
Invigorating the U.S.-Turkey Strategic Partnership

By

Matt Bryza

Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs

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Like Turkey itself, U.S.-Turkey relations have navigated remarkable transitions over the past 50 years. Today, we are living in perhaps the most exciting period. Timeworn clichés about Turkey, such as “bulwark against the Soviet Union” or “NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] Ally since the Korean War” or “bridge between East and West,” are being updated with new concepts, such as “energy hub” and “vibrant, emerging market.”

All of these clichés retain a certain degree of truth. But they reflect a static and simplified view of U.S.-Turkish relations. Today, the U.S. Government’s appreciation of Turkey’s geo-strategic significance is evolving in new and positive ways. Today, we are starting to understand Turkey’s multiple identities. Turkey is not merely a bridge; it is a society whose soul lies in both East and West, with a strategic and cultural reach extending from Pakistan, Afghanistan, Central Asia, and the Caucasus to the Balkans, Berlin, and Amsterdam. At the same time, Turkey is a strategic link between North and South, lying at the center of an extended Black Sea region that connects the European Union, Russia, and Ukraine with the Middle East.

With a more sophisticated appreciation of Turkey’s economic, diplomatic, and cultural might, the United States enjoys new opportunities to pursue the shared interests and common values that unite our two great countries. No factor is more significant in elevating Turkey’s strategic relevance today than its vibrant democracy. Turkey’s constitutional principles of democracy, secularism, and the rule of law can inspire reformers in the broader Middle East and beyond who seek the same political and economic freedoms and the same opportunities to improve their societies as do the citizens of the Turkish Republic.

We are thus in the process of updating our strategic concepts. To understand more deeply the opportunities before us, we should first take a brief look backward at how U.S.-Turkey relations have developed over the past decade.

During the 1990s, Turkey began fully to enjoy the fruits of Turgut Ozal’s groundbreaking reforms; and Prime Minister Erdogan has continued this important reform effort. Ankara and Washington recognized an opportunity to build a new bilateral relationship. Our Cold War conception of Turkey as the cornerstone of NATO’s Southern Flank, blunting Soviet ambitions and hosting key NATO military assets and Incirlik Airbase, was becoming outdated. As Turkey’s economy grew, so did its demand for energy, along with its ambitions to reconnect with Turkic populations in the Caucasus and Central Asia. At the same time, the United States sought to help the newly independent states of Central Asia and the Caucasus cement their independence by connecting their economies to European and global markets. Azerbaijani President Heydar Aliyev and Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev welcomed international investors to help develop the Caspian Basin’s mammoth oil and gas reserves. Then-Turkish President Suleyman Demirel worked with these leaders, and with Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze, to develop a revitalized concept of the Great Silk Road in the version of an East-West Corridor of oil and natural gas pipelines.

And so, a new U.S.-Turkey strategic partnership was born, with energy as a centerpiece. The United States and Turkey worked together in pursuit of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline and the South Caucasus Gas Pipeline (SCP) to connect Azerbaijan’s oil and natural gas reserves with European

and global markets. Meanwhile, Turkey was developing a strategic partnership with Israel, bringing together the Middle East's only two democracies at that time to pursue their common security and economic interests.

At the outset of President George W. Bush's Administration, the U.S. sought to build on the strong energy cooperation outlined above to generate a deeper, East-West dynamic in Central Asia and the Caucasus. Our goal was to help the young independent states of these regions secure their sovereignty and liberty by linking them to Europe, world markets, and Euro-Atlantic institutions via the corridor being established by the BTC and SCP pipelines. Turkey would be the gateway. Reflecting this vision, the National Security Council and State Department reorganized their bureaucratic structures to encourage a philosophical shift toward these countries' deeper connection to Europe as independent actors. The Caucasus and Central Asia were grouped with Turkey, which the Administration viewed as these countries' crucial partner in connecting with European and global markets, and with Euro-Atlantic security institutions.

