

IS THE UNITED STATES LOSING TURKEY?

**By Rajan Menon and S. Enders Wimbush*

Executive Summary

On February 5th and 6th, 2007, the Hudson Institute, with support from the **Smith Richardson Foundation**, convened a small workshop of noted specialists on Turkey, Europe, and international security to assess the state of America's alliance with Turkey and, more specifically, to ascertain whether the United States risks "losing" Turkey as a long-time and critical ally. The workshop was part of a project directed by Rajan Menon, Professor of International Relations at Lehigh University and Fellow at the New America Foundation. S. Enders Wimbush, Director of the Center for Future Security Strategies at the Hudson Institute, served as chairman of the workshop. This report, while it draws on the discussions that occurred during the workshop, is an independent analysis written by Messrs. Menon and Wimbush. The memoranda prepared by the experts in advance of the workshop and the list of participants appear in the appendix to this document.

The alliance between the United States and Turkey, which has endured since the 1947 Truman Doctrine and has contributed to the security of both countries, is now in serious trouble. What is worse, neither side is facing up to this reality, let alone taking serious remedial measures, nor even making concerted efforts to understand the new political currents within each other's societies.

If this neglect continues, the price paid by both sides will be steep. It is becoming increasingly clear that Washington and Ankara see the world and define their interests in divergent ways. If allowed to continue, this trend could well undo the alliance. The good news is that there is still time to act, providing senior leaders on both sides move with dispatch. It is urgent that they do so, for despite the end of the Cold War, which provided a clear rationale for their alliance for four decades, Ankara and Washington still need each other, perhaps more so because they now face multiple and unfamiliar threats, not least those posed by terrorism.

The most important source of discord between Turkey and the United States is the war in Iraq. Ankara fears that Iraq will break up as a result of the war and that a separate Kurdish state will arise, creating even greater disorder and stoking separatist sentiment in Turkey's southeast, and increasing paramilitary and terrorist attacks by the Kurdish separatist organization, the PKK. Washington, for its part, feels betrayed by the Turkish parliament's rejection of its request to open a second front from Turkey's territory against Saddam Hussein's army in the run-up to the 2003 war. But more fundamentally, the Bush administration is preoccupied by the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and seems to have relegated Turkey to the back burner—or so it appears to many Turks.

The widespread belief among Turks that the United States undertook the Iraq war without regard to the consequences for Turkey's security and that Washington now seeks to punish it for the Turkish parliament's vote has created enormous resentment toward the United States. This sentiment is reflected across the political spectrum. It is evident among elites, including the leadership of the Turkish military, arguably the country's most influential institution, but also pervades society more generally. Opinion polls show that Turks, who once viewed the United States as an ally and friend, increasingly see it as not just unfriendly, but as a direct threat to their national security. As a result, influential Turks, government officials and foreign policy experts alike, are discussing a strategic reassessment. This reorientation would involve building deep ties with new partners, among them Russia, China, Iran, and Syria and would, moreover, abandon the longstanding premise that the United States remains the indispensable ally.

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It would be mistaken for the United States to dismiss these discussions as bluster. Turkey remains a crucial ally in the struggle against terrorism; it is a secular and democratic Muslim country; it sits atop an arc extending from Israel to Central Asia, a zone of actual or potential upheaval and war; it abuts waterways critical to the flow of commerce, particularly oil; its territory is a corridor for the strategically important Baku-Ceyhan oil pipeline; and its cooperation is key to a durable settlement in Iraq and to an effective policy to counter the challenges posed by a resurgent (and potentially nuclear-armed) Iran.

Washington must take urgent steps to protect the US-Turkish alliance from further harm:

- Recognize that its alliance with Turkey could be in jeopardy.
- Establish high-level joint working groups that are tasked with proposing concrete measures to safeguard the alliance and to ensure its relevance for the post-Cold War world.
- Make Turkey a central partner in fashioning a political settlement in Iraq and engage in regular consultations and joint planning to this end.
- Work with both the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in northern Iraq and the Turkish leadership to prevent the dispute over the oil-rich city of Kirkuk in northern Iraq (contested by the Kurds and by the Turkmen, who are supported by Turkey) from precipitating open warfare and possible Turkish intervention, which could further dent America's alliance with Turkey.
- Fashion a "grand bargain" between the KRG and Turkey that includes specific and enforceable provisions to assure the KRG that Turkey will not invade Iraqi Kurdistan to forestall the possibility of an independent Kurdish state and to guarantee Turkey that the KRG will not permit the PKK to use northern Iraq as a base of operations.

IS THE UNITED STATES ‘LOSING’ TURKEY?

The Project

On February 5th and 6th, 2007, the Hudson Institute, with support from the Smith Richardson Foundation, convened a small workshop of noted specialists on Turkey, Europe, and international security to assess the state of America’s alliance with Turkey and, more specifically, to ascertain whether the United States risks “losing” Turkey as a long-time and critical ally. The workshop was part of a project directed by Rajan Menon, Professor of International Relations at Lehigh University and Fellow at the New America Foundation. S. Enders Wimbush, Director of the Center for Future Security Strategies at the Hudson Institute, served as chairman of the workshop.

In advance of the meeting, the participants were requested to prepare brief memoranda covering the issues that they regard as pivotal to the future of the Ankara-Washington alliance. (The list of participants and their memoranda are in the appendix.) And they were asked to address the following points during the workshop itself:

- The principal threats to a robust and mutually beneficial US-Turkish relationship.
- Alternative pathways for US-Turkish relations, including those involving a breakdown of the partnership.
- The most important areas of continuing convergence that continue to provide a solid basis to strengthen the alliance despite the rough waters it is now charting.
- Policies that could rescue the relationship from its current trouble state so that it can be revived and made relevant to the challenges of the 21st century.

There was a strong consensus among the participants that the US-Turkish alliance is at a crossroads and that, unless the problems plaguing it are not given immediate attention and corrective measures are not taken, a strategic partnership that has endured for a generation could dissolve, with Turkey rethinking its foreign and national security strategy in ways that involve new priorities and partners. There was also agreement that Turkey polity and society has become more difficult for American policymakers to understand. The familiar elites, secular Kemalists, whether civilian or military, continue to be powerful in setting the tone of Turkey’s internal and external orientation, but they have had to yield political space to those who are influenced by Islamic ideas and who originate from the social classes of Anatolia, as opposed to “European Turkey.” This shift in the political currents does not in itself endanger the US-Turkish alliance. The Islamic party that now governs Turkey favors a strong relationship with the United States, sought (albeit without success) to convince the Turkish parliament to authorize the opening of a second American military front against Saddam Hussein’s army from Turkish soil in March 2003, and is demonstrably committed to gaining membership in the European Union). Still, the domestic sources of Turkish politics are different now, and this makes for a Turkey that is less familiar and hence more complicated for Americans to understand.

Whether it is the Kemalists or the Islamists, however, the possibility that Turkey could reassess its longstanding strategy, which has been anchored in the alliance with the United States, is quite real given that the bilateral relationship now faces a crisis. Indeed, some of Turkey’s foreign policy choices—which are being discussed forthrightly in influential Turkish circles—involve reducing its reliance on the United States, or even turning away from Washington, and deepening ties with America’s competitors. This could precipitate what one of the workshop participants, Ronald Asmus, dubbed “a strategic rupture.” Accompanying Turkish discussions about a new strategic orientation has been the growth a deep anti-Western, and specifically anti-American, mood—one that now shapes the thinking of Turks, regardless of political persuasion, and that has sunk deep roots among the Kemalists (civilian and military), America’s traditional interlocutors.

These threats to the alliance seems to be unnoticed by American leaders (both Democrats and Republicans) or noted but regarded as little more than a rough patch that does not threaten the fundamentals of the Ankara-Washington relationship. Part of the problem here is that American foreign policy planning has reflected complacency about Turkey of late. As Ian Lesser, another participant, observed in an analysis published less than a year before the workshop:

For decades, the relationship between Ankara and Washington has been described as “strategic”—sustained and supportive of the most important international objectives of both sides. Today, the strategic quality of the

relationship can no longer be taken for granted, as a result of divergent perceptions of the Iraq war, and more significantly, international priorities on both sides. As a result, a bilateral relationship of great geopolitical significance, but one that has operated without fundamental reassessment since the early years of the Cold War, is now in question.¹

Defining Loss and Understanding the Turkish Mood

The United States does not, of course, “own” Turkey and must never manage its relationship with Ankara in ways that even suggest that it thinks it does, for the Turks are a proud people with a long and illustrious history, and their country is a key regional power, whose influence extends to the United States, Europe, the Middle East, the South Caucasus, Central Asia, and Russia. Turkish nationalism has become both combative and embittered during the past several years; it could turn against the United States and indeed be shaped strongly by anti-Americanism. This is not a hypothetical danger: there is abundant and unmistakable evidence that America’s relationship with Turkey is under severe, indeed unprecedented, strain, which is why minor missteps could have a disproportionate effect, fraying the alliance further. For example, while we may value Turkey as country with a tradition of moderate Islam and a secular polity, statements that praise it a “model” for Muslims strikes Turks as paternalistic, not complimentary.

So low has confidence in the United States become among Turks and so high is the level of resentment that Seyfi Tashan, a leading Turkish political commentator and long-time proponent of Turkey’s integration into the West, observed that whereas the United States and Turkey had stood together during the Cold War, now the United States (together with Europe) appeared to be waging “an undeclared Cold War” against Turkey.² Let us give a heavy discount for hyperbole; nevertheless, that a prominent member of the foreign policy establishment could characterize the US-Turkish relationship thus is telling, not least because Tashan’s sentiments are not only representative of public sentiment, they are milder by comparison. For instance, a potboiler imagining a war between the US and Turkey in northern Iraq proved wildly popular among Turks, more than 80 percent of whom also opined in a 2005 survey that American policies in their region endangered Turkey’s security.³

The cold reality, then, is that Turkey and the United States are drifting apart—and rapidly. Senior officials and respected academic experts in Turkey and the United States now concur that there is something fundamentally wrong with the state of US-Turkish relations and that if both sides do not recognize this reality and attend to it with seriousness and vigor, a strategic partnership that has served both Americans and Turks well for more than half a century could suffer serious damage.

This assessment is not overblown. It is grounded in considerable, compelling, and consistent evidence derived from opinion polls in Turkey, discussions in the Turkish media, and the analyses and pronouncements of those who conduct Turkish foreign policy, or influence it. Nor does this conclusion rest on a romanticized assumption that there was once an idyllic, perfect friendship that is now dissolving and that must and can be reconstituted in its pristine form. The past was never halcyon, and veteran observers of Turkey well understand that the United States and Turkey have disagreed on important issues in the past, that their relationship has encountered rough terrain on numerous occasions, and that such differences will surface in the future. Nevertheless, the current situation is different in their minds because the two countries are increasingly defining their place in the world, their assessments of major security threats, and their national interests in radically divergent ways.

There will be two consequences if this trend is not reversed: First, future crises that test the strongly strength of the bilateral bond will have greater destructive potential than before; second, even far less

¹ Ian O. Lesser, “Turkey, the United States and the Delusion of Geopolitics,” *Survival*, Vol. 48, No. 3 (Autumn 2006), p. 83. The same points is made in Graham Fuller and Ian O. Lesser, *Turkey’s New Geopolitics* (Santa Monica, CA.: Rand Corporation, 1993); and Soner Cagaptay, *Turkey at the Crossroads: Preserving Ankara’s Western Orientation* (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy Studies, 2005).

² Seyfi Tashan, “Is It a Cold War for Turkey?,” Foreign Policy Institute, March 6, 2007, at http://www.foreignpolicy.org/tr/documents/270207_b.html.

³ These examples are noted in Phillip Gordon and Omer Taspinar, “Turkey on the Brink,” *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (Summer 2006), pp. 65-66.

consequential instances of discord will prove harder to handle than ever before and the cumulative effect will take a steep toll on the alliance. This loss of cushioning is particularly important because, in the aftermath of the Cold War, Turkey and the United States face a new, unfamiliar, and complex environment and will be hard put to adapt their alliance creatively to new conditions without trust and goodwill, both of which are being depleted.

