

New U.S. National Security Strategy and Implications for Turkey

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Articles & Testimony

On April 21, President Obama's National Security Advisor General (Ret.) Jim Jones gave a rare public speech on U.S. Middle East Policy at The Washington Institute's 2010 Soref Symposium. During his address, he focused on the new U.S. National Security Strategy that will be unveiled in the coming weeks. What was striking during this speech was the emphasis on what the Obama administration views as the greatest threat to global security, which is "the danger that terrorists will obtain nuclear weapons or materials."

Another important point (which was noted in a later analysis by Robert Satloff) is that "the enunciation of these pillars alone marks a significant shift from the key principles of the final George W. Bush and Bill Clinton National Security Strategies. For example, there is no reference in the Jones statement to democracy, freedom, or liberty, terms that dominated the Bush National Security Strategy. Democracy promotion, not specifically mentioned in General Jones' remarks, was also a stated pillar of Bill Clinton's final National Security Strategy." Gen. Jones outlined the strategy in four pillars:

U.S. National Security Strategy

Security -- The government has an enduring interest in the security of the United States, its citizens and U.S. allies and partners;

Prosperity -- The government has an enduring interest in a strong, innovative and growing U.S. economy in an open international economic system that promotes opportunity and prosperity;

Values -- The government has an enduring interest in upholding universal values, at home and around the world; and,

International Order -- The government has an enduring interest in an international order advanced by U.S. leadership that promotes peace, security and opportunity through stronger cooperation to meet global challenges.

Gen. Jones said that in order to strengthen its security, U.S. is responsibly bringing the war in Iraq to an end. He said that as evidenced by the successes of recent military operations against al Qaeda in Iraq, Iraqi security forces are in the lead. The United States will end its combat mission in Iraq by the end of August 2010 and all U.S. forces will be out of Iraq by the end of 2011. He stated that the most immediate challenge in Iraq now is to form an inclusive and representative government after the National Elections held in March.

Greatest Global Threat

To confront the greatest threat to global security -- the danger of terrorists obtaining nuclear weapons or materials, President Obama hosted the historic Nuclear Security Summit two weeks ago where 46 nations agreed to secure the world's vulnerable nuclear materials in four years. The new START Treaty with Russia, which is part of President Obama's comprehensive agenda to pursue a world without nuclear weapons -- reflects the three pillars of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty: nations with nuclear weapons will reduce them; nations without nuclear weapons will forsake them; and the recognition that nations have a right to peaceful nuclear energy.

Engagement with Iran

Gen. Jones stated that when President Obama took office, "Iran had already assembled thousands of centrifuges and accumulated nearly a bomb's worth of low enriched uranium. Iran was in active violation of five UN Security Council Resolutions. Moreover, Iran's sponsorship of terrorist actors in Iraq, Lebanon, and Gaza signaled a continued determination to promote violence and coercion across the Middle East.

Despite the efforts led by President Obama to engage Iran, Gen. Jones stated that to date there has been no indication that Iran's leaders want to resolve these issues constructively. After initially accepting it, Iran rejected the Tehran Research Reactor proposal and refused to discuss its nuclear program with the P5+1. The revelation of a previously covert enrichment site in Qom, construction of which further violated Iran's NPT obligations, created further suspicion about Iran's true intentions. Iran recently increased the enrichment levels of its uranium to 20 percent. All the while, Iran continues to brutally repress its own citizens and crush any opposition to the current regime.

Implications for Turkey

Although Gen. Jones did not include Turkey in his remarks; it is possible to draw conclusions that would be directly related to Turkey. In order to prevent terrorists from obtaining nuclear weapons or materials, the Obama administration will continue to seek support from a broad international coalition. As a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council and an important ally in the region, Turkey will be looked up as a reliable partner that will act in accordance with such coalition. In this regard, Turkey's possible abstention from voting for sanctions at the UN Security Council will be regarded as negatively as voting against sanctions.

When there is such a broad effort to prevent a nuclear-armed Iran, it really does not help Turkey to call a potential military nuclear program "just gossip" (March 16 2010, Prime Minister Erdogan press statement in London; Agence France-Presse). According to a recent report by the Crisis Group Europe Report (April 7, 2010 #203), Erdogan's statements contradict with those of AKP officials in private conversations who are convinced that as a regime and as a country, Iran is convinced to acquire a nuclear weapon. President Gul made a similar remark to Claudia Rosett and said "I do believe it is their [Iran] final aspiration to have a nuclear weapon in the end" (Forbes, Turkey Tilts Towards Iran, March 26, 2010). The next day, President's office denied giving an interview to Forbes but did not deny the substance of his comments. Rosett also said that she was a part of larger delegation and did not visit the office as Forbes Magazine's

representative.

The general impression is that the Obama administration has tried to engage Iran on a number of occasions, yet it has failed at reaching anything concrete. Therefore, it is very likely that the U.S. will seek further -- and potentially harsher -- measures to prevent Iran from pursuing nuclear weapons. Obama administration is not asking Turkey to be an additional channel since it prefers to directly communicate with other countries. James Steinberg, Deputy U.S. Secretary of State told Financial Times on February 24, 2010: "We do not need them [Turkey] to label Iran [as their misunderstood friend]. We need them to work with us to make sure that Iran does not become a nuclear weapons-capable...to find a common tactical approach."

The Obama administration underlines that peace between Israel and Palestine can only be achieved through a two-state solution. Turkey can only be supportive in this process if it has good relations with all stakeholders in this process -- Israelis, Palestinians, Syrians and Jordanians. Therefore, Turkey should aim to maintain good relations with all the parties in order to exert influence in the peace negotiations.

Reading in between lines of Gen. Jones' remarks, this presents the challenges ahead for the AKP government in U.S.-Turkish relations. It is more likely that there will be divergence between two countries' strategies, than vice versa in times ahead.

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