

Regenerating the U.S.-Turkey Partnership

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Nov 22, 2010

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Brief Analysis

On November 17, 2010, Soner Cagaptay, J. Scott Carpenter, Osman Faruk Logoglu, and Ian Lesser addressed a special Policy Forum luncheon at The Washington Institute to mark the launch of [Regenerating the U.S.-Turkey Partnership \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC04.php?CID=336\)](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC04.php?CID=336), a new Institute Policy Note. Dr. Cagaptay, who coauthored the report with Mr. Carpenter, is director of the Institute's [Turkish Research Program \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateI02.php?SID=12&newActiveSubNav=Turkish%20Research%20Program&activeSubNavLink=templateI02.php%3FSID%3D12&newActiveNav=researchPrograms\)](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateI02.php?SID=12&newActiveSubNav=Turkish%20Research%20Program&activeSubNavLink=templateI02.php%3FSID%3D12&newActiveNav=researchPrograms). Mr. Carpenter is a Keston Family fellow at the Institute and director of [Project Fikra: Defeating Extremism through the Power of Ideas \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateI02.php?SID=24&newActiveSubNav=Project%20Fikra%3A%20Defeating%20Extremism%20through%20the%20Power%20of%20Ideas&activeSubNavLink=templateI02.php%3FSID%3D24&\)](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateI02.php?SID=24&newActiveSubNav=Project%20Fikra%3A%20Defeating%20Extremism%20through%20the%20Power%20of%20Ideas&activeSubNavLink=templateI02.php%3FSID%3D24&). Mr. Logoglu, who served as Turkey's ambassador to the United States from 2001 to 2005, is president of Turkish Policy Forum, an Istanbul-based think tank. Mr. Lesser is a senior transatlantic fellow at the German Marshall Fund of the United States, where he leads work on Mediterranean, Turkish, and wider Atlantic security issues. The following is a rapporteur's summary of their remarks.

Soner Cagaptay and J. Scott Carpenter

U.S.-Turkey relations have passed a pivotal point. No longer can the partnership be defined as strategic. Although the United States has attempted to reach out and engage Ankara, the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) has not fully reciprocated. Instead, the AKP's foreign policy is increasingly divergent from Washington's, especially on Middle East issues.

Domestically, anti-Americanism has become pervasive in Turkey, and dissent over the AKP's policies is disappearing. The party has created an environment of fear, using the Ergenekon case to intimidate its opponents. The case must be recognized for what it is -- a witch hunt that persecutes rather than prosecutes alleged coup plotters. Accordingly, Turkish authorities must downgrade the investigation so that dissent to the AKP's views on foreign policy and other matters can reemerge and ensure a healthy democratic environment.

Given these developments, how should the United States regenerate its partnership with Turkey? At this point, the question is not so much what to do with Turkey, but rather what not to do. In short, Washington must do no harm. Turkey remains a democracy, and real change in its foreign policy must therefore come from within. The AKP is expected to do well in the next major elections (scheduled for July 2011), so the challenges the party presents to the United States will remain. In order to mitigate this problem, Washington must do four things:

- First and most important, acknowledge the reality of Turkey's strategic pivot under the AKP. Turkey is, unfortunately, no longer a faithful U.S. ally. Its shift in orientation is part of a broader policy framework rather than a simple response to U.S. actions in Iraq or elsewhere. Still, for whatever reason, the AKP perceives President Obama as a close friend and supporter, and Washington must do more to inject clarity into the relationship using this channel.
- Second, dramatically expand its public diplomacy efforts. This is not easy in a country where few people view the United States favorably, and where the AKP can easily manipulate information. Washington need not open a full frontal diplomatic assault on the Turkish government; instead, it should craft a well-funded, Turkey-specific public diplomacy initiative to win over individual Turks.
- Third, redouble its efforts to restart European Union accession talks. Due to French and Greek Cypriot objections, Turkey's membership talks have nearly ground to a halt. The United States should make clear to the EU that it wants Turkey to become part of Europe. In particular, it should do all it can to keep accession talks alive, since that process serves as a lifeline of liberal democracy in Turkey.
- Fourth, make better use of its diplomatic toolkit. Washington should make clear to Turkey that there are costs to not working with the United States. At the highest levels, American diplomats and others must emphasize U.S. unhappiness with the direction of the bilateral partnership. Washington must make smart use of its contacts, providing for AKP access to high-level U.S. officials with the intent of delivering its message, and become less prominent in supporting Turkish candidacy in multilateral organizations, since the AKP increasingly uses such platforms to undermine U.S. policy. Additionally, the United States could work behind the scenes to limit Ankara's pretensions that Turkey is a mediator for Iran policy or the Israel-Palestinian conflict.