Why Turkey Remains Critical to American Interests

If Turkey, a key friend and ally, turns away from the United States, the damage to American interests will be severe and long lasting. Turkey remains exceptionally important to the United States, arguably even more so than during the Cold War. Here are some of the most important reasons why this is true:

- Turkey is the top of an arc that starts in Israel and wends its way through Lebanon, Syria, Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Iran. It abuts, or is proximate to, countries pivotal to American foreign policy and national security, whether because they are allies and friends, adversaries, or loci of instability.
- Turkey's critical location means that instability within it could spill beyond its borders, with the unpredictable ripple effects traveling across its neighborhood, particularly the Middle East.
- Turkey sits astride critical waterways and narrows (the Caspian Sea, the Black Sea, the Mediterranean Sea, and the Bosphorus and Dardanelles) that are channels for trade and the flow of energy to global markets.
- Turkey is a passageway for the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline, and its Mediterranean port of Ceyhan, is the terminus. Turkey is therefore essential to American efforts to reduce the dependence of Azerbaijan, and potentially Kazakstan and Turkmenistan, on Russia's energy pipelines.
- Turkey's substantial economic and political ties with Georgia and Azerbaijan contribute to the stability of these countries, whose strategic significance far exceeds their standing in commonplace measures of power. Georgia is not only a corridor for the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline, its stability is under threat because of its testy relationship with Russia and its conflicts with the Russian-supported secessionist statelets, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Azerbaijan is not only a major energy producer, but also a fellow Turkic country, whose territorial dispute with Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh could boil over into war, just as it did in the 1990s, possibly igniting a wider conflagration that draws in Turkey (Azerbaijan's ally) and Russia (Armenia's patron) and putting the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline at risk.
- Turkey is a democratic and secular Muslim, and its alliance with the United States helps demonstrate that the United States can maintain friendly and productive ties with an array of Muslim countries—that America's does not oppose Islam per se, but rather the violent extremists who invoke it to justify their violence against innocents and their retrograde, intolerant agenda. This is crucial if the American campaign against terrorism is not to be seen by the world's 1.3 billion Muslims, as Islamic terrorist groups would like it to be, as a war against Islam itself.
- Turkey's cooperation is essential to any durable political settlement in Iraq, particularly because it borders Iraq's Kurdish north and fears that the emergence there of a Kurdish state would increase the already-considerable violence and resilient separatist sentiment in its own Kurdish-populated southeast. The fragmentation of Iraq could therefore very likely prompt Turkish military intervention, which in turn could deal a death blow to the US-Turkish alliance, perhaps even culminating in Turkey's exit from NATO. (Turkish forces intervened in northern Iraq to attack the camps of the Kurdish separatist guerillas in the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War; in March 2003 roughly 1,500 Turkish troops entered this region, and Turkish Special Forces have reportedly carried out covert operations in post-Saddam Iraq.)
- Turkey's disillusionment with the West could prompt a reorientation of its foreign policy—away from the United States, the European Union (EU), and NATO, and toward a new multi-azimuth Gaullist strategy that looks to China, India, Iran, Russia, and Syria. Such a shift is already being discussed in Turkey, and the assumption that it amounts to bluff and bluster may prove short-sighted. The new strategic landscape created by the end of the Cold War may pose new threats to Turkey, but it also provides it a choice of

new partners as well. While a rethinking of Turkish grand need not in itself undermine the alliance between Turkey and the United States, it could certainly do so if the force driving it is an anti-Western nationalism.

- Turkey and the United States both face the threat of terrorism, and Turkey's cooperation is essential to any truly effective American policy against global terrorist networks. More specifically, Turkey could also serve as a corridor that militant Islamists use to infiltrate Iraq and Turkey's other neighbors.
- Turkey's participation in the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, a military coalition that for a time was commanded by a Turkish general, demonstrates that Ankara and Washington can cooperate in promoting stability and enabling economic development in war-torn countries. This is true even though Turkey's military forces in Afghanistan are small and are not deployed in the south, the central theater for the anti-Taliban war. (Turkey is no different in this respect than the vast majority of ISAF's other members.)
- Turkey is a member of NATO, and the air bases in its southeast, primarily Incirlik, but also others at Batman, Diyarbakir, Malatya, and Mus remain important to the United States. The value of Turkish airfields was revealed after the 1991 Gulf War, when a no-flight zone was established over northern Iraq to protect the Kurds there from Saddam Hussein's military machine. Moreover despite Washington's inability to open a second front from Turkish territory against Iraqi forces in March 2003, American aircraft were permitted to use Turkish airspace for operations in Iraq, and Turkish installations are important for providing logistical support to US forces in Iraq.

Turkey's New Political Demography

US-Turkish relations have entered choppy waters in part because leaders in both countries have been inept at anticipating shifting currents. But there are broader forces at play, and they are visible both in the internal politics and external orientation of both Turkey and the United States. To begin with, there is what might be called a new political demography in Turkey. The ruling elites that have set Turkey's agenda at home and abroad since the establishment of the Kemalist republic in 1923 still hold considerable sway in the political arena, but new centers of power have emerged to rival these so-called "White Turks," who hale from European Turkey and have dominated the military, the state bureaucracy, and the armed forces, arguably Turkey's most powerful political institution. The White Turks have long embodied Kemal Ataturk's vision of secularism and Turkish nationalism, which follows the French *laïcité* paradigm of citizenship. They have had extensive, close, and sustained contact with the United States—as tourists, entrepreneurs, students, diplomats, and officers trained in American military academies. They have traditionally believed that Turkey's destiny lies with the West (particularly the United States), Islam has no place in politics, multiculturalism is anathema, Turkishness an imperative. Yet Kemalists are not necessarily well disposed to the United States today; to the contrary, a wounded nationalism marked by visceral anti-Americanism pervades their ranks today.

The Kemalist model of politics has certainly not been displaced—and will not, given that the military is its ardent and vigilant champion—but its hold has been weakened by another tendency, which reflects the increased influence of political leaders and business groups from Anatolia, in whose eyes Islam offers a guide to domestic politics and foreign policy, while Kemalism has severed Turkey from its authentic Islamic roots, its historical heritage, and the geographical zones that held priority for centuries. These elites hardly reject integration with the West: they have pursued market-oriented reforms that have boosted economic growth and have pushed for Turkish membership in the EU. True, they stress the value of having substantive relationships with Turkey's neighbors, Iran, Syria, Russia, and the states of Central Asia and the South Caucasus—and in a manner that is not mediated by Turkey's relationship with the United States; but so have Kemalists. Yet contrary to the secularists, the new elites are drawn to the Ottomanist conception of a Muslim-majority society that accommodates ethnic and cultural differences among Muslims by appealing to an overarching commonality of faith. This conception is rather different than the Kemalist variant, which has been the dominant precept of citizenship and insists on secularism and an ethnic definition of nationalism rooted in Turkishness as the overriding bond. The Islamists are careful in voicing their views and savvy enough to realize the dangers involved in using them as a guide to public policy, particularly because such ideas poses an alternative to Kemalism are

anathema to secularists generally and the politically potent armed forces in particular; but this does not mean that the Islamists are not serious about presenting and pursuing a model of nationhood and statecraft that breaks the mold.

A bellwether of this political change was the victory in the 1995 elections of the Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*), an Islamist movement led by Necmettin Erbakan, a development that rattled the Kemalists and aroused the suspicions of the military, the self-appointed guardian of Kemal Ataturk's political legacy. Although Erbakan's government was forced from office in 1997 by the military in what has been dubbed a "soft coup," the electoral triumph in November 2002 of a new, more moderate Islamist movement, the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi*, AKP), led by Recep Tayyip Erdogan, showed that the shift in Turkish politics signified by the Welfare Party's victory, however short-lived, was not an fleeting aberration, but the harbinger of far-reaching change in Turkey's society and politics.

While Kemalism remains the dominant political paradigm, the United States will now have to deal with new political elites and social forces whose notion of how Turkey should be constituted internally and what it should seek externally and how draws upon the country's Ottoman and Islamic heritage. Moreover, unlike the "White Turks" the new elites have been far less influenced by Western ideas and institutions. Given the AKP's enthusiasm for Turkey's membership in the EU—partly because it sees it as a hedge against the military's intervention in politics—our point is emphatically not that Islam's increased role in Turkey's politics must generate conflict with the United States, or that the Kemalists can be counted on to be well disposed toward Washington. Rather, it is that Washington must now understand and work with a new variety of political leaders, whose political proclivities and ideas are distinct from those of the Kemalists, America's traditional Turkish interlocutors. This will demand patience, flexibility, and a willingness to learn about and adapt to the new realities in Turkey and to accept a Turkey that is harder to fathom. Under these circumstances, dichotomous categorizations pitting the Kemalists as natural allies and the AKP as automatic adversaries (or vice versa) are not merely simplistic, but potentially pernicious in terms of their consequences for US-Turkish relations. These qualities, alas, are not always conspicuous in American statecraft.

Turkish leaders have had to make their own adjustments to changes in American politics. George W. Bush has unapologetically described America's role in the world in the aftermath of 9/11 in Manichean, and to much of the world messianic, terms: if you are not with us, the president proclaimed, you are against us. Kemalists and Islamists alike have found this perspective hard to comprehend, albeit for different reasons. But both are disconcerted by an ally who has become unfamiliar and requires regular and unquestioning demonstrations of friendship and support for its policies, even those that its allies may have legitimate reasons to question, or even oppose, on the basis of their own national interests. This is how Turks assessed Washington's 2003 request that Turkey open its territory so that the United States military could attack Saddam's forces from two separate fronts and the Bush administration's angry, if implied, accusations of betrayal when the Turkish parliament said no.

The New Strategic Chessboard

The upshot is that political realignments in Turkey and the United States have created new political visions and vocabularies that will require both partners to adjust to the unfamiliar. More importantly, this challenge is appearing at time when the strategic rationales that have cemented the US-Turkish relationship for the past sixty years are, if not obsolete, then certainly less compelling, and therefore need to be reconceptualized and reconfigured, particularly because the alliance is arguably more important than ever. The costs of shirking this responsibility will prove steep for both sides.

The catalyst for the emergence of a new strategic environment was the disappearance of the Soviet Union. From the promulgation of the Truman Doctrine in 1947 (which offered Greece and Turkey assistance against Soviet subversion) and Turkey's entry into NATO in 1952, to the collapse of the USSR in December 1991, Turks and Americans could, even when the bilateral relationship encountered rough roads, explain the logic and essentiality of their alliance with relative ease. During those decades, they were united against the Soviet Union, and the US-led NATO alliance was the institutional embodiment of the reality that they faced a common foe that they were pledged to deter, or failing that, and in extremis, defeat.

Both Ankara and Washington had other foreign policy concerns, of course, but the Soviet threat, the US-designed strategy of Containment, and NATO united them and helped managed stresses and strains in the relationship. For Turkey, American power was essential to balance Russia, its gigantic and powerful northern neighbor, with it whom it had, under both Tsars and Commissars, a troubled history, which included Russian claims to Turkish territory and to interfere in Turkey's domestic affairs. For the United States, Turkey provided a site on the USSR's southern flank where military forces, airfield, missiles, and intelligence installations could be based, and a center of power that diverted Soviet military forces that might otherwise have been pointed at Western Europe.

Enter the post-Soviet world. It is now much harder for officials and national security and foreign policy mavens on both sides to explain what precisely unites their two countries, the more so because the Soviet Union collapsed so quickly, taking just about everyone by surprise and removing at one fell swoop the common and undeniable foe. One rationale invariably trotted as the basis for continued strategic solidarity between Ankara and Washington is a shared commitment to democratic values. Yet the United States has had close relationships with a number of countries that are anything but democratic (consider Saudi Arabia, for example) and maintained close ties with Turkey during the years when its democracy was quashed by the military, which then ruled the country with a heavy hand. The common Western heritage rooted in the Enlightenment, often invoked in discussions of America's kinship with Europe, does not apply; Turkey belongs to an altogether different tradition, and this has been made clearer with Islam's rise as a force in Turkish politics. In truth, there is not much by a way of a historical and cultural foundation in the Turkish-American relationship. This makes a solid convergence in matters of foreign policy and national security all the more important if there is to be a substantive partnership in international affairs: the is not much else to fall back on.

Yet recent tectonic shifts in global politics have made for more divergence than convergence in Turkish and American worldviews. Since 9/11, the overriding priority in American foreign policy has been the "war on terror," but even though both partners are plagued by the scourge of terrorism, some of the particulars of the Bush administration's anti-terrorism campaign have complicated the US-Turkey alliance rather than providing it a new logic and purpose. In particular, the American invasion and occupation of Iraq has created discord between Ankara and Washington and, in the minds of Turks, brought strife and upheaval right to their southern border, not least by threatening to create an independent Kurdish state in Iraq that could, by its sheer existence, stoke the dogged separatist movement in southeastern Turkey. The Bush administration's claim that the war was essential to root out terrorist cells and weapons of mass destructions from Saddam's Iraq, the more so after 9/11, did not persuade Turks any more than it did most of the rest of the world.

There are other issues that Turkey and the United States now assess quite differently. Consider Russia. Washington is increasingly troubled by Russia's drift toward authoritarianism, its support of separatist movements in Georgia and Moldova, and its use of energy as a political tool against its neighbors, particularly Ukraine. But these issues do not concern Turkey, which has expanded economic ties with Russia: Turkish companies have made major investments in Russia and bilateral trade has increased fourfold since 2000.⁴ And Turkish criticisms of American foreign policies echo several of the themes that were contained in the broadside Russian President Vladimir Putin delivered against American conduct in the world during a February 2007 conference on global security in Munich.⁵ Indeed, in Turkey today, Russia evokes more goodwill than the United States. The same dissonance between Ankara and Washington is evident on China. Washington routinely underscores China's military buildup and the long-term threat that it poses to stability in East Asia. But this issue barely registers in Turkish national security discourse and seems a faraway problem about which Turks know little and care less. Moreover, for Turkey, China is a potential partner, not a problem.

What is striking is that this divergence between Turkish and American perspectives resonates among all political constituencies within Turkey, where, particularly in the aftermath of the Iraq war, American popularity is at all-time low and the notion that the United States seek to weaken, even dismember, Turkey is commonplace, no matter how far-fetched this may seem to Americans. The Bush administration for its part believed that it could reasonably expect cooperation from a NATO ally in the run-up to the war against Iraq and regarded the Turkish

⁴ See <http://www.turkeyfinancial.com/news/category/turkish-trade/>.

