

The US and Turkey: End of an Alliance?

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The alliance between the United States and Turkey, which has endured since the promulgation of the Truman Doctrine in 1947 and has contributed to the security of both countries, is now in serious trouble. Neither side is facing up to this reality, let alone taking serious remedial measures, or 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. There is still time to act, providing senior leaders on both sides move with dispatch. It is urgent that they do, 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.

Turkey's polity and society have become more difficult for American policy-makers 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 whose political views are influenced by their Islamic faith and heritage and who tend to originate from Anatolia's rising commercial class and less affluent groups from its rural regions, 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 favours a strong relationship with the United States, sought (albeit without success) to convince the Turkish parliament to authorise

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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 dynamics of Turkish politics have changed in fundamental ways, and this makes for a Turkey that is less familiar to and more complicated for Americans.

The possibility that Turkey, whether Kemalist or Islamist, could reassess its long-standing alliance with the United States is quite real. 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. Accompanying Turkish discussions about a new strategic orientation has been the growth of 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, America's traditional interlocutors.

These threats to the alliance seem to be unnoticed by American leaders, or noted but regarded as little more than a rough patch that does not threaten the fundamentals of the relationship. Part of the problem is that American foreign-policy planning has been complacent about Turkey. As Ian Lesser has recently observed:

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

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 hint it thinks it does. The Turks are a proud people with a long and illustrious history, and Turkey is a key regional power, with influence extending 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 few 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 Washington's relationship with Ankara is under severe, indeed unprecedented, strain, which is why minor missteps could have a disproportionate effect, fraying the alliance further. For example, while the United States may value Turkey as a country with a tradition of moderate Islam and a secular polity, statements that praise it a 'model' for Muslims strike 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 Even if one takes account of the hyperbole; it is nevertheless significant that a prominent member of the foreign-policy establishment could characterise the US–Turkish relationship in this fashion. And although Tashan's sentiments are representative of public sentiment, they are milder by comparison. For instance, a 2005 potboiler imagining a war between the United States and Turkey in northern Iraq proved wildly popular among Turks, more than 80% of whom also opined in a 2005 survey that American policies in their region endangered Turkey's security.³

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. 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 allies and friends, adversaries, or loci of instability.

- Turkey's critical location means that instability within it could spill beyond its borders, with unpredictable effects rippling across its neighbourhood, particularly the Middle East.
- Turkey sits astride critical waterways and narrows (the Caspian Sea, the Black Sea, the Mediterranean, and the Bosphorus and Dardanelles) that are channels for trade and the flow of energy to global markets.
- Turkey's Mediterranean port of Ceyhan is the terminus of the Baku–Ceyhan pipeline. Turkey is therefore essential to American efforts to

reduce the dependence of Azerbaijan, and potentially Kazakhstan 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 a corridor for the Baku–Ceyhan pipeline, and 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 drawing 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 state, 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 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 south-east. The fragmentation of Iraq could therefore 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 and NATO,

Turkey's cooperation is essential to any durable settlement in Iraq

and toward a new 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 strategy 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 for militant Islamists to infiltrate Iraq and Turkey's other neighbours.
- Turkey's participation in the International Security Assistance Force 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, although Turkey's military forces in Afghanistan are small and are not deployed in the south, the central theatre of the anti-Taliban war. (Turkey is no different in this respect than the vast majority of other contributors to the force). Turkey is a member of NATO, and the air bases in its southeast, primarily Incirlik but also 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-fly zone was established over northern Iraq to protect the Kurds 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. To begin with, there is a new political demography in Turkey. The ruling elites that have dominated the military, the state bureaucracy and the armed forces, arguably Turkey's most powerful political institution, and 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 centres of power have emerged to rival these so-called 'White Turks', a cosmopolitan and Europeanised group, many of whom are from European Turkey's political family dynasties. The White Turks have long embodied Kemal Atatürk'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 West, 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), that Islam has no place in politics, that multiculturalism is anathema and that Turkishness is an imperative. Yet Kemalists are not necessarily well disposed to the United States today: a wounded nationalism marked by visceral anti-Americanism pervades their ranks.

The Kemalist model of politics has certainly not been displaced – and will not be, given that the military is its ardent and vigilant champion – but its hold has been weakened by the increased influence of political leaders and business groups from Anatolia. In their 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 geographical heartland. These groups 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 Iran, Syria, Russia and the states of Central Asia and the South Caucasus, not mediated by Turkey's relationship with the United States; but so now do Kemalists. Yet the new elites are drawn to an 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 differs from Kemalism, which 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 realise the dangers involved in using them as a guide to public policy, particularly because such ideas posing 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 mould.

