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No. 100



THE BEGIN-SADAT CENTER
FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES

Obama's Best Friend? The Alarming Evolution of US-Turkish Relations

Ariel Cohen

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Obama's Best Friend? The Alarming Evolution of US-Turkish Relations

Executive Summary

Over the last decade, shifts in Turkey's domestic political orientation have led to a fundamental change in Turkey's perceptions of its foreign policy roles and capabilities. Turkey sees itself first as an independent, regional power and a leader of the Islamic world, and only then a US and NATO ally. This fundamental shift in US-Turkish bilateral relations endangers shared US-Turkish objectives in the Middle East, eastern Mediterranean, the Caucasus, and Iran.

However, the US and its policy-making elite have misunderstood and largely ignored this shift, and appear to fail to understand the implications of Turkey's geopolitical and internal transformation under the AKP. The US cannot and should not any longer take for granted Ankara's cooperation in several critical zones of US vital interests.

The US must take several steps while reassessing its Turkey policy. Washington must, among other things, support secularist forces in Turkey; use the rift between Turkey and Iran as a means to strip Tehran of an important partner; encourage Turkey to support less radical elements in Syria; heighten expectations of Turkey as a significant regional ally, and remind it of its obligations to NATO and the US; develop a comprehensive policy regarding the Kurdish question; and increase the diplomatic level of mediation between Turkey and Israel.

A strong and comprehensive policy towards Turkey based on unflinching recognition of its internal change, together with a clearly articulated US policy based on its national interests and values, is long overdue.

Obama's Best Friend? The Alarming Evolution of US-Turkish Relations

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Obama's Best Friend?

The Alarming Evolution of US-Turkish Relations

Ariel Cohen

INTRODUCTION

For decades, Turkey was a staunch ally of the United States and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Commanding the second-largest military in NATO, Turkey strove to enter the Western fold since the final decades of the Ottoman Empire. After the Atatürk authoritarian era, it at times looked as if Turkey had succeeded – especially in the last two decades of the twentieth century. However, despite the perception of close relations between the US and Turkey, there is in reality a broad chasm between the two nations, the latter under the rule of the “moderate” Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP), and the gap is continuing to grow.

US interests in Turkey encompass matters of strategic, economic, and regional political importance. Turkey is important to American regional interests, with its active involvement in the Arab uprisings and potential balancing and mediating role in the frozen conflicts of the South Caucasus. While Turkey has traditionally played the pro-American foil against various interests in the Black and Caspian Seas – and shares an economically and politically important border with Iraq, a critical US political investment – this is changing. A Western-leaning Ankara also could have the opportunity to act as a partner to Washington and to American ally Israel and cooperate against the anti-status quo Islamic Republic of Iran. Thus, close US-Turkish relations, if they were to continue, are vital to American interests in the post-Soviet space and, especially, the Middle East.

Simultaneously, the Turkish Republic is a major emerging market, with a 2012 GDP of \$795 billion,¹ growing quickly and steadily over the last several years and bringing in increasing foreign investment. Turkey

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is also a significant energy transit state, with its pipeline infrastructure increasing in relevance as it expands every year. The country already moves Russian, Caspian, Iranian, and Iraqi oil and gas to domestic and Western markets. To the United States and its allies this infrastructure is vital to the close economic ties which underpin political relations.

In the last decade, however, shifts in Turkey's domestic political orientation have led to a fundamental change in Turkey's perceptions of its foreign policy roles and capabilities. Turkey sees itself as an independent, regional power first, a leader of the Islamic world second, and a US and NATO ally as a distant third. This is a fundamental shift in US-Turkish bilateral relations, one which endangers shared US-Turkish objectives in North Africa, the Middle East (including the eastern Mediterranean), the Caucasus, and Iran. The United States and its policy-making elite, however, have misunderstood and largely ignored this shift, and to date appear to fail to understand the implications of Turkey's geopolitical and internal transformation under the AKP. The US cannot and should not any longer take for granted Ankara's cooperation in several critical zones of US vital interests.

Since the 2002 advent of the AKP to power, Turkey's newly empowered Islamic elites have re-evaluated the role of both Western and Eastern influence, with conservative Islamic businessmen from the Black Sea and Central Turkish regions driving both economic and political change.

This has influenced Turkish foreign policy as well, shifting Ankara away from a number of pro-US positions towards a more anti-Western and Islamist direction. Ankara is seeking to move away from the perceived decline of Europe and the US, and is aspiring first and foremost to expand Turkey's regional footprint, at times to the detriment of Turkey's obligations to the West. Ankara's lack of cooperation on Iran and anti-Israeli policies and support of Islamist fighters in Syria are clear cases in point.

The George W. Bush Administration experienced Ankara's change of heart firsthand, with Turkey's refusal to allow transit to the US 4th Armored Division transit to Northern Iraq in 2003, and a temporary delay of US naval passage in the Bosphorus for ships bringing American aid to

Georgia during the August War of 2008. Ankara's decision to prioritize its regional ambitions, while effectively giving succor to Russia, should have been a warning to President Barack Obama when he entered the White House.

In dealing with US-Turkish relations, the United States has done little to counter or influence Turkey's movement away from the West. Obama has a strong personal connection to Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and his administration has pursued select cooperation with the AKP regime, such as on Syria and Iraq, but maintained a hands-off approach with regards to Erdoğan's overall foreign policy course.

The US has praised Turkey's proclaimed democratization, in line with American worldwide support for human rights and democratic politics, but the Obama Administration has failed to recognize both the AKP's domestic anti-liberal politics and the negative consequences of Turkey's new and ambitious foreign policy. Thus, the United States has reacted minimally to Turkey's overtures to Iran, its rejection of a decades-long friendship with Israel, and its close connections with Islamists in the Middle East. Nor has the United States capitalized on the shared objective to stop the civil war in Syria or to coordinate policies in order to remove the Assad regime without allowing Islamists to take over. Washington was isolated when Turkey and its Arab allies, such as Qatar and Saudi Arabia, led the charge supporting radical Islamists in Syria.

To better understand Turkey's changes in policy, it is noteworthy that the United States failed to convince its European allies to resolve the Turkish EU membership issue, which has generated a great deal of bitterness within the Turkish electorate. In fact, American leaders, such as the former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, British Prime Minister David Cameron, and major public intellectuals believe Turkey was helped onto its drifting path by the inability or unwillingness of the European Union to accept and integrate it into the EU ranks. While in the past, these voices have stated a desire to remedy this alleged neglect on the part of the United States, nothing concrete has been achieved so far.

In addition, Turkey's increasingly anti-Western foreign policy is a result of not only of the party's Islamist and Middle Eastern leanings, but also

the product of complacency, neglect, and appeasement on the part of the United States and Europe. Since the rise of the AKP, US-Turkish relations have been characterized by Washington's passivity in the face of an active Turkish foreign policy which is drifting away from the US and NATO-led course. President Obama may be striving to avoid a confrontation with an increasingly powerful regional economic and political player like today's Turkey because he believes the US cannot win due to its economic problems. If so, he has not articulated this position. What has been visible from the outside is that Washington has failed to understand Turkey's domestic and foreign policy shifts, preferring the bromides of "close cooperation" and "friendship."²

This paper seeks to examine what Turkey's newly assertive foreign policy means for Washington, how it will affect US interests in the region, how the US has responded, and what the outcomes may be in the face of this response. Specifically, this paper will focus on how Turkey's relations with Israel, the Islamic world, and Russia highlight the extent to which Ankara has moved away from pro-US orientation, and will illustrate the administration's inaction in view of this transformation.

In order to understand the evolution of Turkish foreign policy as articulated by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, President Abdullah Gül, and other decision-makers, this paper recognizes that the AKP is not simply another party-taking office, but a political movement that strives to oust and replace former political elites and reorganize the traditional Turkish institutions that bound the country to Western values and American interests. The AKP is leading a wide-ranging, incremental political revolution – something that many in Washington fail to grasp, or chose to ignore.

This paper will begin by explaining paradigm-changing shifts in Turkish domestic politics caused by the rise of the AKP and the subsequent strategic shifts in Ankara's foreign policymaking institutions. The paper will then give an overview of US policies and approaches in dealing with Turkey, as well as the Washington, DC intellectual debate concerning US-Turkish ties. Following this, the paper will examine specific characteristics and conflicts that have emerged as daylight grows between American and Turkish foreign policy priorities. Finally, this paper will offer a number

of recommendations to ensure a more successful, mutually beneficial US-Turkish relationship in the future.

TURKEY'S NEW FOREIGN POLICY: SULTANIC STRATAGEMS

Prior to the AKP's rise to power, the US could rely on Turkey's staunch friendship as a NATO ally. That Turkish soldiers fought and died alongside their US brethren in Korea in the 1950s, as well as Turkey's cozy relationship with Israel, were emblems of the closeness of the US-Turkish alliance from the 1940s to 1990s. However, foreign policy under the AKP has undergone a shift that tied Turkey to the Arab Middle East, causing Ankara to develop relations with Iran and expand its relations with Russia, while disregarding the United States and fracturing its historic links with Israel.