⁵ For the full text of Putin's speech, see <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/02/12/AR2007021200555.html>.

parliament's vote disallowing US forces to use southeastern Turkey to open a second (northern) front against Saddam Hussein's armed forces as tantamount to betrayal. Turkey, on the other hand, is now convinced that Washington seeks to punish it for a decision that was based not on animus toward the United States, but on vital national interests, specifically the fear that the end result of allowing US forces to open an additional front would be to implicate Turkey in a war that was unpopular in most parts of the world—especially in its Muslim regions—and to create upheaval on its sensitive southern flank, thereby exacerbating the problems in its Kurdish-populated southeast. It is this breakdown in goodwill and trust that has led seasoned observers of US-Turkish relations to wonder whether a divorce between the two longstanding allies is in the offing.

The Effects of the Iraq Imbroglia

No development has poisoned the well of US-Turkish relations more than the American war in Iraq, launched in March 2003 amidst deep Turkish misgivings. Like many people in the world, including in America's other major NATO allies, Turks solidly opposed the war. They did not believe that it was necessary to defend the American people and regarded it as a preventive (as opposed to preemptive) campaign which, in contrast to the Gulf War, was launched without the legitimacy conferred by an enabling United Nations resolution. More to the point, Turkish leaders feared—and hardly without justification, as it happens—that the war would bring chaos to Iraq, threaten its unity and spread turmoil to Turkey's southeastern perimeter. They were also convinced that the war would provide even more extensive safe havens to the PKK (*Partiya Karkarên Kurdistan*, or Kurdish Workers' Party), the Kurdish separatist movement that was founded in 1974 and against which the Turkish army has fought a war that has killed some 30,000 people, the majority PKK fighters or supporters.

However wise and well-meant it may be, Western advice that separatist passions among Turkey's 15 million Kurds are best defused through a strategy that combines autonomy, the expansion of cultural and rights, and greater political space for non-secessionist Kurdish organizations convinces few Turks, least of all members of the armed forces, the intelligence agencies, and elites who hew to the Kemalist position that all Muslims in Turkey are essentially Turks and must so conduct themselves.⁶ While the AKP government takes a different view, arguing that Islam can accommodate, indeed supersede, ethnic distinctions among Turkey's Muslims (although this seems not to apply to the Shi'a Alevi minority, which AKP acolytes regard as veritable apostates) the Erdogan government protests that, starting in 2002, major changes have in fact been made in policies affecting Turkey's Kurds (in order to meet the EU's benchmarks for political openness), notably in the spheres of private education and the media. Claims that such reforms do not go far enough and must be deepened may be accurate, but Turks increasingly view such assessments as cynical ruses invoked to keep moving the goalposts forward to delay, even scuttle, Turkey's admission to the EU. This matters, for in the end, politics is all about perceptions. Indeed, while the armed forces take the hardest line on the Kurds, the view that more permissive policies on the political and cultural front will not solve the problem posed by the PKK has considerable purchase in Turkey: an overwhelming majority of Turks see the PKK as nothing more than a secessionist terrorist group that threatens their country's territorial integrity.

The assessment that the American war in Iraq has created a dire threat to Turkey's territorial integrity is particularly pronounced among Turks now—and for several reasons. First, although the February 1999 capture of the long-time PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan (he was apprehended in Kenya, one of many stops while on the run) took the winds out of the organization's sails for several years. From his jail cell, where he is serving a life sentence, Öcalan has renounced his political ideas, abandoned his dreams for an independent Kurdish state, and called on the PKK to lay down its arms and to embrace a solution based on autonomy. But the party faithful nevertheless continue to revere him and to tout his leadership. Whatever hopes Turks may have had Öcalan's capture would destroy the PKK were dashed by the upsurge in violence in southeastern Turkey in 2006 and the revival of the organization, which canceled its 2004 ceasefire declaration and resumed its attacks, with Murat Karayilan as its principal field commander, despite the arcane splits that followed Öcalan's arrest, producing changes in ideology and nomenclature.⁷

⁶ The best analysis of the Turkish Kurds is Henri J. Barkey and Graham Fuller, *Turkey's Kurdish Question* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998).

⁷ The PKK—or elements of it—appeared in April 2002 as KADEK, *Kongreya Azad" z Demokrasiya Kurdistan*, Kurdistan Democratic and Freedom Congress, which in November metamorphosed into the *Kongra-Gel*, People's Congress. A third group, the *Partiya Welatparêzên Kurdistan*, Patriotic Democratic Front, led by Abdullah Öcalan's brother, Osman, also

Second, the Erdogan government's reforms relating to the Kurds notwithstanding, the Turkish armed forces' leaders remain convinced that the PKK presents first and foremost a military problem that must be dealt with by force and that Western proposals to address Kurdish separatism by expanding Kurds' political rights and cultural autonomy are naïve, and perhaps even intended to weaken, even fragment Turkey. In this assessment, making concessions to the Kurds, prompted by the lure of EU membership, amounts to starting down a slippery slope and is particularly perilous because of the uncertainties created by the possible crumbling of Iraq. For the overwhelming majority of Turks, preventing the rise of an independent Kurdish state in Iraq's north trumps the aspiration to join the EU, a point that has been put starkly by Prime Minister Erdogan.

Third, the rise of a Kurdish enclave in northern Iraq that appears (certainly to Turks) independent in all but name—the Iraqi flag is conspicuous by its absence, independence remains the public's dream and is openly spoken of, and an independent military force, the *peshmerga*, stands ready to defend the homeland—has added to the already substantial fear that the American war to topple Saddam could culminate in Iraq disintegration and the rise of a Kurdish state that energizes, or even assists, Kurdish separatists in Turkey. That Öcalan is feted as a hero in Iraqi Kurdistan merely fans Turkish animus and encourages conspiracy theories and dire analyses.⁸

Fourth, in a development that has confirmed these fears, some PKK fighters (most remain in the sparsely populated areas of southeastern Turkey) have crossed into havens in the Kandil Mountains of northern Iraq—where they have been seeking refuge since at least 1984—with greater freedom. The fear that the PKK has acquired an even more reliable bastion for launching attacks and a deep reservoir of popular support among Iraq's Kurds partly explains the Special Forces operations that Turkey has apparently conducted in northern Iraq, as well as the continued presence of its military contingent. But such countermeasures can themselves make US-Turkish relations even worse, as witness the outcry that occurred in Turkey when its Special Forces operatives were arrested and detained by American troops in July 2003. Turks were incensed that a long-time ally should resort to such an extreme step, and without regard to the threat posed by PKK redoubts in northern Iraq.⁹ The episode received considerable play in the Turkish media and in public circles, where it was portrayed as a humiliation, evidence of American ill-will, and payback for the Turkish parliament refusal to allow US forces to attack Saddam's army from the north.

Fifth, the status of the oil-rich Kirkuk, capital of at-Tamim province, has become a problem with the potential to create even greater acrimony between Ankara and Washington. Following the Gulf War, in an effort to cement Baghdad's control over the city and its environs, Saddam Hussein's regime flooded Kirkuk and its surrounding areas with Arabs (mainly Shi'a from the south), while also expelling some 100,000 Kurds, Turkmen, and Christians. Once Saddam's dictatorship was felled by the American sword, the Kurds were quick to claim rightful ownership of Kirkuk. The problem is that the Iraqi Turkmen Front (ITF), *Iraq Türkmen Cephesi* has done so as well. (Established in 1995, the ITF subsumes some six different political parties. Three others exist separately.)¹⁰ Concentrated in Erbil, Mosul, and Kirkuk, the Turkmen insist that they are Iraq's third largest ethnic group, following Arabs and Kurds (although the Assyrian's claim that status as well). Some Turkmen parties belong to the ITF, which receives Turkish funding, aligned with Shi'a-dominated United Iraqi Alliance in the December 2005 parliamentary elections, while still others joined the Democratic Patriotic Alliance of Kurdistan (which unites the two main Kurdish parties and a number of others). These divisions have not prevented Ankara from anointing itself guardian of what it depicts as a persecuted minority with which it has cultural and historical

emerged. To compound the confusion, the new names may have created separate organizations.) For details, see James Brandon, "The Evolution of the PKK: New Faces, New Challenges," Jamestown Foundation, *Terrorism Monitor*, Vol. IV, No. 23 (November 30, 2006), pp. 4-7; "Predicament after the PKK Leaders Trial," at <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G1-131997305.html>.

⁸ Öcalan's prestige among Iraqi Kurds was observed first-hand by Christopher Bellaigue. See his "The Uncontainable Kurds," *New York Review of Books*, March 1, 2007, p. 35.

⁹ "Detention Strains Already Tense US-Turkey Relations," *Christian Science Monitor*, July 15, 2003, at <http://www.csmonitor.com/2003/0715/p11s01-woeu.html>.

¹⁰ The ITF comprises the Iraqi National Turkmen Party, the Turkmenli Party, the Adalet Party, the Islamic Movement of Iraqi Turkmen, the Provincial Turkmen Party, and the Movement of Independent Iraqi Turkmen (MIIT). The ITF website can be found at <http://www.kerkuk.net/eng/index.asp>. The Turkmen Nationalist Movement, the Turkmen Wafa Movement, and the Islamic Union of Iraqi Turkmen are outside the ITF.

kinship. (Descendents of the Seljuk Turks, who created an empire that spread west from Central Asia in the 11th century, the Iraqi Turkmen are Oghuz Turks, as are the Turks of modern-day Turkey.)

But more is involved here than cultural solidarity. In Turkey's calculus, the Kurds' control of Kirkuk's oil wealth—which now accounts for some 40 percent of Iraq's total output and a larger proportion of its natural gas production—will boost the political leeway, or at minimum viability, of a future Kurdish state in northern Iraq. A confrontation between Kurds and Turkmen over the ownership of Kirkuk—clashes between the two groups have made the city a violent place, and an anomaly in Iraq's north—could provoke Turkish military intervention and prove to be yet another pathway through which the chaos in Iraq war does heavy damage to US-Turkish relations. No matter how American policymakers assay the probability of such an extreme denouement, they would be foolish to rule it out in view of Iraq's unpredictable future—or to discount the toll it will have on the alliance with Turkey.¹¹ It would be unwise to conclude to assume that Turkey's bark will prove worse than its bite given that it did nothing in the face of Saddam's killings of Turkmen: Ankara's calculus has changed now that Iraq's collapse looms as a possibility.

Sixth, Ankara insists that its interest in Kirkuk has a strong historical basis. In this rendition, northern Iraq was transferred from the Ottoman Empire, and despite Turkish opposition, under the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, and the while Turkey is prepared to remain on the sidelines so long as there is a united Iraq, it will assert its historic interests should Iraq be partitioned or break apart.¹² Turkey's legitimate interests in Kirkuk have been with particular forcefulness as the inflow of some 350,000 Kurds (many with no ties to the city), with encouragement and material assistance from the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), has been paralleled by the departure of Kirkuk's Arab and Turkmen population. In Ankara's mind, this demographic transformation threatens to predetermine the referendum over the city's future, which is set to take place before the end of 2007. Turkish concerns about Kirkuk have been heightened by the KRG's assertion that it can legitimately assign rights to develop the disputed territory's oil fields and its decision to follow up by signing agreements with foreign petroleum companies.¹³

The American campaign in Iraq and the unremitting bloodshed in that country have affected the US-Turkish relationship in ways that go beyond Iraq. Consider the change in Turkish attitudes toward Syria and Iran, two countries with which Ankara has had a troubled history. The nervousness evoked by the prospect of a Kurdish state emerging from the detritus of Iraq has created an alignment between Turkey and its two neighbors. While Turkey has more Kurds than both put together, the rise of a Kurdish state would provide a fillip to Kurdish nationalism in all three countries, particularly Iran, where the PJAK (*Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistané*, Party for a Free Life in Kurdistan), led by Haji Ahmadi, has been battling Iranian security forces with greater intensity, while using Iraqi Kurdish territories as sanctuaries.¹⁴ That the PJAK seems to hew to a different political line than the PKK—liberal as opposed to Marxist, seeking autonomy rather than independence—does not mollify Ankara or Tehran. Whereas Syria and Iran have supported the PKK in the past as a means of squeezing Turkey, and while Saddam aided Iranian Kurdish groups during the 1980-1988 Iraq-Iraq war, the three states have joined forces against the PKK and attacked its positions in the mountainous north of Iraqi Kurdistan. The end result is that Washington and Ankara's assessment of Iran and Syria have diverged following the Iraq war, and Turkey is apt oppose tough American tactics against either countries for fear that such steps would weaken the regimes and strengthen Kurdish nationalism in both, particularly in Iran, which not only seems at times to be on a collision course with America, but has many more Kurds than Syria.

¹¹ See Carol Migdalovitz, "Iraq: The Turkish Factor," CRS Report for Congress, Congressional Research Service Report, Updated October 31, 2002.

¹² For a statement of the Turkish position, see "An Inhouse (sic.) Debate on the Future of Iraq," Foreign Policy Institute, March 6, 2007, at <http://www.foreignpolicy.org.tr/documents/220207.html>.

