

TURKEY AT THE CROSSROADS: WHAT ROLE IN THE DECADE AHEAD?



A Special Report on the Key Crossroads State

A SPECIAL REPORT ON TURKEY

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The Turkish Re-Set: A Cause for Concern in the West?

By Franck Znaty

The current US administration sees Turkey as a model to be replicated for Arab and Muslim countries. It is viewed as a Muslim majority country within secular institutions, western ally and NATO member, with a strong economy and pro-market policies, a newly-found tight control of the military, friendly relations with the Muslim world, as well as a country which once had a strong collaboration with another key US ally in the region- Israel.

The desire to see Turkey act as template for other countries in the region has often been demonstrated by the Obama administration.



Is the Western Image of Turkey Increasingly Out of Date? (Credit Image: Bigstock)

As the recent meeting between President Obama and Prime Minister Erdogan in the margins of the UN General Assembly showed, in which the former lauded the latter with praises of displaying “great leadership” in the pursuit of democracy in the Middle East.

Furthermore, this American desire to see Turkey take on an important role in the region was manifested by the recent establishment of the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF). This new institution is meant, according to the US State Department, to “address the evolving terrorist threat in a way that would bring enduring benefits by helping front-line countries and affected regions acquire the means to deal with threats they face.”

This forum was officially launched during a meeting between the Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, and the Turkish Foreign Minister, Ahmet Davutoglu, where Turkey was offered by the US to co-direct this new venue.

But this Administration view of Turkey may be increasingly out of date in light of Turkish domestic and foreign policy developments.

In order to understand Turkish Foreign Policy actions and changes since the ‘Justice and Development Party’ (AKP, in its Turkish acronym) came to power in 2002, one needs to look at the writings of current Turkish Foreign Minister, Ahmet Davutoglu, who outlines his vision for the future of his country’s foreign policy prior to his entry into politics.[\[1\]](#) In his book entitled *The Strategic Depth: The Turkish International Location*[\[2\]](#), the author argues that Turkey’s strategic depth is based on the country’s geographical and historical depths. Turkey, he explains, is located at the center of “several geo-cultural basins”, and as such, this geographical location “places Turkey right at the center of many geographical areas of influence”.

Turkey must be actively engaged, he argues, on several fronts of the world order: the West (Europe and the United States), the Middle East, Africa and the Caucasus. This policy of active engagement in several different regions resonates even further when one considers the historical legacy of the Ottoman Empire, which places Turkey “at the epicenter of [historical] events” [\[3\]](#).

Furthermore, Davutoglu, in previous writings[\[4\]](#), takes a shot at the Kemalist establishment, which ruled on Turkey’s foreign policy almost uninterrupted since the Republic’s creation in 1923. He argues that the Kemalist put too much efforts in locking Turkey with the West and Europe, and thus failed to recognize Turkey’s great opportunities in the Muslim world, and with most of its immediate neighbors.

According to his vision, the Muslim world should be a main focus of the Turkish re-set in the conduct of foreign policy. This world he claims, “becomes the focal point in international relations”[\[5\]](#).

The theoretical concepts gave rise to the much debated “zero problems” policy whereby Turkey would seek to entertain good relations with all of its neighbors, assert its presence in several international systems and regions (NATO, EU, Middle East, Caucasus) and engage with actors with whom it had stormy relations in the past under Kemalist rule: Iran, Syria, Russia, Armenia.

When the AKP first came to power in 2002, their electoral victory was met by a good reaction from the then-US administration. The AKP party did not initially deviate from the pillars of the Kemalist foreign policy as it maintained a close relationship with the West as well as made an entry into the European Union a priority. Furthermore, fears that its Islamist-roots would dictate a reversal in Turkey’s positive inclinations towards Israel were not met, as Ankara and Jerusalem maintained, despite ups and downs due mostly to the meanders of the Intifada, a close defense and strategic collaboration.

In the last few years however, Turkey’s “zero problems” has turned into a more aggressive and controversial conduct of foreign affairs, which some have dubbed Neo-Ottomanism, whereby Turkey sees itself as the leader and engine of the Muslim world.

While it is very hard to predict where this new role in the region will lead Turkey, I propose to look at the following recent developments, which should be the cause of concern for Western policy planners in the region:

Turkey’s NATO commitment:

Turkey’s commitment to the North Atlantic Alliance has been put under question in recent years in the face of several developments. Let us consider the case of the war in Georgia in 2008, in which out of concern not to anger Moscow, the Turkish Prime Minister ceded until the very last moment to the NATO request to support Georgia’s case in its war

against Russia. This foot dragging was showed by the reluctance of Turkey to let European and American warships go through the Black Sea in assistance to Tbilisi, on the pretext that these warships were too big.

Turkey's hesitancy with the NATO's request has been repeated very recently on two occasions.

First, NATO has been pressing with the installment of an early warning radar system within Turkish territory meant to detect possible missiles coming from Iran. In order not to harm its fragile relationship with Teheran, Turkey showed great hesitation in complying with NATO's request but in the end receded.

Second, Turkey has showed initial reticence at the idea of NATO's intervention in Libya, in order that its \$15 billion investment in Libya would remain unharmed.

Turkey's growing strategic collaboration with China has also been seen as a worrying development. This growing relationship became apparent in the wake of Turkey's Air Force's exercise, "Anatolian Eagle". Turkey has been hosting this event, where many NATO members plus Israel were invited to participate since 2001.

However, following the Cast Lead war in Gaza and in light of Turkey's growing dissatisfaction with Israel, Jerusalem was excluded from the participation in the exercise in 2009. As a result, the US and some NATO members withdrew their participation in protest.

Ankara then decided to replace the Israeli Air Force with that of China. Chinese's Sukhoi SU-27 were subsequently sent to train with the Western-equipped Turkish Air Force. This strategic relationship was cemented later that year with a number of strategic agreements signed during the visit of the Chinese Prime Minister, Wen Jiabao, to Ankara.

This relationship also took the form of the joint development of a surface-to-surface rocket-launching system, as well as an increased collaboration in the fight against terrorism and extremism.

Tensions in the Mediterranean :

In June 2010, an important discovery of gas field in Israeli waters was revealed along the fact that these gas fields may well extend to Cyprus waters. Estimates put these fields at 300 trillion cubic feet which could be worth a tally of US\$4 trillion.

Cyprus's intentions to start drilling for oil and gas exploration in the Mediterranean have been met by a fierce Turkish reaction. Turkish "Frigates, gunboats and [its] air force will constantly monitor developments in the area", was Erdogan's response to the Cypriot move.

According to media reports, these threats have been followed by acts, as Turkey has already sent a fleet of warships, submarines and fighter jets to the area. Moreover, in response to the Cypriot exploration, Turkey signed its own agreement with the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, to have a Turkish seismic vessel explore the area. Erdogan said that this agreement was meant to show Turkey's determination in the face of Cyprus' actions and that sending its own vessel was a signal "to show our presence there".

While the EU and the US have criticized Turkish moves and have called Turkey to resume the island's reunification talks, the threat of confrontation over Cyprus needs to be taken seriously, especially in the face of continued Turkish inflammatory rhetoric on the issue. Speaking to Turkish media the Turkish minister for the European Union, Egemen Bagis, said : "It is for this (reason) that countries have warships. It is for this (reason) that we have equipment and we train our navies." Furthermore, following on this development, Turkey has announced that it would freeze relations with the European Union if rotating presidency would indeed be given to Cyprus in July 2012 as planned.

Moreover, Turkish's intentions in the Mediterranean do not end over the Cyprus issue as Israel has also been on the receiving end of Turkey's "activism" in the region.

First, it argues that Cyprus does not have the authority to sign deals with Israel on the issue of oil and gas exploration. As a response to the Cyprus-Israeli accords, Turkey has announced a bigger presence of its Navy in the Mediterranean for surveillance purposes. Speaking about the Israeli naval presence in the Sea, Erdogan said that "until now, they were running wild in (the eastern Mediterranean). From now on, we will see Turkish ships more often especially in our exclusive economic zones".

Second, in light of Israel's refusal to apologize over the deaths of 9 Turkish citizens who were aboard the Mavi Marmara that attempted to break the Gaza blockade, Turkey has threatened to send its own Navy to escort Turkish ships that would again attempt to reach the Gaza shores thus pitting these vessels against that of the Israeli Navy. Turkey claims that it acted with "great patience" following the Israeli takeover of the ship, and they viewed the Israeli action against the boat as "grounds of war".

As it stands today, Turkey has dramatically downgraded its bilateral relationship with Israel, and has announced a suspension of the defense trade as well as an end to the military-to-military relations.

Turkey's Relationship with Muslim States:

The 'zero problem' policy has been leading Turkey to take on the role of leader in the Middle East. This policy meant that Turkey had to mend ties with previous enemies in the region.

However, these attempts were only partially successful, and today we see that they did not pass the test of time.

Turkey's growing activism in the region has not been well received by Teheran as the two countries have a history of rivalry. Turkey's acceptance of the installation of the NATO radar that we evoked earlier aroused anger among the Iranian government.

Iranian Defense Minister, Ahmad Vahidi, was quoted as saying that "The West claims the radar system (in Turkey) is to confront Iranian missiles, but they should be aware that we will not tolerate any aggression against our national interests".

Moreover, NATO's radar ordeal comes in a context of growing tension between Ankara and Teheran, as the latter accuses the former of backing away from its support of Assad in the face of the Syrian people's revolt against the Alawi rule.

In addition, the Turkish decision to host the NATO radar could prompt the Iranian leadership to renew the connections it once had with the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party), and use this as a leverage to influence the course of its relationship against Turkey.

Turning to Syria, while it is true that Turkey did respond to Assad's violent crackdown out of fear that a collapsed Syria would threaten Turkey, Ankara has joined the West in its critique of the Syrian regime actions thus ending the growing relationship it enjoyed with Damascus throughout the first decade of the century. This break in the relation has been manifested by the Turkish's decision to enforce an arm embargo on Syria, following two Iranian attempts to smuggle arms to Damascus, which were intercepted by Turkish authorities earlier this year.

Turkish relations with the post-Mubarak Egypt is also a cause for concern for Turkish ambitions of friendly relations with the Muslim world. Turkish involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the coziness it has displayed with Hamas does not sit well with Egypt's military authority.

Indeed, the current ruler of Egypt, the military council, is wary of the relationship between the Muslim Brotherhood in its country, and its offshoot in the Gaza Strip. As an example, in anticipation of his last visit to Egypt last September, Erdogan announced its intention to visit the Gaza Strip, but was later forced to backtrack in the face of Cairo's refusal. To be sure, Egypt does not favorably view a Turkish meddling with affairs close to Egyptians borders, as well as acts that could embolden Hamas.

A Coming Economic Crisis?

Erdogan's AKP reelection earlier this year was mostly explained thanks to his government solid performance on the economy and the implementation of market-friendly policies, which managed to leave the country for the most part unscathed from the consequences of the world economic crisis.

Leaving aside foreign policy, Omer Taspinar, an expert on Turkey at the Brookings Institution, explains that " this is a very impressive victory for AKP, but perhaps because I'm more of an economic determinist, I really think the big story in Turkey is the economy and that people essentially do not vote when they go to the ballot box thinking about foreign policy."

However, Turkey's economic success may come to an end. As recent news have reported: "Turkey's current account deficit is out of control. It exceeds 10% of gross domestic product (GDP), about the same as crisis-ridden Greece and Portugal. Turkey's central bank has let the currency slide in a belated effort to correct the imbalance, but the lira's depreciation has backfired", writes David Goldman.

Other news report agree with the analysis put forward by Goldman, and explain that Turkey under the AKP has been very generous in handing out loans and mortgages with low interest rate. This generosity was financed by loans made by the country's Central Bank.