During the Cold War, Turkey's role as bulwark against the Soviet southern flank was invaluable. Although things were never perfect, there was cooperation based on common values and mutual interests between the United States and Turkey until 2002. When the Cold War ended, the United States focused its economic and political energies on expanding NATO and developing ties with the newly independent post-Soviet states. The Turks were angered when, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, it appeared to them that the Euro-Atlantic community was far more interested in expansion to Eastern Europe than in closer integration with their country. The Turks had expected accession to the EU and a continuing role as a critical security actor. Increasing Turkish frustration with the EU's haughtiness and the indifference of the United States opened a window of opportunity for Ahmet Davutoğlu, Turkey's foreign minister since 2009, to begin implementing a policies described in his important, albeit controversial book, *Strategic Depth* (which has still not been translated into English, to the detriment of Western decision-makers).³

Davutoğlu's attempts to move Turkey's foreign policy from a reactive to a predictive strategy based on a foreign policy aimed at resurrecting Turkey's imperial grandeur are far from sure-fire. One observer wrote:

Neo-Ottomanism sees Turkey as a regional superpower. Its strategic vision and culture reflect the geographic reach of the Ottoman and Byzantine Empires. Turkey, as a pivotal state, should thus play an active diplomatic, political, and economic role in a wide region of which it is the “center.” Such grand ambitions, in turn, require a nation-state at peace with its multiple identities, including its Muslim and Ottoman past.⁴

Davutoğlu described Turkey as the center of three geopolitical circles: the Balkans, the Black Sea basin, and the Caucasus; the Middle East and the eastern Mediterranean; and the Persian Gulf, Africa, and Central Asia.

This policy, which has been labeled “neo-Ottomanism” by supporters and detractors alike, focuses in theory on developing ties with Turkey’s neighbors – former subjects of the Ottoman Empire, or “the East” – as a means to complement their existing ties with the Euro-Atlantic community, or “the West.” Davutoğlu’s foreign policy seeks to establish Turkey as a regional, Islamic leader first and foremost – even, if necessary, at the cost of its security and foreign policy ties with the US and the West.

Davutoğlu’s “strategic depth” approach was predicated upon a policy of “zero problems with neighbors.” Today, given the strife between Turkey and the Assad regime and many other developments, there is more than a whiff of irony in this term. The Turkish Foreign Ministry’s official explanation of this principle outlines both the Turkish desire to be the primary a power in multiple regions, and the tactic of immediate engagement with surrounding nations:

Anchoring peace, stability, and security on firm foundations in such a global environment...becomes a necessity...As a matter of fact, one of the rare common denominators of many countries, which have significant disagreements over deep-rooted problems in our region, is their confidence towards Turkey. Likewise, the level reached by Turkey in the field of economic development and democracy has broadened her

foreign policy outreach and increased her power of impact in this domain.⁵

The policy has appeared to fail in a number of cases. The Armenian rapprochement – which was encouraged by Washington and involved a widely-publicized incident in which Erdoğan invited his Armenian counterpart to a soccer game as a part of his so-called “football diplomacy”⁶ – was halted after Turkey decided to link rapprochement to resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Greek engagement has stalled because of over the ongoing conflict over Northern Cyprus, and, in January 2011, over a planned Greek border fence to prevent Turkish and other migrants from entering the EU.⁷ In addition, relations with the Arab states have grown immensely complicated due to the “Arab Spring” uprisings.

Ankara’s foreign policy drift highlights a belief in Turkish exceptionalism as an Islamist democracy and a leader of the Muslim world.⁸ Turkey began seeking a dominant role in the Muslim world, whether that role was desired by other countries or not, and began steering itself away from its twentieth century self-identity as a successfully Westernizing nation and a key US partner. The trend of thought may have gained momentum following the “Arab Spring,” as Turkey’s economic successes can clearly be touted and Ankara’s abuses of civil society can perhaps be brushed off in comparison to the chaos and violence that has seized some of the Arab countries. Although the United States has demonstrated some support for Turkey serving as a “role model” for the transforming Arab societies, America has demonstrated little resistance to Turkey’s strategic re-orientation towards the Islamic world.

THE DOMESTIC ROOTS OF AKP FOREIGN POLICY: SOURCES OF DIVISION WITHIN THE WEST

Washington’s response to the excesses of the AKP’s foreign and domestic practices indicates a grave misunderstanding of Islamism in general and of the AKP’s ascendancy in particular. It is critical for United States policymakers to recognize that the AKP’s “democratic” victory in Turkey is not a simple transfer of power to another party with a different political

platform. The advent of the AKP began and will continue to a total dismantling of the Kemalist vision and institutions that guided Turkey as a secular, Western-oriented nation-state for the last eight decades. When the newly-created AKP and Erdogan came to power, they promised to bring Turkey's civil society and its political sphere into a new era of democracy. However, the AKP took steps to assure its power would not be challenged. When blocked in any direction, the AKP's course has been to bend the rules – legally, illegally, and semi-legally – to ensure a lasting dominance that belies any promises of liberalization. Having brought the military and judiciary systems – the traditional balances to party politics – to heel, Turkey's prime minister has acted on his own infamous joke: "Democracy is like a streetcar. You ride it until you arrive at your destination and then you step off."⁹

On September 12, 2010, Erdogan forced a nationwide referendum to accept or reject 26 constitutional amendments. Among the articles were propositions that limited powers of the country's Supreme Court: increasing the number of judges and placing their selection in the hands of the parliament, which is currently dominated by the AKP. Another article expanded the Supreme Council of Judges and Prosecutors, with the administration playing a greater role in appointments.¹⁰ Thus, the prime minister brought the judiciary under his party's political control.¹¹ The AKP also managed to check the military's authority. The government now has the right to bring to trial any soldier in a civilian court, severely limiting the military's traditional autonomy, its historic role as the guardian of secularism, and its military tribunals' exclusive jurisdiction. Servicemen accused of responsibility for "crimes against state security" or the country's constitutional principles can now be tried in civilian courts. Also, soldiers discharged by military courts have gained the right to challenge military court decisions in civilian court.¹² This referendum took an important political step away from the state's secular nature and, indirectly, away from its alliance with the United States and NATO. The referendum passed 58 percent to 42 percent, a victory that increased the AKP's control of the judiciary and the diplomatic service, weakened the separation of powers, diluted checks and balances, further defanged the army, and undermined Turkey's pillars of secularism.

Instead of attempting to reverse Turkey's drift away from secularism, the Obama Administration and leaders of the European powers and the EU offered only plaudits to Erdoğan and the AKP for these "progressive" reforms. Though the AKP again won national elections again in 2011, the party did not obtain the supermajority votes required to accomplish their eventual ambition, which is to rewrite the constitution altogether. Nevertheless, in its pursuit for further power, the AKP under Erdoğan is utilizing unethical, undemocratic, and illegal methods to bring the country's military, intellectual, and media forces under control.

The most visible proof of this is the controversial "Ergenekon conspiracy," which AKP-friendly investigators and prosecutors unveiled in 2007, with nary a word from Washington. Some 600 suspects, including former military generals, senior officers and intellectuals, many friendly to the US, were arrested in 2007.¹³ These numbers have continued to grow in the last years. Individuals, often from the military, media, or political/intellectual classes, who oppose the AKP or Islamists, are arrested for wrongdoings despite a lack of evidence. These individuals are then held in detention for extended periods of time without any charges, while the rest of the society is intimidated. Cases began to be heard in 2009-2010, and the individuals involved in a number of these "plots" or purportedly dangerous scenarios are then tied up with attempting to defend themselves after extended periods in prison. Alleged assassination and conspiracy cases have been merged into the Ergenekon trials. Significant inconsistencies have been discovered in a number of the investigations relating to the arrests. Phones had been tapped, apparently by the secret services and police, at times without court orders, and the wiretaps were illegally leaked to the pro-AKP media.¹⁴

It is important to note that journalists, and not just members of the military, are frequent victims of the AKP, in arrests ordered in connection with the Ergenekon witch hunt. In March 2011, several journalists were picked up.¹⁵ They were put on trial nearly a year later, in January 2012, having remained in detention until that time. Although the Turkish government has argued that a limited number of journalists have been arrested, the Turkish Journalists' Union announced that 97 members of the news media have been detained.¹⁶ Although the US State Department has

issued statements of concern about Turkey's treatment of journalism and censorship of the free press, these complaints have been minimal. The US remains inactive as one of its NATO allies blatantly violates the rule of law and freedom of the press.

Turkey's economic success may serve for now to protect Erdoğan's – and the AKP's – political dominance. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) reported that Turkey's economy grew at a rate of 8.9 percent in 2010,¹⁷ while analysis from *The Economist* pegged Turkish growth at 8.5 percent in 2011.¹⁸ But the sustainability of growth is what experts are casting doubts about as the economy is overheating. In 2012, *The Economist's* correspondents pointed out that Turkey's current account deficit has continued to grow, that "Turkey's deficit is second only to America's" as a percentage of GDP, and that the country remains dependent on foreign financing while the Turkish central bank has failed to contain inflation.¹⁹ Thus, despite the anti-democratic tilt and repressive measures of the AKP, barring any significant financial deterioration, Turkish voters will apparently not vote against a party that reinvigorated the economy.