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, which rattled the Kemalists and aroused the suspicions of the military, the self-appointed guardian of Atatürk's political legacy. Erbakan's government

was forced from office in 1997 by the military in what has been dubbed a 'soft coup'. But 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 was not a 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 draws upon the country's Ottoman and Islamic heritage. Unlike the White Turks, the new elites have been far less influenced by Western ideas and institutions. Given the Justice and Development Party's enthusiasm for Turkey's membership in the EU, partly because it sees it as a hedge against the military's intervention in politics, Islam's increased role in Turkey's politics will not inevitably generate conflict with the United States. Nor can Kemalists always be counted on to be well disposed toward Washington. Rather, Washington must now understand and work with a new variety of political leaders, whose political proclivities and ideas are distinct from America's traditional Turkish interlocutors. This will demand patience, flexibility and a willingness to learn about and adapt to a new, more complex Turkey. Categorising the Kemalists as natural allies and the Justice and Development Party as automatic adversaries (or vice versa) is not merely simplistic, but potentially pernicious.

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 11 September 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 hard to comprehend, albeit for different reasons. Both are disconcerted by an ally which has become unfamiliar and requires regular and unquestioning demonstrations of friendship and support for its policies, even policies that its allies may have legitimate reasons to question, or even oppose, on grounds of national interest. 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 implied accusations of betrayal when the Turkish parliament said 'no'.

The new chessboard

The catalyst for the emergence of a new strategic environment was the disappearance of the Soviet Union. From the 1947 Truman Doctrine, 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 explain the logic and necessity of their alliance with relative ease. The US-led NATO alliance was the institutional embodiment of their unity in the face of the Soviet Union, which they were pledged to deter or, in extremis, defeat.

Both Ankara and Washington had other foreign-policy concerns, but the Soviet threat, the US-designed strategy of containment, and NATO united them and helped manage stresses and strains in the relationship. For Turkey, American power was essential to balance Russia, its gigantic and powerful northern neighbour, with whom, under both tsars and commissars, it had a troubled history, including Russian claims to Turkish territory and Russian interference in Turkey's domestic affairs. For the United States, Turkey provided a base for military forces, airfields, missiles and intelligence installations on the USSR's southern flank, and a centre of power that diverted Soviet military forces that might otherwise have been pointed at Western Europe.

In the post-Soviet world, it is much harder for officials and national-security and foreign-policy experts on both sides to explain what precisely unites their two countries. One rationale invariably trotted out as the basis for continued strategic solidarity 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 – for example, Saudi Arabia – and maintained close ties with Turkey during the years when its democracy was quashed by the military. 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, as Islam's rise as a force in Turkish politics has made clear. In truth, there is not much in the 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: there is little else to fall back on.

To begin with, post-Cold War Turkey and the United States assess relations with Russia quite differently. 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 neighbours, particularly Ukraine. But these issues do not concern Turkey, which has expanded economic ties with Moscow. 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

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It is harder to explain what unites the two countries

several of the themes 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 Russia evokes more goodwill than the United States in Turkey today. The same dissonance between Ankara and Washington is evident on China. Washington routinely underscores China's military build-up and the long-term threat it poses to stability in East Asia, but this issue barely registers in Turkish national-security discourse. For Turkey, China is a potential partner, not a problem.

The divergence between Turkish and American perspectives resonates among all of Turkey's political constituencies. American popularity, particularly in the aftermath of the Iraq War, is at an all-time low and the notion that the United States seeks to weaken, even dismember, Turkey is commonplace, no matter how far fetched this may seem to Americans. The Bush administration, for its part, expected cooperation from a NATO ally in the run-up to the war against Iraq and regarded the Turkish parliament's vote disallowing US forces to use southeastern Turkey to open a second front against Saddam Hussein's armed forces as tantamount to betrayal. Ankara is now convinced that Washington seeks to punish it for a decision based not on animus toward the United States but on vital national interests, specifically the fear that allowing US forces to open an additional front would implicate Turkey in a war that was widely unpopular, especially in the Muslim world, and exacerbate problems in its Kurdish-populated southeast.