These loans are now deepening the country's deficit, which has doubled in the past year and half. Goldman compares Turkey's coming economic situation to that of "Argentina in 2000 or Mexico in 1994".

Time will tell if these prophecies of coming economic collapse will materialize, and how they might affect Turkey's activism on the regional stage.

[1] See most notably: Stratejik Derinlik / Türkiye'nin uluslararası konumu (Istanbul: Küre Yayınları: 2000) & A. Davutoglu, 'The Clash of Interests: An Explanation of the World (Dis)Order', Perceptions Journal of International Affairs, Vol. 2 N°4 (Dec. 1997-Feb. 1998).

[2] Original title Stratejik Derinlik / Türkiye'nin uluslararası konumu (Istanbul: Küre Yayınları: 2000).

[3] A. Murinson, 'The Strategic Depth Doctrine of Turkish Foreign Policy', Middle Eastern Studies Vol. 42, N°6, (Nov. 2006), 945-964, p.951.

[4] A. Davutoglu, 'The Clash of Interests: An Explanation of the World (Dis)Order', Perceptions Journal of International Affairs, Vol. 2 N°4 (Dec. 1997-Feb. 1998).

[5] A. Murinson, 'The Strategic Depth Doctrine of Turkish Foreign Policy', *Middle Eastern Studies* Vol. 42, N°6, (Nov. 2006), 945-964, p.948-49.

An Update from Turkey

by Richard Weitz

Second Line of Defense was invited to send a representative on a study trip to Turkey for U.S. foreign policy specialists. The trip, which is occurring from October 7-14, included visits to Ankara, Hatay, and Istanbul and meetings with a range of government officials, academic and think tank experts, and Turkish business leaders.

The Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists of Turkey (TUSKON) was the trip sponsor. TUSKON is an umbrella organization for 7 regional federations that include 151 Turkish business associations with more than 35,000 business members throughout Turkey. TUSKON has offices in Washington, DC, Brussels, Moscow, and other major foreign cities. In addition to sponsoring annual study trips for U.S. foreign policy experts to Turkey, TUSKON organizes "Foreign Trade Bridge" programs that bring thousands of foreign business people to Turkey to meet with local entrepreneurs, generating billions of dollars of trade.



Turkey as a Global Crossroads in Transition Credit Image: Bigstock

One priority for these business match-making summits and other TUSKON activities is to increase the volume of U.S. businesses in Turkey. The percentage of U.S. trade or direct investment in Turkey has declined steadily over the years due to much more rapid growth in Turkey's business connections with other countries. Every year TUSKON sends business delegations to several U.S. cities in the hope of catalyzing profitable contacts.

Turkey has also become an important country for U.S. national security analysts. It has a population of almost 80 million people and is located at the crossroads of Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. For decades the Republic of Turkey loyally aligned its foreign and defense policies with those of the United States and its other NATO allies. But since the end of the Cold War, the country has sought to develop new partnerships while calling into question old ones, such as with Israel.

The “Whither Turkey” question has assumed elevated prominence among U.S. and NATO analysts pondering to what extent Turkey will remain tightly linked to NATO, will move northward toward Russia, will attempt to regain influence among the Turkic republics of Central Asia (possibly to include building security ties with China and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization), or will turn southward to identify more with the other Muslim Majority countries of the Middle East.

The recurring message we received in Turkey was that Turks wanted to develop ties in all directions, and considered these ties non-exclusive.

In fact, many Turks stressed that they saw their country as a bridge among these blocs and civilizations. For example, they stressed their newfound commitment to convey Western liberal democratic values to the newly emerging democracies that are slowly displacing the traditionally authoritarian countries of the Middle East. Still, it was clear that one reason Turkey was seeking new partnerships was that many Turkish national security experts no longer believe they can assure their country’s security through alignment with the United States.

This concern was most evident during our meetings at the Wise Men Center For Strategic Studies (BILGESAM) in Istanbul, our first stop in Turkey. BILGESAM was founded to develop policy options for national leaders as well as to train junior staff to assume policy execution positions in government. It is an independent and non-partisan research organization whose members include some of Turkey’s most experienced former diplomats and military officers as well as current diplomats. BILGESAM’s three main areas of research include global studies (which include the policies of the United States, Russia, and China); regional studies (which address issues related to Central Asia, the Middle East, the Balkans, and other geographic regions); and functional studies (such as the international economy or energy security issues).

In addition to a quarterly journal, recent BILGESAM publications include reports on Turkish-Armenian relations or how the U.S. military withdrawal from Iraq might affect Turkish security. It employs an interdisciplinary perspective to analyze topics for different sponsors. Many of its studies aim to provide Turkish decision makers with practical policy options and recommendations. BILGESAM also seeks to provide Turkey with an independent means to analyze international developments rather than rely on NATO or other foreign-based institutions.

During our hour-long discussion, their staff spent much time complaining that the United States imposed excessive limits on transferring defense technology to Turkey. As a result, while Turkey would often prefer to buy U.S. military systems, the country has increasingly been either buying from other countries or developing indigenous substitutes for these systems.

Before 2004, the share of domestically produced technology in Turkey’s military systems was between 20-25 percent. That year, the government decided to make a comprehensive and sustained effort to increase the proportion of Turkey’s military technology that was produced at home. The Turkish Armed Forces identified 11 Technology Activity Fields and 109 Technology Areas to focus its development efforts.

Since 2004, Turkey has increased the share of its military equipment that was domestically produced to more than 60 percent. Still, Turkish officials are dissatisfied that many of these are low-technology items. And indigenous systems still often cost more than equivalent foreign systems, which means that the Turkish arms industry is frequently unable to compete on international markets.

Ironically, the day of our meeting the local newspaper had a front-page article indicating that the United States had decided to sell Turkey three AH-1W Super Cobra attack helicopters. And Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Er-

dogan recently announced that Turkey would purchase MQ-1 Predator unmanned aerial vehicles from the United States. Although Turkey had previously acquired drones from Israel, Turkish-Israeli relations have been on a downward spiral in recent years, leading the Turkish government to ask for both unarmed and armed versions of the Predator nearly three years ago. The MQ-1 Predator is mainly the surveillance version, and the MQ-9 Reaper is the armed version.

The U.S. extensively uses the Reaper in attacking al-Qaeda, the Taliban and other terrorist and insurgent groups in Afghanistan. The U.S. has sold the Reaper just to Britain for use in Afghanistan.

Past discussions of sales of attack helicopters to Turkey have proved controversial since they have been used to attack anti-Turkish Kurdish insurgents. But the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) terrorist group lost international support in the 1990s so Turkey has found it easier to buy counterinsurgency weapons. The United States sold Turkey 10 AH-1W Super Cobras in the 1990s. They have proved powerful weapons against the PKK insurgents, who recently increased their operations.

Turkey also possesses dozens of earlier model U.S. attack helicopters, but these one-engine planes have found it hard to operate in the challenging terrain of northern Iraq.

Due to crashes and other problems Turkey's fleet of operational helicopters has declined to six, so Turkey has been pressing the United States to provide replacements. Washington had resisted since its own copter fleet was heavily engaged in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Now with the U.S. military drawdown in both countries and the aspirations to reset the U.S. Marine Corps aviation component in coming years—including with the new more advanced AH-1Z helicopter, which the Marines began receiving earlier this year, the Marine Corps is transferring the three AH-1Ws to the Turkish military.

This may be the last Turkish purchase of a U.S.-made attack helicopter for a while. Bell Helicopter Textron tried to sell Turkey its more advanced AH-1Z, the latest member of the Cobra family and actually won Turkey's tender for a new attack helicopter in 2002. Despite three years of negotiations, Turkey's Undersecretariat for Defense Industries (SSM), the country's military procurement agency, and Bell proved unable to reach agreement on the appropriate price and features for the Turkish version.

The SSM then canceled the first tender and opened a new bidding process. U.S. manufacturers declined to participate in that second tender, which was eventually won by AgustaWestland of Italy. It offered the T-129, a Turkish version of the A-129 Mangusta International, and co-production with Turkish Aerospace Industries (TAI). Deliveries of a planned 59 T-129s for the Turkish Army are scheduled to begin late next year.

AgustaWestland and TAI are considering how to sell the T-129 to other countries. Even so, TAI is trying to use the technology transfers it is receiving through this foreign co-production agreement and other contracts to manufacture its own attack helicopters in the future.

The Turkish media said that Turkey has received the AH-1W Super Cobra helicopters as a "reward" for agreeing to host an early warning radar for NATO's developing ballistic missile defense system (BMD). The Turkish Foreign Ministry announced on September 14 that the radar would be located at a military base in Kürecik in the eastern province of Malatya. Turkish defense officials have said that a base in Germany would oversee the radar's operations. A Turkish general would serve there along with other NATO military personnel.

The United States has been lobbying Ankara to participate in its BMD program within a NATO framework, while Iran and Russia have been pressing Turkey to keep its distance from Washington's BMD plans.

Turkish officials have sought to balance these competing forces while leveraging them to advance Turkey's own security interests. For example, while welcoming the transfer of the three helicopters, a Turkish military analyst quoted in the story said Turkey expected more. "All this is valuable, but is still a small price for taking the risk of hosting the NATO radar. Iran already has expressed its ire against Turkey. So something more is expected to come from the United States, probably in terms of equipment and in political support."

Turkey's Syria Problem

By Dr. Richard Weitz



(Credit: Bigstock)

Turkish President Abdullah Gu, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu have recently warned that they might side with the Syrian protesters if the Syrian government did not order the security forces to end their massive violence against the peaceful demonstrators. But Turkish leaders still oppose imposing economic sanctions on Syria, have not recalled their ambassador from Damascus, and have not followed Western governments in demanding that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad leave office.

Even so, the Turkish government's hardening line toward Syria provides an opportunity to strengthen Turkish-U.S. ties.

Turkey's hedging policy reflects an effort to balance competing domestic and foreign policy interests. On the one hand, Turkey has important economic and security interests at stake in Syria, including a desire to sustain border security and cooperation against Kurdish terrorists. In addition, Turkey does not want to jeopardize its improved relations with Iran, which strongly backs the current Syrian government.

On the other hand, several factors are driving Ankara to adopt a harder line toward Syria. First, Turkish public opinion and civil society are increasingly demanding action. Second, many other foreign countries have lost patience with the Assad regime. Third, the Turkish government also sharpened its line regarding Libya, another case where the regime has resorted to violence to remain in power. Fourth, simple emotion has contributed to the sharpening of the regime's rhetoric, with Turkish leaders outraged by the massacres and by the Syrian regime's ignoring their advice.

Relations between Turks and Syrians have historically been troubled. For centuries Syrians were subject to Ottoman rule. Although the Ottoman Empire ended after the First World War, hostility persisted after Turkey annexed the Syrian Hatay district that was located along Turkey's Southern edge. They disputed Turkey's water usage and management of rivers on which Syrians rely. In 1998, Turkey threatened to invade Syria to end that government's support for Kurdish terrorists who, as the Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan (PKK, Kurdistan Workers Party), had established a safe haven there.

The seven years of rapprochement under the AKP have brought about a significant strengthening of Syrian-Turkish ties.

In 2004, Turkey and Syria signed a strategic partnership treaty and a free trade agreement, which has made Turkey Syria's largest trading partner.

Turkey and Syria established a visa-free travel regime in 2009.

They also began convening joint cabinet-level meetings under the auspices of their new High Level Strategic Cooperation Council.

At the second ministerial meeting in early October 2010, the dozen ministers from both countries discussed ambition plans for cooperation in agriculture, energy, environment, health and other fields as well as initiatives to promote economic integration in the Middle East.