OBAMA'S POLICY TOWARD TURKEY: IGNORING US NATIONAL INTERESTS?

One of President Obama's most famous speeches on US engagement with the Muslim world occurred in Turkey, in April 2009. It is not surprising that Obama referred to Turkey as a "model" for the Muslim world, and to the US-Turkish relationship as the model for future generations and operations. Upon Obama's election, the United States was expected to develop an increasingly conciliatory relationship with the various states of the Muslim world, and to try to "atone" for the previous administrations' mishaps. Instead of antagonizing the Muslim world, Obama's intention was to cooperate and partner with what he considers as reasonable, moderate allied states like Turkey, to foment closer ties with the United States.

Turkey, a traditional US ally with what was assumed to be a moderate Islamic presence, was to be seen as the ideal model for American engagement with and support for democratization efforts in the Arab

world. The promotion of Turkey's model in those countries was designed to demonstrate both the potential of democracy in a Muslim world and the potential for good relations with the United States. In pursuing his relationship with Turkey, however, President Obama has lacked both the sense of reality and action; the rising concerns which emerged as Turkey began to re-establish a new, neo-Ottoman regionally-oriented foreign policy aimed at dominance in the Middle East have been ignored by the administration. It appears that the president's failure to act is a result of confusion and the lack of understanding of the internal processes shaping the external behavior of the Second Turkish Republic led by the AKP and Erdoğan.

It is significant that under the AKP, Turkish foreign policy has become increasingly regionally oriented, and in many cases affected bilateral ties with the United States only indirectly. However, many key relationships – such as with Iran, Iraq, Syria, Israel, and Egypt – have a strong US dimension. In many cases, Turkish policies contradict US interests, such as with Iran (Turkey is violating economic sanctions by buying gas for gold), Syria (Turkey supports radical Islamists fighting the government), and Israel (Turkey has become a sponsor of the US and EU-designated terrorist organization Hamas and engaged in a clearly provocative campaign designed to generate a highly publicized crisis in 2010 with the *Mavi Marmara's* attempted breach of the Israeli Gaza blockade).

However, when President Obama visited Turkey in April 2009 and spoke in Turkey's parliament in Ankara, he stated that the US-Turkish relationship was a model for other US ties around the world. Obama was and is convinced that the key to the relationship between the US and Turkey lies in the AKP's image as a moderate Islamic regime. The last years, however, have shown Obama's weak hand in dealing with US foreign affairs in general, and with Turkey in particular. Mostly, though, the AKP leadership has realized – and taken advantage of – the fractures and weaknesses in the Euro-Atlantic sphere. It turned to the Muslim East in order to gain substantial power and influence, while confident that it will lose relatively little in the West.

However, the Obama Administration has not sought to influence Turkish foreign policy to protect American interests. The United States did

not help guide the Turkish leadership in its dealings with the “Arab Spring” away from the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafis, and toward support of pro-Western forces, most probably because its own view and understanding of the turmoil was deeply flawed. At least at the outset, the Obama Administration clearly considered the Muslim Brotherhood as a strategic diplomatic partner in Egypt and elsewhere in the Middle East and erroneously viewed elections as the principal measurement of democratization.²⁰ This is part of the administration’s belief that embracing “moderate Islam” is the key to improving relations between the US and the Muslim world. The recent deeply-flawed political machinations in Egypt, which led to adoption of a hastily rammed-through Islamist constitution, did not help matters.

Egypt’s Basic Law fails to protect Coptic Christians and women while enshrining Muslim Brotherhood leader President Mohamed Morsi as a dictator-in-the-making. The resounding lack of denunciation by Obama in the wake of these developments indicate that the president has yet to understand the depth to which his administration’s thinking in this area is dangerous as far as US interests – and the stability of the Middle East – are concerned.

Nor did Obama prevent Turkey from initially siding with Col. Muammar Gaddafi during the crisis in Libya, though Ankara eventually did switch sides to support the anti-Gaddafi forces, or attempt to curb Ankara’s heavy handed attempts to legitimize Iran’s runaway nuclear program.

In the fall of 2012, the US administration should have exploited fractures developing between Turkey and Iran and Turkey and Russia as a result of the Syrian civil conflict. Instead, Washington failed to stop Ankara from derailing US and EU sanctions on Tehran and, at least openly, had little to say about Turkey’s gold-for-gas trade with Iran in violation of those sanctions. Most recently, the Obama Administration’s efforts to persuade Turkey and several of the Arab states away from supporting Salafis and other radical Islamists in favor of more secular elements in the Syrian opposition have failed.

Meanwhile, Obama has spent time developing a close personal relationship with the Turkish prime minister, touting the supposedly

ideal state of the US-Turkish partnership and literally hugging Erdoğan at international summits.

At least as far as Turkey is concerned, Congress can play a more substantive – and critical – role. In 2010, the passage of a resolution by the House International Relations committee condemning Turkey's early twentieth century mass murders of the Armenians compelled the Turkish government to withdraw its US ambassador.²¹ The resolution was criticized by the White House; then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stated that both she and Obama "do not believe any action by the Congress [in this area] is appropriate, and...oppose it."²²

Obama's lack of a substantive strategy, beyond consultations over Syria and singling out Erdoğan as a personal friend, should be raising more than eyebrows in Washington. It should also raise questions about the nature and direction of the administration's foreign policy, not only in relation to Turkey. The same questions arise with regards to the relationship emerging with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and elsewhere, as demonstrated by the White House visit of a Brotherhood delegation and Clinton's profuse praise of President Morsi. This happened in the wake of the 2012 Israel-Hamas ceasefire, on the eve of Morsi's assumption of unprecedented powers and the adoption by "referendum" in Egypt of the anti-democratic and Islamist constitution.²³

The Obama Administration has not realized that the Turks are not impressed by mere gestures of friendship, which they view as a sign of weakness, as they pursue a strategically significant policy that will increase their independence and power through a rapprochement to the Sunni Muslim Arab states, as well as with Iran, Iraq, and China. Nor will the AKP respond to entreaties and appeasement. Since the advent of the Obama Administration, Ankara's dismissal of American requests to mend the Turkish-Israeli relationship have only proved this point. Curiously, although there have been a number of conversations between Obama and the AKP leadership, very little follow-through is evident on the part of the United States on any of the significant issues. For example, Obama has not pursued a meaningful role for Turkey in the rebuilding of Iraq, particularly given Turkey's traditional place as a transit state for Iraqi oil via the Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline and plans to build gas pipelines from the

Kurdish territory into Turkey. Nor has the administration attempted to recruit Turkey as a transit point for supplies to Afghanistan, despite the political uncertainties of the Northern Distribution Network via Russia or Georgia, and the dangers of the trans-Pakistan war supplies route.

Important European and American voices have warned against neglecting Turkey as an ally, although these warnings have largely fallen on deaf ears. In 2010, US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates argued that Turkey's strategic realignment was occurring partially because of the European Union's reluctance to grant Turkey full membership. NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen reiterated Gates' point, criticizing the European Union for its "unfair" treatment of Turkey. British Prime Minister David Cameron said, "It is just wrong to say that Turkey can guard the camp but not be allowed to sit in the tent."²⁵ Nevertheless, the EU continued to send mixed messages to Turkey, granting it accession status but refusing to consider some of the chapters of the *acquis communautaire*, the EU legal code, which Ankara must sign and execute for accession.

President Obama also voiced support for Turkey's membership in the EU, which led to a clash with then French President Nicolas Sarkozy in 2009; however, his administration applied little consistent pressure on Europe to develop stronger ties with Ankara. Nor has the United States used the diplomatic, economic, and political tools at its disposal to censure Turkey for its Eastern drift. This lack of meaningful and consistent action on the part of the US on both fronts indicates a lack of understanding, a fundamental absence of interest in anchoring Turkey to the West, and unwillingness to invest political capital to keep Turkey in the American orbit.

As Turkey's accession to the European Union has continued to stall, frustration with the EU process has led to disinterest on the part of the Turkish public in membership, particularly following the European debt crises and the instability of the European financial system, which erupted in 2011. According to a 2010 *Al-Jazeera* report, only some 38 percent of the population supported joining the European Union, a drop from the 74 percent supporting ascension in 2004.²⁶ This skepticism may only rise further.