The effects of Iraq

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

However well intentioned or wise, Western advice that separatist passions among Turkey's 15 million Kurds are best defused through a strategy that com-

bines autonomy, the expansion of cultural rights, and greater political space for non-secessionist Kurdish organisations convinces few Turks. Most sceptical are members of the armed forces, the intelligence agencies and elites who hew to the Kemalist position that all Muslims in Turkey are essentially Turks.⁶ The Erdogan government takes a different view, arguing that Islam can accommodate, indeed supersede, ethnic distinctions among Turkey's Muslims,⁷ and that major changes have in fact been made since 2002 in policies affecting Turkey's Kurds, notably in the spheres of private education and the media, in order to meet the EU's benchmarks for political openness.

The assessment that the US-led war in Iraq has created a dire threat to Turkey's territorial integrity is particularly pronounced among Turks now. Whatever hopes Turks may have had that the February 1999 capture in Kenya of long-time PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan would destroy the PKK were dashed by an upsurge in violence in southeastern Turkey in 2006 and the revival of the organisation.⁸ The Erdogan government's reforms relating to the Kurds notwithstanding, Turkish military leaders remain convinced that the PKK must be dealt with by force and that Western proposals to address Kurdish separatism by expanding Kurds' political rights and cultural autonomy are naive, and perhaps even intended to weaken or even fragment Turkey. In the Kemalists' view, concessions to the Kurds, prompted by the lure of EU membership, amount to starting down a slippery slope and are particularly perilous because of the uncertainties created by the possible disintegration of Iraq. For the overwhelming majority of Turks – including Erdogan – preventing the rise of an independent Kurdish state in northern Iraq trumps the aspiration to join the EU. The rise of a Kurdish enclave in northern Iraq that appears independent in all but name has added to this already substantial fear. That Öcalan is feted as a hero in Iraqi Kurdistan merely fans Turkish animus and encourages conspiracy theories and dire analyses.⁹

Some PKK fighters now cross more easily from the sparsely populated areas of southeastern Turkey into havens in the Kandil Mountains of northern Iraq, where they have been seeking refuge since at least 1984. 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 Turkey's apparent special-forces operations in northern Iraq, as well as the continued presence of its military contingent. But such counter-measures can themselves make US–Turkish relations even worse, as the outcry in Turkey when its special-forces operatives were arrested and detained by American troops in July 2003 shows.¹⁰ The episode received considerable play in the Turkish media and political 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.

The status of oil-rich Kirkuk, capital of al-Tamim province, is a problem with the potential to create even greater acrimony between Ankara and Washington. Following the 1991 Gulf War, in an effort to cement Baghdad's control over the city and its environs, Saddam's regime flooded Kirkuk and its surrounding areas with Arabs (mainly Shi'ites from the south), while expelling some 100,000 Kurds, Turkmen and Christians. Once Saddam was deposed the Kurds were quick to claim ownership of Kirkuk, but so did the Iraqi Turkmen Front (Iraq Türkmen Cephesi, ITF).¹¹ Concentrated in Erbil, Mosul and Kirkuk, the Turkmen claim they are Iraq's third-largest ethnic group after Arabs and Kurds (the Assyrians make the same claim). The Iraqi Turkmen Front, which receives Turkish funding, aligned with the Shia-dominated United Iraqi Alliance in the December 2005 parliamentary elections, while other Turkmen parties 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 kinship.¹²

But more is involved here than cultural solidarity. In Turkey's calculus, Kurdish control of Kirkuk's oil wealth, which accounts for some 40% of Iraq's total output and a larger proportion of its natural gas production, will boost the viability of a putative Kurdish state. A confrontation between Kurds and Turkmen over the ownership of Kirkuk could provoke Turkish military intervention. Clashes have already made the city a violent place, unlike the rest of northern Iraq. No matter how American policymakers assess the probability of such an extreme outcome, it would be foolish to rule it out or discount the effect it would have on the alliance with Turkey.¹³ It would be unwise to assume, given that Ankara did nothing in the face of Saddam's killings of Turkmen, that Turkey's bark will prove worse than its bite: Ankara's calculus has changed now that the collapse of Iraq looms as a possibility.