This approach proved to be of crucial importance in the aftermath of September 11. The East-West Corridor we had been building from Turkey and the Black Sea through Georgia and Azerbaijan and across the Caspian became the strategic air corridor, and the lifeline, into Afghanistan allowing the United States and our coalition partners to conduct Operation Enduring Freedom. Uzbekistan emerged as crucial in launching and then sustaining this multi-national effort from the airbase at Karshi Khanabad. Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan immediately offered blanket over flight clearances, while Kyrgyzstan allowed use of the Manas Airbase, which evolved into our crucial logistics hub for Operation Enduring Freedom after Uzbekistan rescinded U.S. access to Karshi Khanabad.

U.S. efforts to establish these operational relationships advanced on the foundation of our cooperation with Turkey in preceding years on the East-West Corridor. Turkey's contributions to the war in Afghanistan grew much deeper. Turkey has now commanded the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan twice. Former Grand National Assembly Speaker and Foreign Minister Hikmet Cetin served as NATO's civilian representative in Kabul. And Turkey now leads a Provincial Reconstruction Team in Wardak Province north of Kabul. Security cooperation in Afghanistan thus emerged as a cornerstone of strategic partnership between the United States and Turkey. At NATO's recent Bucharest Summit, Turkey and the United States joined our other Allies and Alliance partners to renew our long-term commitment to security and stability in Afghanistan. We have pledged to provide the forces, resources, and flexibility necessary for success, so Afghanistan may never again become a haven for terrorists.

Our success in sustaining and strengthening U.S.-Turkey cooperation in Afghanistan is particularly significant given the severe strains the war in Iraq initially placed on our two countries' relations. In late 2002, many of us responsible for U.S. policy toward Turkey anticipated a joint effort in Iraq that would elevate U.S.-Turkey relations to a new and unprecedented strategic level. Turkey would help the United States better understand the challenges ahead of us in Iraq, both in terms of the approaching military campaign and Iraq's post-war reconstruction; and the United States would work with Turkey to counter the PKK [Partiya Karker Kurdistan (Kurdistan Worker's Party)] terrorist threat emanating from northern Iraq, while helping to cushion Turkey's economy against any exogenous shocks that might result from war along Turkey's southern border.

Scholars will long debate what went wrong in the lead-up to the Turkish Grand National Assembly's vote on March 1, 2003. The bottom line is that the Turkish Parliament's sovereign decision to decline the U.S. requests to transit troops and equipment through Turkey and into Iraq set U.S.-Turkey relations into a tailspin and shattered our concept of strategic partnership.

Despite this, we worked hard to salvage U.S.-Turkey relations. The United States offered an \$8 billion assistance package as a sign of Allied friendship to ease what we feared could be short-term economic

shocks to Turkey's economy from the war in Iraq. Ankara eventually declined our offer, just as Washington declined Ankara's offer in October 2003 of Turkish troops for Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Still, we tried to move ahead. We viewed 2004 as a potentially key year for restoring the U.S.-Turkey partnership. It began with Prime Minister Erdogan's visit to the White House in January. That June, Prime Minister Erdogan joined G-8 [Group of Eight (forum of top economic world powers)] leaders in Sea Island, Georgia to discuss cooperation to advance democracy in the broader Middle East and then hosted the NATO Summit in Istanbul. We hoped these events would help Turkey showcase its strategic value to the European Union as a democracy with a predominantly Muslim population and strong traditions of secularism and the rule of law. In December 2004, the European Council decided to commence accession negotiations with Ankara; and the talks began in October 2005, with strong U.S. support.

Despite this positive momentum, U.S.-Turkey relations remained stalled over the issue of PKK terrorism. Since 2006, we have made important progress in undercutting the PKK's financial, operational, and political support mechanisms in Europe — through a robust combination of political pressure and information sharing. Then-Foreign Minister Gul graciously praised these efforts. But the continued presence of PKK bases in northern Iraq led many Turkish citizens from all walks of life to resent what they perceived as the U.S. treating Turkey's primary terrorist (and national security) threat differently than we treated Al Qaida. As a result, the popularity of the United States shrank to record low-levels, reaching a depressing 9 percent in mid-2007.

The November 2007 Oval Office meeting between President Bush and Prime Minister Erdogan marked a decisive turning point. President Bush's designation of the PKK as "an enemy of Turkey, an enemy of Iraq, and therefore an enemy of the United States" signaled a new approach by Washington. The intensive information sharing authorized by President Bush has opened a new chapter in security cooperation between the United States, Turkey, and Iraq. It has also cleared the way for deeper cooperation not only on security, but on energy and democracy as well.