From across Washington, experts have disagreed about how to most effectively act with regards to Turkey. Although the DC think-tank community has read Turkey's behavior in a variety of ways, each has emphasized the danger of US passivity regarding Turkey's changing world view and policy. Neo-conservative foreign policy analysts, such as Michael Rubin from the American Enterprise Institute, have argued that Turkey has re-oriented its policy to emphasize ties with potentially hostile Middle Eastern states and turned its back on its region-stabilizing relationship with Israel. Rubin noted that the AKP effectively used the anti-militaristic provisions of the EU accession requirements to undermine the military's power to regulate and moderate the nature of the Turkish sociopolitical structure, and created a nominal democracy fraught with gaps in the protection of civil society and basic freedoms.²⁷ In 2010, Rubin stated his disagreement with selling F-35 fighter jets to Turkey, given that the country's foreign policy direction seemed to be moving away from American interests. By late 2011, and in light of Turkey's continuing support for Sudan's genocide, various terrorist organizations, and rogue Middle Eastern states, as well as its continuous and very public antagonism towards Israel, Rubin suggested that Turkey's role in NATO should be questioned altogether.²⁸

Soner Çagaptay of the Washington Institute pointed out in August 2012 that the Turkish government has essentially dismissed the Kemalist, secular state model in favor of its Ottoman heritage.²⁹ In June of last year, Çagaptay also warned that Turkey has some incentives to leave NATO altogether, in favor of rising economic powers like the BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) or emerging democracies, like the IBSATI (India, Brazil, South Africa, Turkey, and Indonesia). His recommendation is that a concerted effort be made by NATO to engage and support the Turkish Republic:

It could, for instance, design a program for new democracies in the Arab world, similar to its post-Soviet Partnership for Peace initiative, and grant Turkey status as the lead nation in this endeavor. A NATO mechanism with a heavy Turkish flavor would excite far fewer antibodies among Arab partners than bilateral security cooperation programs run by individual Western nations. It would also give NATO an opportunity to

invest in Turkey without a large armed presence.³⁰

Other intellectual forces are more conciliatory. In 2010, Henri Barkey, a veteran Turkey watcher, argued that the problem is miscommunication – Turkey needs the United States, despite their misunderstanding of US policy.³¹ While Barkey recognized the “acrimony” between Turkey and the United States, he argued that relations have always been prickly.

A Council on Foreign Relations taskforce on US-Turkish relations chaired by former Secretary of State Madeline Albright and former Bush Administration National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley reiterated a similar position. US-Turkish relations have never been smooth. Turkey has changed dramatically, but this does not necessarily spell the end of a meaningful relationship. Instead, the United States must recognize that its previous expectations must be modified to adapt to Turkey’s evolving political landscape and international profile. The taskforce suggested that the US see Turkey as a potential strategic partner, comparable to India and Brazil, and even as much as Japan and South Korea.³²

The taskforce recommended a new relationship based on “no foreign policy surprises,” calling for a transition from close ties between the American and Turkish heads of state to cooperation between relevant agencies and departments, to focus on new potential areas of joint collaboration, including a positive role in the “Arab Spring.” Overall, the taskforce sees Turkey as a nation undergoing a gradual transition, not radical transformation, to a system based on political Islam, and attributes a number of Ankara’s more troubling domestic and foreign policy shifts to this incomplete evolution. The taskforce calls on America to play a positive role in the country through enhanced, more sophisticated communication.

The Brookings Institution’s Omer Taspinar argued that neo-Ottomanism should not be equated with Islamism, while is seeking to embrace it:

In this neo-Ottoman paradigm, Ankara exerts more soft power political, economic, diplomatic, and cultural influence in formerly Ottoman territories such as the Middle East, North Africa, and the Balkans, as well as in other regions where Turkey has strategic and national interests. This broad

vision for Turkish foreign policy requires embracing the Ottoman great power legacy, and most importantly it calls for a redefinition of Turkey's strategic and national identity.³³

Taspinar argued that the thesis of Kemalism and antithesis of neo-Ottomanism will accomplish a synthesis of "Turkish Gaullism," complete with its own strategic nuclear triad known as *Force de Frappe*—a chilling idea in the rapidly destabilizing Middle East.³⁴

It may appear that the intellectual community of Washington disagrees. Some scholars see Turkey as increasingly estranged from the West and argue that the United States must engage Turkey critically to offset the country's new direction, while others suggest that it is vital to accept Turkey's new status and identity and to develop deeper ties for shared success. However, the various positions do share a common thread. The United States cannot continue to assume that Turkey will be a quiet ally and follower of America or her interests. This development portends grave danger to the future of US-Turkish relations and more instability in the Middle East. Despite the potential dangers for this direction, President Obama's policies suggest that the president agrees most closely with Taspinar, and treats neo-Ottomanism as a tolerable, if not positive development for the US-Turkish relationship.

TURKEY AND IRAN: KEEP YOUR FRIENDS CLOSE...

The degree to which Turkey's new foreign policy counters US interests is reflected in the efforts Erdoğan's cabinet has put into fostering better relations with the anti-Western leadership in Tehran. In October 2009, Erdoğan described the sanctions as "arrogant," placing himself in strong support of Iran's "peaceful" nuclear program. The Turkish prime minister clearly had in mind the US and Israel when he said: "those who take this stance, who want these arrogant sanctions, need to first give these [nuclear weapons] up. We shared this opinion with our Iranian friends, our brothers."³⁵ Later, in May 2010, Erdoğan, along with then Brazilian President Lula de Silva, attempted to ram through a nuclear fuel exchange agreement between themselves and Iran to forestall the initiation of UN sanctions against Tehran.³⁶ Again, despite some strongly-

worded messaging, the United States offered neither positive incentives, nor negative consequences to ensure Turkish support for sanctions.

Turkey went a step further with Iran in August 2010, removing the Islamic Republic from a list of potential threats from the Turkish threat assessment document known as the "Red Book," clearly signaling that the earlier assessment that Iran might try to spread its Islamic revolution into Turkey had been scrapped.³⁷ This move was made despite indications of Iran's funding of terrorism in neighboring countries, such as Lebanon and Azerbaijan.³⁸

At times, it appears that Turkish policy towards Iran is at cross-purposes, or that different government offices have different policies. In 2010, Turkey voted against the US-led plan for sanctions on Iran over its nuclear program. However, at the same time that Prime Minister Erdoğan went on record expressing his opposition to sanctions in late-June 2012,³⁹ Turkey appeared to be decreasing Iranian oil imports, with Energy Minister Tamer Yildiz stating that Turkey had cut Iranian oil imports by 20 percent.⁴⁰ This reduction was a welcome sign, even if it was an economic decision and not a concession to the United States. In 2012, Congress indirectly criticized Turkey for its gas-for-gold trade with Iran; Ankara uses gold exports to maneuver around sanctions after financial transactions with Iran were prohibited. Since March 2012, Turkey has used gold to purchase Iranian hydrocarbons. In January 2012, Turkey and Iran signed agreements to double bilateral trade by 2015. Ankara has consistently chosen to take one step forward, such as agreeing to deploy NATO missile defense, only to take a step back by boosting Iranian trade. In June 2012, Ankara and Tehran agreed to increase trade from \$15 billion to \$30 billion dollars per annum,⁴¹ despite the intensely contentious relations between the US and Iran, and the part Iran plays in supporting the Assad regime, opposing Turkey's Sunni Arab friends in the Arabian Peninsula, and promoting instability in the Middle East. Again, the United States has done nothing to prevent Turkish pro-Iranian actions. Warnings from the US about potential asset freezes for Turkish financial institutions operating in Iran remain unheeded, and Washington has done nothing to enforce its writ.

In November 2012, the US authorized new sanctions to prevent precious

metals trade with Iran, hoping to isolate the rogue state further and subtly taking aim at Turkey's gold trade with the Islamic Republic. Turkey's economic ministry responded with some degree of defiance, though Yildiz stressed that the United States and Turkey were in discussions regarding the issue, and that the outcome would likely be without conflict.⁴²

Despite Ankara's opposition to sanctions, the Turkish-Iranian relationship has not been smooth. Turkey's agreement in late 2011 to install a NATO anti-missile radar facility on its soil – ostensibly to protect Europe from missile threats – prompted the Iranian political and military leadership to criticize Ankara harshly, ignoring Turkish statements that the technology was not being deployed against Iran.⁴³ Gen. Amir Ali Hajizadeh, a senior military official in the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, went so far as to threaten strikes against Turkey if the United States or Israel attempted to attack Iran.⁴⁴ Although the radar deployment demonstrated that the US-Turkish relationship is still alive if unwell, and highlighted the advantages of Ankara's NATO membership, Ankara nevertheless insisted on limiting Israel's access to the radar data – once again demonstrating Turkey's new expectations concerning its own ability to define foreign policy beyond the constraints of US objectives.

Unsurprisingly, in the emerging competition between Ankara and Tehran in Syria and Ankara's overall growing influence amid the "Arab Spring" countries, Turkey has drawn censure from the Iranian rulers. This is when the United States once again missed an opportunity. Both countries could have benefited from the suppression of Iranian influence and the defunding of extremist religious groups such as Hizballah and Hamas. However, the US failed to press its advantage and did not push the Turks for cooperative measures. Despite the consistent diplomatic attention it has paid to the Islamic Republic of Iran, this was an angle that the Obama Administration evidently chose to ignore – one that could have solidified Ankara's perception of itself as a critical player in Western policy towards Iran – even as Turkey redefines its self-identity.

