

The U.S.-Turkish Relationship beyond Iraq:

Common Values, Common Agenda

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Brief Analysis

On July 18, 2005, Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs R. Nicholas Burns addressed The Washington Institute’s Seventh Turgut Ozal Memorial Lecture. Undersecretary Burns’s prepared remarks were delivered by Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Daniel Fried. The following are excerpts from the speech followed by a summary of the subsequent question-and-answer session. [Read a full transcript. \(templateC07.php?CID=247\)](#)

“Today, we have all gathered to honor Turgut Ozal, a strong leader with a clear vision of Turkey’s future. Ozal—who we as Americans are proud to call a close friend—sought tirelessly to advance Mustafa Kemal Ataturk’s legacy, his dream of a modern, democratic Turkey anchored in the West....

“Like all close friends, we have had our share of disagreements. There is no doubt that we have had differing views on Iraq. We have also disagreed on tactics for dealing with Syria, a brutal dictatorship which supports terrorism and meddles in the affairs of its neighbors. It is the constructive way in which we discuss our differences that sets our relationship apart....

“But today...what I want to do is to set out for you my vision of the future of U.S.-Turkey relations, the great potential that is waiting to be realized. But I cannot do that properly without first outlining President Bush’s vision for U.S. foreign policy. It is a vision that security in our world comes through making a better, freer world. It is a vision that seeks the spread of democratic freedoms in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world....

“This vision has its application in nearly every aspect of U.S. policy. The United States—working with the G-8 and our European friends and allies, and particularly Turkey—seeks to spark reform in the Broader Middle East and North Africa...and convince the people of that troubled region to let go of bitterness, hatred, and violence, and get on with the serious work of economic development, political reform, and reconciliation....

“We seek to bring the weight, experience, and resources of a revived transatlantic relationship to support the forces of freedom in the rest of the world. For the United States and Europe—and we see Turkey as very much a part of Europe in this context—this must be our great common project: to strengthen and preserve peace, security, and

democracy around the world. And as the premier alliance within the transatlantic relationship, NATO will evolve in support of its core ideal, that all people should live free, protected from oppression....

“This is the American vision. But it is a vision that the U.S. cannot achieve by itself. The United States and Turkey are natural partners for the twenty-first century because our common values and our interests draw us together....

Turkey has demonstrated its commitment to these values through its own internal transformation into a democracy that respects the rights of all its citizens, provides economic opportunities for all its people, and seeks to share the fruits of democracy and freedom with others. This is the Turkey and the vision of Turgut Ozal, and it is the Turkey that my country sees emerging today.

“As it moves on its path of reform toward the European Union, Turkey can be a key partner of the United States in this grand project. We firmly believe that Turkey’s future lies in a Europe that is whole, free, and at peace, and I counsel patience and steadiness as Turkey watches the turbulent debate within the EU today. A Turkey on its way to Europe will be a stronger partner for the United States and, I believe, a more secure nation. I also believe that a democratic, modernizing, progressive Turkey will be good for Europe, and I believe that Europeans will come to see that as Turkey’s reforms proceed....

“Turkey, with strong and able armed forces in NATO, can help transform the alliance to address the global challenges of the twenty-first century. Turkey’s crucial role in bringing stability and security to the Balkans, Georgia, Sudan, Haiti, and elsewhere shows that Turkey—side by side with the United States—is helping bring about NATO’s future as an instrument of security wherever it is needed, from Darfur to Afghanistan. In Afghanistan, U.S.-Turkish cooperation is at work helping to transform a country and society broken by years of Taliban misrule.... Closer to home, Turkey...is an energetic cosponsor, along with Italy and Yemen, of the Broader Middle East and North Africa initiative’s Democracy Assistance Dialogue.