Turkish officials have, at various times, proposed consideration of a free trade agreement, a customs union, and a visa-free regime.

There regional cooperation has also extended to Turkey's to mediate peace talks between Syria and Israel in 2008.

Finally, they have begun to cooperate in the defense sector. Turkey and Syria held an unprecedented three-day military exercise in April 2009.

The Syrian government also had strong incentives to seek a rapprochement. Damascus was isolated during the George W. Bush administration, which considered Syria a core member of its "axis of evil." Ties with Turkey also yielded Syria important economic benefits at a time when Western governments were imposing more trade, banking, and investment sanctions on Damascus. Turkey helped Syria keep open lines of communication with Israel. Finally,

despite Syria's good relations with Iran, Damascus wanted alternative to provide some leverage in its relations with Iran.

Concerns about Kurdish nationalism have been a major driver of this reconciliation. Syrians have joined with Turks in expressing alarm about the advent of a Kurdish autonomous region in Iraq could affect their own Kurds. Kurdish unrest in Syria's northeastern city of al-Qamishli in 2004 convinced Damascus to adopt harsher measures against Kurdish nationalists, who had been aroused by the creation of the Kurdistan Regional Government the previous year.



(Credit: Bigstock)

Kurds are the largest ethnic minority in Syria, with their community of three million constituting 16% of the population. For the past decade, the Syrian government has offered strong support for Turkish officials to cut off foreign support for the PKK. Last year, Turkey and Syria signed a counterterrorism agreement and a counterinsurgency pact.

Turkish authorities have made considerable if incomplete progress in recent years in transforming the Kurdish question in Turkey from primarily a military-security issue centered on opposition to the PKK to a social-political question that can be addressed by non-violent means. The point that makes Syria case more complicated than other Arab uprisings (or Arab spring for some), is the very existence of an ethnic tension which is capable to affect the region. This factor that can ignite a regional fire is the Kurdish dimension of the problem.

Now the chaos in Syria has weakened this cross-border cooperation. According to the Turkish media, a report of the National Intelligence Organization warns that the Syrian authorities may be decreasing their cooperation on the PKK issues in retaliation for Turkish criticism of Assad's crackdown. Many PKK operatives are born or based in Syria. And Iranian-Turkish anti-terrorist collaboration may be weakened by their rift over Syria.

Even if the Syrian authorities do not adopt a deliberate policy of aiding the PKK, Turkish officials worry that extremists will exploit the flows of refugees fleeing Syrian impression to infiltrate terrorists into Turkey. Already more than 10,000 Syrian refugees have entered Turkey, and Turkish authorities fear that the Syrian crackdown will lead to mass refugees on the scale of those that followed the 1988 Enfal operation in Iraq.

Turkish strategists still remember what happened after the first Gulf War, when the power vacuum allowed PKK to establish a terrorist structure in northern Iraq and uncontrollable refugee movements provided a "human cover" for these terrorists to infiltrate Turkey. As both countries share an open 850-km border, the flow of Syrian refugees into Turkey will continue commensurate with the scale of the violence in northern Syria, which explains Erdogan's comment that "Syria is Turkey's internal affair."

Given these competing interests, the Turkish government naturally tried at first to straddle the issue. When the Arab Spring unrest spread to Syria in March, Turkey first sought to induce the Assad regime to introduce the reforms demanded by the moderate protesters. Then a June Syrian crackdown in the north led more than 12,000 refugees to flee to Turkey.

The Turkish rhetoric against the violence accordingly escalated. Last month, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu again went to Damascus to demand "concrete steps" to end the violence. But the Syrians have again ignored this latest Turkish initiative, as they did earlier warnings.

Turkey's relations with the Syrian government have naturally suffered from Ankara's harder line. Many pro-regime Syrians attack Turkey's intervention in their internal affairs as an example of "neo-Ottomanism." Meanwhile, Turkey's policies toward Syria are also threatening another AKP achievement: Turkey's improved relations with Iran.

The preservation of a friendly regime in Damascus is a vital national interest for Iran. The Syrian government represents one of Iran's few genuine allies, having resisted strong U.S. efforts to wean it away from Tehran.

In addition, Iran's ability to "unleash" Hamas and Hezbollah is seen in Tehran as an important means of deterring, through threats of retaliation, Israeli or U.S. military action against Iran.

And Syria provides the territory, intelligence, and other essential enablers that Iranians need to keep these two proxies militarily powerful.

Both Iranian and Turkish leaders want stability in Syria, but they disagree how best to achieve it. Turkish leaders, seeing the disorders as resulting from mass discontent with Syrian government policies, believe that the Assad regime could stabilize the situation through reforms.

Iranian leaders, by contrast, attribute the protests to foreign instigation, specifically a U.S.-European-Saudi-Israeli attempt to overthrow the Assad regime. Since these foreign plotters want to replace rather than reform the regime, they believe that the Syrian government must forcefully suppress the popular protests, as the Iranian government has done with what Iranian leaders perceive as foreign-backed efforts to depose it.

Thus far, Syrian leaders have followed the Iranian path, believing they would be swept out of office, as with the communist regimes of Eastern Europe, if they started yielding on core issues as opposed to fig-leaf reforms designed to divide the opposition and perhaps win some foreign support.

Turkish leaders insist that, even today, if the Syrian government chooses the reform path, it would find Turkey an eager partner willing to help Syria follow Turkey's route towards Islamist democracy and a more independent foreign policy.

But since Syrian leaders have continued to follow the path of violence and repression, they have found Iran a more suitable source of assistance and advice, leaving Ankara with the unwelcome prospect of having to turn to Tehran to influence developments in Damascus.

All this threatens to dissipate all the good will in Tehran that the AKP government has earned in Iran in recent years by defending Iran's controversial nuclear program, breaking with Israel, opposing the imposition of economic sanctions on Iran. The two countries have also seen a surge in bilateral commerce, thanks in part to Iran's subsidizing oil sales to Turkey.

The Turkish government has responded to these dilemmas by hedging. They have kept lines of communication open with Assad, never calling for his overthrow, but also developing ties with opposition groups. Predicting the winner in Syria's civil war is so difficult because of some unique factors at play in this case. The person of Bashar Al Assad is not the *center of gravity*, in Clausewitzian terms, as Qaddafi is in Libya. Bashar was not expected to be the president, and the regime's power resides with the military and other security forces and certain business and political elites.

This system of collective rule, which has a sectarian orientation due to the large numbers of minority Alawites among the elite, makes Assad wary of making excessive reforms that could lead the regime's collective power holders to displace him for threatening their rule. The regime also has an incentive to polarize the situation through repression since outsiders are then confronted with a choice between a continuation of the current regime and a radicalized and violent opposition.

At the international level, the regime looks to be immune from foreign military intervention. The United States and its NATO allies are overtaxed elsewhere. Israeli military intervention might be the one act that rallies dissatisfied Syrians behind the regime. The protesters have not established a safe haven from which they could organize an armed force that could receive foreign support. Whatever objections the Turkish government has toward Assad's policies, Turkey would hardly allow such activity on its territory given its objections to PKK activity in foreign countries.

Turks fear how international sanctions on Syria could force them to reduce their economic activity with Syria. The United States and the EU have imposed diverse sanctions on Syria, and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is now calling on other countries to join them.

Turkish leaders do not want to jeopardize their newly acquired commercial interests in Syria. Furthermore, they doubt that economic sanctions would be effective and have any major impact on Syrian policies.

Thus far, Turkey has been shielded by Chinese and Russian opposition in the Security Council, but that could end, leaving Ankara as exposed as it has been when it tried to mediate a resolution of the Iranian nuclear crisis. Turkey might lobby for narrowly targeted sanctions against the Syrian leaders most closely linked to the violence to minimize the damage to Turkey's economic interests or Syria's general population, which is victimized already by the violence.

There is always the possibility of an actual military confrontation. Middle Eastern media sources have been flaming tensions by reporting mutual threats, with Turkish officials purportedly telling Western governments were preparing to intervene to use force to overthrow the Assad regime and Iran's Ayatollah Ali Khamenei supposedly warning that Iran would bomb NATO and US bases in Turkey if Turkey supported any Western military action against Syria. Both governments have officially denied such reports. Turkish officials recognize that, since the Assad regime sees itself as fighting for its survival, it would fight viciously against any foreign military intervention.

In any case, Turkey's break with Syria could bolster Ankara's claims that its NATO and EU partners actually benefit more from Ankara's newly independent foreign policy because it enhances Turkey's influence to support Western-supported initiatives in the Middle East and Eurasia.

U.S and Turkish officials have been in constant contact during the last few months regarding Syria, presumably hoping to avoid the miscommunications responsible for last year's snafu over Ankara's efforts to broker an Iranian nuclear settlement, when the Turks erroneously had Washington's backing for their proposed fuel swap.

Turkey Prepares for Syria Sanctions

By Richard Weitz

The political turmoil in Syria is depriving Turkey's ruling Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP, or Justice and Development Party) of one of its most significant foreign policy achievements. Since the AKP came to power in 2002, Turkey and Syria have seen a major improvement in their bilateral relations after decades of general hostility punctuated by periodic acute confrontations. But the recent months of upheavals in Syria have strained ties between Ankara and Damascus. In addition, Turkey could suffer major economic losses, threats to border security, and a more complicated regional security problem.



"Syria is the most complicated case in the Arab world." Credit Image: Bigstock

These concerns were most evident in the day we spent in the city of Antakya, the capital of the province of Hatay in south-central Turkey, which borders Syria. Although less developed than Istanbul or Ankara, Hatay is an up-and-coming Turkish province. According to the Turkish government, Hatay ranks 12th of Turkey's 81 provinces in terms of production, 9th in terms of contributions to Turkey's tax revenue, and 8th in terms of the volume of its international exports. Fresh fruits, vegetables, and other agricultural products are major export items since Hatay has a good Mediterranean climate for their production. The local authorities hope to transform Hatay into one of the leading producers and exporters of agricultural products in the Middle East, but realizing that vision will require that Hatay develop its infrastructure further as well as that the Middle East region becomes more stable.

The people we met with in Hatay stressed their province's cosmopolitan nature. Most of the inhabitants are conservative Sunni Muslims, but there are other Muslims there too.

In Ancient Times, Antakya was known as Antioch. It is considered the first location where the followers of Jesus Christ were called Christians. Antakya has one of the world's oldest Christian churches. It also has an Armenian minority and even a small Jewish community. In addition to visiting the church, we also saw a mosque and a synagogue.

In addition, we spent a few hours at the local Mustafa Kemal University. Founded in 1992, the university is one of Turkey's newest. The university leaders and academics we met described their students as relatively politically inactive despite the debates over what should be in Turkey's new constitution and how Turkey should respond to the Arab Spring.

Through our discussions in Hatay, we soon realized that few of the local business, religious, or academic groups had regular contact with Americans or the United States, primarily because of geographic distance but also due to the lack of a local American presence. This situation offers an opening for greater U.S. outreach efforts by American businesses, universities, and other institutions, supported by the State Department and other U.S. federal, state, and local institutions.

Much of our discussions in Hatay concerned Turkish-Syrian relations. Hatay has historically been a contested part of Turkey. The Syrian government had long claimed the territory as its own due to Hatay's being a part of colonial Syria under French rule until the 1930s, when the French government, preoccupied with the rising threat from Hitler's Germany, allowed Turkey to establish control of the province despite Syrian protests that the transfer was illegal. The French gambit did contribute however to helping keep Turkey neutral during World War II.

Turkish President Abdullah Gu, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, and other Turkish government leaders have adopted an increasingly hard line toward Syria in recent months, though Turkey is still less hostile toward Syria's current regime than earlier Turkish governments or most of its NATO partners.