¹³ We draw here on "Iraqi Turkmen: Challenges Surrounding Kirkuk," Washington Institute for Near East Policy Studies, January 18, 2007, at <http://www.unpo/article.php?id=6180>. For a detailed (32 pages) analysis of the complex dispute over Kirkuk, see "Iraq and the Kurds: The Brewing Battle over Kirkuk," International Crisis Group, Middle East Report No. 56, July 18, 2006.

¹⁴ On PJAK, see Mahan Abedin, "Iran's Enemy Lurking Within," Asia Times Online, June 8, 2006, at http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/HF08Ak03.html; James Brandon, Mount Kandil: A Safe Haven for Kurdish Militants—Part 1, Jamestown Foundation, *Terrorism Monitor*, Vol. IV, Issue I7 (September 8, 2006), pp. 1-3, and Part 2, Vol. 4, Issue 18 (September 21, 2006), pp. 1-4.

Turkey, the EU, and the US

Turkey's growing antipathy toward the United States is accompanied by an anger directed at the EU, which flows mainly from the delay in admitting Turkey to the Union and the frustration that has been produced as a result. While the United States can shape the EU's decisions relating to Turkey only at the margins, and has in fact deployed its persuasive powers to press for Turkey's admission, Turks' increasing animus toward Europe seems to be ratcheting up their already strong anti-Americanism.

Support for accession to the EU has plummeted in Turkey. This was not always the case. For most of the years since Turkey first applied for admission to the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1959 as an Associate Member, enthusiasm for integration with Europe remained high. While the path was not always smooth, the progression was as desired: Turkey became an Associate Member of the EEC in 1963, applied for full membership in 1987, entered into a customs union in 1995 with what had by then become the EU, and was invited in 2005 to start formal talks on full membership. To Turks, the prize seemed at hand.

Ironically the start of the accession talks have made EU-Turkish relations worse, not better. The EU has been forced to reckon with the reality that Turkey might actually join the club. For several reasons, this has spooked many of its members. First, there is the sheer size of Turkey's population. The admission of 70 million Turks is seen by Europeans as qualitatively different in comparison to extending membership to, say, the Greeks in 1981, or the Balts, following the fall of the USSR. Second, although rarely is this stated publicly by European leaders—though there have been prominent exceptions—there is the religious difference, which is in fact more important than the size of Turkey's population. After all, Poland's population is 38 million, and even though that is considerably smaller than Turkey's, it is still a large figure; moreover, if one adds up the population of the states that have joined the EU since 1990, the number approximates that of Turkey. The paramount difference is that Turkey would be the EU's first Muslim member. Quite apart from the cultural shift that this would entail for many Europeans, there a growing unease, even fear, in Europe centered on Islamic extremism, particularly following the atrocities of 9/11, what has come to be known as Spain 3/11, and the murder in 2004 of filmmaker and director Theo van Gogh by a Muslim extremist. While these atrocities were perpetrated by militants who invoked what most Muslims consider a warped reading of Islam, such doctrinal distinctions are often lost on Europeans, who were becoming increasingly attuned to the reality that 20 million Muslims live in their midst and that some, despite having been born in Europe, are attracted by this same variant of Islam. However unfair and unsubtle this assessment, it is undeniably present—Europeans know it, and Turks are increasingly convinced that this is the real reason why Turkey's application to the EU seems to be becoming less and less likely to succeed. The offer of a "privileged partnership" in the Union viewed as a sop and an act of bad faith and merely confirms growing suspicions among Turks that Europe rejects them because they are Muslims.

The EU insists that the real barrier is that Turkey has yet to complete the reforms needed to qualify for membership. But most Turks remain unconvinced. They wonder why Bulgaria and Romania gained membership despite having not long ago been communist-ruled societies with state controlled, largely non-market economies and may also have noticed that, following their admission, some Baltic and East-Central European countries, among them Hungary, Poland, and Lithuania, seem to be backsliding on the very reform indices that the EU uses while acting on applications for membership. They wonder why the EU insists that Turkey's Kurds be given more cultural and political rights even though Ankara has made major changes on this front. They wonder why several European countries insist that Turkey admit that the killing of millions of Armenians in 1915 was genocide, seeing the demand not as a sincere call to come to terms with history, much as Germany did after World War II, but as yet another pretext to keep Turkey standing at the gate. They wonder why Turkey received no tangible benefits for inducing Turkish Cypriots in April 2004 to accept a referendum on creating a confederation in Cyprus (as a solution to the division of Cyprus into Greek and Turkish segments after a 1974 Turkish invasion mounted following a coup in Cyprus that Ankara believed was a prelude to union between Cyprus and Greece), even though it was rejected by the republic of Greek Cyprus, which was nevertheless was admitted to the EU. As Turks see it, not only did they get nothing for their effort, Cyprus gained EU membership, and with it the capacity to veto Turkey's bid for membership. Their outrage was worsened by the EU's decision to put the negotiations on Turkey's accession on ice until Ankara allowed Cypriot vessels into Turkish ports. And as if to add insult to injury, or so it seemed to Turks, the EU rejected Ankara's request to ease the isolation of Turkish Cyprus, even though Turkey had agreed to extend the customs union accord it signed with the EU to Cyprus (and to the EU's

recently-admitted East-Central European members).¹⁵ What matters ultimately is not which rendition is right, the EU's or Turkey's, but the reality that there is by now a consensus among Turks of all political persuasions that the EU is humiliating Turkey by treating it as a supplicant. The result? Two-thirds of Turks supported EU membership as late as 2004; only a third do so now.¹⁶

Why should this spat between Turks and Europeans concern the United States, especially in light of Washington's consistent support for Turkey's EU membership? The answer is that the deepening belief among Turks that the EU is stalling Turkish membership has created an angry nationalism directed at the West in general. Recall Seyfi Tashan's assessment that the EU and the US together are waging a Cold War against Turkey, or consider that surveys show that a solid majority of Turks now believe that the West wants to carve up Turkey, a view that appears to be common among well-informed civic leaders and has been voiced by the powerful chief of staff of the armed forces, General Yasar Buyukanit—during an official visit to the United States no less.¹⁷

To be sure, in terms of its ability to spoil US-Turkish relations, Turkey's EU problem is not equivalent to that posed by America's war in Iraq and the possible rise as a result of a Kurdish state on Turkey's doorstep. That is a good thing, because, as messy a problem as the latter is, in theory at least, the solution, however distant it now appears, lies in American hands. Still, Turks are feeling rebuffed by Europe at the very time that they believe that the United States has, by invading Iraq, presented Turkey with a dire threat. So the two sources of resentment reinforce one another, and instead of Turkey's ire at the EU strengthening its ties with United States, the paradoxical effect has been to feed Turkish animus toward Washington and to prompt discussions among Turkish elites about mapping new directions and strategies in foreign policy that no longer rest on the premise that the United States is the indispensable partner. These alternatives, whether they involve reconsidering the relationship with Iran and Syria, constructing strategic partnerships with Russia and China, or seeking spheres of influence in Central Asia and the South Caucasus, could undo, or at the very least weaken, a decades-long US-Turkey alliance.

Could this talk about a strategic recalculation simply be empty rhetoric emanating from a Turkey that is angry and wants Washington to notice? Perhaps so. But given Turkey's continuing value as an ally, it would be foolhardy to stand back and put the proposition to the test; the costs to the United States of being wrong will prove considerable and long-lasting. The wiser course would be to take steps to ensure the continued vitality of an alliance that has lost none of its importance for America's national security interests despite the momentous changes that have occurred in international politics over the past twenty years and that both Ankara and Washington need to deal effectively with unfamiliar dangers.

What Is To Be Done?

We recommend the following steps to prevent a further deterioration in America's relationship with Turkey and to revive the alliance so that it endures and continues to serve the national security interests of both countries:

- **Recognize the Seriousness of the Problem:** Washington's preoccupation with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and Turkey's anger over American policies must not obscure the larger picture: without serious attention from both sides their alliance, badly frayed, could be torn asunder. Before doing anything specific to address this problem, Ankara and Washington must recognize its magnitude. Alas, there is little to suggest that either side does. The alliance appears to be on auto-pilot even as it is veering off course. This passivity needs to change, and for that to happen, senior American and Turkish leaders need to act quickly and decisively.
- **Institutionalize Consultations:** Turkey and the United States should create official working groups that assess the mounting problems in the bilateral relationship and develop concrete policies to address them.

¹⁵ "Turkey Will Not Respond to EU Deadline," *International Herald Tribune*, November 21, 2006; Gordon and Taspinar, "Turkey on The Brink," p.64.

¹⁶ Omer Taspinar, "Turkey's Fading Dream of Europe," *Current History*, Vol. 206, No. 698 (March 2007), p. 124.

¹⁷ Taspinar, "Turkey's Fading Dream," p. 125: "Turkish Nationalism: Waving Ataturk's Flag," *Economist*, March 10, 2007, p. 45-46.

This step should be complemented by “track two diplomacy” that convenes Turkish and American foreign policy experts regularly, with the venue alternating between Turkey and the United States, so that assessments of the relationship and the formulation of proposals to strengthen it also involve “opinion makers” in both countries.

- **Formulate a “Grand Bargain” on Iraq:** Washington feels let down by the Turkish parliament’s March 2003 vote; Ankara believes that the United States attacked Iraq without regard to the danger posed to Turkey by the possible emergence of a Kurdish state from Iraq’s ruins. Among the proposals to resolve the problem of Northern Iraq is a “grand bargain,” first presented by the Lehigh University expert on Turkey, Henri J. Barkey. Barkey suggests a three-way dialogue between the KRG leadership, the US, and Turkey to devise an accord containing clear-cut assurances that the KRG, whether or not it evolves into a full-fledged state, will eschew any steps that encourage separatism among Turkish Kurds and will furthermore rid its territory of PKK fighters. Ankara may in the present political climate reject Barkey’s additional suggestion that an American military presence could be established to reassure both parties, but it may be worth exploring with the Turks the idea of joint US-Turkish operations against PKK forces in Northern Iraq in exchange for a commitment from Ankara not to invade that region. In addition, a series of confidence-building measures can be fashioned to assuage the KRG’s fears about a Turkish invasion and Turkey’s apprehension that Iraqi Kurdistan is becoming a springboard for PKK operations. True, General Joseph Ralston, former NATO commander and President Bush’s envoy, has been working to forge an agreement between Turkey and the KRG, but Ankara has been frustrated at the lack of progress. It is time to deal with this issue at a higher level—and urgently.
- **Make Turkey a Central Participant in Any Regional Settlement on Iraq:** Turkey has a special interest in Iraq’s future for the reasons mentioned in this analysis; the KRG has every reason to avoid war with Turkey; and the United States has clear stake in preventing such a conflict. If Iraq, in whatever form, is to become stable enough to permit the withdrawal of US forces, Turkey’s cooperation is essential. The problems of Northern Iraq, which are damaging the US alliance, must be used as an opportunity to demonstrate that it is in fact supple enough to meet the challenges lurking within the new international landscape and that the end of the Cold War has not made it obsolete.

**APPENDIX: WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS AND
MEMORANDA**

WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS

Rajan Menon, Professor of International Relations, Lehigh University, and Fellow, New America Foundation (Project Director)

S. Enders Wimbush, Senior Fellow and Director, Center for Future Security Strategies, Hudson Institute (Workshop Chairman)

Ronald D. Asmus, Executive Director, German Marshall Fund of the United States

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Henri J. Barkey, Professor, Lehigh University, and Public Policy Scholar, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars

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TURKEY AND THE RISK OF STRATEGIC RUPTURE

Ronald D. Asmus

Executive Director, German Marshall Fund of the United States

Structural Change

The end of the Cold War and the two Gulf Wars are leading to a structural shift in how Turkey's views its foreign policy priorities and challenges. In a nutshell, Turkey has and is breaking out of its Cold War straightjacket. Ankara is increasingly focused on what might be called its own “near abroad” and neighbors, including the wider Middle East, the Black Sea/Southern Caucasus and Central Asia. This shift was started under the late President Ozal, in large part for economic reasons, but then not really followed up by his immediate successors. It has been then accelerated by the AKP government under PM Erdogan. It has been given intellectual coherence and political visibility by key advisers such as Ahmet Davutoglu. The second Gulf War has obviously reinforced this trend in different ways.

There are interesting parallels between this shift in Turkey and the emergence of Ostpolitik in West Germany under Willy Brandt and Egon Bahr in the early 1960s. Both were conditioned by broader changes in the international environment but also contained whiffs of romanticism, rediscovering of past historical geopolitical terrain, an implicit effort to emancipate oneself from American domination as well as an effort to find and legitimate new foreign policy leeway to pursue national goals. Russia was and is a major factor in both cases.

This shift is not necessarily against American or European interests. Indeed, one can argue that as American foreign policy priorities shift toward the Wider Middle east, Washington should want those of its key allies in the region to shift as well. A strong case can also be made that it is a correction of a historical anomaly and represents the return to a more “normal” Turkish foreign policy.

Yet, this shift and new foreign policy is being born at a moment of extreme anti-Americanism, growing anti-Europeanism and rising Turkish nationalism. They are also taking place with little consultation or policy coordination with Washington and key European capitals. Instead it is coinciding with a phase of political and possibly strategic estrangement between Turkey and its two Western anchors—the United States and the European Union—and without any coordinated overall Western policy approach. Together, these factors color the new strategic discourse in Turkey but also contain the seeds for potential real disagreements.