Ankara insists that it has a strong historical interest in Kirkuk: what is now northern Iraq was transferred from the Ottoman Empire, despite Turkish opposition, under the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, and 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.¹⁴ An inflow of some 350,000 Kurds to Kirkuk, many with no ties to the city, with encouragement and material assistance from the Kurdistan Regional Government, has been paralleled

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by the departure of the city's Arab and Turkmen population. In Ankara's view, this demographic transformation threatens to predecide the referendum over the city's future set to take place before the end of 2007. Turkish concerns about Kirkuk have been heightened by the Kurdistan Regional Government's assertion that it can legitimately assign rights to develop the disputed territory's oil fields and its decision to sign agreements with foreign oil companies.¹⁵

The nervousness evoked by the prospect of a Kurdish state emerging from the detritus of Iraq has created an alignment among Turkey and its neighbours Syria and Iran. The rise of a Kurdish state in northern Iraq would provide a stimulus to Kurdish nationalism in all three countries, particularly Iran, where the Party for a Free Life in Kurdistan (Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistané, PJAK), led by Haji Ahmadi, has been battling Iranian security forces with greater intensity, while using Iraqi Kurdish territory as a sanctuary.¹⁶ That the Iranian Kurds seem to hew to a different political line than the PKK – liberal rather than Marxist; seeking autonomy rather than independence – mollifies neither Ankara nor Tehran. Although Syria and Iran supported the PKK in the past as a means of squeezing Turkey, and while Saddam aided Iranian Kurdish groups during the 1980–88 Iran–Iraq war, the three states are now aligned against the PKK and have even attacked its positions in the mountainous north of Iraqi Kurdistan. US and Turkish assessments of Iran and Syria have diverged following the Iraq War, and Turkey is apt to oppose tough American tactics against either country for fear that such steps would weaken the regimes and strengthen Kurdish nationalism.

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Turkey, the EU and the US

Turkey's growing antipathy toward the United States is accompanied by anger directed at the EU, flowing mainly from frustration over the delay in admitting Turkey to the Union. While the United States can only shape EU decisions relating to Turkey at the margins, and has in fact pressed for Turkey's admission, increasing animus toward Europe among Turks seems to be strengthening their already strong anti-Americanism.

Support for EU accession has plummeted in Turkey. Since Turkey first applied for admission to the European Economic Community in 1959 as an associate member, enthusiasm for integration with Europe had been high. While the path was not always smooth, Turkey became an associate member in 1963, applied for full membership in 1987, entered into a customs union with the EU in 1995 and was invited in 2005 to start formal talks on full membership. To Turks, the prize seemed at hand. But the start of accession talks made EU–Turkish relations worse, not better. The EU has been forced to recognise that Turkey might

actually join the club, a prospect that worries many member states. Admitting 70 million Turks is seen as qualitatively different from extending membership to Greece in 1981 or the Baltic states following the fall of the Soviet Union. But Poland has a population of 38m, and the total population of states that have joined the EU since 1990 approximates Turkey's. Although rarely stated publicly by European leaders, the paramount difference is that Turkey would be the EU's first Muslim member. Quite apart from the cultural shift this would entail for many Europeans, there is a growing unease, even fear, in Europe centred on Islamic extremism following the atrocities of 11 September, the bombings in Madrid and London, and the 2004 murder by a Muslim extremist of Dutch filmmaker and director Theo van Gogh. While these atrocities were perpetrated by militants who invoke what most Muslims consider a warped reading of Islam, such doctrinal distinctions are lost on many Europeans increasingly aware of the 20m Muslims living in their midst. Turks are increasingly convinced this is the real reason why Turkey's application to the EU seems less and less likely to succeed. The offer of a 'privileged partnership' in the Union is viewed as a sop, an act of bad faith and confirmation of the growing suspicion 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 only recently had state-controlled, largely non-market economies and see that some Baltic and east-central European countries, among them Hungary, Poland and Lithuania, seem to be backsliding in the indices the EU uses in 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 already 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 the Second World War, but as another pretext to keep Turkey standing at the gate. They wonder why Turkey received no tangible reward for inducing Turkish Cypriots in April 2004 to accept a referendum on creating a confederation in Cyprus, even though it was rejected by the Republic of Cyprus. As Turks see it, they got nothing for their effort, while Cyprus gained EU membership, and with it the capacity to veto Turkey's bid for membership. Turkish outrage was strengthened by the EU decision to put negotiations on Turkey's accession on hold until Ankara allowed Cypriot vessels into Turkish ports. And as if to add insult to injury, 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 the recently admitted east-central European members.¹⁷ There is now a consensus among Turks of all political persuasions that the EU is humiliating Turkey by treating it as a supplicant. Two-thirds of Turks supported EU membership as late as 2004; only a third do so now.¹⁸

Turks' conviction that the EU is stalling Turkish membership has created an angry nationalism directed at the West in general. 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 was voiced by the powerful chief of staff of the armed forces, General Yasar Buyukanit – during an official visit to the United States, no less.¹⁹ Turks are feeling rebuffed by Europe at the very time they believe the United States has, by invading Iraq, presented Turkey with a dire threat. The two sources of resentment reinforce one another. Instead of Turkish ire at the EU strengthening US–Turkish ties, it paradoxically feeds Turkish animus toward Washington and prompts discussions among Turkish elites about mapping new directions and strategies in foreign policy.

