

## **Turkey Add Energy to America's Relations with Turkey**

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Americans should pay close attention to the news from Turkey . The August 28 election of a new president, which has provoked strong opposition from the powerful Turkish military, is a test of Turkey 's democracy. The visit of Turkey's energy minister to Iran earlier in August to sign energy deals, including the establishment of a joint Turkish-Iranian company to carry up to 35 billion cubic meters of Iranian natural gas via Turkey to Europe, is a test of America's commitment to bring alternate sources of gas and oil to the world's energy markets.

One interpretation of Turkey's desire for closer energy connections to Iran is that Ankara no longer believes Washington, distracted by Iraq, actively supports what was once a major U.S. objective: creating an East-West energy corridor, the network of existing and proposed pipelines that bring oil and gas from the Caucasus to the West avoiding both Russia's monopolized pipeline system and the crowded sea lanes in the Bosphorus. America runs the risk of losing the East-West energy corridor to alternate visions pursued by Iran , Russia , and China .

Tehran has made concessions to Ankara on energy transit questions to win Turkey 's cooperation. Russia is meanwhile trying to reduce the importance of Turkey as an energy hub by proposing that Turkmen gas skirt Turkey . Chinese President Hu Jintao signed agreements with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan to move oil and gas east during his recent visit to the region. Leaders of Russia and China and four Central Asian states have just established an "energy club," which does not include the United States . The U.S. Administration has tried to stay in the game by financing a new feasibility study with Azerbaijan for the construction of two new trans-Caspian pipelines, but it will take political and economic muscle to make studies reality.

In 1995, to promote supply alternatives, the United States announced support for an oil pipeline that would bring Caspian crude from Baku , Azerbaijan to the southern Turkish port of Ceyhan . Although some commentators said that the pipeline would never be built, they were wrong. In 2006, oil first flowed through the pipeline, which now runs through Georgia . With strong U.S. backing, diversity of supply became a reality.

Other important pipelines in Turkey can further contribute to that diversity. The South Caucasus pipeline (Baku-Erzurum-Ceyhan) began to move gas in July. The Shah Deniz project taps Azeri gas fields in the Caspian Sea and then transports the gas across Georgia and Turkey . An onward connection will carry this natural gas to Greece and Italy . Other lines across Turkey are also possible, and perhaps one day, a Turkey-Israel oil or gas pipeline.

Strategic foresight requires considering potential military threats to this energy supply, since investors want to know that the facilities will be secure. While no one can predict the ultimate outcome of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, what is certain is that protecting Western interests in and around the Middle East will require the presence of U.S. forces in the region for years to come. Decisions the Administration takes today about force levels in Iraq or arms sales to the Gulf can either expand or constrain America's ability to promote these interests, including energy security. Saudi Arabia has reportedly begun setting up a 35,000-strong security force to protect oil infrastructure from potential attacks. The Turkish airbase at Incirlik is near Ceyhan, the end of the 1,760 kilometer BTC pipeline; it must be at the heart of any serious Turkish-Western thinking about how to be ready to protect the energy corridor.

Western leaders need to move quickly to renew energy security as a foundation for relations with Turkey. This requires more than friendly rhetoric and promises. The Turkish public will be skeptical of any proposal emanating from Washington, and U.S. policy choices about Turkey, including actions in Congress, should be made with Western energy security interests in mind. The U.S. Administration can gain traction on energy security by taking active measures against the PKK, the terrorist group committed to the dismemberment of Turkey that operates in Northern Iraq. The Administration should not permanently base U.S. forces in the Kurdish areas in the north of Iraq, which Turks will see as U.S. support for an independent Kurdish state. U.S. leaders must convince Turks that they won't prematurely withdraw from Iraq, creating a vacuum that will leave that country in even further distress. Europeans should leave the door open to Turkey's full European Union membership.

This American president and the next will need to pursue policies that increase energy conservation and efficiency and ensure the diversity of energy supplies. Turkey's relationship with the West remains both frozen in Cold War glaze and downgraded by the focus on Iraq. A future-oriented commitment to energy security would bring new focus to this still vital partnership. To achieve this objective, Western leaders need to make decisions today that will keep open viable options for tomorrow.

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