TURKEY AND ISRAEL: UNRAVELING RELATIONS AND THE NETANYAHU APOLOGY*Deterioration in Bilateral Ties Between Turkey and Israel*

Although relations between the two countries have not been always smooth, the Turkish-Israeli rapprochement was one of the major positive developments in the Middle East in the 1990s, as ties to an embattled US ally contributed to good faith between Ankara and the generally pro-Israel US administrations, from Bill Clinton to George W. Bush. In the 1990s Israel emerged as a major supplier of weapons to the Turkish military. Despite Erdoğan's past anti-Semitic rants and plays he authored, and Islamist poetry he wrote,⁴⁵ relations did not sour for several years, even after the AKP came to power in Ankara. In 2005, Erdoğan visited Israel, bringing with him a slew of businessmen to promote new commercial deals, and even laid a wreath at Yad Vashem.

Erdoğan offered to play a mediating role between Israel and the Palestinians and Israel and Syria, his own sharp criticism of Israel's policies notwithstanding.⁴⁶ This mediation failed around the time of Operation Cast Lead in December 2008-January 2009 – a Gaza ground operation that followed years of Hamas rocket attacks against south of Israel – when Obama began his presidency. Even before that, relations had drastically deteriorated, and it appears now that the Israeli-Turkish relationship may have been permanently destroyed by Erdoğan's and Davutoğlu's policies.

The souring of relations began even before Ankara denounced Cast Lead. At the 2009 World Economic Forum in Davos, Erdoğan stormed offstage after attacking Israel's elder statesman, President Shimon Peres, during a joint appearance, telling Peres that "[w]hen it comes to killing, you know well how to kill."⁴⁷

In fact, Turkey's recent attempts to isolate Israel are a vivid portrayal of the AKP's foreign policy shift. The new Turkey is willing to forego vital US-Israeli-Turkish trilateral relations in favor of its own "neo-Ottoman" foreign policy and friendship with its Islamist friends and neighbors. Hostile actions, including blocking Israel's participation in the 2012

Chicago NATO summit and withdrawal from cooperative military exercises, all fit into this framework

The catalyst for a near-complete meltdown, however, was the *Mavi Marmara* incident. In May 2010, a much-publicized flotilla carrying aid from Turkey tried to break through the Israeli blockade of Gaza. The operation was managed by the Turkish Foundation for Freedoms and Human Rights and Humanitarian Relief, known as IHH, a terror-linked Islamist charity with roots in the Milli Görüş Islamist movement, which works closely with the AKP.⁴⁸

Israeli naval commandos boarded the ship, where they encountered violent resistance and opened fire in self-defense, killing nine Turkish citizens, including one Turkish-American. Seven Israeli soldiers were wounded. The response from Turkey was immediate. Ankara re-arranged its 2010 military exercises, known as “Anatolian Eagle,” such that they were conducted with China instead of the United States and Israel,⁴⁹ and withdrew its ambassador from Israel until an official apology and reparations to bereaved families were provided by the Israelis. Additionally, the Turkish foreign minister demanded the end of the Gaza blockade as a prerequisite to Israel’s normalization of relations with Turkey.⁵⁰ Relations grew even colder after the release of the UN’s Palmer Panel report in 2011, which, while agreeing that the use of live fire by the Israeli naval commandoes was “unreasonable” and “excessive,” found that Israel’s blockade of Gaza was “a legitimate security measure to prevent weapons entering Gaza by sea and its implementation complied with the requirements of international law.”⁵¹

Turkey’s military, security, and diplomatic distancing of itself from Israel, particularly after the flotilla incident, has been far-reaching. Although Ankara permitted the construction of a NATO missile shield system on its territory, the Turkish government stipulated that the equipment be used only in the protection of NATO countries and not any others; in other words, the missile defense system would not protect Israel, Iran’s most obvious military target. At a NATO meeting in February 2012, Turkey’s foreign minister specifically indicated Israel would have no access to the data generated by the NATO radar site in Malatya.⁵² Turkey also added Israel as a “major threat” to its “Red Book,” the list of Turkey’s

most significant security threats, arguing that Israeli actions may trigger a regional arms race.⁵³ Adding Israel, a close American ally in the Middle East, to the list of threats suggests that Turkey is helping to undermine the American position in the eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East.

Ankara has turned a deaf ear to Washington's (rather weak) pleas to repair relations with Jerusalem. Despite then Secretary of State Clinton's urging in late 2011, the two countries have not resolved their differences.⁵⁴ President Obama's personal calls for reconciliation also failed to move either country back towards rapprochement. Most recently, congressional figures from both the House and Senate called on Turkey, as well as Egypt, to play a constructive role in resolving the Israeli-Gaza conflict of November 2012.⁵⁵ This call to action, issued on November 19, 2012, occurred the same day that Prime Minister Erdoğan referred to Israel as a "terrorist state."⁵⁶ Three days later Erdoğan told reporters that Israeli and Turkish intelligence services were in communication with regards to a potential Israel-Hamas ceasefire.⁵⁷

Noteworthy, US efforts to resolve the Turkish-Israeli divide have been rather limited, possibly due to the gradual chilling of US-Israeli relations under the Obama Administration and its inept handling of America's crucial relationships with both Israel and Turkey. Though the administration policymakers have offered little censure of Turkish policies toward Israel, the academic institutions have taken particular note. Authors such as Michael Rubin and Soner Çagaptay, as well as the Council on Foreign Relations taskforce and the author of this article, have commented on the dangers of treating this matter as a low priority.

In some respects, the Turkish-Israeli diplomatic standoff is the clearest proof of the US-Turkish foreign policy drift. The de facto alliance between Turkey and Israel had been a highly reliable constant for Euro-Atlantic and Middle Eastern geopolitics for a decade and a half, yet now the Obama Administration, developing a complex relationship with Middle Eastern Sunni Islamists, has been unable or unwilling to reconcile the key two powers. While it has not stated so openly, the White House considers Ankara's hostility towards Israel a welcome pressure point, one which may help force Israel to agree to withdraw from Judea and Samaria (the West Bank) and East Jerusalem, and to sign a peace treaty with

the Palestinian Authority, as President Obama has repeatedly demanded. The highest levels of the US policy-making community may believe that keeping Israel isolated answers broader US foreign policy goals. With the ascendancy of Israel's critics, such as Chuck Hagel, to the Pentagon's helm, such Obama policy appears more likely. Alternatively, Erdoğan's willingness to ignore the leader of NATO and his close geopolitical and economic partners proves that the influence the United States wields over Turkish foreign policy is waning.

President Obama's influence over Israel has not diminished, however, given that after a March 2013 working visit by the president to the Middle East, Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu issued an apology for the *Mavi Marmara* incident. On March 22, after years of alienation between Jerusalem and Ankara, Netanyahu stood next to Obama and apologized to the Turkish people, promising reparations to the individuals who died on the *Mavi Marmara* and discussing steps to partially lift the blockage of Gaza.⁵⁸

Despite the satisfaction that this should have brought – and did bring to some segments of Turkish society – Erdoğan has remained relatively skeptical with respect to the Israeli apology, stating that he will wait to see whether Israel will follow through with its promises, and has declared that re-entrenching the Israeli-Turkish relationship will not happen overnight. Erdoğan has also stated that this event raised Turkey's regional clout significantly, gloating over his "success" in convincing Israel to apologize, or convincing the US to push the Israelis into it. He stated that Turkey was "at the beginning of a process of elevating [itself] to a position so that it will again have a say, initiative and power, as it did in the past."⁵⁹ Shortly after the apology, Erdoğan demonstrated an interest in traveling to Gaza and Judea and Samaria (the West Bank). At the time of this writing, Turkey has continued to block Israel-NATO cooperation.

Dangerous New Friends: Turkey's Support for Hamas

On July 24, 2012, after his triumphant visit to Cairo where he met with newly elected Muslim Brotherhood President Mohamed Morsi, the leader of Hamas, Khaled Mashaal, visited Erdoğan for Iftar (the fast-breaking

dinner held at the end of the day during Ramadan). The treatment of a top terrorist as if he was a head of state may yet boomerang against Turkey, which suffered from PKK violence for decades.⁶⁰ While hosted in Ankara, Ismail Haniyeh, the former prime minister of the Palestinian Authority and head of the Hamas regime in Gaza, stated that the "Arab Spring" is turning into an "Islamic Spring."⁶¹

While the Obama Administration policies have seemed to mostly align with Turkey's in the case of the "Arab Spring," the increased Turkish intimacy with acknowledged terrorist organizations in the Middle East, specifically with Hamas and Hizballah, stands directly against US proclaimed policies and values. Turkey has lent great legitimacy to Hamas over the last several years, inviting the organization's leadership for high-profile visits with Erdoğan and preferring it to the somewhat more secular and Western-supported Palestinian Authority. Erdoğan publicly stated in 2011 that Hamas is a political organization and not a terrorist group.⁶²

It was reported in June 2012 that Turkey had sent funding to Hamas to the tune of \$300 million to alleviate Hamas's financial problems after Iran failed to contribute,⁶³ although the Turkish establishment has emphatically denied this accusation.⁶⁴ Turkish-Egyptian-Qatari support of Hamas had set the scene for the rocket barrages against Israel, which led to Operation Pillar of Defense in November 2012.