The Danger of a Strategic “Perfect Storm”

There is a real danger of a perfect storm coming together in Turkey’s relations with the United States and the EU in the years ahead to produce an estrangement with both of Turkey’s Western anchors and thus a strategic train wreck. That perfect storm could be brought about by the following trends:

US-Turkish Relations

US-Turkish relations have been more strained in recent years than at any time in recent memory. Public opinion polls show that the Turkish public today has become in many ways become the most anti-American country in Europe, a remarkable turnaround from the situation only a few years ago. US-Turkish military relations are badly strained. And while the USG embraced the AKP-led government as the best hope or democratic reforms, that support has also alienated other traditional sources of support. Moreover, the road back to better relations could be long and hard. In spite of efforts to stabilize relations, we may be headed for even choppier water ahead because of the following factors:

- A further deterioration in US-Turkish relations—already at a nadir—by the disintegration of Iraq and the reemergence of the Kurdish issue, in particular the PKK.
- Possible US military action against Iran

- The passing by the US Congress of a resolution on the Armenian genocide issue.
- Disagreements over Syria and more generally on Middle Eastern issues, including Palestine
- Are the problems we currently see in US-Turkish relations cyclical or structural? How much of the current deterioration will pass when President Bush steps down from office and how much will remain? While some argue that Ankara will find its way back to Washington with relative ease in the years ahead, I am more skeptical. I believe the path to rapprochement will be a stony and uphill one. While a change of Administration in Washington can make a real difference, many of the changes we are witnessing are broader and deeper than has commonly been accepted in the West.
- One final point before we turn to the EU. The role of NATO as an anchor for Turkey to the West is also weakened today by the growing marginalization of the Alliance. Moreover, when it comes to the debate over whether and how to reinvigorate NATO, The US and Turkey are at loggerheads and we are not working together. So this relationship—which we used to consider the ultimate guarantee of binding Turkey to the West—is also no longer as strong as it once was.

The EU and Turkey

EU-Turkish relations are also at risk of a strategic estrangement as prospects for EU membership fade and support for the EU in Turkey itself falls. The factors contributing to this trend are several and include:

- A lack of self-confidence in Europe driven by economic stagnation and political paralysis symbolized by the failure of the constitutional referendum in France and the Netherlands.
- Enlargement fatigue following the accession of Central and Eastern Europe to the EU and the problems of “digestion.”
- A growing sense that Turkey is “too big, poor and Muslim” for the EU to successfully integrate. This is reinforced by the sense that as Turkey opens and democratizes, it is also seen as becoming more Muslim. While this trend toward opening should be welcomed, it also reinforces a sense in parts of Europe that Turkey is “different.”
- A sense by some at the European elite level that Turkish attitudes on core issues of sovereignty and political compromise may not be compatible with those of the EU.
- The unresolved Cyprus issue will constitute a growing drag on Turkey's EU accession negotiations with prospects for progress on Cyprus currently looking bleak.

The debate and fight over eventual Turkish accession is not yet lost and it would be a mistake to assume that it is. Turkey may still have more support and supporters than is often realized. Opposition is concentrated in France and Germany. Northern Europe is more supportive and the arrival of Carl Bildt has shored up that position in the Nordic countries. Southern Europe is still open and the Commission remains a strong supporter. Support on the European left is still significant whereas opposition is largely concentrated on the right.

One can also imagine scenarios where the German position evolves over time but the French opposition is much more fundamental. The real opponent of Turkey is France which basically believes Turkey is not and has never been a European country—a position clearly and forcefully being articulated today by Sarkozy. And Paris has of course committed to holding a referendum on this issue.

Turkey's supporters in the EU today are on the defensive. Its opponents believe that time and the current public mood are on their side and are trying to force a debate and set of decisions that could close the door to Turkey's accession once and for all. That is more difficult than it may seem to the outside world because of how the EU works. But it is undoubtedly true that if a vote were taken today, Turkey would be rejected for EU membership.

It is conceivable that it will be possible to turn this situation around over the next five to ten years. But that would require a rather fortunate combination of successful domestic reform in Europe, a growing appreciation of Turkey's strategic importance and the kind of far-sighted leadership not evident today; sustainable real reform and

transformation in Turkey itself; and last but not least a bit of luck. If we were in Las Vegas, the odds would not look all that great.

The Rise of Turkish Nationalism

I will leave this subject to others in the group who know more than I do. But clearly Turkey is experiencing the rise of modern-day nationalism. I would just like to pose the following questions for our discussion:

- How much of the current xenophobic and nationalist trend in Turkey is really new or has it always been there but simply not mobilized? Is this all “just” a product of Iraq or is there something else going on in Turkish society we don't fully understand?
- Were Americans wrong to assume in the past that the Turkish public was anti-American? Were we too focused on a smallish elite?
- How much of this is the result of forces that now enjoy more political space—in part because of the EU accession process and the opening of Turkish society? Is it fueled by the above-mentioned trends and manipulated by different political forces in Turkey for their own purposes?

That nationalism now has a clear anti-American and at times anti-Western tinge to it. According to some public opinion polls, Turkey today is already the most estranged and anti-American country in Europe. A failure in its EU bid plus the Kurdish issue emerging in a major way would add significant fuel to the nationalist fires. This is an issue that many in the West, in particular in the United States, have a hard time coming to terms with given our deeply held assumption that the US is Turkey's best friend and vice-versa. It is no longer the case.

Can These Trends Be Halted and a Crisis Averted?

The point of departure for a new strategy on Turkey must be the recognition that a strategic rupture is by no means inevitable or even likely. But it is definitely within the realm of the possible. I deliberately use the phrase a “perfect storm: because I believe that it is precisely the combination of things going wrong in both the US-Turkish and EU-Turkish relationships—for very different reasons—that could lead to a rupture and a historical setback that too few people today take seriously enough.

It seems to me that the key to getting US-Turkish relations on track is both more clear cut in theory and difficult in practice. I do not believe that basic US and Turkish interests are fundamentally at odds. And in some ways Turkey is more important to use than it was even during the Cold War. As American strategic focus shifts to the Middle East, it is only natural that Turkey's does as well. Some Turks may dream of strategic emancipation but at the end of the day Turkey will need the US to try to resolve the problems in its new near abroad. The problem today is that Ankara believes that US policies are exacerbating rather than resolving those problems.

At the same time, it will be difficult to get to the broader need to harmonize views and policies towards the wider Middle East unless we first stabilize Iraq or can come up with a solution to the Kurdish problems that both sides can live with. In the short term, this will also require American action against the PKK and avoiding things like the passing of the Armenian resolution in Congress—at least this year before the Turkish elections.

While EU-Turkish relations have had less drama and crisis in recent years than relations with Washington, they may actually be more difficult to fix. The downward spiral in EU-Turkish relations has thus far been less dramatic but the forces driving them may be more difficult to halt or reverse. The EU will not be able in the foreseeable future to deliver on what Turkey wants and feels it needs—i.e., a clear perspective of possible membership. In all likelihood, we will be looking at a very murky and confused debate within the EU on enlargement in general and Turkey in particular.

Turkey's supporters in the EU are currently arguing that it should play it long and hope for a better day when a new constellation of leaders and factors works to its advantage. There is also a sense that we need to

come up with better interim strategies that engage Turkey and place it much more in the mainstream of Western diplomacy and which could highlight its strategic importance.

In this context, it is glaring how Turkey is currently not included in the core Western diplomacy surrounding issues such as Kosovo, energy, Russia or the Middle East. Part of a new strategy to engage Turkey should include new ways to do so. Yet that needs to be conducted in a way that this does not appear to Ankara to be legitimating the kind of 'privileged partnership' that opponents of Turkey EU membership are calling for.

Let me conclude on one final point. Over the years I have thought a lot about why and how great countries and obviously intelligent leaders make major strategic mistakes. (This may be an occupational hazard for anyone who focuses on Europe and the former USSR!) My answer is that it is because they often do not grasp the bigger picture and the confluence of factors that can drive them to decisions whose consequences become clear only in hindsight. It happens when leaders make decision driven by short-term, often tactical political criteria and prove unable to halt a dynamic even when they see it may take them over a cliff.

Without wanting to sound apocalyptic, I believe that many of these ingredients are already on the table today when we discuss Turkey's future. And I worry that we do not see the kind of leadership—either in Washington, Brussels or Ankara—that could step in and prevent the kind of perfect storm and possible strategic rupture described above from happening and again put or keep Turkey on a positive historical trajectory headed toward fuller integration with the West.

CHANGED THREAT PERCEPTIONS

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The Issue

The fundamental problem for US-Turkey relations is that the threat perceptions of Washington and Ankara have changed considerably since 9/11. For the US, the primary threat is al-Qaeda terrorism. While Saddam Hussein was considered a primary threat for some time, Iran and now Syria are increasingly viewed in this light—as are Hamas and Hizbullah. For Turkey, the primary threats are the PKK, instability in and outside Turkey, the independence of Kurdistan or the splitting of Iraq into three sections (whether by “soft” or “hard” partition), and the takeover of the Turkish government by “moderate Islamists.”

Description

After 9/11, the US administration made the fight against al-Qaeda (as well as changing the conditions across the Middle East that facilitated the group’s attack on American soil) its key priority. At first, Turkey was in principle allied with the US in this campaign, but began having serious doubts when, linking al-Qaeda and Saddam Hussein, Washington attacked Iraq—thereby opening a Pandora’s box of ethnic and religious chaos in and around Iraq. For various reasons, a majority of Turks were opposed to the invasion, and now feel justified given the current situation. Furthermore, this majority no longer considers the US to have moral authority over international affairs, and views American power as declining.

Turkey is extremely concerned about a possible region-wide Sunni-Shiite war—one into which it could be drawn. Such a development would considerably strengthen the Sunni religious identity in Turkey and pull the country closer to the Middle East, further weakening its pro-Western and secular identity. A majority of Turks are angry with American “messing” with the region and its extremely delicate balance of power. Consequently, an increasing number of Turks today consider the US “the biggest threat to world stability.”

A second and possibly more important (as it is more imminent and urgent) issue is the problems in Iraqi Kurdistan. These include questions regarding the PKK, the city of Kirkuk, the status of the Turkmen minority, and the possibility of de facto independence for Kurdistan in the medium-term. Turks cannot understand why the US would not put pressure on the Iraqi Kurds, primarily Massoud Barzani, to stop harboring members of the PKK, which is a US-designated terrorist organization. The phrase “allies against terrorism” has become completely meaningless for Turks, as for them it is clear that the US defines as “terrorist” only those groups that attack Americans and American interests. This is considered by majority of Turks to be a major hypocrisy. Top Turkish leaders have repeatedly asked the US to address this issue over and over again, and each time were told to wait. Now, their patience has run out, and pressure is increasing on Turkish leaders to undertake a military operation—with or without US consent.

The Turkish government will need to act before the presidential election process begins in earnest in Turkey this April. It is likely that Turkey will attempt to obtain tacit approval for such an operation during the February visits to Washington of the foreign minister and chief of the general staff. In an ideal scenario, the US would engage in such an operation together Turkey and with the Iraqi Kurds; however the chances of this are slim. The US does not wish to open yet another front in Iraq, one which would turn the PKK into an enemy (as the group has never yet attacked US forces.) If Turkey does not get support from Washington, it would need to act alone—or perhaps with Iranian participation. It would be rather problematic for Washington to have its archenemy Iran and its NATO ally Turkey cooperate in an operation against the wishes of Iraqi Kurds.

There are two further complicating matters in the February to April timetable. First, if the planned referendum in Kirkuk in April is not postponed, then there will be more tension between the US and Turkey—especially given Turkish concern about the Iraqi Kurds’ treatment of the ethnic Turkmen minority. After all, the infamous July 4, 2003 incident was a reaction to Turkish Special Forces arming and training Turkmen; with continued attacks on Turkmen by Kurdish groups, Turks will feel compelled to provide military support for the

Turkmen, as Turks expect attempts of ethnic cleansing ahead of the referendum. Of course, the referendum is primarily about the control of the Kirkuk oil fields. The US is focused on Baghdad and on a broader Iraq strategy, and thus has so far not realized the ticking time bomb in Kirkuk.

The second issue is the likely passing of the Armenian genocide resolution in the US House of Representatives. While a resolution may also be introduced in the Senate (where it is unlikely to pass), this is irrelevant. For the many Turks who are ignorant of (or unconcerned about) the differences between the Bush administration and Congress, the passing of such a resolution would represent an enormously hostile act. Some in Turkey already believe that Armenian-Turkish intellectual and journalist Hrant Dink was killed so that the passing of the genocide resolution becomes more likely. And if the resolution passes, many more people will subscribe to conspiracy theories that the US wanted to “punish” Turkey with this resolution. After all, Tom Lantos, the new chair of the House Foreign Relations, last year voted in favor of the genocide resolution (which is regularly introduced) for the first time in many years. Although Lantos, a Holocaust survivor, has stated that he does not believe what the Turks did in 1915-16 was “genocide,” he has privately remarked that he supported the bill this time due to his dissatisfaction with Turkey’s March 2003 parliamentary vote and with its subsequent relations with Hamas and Hizbullah.