Turkey's hedging policy reflects an effort to balance competing considerations. On the one hand, Turkey has important economic and security interests at stake in Syria, including sustaining the security of its border with Syria and preventing Damascus from again adding anti-Turkey Kurdish terrorists.

In addition, Turkey does not want to risk a break with Iran, which strongly backs the current Syrian government. Some Iranian officials have expressed irritation at Turkey government criticism of Syrian policies, but the government in Tehran has generally sought to avoid a confrontation with Ankara over the issue.

Nonetheless, competing considerations have been inducing the Turkish government to adopt a harder line toward the Syrian regime.

First, Turkish public opinion has been pressing Turkish officials to at least denounce the repression as well as warn Syria that further regime violence will inflict harm on their bilateral relationship.

Second, many foreign governments close to Ankara, including the members of NATO and the EU as well as Arab leaders, have adopted their own harder line toward the Bashir Assad regime, raising pressure on Ankara to follow suit.

Third, the Turkish government broke with Qaddafi in Libya due to his government's use of violence against Libyan civilians, so there was pressure on Ankara to follow the same path toward Damascus.

Fourth, Turkish leaders have become genuinely outraged by the Syrian regime's repressive policies and Assad's failure to follow earlier Turkish government advice to end it.

One factor that underscored Syria's troubles to the people of Hatay is that Turkey has established several refugee camps in Hatay and other border provinces to provide a safe have for Syrians fleeing the violence in their own country. The number of refugees tends to fluctuate, ranging from several thousand to several tens of thousand refugees depending on the level of violence in Syrian regions near Hatay. In addition to those in the camps, many Syrians are now living illegally in Turkey, often staying with friends pending a normalization of the situation in their home country.

Regardless of their location and status, the Syrian refugees were most often not the same groups of people who form business partnerships with Hatay's commercial elite. Syrians with large property holdings or other physical assets do not want to risk losing their wealth by fleeing. In their absence, the authorities would naturally be tempted to confiscate it.

As a result, the refugees are mostly poor people or military conscripts who have deserted rather than shoot their own people, who risk severe punishment if they are captured by the Syrian authorities.

We were originally scheduled to visit one of these camps but the Turkish authorities in the end postponed opening them to visitors. Erdogan was supposed to make a trip to the camps a few days before our arrival, which would result in their being more open to foreign visitors, but his mother died a few days before the scheduled trip so his visit was canceled.

We did ask the local officials in Hatay about the Syrian issue, but they declined to answer many questions since such issues are being decided primarily by the central government.

In addition, the Red Crescent and some other local Turkish charities were providing assistance to the refugees as well as other Syrians suffering from their country's domestic upheavals.

The local Turkish business leaders we met expressed genuine outrage at the behavior of the Syrian government. Turkey and Syria established a visa-free travel regime in 2009, which dramatically increased people-to-people exchanges. Many of these members of Hatay's local business elite have been developing good business contacts in Syria, trading goods and making small-scale commercial investments.

Some of these business leaders indicated that, whenever they go to Syria, they try to stay at the homes of their Syrian business partners rather than in hotels in order to establish the personal trust and understanding that they consider essential for good business relations. They thus had a very good sense of the pains the Syrian people had been suffering in recent months.

These business leaders praised the current AKP government for overcoming the impediments created by Turkey's historic legacy of distancing itself from its former Ottoman dependencies. They also criticized previous Turkish governments for stoking fears among Turks about how they would allegedly risk personal dangers by traveling to the Arab world.

One business leader told a moving story about a recent visit to Syria. He recalled how one elderly Arab shopkeeper he met praised the Turks as a great people who had been betrayed by the Arab revolt during World War I. The shopkeeper then attributed the Arabs' misfortunes during the following century to this betrayal. Although he recognized that not all Arabs think this way, polls do show that Turks and the Turkish government now enjoy widespread popularity in the Arab world.

These Hatay business leaders recognized that they could suffer financial losses from any sanctions imposed on Syria by their own government or the restrictions on contacts with Turks that the Syrian authorities might themselves apply. Still, they were willing to suffer personal economic costs if their sacrifices might contribute to the spread of democracy and human rights in Syria and other Arab countries.

The business leaders attributed this widespread sentiment in part to the own changing economic circumstances. Ten years ago, discussions among Turks often focused on their country's high levels of unemployment, inflation, and other economic problems. Now that many more people are satisfied with their economic status, Turks more often discuss other issues, including how to advance liberal democratic values in Turkey and its neighbors.

Nonetheless, even the more outspoken local business leaders recognize that, in themselves, any sanctions Turkey imposes cannot have much affect on the outcome of the Syrian situation. The members of a liberal democratic think

tank in Istanbul explained that the Turkish people had already inflicted their most powerful sanction on Syria, which was to make clear that Turks no longer consider the current Syrian government worthy of their friendship.

Truly robust economic sanctions on Syria require the UN Security Council to adopt and enforce vigorous sanctions on the government. Thus far, China and Russia are using their permanent membership status on the Council to veto rigorous sanctions on Damascus.

We also had the opportunity to discuss the Syrian issue with several senior Turkish executive and legislative branch officials. Due to the improvement in bilateral relations in the last few years, many Turkish government ministers had developed institutional ties with their Syrian counterparts. These relationships allowed them to cooperate on common problems as well as enabled Turkish officials to help train and educate their Syrian counterparts on such issues as public housing, national economic policy, and central bank management. Ironically, the Turks said they learned the value of promoting cross-border cooperation by observing how effectively the EU has promoted such cooperation within its framework.

Although some of these bilateral institutional relations continue, the deterioration in Turkish-Syrian ties during the last few months has disrupted some joint projects. For example, there were plans to expand the collaboration between the two central banks that has arisen in recent years into a common finance area that would also include Jordan and Lebanon. There were even discussions about how to expand this area into a regional customs union. But the Turkish and Lebanese central bank heads have declined to meet with their Syrian counterpart for fear that the Syrians would exploit the opportunity to claim that they remain respected partners of these two governments.

Now Turkish officials are considering developing their partnership with Egypt and other Arab states in an Eastern Mediterranean Cooperation Partnership based on cooperation in financial services, with the hope they could resume their bilateral and multilateral cooperation with Syria after its government improves its behavior.

As for the effects of any economic sanctions Turkey might impose on Syria, the Turkish officials argued that such measures would likely have only a small, primarily regional impact on the Turkish economy given the large size of the Turkish economy and small share of activities involving Syria in that total. Turkish officials acknowledge that the sanctions might reduce cross-border economic opportunities for the inhabitants in Hatay, but the Treasury, Ministry of Development, and other Turkish government agencies were already taking steps to counter these negative impacts.

An influential Turkish legislator called Syria the most complicated case in the Arab world.

The protests make evident that strong hostility toward the regime exists, but the demonstrations remain confined to several enclaves and the regime benefits from having perhaps the strongest internal security forces in the Arab world. Turkish diplomats confirmed that their government had given up on reforms and the ability of Assad to fulfill the promises to reform that he has made to Turkish officials.

Still, Turkish officials do not think it is their place to say that Assad must go. One senior diplomat noted that it was still possible that Assad could, despite expectations, reach an agreement with his main domestic opponents that could meet many popular demands, improve the lot of the Syrian people, but allow him to stay in power.

Ankara is also seeing how the newly emergent Syrian opposition evolves in the coming months. Turkish officials described the opposition as in the midst of a "learning process." They argued that the opposition needs further time to develop its potential and become more representative of the Syrian people.

Meanwhile, Turkey is allowing the opposition to meet on its territory, though Turkish officials stressed that their government is not favoring any side. Turkish officials stressed that they would adhere to international law when developing and executing their policy regarding Syria. They have no intention to provide arms to the Syrian opposition but will seek to prevent arms reaching Syria through Turkish territory if the UN or the Turkish government adopts an arms ban on the Syrian government.

The Russia-Turkey Partnership

By Richard Weitz

Many of my questions in Turkey concerned that country's ties with Russia. The Turkish officials we met considered their country's relations with Russia to be their best ever.

They pointed to their extensive bilateral trade, the millions of Russian tourists who visit Turkey each year, and the strong harmony in Russian and Turkey security interests in the Balkans, Middle East, Afghanistan, and the Black Sea region. Although acknowledging some differences, they believe that Turkey and Russia have now developed a profoundly healthy relationship based on mutual respect.



Turkey is Re-Defining Its Position as a Crossroads State and Expanding Its Role

Credit Image: Bigstock

Even during the first few years following the end of the Cold War and the demise of Soviet Union, Russian-Turkish ties remained troubled. The leaders of the new Russian Federation feared a strengthening of pan-Turkism among the Turkish peoples of Central Asia, with a corresponding decrease in Moscow's influence in the region.

From the Turkish perspective, the Russian government's initial reluctance to label the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) as a terrorist organization, despite its attacks against civilian targets in Turkey, and Russia's support for the Greek Cypriots in their conflict with the Turkish-dominated state of northern Cyprus, which still hosts Turkish troops, presented major stumbling blocks to better bilateral ties between Ankara and Moscow.

Relations between Turkey and Russia began to improve toward the end of the decade. One of the consequences of the Russia's 1998 financial meltdown was to compel Moscow to soften its approach toward Turkey. By then, Russian leaders had recognized that Turkey lacked the capacity to challenge Moscow's primacy in Central Asia or in the Black Sea region. As part of their economic recovery efforts, Russian officials sought to expand economic relations with Turkey.

They adopted corresponding political and security initiatives to improve the prospects of Russian-Turkish reconciliation. For example, the Russian government refused to give rebel PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan asylum in Russia and redirected S-300 air defense missile systems Russia originally planned to sell to the government of Cyprus to the Greek island of Crete instead.

Despite some unease in Turkey with Moscow's repressive counterinsurgency policies in the South Caucasus, Russian security ties with Armenia, and Russia's growing military power in Turkey's neighborhood, many Turkish leaders no longer perceive an imminent military threat from Russia.

Within Turkey, newly empowered societal actors such as ethnic lobbies, business associations, influential civilian politicians, and religious groups pushed for changes in Turkey's traditional foreign and defense policies. The Justice and Development Party (AKP), which has governed Turkey since 2002, has pursued better Russian-Turkish relations while also trying to maintain good ties with Turkey's traditional NATO allies as well as cultivate new partnerships in the Middle East and with the newly independent states of Central Asia and the South Caucasus.

Meanwhile, Turkey's ties with various Western countries deteriorated during the last twenty years.

Disputes with European countries over various issues and a general lack of enthusiasm among Europeans for inviting Turkey to join the European Union (EU) have caused Turkish leaders lose hope that Ankara's will soon enter the EU as a full member, despite the enormous changes Turkish governments have made to realign Turkish policies with those of the EU.

EU leaders still characterize Turkey's accession negotiations, which formally commenced in October 2005, as a decade-long process that might not lead to full membership even if Turkey completes them successfully. The most recent annual EU report card on the EU enlargement process, issued while we were in Turkey, claimed that Turkey had failed to make progress during the past year on any of the main impediments to Turkey's joining the EU.

http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2011/package/strategy_paper_2011_en.pdf

Another sore point between Turkey and the EU has been the latter's efforts to develop a European Security and Defense Identity (ESDI) distinct from NATO. Given its limited influence on EU decision making, Ankara naturally is unenthusiastic about the ESDI arrogating missions that have until now belonged to NATO or its individual member governments.

Ironically, Turkey's superior economic performance during the past decade, which contrasts with the severe economic problems in many European countries, has dampened many Turks' enthusiasm for joining the EU or adopting the euro. **Instead, they are seeking to align Turkey more closely with the more dynamic emerging market economies situated outside Europe.**

Furthermore, the war in Iraq, which saw the Turkish parliament reject a proposal to allow the U.S. military to enter northern Iraq through Turkish territory, substantially weakened Turkish-American security ties and brought about a precipitous collapse in Turks' previously favorable opinion of the United States.