In the future, the Gaza-based terror organization could drag its state sponsors into armed conflict with the Jewish state. Turkey has publicly and blatantly ignored the designation of Hamas as a terrorist organization by the US and the EU, as well as criminal indictments of the leaders of both Hamas and Hizballah. Instead, Turkish courts indicted Israeli military leaders over the *Mavi Marmara* affair, possibly damaging Turkish-Israeli relations beyond the point of no return.⁶⁵

The Eastern Mediterranean Offshore Natural Gas Flashpoint

The discovery of natural gas offshore in the eastern Mediterranean has an American dimension, particularly given the involvement of US petroleum companies operating exploration and production in the

Israeli and Cyprus offshore. The rift between Ankara and Jerusalem about exploration for those gas deposits also complicated matters between the two former Mediterranean allies and forced Israel to seek new Greek-speaking friends. Although Israelis and Cypriots agreed to develop Cypriot offshore reserves together, Turkey has used naval and air forces to threaten and harass exploration of those deposits. In 2011, Ankara stationed fighter jets in Turkish-occupied Northern Cyprus and sent warships to escort its own exploration vessels into the eastern Mediterranean.⁶⁶ In 2011-2012 a few aerial confrontations occurred between Israeli and Turkish military airplanes.⁶⁷ Turkey's aggressive actions with regards to "East Med" gas development are based on its unwillingness to recognize Cyprus' sovereignty and legitimacy and, therefore, its claim over the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) where gas has been discovered.⁶⁸ Turkey's interest in eastern Mediterranean gas resources may eventually lead to armed conflict. Ankara is interested in gaining control over the maritime gas fields in the area to allow itself to serve as an "energy bridge" to the West and create a dependence on it. This may lead Turkish troops stationed in the northern part of Cyprus to eventually complete the conquest of the island started in 1974.⁶⁹

In accordance with international law, Turkey's exploration of the eastern Mediterranean hydrocarbons should be confined to its own territorial waters and EEZ. Ankara's militaristic approach to resolving the tensions concerns not only American strategic interests, but could threaten US businesses as well. Noble Energy, an American company, is leading the Israeli and Cypriot exploration and production efforts in the "East Med" offshore gas fields. The chasm in Turkish-Israeli relations is not simply an expression of a leadership's personal anti-Semitism, internal politics, or Turkey's disdain for Israel's handling of the Palestinian problem and outrage over the *Mavi Marmara*. Turkey may have chosen to sacrifice its relationship with Israel specifically to gain clout with the Arab states and Iran, and in particular, with the Islamist street. If so, this calculation ignores the concerns of Turkey's Western allies, especially the US. Ankara's attempts to forge closer ties to Moscow demonstrate the same *modus operandi*: hostility to the West is being traded for increasing clout without regard for the concerns or interests of traditional/former allies.

TURKEY AND IRAQ: PROBLEMS WITH NEIGHBORS*Tensions With Baghdad*

Turkish and Iraqi political and economic relations do not seem to develop well, despite Ankara's "zero problems with neighbors" slogan. On one hand, tensions between Turkey and Iraq, particularly revolving around the Kurdish question, have escalated since the US war in Iraq and particularly over the last few years. Turkey has appeared to be the economic beneficiary of the Iraq war, because the conflict has allowed Turkey to broadly expand its business ties with the new Iraqi state. Since the outbreak of the war in early 2003, Iraq has become Turkey's second largest export market, with \$10.8 billion in exports in 2012.⁷⁰ An economic expert forecast further growth to Iraqi imports of Turkish goods equaling \$2 billion per year, particularly as the country grows wealthier from its increasing oil exports. Also, Turkish construction projects in Iraq equaled \$3.5 billion dollars in 2012, including energy utility projects.⁷¹ Despite increasing political pressures, particularly with respect to the northern, Kurdish-populated part of Iraq, Turkey's economic presence in Iraq, including significant interest in the country's energy sector, is focused in Iraqi Kurdistan even as Baghdad has been willing to use economic levers to demonstrate its political displeasure with Ankara.

Turkey has already demonstrated its displeasure with US policy in Iraq, forbidding the use of Turkish territory for the 2003 US invasion and military bases for US transport during the Afghanistan war without a supporting UN resolution. Since the US troop withdrawal in 2011, relations between Iraq's US and Iran-friendly administration headed by Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki and the AKP regime have soured. In January 2012, Turkey publicly supported Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi, a Sunni power-rival to the Shiite Maliki, a move perceived by Iraq as an intervention in the country's domestic affairs. By May of the same year, Hashemi had escaped to Turkey, and a conflict emerged as Iraq demanded that Hashemi be extradited, for allegedly leading death squads in northern Iraq.⁷² In late April 2012, Maliki declared that Turkey was a hostile state, stating that Ankara was seeking to intervene in Iraqi affairs to help engineer sectarian faults.⁷³ Baghdad has attempted

to use political instruments to restrict Turkish hydrocarbons projects in the country, even attempting to limit Turkish-Iraqi oil pipeline plans.⁷⁴ These contentious relations fit both into the model of Turkey's new neo-Ottoman paradigm, with attempts to implement economic dominance and pro-Sunni political leadership from abroad. This approach presents a significant difficulty for the United States, who maintain largely positive ties with the Shiite-dominated Iraqi administration – reflecting a large majority of the country – and who must be concerned for regional peace and security in the face of such destabilization attempts. The fact that Iraq has become closer to Iran complicates the Washington-Ankara discussion of Iraqi issues.

The Kurdish Problem

On March 20, 2013, Abdullah Ocalan, the jailed leader of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), declared a formal ceasefire to a 30 year-old conflict between the Turkish government and the PKK, a militant/terrorist movement closely associated with the Kurdish irredentist national movement in Turkey. After 14 years in jail, Ocalan utilized a Novruz celebration announcement to promise a withdrawal of Kurdish fighters from Turkey's lands and the beginning of PKK disarmament.⁷⁵ Prime Minister Erdoğan termed it a positive development the following day, though he also stated that implementation would be the critical turning point, not the statement alone.⁷⁶ It is possible that this will create a completely different Turkish domestic and foreign policy environment, as the cessation of a violent conflict between Turks and Kurds will allow Ankara to gain prestige and put a number of ongoing human rights violations behind them. It will also help Ankara reallocate diplomatic resources and political capital to less existentially threatening diplomatic questions. This increase in resources and prestige could be useful for the United States, but Obama has made no statement on the subject at this point.

Indeed, this silence has flown in the face of the US Congress's increasingly visible role in counter-balancing the administration's "see-no-evil, hear no-evil" Turkish policy. Turkey and the United States agree that the PKK is a terrorist organization. A June 2012 congressional resolution condemned PKK terrorism and compelled

various states to help to foil the PKK's influence, while agreeing that the Erdoğan government has sought to alleviate historical tensions between Ankara and the Kurdish population.⁷⁷ Simultaneously, the United States is wary of the Iraqi Kurds' negative perception of the Turks, and Turkish attacks on PKK targets have already extended to pursuit into Iraq on more than one occasion, another sticking point between the two states. However, Kurdish actions against the Syrian rebels may consolidate the Turkish and the United States' position against Kurdish rebels. The United States must use Ocalan's apology and the ensuing increase to Turkish prestige to both help the plight of the Kurdish people and to channel Turkey's newfound regional respect to better suit US interests, including vis-à-vis Iran.

TURKEY AND THE ISLAMIC WORLD: I SAY DEMOCRACY, YOU SAY ISLAM

While Washington experts have spent time debating the finer points of Turkish policy, Davutoğlu and his "strategic depth" approach have gone into action. Under the AKP, Turkey developed closer ties with several Arab states on economic, political, and cultural fronts, including personal relationship between the AKP leadership and several controversial figures. To the detriment of its relations with the US and Israel, Turkey sought friendlier relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran, and Ankara also defied the West by maintaining close contacts with such leaders as Sudan's Omar al-Bashir, Hamas' Ismail Haniyeh, and the late Muammar Gaddafi of Libya. Prime Minister Erdoğan accepted the Al-Qaddafi International Prize for Human Rights in 2010⁷⁸ – a morally odious accolade, given the late dictator's treatment of the Libyan people. Although Erdoğan eventually supported the overthrow of the Gaddafi regime, this was not because of US influence, but because Islamist forces stood to gain from Gaddafi's ouster, and even then Ankara's support remained limited to words, not deeds.

Erdoğan's declarations about the mass murders in Darfur was further proof of Ankara's increasing bias in favor of even the most controversial Middle Eastern Islamist policies over the US and the West. He explained that Omar Hassan al-Bashir could not have committed the crimes which he was publicly accused of by former Secretary of State Colin Powell

and for which he had been indicted by the international courts, saying:

I wouldn't be able to speak with Netanyahu so comfortably but I would speak comfortably with Bashir. I say comfortably "What you've done is wrong." And I would say it to his face. Why? Because a Muslim couldn't do such things. A Muslim could not commit genocide.⁷⁹

In this instance, Washington again failed to respond, and Erdoğan's comment received little to no criticism.