Osman Faruk Logoglu

To understand Turkey's foreign policy and relations with the United States, one must first understand what is happening in Turkey as a whole. There are two schools of thought on this issue. One holds that Turkey is becoming less militaristic, stronger economically, more democratic, more liberal, and more of a regional power, with activity on many fronts.

The second school of thought is quite different: it argues that Turkey is moving in an unhealthy direction because its current leadership is guided by a worldview heavily influenced by an Islamist outlook. The religious and ideological space is constantly expanding in Turkey at the expense of all other spaces, including the secular. Every issue in the country is now addressed in terms of religious and ideological precepts, mores, rules, and regulations.

In other words, the axis of Turkey as a society is changing, and the country's foreign policy is simply following suit. Nothing about Turkish foreign policy -- including Ankara's vote against Iran sanctions in the UN Security Council, its worsening relations with Israel, and its warming relations with Hamas -- is accidental.

From this perspective, U.S.-Turkish relations can be couched in more concrete terms, assessed according to four pillars that have come to demonstrate "Turkey's spirit" and that characterize modern Turkey: namely, its ties with the United States, Israel, NATO, and the EU. Turkey cannot expect to remain a part of the Euro-Atlantic community when each of these four relationships is failing.

Regarding the NATO pillar, Ankara has legitimate concerns about the missile defense project, including the issue of naming specific sources of threat. Yet if Turkey is unable to join the NATO consensus on the issue, where will that leave the country?

The Israel pillar is undoubtedly in the worst shape, so much so that it is compromising the U.S. pillar. If the U.S.-Turkey relationship is to return to its former state, then Turkey and Israel must first repair their relationship. Ankara's partnership with Washington is based on a tripod: an American leg, a Turkish leg, and an Israeli leg. With the Israeli leg shaky at best, the rest of the structure is at risk. Improving Israeli-Turkish relations is an absolute necessity for both the United States and the region.

Finally, Turkey's relations with the EU, though not yet catatonic, are nearly immobile. EU accession is necessary for the survival of democracy within Turkey, not to mention secularism.

The AKP is poised to win the 2011 elections, and if it does, it will continue its current policy reorientation. The environment of fear within Turkey is very real. The ultimate test in a democracy -- and Turkey remains a democracy for now -- is the ballot box. If Turks are unhappy with the current government and the environment it has fomented, then they should throw electoral support toward the opposition, such as Kemal Kilicdaroglu, the new leader of the Republican People's Party (CHP).

Ian Lesser

Americans and Turks alike are creating a bit of mythology in supposing that the two countries have departed from a long-lost golden age in which relations were easy, strategic, manageable, and free of disputes. In fact, the relationship has always been a tough one. The United States and Turkey both hold a very strong sense of their own security interests, national interests, and sovereignty. In many ways, they are not natural allies.

The growing asymmetry between American and Turkish worldviews, vocabulary, and priorities is often put in terms of Turkey's turn toward the East. Yet Turkey views itself as a non-aligned state. The country's strategic establishment has been hollowed out since the Cold War, and as a result, U.S. concerns (e.g., Iranian nuclearization) lack resonance within Turkey.

Ankara's current foreign policy is very much commercially driven, and its economic dynamism is increasingly similar to that of Asian countries, with annual growth rates of up to 8 percent. Meanwhile, many European countries remain stagnant. Such prosperity contributes to Ankara's confidence and underscores the fact that despite U.S.-Turkish cooperation on defense issues, their economic relationship is extremely underdeveloped. For example, current U.S.-Turkish trade levels are roughly on par with Turkish-Syrian levels. The United States should work to fix this, with the understanding that it would be a decades-long endeavor.

To be sure, the United States, even under the current administration, has had trouble finding keen supporters of Turkish accession -- in fact, most of them are in Washington. Yet despite changing attitudes and tremendous disenchantment in both Europe and Turkey, EU accession should remain at the top of Washington's Turkey agenda. It is possible to be both pessimistic regarding accession prospects and optimistic for Turkey-EU convergence.

The authors of [Regenerating the U.S.-Turkey Partnership \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC04.php?CID=336\)](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC04.php?CID=336) are right to underscore the challenge: public diplomacy is tough when Turkish favorability ratings regarding American leadership are in the single digits. Although repairing that problem will no doubt take many years, the pervasive anti-Americanism within Turkey clearly cannot be fixed by official visits or other standard diplomatic means.

This rapporteur's summary was prepared by Allison LeBlanc. ❖

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