“In the debate about reform in the Broader Middle East, some have said that democracy is incompatible with Islamic tradition. Turkey’s 150 years of reform—stretching back to the Tanzimat period of the Ottoman Empire, accelerating dramatically with Atatürk’s founding of the republic, advancing again under President Ozal and again today—prove how false this is. Turkey is a secular republic but has a strong sense of its own history. One senior Turkish official familiar with Ottoman political traditions explained to me that fundamentals of political democracy—separation of mosque and state, and the political sovereignty of the people—have roots in the Ottoman period. These are not, he said, foreign imports. They are Turkey’s traditions, and since they were developed in Istanbul in the nineteenth century, they were also developed in Cairo and Damascus....[P]rogressive political reform is within the tradition of the whole region. So much for the clash of civilizations.

“Turkey, like other nation states, especially in Europe, is considering the nature of its political community and how different ethnicities and religions can be brought together into a single civic citizenship. In this task, Turkey’s tradition of tolerance and learning provide a way ahead, countering the false idols of extremism and violence.

“Among the key issues that affect Turkey and the United States is Iraq. We have had our differences, but we both seek a democratic, pluralistic, federal, and united Iraq, free of terrorists. This includes a common determination to eliminate the PKK threat from northern Iraq. Our Turkish friends recognize that security conditions preclude major military operations against the PKK at this time. But we are prepared to work now with the governments of Turkey and Iraq to combat PKK terrorists through the full range of law enforcement, financial, and diplomatic tools. We must also remember that the PKK will have no home or sanctuary in a secure, peaceful, and successful Iraq, and so the United States and Turkey must work together to help the Iraqi people build just such a nation....

“Turkey sits astride the great historical trade routes from east to west and north to south, and the passage of roads, rails, ships, and now pipelines will give Turkey a key role in bringing new sources of energy from the Caspian Basin

and Central Asia to world markets....

“And Turkey will continue to be one of our staunchest partners in the global war on terrorism, with which Turkey has long and bitter experience....

“Quite simply, this is what we hope for our friendship, our alliance, and our continued partnership with Turkey. It is a grand vision, a vision based on our shared values and common interests, a vision that has inspired generations of Americans and Turks, including leaders like Turgut Ozal. And it is a vision that the United States is ready to undertake with Turkey as its partner.”

The following is a rapporteur’s summary of the question-and-answer session with Assistant Secretary of State Daniel Fried:

Long-Term Relations

The U.S.-Turkish relationship should be less about itself and more about what Washington and Ankara do externally. The U.S. and Turkish governments could organize themselves to pursue common goals more effectively. Subject to the laws of reality, the two countries could build a solid agenda like that seen in the 1990s, focusing on issues such as the Broader Middle East, democracy-building, Central Asia, Georgia, and the consolidation of stability in the southern Caucasus. If situations arise in which NATO must become more active and expeditionary, Turkey may assist where needed. Washington will also stay in close contact with Ankara in order to deal with common challenges concerning Syria and Iran. Collectively, these factors constitute a rich agenda. The bottom line is that the U.S.-Turkish partnership is about advancing common values and a common agenda.

The PKK and Iraq

We are not cooperating with the Iraqi Kurds on a Kurdish agenda; we are cooperating with the Iraqi Kurds as Iraqis in the formation of a viable nation, at peace with itself and its neighbors. We share Turkey’s view that the PKK is a terrorist organization and that there is no place for it in Iraq. There is no justification for terrorist attacks, nor for a terrorist agenda. Turkey need not wait to take steps to defend itself within its own borders. I personally do not think that “hot pursuit” or military escalation is the best course of action, given that the law of unintended consequences usually comes into play. For the moment, we would be better served by working together to make Iraq a success as a nation. We have to pursue short- and long-term strategies with respect to the terrorist threat. In the short run, we should take all practicable steps—intelligence, law enforcement, and economic measures—against terrorists. Military measures should be our last resort. Terrorism is, by its nature, a long-term challenge. Conditions will change in Iraq when the terrorists and extremists are isolated. The Kurdish citizens of Iraq are increasingly thinking and acting as Iraqi citizens and as Iraqi leaders. A unified Iraq and an Iraq of its people is the way forward.

This report was prepared by Nuray Nazli Inal. ❖

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