
The United States and Turkish Relations and the Challenges Ahead

**By
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United States Secretary of State Rice instructed me to seek to shift the focus of the United States and Turkey relationship from just managing challenges to finding ways the United States (U.S.) and Turkey can work together in the world on issues where we agree. Turkey, a majority Muslim state, with a tradition of secular governance, a deepening democracy and a thriving free market is of strategic importance to the United States. Its legacy of modernization can inspire people throughout the broader Middle East

Washington and Ankara have developed a blueprint to invigorate our bilateral relations, the Shared Vision statement that Secretary Rice and Foreign Minister Gul concluded last July. We have made progress implementing the statement, though much work remains and in Turkey, as you said, sir, public anti-Americanism remains at a historic high. We have made steady progress over the past two years in elevating U.S. and Turkish relations from their low point on March 1, 2003, when the Turkish parliament voted not to allow U.S. forces to deploy through Turkey to Iraq. Today, Turkey does support U.S. objectives in Iraq and has urged us not to abandon the Iraqi people. In turn, the United States depends greatly on Turkey to pursue shared objectives in support of the Iraqi and Afghan peoples.

Turkey, for example, provides extensive logistic support to our troops in Iraq. This critical lifeline includes: the cargo hub at Incirlik Air Base, through which, as you said, we ship 74 percent of our air cargo to Iraq. The land border crossing between Turkey and Iraq at the Habur Gate accounts for delivery to Iraq of a substantial portion of the fuel used by coalition forces and the fuel, food and water consumed by Iraqis. Turkey is the source of many imports of electricity into Northern Iraq. Turkey has used technical and financial assistance effectively to train Iraqi political parties:

- To live in their new democratic world
- To rebuild infrastructure and spark commercial development
- To deliver to average Iraqis the necessities of daily life

Turkey's grant of blanket overflight clearances of U.S. military aircraft is of critical importance to our military operations in both Iraq and Afghanistan. In Afghanistan itself, Turkey has commanded the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) twice and is now sharing joint rotational command of ISAF Capital Region Command with France and Italy. Turkey also has participated generously in civilian reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. We continue to urge Turkey, a dependable North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) ally to continue to contribute to Afghanistan and to remove existing caveats. In the broader Middle East, Turkey is part of the robust international coalition working to achieve a diplomatic solution to Iran's continuing noncompliance with international nuclear obligations. Turkey has committed itself to implement fully the provisions of the United Nations (U.N.) Security Council Resolution 1737, which imposes sanctions on Iran and is helping to apply targeted financial pressure on the Iranian regime.

Turkey is a partner in the search for Israeli and Palestinian peace. Its leaders have conducted their own diplomacy between Tel Aviv and Arab capitals and have encouraged the Palestinians to accept the Quartet principles. Turkey has been actively engaged in Lebanon, notably by contributing about 900 troops to U.N. Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in the fall of 2006. During last the summer of 2006 Israeli and Hezbollah clashes, Turkey helped evacuate almost 2000 American citizens from war-torn Lebanon.

On energy security, the United States has offered strong support to help realize the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, working with Turkey, Georgia and Azerbaijan and with companies to establish a public-private partnership that has resulted in one the most complex and successful pipeline projects of all time. A companion natural gas pipeline, the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzerum (BTE), a pipeline, is about to begin delivering Azerbaijani natural gas to Georgia and Turkey.

Over the next decade, we hope a trans-Caspian gas pipeline from Kazakhstan and even Turkmenistan will connect with this BTE pipeline. We have also just launched trilateral discussions with Ankara and Baghdad on developing gas production in northern Iraq. This so-called Southern Corridor can change Eurasia's strategic map by offering Europe its best hope for large volumes of natural gas supplies that will allow diversification away from a deepening European reliance on Gazprom.

We are committed to eliminating the threat of the Turkish Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) terrorism in northern Iraq, where this terrorist group is headquartered and from which it continues to launch deadly attacks on Turkey. My colleague and friend, General Joe Ralston, former Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, has been appointed by Secretary of State Rice as the Special Envoy to counter the PKK.

The Turkish-American strategic partnership, though, rests on a foundation of Turkey's own democratic development. Turkey remains a secular, democratic state. But it is today a very different and a far more robust democracy than the Turkey of a generation ago. Former boundaries of expression and limits upon political options have gone or much widened. Basic freedoms are much more respected.

But with greater democratic freedoms have come deeper debate within Turkey about its strategic course, its identity, and about the role of religion in public life. These debates in turn have brought increased volatility. These intense debates within Turkey take place at a time of a very active political calendar. Turkey will hold presidential elections in May 2007 and parliamentary elections in November 2007.

Euro-skepticism, anti-Americanism and tensions over Turkey's identity and strategic course are present and sometimes growing as is a popular nationalism. One cause is Turkish citizens' frustration with PKK terrorism emanating from Iraqi territory. Many Turks feel humiliated by what they perceive as a shifting of accession requirements by the European Union (E.U.). As political tensions mount, additional political strains can undermine America's ability to sustain the recent improvement in U.S. and Turkish ties. But amid these difficult issues, we have confidence that the Turkish people will address their differences peacefully and within Turkey's deepening democratic process. Against this complex background, Mr. Chairman, Turkey now faces the possibility of a congressional resolution defining as genocide the mass killings and forced exile of as many as 1.5 million Armenians in the final years of the Ottoman Empire. The Administration has never denied, nor does it dispute or minimize, the historical facts of these mass murders and this ethnic cleansing. Each year, the President has issued a solemn statement on April 24th, Armenian Remembrance Day.

Our goal is to stimulate a candid exploration within Turkish society of these horrific events in an effort to help Turkey reconcile with its painful past and with Armenia. This is not easy. It was not easy

for the United States to address its own historic dark spots either. We will have to be persistent and we will have to be thoughtful. But after a long silence, Turkey is making progress addressing these issues. Dramatically in 2007, more than 100,000 Turkish citizens of all backgrounds demonstrated at the funeral of an Armenian-Turkish journalist murdered by a Turkish ultra-nationalist and they demonstrated in support of tolerance and a candid exploration of Turkey's past.

Political leaders across the political spectrum, including the President, the Prime Minister and the Chief of the General Staff condemned this killing. We are also seeing growing calls, including from Prime Minister Erdogan and Foreign Minister Gul, for changes to Article 301 of the Turkish Criminal Code which criminalizes insulting Turkishness. We welcome Turkish leaders' and opinion makers' calls to amend or repeal Article 301. Against this backdrop, we believe that House Resolution 106 would undercut voices emerging in Turkey who call for a truthful exploration of these events in pursuit of Turkey's reconciliation with its own past and with Armenia. Members of the Armenian-Turkish community tell us that such resolutions would stifle the dialogue they seek and would even raise popular emotions so dramatically as to threaten the progress they have made in Turkey. Our goal is an opening of the Turkish mind and the Turkish heart through honest, if painful, self examination. We fear that passage of any such resolutions would close minds and harden hearts.