With that historical context in place, I would like to look forward to what we are doing now to deepen our strategic partnership with Turkey. The "Shared Vision" document concluded by Secretary Rice and then-Foreign Minister Gul in July 2006 outlines a structured dialogue between our two governments in pursuit of the strategic interests and values our two countries share. Our cooperation focuses on three broad areas: energy and economy, security, and democracy.

As I noted above, cooperation on energy in the late 1990s formed a cornerstone of the U.S.-Turkey strategic partnership, resulting in a successful "first phase" of Caspian development anchored by BTC for oil and SCP for gas. Today, we are focusing on the next phase of Caspian development, looking to the Caspian Basin and Iraq to help reduce Europe's dependence on a single Russian company, Gazprom, which provides 25 percent of all gas consumed in Europe. Gazprom provides 25 percent of Europe's overall gas consumption in Europe and 80 to 100 percent of gas to countries in Eastern Europe, Scandinavia, and the Baltic region. Turkey's dependence on Gazprom, at 65 percent, is significant. Turkey also will need additional new sources of gas to help diversify its supplies.

Our goal is to develop a "Southern Corridor" of energy infrastructure to transport Caspian and Iraqi oil and gas to Turkey and Europe. The Turkey-Greece-Italy (TGI) and Nabucco natural gas pipelines are key elements of the Southern Corridor. Azerbaijan provides the most promising near-term option for Turkey and the EU in its pursuit of diversified gas supplies from the Caspian Sea region. Azerbaijan possesses sufficient gas reserves to fill TGI, while providing some gas for domestic, Georgian and Turkish consumption, as well as for the Nabucco pipeline. However, gas in the ground does no good. Companies need access to these resources to develop them for Turkey and Europe. These two pipeline projects alone could provide Europe up to 44 billion cubic meters (BCM) of new gas supplies over the next seven to twelve years, of which 20 BCM (a not insignificant amount) will hopefully come from Azerbaijan,

the rest from Iraq and the Caspian Basin. Gazprom, by comparison, currently exports 160 BCM to Europe. So TGI and Nabucco could add to European markets more than one-quarter of the gas currently supplied by Gazprom. Such competition is crucial to ensuring that natural gas prices in Europe are set by market forces.

To achieve these goals, Turkey and Azerbaijan must work together to resolve their dispute over the commercial terms for the transit of natural gas across Turkey and onward into Europe, including by the TGI and Nabucco pipelines. Once this dispute is resolved, Azerbaijan is more likely to be able to conclude gas sales and purchase agreements with European investors required to advance these two major pipeline projects. Turkey could come to be seen as a reliable gas transit state, elevating its strategic importance to the European Union as the crucial partner linking enormous gas supplies in the Caspian region and Iraq with European markets. With the inauguration of the Turkey-Greece gas inter-connection last November, it is now possible to export gas from Azerbaijan's sector of the Caspian Sea to Greece and the EU-15 [European Union member countries prior to the accession of ten candidate countries on 1 May 2004] via Georgia and Turkey.

Potential gas supplies in Turkmenistan and Iraq can provide the crucial additional volumes beyond those in Azerbaijan to realize the Southern Corridor. Washington and Ankara are working together with Baghdad to help Iraq develop its own large natural gas reserves for both domestic consumption and for export to Turkey and the EU [European Union]. I have the honor to co-chair the U.S.-Turkey-Iraq Trilateral Working Group on Natural Gas, which aims to attract U.S., Turkish, and other international investment to Iraq's natural gas fields, much of which awaits Iraq's national hydrocarbon law, and then export Iraqi gas to Turkey and onward via the Nabucco Pipeline.

Energy is only one component of the growing economic partnership between the U.S. and Turkey, albeit, a crucial one. We are also working to deepen our trade relationship, which has lagged behind our energy and security cooperation for years. My friend and colleague, Assistant Secretary of State for Economic, Energy, and Business Affairs, Dan Sullivan, co-chairs the U.S.-Turkey Economic Partnership Commission (EPC) with Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs Under Secretary Ertugrul Apakan. Our EPC is indeed making important progress in deepening trade and investment between our two countries. And, as Turkey's economy continues to grow, it helps drive investment and economic development in Iraq and beyond.