Even Turkey's security establishment, long closely tied to Washington, criticized U.S. policies for creating an autonomous Kurdish region in northern Iraq that facilitated PKK terrorist operations against Turkey. While the AKP government has sought to improve the status of Turkey's Kurdish minority, the Turkish military has conducted several large-scale raids into northern Iraq to combat PKK terrorists there.

The winter 2008-09 Gaza War alienated the AKP from Israel, and the Israeli military's killing of nine Turkish citizens when intercepting a Gaza-bound aid flotilla from Turkey in 2010, generated unprecedented strains in the long-standing security alliance between Turkey and Tel Aviv. The tensions ended Turkish-Israeli joint exercises and reduced other forms of military cooperation, depriving Israel of one of its few military allies in the Middle East.

In contrast to Turkey's strained relations with its traditional Western partners, Ankara's ties with Moscow have noticeably strengthened in recent years. Since Vladimir Putin became Russian President at the end of 1999, Russian leaders have cultivated relations with Turkey, exploiting that country's alienation from the West. When Putin visited Ankara in December 2004, he and Turkish President Ahmet Necdet Sezer signed six cooperation agreements in the areas of energy, finance, and security. The two governments also signed a "Joint Declaration on the Intensification of Friendship and Multidimensional Partnership," which established a formal framework that contributed to the subsequent expansion of bilateral Russian-Turkish ties. Since then, the leaders of both countries have exchanged frequent visits. These reciprocal exchanges culminated in February 2009, with the first state visit by a Turkish president to Russia.

Russia became Turkey's largest trading partner in 2008 due to Turkey's growing consumption of imported Russian energy. Bilateral commerce peaked that year at some \$34-\$37 billion, with Turkish figures citing the higher figure. This trade figure declined in 2009, to around \$20-\$23 billion, with Russian sources again using lower numbers. The worldwide recession reduced overall volumes of international commerce, while world prices for Russian oil and gas decreased from earlier record highs. These developments reduced both the volume and the value of Russian-Turkey commerce in 2009.

But Russian-Turkish trade has risen since then. Turkish businesses have already begun pursuing opportunities related to Russia's preparation for the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi. Turkey and Russia are also leading members of the multinational Black Sea Economic Cooperation organization, which promotes trade, energy, and environmental collaboration among the littoral states.

One source of economic friction between Russia and Turkey is the large and persistent trade imbalance in Russia's favor, despite recurring pledges by both governments to work to change the balance and composition of their trade. The imbalance, which does not characterize Turkey's trade with other major economic partners, results from Turkey's heavy dependence on Russian oil and gas, which accounts for almost three-fourths of Turkey's imports from Russia. Turkey has become one of the largest Russian gas importers and natural gas accounts for the largest proportion of Turkey's annual trade turnover with Russia.

Turkey's overwhelming reliance on Russian oil and gas concerns many Turkish officials. Diversification of energy partners would make Turkey less vulnerable to disruptions in Russian energy deliveries. For instance, Turkey has been trying to import gas from alternative suppliers to prevent Russia's state energy giant Gazprom from demanding excessively high prices for its gas shipments. Turkey is also planning to develop its civilian nuclear power sector.

Despite the nuclear disaster in Japan, the Turkish business leaders we met overwhelmingly supported their government's plans to construct several nuclear reactors in Turkey in coming years. They note that Turkey lacks the resources to become energy independent despite its new commitment to green industries and other renewable energy

technologies. Since Turkish business leaders would like to minimize their dependence on Russia and Iran for carbon-based energy supplies, they originally sought to have an American, European, or Asian (Japan or South Korean) corporation assume the lead role in developing their nuclear energy sector.

According to our Turkish interlocutors, none of the nuclear corporations from these countries that Turkish representatives approached about the construction were prepared to transfer adequate technology to Turkey or assume a management role there. So Ankara has now partnered with Moscow to develop its first nuclear power plant, which will use a third-generation Russian-made reactor. Russia has agreed to pay most of the costs of this construction and accept repayment out of the revenue from the electricity the plant will generate. Russia is also training 150 Turkish technicians each year on how to operate a nuclear power plant. The Turkish authorities intend that these technicians, or the ones they then train themselves, will then operate the approximately five nuclear power plants Turkey will build in coming years.

Turkey and Russia have adopted similar formal positions regarding Iran's nuclear program. Neither government wants the Islamic Republic to obtain nuclear weapons, but both Ankara and Moscow do not object to Iran's pursuit of limited nuclear activities under appropriate international monitoring. In addition, Turkey and Russia want to prevent other countries from employing force against Iran to attack its nuclear facilities.

Both Russian and more recently Turkish leaders have proposed that they could help mediate the nuclear dispute between Tehran and Washington. The Turkish government has played such a role in the case of Syria and Israel as well as between Afghanistan and Pakistan, but Iranian officials have denied the need for intermediaries, urging a direct U.S.-Iranian government dialogue instead. A joint Turkish-Brazilian effort to mediate a resolution of a dispute over whether Iran can enrich uranium for its research reactor in Tehran, which requires uranium fuel enriched to higher than normal levels, failed to secure Washington's approval.

Turkish diplomats expressed some disappointment that Russia has refused to reduce its support for the Syrian government of Bashir Assad. The Syrian regime's repressive domestic policies have outraged many Turks. Yet, the Turkish government recently advised Britain, France, and the United States to continue consultations within the UN Security Council rather than force a vote on a sanctions resolution. These Western governments ignored Turkey's advice. As expected, Russia and China then vetoed the proposed sanctions resolution.

Turkish diplomats fear that the resolution's defeat has strengthened Assad's regime. They also worry that the divisions in the Security Council are paralyzing that body. Turkish diplomats want the Security Council to serve as an important multinational tool for managing the international consequences of the Arab Spring. They therefore continue to encourage the Russian government to reduce its support for Assad in the Security Council and elsewhere, but are unwilling to break with Moscow over the issue.

Turkey Positions for US Military Withdrawal from Iraq

by Richard Weitz

Now that all U.S. combat troops are scheduled to withdraw from Iraq by the end of this year, Iraq's neighbors are positioning themselves. These neighbors are maneuvering to manage the resulting transformation in their regional security environment.

And such re-configurations will have significant consequences for the United States, even while the domestic focus has been upon ending an era, rather than opening another one. The withdrawal is occurring in a time of fundamental upheaval in the Middle East associated with the Arab Spring and in North Africa with the Libyan implosion.

Iran and Saudi Arabia have been the most active neighboring countries seeking to influence events there through various local allies, but Turkey's influence in Iraq has grown considerably in recent years, as Turkish policy makers have adopted more inclusive policies and as economic and cultural intercourse between Iraqis and Turks have grown.

The nadir of Turkish influence in Iraq occurred in 2003, when the Turkish parliament voted not to join the British-U.S. invading coalition or even allow the United States to send troops across the Turkey-Iraq border. As a result, the U.S. had to reposition its troops in the south, while Ankara exerted minimal influence on the immediate post-Saddam security environment, which soon deteriorated into quasi-anarchy.

Since then, the application of the "zero problems" with neighbors policy of the governing Justice and Development Party (AKP) has led Prime Minister Recep Erdogan, President Abdullah Gul, and other Turkish policy makers to balance unilateral military action with the cultivation soft power means of influence in Iraq through deepening cultural, education, and business ties. This reorientation culminated in President Gul's March 23-24, 2009, visit to Iraq, the first official Turkish visit to Iraq at the presidential level for 33 years.

Turkey has several core interests in Iraq: cultivating ties with the various Iraqi factions, preventing the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) from using northern Iraq as a base of operations; balancing the influence of Iran; securing access to Iraqi oil and other economic opportunities; and generally seeking to promote stability in a key neighboring region.

Turkish leaders have developed their most extensive ties with Iraq's Sunni minority, which until Saddam Hussein's overthrow in 2003 ruled over Iraq's other minorities as well as its Shiite majority.

During Iraq's March 2010 national elections, Turks generally supported the more secular Iraqi National Movement bloc led by Ayad Allawi rather than the Shiite-dominated State of Law Coalition, led by incumbent Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki.

As revealed by WikiLeaks, Turkish officials view al-Maliki less as an Iranian puppet than as an ambitious strongman who has exploited the postwar weakness of competing Iraqi political and social institutions to accrue and exercise near dictatorial powers. But Turks' support to al-Maliki's opponents, financial and otherwise, was much less than that provided by the Persian Gulf states. And the pressure of Turkey, the United States, and other foreign governments during the coalition formation talks did succeed in inducing the rivals to form a multi-party government in which al-Maliki's influence has been diluted.

In addition to reaching out to Iraq's Sunni and Kurdish minorities, the AKP has more recently tried to cultivate ties with Iraqi Shiites, including by reaching out to populist Shiite cleric Moktada al-Sadr by training lawmakers belonging to al-Sadr's party in parliamentary protocol. Erdogan, though a devout Sunni Muslim, attended the Shiite commemoration of Ashura.

In addition, a Turkish consortium plans to participate in an \$11-billion renovation project in Sadr City, Baghdad's largest Shiite neighborhood. On March 28-29, 2011, Prime Minister Erdogan, a Sunni Muslim, became the first Turkish leader to visit Hz. Ali's tomb in Najaf, one of the most important Shiite sites in Iraq.

Regardless of their religious affiliation, Iraqis appreciate that Turkey is one of their most important regional partners. Turkey is the most prosperous and industrialized of Iraq's neighbors, offers routes to and from Western markets, and provides an exit to the Mediterranean Sea for Iraqi hydrocarbons.

Between 2003 and 2010, bilateral trade increased from \$940 million to \$6 billion, making Iraq Turkey's fifth largest trade partner. The trade between the two countries now approximates \$10 billion, half of which will involve the KRG. Turkish policy makers would like to increase this level to \$25 billion in five years. In his March 2011 trip, Erdogan attended an Turkey-Iraq Business Forum, where he called for opening new border gates between the two countries. At present, there is only the Habur/Halil Ibrahim Kara border gate, which is already working at full capacity.

Turkey-Iraq Bilateral Financial Data Statistics

YEARS	EXPORT TO IRAQ	IMPORT FROM IRAQ	TRADE VOL-UME	BALANCE
2003	\$ 829 M	\$ 112 M	\$941	\$ 716 M
2004	\$ 1,820 B	\$ 467 M	\$ 2,288 B	\$ 1,353 B
2005	\$ 2,750 B	\$ 458 M	\$ 3,208 B	\$ 2,291 B
2006	\$ 2,589 B	\$ 375 M	\$ 2,965 B	\$ 2,213 B
2007	\$ 2,811 B	\$ 645 M	\$ 3,456 B	\$ 2,167 B
2008	\$ 3,912 B	\$ 1,320 B	\$ 5,233 B	\$ 2,591 B
2009	\$ 5,126 B	\$ 952 M	\$ 6,078 B	\$ 4,174 B
2010	\$ 6,042 B	\$ 1,354 B	\$ 7,396 B	\$ 4,688 B

[SOURCE: "Turkey-Iraq Bilateral Financial Data Statistics," Turkish Foreign Ministry official website]

Turkey sells Iraq various materials, machinery and construction products, basic food and cleaning materials, and electrical and electronic products. In contrast, almost all of Turkey's import from Iraq is composed of oil and fuel oil. In particular, Turkey is helping bring Iraqi energy to European markets. On August 7, 2007, Turkey and Iraq signed a memorandum of Understanding that Iraqi natural gas would be supplied to Turkey and via Turkey to Europe. A major oil pipeline runs from Kirkuk in Iraq to Ceyhan in Turkey. It carries one quarter of Iraq's crude oil exports. The flow assures both the authorities in both Kurdistan and beyond considerable revenue while helping secure Turkey's position as major energy bridge between the Middle East and Europe. Turkey and Iraq now exchange oil at the rate of 450,000 to 500,000 barrels a day.