Turkey sees its role as not only a partner in technological, trade and political relations but as a potential model nation for the "Arab Spring" hatchlings. Yet, as the Syrian and Hamas cases suggest, Ankara supports Sunni Islamists, not pro-Western democrats.

A Model for the "Arab Spring" Post-Revolutionary Systems?

In November 2011, Prime Minister Erdoğan boldly embarked on a tour of Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya – the three countries that had successfully ousted their dictators in the "Arab Spring" and stood ready to begin on new political paths. Erdoğan presented Turkey as a possible model for emulation, as a powerful economy with a distinctively Islam-flavored democracy. He also used the trip as an opportunity to openly attack Israel in the public sphere, a surefire way to win the admiration of the Arabs. Yet, there are hefty historical reasons why Arabs are likely to reject a Turkish political model as a "model for emulation." The multi-generational memory of the heavy-handed and often-incompetent Ottoman rule is hard to eradicate. Moreover, Mohamed Morsi's instincts are much less risk-averse than Erdoğan's. Morsi moved quickly in 2012 to emasculate the military, and to draft and pass an Islamic constitution. Erdoğan took almost 10 years to do the former and still hesitates to do the latter.

The Obama Administration provided support for Turkey's bid for a leading role in the "Arab Spring," despite the fact that Turkey is advocating for Arab Islamization through democratization, not for secular democracy. Nevertheless, beginning in June 2010, President Obama became and remains a champion of a role for Turkey role in the Arab world despite

the fact that this policy has failed to yield any tangible benefit for the US.

In November 2011, the Turkish prime minister received a hero's welcome in Cairo, although some Muslim Brotherhood authorities took issue with his defense of elected government systems.⁸⁰ Erdoğan publicly criticized the ruling Supreme Council of the Armed Forces,⁸¹ which, unsurprisingly, refused to broadcast his remarks, finding his promotion of Islamic identity unpalatable.

Next, speaking in Tunis to massive crowds, Erdoğan said:

The most important thing of all, and Tunisia will prove this: Islam and democracy can exist side by side... Turkey, as a country which is 99 percent Muslim, does this comfortably, we do not have any difficulty... On the subject of secularism, this is not a secularism in the Anglo-Saxon or Western sense. A person is not secular, the state is secular... A Muslim can govern a secular state in a successful way.⁸²

Propagating the Turkish political model is the ultimate projection of neo-Ottoman policy by showcasing Turkey's economy, civil society, and its aggressive approach to Israel. Even if Turkey's model is not precisely followed or exactly applicable, Turkey's presence as a viable state may connect the destinies of states like Egypt and Tunisia to Turkey and project the AKP's "Islamic democracy" vision. On the other hand, 5,000 years of Egyptian history suggest that Morsi may opt to search for a separate identity for Egypt, and will compete, rather than cooperate, with Ankara, as he did when he practically denied Turkey a mediator role in the Israel-Hamas confrontation in November 2012.

US support of a Turkish role in promoting Arab democratization, which leads to Islamization, betrays Washington's lack of understanding of both Turkey's objectives and the system the AKP seeks to proliferate – a model oriented specifically toward a religiously-minded populace, with the objective of binding new Arab "democracies" to Ankara in a quasi-imperial/sphere of influence structure that promotes Turkish regional power.

TURKEY AND SYRIA: INTERACTIONS WITH THE US

Syria presents a particular challenge for Turkey. Under the AKP, Ankara invested nearly a decade to develop a friendship with and influence over Syria's Ba'ath Alawite-nationalist pro-Iranian regime. In 2009, Turkey and Syria signed a strategic partnership agreement, held joint cabinet meetings, and conducted joint military exercises. Expanding influence in what used to be an Ottoman eastern Mediterranean province, Turkey introduced visa-free travel with Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan, and exported everything from foodstuffs to appliances to Syria.

However, when tested by fire and steel, solidarity with Turkey's Sunni Arab allies and the Muslim Brotherhood prevailed. As was the case in its relationship with Gaddafi, after a period of initial support for Assad, Ankara sided with its Sunni co-religionists. It first played a significant role in censuring Syria, and then sought international resolutions to prevent Assad's violent repression. At the time of this writing, Ankara, in coordination with Qatar and Saudi Arabia, actively supports, arms, finances and provides cross-border shelter to Islamist forces battling the Assad regime.

In October 2011, the Turkish government promised to implement sanctions against the Syrian government in protest against the deaths of thousands at the hands of Assad's military. Erdoğan did not specify the exact nature of the new sanctions, but hinted at a range of military and commercial measures.⁸³

The Turkish leadership has actually moved closer to the West in dealing with Syria. Potential resolution of the conflict was the primary focus of a meeting between President Obama and Prime Minister Erdoğan in Seoul in March 2012.⁸⁴ Circumstances grew increasingly dire in April 2012, when the Syrians, pursuing cross-border refugees, opened fire across the Turkish border, inflicting casualties.⁸⁵ Things came to a head when Syria admitted to shooting down a Turkish F-4 Phantom aircraft in June 2012. However, the incident apparently took place in Syrian air space, which had been violated by the Turkish air forces. Turkey's reaction to the attack was complaining to NATO and beefing up border defenses.⁸⁶

Although Turkey's reversal of its position on Syria has placed it in the

same political boat as the United States, the Obama Administration has once again missed an opportunity, providing little diplomatic support for or coordination with Turkey. Instead, Washington limited itself to statements of support for the Turkish NATO ally after the downing of the Turkish jet.⁸⁷ Here the US chose passivity over pressing its advantage, and the Turkish leadership cannot have failed to notice the lack of American response to the downing of its F-4 and the incidental mortar fire into Turkey from Syria that followed. Once again, the administration demonstrated its misguided policies in the Middle East. Nevertheless, the potential threat of chemical weapons use by the Assads has resulted in the deployment of some US and Dutch troops on the Turkish-Syrian border, mostly to operate Patriot missiles there.⁸⁸

Turkey has tried to synchronize its policies with other Sunni states, including Saudi Arabia, which withdrew its diplomatic staff from Syria. Davutoğlu and Erdoğan have repeatedly demanded that Damascus stop the killing of civilians. Their support of the Sunni-driven opposition, which includes terrorist elements, should be of concern for the United States. However, the Obama Administration has failed to encourage Turkey to support secular opposition organizations instead of the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamists in the Syrian conflict. Indeed, Turkey's policy coordination with Sunni power centers – but not the US – demonstrates where Erdoğan's priorities really lie. In fact, the US had to synchronize its support for Syrian rebels with Jordan and other more pragmatic states, in an attempt to counteract Turkish-Qatari-Saudi support for Islamist elements of the anti-Assad resistance.⁸⁹ This demonstrates that Turkey and the United States, while attempting to topple the Assad regime, are supporting different segments of the resistance. In addition, these two segments may clash in the future, causing a flashpoint in US-Turkish relations.

Indeed, Syria's opposition to the Assad regime has demonstrated internal fractures based on secular and Islamic lines, with the US and Turkey providing aid even as they disagree on who must lead. In 2011-2012, hopes were high that Free Syrian Army, mostly free from Islamist radicals, would be able to take a lead in resistance to the Assad regime. These hopes were mostly vanquished as Islamists' influence grew.⁹⁰ Since the outbreak of the crisis, the regime has claimed that

Salafis and extremists groups have threatened the secular state that it is protecting. It also spoke of an al-Qaeda presence and of foreign jihadis coming to carry out acts of terrorism.⁹¹

One of the leading rebel groups has been the highly-radicalized Al-Nusra Front. Following the Front's decision not to support the Western-backed rebel coalition in November, the United States declared the Nusra Front a terrorist organization in December 2012.⁹² Other Salafi-jihadi organizations included Abdullah Azzam Brigades, Fatah al-Islam, and Jordanian Salafi-jihadists.

In Syria, Turkey has acted in its own interests to boost Sunni solidarity and gain a potential sphere of influence in a Sunni Islamist post-Assad Syria, while the US-Turkish relationship has not played a key role in that calculus.

TURKEY AND RUSSIA: THE EAGLE AND THE BEAR

Historically, Turkey was a regional competitor of Russia – a competition that the Ottoman Empire resoundingly lost. While newly-communist Moscow agreed to a peace with Atatürk's Turkish Republic and abandoned its claims to historic Armenia and the Straits, Stalin later revived these claims, though he did not act on them. After decades of tension on the Soviet-Turkish border during the Cold War, the collapse of the Soviet Union allowed Turkey and Russia to begin an intensive improvement in their relationship, particularly in terms of trade, tourism, energy, and technology. However, the current confrontation over Syria is endangering these achievements.