In this context, though the Bush Administration will do all it can to stop the passage of the resolution, it may not be possible considering key dynamics—such as Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s strong support base in California, home of an active Armenian community. If this happens, neither Erdogan nor Buyukanit would be able to contain Turkish nationalists—making a cross-border operation into Northern Iraq inevitable. (Note that I am leaving out EU dynamics, as it has become an almost irrelevant factor for the short- to medium-term)

In fact, with deteriorating US-Turkey relations, the secular forces in Turkey would have a freer hand against the Islamist threat as well—which is the second major difference in threat perception. This perception on the Turkish side is mainly within the secular camp—that is, those who are concerned about ongoing US support for Erdogan as a role model for a “moderate Islamic leader.” The US would not object to a more Islamic Turkey so long as it remains pro-Western; however, for many Turks, there is a slippery slope between moderate and radical Islam. After four years of AKP rule, they view much erosion in society’s commitment to secularism. The different understandings of “secularism” between Turks and Americans is hard to reconcile—for many Americans (and Islamists) “secularism” means “non-religiousness”; for Turks, it means simply keeping religion out of politics and preventing any social engineering that would in the long term lead to an environment in which a majority of Turks would prefer shariah law.

Previously, Turkish secular forces (including but not limited to the military) have intervened in Turkish politics whenever there has been a threat of Islamism. While many observers rightly argue that no such intervention is possible and likely in 2007, it cannot be ruled out—especially if US-Turkey relations continue to deteriorate and if the restraining EU factor is no longer there. The civil institutions (media, business, NGO groups, political parties) are unfortunately too disorganized and lack a clear vision; moreover, with the possibility of Turkey being pulled into a Sunni-Shiite conflict, some form of military intervention in politics may become inevitable.

Implications

The US theater of action is on Turkey’s borders; so far, it has caused massive instability. Consequently, Turkey is drawing close to countries that could “contain” US actions in its neighborhood—thus, it is forming a closer alliance with Iran and Russia.

Turkey and Iran share a common threat perception of a separatist Iraqi Kurdistan, as it would greatly impact their own Kurdish populations. They also are irritated at the close relations enjoyed by Iraqi Kurds with the US and Israel; for Turkey, Barzani’s ongoing support of the PKK is an additional and unbearable factor. Iran has already attacked the PKK in Northern Iraq on its own; the US, for its part, has launched operations against Iranians in Northern Iraq but not the PKK.

While Turkey is clearly concerned about a nuclear Iran—which would then overshadow Turkey as a regional power—a majority of Turks are supportive of what they see as Ahmadinejad’s “standing up to America and Israel.” The decisive factor in this support is Muslim pride, not a desire to see Israel destroyed. However, the risk remains that if the US does not read Turkish-Iranian dynamics correctly, it may inadvertently push the two states towards closer cooperation.

The same risk exists with regards to the Turkish-Russian partnership. Russia began pulling Turkey closer during Yeltsin’s rule with the construction of the controversial Blue Stream gas pipeline, which connects the two countries via an undersea pipeline across the Black Sea. Over the last few years, Russia has surpassed Germany as Turkey’s largest trading partner. The two share concern about US-backed “color revolutions” across Eurasia and the Broader Middle East; both are status quo powers and dislike change—especially if such change is against their interests or creates instability. Putin has already invited Erdogan to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) as an observer; this organization is co-chaired by Russia and China and includes countries such as India and Iran as observers and Central Asian states as members. While for now Ankara has stayed away from the SCO, more people consider this set of countries to be more aligned with Turkey’s interests than the US or EU.

Both Russia and Turkey are also strongly opposed to the new American and European Black Sea initiatives and to a potential US attack on Iran. They also jointly favor talks with Syria, and are now cooperating once again on a new gas pipeline, Blue Stream II. This pipeline would once again thwart the American (and now European) desire to bring Caspian gas (via Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan) to Europe via a non-Russian pipeline.

Conclusion

There is no reason to expect any change in these dynamics. Thus, Turkey and the US are likely to grow further apart, and anti-Americanism and its associated anti-Semitism will increase in Turkey. Turkey will be reluctant to participate in any future US-led projects (such as sanctions on Iran or a halt to Blue Stream II); it is likely only to act in its perceived national interest.

THE US, TURKEY, AND THE IRAQ CONUNDRUM

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The future of Iraq stands as the single most corrosive issue in US-Turkish relations. The continued presence of PKK, Kurdistan Workers' Party, fighters across the border from Turkey, the potential independence of Iraqi Kurds with the concomitant demonstration effects on Turkey's own Kurds, and the possibility that the Iraqi Kurds will win over the oil-rich city of Kirkuk, either as part of an independent state or an autonomous entity within Iraq, have helped sour US-Turkish relations. The Turks blame the US war on Iraq for creating the conditions that have given rise to a potential independent Kurdish state. They also accuse the US of ignoring Turkish red lines, concerns and demands. In fact, Turks are convinced that the US prefers its newfound Kurdish allies instead of its old NATO ally. As a result, the Turkish public has become the most anti-American one according to opinion polls. Although both countries are aware of the pitfalls involved and have taken steps to improve cooperation, the fact remains that the continued stalemate is hostage to a flare up of violence or miscalculation or even accident and, therefore, the relationship is likely to be subject to serious impairment.

By Way of Background

Ironically, on Iraq Turkey and the US share the same basic medium and long-term goals. They both would like to see the reemergence of a strong and secular Iraqi state capable of holding the center and standing up to the Iranians. They differ on the internal arrangements that would underpin this new Iraqi state. The Americans have concluded that only a federal state can keep all the different nationalities and sectarian groups together while Ankara still believes and hopes that the Iraqi state should be as centralized as before, ending the expectation of Iraqi Kurdish autonomy.

Long-term commonalities notwithstanding, it is the short-term differences that have taken center stage to mar the Turkish-American relationship. Turks have demanded that the US take action against PKK bases in northern Iraq, especially those that are immediately across the border. Their demands gained an added urgency when the PKK abandoned its self-declared ceasefire. To date, Washington has demurred. US officials are at pains to justify their position given that the PKK is recognized as a terrorist organization and the US led the effort to get the PKK leader sent to Ankara for trial in 1999 after his flight to Kenya from Syria. The US military command in charge of Iraq, USCENTCOM, has refused to engage the PKK militarily for two basic reasons: given the chaos in Iraq, it has no troops to deploy in the north, especially the combat-capable assets that this job would require, and second it does not want to be the cause of any kind of instability in the one region of the country that has remained quiet, stable and pro-American. Moreover, the US has also tried to convince the Turks not to embark on a military operation of their own. However, as will be demonstrated later, Washington is considering providing Ankara with a limited green light for a military operation and is also contemplating other options as a means of reducing the tensions between the two countries. Another and equally difficult demand made by Ankara concerns the Kirkuk referendum scheduled to occur before the end of 2007. The Turks have made it clear that it should be postponed (better canceled completely). They accuse the Kurds of gerrymandering the population of that town in order to ensure that the city votes to join the Iraqi Kurdish federal state. This has sparked a bitter verbal duel between the Turks and Iraqi Kurds with the US caught in between.

Further complicating the American-Turkish discourse are the events of 2003. On the eve of the Iraq war, the US had asked Ankara to allow the deployment of the 4th Infantry Division on Turkish soil for operations against the Saddam regime. After long and tedious negotiations the AKP government, which had just assumed power, concluded an agreement with Washington on deployment. Much to its surprise, in the ensuing vote in parliament, this accord was defeated by a handful of votes. Some in the U.S. have blamed Turkey's rejection of the agreement for some of the difficulties encountered in Iraq. Turks have since then assumed that Washington is intent on punishing Ankara for the failure to deploy the 4th Infantry Division which did not make its way to Iraq long after Baghdad had fallen.

More ominous for the relationship was the July 4, 2003 fracas in northern Iraq when US troops arrested a number of Turkish Special Forces troops together with operatives from their ally Iraqi Turkmen Front on

suspicion of preparation an assassination attempt on the governor of Kirkuk province. In the ensuing melee, the Turks were given the al-Qaida treatment and were hooded and transported to Baghdad. The specter of Turkish troops in hoods was a humiliating blow seared into the Turkish psyche and this event became emblematic of Turkish-American relations. Paradoxically, few in Turkey noticed that the Turkish General Staff quietly retired and/or dismissed the two generals in command of the Special Forces in Iraq in an indirect admission that theirs was a rogue operation not sanctioned by the command in Ankara. More than three years later, this event continues to cast its long shadow over Turkish American relations.

The recent emergence of Kirkuk as a contentious issue has to do with Saddam Hussein's ethnic cleansing of Kurds and Turkmen from the early 1980s onwards. Baghdad then replaced the city's Kurdish and Turkmen residents with Arabs, mostly Sh'ia, from other regions of Iraq. While Turkey claims Kirkuk to be a majority Turkmen city, the Kurds have staked their own claim on it calling it their Jerusalem. The Turks have objected to Kurdish attempts at resettling the city with refugees and their descendants from the Saddam years. The problem that Turkey encounters in Iraq is that its only ally is its own creation, the Iraqi Turkmen Front (ITF). The ITF has not succeeded in making itself the voice of Iraqi Turkmen, in fact, it failed miserably in the 2005 elections as the Turkmen cast their votes for the dominant Sh'ia coalition in Baghdad and some even for the Kurdish alliance (50 percent of the Turkmen are Sh'ia and tend to vote along their sectarian identity). The ITF only managed to garner 0.87 percent of the votes leading to a serious reevaluation of policy by the Turkish ministry of foreign affairs. The ITF, however, has been quite successful in Turkey where it is perceived as the champion of a besieged minority.

Current Dynamics

For Ankara, of the three issues confronting it in Iraq, the PKK, the potential Iraqi Kurdish independence, and Kirkuk, the most critical is Iraqi Kurds. At the beginning of the war, the Turks had made it clear that a robust federal Kurdish autonomous region in the north was unacceptable to them. With time and the introduction of the new Iraqi constitution they were obliged softened their stand. Still, the fear that their own Kurds, often estimated to be about 20 percent of their own population and half of which live in regions adjacent to Iraq, may want to emulate their Iraqi brethren is paramount. The Kurdish issue is as neuralgic as it is existential. Kurds in Turkey have since the inception of the republic in 1923 in one form of upheaval or another in pursuit of greater rights and recognition. Sometimes these upheavals have assumed a violent form, as with the PKK-led one in the 1980s and 1990s, or more often than not they have followed a path of increased political mobilization. Either form of activity has been seen as dangerous by the state which until recently had refused to acknowledge their existence. Although Turkish Kurds have a great deal of affinity towards those in northern Iraq, it is not clear that they too would seek independence or would fall for irredentist ambitions.

This fear has hampered any cooperation with the Kurdish Regional Government, a constitutionally recognized region by the central government in Iraq. Ankara has tried its best to ignore the presence of the KRG. The Turkish Special Iraq coordinator, Oguz Celikol, for instance has refused to meet with KRG officials. The Turkish President Ahmet Necdet Sezer, despite the Turkish government's entreaties, has obstinately refused to invite the Iraqi president Jalal Talabani to Ankara simply because the latter is a Kurd from northern Iraq.

The confluence of two sets of developments relating to Iraq have the potential of accelerating the derailment of the US-Turkish relations and causing significant damage to long-term prospects of collaboration. The first is the continuing deterioration of the security situation in Iraq itself, the possibility of US troop withdrawal or redeployment to Iraq's border areas, and the increasing prospect of Iraq's implosion or division along three ethnic and sectarian communities. The recent surge option proposed by President Bush is viewed in Turkey as increasing the Kurds' influence because of the reliance on them to supply extra forces to secure Baghdad. Still, no one in Turkey believes that the US will be able to halt the spiraling deterioration in Iraq.

The second development is a function of the increasing civil-military tensions that pit the moderate Islamist Justice Development Party of Recep Tayyip Erdogan against a secular military-civilian coalition that is determined to prevent either the prime minister from assuming the presidency or deny the AKP a parliamentary majority in the upcoming national elections scheduled in November 2007. The domestic tensions are being played out against the backdrop of a nationalist revival, increasing xenophobia, and anti-Western feelings. The difficulties with the EU accession talks and other events such as the pending Armenian Genocide resolution in the

U.S. Congress have all contributed to these. Fundamentally, however, it is the Iraq war which lies at the heart of the angst. Turks are being fed a daily barrage of news that not only accentuate the worse, but also recount and warn of massacres of Turkmen in Iraq, whether in Kirkuk or Tel Afer.

For all these reasons, the Iraq dossier has come to represent the government's Achilles' Heel. It is vulnerable to accusations of being soft on Iraqi Kurds, the U.S. and the PKK presence in Iraq. Unable to undermine the its overwhelming parliamentary majority, the anti-AKP establishment has tried to force the government's hand to initiate some kind of cross-border military operation against the express will of the US military in Iraq and the Iraqi Kurds. The government and especially the prime minister have contributed to these tensions by adopting a combative stance of their own. Erdogan in particular in order to protect his nationalist flank has said publicly that Turkey would not remain as a spectator to events in Kirkuk and thereby raising the specter of an intervention.