If Iraq doubles or triples its current level of daily oil exports of some two million barrels, then Turkey will benefit from both the revenues it earns as a transit country for Iraqi oil flowing to European markets as well as from the increased ability of Iraqis to purchase Turkish goods and strengthen their internal security.

Another future development that could have the same effect would be if the long-planned Nabucco gas pipeline is constructed. Turkey has agreed that the pipeline could traverse its territory as it conveys natural gas from Iraq and other Middle Eastern as well as Caspian Basin countries to Europe.

Meanwhile, Turkey is helping Iraq meet its own energy demands. Iraq relies on Turkey to provide 250 megawatts of electricity each day. Turkey plans to increase the megawatts of electricity to Iraq to 1200 mw/h, providing one-

quarter of the electricity requirements of Iraq. The Electricity Ministry of Iraq contracted three Turkish companies at \$900 million to install 20 gas turbines and increase Iraq's power-generating capacity by 2,500 megawatts.

Turkey is Iraq's largest commercial investor, excluding oil. Turkish firms have invested in hotels, housing, and the energy sector in Iraq. These companies provide manufactured goods and other products. In 2008, Turkish companies contracted 72 projects with a volume of \$1.43 billion, focusing on infrastructure investments in Iraq. More than 260 Turkish contractors are currently in Iraq working on approximately \$11 billion worth of projects.

The Turkish government has made a vigorous effort to expand Turkish-Iraq economic ties. In addition to commercial considerations, Turkish officials have sought to make Iraq's economic health depend more on its sustaining good relations with Turkey, which increases Ankara's leverage over Baghdad's policies. Furthermore, economic exchanges with Iraq especially benefit eastern Turkey, where the Turkey's discontented Kurdish population lives. One means of reducing their dissatisfaction is to improve their standard of living.



The Iraqi Neighborhood is in Upheaval with Strategic Positioning by Its Neighbors

Image Credit: Bigstock

Turkey has sought to exert influence in Iraq by means other than politics and economics. Turkey has been utilizing "soft power" and projecting an image of pop culture over its border. In addition, Turkey helped double the number of out-of-country training opportunities that NATO could offer Iraqis in 2010 for internal security training. In December 2005, Turkey encouraged efforts in Iraq to bring together the Sunni Arab Party representatives and U.S. ambassador in Istanbul. Turkey also hosted programs to train over 500 Iraqi politicians in democratization for all of Iraq's various ethnic and sectarian political parties.

Nonetheless, the current Turkish military intervention in northern Iraq, the subject of a future SLD piece, underscores that Turkey still relies on military power as its ultimate security guarantee in northern Iraq.

Some Turkish analysts have considered the option of aligning with Iran to promote Turkey's interests in Iraq following a U.S. military withdrawal. Thanks to Iraq's Shiite majority as well as the presence of prominent pro-Iranian leaders in Iraq's government, armed forces, and economy, Tehran exerts substantial influence in Iraq.

The thrust of Iran's strategy in Iraq has been to engineer and perpetuate domination of Iraq's government by pro-Iranian Shiite Islamist movements that would, in Iran's view, likely align Iraq's foreign policy with that of Iran. Since both Turkey and Iran have large Kurdish minorities dissatisfied with the policies of their central governments, they share a common interest in constraining Kurdish militarism and autonomy in Iraq. Despite their current differences over Syria, Ankara and Tehran have cooperated on many other issues. Even so, the Iranian option still lacks much support among Turks.

For this and other reasons, Western and some Arab governments have generally encouraged Turkey to expand its presence in Iraq. Not only does this presence help dilute Iranian influence, but Turkish business activities generate economic growth and jobs in Iraq, helping the country recover from decades of war and civil strife.

Furthermore, many Western leaders still see Turkey's Islamic-influenced but essentially secular political system as a model of the type of political and social system that could work well in Iraq, which its large Sunni minority and secular tradition, or at least as offering a superior alternative to that of an Iranian-style Shiite autocracy.

This trend is likely to continue as Western influence in Iraq declines further in coming years with the withdrawal of U.S. troops and the natural deeper integration of Iraq into mainstream Middle East politics.

And by helping keep Iraq out of Tehran's orbit and linking Baghdad to the West, Ankara increases its own regional influence and enhance its value as a strategic partner of Western and Persian Gulf governments.

Turkey and Iran: Cooperation and Conflict

By Dr. Richard Weitz

During our time in Turkey, a key issue of interest was getting an update on their relationship with Iran. Although we were in Turkey for only one week, it was evident that Turkey's relationship with Iran is complex. The two countries cooperate in some areas and conflict in others.

For example, when pressed, the Turkish policy makers we met acknowledged that Iran and Turkey see one another as rivals for influence in the Middle East. Turkish academics and business people more readily confirmed this competition, though all our interlocutors made clear that Turkey would seek to avoid a direct confrontation with Iran because it would undermine the progress Ankara and Tehran had made in resolving their historic tensions.



Turkey's role as a crossroads power has been enhanced by the Arab Spring and the challenges posed by Iran.

(Credit image: Bigstock)

Turkey and Iran share some regional security interests. Turkish foreign policy experts emphasize that, while the United States and other NATO countries appear to want to withdraw their military forces from Iraq and Afghanistan as soon as possible, Turkey cannot escape the geographic imperative of dealing directly with the security issues involving these neighboring countries.

The Turkish national security elite therefore wants to see a strong Iraqi government that could enforce control over the Kurdish region bordering Turkey, especially to prevent the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which still conducts guerrilla and terrorist attacks against Turkey, from strengthening its presence in the region. Turkey has also sent troops to Afghanistan and sought to reduce tensions between the Kabul government and Pakistan.

In light of these objectives, Turkish officials naturally want Tehran's help in keeping Afghanistan, Iraq, and other neighboring regions stable. Turkish experts do not consider Iran a disruptive force in Afghanistan given all the other problems facing that country as well as the large number of other countries active in Afghanistan, which dilutes Tehran's influence and options.

With regard to Iraq, some Turkish analysts foresee the possible advent of a pro-Iranian Shiite government in Baghdad. In this case, they would try to work with Tehran to exert influence on Iran's policies towards Turkey, Kurdistan, and other regional security issues.

With regard to Iran's relations with Western countries, Turkish experts fear that isolating and threatening Tehran could further radicalize Iran's foreign policy, which at least with regards to Turkey has been generally non-confrontational. An alienated Iranian government might deepen its ties with international terrorist organizations, intervene more aggressively in Iraq and Afghanistan, and pursue other retaliatory actions against NATO countries that would invariably harm Turkish interests.

Turks have already seen this process at work. Since 1990, they have suffered considerable economic costs, regional security setbacks, and other losses from Western sanctions and military actions against Iraq.

During its most recent two-year rotating term on the UN Security Council (UNSC), which ended in 2010, Turkey joined with Brazil as the most vocal opponent of imposing additional sanctions on Iran for its controversial nuclear activities. Turkish officials consider the “dual-track” approach adopted by the UNSC and other countries toward Iran—combining offers of cooperation with threats of retaliation—counterproductive.

Instead, they argue that the best way to prevent Tehran from seeking nuclear weapons is to address the underlying sources of insecurity that might induce Iran to seek them. Rather than rely on threats and sanctions, they want to offer Iran security pledges in return for reciprocal Iranian guarantees that Tehran will not misuse nuclear technology for military purposes.

Economic and energy considerations have also motivated Turkish opposition to applying more sanctions against Iran. The two countries have also seen a surge in bilateral commerce, thanks in part to Iran’s subsidizing energy sales to Turkey. Bilateral trade already exceeded \$11 billion last year and the two governments have set the goal of tripling that figure to \$30 billion by 2015.

Each day Turkey imports some 20-25 million cubic meters of Iranian gas at discounted prices through a direct pipeline connecting the two neighboring states. This equates to approximately 10 billion cubic meters of gas per year, which amounts to almost one-third of Turkey’s yearly gas consumption and has made Iran Turkey’s second largest supplier of gas after Russia.

There are numerous media reports that Turkey has not fully enforced the international economic sanctions imposed on Iran. But Turks worry that new sanctions on Iran will make circumvention more costly and further harm Turkey’s economic interests. International sanctions already contributed to last year’s decision of Turkish Petroleum International Co. to withdraw from a \$7 billion deal to develop a part of Iran’s enormous South Pars field.

Another factor drawing Turkey and Iran together has been the decreasing strength of Turkey’s secular political parties and national security establishment. Before 2002, Turkish secularists pointed to Iran as a potential nightmare model that might occur should an avowedly religious party gain control of the Turkish government. But the Justice and Development Party (AKP), which has governed Turkey since 2002, has discredited this claim.

Furthermore, whereas Turkish politicians and military leaders used to see Turkey’s Islamic neighbors Iran and Syria as potential threats, and sought to develop security ties with Israel, the other important non-Muslim state in the Middle East, Turkish and Iranian leaders now share a common animus towards Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians.

At times, Prime Minister Erdogan and President Ahmadinejad appear to compete for Arab mass support through their public attacks on Israel and their endorsement of various pro-Palestinian initiatives such as the controversial “freedom flotillas” seeking to defy Israel’s blockade of Gaza. While the previously robust intelligence cooperation between Turkey and Israel has largely ended, Turkey now shares intelligence with Iran about the PKK insurgents in Iraq and other mutual threats.

Despite these economic, energy, and security ties, sources of bilateral tension are growing. Turkish officials do not object to Iran’s pursuit of limited nuclear energy activities under appropriate international monitoring. In addition, Turkey wants to prevent other countries, such as Israel or the United States, from attacking Iran’s nuclear facilities using military force. (They do not comment on the more exotic cyber attacks.)

Nonetheless, while Turkish officials profess to believe that Iran's nuclear program is for peaceful purposes, they clearly do not want Tehran to obtain nuclear weapons. They fear that such a development would set off a wave of nuclear proliferation in the Middle East and would also embolden Iran to behave more aggressively.

Members of Turkey's still influential national security establishment have suggested that, if Iran ever acquired nuclear weapons, Turkey would rapidly do likewise for reasons of security and prestige.

Turkish leaders have sought to mediate the nuclear dispute between Tehran and Western countries, seeking a deal that would permit Iran to conduct peaceful nuclear activities but not nuclear weapons. Most notably, last May Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and President Lula Inacio da Silva of Brazil even announced an agreement in Tehran on May 17 whereby Iran would deposit 1,200 kilograms of its low-enriched uranium (LEU) in Turkey in return for the delivery within one year of 120 kilograms of uranium enriched to the higher level needed for Tehran's medical research reactor. The previous year, the Obama administration unsuccessfully tried to construct a package deal whereby Iran would receive additional fuel for this reactor from a foreign supplier in return for accepting various temporary constraints on Iran's nuclear program as a confidence-building measure.

The Turkey-Brazil-Iran agreement differed in crucial respects from the deal the United States and its allied had offered at a 2009 meeting with Iranian representatives in Vienna. For example, whereas the Vienna Group sought to secure a suspension of Iran's uranium enrichment activities as part of the deal, the trilateral declaration explicitly affirms Tehran's right to research, develop, produce, and use all elements of the nuclear fuel cycle, including enrichment. After the declaration, the Iranian government affirmed that it would continue to enrich uranium to the 20 percent level, which the original Vienna deal was explicitly designed to prevent.