Turkey recently pursued a mutually beneficial regional geopolitical rapprochement, reflected in the proposed "Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform" of 2008, which would have excluded the US and European Union but included Turkey, Russia, and the three states of the South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia).⁹³ The idea did not excite the Russians at the time, but Turkey's proposal indicated its interest in securing prominent regional status in the Caucasus, while specifically excluding both the US and its European allies. Turkey also

demonstrated its preference for Russian partnership by refusing to back Georgia in the August War of 2008, and even temporarily delayed use of the Bosphorus by US warships delivering aid.⁹⁴

Turkish-Russian ties are linked to the two countries' growing trade. Russia became Turkey's largest trade partner in 2008, with annual trade between the two countries totaling \$40 billion.⁹⁵ In 2010, leaders of Turkey and Russia stated that both countries aimed to boost trade volume to \$100 billion within five years.⁹⁶ Some 2,000 Turkish companies operate inside Russia.⁹⁷ Russia comprises a quarter of the world market for Turkey's construction companies. Turkey is also one of the most popular destinations for Russian tourists. To this end, Russia and Turkey implemented a visa-free agreement in 2010.⁹⁸ In 2011, more than 3.4 million Russian tourists visited Turkey.⁹⁹

Most disconcerting is Turkey's decision to allow Russia's nuclear sector to build Turkey's first atomic power reactor at Akkuyu on the country's southern Mediterranean coast. Fifty-one percent of the plant's shares will be controlled by the Russian subsidiary, Rosatom, while the other 49 percent will be auctioned to Turkish power companies that can help foot the estimated \$20 billion cost.¹⁰⁰ Though the plant is peaceful, it is highly unusual that a NATO member should decide to commission a Russian nuclear state monopoly to build its first atomic power plant. While it is understandable that oil and gas-poor Turkey may want to diversify its electricity-generating sources, it is clear that Turkey is willing to sacrifice its US and European connections, including in the civilian nuclear sector.

Turkey is also a major consumer of Russian petroleum products. In 2011, the country relied on Russia for 35 percent of its crude oil imports.¹⁰¹ Turkey is also dependent on Russian gas, with some 26 billion cubic meters imported in 2011¹⁰² and an expected increase by 2 billion cubic meters in 2012.¹⁰³ In August 2009, Turkey signed on to construction of the Gazprom-backed South Stream gas pipeline, along with other projects.¹⁰⁴ The agreement for South Stream was finalized in late December 2011.¹⁰⁵ Despite full support for the \$7 billion Trans-Anatolian natural gas pipeline project (TANAP) from Azerbaijan via Turkey to Europe and some tepid support for Nabucco and the other Western oil company-

driven gas pipeline projects, Turkey has put its weight behind South Stream, choosing an economically beneficial Russian relationship over ambivalent and regionally less relevant EU and US energy ties.

Security decisions have followed economic ones in Turkey's dealings with Russia. In of the same revision of Turkey's "Red Book" security risk analysis that removed Islamic Republic of Iran from the list of threats and added Israel, Russia was also removed from the threat list. Indeed, in some non-military respects, it appeared for a while that Turkey is complementing its powerful US connections with the more regionally relevant Russia.

Yet despite all economic and political advances, it is the similarity in world view based on imperial instincts and the nineteenth century notion of spheres of influence which forced Russian and Turkish interests to clash in Syria and disagree on Cyprus offshore gas exploration. In the future these disagreements may lead to friction in the Caucasus and Central Asia as well. The two nations may share a cooperative relationship, but both are driven by a combination of realism and neo-imperial ideology, and are competing for their spheres of influence, sometimes in the same regions (the Black, Caspian, and Mediterranean Seas).

This re-emerging competition may lead to insurmountable obstacles and a resurrection of old animosities, as recent disagreements over Syria and Cyprus suggest. In the future, Washington may need Turkey's cooperation in its dealings with Russia and Iran, as well as elsewhere in the Caucasus and the Middle East. For this to work in Washington's favor, however, the US must understand the domestic drivers of Turkish foreign policy that preclude the US from taking the country for granted.

CONCLUSION

It is certain that the United States has a complex set of national interests vis-à-vis Turkey and the strategic regions it abuts. However, the leadership's ideological agendas, and the country's shift in orientation

from Euro-Atlantic to Middle Eastern and Islamist, complicate close cooperation. As discussed, the Obama Administration's track record as far as understanding Turkish internal dynamics, protecting individual rights and the rule of law, and managing this strategic relationship leave much to be desired. Clearly, Washington must seek to rejuvenate its ties with Turkey based on America's interests and priorities, and not try to appease the increasingly Islamist regime in Ankara. Washington should encourage more integration and cooperation with the West while counteracting Islamization, defending freedom, supporting and protecting its friends, and preventing Turkey's drift towards the Middle East and the Arab world. Specifically, Washington should:

- Conduct a comprehensive assessment of America's Turkish policy, to be coordinated by the National Security Council, and undertaken by a multi-agency task force to include the Departments of State, Defense, Energy, and the intelligence community.
- Support the secularist forces in Turkey – including in the military, the judiciary, the diplomatic corps, other public service, and in the media and academia – to uphold ideals and ideas of individual rights and liberties. The US should use the bully pulpit of its public diplomacy to expose and criticize violations of human rights and continued abuse of the Turkish legal system as a venue for the AKP's parade of show trials.
- Support the development of energy transit infrastructure in Turkey for Caspian and Iraqi hydrocarbons, and help develop and improve the country's financial capabilities on the condition that Turkey abandon its economic rapprochement with Iran. Substantial economic policies that benefit the Turkish and US economies and that are highly publicized to both elite and popular audiences in both countries may help revive and improve cooperation between the two countries.
- Explore the rift between Turkey and Iran as a means to strip the Islamic Republic of an important partner. The Obama Administration should intervene in a more robust way to convince Ankara to get on board with the US and EU economic sanctions against Teheran. The US should use all its diplomatic and economic tools to prevent the purchase of Iranian energy resources – such as oil and natural gas, by Turkish companies – and to frustrate Iranian commerce, especially by

the government of Iran and IRGC-connected firms operating through “front” companies in Turkey and using Turkish banking and financial capabilities.

- Encourage Turkey to support less radical elements in Syria, such as renegade officers of the Free Syrian Army and secular politicians, while cutting off the Al Nusra front and other Islamists. Iran has censured Turkey strongly for recommending Islamic democratic models instead of Islamist fundamentalism, for the “Arab Spring.” The divide between Ankara and Tehran regarding Syria is a potential wedge issue that Washington should emphasize and exploit. The souring of Turkish-Iranian relations offers a diplomatic opportunity for the United States to deepen Iran’s isolation.
- Heighten expectations of Turkey as a significant regional ally and the second-largest military in NATO, and remind Turkey of its obligations to NATO and the United States. For the US to support some measure of Turkish regional influence, Ankara has to demonstrate its reliability and commitment to Western values. However, at the same time, the White House must articulate its expectations of responsible behavior towards other US allies, including Israel, Greece, and Cyprus.
- The United States must develop a coherent and comprehensive policy regarding the Kurdish question, taking into account America’s historic ties with the Kurds and commitments provided after the First Gulf War. While the loose borders and relative instability of the Kurdish communities of Turkey, Syria, and Iraq provide a security threat for Turkey, violence of the Turkish armed and security forces against the Kurds and systematic violation of their human rights also counters US interests and values. The United States, together with Turkey as well as with its European and Arab allies, should be seeking solutions which uphold universally recognized Kurdish rights. By doing so, such an approach may eventually help to ensure peaceful borders and dignity for all in the region.
- Finally, the United States must apply more pressure and increase the diplomatic level of a mediated resolution between Turkey and Israel. First, regional security in the eastern Mediterranean suffers when two Western allies quarrel. It is within the US interest to diffuse tensions

and prevent a military confrontation. Second, this is an international image perception/optics concern for the United States; as a superpower, it should be able to prevent, and, when necessary, resolve squabbling between its allies. While the damage of the Turkish-Israeli row has been suffered by Israelis, including denial of anti-missile radar data and exclusion from NATO and anti-terrorism forums and other international activities, friends and foes alike cannot help but notice that the United States has not done enough to mediate and resolve the conflict between two key allies in the Middle East. A perception of weakening US power is against US national interest.

As the AKP solidifies its power and attempts to boost its influence in a politically fractious, sectarian region, it is diluting US influence in the Middle East. Ankara has chosen to gain its regional influence through the application of military and soft power, including economic and diplomatic tools, and robust public diplomacy. While tactical cooperation with the West is still ongoing, the AKP has tied its future to political Islam. This presents a long-term foreign policy problem and may develop into a security challenge to the Euro-Atlantic community. In response to this re-orientation by a vital regional power, the United States has to date ignored or even embraced a string of Turkish domestic and foreign policy decisions aimed at increasing the daylight between Turkish and US interests and violating core Western democratic values. The administration's failure to perceive these changes is due to its embrace of moderate Islamic governments.

Ultimately, the United States has viewed Turkish actions positively, falsely believing that Ankara's foreign policy stratagems and AKP domestic power consolidation are not fundamental shifts of Turkey's sociopolitical national identity. For the Obama Administration, sophisticated management of the American-Turkish relationship and keeping Ankara oriented towards the West and in the US orbit has not been a priority. This must change. A strong and comprehensive policy towards Turkey based on unflinching recognition of its internal change, together with a clearly articulated US policy based on its national interests and values is long overdue.

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