American efforts at reducing tensions have taken many forms; the US has helped the Turks by convincing the European countries to clamp down on their PKK-affiliated organizations, increased intelligence cooperation and most recently by appointing a special representative, retired general Ralston, to help the Turkish and American bureaucracies find ways of cooperating further. It is in this context that a new American promise of action was delivered recently to Ankara. The Turks especially the Turkish military would very much prefer if the US militarily, with the help of its Kurdish allies, were to deal with the PKK by force, either by decapitating the organization's leadership or eliminating it as a whole. Failing that they would like the right to begin a sustained cross border operation of their own.

However, none of these options are likely to satisfy the primary Turkish concern regarding northern Iraq and Kurdish independence.

What the Future Holds

Too busy with developments in Iraq proper, the US has so far been reluctant to engage in a major diplomatic offensive on the question of northern Iraq. The fact remains that Iraq is unlikely to revert to its status quo ante: the new reality in Iraq is unlikely to be to the liking of either the Turks or the Americans. The time has come to start preparing for different scenarios and possibilities.

Iraq's future will be governed in some way by the separation of the three communities—whether this is within a loose federation or through three independent states—it is critical for Turkey and Iraqi Kurds find a modus vivendi. Kurds are secular, anti-Sh'ia or Sunni fundamentalism, most interested in relations with Turkey and beyond than with the West, and anxious to find a patron in Ankara. Their future is very much dependent on how well they connect with Turkey. Oil pipelines from northern Iraq already flow into Turkish ports on the Mediterranean. Turkish concerns regarding the Turkmen have always been exaggerated as a foil against the Kurds. In fact, in a recent trip I took to Turkey, I asked almost everyone I met with to let me what their preferences would be for the Turkmen in the event of three-way split in Iraq. Invariably—with few exceptions—Turks answered that they saw the future of the Turkmen in Iraqi Kurdistan. The Kurds, especially with access to the oil riches of northern Iraq, are likely to be a far better commercial partner for Turkey. Turkey's concerns with respect to the Turkmen can better be addressed through an arrangement with the Kurds. The KRG constitution already calls for respecting minority rights and languages and Turkey can make sure that Kurds live up to these promises since a separate Turkmen entity is not in the cards.

Similarly, the Kurds are more likely to make sure that the PKK ceases to operate from their territory if the Turks can be more forthcoming on future relations. Current Turkish policy of wishing the Kurds away is likely to create greater complications down the road for both the US and Ankara. By contrast, a concerted effort at bringing the parties into a dialogue with the US oversight can produce results that would also help the US when it decides to disentangle itself from Iraq in the future.

CONTRADICTIONS IN US-TURKISH INTERESTS

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Turkey has gone through three major phases in the development of its foreign policy: first a period of neutrality under Ataturk, then a period of abnormally pro-Western alignment during the early Cold War that coincided with Turkey's immense desire to be accepted as Western state and concern for the USSR; since the height of the Cold War it has been moving in the direction of greater independence and broad expansion of policy interests towards the former Soviet Union and the Middle East, and even with China. With growing Turkish independence of outlook it will encounter greater differences of interest between itself and the US. Many factors come into play here.

Turkish-American relations have changed, particularly since 1991.

The Cold War is over; even before then Turkey had begun the process of moving away from a strongly "aligned" position in those years towards broadening its global relations. Its goal has been to gain for greater international support for its own policies, especially outside of NATO.

Turkey's increasingly open economy starting in the mid-1980s has opened it to world market forces of which the US is only a modest player in the Turkish economy compared to EU. At the same time, Turkish society has changed, bringing more traditional minded, Central Anatolian, Islamic oriented people into the political order.

In real terms, EU membership now increasingly matters to Turkey, even if those prospects at the moment are not bright. A lot can, and will happen between Turkey and Europe in the next decade. At the same time, Russia is no longer an enemy of Turkey for the first time in a nearly 800 years, but in fact has very close relations with Ankara. One factor in this is Ankara's gradual move away from its pan-Turkish phase which has opened the door to better relations with Russia and China.

"Shared values"

American and Turkish diplomats often speak of "shared values and interests." But this argument is mostly at the level of motherhood and apple pie. What are the areas of theoretical US-Turkish *shared interests* in the Middle East—at least in principle? Both countries desire a new peaceful centralized Iraq, a non-militant non-nuclear Iran, and an end to the Arab-Israeli dispute. Both countries also seek an end terrorism in the region, particularly as it affects Turkey and wish to discourage the development of radical Islam. Turkey is one of the few countries in the region to have constructive ties with Israel, especially in material goods. Both the US and Turkey desire broader stability in the Middle East. In terms of developing ties with the former Soviet Union, both the US and Turkey seek development of Caspian and Central Asian oil pipelines to Turkey that would make Turkey an energy hub, and support the independence of Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Central Asia.

Yet all but the last two of these "shared interests" are shared with virtually all other states in the world as well and betoken no special US-Turkish relationship. Furthermore, Turkish acceptance of most of these "shared values and interests" would need to be sharply qualified: "it all depends on how it is done."

Let's look at the often sharply *different* understandings, approaches, policies and even interests between the US and Turkey on many of these key issues:

Patterns of Past US-Turkish Tensions

First has been an overall Turkish concern over *loss of sovereignty* due to the impact of US political, economic, military and strategic plans and actions in the Middle East; these US policies affect Turkey heavily but lie beyond Turkish control. Turkey has also expressed concern over perceived US disregard of Turkish national honor and dignity. Ankara often feels that close strategic ties with the US have often foreclosed other options for Ankara in the region; in particular Ankara has expressed concern over alliance entanglements that could drag it

into unwanted regional conflicts, including earlier on with the USSR. Turkey has also questioned the degree of reliability of US security commitments when they run counter to the US interests of the moment, most notably during the Cuban missile crisis and the “Johnson letter” on the Cyprus crisis in the mid 1960s. Above all else is a difference in philosophy and style: Turkey has almost always been a strong proponent of maintenance of the status quo and rule of law in international relations; the US has veered away strongly in both particulars. Many of these concerns are intertwined and interrelated; most involve frictions inherent in any alliance between unequal powers.

More currently Ankara has demonstrated much unhappiness with Washington on key Middle Eastern issues. US GWOT policies are seen as exacerbating tension in the Muslim world and polarizing Muslim-Western relations. US policies towards Iraq have consistently damaged Turkish interests, starting in 1991: it stimulated the Kurds towards independence, facilitated the breakup of Iraq and created a new center of radical Islamic terrorism that is spreading out across the region. At the same time Washington has not significantly worked to solve the PKK problem in Iraq—a high priority for Ankara. Washington has furthermore restricted Turkish freedom of action in Iraq.

On Iran, US policies have only served to intensify Iranian nationalism and its spirit of resistance to the West, and to strengthen Iranian hardliners; US policies immensely complicate Turkey’s access to Iranian energy supplies. Ankara believes that any US attempt at a military solution to the Iranian nuclear issue will not be effective and will only destabilize regional conditions against Turkey’s interests. Washington has escalated tensions with Syria at a time when Turkey wants to strengthen its dramatically improved bilateral ties with Damascus. As part of its new regional vision Turkey wants to play a mediating role between the West and Iran, Syria, Palestine; Washington has discouraged this.

Ankara also complains that Washington does not seriously consult with Turkey on major strategic and military actions that have immense impact on Turkey’s own security and interests and believes that Washington does not treat Turkey with sufficient respect.

In the meantime, Israel’s policies as supported by Washington consistently exacerbate the Palestinian problem in Ankara’s eyes and serve to polarize Muslim-US tensions in the region—all of which harm Turkey’s interests. US unilateralism and style of policies create negative reactions elsewhere in the world including in Europe, making it harder for Turkey to identify with those policies or to cooperate with them. Additionally, Washington’s agenda of US-imposed democratization in the Muslim world in Ankara’s view only serves to destabilize the region further.

Many of these differences existed before 1991 but have been greatly exacerbated by the Bush administration. More worrisome from Ankara’s point of view is that the roots of US strategic policy run deeper and are not likely to be reversed anytime soon.

Other areas of Turkish-US tensions wait in the wings. Washington will not be happy with the trend of a growingly independent-minded Turkey that is sensitive to its sovereignty like France and India. Turkey is working more closely with China and Russia in Eurasia which angers Washington. Meanwhile the world seems to be pushing for a more multipolar world and Ankara too welcomes that process. And finally, Turkish failure to get into the EU is unlikely to push Ankara back into Washington’s arms, but rather towards closer ties with the Gulf and Eurasia.

ARE WE LOSING TURKEY?

Suat Kınıklıoğlu

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The answer to this question is ‘No’. We are not losing Turkey but we are seeing a profound transformation in Turkey. This transformation is occurring in front of our very eyes but we often fail to recognize what is at play. The primary trends in Turkey can be summarized as follows:

Change of Elites

There is a rapid and sweeping change of elites. The old polished, English-speaking staunchly pro-western elite is slowly being replaced by a more nationalist, suspicious and less dependent one. Some parts of this elite is more self-confident, challenges decades-old dominance of pro-western outlook of Turkey. This elite—as well as most of the population—is more conservative, devout or at least more respectful to religion in general. That said, the new elite is not necessarily anti-western or anti-American but is more questioning. A good portion of this elite recognizes that Turkey needs the U.S. and the West in general and cannot afford to disrupt relations.

New Understanding of Foreign Policy

Most Turks and a good portion of the foreign & security policy establishment sees Turkey’s role in its region evolving. Intellectually inspired by folks such as Ahmet Davutoglu (Advisor to the PM/FM) more and more Turks understand that Turkey is no longer a flank country but is situated at the *center* of a critical region. Combined with Turkey’s increasing economic self-confidence and ease to deal with these regions Turkey understands that it has a lot more playground than the EU. Hence, Turkey is *reintegrating* with its immediate neighborhood, most strikingly evident with Russia, Syria and Iran. Turkey’s newly found regional activism should not be viewed from an “either—or” prism but should be seen from an added value from which Turkey’s allies also can benefit. After all, Turkey is a security producing stable actor in the region and wants to implement a multidimensional foreign policy that reintegrates Turkey back into a region from which it was abnormally alienated for decades. Turks are wary about the doubts raised in the U.S. and have difficulty in understanding the objections. In the final analysis, Turkey is intent on normalizing with its immediate neighborhood and it would appear to be in the U.S. and the EU’s interest to see this as a positive and constructive development.

A Distinct Sense of Frustration

If one examines the last 15 years from a Turkish perspective there is not a lot of positive to be accounted. Gone are the days when Turks were defending the southeastern flank of NATO. Formerly communist/socialist adversaries now arrogantly taunt that Turkey should not be allowed to join the EU. Its immediate neighborhood is on fire with Bosnia/Kosovo, Abkhazia/S. Ossetia, Karabakh, Iraq and maybe Iran. The EU process has become very fragile as Turcosceptics such as France and Austria have been successful in provoking Turkey. Small and tiny Greek Cyprus has effectively been able to hold the EU hostage. Turkey’s relationship with the U.S. has also been severely damaged due to the Iraq debacle and the direct security threat emanating from the PKK presence in Iraq. The First Gulf War and the events afterwards have opened the lid of the Pandora’s Box for Turkey in relation to the Kurds and Turkey continues to struggle with this profound challenge.

Despite these three major trends there is a positive emerging and that is that Turkey is normalizing both domestically and regionally. The decades-old anomaly of Turkey turning its back to the Middle East, the Caucasus, the Mediterranean and the Balkans has come to an end. Turkey is gradually normalizing with these regions and is destined to become a regional hegemon that will shape events in the region. On the domestic front also Turkey is making significant strides to further open and democratize. The two key challenges to the established order, namely how to deal with religion in a democracy as well as the Kurdish issue are increasingly being deliberated and will eventually be solved.

In that respect the question can also be asked whether Turkey has lost the West? Neither of these questions is correct. What is at work is that Turkey is becoming a different country, a country that acts more independently and is more integrated with its immediate neighborhood. As much as the neighborhood may have an impact on Turkey, the re-entry of Turkey may have an influence to the neighborhood. The challenge remains for our European and American colleagues to make the mental shift that recognizes this momentous change in Turkey.

US-TURKISH RELATIONS: THE PERILS OF GEOPOLITICS

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As Ambassador Marc Grossman has observed, the US and Turkey are not natural allies. The countries are divided by distance, (some) culture, and the natural differences in perspective of a global and regional power. For Americans, the relationship has been sustained by broad gauge geopolitical ideas, above all the notion of Turkey as a “bridge” between strategically significant regions, between the Muslim world and the West, and between north and south. In the Cold War context, Turkey was also seen as a strategic “barrier” to Soviet expansion, a role that some, especially in Europe, still see Ankara playing in relation to risks from the Middle East and Eurasia.

Until quite recently, Turkish strategists have held similar views about the importance of the US as a global partner in the containment of regional adversaries, and as a backer of Ankara’s strategic priorities, from EU membership to pipeline projects. Turks have long balanced a desire for a seat at Washington’s strategic table with deep-seated suspicion regarding American intentions in Turkey’s neighborhood (and toward Turkey itself).

This traditional and mutually reinforcing focus on geopolitics—location rather than policies—as the backbone of cooperation has led to considerable volatility, frustration, and hollowness in the bilateral relationship.