Another problem was that, as a result of the time that has elapsed since last October, Iran has continued to enrich much more uranium, making the 1,200 kilograms of LEU Iran would exchange under the new trilateral proposal a much smaller share of its total stockpile.

The immediate reason Iranian government accepted the trilateral agreement was to avert new UN sanctions, which were nonetheless approved by the Security Council the following month. As in the past, Iranian diplomats sought to make some concessions in order to keep the focus on the negotiation track, especially by giving a justification to governments that were looking for a plausible excuse to delay adopting new sanctions. Until then, Iranian officials had ignored Turkish officers to mediate the dispute, including a Turkish offer the previous year to allow the proposed nuclear fuel exchange to occur on Iranian territory, one of Tehran's core demands.

Iran's gambit failed to break the great power unity. Years of frustrating negotiations have led European governments, the Obama administration, and now Russia and China to discount Tehran's present willingness to negotiate acceptable constraints on its nuclear program. Middle-ranking powers like Turkey have been drawn into this vacuum, but their mediation efforts have proven equally unsuccessful, and they still lack the power to block further sanctions.

Turkey voted against UNSC Resolution 1929, adopted on June 9, 2010, since it imposed additional sanctions on Iran rather than accept the Turkish-Brazil-Iran agreement as a means to reconcile Tehran with its nuclear critics. Turkish officials have said they will respect the resolution, which is binding on all UN members, but not enforce the supplementary sanctions adopted by the United States, EU members, or other countries unless they are also adopted by the UNSC, which would make them legally obligatory for all UN members. Some nonproliferation allege that certain Turkish firms have been aiding Iran's nuclear program by providing dual-use goods and services (e.g., banking) that could have military as well as peaceful applications.

Although Turkey still does not oppose Iran's nuclear activities, new sources of tension have disrupted their relations. The Iranians complain about Ankara's decision to host a missile defense radar on Turkish territory that, despite NATO's denials, is clearly designed against Iran's growing fleet of ballistic missiles which could easily reach Turkey. Furthermore, they object to Turkish leaders' seeking to export their version of Islamic democracy to the new regimes of the Middle East that came to power with the Arab Spring, which Iran generally opposes.

But the most divisive issue between Ankara and Tehran is their contrasting approach toward Syria.

The preservation of a friendly regime in Damascus is a vital national interest for Iran. The Syrian government represents one of Iran's few genuine allies, having resisted strong U.S. efforts to wean it away from Tehran. In addition, Iran's ability to "unleash" Hamas and Hezbollah is seen in Tehran as an important means of deterring, through threats of retaliation, Israeli or U.S. military action against Iran. And Syria provides the territory, intelligence, and other essential enablers that Iranians need to keep these two proxies militarily powerful.

Given these interests, it is unsurprising that the Iranian media, and some Iranian officials, have criticized the Turkish government for acting as a proxy for the West in these conflicts. Nonetheless, Turkish officials have calculated that the Iranian government, which is regionally isolated and potentially vulnerable to its own Arab Spring, cannot risk a break with Turkey.

Turkey-Iraqi-Kurdistan Reconciliation Pays Dividends

By Richard Weitz

During a week-long study trip to Turkey earlier this month, I was in Ankara at the same time as a senior Iraqi government delegation. We had simultaneous meetings at the Foreign Ministry. The Turkish Deputy Foreign Minister had to send a replacement to our session since he was meeting with his Iraqi counterpart to discuss an urgent issue: Turkey's perception that security along the Iraq-Turkish border was declining. Their discussions, building on other dialogue and cooperation that has deepened with their reconciliation of the last few years, has thus far proved sufficient to prevent the current Turkish military intervention in northern Iraq from exploding into a major bilateral confrontation.

(But today apparently the Turks have intervened as of 10/25/2011)

Turkish tanks entered northern Iraq and were heading towards a Kurdish militant camp, Turkish media reported Tuesday. The army's incursion is part of the reaction to last week's series of attacks by the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) in which 24 Turkish soldiers and policemen were killed in the border province of Hakkari. Turkey responded with air raids on PKK camps in northern Iraq, which it uses as bases to attack Turkey.

The target of the latest operation was a PKK camp in Haftanin, around 20 kilometres over the border.

<http://www.military.com/news/article/turkish-tanks-enter-northern-iraq.html>.



Turkey is at the crossroads and located in a dangerous neighborhood. The Turkish leadership will have to fill in power vacuums wherever they perceive they exist. Credit Image: Bigstock

Some 10,000 Turkish security personnel, including elite Special Forces units in addition to regular conscripts, are engaged in the present Turkish military operation against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (Kurdish: Partiya Karkerê Kurdistan or PKK), but the Turkish military has emphasized that most of its forces remain on Turkish territory. A statement on its website said that, "The large part of air and ground operations are carried out in the country, focusing mainly on the Cukurca area, and air and ground operations continue in a few areas of northern Iraq." Perhaps at most 2,000 Turkish troops have intervened into northern Iraq. They have been supported by surveillance drones, attack helicopters, and F-16 and F-4 fighter-bombers.

The current operation aims to avenge the death of 24 Turkish soldiers, and the wounding of many more, in an October 19 ambush in Hakkari province by the PKK. Although clashes have increased in recent months, the most recent PKK attack has been the most deadly against the Turkish military in years. Earlier PKK attacks have killed dozens of other Turkish security personnel since this July. These attacks, which PKK representatives claim are a response to earlier Turkish military and police assaults on their fighters and sympathizers, have provoked widespread outrage among Turks and many Kurds, who fear they will make it harder for them to secure their rights and privileges within Turkey and Iraq.

For now, the Turkish forces inside Iraq have confined their air and ground attacks to a narrow border region. It is uncertain how long the cross-border intervention will last, but one-three weeks is likely. Speculation persists that the number of Turkish troops in Iraq might increase and that the intervention force will move deeper into Iraq. But Ankara has apparently decided to minimize its losses and rely on its improved relations with the Iraqi central government in Baghdad and the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) to deal with the PKK fighters. In contrast to earlier stances, the KRG has publicly endorsed the current Turkish military intervention against the PKK.

Ironically, one reason for the deterioration in U.S.-Turkish relations a few years ago was Ankara's opposition to Washington's policies regarding Iraqi Kurdistan.

Despite an offer of billions of dollars of U.S. aid, the Turkish parliament in March 2003 refused to permit the U.S. military to attack northern Iraq through Turkey's southeast border during Operation Iraqi Freedom. Turkish public sup-

port for U.S. foreign policy collapsed following the invasion, while the Pentagon blamed Turkey's decision for the subsequent anti-U.S. insurgency. In 2005, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld claimed that, "If we had been able to get the 4th infantry Division in from the north through Turkey . . . the insurgency would have been less."

Differences grew when Turks perceived U.S. policies as promoting an autonomous Kurdish quasi-state in northern Iraq. The KRG was seen inspiring Kurdish separatism in southern Turkey, which Kurdish nationalists refer to as "northern Kurdistan" in contrast to "southern" Kurdistan in Iraq, and providing a de facto sanctuary for the PKK, whose terrorist attacks on Turkish civilians escalated following the 2003 Anglo-American invasion. Turkey's exclusion from the occupying coalition combined with the tensions between Ankara and Washington resulted in Turkey's exerting minimal influence on Iraq's post-Saddam security environment, which soon deteriorated into quasi-anarchy.

Starting in 2007, the Turkish and U.S. governments started to cooperate more effectively regarding the PKK cross-border raids into Turkey. Before then, Ankara had complained repeatedly that Washington was paying insufficient attention to Turkey's security interests in northern Iraq, especially PKK activities in the KRG. But the deaths of 13 Turkish soldiers in a border clash in October 2007 led the United States to provide intelligence and other assistance to the Turkish military, which conducted air and ground attacks against PKK targets in northern Iraq. The more precise Turkish attacks minimized Kurdish civilian casualties and therefore KRG complaints.

In recent years, Turkish-Kurdish-U.S security cooperation regarding Iraq has increased. In July 2008, Turkey and Iraq signed a joint political declaration that established a high-level strategic cooperation council aimed at establishing a "long-term strategic partnership." The agreement also calls for joint efforts to prevent terrorists and illegal arms from moving across their border. The council has since served as a discussion forum for the prime ministers and other high-level government officials of both countries. They have met three times a year to improve cooperation regarding energy, security, diplomatic, and economic issues.

2009 also saw a major change in Turkey's approach to the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG). Until a few years ago, Turkey eschewed official contact with the KRG based in Ebril and sought to constrain its autonomy and regional influence. Ankara feared that the KRG's emergence as a quasi-independent state would encourage separatist tendencies among Turkey's own Kurdish minority, estimated to number as much as 20 percent of the population.

Instead, the Turkish authorities pursued their interests within Iraq primarily by engaging with the occupying powers and, as it gained more influence, Iraq's central government in Baghdad. This latter approach was similar to how Ankara worked in the past with Iraq to contain Kurdish influence. But this strategy, while yielding gains in the 1960s and 1970s, has proved less effective since the 1991 establishment of a Kurdish autonomous region and especially since 2003 due to the decentralized nature of political authority in post-Saddam Iraq.

Attempts to use the Iraqi Turkmen Front (ITC), established in 1995 to consolidate several smaller political parties and therefore strengthen the influence of , as a local proxy also failed to yield major benefits. Ankara has backed Turkmen objections to the incorporation of the city or region of Kirkuk into the KRG since having control of the area's oil resources would bolster the KRG's wealth, autonomy, and perhaps embolden its leaders to declare independence. Although the local Turkmen are eager to partner with Ankara, Baghdad, and Iran (many are Shiites) to contest Kurdish influence in Kirkuk and other areas, they lack much political strength and have been able to elect only a couple of members to the Iraqi national parliament in each election. As a result, Ankara found itself with little influence in northern Iraq despite that border region's vital importance to Turkey's security.

In 2009, the Turkish government reversed course and adopted a more flexible and embracing policy towards the KRG as well as its own Kurdish minority. Within Iraq, Turkey now began to engage directly with the KRG, which still en-

joys considerable autonomy but whose leaders have committed to remaining part of a unified Iraqi state and to suppressing PKK operations in their area of control. KRG pressure reportedly contributed to the PKK's decision to declare a ceasefire in August 2010. For their part, Turkish officials currently prefer a strong KRG that has the power to control its border and internal security, promote economic development that provides opportunities for Turkish traders and investors, and provides Kurds with an alternative successful model to that of supporting the PKK.

Many Kurds in Turkey as well as Iraq support the KRG as their best means of achieving limited autonomy in a situation in which Kurds cannot establish an independent country. Turkey's 2010 opening of a consulate in Erbil, the KRG capital, signified Turkey's new approach by recognizing the KRG as a core constituent element within the federal state of Iraq. Turkish officials have also developed ties with moderate Kurdish leaders such as Iraqi President Jalal Talabani and KRG President Massoud Barzani, who regularly visit Ankara as honored guests.

Ankara's elevated role in the KRG has also enhanced Turkey's influence in Baghdad since Turkey has become the most powerful foreign actor in a region of vital importance to the Iraqi government. Should Iraq ever come under the control of a government hostile Turkey, Ankara could use the KRG as a buffer to shield Turkey from Baghdad as well as a means to exert pressure on Iraqi policies. But Turkish officials have been careful to refrain from discussing such an option for fear of exacerbating fears that Ankara's real objective is to recover northern Iraq, which under the Ottoman Empire had been the vilayet of Mosul, in line with what some see as the foreign ministry's neo-Ottoman policy.