On security, the second cluster of interests identified in our "Shared Vision" document, the United States and Turkey are deepening an impressive record of cooperation. Turkey was already making major contributions to Iraq's stabilization even before the November 5 meeting in the Oval Office that catalyzed our collaboration against PKK terrorists. Turkey has been a leader of the Iraq Neighbors process and, in fact, initially proposed the concept. Turkey's training of Iraqi political parties has contributed to the normalization of Iraq's political life. And Ankara's logistical support has been crucial to providing Coalition forces and Iraqi civilians with water, fuel, and electricity.

In Afghanistan, I have already mentioned Turkey's important contributions to ISAF [International Security Assistance Force] and provincial reconstruction. During the Paris Conference earlier this month, Turkey increased its original \$100 million humanitarian assistance pledge for Afghanistan to \$200 million. Turkish firms have invested \$1.5 billion in projects in Afghanistan since 2002, including schools and mosques, hospitals and health clinics, bridges and water wells. Turkey is also leading an effort to create a special investment zone along Afghanistan's border with Pakistan, which could play a key role in stabilizing that volatile region.

In the Middle East, Turkey's close and constructive relations with Israel and its Arab neighbors have enabled Turkey to play a constructive role in encouraging progress towards peace. On the economic front, Turkey is working with Israel and the Palestinians to build an industrial estate in the southern West Bank

that, when established, will generate economic development and job opportunities for Palestinians. On the political front, Turkey helped make last winter's Annapolis conference a success, encouraging Syria to attend even in Iran's absence. Turkey is facilitating a new round of indirect discussions between Syria and Israel. In these ways, Turkey demonstrates its indispensability in helping the Euro-Atlantic Community better understand the broader Middle East and develop successful strategies to advance peace and freedom in this extended region.

On Iran, while we recognize Turkey's longstanding relationship with its southern neighbor, and their economic ties, we look to Ankara to be a regional leader and continue to reinforce the international community's demands that Iran cease its nuclear enrichment program. These demands have been expressed in numerous UN [United Nations] Security Council resolutions. Moving forward, we need the strong commitment of Turkey and all our friends in the international community to send the message to the regime in Tehran that we are united in pressing Iran to change its behavior.

We anticipate that Turkey will maintain and deepen its close ties with Israel that developed into a strategic partnership in the 1990s and is based on the two countries shared democratic values. Turkey is making important contributions to maintaining peace and restoring stability to Israel's northern neighbor, Lebanon. And Turkey can play an important role in supporting economic growth in the Palestinian territories.

In Europe, the United States remains convinced that Turkey's eventual membership in the European Union will benefit Europe and Turkey alike. Turkey's blend of democracy, secularism, and rule of law can help us all deepen our understanding of how to integrate our Muslim populations into our mainstream societies while countering extremist recruiters. Meanwhile, Europe's criteria for accession to the EU provide a set of incentives for sustained reforms which, while in Turkey's national interests, are often politically difficult to make.

The United States remains firmly committed to offering all possible support to UN efforts to foster a just and lasting Cyprus settlement. Our goal is reunification of the island into a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation that builds on the body of work assembled over the past four decades. We are pleased by the discussions between the parties that have emerged since the constructive meeting between the two leaders in March, which led to reopening of the Ledra Street crossing and technical discussions between working groups in preparation for the resumption of comprehensive settlement talks under UN auspices. We also welcomed the May 23 statement by the two leaders, which set the goals for a re-unified Cyprus. We hope to see comprehensive talks resume over the next month or so. We believe the two communities themselves must generate the solution to the longstanding division of the island. We will consider appointing a new U.S. Cyprus Coordinator once the parties on the island express their readiness for such a move by the United States.

We share our European Allies' hope that Turkey and Armenia will soon normalize their relations. This will involve a decision by Turkey to restore diplomatic relations and reopen its border with Armenia and Armenia's recognition of its existing border with Turkey. We hope such steps will also lead to a heartfelt discussion of the shared and tragic past of these two friends of the United States.