The Myth of a Golden Age

The current strategic environment, with immediate challenges in Iraq, Iran and elsewhere in Turkey’s neighborhood, places direct, practical demands on US-Turkish relations—tests rarely encountered in past decades, NATO nuclear guarantees notwithstanding. It is too simple to contrast post March 2003 frictions between Turkey and the US with a lost “golden age” of cooperation. In reality, Turkish-American relations since the 1960s have been characterized by recurring tension, including widespread anti-Americanism, arms embargoes, disagreements over the Aegean, and over Kurds, northern Iraq and the PKK. Few if any of the contentious issues on the bilateral agenda are really new.

Changing Bilateral Dynamics

What is new, and gives today’s troubled relations special meaning, is the substantially changed foreign and security policy outlook on both sides.

- On the Turkish side, the AKP government, and the social movement it represents, has spurred changes on the domestic scene. But it has also brought a new look to Turkey’s foreign policy, with more attention to the north, east and south. AKP strategists argue that this is simply useful diversification. Others are concerned that it suggests a more fundamental shift in Turkey’s strategic orientation, fueled by increasing ambivalence about Turkey’s European project, and irritation with the US. By design, or by circumstance, more of Turkey’s external policy energy is now devoted to relations with Russia, Iran, Syria et al., and rather less to the maintenance of relations with Washington and Brussels. Does this add up to a shift in national orientation? Probably not. Does it complicate the bilateral relationship with the US? Absolutely.
- Public opinion now counts in Turkish foreign policymaking, and the public and elite mood has turned decidedly negative. This, combined with the recurrent suspicion of Turkey’s foreign policy elites—and the atmosphere of strident nationalism in almost all sectors of society—has made Ankara an increasingly difficult and sovereignty conscious partner (this re-nationalization of policy is observable elsewhere on the international scene).
- On the US side, the post 9/11 focus on specific security challenges, with less attention to long-term regional alliances, has encouraged a tougher style in dealing with allies, and closer measures of cooperation. Key defense constituencies in the US remain disenchanted with Turkey based on the March 2003 experience (even if much logistical support for the US presence in Iraq still goes through Incirlik airbase). As elsewhere, the Iraq war has triggered a more profound debate in Turkey, not just about the specifics of American policy, but about the nature of American power. More revolutionary,

“transformational” strategies in the Middle East are a poor fit with Turkey’s conservative, status quo approach to adjacent regions.

- By contrast, Turkey’s strong economic performance since the financial crisis of 2000-2001 has spurred much stronger US private sector interest in Turkey. Recent investments by Citibank (in Akbank) and GE Capital (in Garanti Bank) are leading examples. The question “are we losing Turkey?” is fashionable in Washington, but not on Wall Street.

Beyond Geopolitics

A reinvigorated US-Turkish relationship will be less strictly bilateral, with lower expectations, less geopolitical theorizing, and with practical cooperation at the core. Three places to start:

- **Put Turkey at the center of regional diplomacy for Iraq.** The debate here has focused on the role of Iran and Syria, but Turkey is rarely mentioned. Ankara has at least as much leverage over key aspects of the Iraq scene, and a leading stake. It is imperative that the US convey a stronger interest in Turkey’s concerns about the PKK and the future of Northern Iraq. Coordinated action against the PKK should be at the top of the agenda. Turkey and the US share a core interest in Iraqi stability (or what can still be salvaged). But if a more concerted approach is not forthcoming, there is a risk that Turkey will go it alone, with negative consequences for all sides.
- **Develop a concerted response to Iranian nuclear and missile programs.** Turkey is already exposed to Iranian missiles, and the prospect of a nuclear or near-nuclear Iran will have a profound effect on the strategic environment around Turkey. Turkey is unlikely to “go nuclear”, but Ankara can be a key partner in containing and managing Iranian ambitions. NATO can be a useful angle to engage Turkey on this issue (this might also be true on PKK and Iraq).
- **Foster a More Diverse Relationship.** Turkish and American observers have long complained about the shortcomings of a relationship too heavily focused on security matters. The security relationship is likely to remain unpredictable in key respects, but the economic and other dimensions of the relationship, while expanding, remain underdeveloped (precisely the opposite of US-India relations, for example). This goal is closely related to Turkey’s continued *convergence* with European practice in various sectors, whatever the prospects for EU membership *per se*. In key areas, Turkish foreign policy is essentially in the European mainstream. This and other factors suggest that the prospects for a revived US-Turkish strategic relationship depend critically on the restoration of transatlantic relations as a whole. A troubled transatlantic relationship will make a troubled relationship between Washington and Ankara much more difficult to fix.

THE SOURCES OF TURKEY'S ANTI-AMERICANISM

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Turkish-American relations witnessed their fair share of ups and downs during the Cold War, mostly in the form of Cyprus-related problems. These problems occasionally escalated to “crisis” level, with abundant drama and posturing, as in the case of the “Johnson letter” in 1969 and the weapons embargo in 1974. Such episodes, however, took place in the more or less predictable context of the Cold War. In this bipolar world, Ankara and Washington shared a common enemy and anti-Americanism usually belonged to the realm of the left. The Soviet menace brought predictability, as well as clear limits to Turkish-American differences. Today, this context no longer defines the essence of Turkish-American relations. The two countries no longer share a common enemy. In short the “Axis of Evil” is hardly a good substitute for the “Evil Empire.”

The Sources of Anti-Americanism

Over the last three years, the image of the United States in Turkey has become part of the collateral damage of the Iraq war. Polls after polls confirm that growing numbers of Turks perceive their NATO ally as a security problem, rather than a strategic partner. In analyzing this Turkish frustration with the United States, one needs to go beyond the Bush administration’s negative global image. The German Marshall Fund’s 2006 transatlantic survey showed that while anti-Americanism is in relative decline in Europe, the trend in Turkey is in the opposite direction. Turkey seems to present a sui-generis case where anti-Americanism needs to be analyzed, at least partly, in light of the country’s own domestic dynamics and identity problems.

Any attempt to understand the current wave of Turkish anti-Americanism must acknowledge that the U.S. is now on the wrong side of the Kemalist polarization in Turkey. The twin threats to Turkey’s official state ideology of Kemalism are perceived to come from political Islam and Kurdish nationalism. On the front of Islam, the Kemalist establishment of Turkey suspects that Washington sees Turkey and more particularly the AKP as model for “moderate Islam.” This greatly alarms Turkish secularists. Although Washington now erased the term “model” from its Turkish political vocabulary—replacing it with creative formulas like “source of inspiration”—the Kurdish problem is trickier to solve. America’s strong partnership with the Kurds in Iraq, the new Iraqi Constitution’s loose federalism, the status of the oil-rich city of Kirkuk, and the Pentagon’s reluctance to take action against PKK terrorists in northern Iraq, rattle the Kemalist guardians in the Turkish military.

The Kurdish Issue

What makes the Kurdish issue particularly relevant is that it strongly affects Turkey’s perception of the European Union as well. After all, it is Brussels, not Washington, that demands from Ankara to accept the Kurds as a national minority with distinct cultural and linguistic rights. In that sense, Turkey’s anti-Americanism often overlaps with anti-EU feelings as well. In fact, anxiety about Kurdish nationalism is the common denominator of Turkey’s anti-EU and anti-American feelings.

The Kurdish agenda in post-Saddam Northern Iraq has generated a deep distrust of the United States among the majority of Turks. Turkey’s longstanding fear that independence-minded Kurdish nationalists in Iraq would set a dangerous precedent for Kurds in Turkey is now being borne out. Emboldened by their partnership with Washington, Iraqi Kurds have embarked on an ambitious nationalist journey with a clear destination: an independent state with the oil-rich city of Kirkuk as its capital.

Making things worse is the PKK’s presence in northern Iraq. The PKK guerillas launched a new terrorist campaign against Turkey between 2004 and the summer of 2006. Most Turks believe that the current ceasefire is merely tactical and will last only until spring. The nightmare scenario in Turkey would be a major PKK terrorist attack in Istanbul or another western city, followed by a Turkish nationalist backlash leading to inter-ethnic clashes between Kurds and Turks similar to those that took place, on a limited scale, in the summer of 2005. In such a scenario there would be growing pressure on the Turkish military and political establishment to intervene in northern Iraq, potentially bringing Turkish and American forces into a confrontation.

Winning Turkey

The place to start winning Turkey is by helping it deal with the Kurdish issue, which threatens Turkey's stability more than any other. There are a series of steps Washington could take to minimize the Turkish perception that Americans do not take Turkish interests into account. The most obvious one would be a visible military action, such as an attack on a PKK camp in Northern Iraq, to demonstrate America's seriousness of purpose.

Even short of such action, the United States can do much more to help by arresting known PKK leaders, pressing Europeans to crack down on PKK financing and front organizations, and sharing intelligence with Turkey. Right now the symbolic recent dates in U.S.-Turkey military relations are "March 1"—the Turkish parliament's vote against allowing the passage of U.S. troops—and "July 4"—the U.S. arrest of Turkish special forces in Northern Iraq. A high-profile U.S. strike on the PKK or arrest of a PKK leader would do much to displace those negative symbols with a more positive one, signaling a new start to U.S.-Turkey relations.

To be sure, the tension between Turkey and the U.S. cannot be reduced to symbols, and a cosmetic operation against the PKK in northern Iraq will not solve Turkey's Kurdish problem. Clearly, the solution will have to be largely political. This is why Turkey should seriously consider a partial amnesty against certain PKK guerillas. Cultural and human rights reforms also need to continue in the framework of a pro-EU accession agenda.

Washington, for its part, needs to do more to ensure that Ankara's greatest fear—an independent Kurdish state in northern Iraq that purges Turkmen minorities and supports the PKK—does not become a reality. American leverage with Iraq's Kurds remains considerable, and Washington needs to be clear about its red lines: no formal independence, no support for irredentism, tolerance of minority populations, and ideally a special status for the city of Kirkuk. The United States needs to let Iraq's Kurds know that if these redlines are crossed, there is little it could do if Turkey—or Iran or Syria for that matter—felt it imperative to intervene.

To compensate for inaction on the PKK front, Washington could also do more to address another Turkish grievance: Cyprus. In wake of the failure of the Annan Plan in the spring 2004, a Cyprus solution is highly unlikely in the near term—the Greek Cypriots, now members of the European Union, now feel time is on their side and see little reason for compromise. But if there is little the United States can do in the near term to reach a final settlement, there is much it can do to counter the Turkish perception that Turkey has yet again gotten the short end of the stick. The United States has already taken several useful steps—far more than the European Union so far—to fulfill its pledge to lessen the isolation of the Turkish Cypriots following their support of the Annan Plan. It has sent \$30 million in aid to the Turkish Cypriots, it supported a rare Congressional visit to Northern Cyprus in June 2005 and in October 2005, and for the first time ever it invited the Turkish Cypriot leader—Mehmet Ali Talat—to Washington for a formal meeting with the Secretary of State.

Washington should now follow up on these useful steps by opening direct trade with Northern Cyprus, expanding official contacts in areas such as law enforcement, health and other areas of technical cooperation, and facilitating Turkish Cypriot citizens' interaction with the outside world. The United States should also work with—and pressure—the EU to fulfill its own promises to help the Turkish Cypriots. Whereas the most important potential step the EU can take—direct trade with the North—can be blocked by a Greek Cypriot veto, the EU should use qualified majority voting to authorize a significant aid donation that Turkish Cypriots could use on infrastructure, education, and travel for its citizens. Such measures would not only show Turks that it still has friends in the West, but would help convince Greek Cypriots to come back to the negotiating table, by proving that the international community will not abandon the Turkish Cypriots. The U.S. and EU should also seek to win support for Turkish Prime Minister Abdullah Gul's May 31, 2005 proposal for completely free trade among Turkey and both parts of Cyprus—such a plan is not only consistent with America's vision for openness throughout the region but would resolve the thorny issue of Turkey's openness to Greek Cypriot ships while also promoting ties between Cyprus's two communities.

In Turkey's current political scene, the West would be hard pressed to find a better ally than the AKP government to push ahead for domestic democratic reforms and a pro-EU foreign policy. It is important to remember that the problem Turkey faces is not Islamization, but growing "nationalist" frustration with the United

States and Europe. Ironically, Turkey's moderately Islamic government is also its most pro-Western in recent history. Having suffered the most under the illiberal vagaries of the Turkish political system, Turkey's Islamists now see the EU as their best hope for keeping the country on track to liberal democracy and economic prosperity. Yet, there are also clear limits to AKP's pro-EU stance, particularly when Europe sends mixed signals and the Turkish public develops nationalist tendencies.

A majority of Turks still wants to see their country firmly anchored in the West. But their patience is wearing thin because of what they perceive as European double standards and American neglect of Turkish national and security interests. Under such circumstances, European and American policy makers would be well advised to stop taking Turkey's pro-Western orientation for granted. It is time to revisit the conventional wisdom that Turkey has no strategic options other than the West. Unlike during the Cold War, Turkey now has a Russian and Eurasian strategic alternative that looks increasingly appealing to growing numbers of frustrated nationalists within the country. If Turkey's relations with the United States continue to deteriorate, while relations with Europe also take a negative turn, Ankara could very well opt for closer strategic relations with countries such as Russia, Iran, China, India and the larger Islamic world. Americans and Europeans who do not take this risk seriously underestimate the nationalist resentment already building up in Turkey.