

Turkey:

Domestic Politics, Regional Security, and the Middle East

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Brief Analysis

Turkey's global role, in the post-Cold War era, is more significant than ever. During the Cold War years, Turkey's primary role was to halt communist expansion in the region. In return, Turkey, under the NATO umbrella, enjoyed the protection of its Western allies. The end of the Cold War removed the risk of global war and ushered in an era of ethnic and "micronationalist" conflicts. Armenian aggression against Azerbaijan, ethnic cleansing of Bosnian Muslims, and the Gulf War are clear examples of the real danger represented by this instability. Additionally, Turkey is confronted with the risk of rapid proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the use of terrorism by some neighboring states. These dangers, combined with an increase in organized crime, arms, and drug smuggling, undermine the political and economic development of this strategic region. Turkey's relevance as a front-line state thus has increased as a result of the changes in the international system since the end of the Cold War.

> One of Turkey's new roles is to support regional peace and stability by maintaining strong deterrence capabilities and contributing to United Nations and NATO multilateral peace-keeping efforts. Turkey also acts as a catalyst for regional economic integration, the cornerstone for lasting peace, by playing an active role in groups like the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BESC), the D-8, and the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO). In this capacity, Turkey provides a working model for the newly independent states in the Caucasus and Central Asia, which also participate in BESC and ECO, of how democracy and pluralism can thrive in a Muslim country.

Turkey has had a Western-style democracy for nearly half a century. The Turkish press operates openly and freely. As a member of the Council of Europe, Turkey grants its citizens the right to petition the European Court of Human Rights regarding Turkish court decisions. Turkey is the only Muslim country to have these freedoms.

> Turkey is continuing to open and liberalize its economy. The drive towards privatization has cut the state's fifty-percent share in the economy by half. With a GNP exceeding \$200 billion, Turkey boasts the seventeenth largest economy in the world. Foreign investors are encouraged to tap into the potential of this strong domestic economy. Once a recipient of aid, Turkey is now among the largest donors of foreign aid as a percentage of GNP. Despite some very real problems, such as inflation, Turkey's overall economic performance during the last decade has been a success story. It is these realities that allow Turkey to play such a productive role in the region.

Regional Relations: Turkey supplied aircraft and troops to NATO forces in Bosnia. Currently, Turkey is participating with the United States in a program to train Bosnians to defend themselves. Turkey itself provides substantial aid to Bosnia and is the leading proponent of assistance to Bosnia in the Islamic Conference Organization. As a member of the OSCE Minsk Group, Turkey is actively seeking a solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute between Azerbaijan and Armenia. The key to a settlement would be the unconditional withdrawal of Armenian forces, still occupying one-fifth of Azerbaijan. Turkey has opened an air corridor to Armenia to allow for the flow of humanitarian aid; Ankara will do even more to help Armenia once that nation resolves the Nagorno-Karabakh problem peacefully. Turkey was among the very first nations to establish relations with the newly independent Caucasian and Central

Asian states and was influential in encouraging them to join Western institutions such as the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and NATO's Partnership for Peace program. Turkey also has done a great deal for the educational infrastructure of these states, including opening schools and universities, providing teachers and textbooks, and even assisting in adopting the Latin alphabet. By sharing experiences in building a democratic and secular society, Turkey hopes to assist these republics in consolidating their independence and insulating themselves from extremism.

The Caucasus and Central Asia have the potential to become a major energy hub in the next century. Turkey is the most likely terminal and distribution point for these oil and gas resources. Distribution via Black Sea ports is not a viable option, as the Turkish Straits are already congested with mega-tankers, and any more would pose a serious threat to the population of Istanbul. Therefore, Turkey welcomes U.S. support for an alternative overland pipeline running from Baku, Azerbaijan, to Ceyhan, Turkey, on the Mediterranean coast. This pipeline would be an environmentally safe and economically sensible way to transport oil to Western markets.

> Turkey continues to protect the inhabitants of northern Iraq within the framework of the Northern Watch Operation. Turkey also is active in the "Ankara process," aimed at resolving conflicts between the inhabitants of northern Iraq. Additionally, Turkey is the key country enforcing UN sanctions against Iraq, despite the loss of some 35 billion U.S. dollars as a result.

Turkey not only supports the Middle East Peace Process, but actively participated in multilateral working groups, dealing with issues from disarmament to regional water disputes, when those groups were meeting regularly. Turkey also provides observers to monitor the implementation of the Hebron Agreement, signed by Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA) in January 1997. In addition to continued assistance to the PA in its effort to establish viable political and economic institutions, and in line with its "balanced" approach toward the region, Turkey also wishes to realize the full potential of its fast-developing relations with Israel, the only other democracy in the region. Notwithstanding Arab criticism and Syria's relentless propaganda, Israel and Turkey have not formed a political or military alliance against any third country. Turkey will continue to encourage Israel to be more constructive in the peace process while continuing to further bilateral cooperation, which is in Turkey's long-term interests. Once a permanent peace is established, Turkey would like to see inter-state projects ranging from interconnecting power networks and gas pipelines in the region to construction of a water pipeline extending from Turkey to the Gulf via Israel. Turkey and Israel, as the countries with the most advanced economies in the area, are well suited to promote this kind of regional economic integration.

Relations with the West: Turkey, an associate member of the European Union (EU) for more than three decades, entered into customs union with the EU in 1996. As a result, the EU enjoys a \$10 billion trade surplus against Turkey. Economically and politically, Turkey is better qualified for full membership than some EU countries were when they became full members. Despite these factors, during the most recent summit in Luxembourg, the EU failed to include Turkey among the countries to be formally recognized as potential members. This decision was "biased, unfair, and openly discriminatory." The EU imposed criteria on Turkey that none of the other applicants were asked to fulfill. The fact that Turkey is the only Islamic country in the group brings to Turkish minds the existence of a religious and cultural bias. Turkey's exclusion from the EU will send a negative message to the Muslim-majority states of Central Asia, discouraging them from continuing along the path of democratization and modernization. Turkey "expects" the EU to correct this "colossal" mistake and to make the next EU summit, in Cardiff, a turning point in Turkish-EU ties. Taking an example from American society, "certain sections" of European society should learn that "diversity" is not to be feared; rather, it is a strength in its own right.

Ankara welcomes U.S. support in explaining Turkey's case to the EU. Turkey and the United States share many deep bonds of friendship and close cooperation in every field. This relationship has reached an advanced stage called

"enhanced partnership," which consists not only of defense and security cooperation but of a broad economic partnership. Turkey seeks to increase bilateral trade, which is now approximately \$6 billion. U.S. investments and joint ventures in Turkey are increasing rapidly, and many U.S. firms also are discovering Turkey's value as a gateway to Central Asia and other regional markets. U.S.-Turkish efforts in building an overland Caspian-Mediterranean oil pipeline and in fighting organized crime, terrorism, drug trafficking, and extremism also can open this part of the world to greater prosperity.

This Special Policy Forum Report was prepared by Jonathan Lincoln.

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