral relationship on more solid footing. If the course is plotted correctly, Turkey and the United States are in a position to re-invigorate an enduring strategic relationship, built on similar interests and democratic values. Given the common international challenges both countries face—combating terrorism, stabilizing Iraq and Afghanistan, ending Iran’s nuclear ambitions, creating new pathways for energy to the West, and advancing peace in the Middle East—the United States and Turkey must rebuild their partnership.

In order for the relationship to flourish, however, both sides will need to make it more of a priority and readjust thinking. The United States should fully recognize Turkey’s new “soft power” position in the 21st century, and embrace Turkey’s growing clout as a mediator in troubled regions. To do this effectively, the United States must work to bring Turkey into strategic decision-making early in the process (not as an afterthought after deciding on a course of action), and accept that Turkey will not always act in lockstep with America.

The United States also should play a vigorous role in helping Turkey become a more effective partner for the U.S. on matters concerning Europe, the Middle East, and the Caucasus, by continuing to push for Turkish accession to the European Union, supporting Turkey’s efforts to play a larger diplomatic, economic, and peacekeeping role in the Middle East, and playing a constructive and careful role in the ongoing efforts to resolve the Cyprus stalemate and longstanding conflict between Turkey and Armenia.

Rebuilding a stronger U.S.-Turkish partnership on all of these fronts is perhaps one of the best ways for the United States to send the message that it favors Turkey’s ultimate accession to the European Union. Taking tangible steps to enhance bilateral ties with Turkey on multiple issues is also a way for the United States to signal to its European allies the importance the United States places on Turkey being better integrated with the West. In addition, stronger U.S.-Turkish bilateral ties will help guarantee that the alliance remains strong even if the EU accession process falters.

Turkish leaders also must make more of a significant effort to strengthen the U.S.-Turkish relationship. Not only should the government step up its efforts to improve democratic institutions and increase freedoms, especially in the Kurdish south, but should also work

more actively to combat a pervasive anti-Americanism among the Turkish populace. While much of the negative perception can be countered through U.S. policy choices, such as providing more support to Turkey in its battle against the PKK, the United States cannot do it alone.¹⁴⁴

The Obama administration should impress upon Turkish officials how critical it is for Turks to hear from their leadership about the common strategic interests the two countries share, and for Turkish leadership to highlight the positive steps America takes that are in the Turkish national interest. In the end, without greater support of the United States by the Turkish people, it will be difficult for the United States and Turkey to form the type of relationship necessary to be true partners.

The incoming Obama administration has a tremendous opportunity to help craft a new and lasting U.S.-Turkish relationship that would benefit both sides of the Atlantic. In Turkey, as in most other European countries, there was great enthusiasm for Obama's election and hope that such a dramatic change on the American scene could further economic and political ties between the United States and Turkey. The Obama administration should use this to its advantage. An early effort in 2009, through words and deeds, to show that Turkey is a critical ally of the United States—and already an indispensable component of Europe—as well as a partner whose judgment and independence should be respected would go a long way in healing the strained relationship.

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