Although Turkey's overall economic exchanges with Iraq has increased considerably in recent years, its economic presence has become particularly prominent in Iraqi Kurdistan, especially its trade, energy, and construction sectors. In the KRG, 80 percent of goods sold are imported from Turkey. The border between Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan has never been more open, as 1,500 trucks daily pass through the 26-lane border main crossing of Ibrahim Khalil. A few years ago, the main Turkish presence in northern Iraq was military. Although some 1,500 Turkish troops now quietly remain in northern Iraq, Turkey's most visible presence is its pop culture, especially cinema, and Turkish goods. Turkish clothes, furniture, toys, building materials, and other products flood the malls and shops throughout Iraqi Kurdistan. Turkish investment is also flourishing, with more than half the registered foreign firms operating in Iraqi Kurdistan—almost 800 of the 1,500 registered foreign companies—being Turkish.

Many Turkish business leaders see Iraqi Kurdistan as both an area of economic opportunity in itself as well as transit zone for increasing Turkish trade with more distant regions in the Middle East. Since 2009, Iraq has been importing oil directly from the KRG, using an oil pipeline that runs from Kirkuk in Iraq to Ceyhan in order to bring half a million barrels per day northward. If the KRG were a separate country, then it would rank among Turkey's top ten trading partners. Turkish political leaders want to strengthen their border security by working with Iraqi Kurdish authorities against the PKK. They also hope that the increased economic exchanges across the border will bring greater prosperity to the traditionally economic backward regions where many of Turkey's Kurds, which constitute one-fifth of Turkey's population, reside.

Iraqi Kurds appreciate that their economic development depends heavily on their attracting Turkish investment as well as being able to trade with Turkey and beyond by means by transiting Turkish territory. The KRG is landlocked and Turkey offers the optimal connecting route to European markets. Barzani observed during a June 2010 trip to Turkey that, "Turkey is a gateway for us to Europe as we are a gateway for Turkey to Iraq and the Gulf countries." Kurds attribute several Turkish advantages, including lower prices and more flexible contract terms than other foreign sellers. But the PKK insurgency will remain an impediment to deeper cross-border economic ties.

The October 21 confirmation by President Barack Obama that all U.S. troops will withdraw from Iraq in a few months could see a further escalation in violence as Turkey maneuvers to defend its border in the new security environment. The day before Obama's announcement, the U.S. military officially transferred control of northern Iraq to the Iraqi army at a brief ceremony in Tikrit. If the U.S. withdrawal results in less effective U.S.-Turkish security cooperation regarding northern Iraq, Turkey may pursue stronger security measures there. The leaders of both the Iraqi central government and the Kurdish Regional Government in northern Iraq have denounced the PKK attacks and not opposed the current Turkish military operations on their territory, but lack the means to eliminate the PKK forces on their soil without foreign assistance.

Turkey may also read the U.S. military withdrawal as a green light to enforce its own border security vision on Iraq, which willy-nilly has offered Kurdish militants a safe haven from which to organize attacks on Turkey. Unimpeded by a U.S. presence, the Turkish military might aim to inflict a decisive blow on the PKK infrastructure there and force the PKK to resume negotiations from a weaker position. But such a policy could easily become counterproductive, increasing sympathy for the PKK in northern Iraq and weakening support for the Turkish-Iraq cooperation so essential for both countries' future prosperity.

Turkish Divisions over Central Asia

By Richard Weitz

One of the few points of division we encountered among Turkish government officials and analysts was their competing views regarding future political developments in Central Asia. One group believes that Central Asia was ripe for deep political change through its own version of the Arab Spring. They see the region as the last bastion of one-party authoritarian rule and considered the prospects for its near-term democratization to be high.



Turkey as a Crossroads Country is trying to shape a role in Central Asia Credit Image: Bigstock

This first group would also welcome a phenomenon like the Arab Spring in the region since they consider the absence of functioning democracies in most Central Asian countries a significant problem for Turkish entities. For ex-

ample, they note that, since all major policies in a dictatorship are determined by a single individual or group, authoritarian governments are prone to make radical changes in policy overnight. In addition, the constraints on most individuals' ability to access information in authoritarian regimes as well as the legal arbitrariness common in non-democracies present major obstacles to domestic and foreign entrepreneurs seeking to run profitable businesses in these countries.

But another group of Turkish officials consider the prospects for Central Asia's near-term democratization to be low because they were more optimistic about these regimes' ability to withstand the kind of political chaos sweeping through the Arab world. They argue that it would take decades for these countries, whose leaders still consist of people who have overwhelmingly developed their political views during the Soviet period, to abandon their Soviet mentality and adopt Western liberal values.

In the view of these Turkish analysts and officials, another constraint on political change in Central Asia is the geographic isolation of these states from other democratic countries as well as their history of authoritarian rule. They argue that Central Asia's democratization would entail a lengthy process requiring the further political and economic evolution of these countries. For example, they believe that these nations' economic development would expand the size of their middle class. In time, these stronger middle classes could provide a foundation for these states' evolution into more democratic regimes since people having some property want to exert influence on government policies that could affect these interests.

Conversely, this second group of Turkish officials fear that efforts to rush Central Asia's democratization could easily backfire and lead their rulers to adopt even more repressive domestic politics. Instead, they advocate that, for the time being, Western governments focus on promoting the rule of law and human rights in Central Asia while hoping that economic development and other modernization trends would eventually lead to more democratic governments in the region.

At present, this second group of Turkish officials seems to have greater influence on Turkey's policies toward Central Asia. But the onset of revolutionary upheavals in this region could easily shift the balance of influence in favor of the first group more eager and optimistic about the prospects for Central Asia's democratization.

Despite their differences, both groups of Turkish officials maintain that their country could play at best a modest role in Central Asia. Neither thought Turkey sufficiently powerful to compete with Russia directly for regional influence. Turkish officials recognize Russia's political, military, and economic primacy in Central Asia. They also perceive China as a growing economic power in the region. These officials see Turkey's role in Central Asia mainly in cultural terms, encouraging these Turkic people to learn Turkish and acknowledge their historical affinity with the commonwealth of Turkish nations. They also want Turkish businesses to trade and invest in the region. In practice, the few Turkish companies having a major presence in Central Asia concentrate their activities in certain economic sectors such as construction.

During our visit to Ankara, we were fortunate to meet a wealthy Turkish entrepreneur who manages many investment projects in Turkmenistan. He confirmed that Turkmenistan does not offer foreign direct investors a welcoming environment. The country generally has inadequate infrastructure, pervasive corruption, low-skilled workers, political leaders and bureaucrats with an enduring Soviet mentality, and an authoritarian government. In theory, Turkmenistan could fulfill a large share of Turkey's demands for imported natural gas. But in practice Turkmenistan officials have been content to sell their natural gas to just two primary customers—Russia and China. Russia sells some of the gas it imports from Turkmenistan to Turkey, but with a healthy markup.

Turkey has striven to develop cooperative programs with the independent states of the South Caucasus and Central Asia. Azerbaijan and several of the Central Asian republics have majority populations of ethnic Turkic origin and all have long engaged in trade and other relations with Turkey. Since these countries became independent in 1991, the Turkish government has sought to train and educate their people and provide technical, linguistic, and other assistance to their institutions, from their militaries and government agencies to their businesses and other non-governmental organizations. Turkish officials also see one of their missions as representing Central Asian interests and views within major international institutions such as the G-20. They therefore encourage Central Asians to convey messages to these institutions' members via Turkey.

One researcher at an Ankara-based think tank estimated that more than 30,000 students from Central Asia and the South Caucasus have received some university education in Turkey since the countries of these regions had become independent in 1991. Nonetheless, he acknowledged that few of those receiving a Turkish education had risen above the status of mid-level managers or state bureaucrats upon their return to their home countries. In contrast, the number of university students from these countries who have received advanced education in Russia has soared since Putin became Russia's leader in 2000 and made strengthening Moscow's influence within the other former Soviet republics a priority. This trend has in turn reinforced the domination of the Soviet-era educated elite in these former Soviet republics and, in the view of this researcher, had made it harder for these nations to break with their Soviet mentalities.

The Turkey-Russia dynamic in the South Caucasus is also complex. For example, in the Armenia-Azerbaijan dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh and related issues, Moscow favors Armenia while Ankara backs Azerbaijan. That said, both Turkey and Russia are working to prevent renewed fighting between Azerbaijan and Armenia. The Russians would also like to see a reconciliation between Turkey and Armenia. Among other reasons, a rapprochement between Ankara and Yerevan could see an opening of their border, closed for almost two decades to most commercial activities.

Similarly, the Turkish government remains committed to support the 3,000-km Nabucco pipeline that would bring large volumes of natural gas from the Caspian Basin to Europe through Turkey while bypassing Russian territory. Nabucco is intended as a complement to the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, built in 2005, which circumvents Russian territory by bringing oil from Caspian fields to Europe through Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey. Although the Turkish government remains committed to Nabucco, financial and other problems continue to impede its construction. Nabucco would be twice as long as Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan, cost three times as much (over \$11 billion), and has not even begun construction despite being proposed in 2002. In any case, Turkey has sought to keep Nabucco from being seen as a threat in Moscow by inviting Russian energy firms to become key partners in the project.

Even in the case of Georgia, Turkey has managed to maintain good relations with Tbilisi without antagonizing Moscow, though Turkish efforts to lessen Russia-Georgia antagonisms have largely failed.

Russia's decision to use overwhelming force to defeat Georgia in its August 2008 war resulted in Turkish policy makers modifying their regional security policies. Moscow's response shocked Turkish policy makers into realizing that their margin for maneuver in Russia's backyard might be smaller than anticipated. To prevent further regional military conflicts, Ankara sought to advance a multilateral regional security framework that would both constrain Moscow's assertive impulses as well as revitalize efforts to resolve the "frozen conflicts" among the former republics that, as shown by 2008 war, might unexpectedly thaw.

Although Turkish leaders had traditionally strongly supported Georgia's territorial integrity and developed strong economic ties with Georgians, Turkish officials restrained their criticism of Moscow's intervention and subsequent dismemberment of Georgia. Turkish representatives instead focused on averting future conflicts by promoting the

creation of a Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform (CSCP) that would include Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Russia as well as Turkey. The CSCP would supplement the contributions made by other regional security institutions, such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), also seeking to resolve the frozen conflicts.



Turkey, Russia and Iran are key players in Central Asia Credit Image: Bigstock

Russian officials endorsed the proposed platform in principle since, by excluding non-regional actors, it would give Moscow and Ankara a leading role in addressing local security problems. The first meeting within the CSCP framework occurred on the sidelines of an OCSE meeting in Helsinki in early December 2008. Since then, the initiative has stagnated along with other efforts to engage Russia and Georgia within a common security framework. Additional weaknesses of the CSCP as a regional energy and security framework are that it excludes Iran and has been unable to overcome longstanding Azerbaijani-Armenian tensions.

Earlier this year Kazakh officials and the Russian press had discussed Turkey's acquiring some kind of formal affiliation with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the dominant multinational institution in Central Asia. But thus far Turkey has not obtained even formal observer status in the SCO. Indeed, the Turkish diplomats we met disclaimed any interest in obtaining some kind of official status in the SCO. I remarked at several meetings in Turkey that some people in NATO might see Turkey's affiliation with the SCO as helping to keep the organization from moving in an anti-Western direction by diluting Moscow's and Beijing's domination of the organization and adding another pro-Western state into its ranks. But my interlocutors seemed unenthusiastic about Turkey's playing that role within the organization.

In general, one gets the impression that Turkey's policy makers have concluded that they lack the capacity and resources to have a major independent impact in Central Asia given Russia's longstanding political, economic, and cultural domination of the region. But they believe Turkey can exert some regional influence when it partners with Europe, the United States, Russia, or other more powerful actors. In the future, China and India might also serve as powerful partners if they continue to increase their economic presence in Central Asia.