In the Black Sea region, the United States and Turkey are working together to advance democracy in Georgia as our Georgian friends pursue their NATO aspirations. Turkey can play an important role in resolving the conflict in Abkhazia, drawing on its large Abkhaz Diaspora, which is anxious to invest in Abkhazia, Georgia, and thereby stimulate cooperation and reconciliation. More broadly in the Black Sea, the United States strongly supports Turkey's leadership in Operation Black Sea Harmony to foster maritime security cooperation with Russia, Romania, Ukraine, Bulgaria, and Georgia against threats of proliferation and terrorism. We also welcome strong information sharing between Operation Black Sea Harmony and NATO's Operation Active Endeavor in the Mediterranean Sea.

Our third cluster of common interests, the advance of democratic and market economic reform, reflects the values shared by our two countries. Turkey's unique historical experience ensures it cannot be a model for any country. But its legacy of over a century and a half of modernizing reforms can inspire those in Iraq, the rest of the broader Middle East, and beyond who seek the same political and economic freedoms as Turkey's citizens have come to enjoy. The democratic system that Mustafa Kemal Atatürk launched 85 years ago affords Turkey its greatest strategic significance in this day and age. It is precisely the advance of democracy, secularism, and the rule of law that can ensure separation of mosque and state, advance political and individual freedoms, and blunt efforts of extremist recruiters. We welcome the Turkish Government's reform of Article 301 of the Penal Code and look forward to a new and invigorated effort to enact further reforms required to fulfill Turkey's EU aspirations. The economic reforms launched by President Turgut Ozal in the 1980s have helped transform Turkey into one of the most promising emerging markets in the world. Sound fiscal policies have allowed Turkey to weather the severe financial crises of the 1990s and 2001 and orient its economy toward fulfilling its EU aspirations.

We support the Turkish Government as it pursues this reform agenda. As President Bush said following the U.S.-EU Summit in Slovenia June 10: "We strongly believe Turkey ought to be a member of the EU; and we appreciate Turkey's record of democratic and free market reforms, and working to realize its EU aspirations."

But, as we know from our own experience in the United States, the job of building democracy is never done. Political ideologies must adjust to broader societal change. It took our country nearly a century to abolish slavery; and only now, 145 years later, has an African American emerged as a top Presidential candidate. In Turkey, some political leaders argue they are trying to adjust the vision of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk to a new era; their opponents contend these efforts aim to undermine Kemalism and the constitutional principles of secularism, democracy, and the rule of law.

The current closure case against the ruling AK Party [Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party)] is where these arguments come to a head. What is clear to me as a U.S. official is that Turkey's democratic system is the product of Turkey's historical experience and remains vibrant. As in the past, Turkish democracy will work through this current and difficult challenge. In the end, a democracy requires that voters determine their country's political future; and Turkey's voters made clear decisions during elections twice in 2007. Turkish leaders, including President Gül and Prime Minister Erdoğan, have underscored the crucial importance of maintaining the separation of mosque and state through the constitutional principle of secularism as a central element of Turkey's democratic system. Ultimately, we are confident our Turkish Allies will rely on their Anatolian traditions of pragmatism and tolerant faith, combined with a modern embrace of scientific learning, to resolve the current controversy in a way that strengthens Turkish democracy.

In summary, U.S.-Turkish relations now enjoy a new and modern agenda, which differs profoundly from our partnership during the Cold War era. We have reshaped our bilateral agenda radically during the Administration of President George W. Bush. Having weathered some serious difficulties, the U.S.-Turkey strategic partnership is broader and richer than any time in the past. Our relations are based on common interests and shared values. Today, the United States appreciates Turkey as a key Euro-Atlantic Ally that uniquely enjoys multiple identities as a European, Middle Eastern, Eurasian, Balkan, Black Sea, and Mediterranean country. Our cooperation on energy, security, and democracy provide the foundation for a partnership that is more deeply and genuinely strategic than any time in the past. As we contemplate the threats that will confront the Euro-Atlantic community in the coming decade, Turkey has emerged as an indispensable partner. Maximizing the potential of our strategic partnership will require the next U.S. Administration to keep all these factors in mind and require Turkey to sustain political and economic reforms even when tempted by its propensity to avoid tough decisions.