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This talk about a strategic recalculation might simply be empty rhetoric from a Turkey that is angry and wants Washington to notice. But it would be foolhardy to put the proposition to the test; the costs to the United States of being wrong would be considerable and long lasting. The wiser course would be to take steps to ensure the continued vitality of an alliance that both Ankara and Washington need to deal effectively with unfamiliar dangers, and 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 20 years.

The alliance appears to be on auto-pilot even as it veers off course. America'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 the badly frayed alliance could fall apart.

Notes

¹ Ian O. Lesser, 'Turkey, the United States and the Delusion of Geopolitics', *Survival*, vol. 48, no. 3, Autumn 2006, p. 83. The same point 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, 6 March 2007, 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. 65–6.
 - 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>.
 - 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 This seems not to apply to the Shia Alevi minority, which AKP acolytes regard as veritable apostates.
 - 8 This despite the arcane splits that followed Öcalan's arrest, producing changes in ideology and nomenclature. 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 Partîya Welatparêzên Kurdistan (Patriotic Democratic Front), led by Öcalan's brother, Osman, also emerged. To compound the confusion, the new names may have created separate organisations. For details, see James Brandon, 'The Evolution of the PKK: New Faces, New Challenges', *Jamestown Foundation, Terrorism Monitor*, vol. 4, no. 23, 30 November, 2006, pp. 4–7; 'Predicament after the PKK Leaders Trial', <http://www.enclpedia.com/doc/1G1-131997305.html>.
 - 9 Öcalan's prestige among Iraqi Kurds was observed first-hand by Christopher Bellaigue. See his 'The Uncontainable Kurds', *New York Review of Books*, 1 March, 2007, p. 35.
 - 10 'Detention Strains Already Tense US–Turkey Relations', *Christian Science Monitor*, 15 July 2003, <http://www.csmonitor.com/2003/0715/p11s01-woeu.html>. Established in 1995, the ITF subsumes six political parties.
 - 11 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. 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.
 - 12 The Iraqi Turkmen are Oghuz Turks (descendants of the Seljuks, who created an empire that spread west from Central Asia in the eleventh century), as are the Turks of modern-day Turkey.
 - 13 See Carol Migdalovitz, 'Iraq: The Turkish Factor', CRS Report for Congress, Congressional Research Service Report, updated 31 October 2002.
 - 14 For a statement of the Turkish position, see 'An Inhouse [sic] Debate on the Future of Iraq', Foreign Policy Institute, 6 March 2007, <http://www.foreignpolicy.org.tr/documents/220207.html>.
 - 15 We draw here on 'Iraqi Turkmen: Challenges Surrounding Kirkuk', Washington Institute for Near East Policy Studies, 18 January 2007, <http://www.unpo/article.php?id=6180>. For a detailed (32-page) analysis of the complex dispute over Kirkuk, see International Crisis Group, *Iraq*

- and the Kurds: The Brewing Battle over Kirkuk*, Middle East Report No. 56 (Washington DC: ICG, 18 July 2006).
- ¹⁶ On PJAK, see Mahan Abedin, 'Iran's Enemy Lurking Within', *Asia Times Online*, 8 June 2006, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/HFo8AKo3.html; James Brandon, 'Mount Kandil: A Safe Haven for Kurdish Militants – Part 1', Jamestown Foundation, *Terrorism Monitor*, vol. 4, no. 17, 8 September 2006, pp. 1–3, and Part 2, vol. 4, no. 18, 21 September 2006), pp. 1–4.
- ¹⁷ 'Turkey Will Not Respond to EU Deadline', *International Herald Tribune*, 21 November 2006; Gordon and Taspinar, 'Turkey on The Brink', p. 64.
- ¹⁸ Omer Taspinar, 'Turkey's Fading Dream of Europe', *Current History*, vol. 206, no. 698, March 2007, p. 124.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 125: 'Turkish Nationalism: Waving Ataturk's Flag', *Economist*, 10 March 2007, pp. 45–6.

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