

NATO, Iraq, and the Greater Middle East: Implications for the U.S.-Turkish Relationship

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Brief Analysis

Cyprus

For years, the Turkish Cypriots have been blamed for the Cyprus issue. Nevertheless, Turkish prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan personally convinced UN secretary general Kofi Annan to open the fourth round of negotiations, and Rauf Denktas, president of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, was much more productive in these talks than was the Greek Cypriot leader. The conclusions emerging from the Annan Plan negotiations were the best obtainable result, even though they did not address all Turkish priorities. According to the plan, the Greek and Turkish Cypriots each submitted the plan's proposals to a separate referendum. Yet, only the Turkish Cypriot leadership stood behind its word and asked for a "yes" vote. With this, the Turkish Cypriots sent the message that they were ready to integrate into the international community. Unfortunately, the Greek Cypriot leadership backed off of its support for the agreement, and the Greek Cypriots consequently rejected the plan in their referendum. The European Union (EU) had promised Greek Cypriot accession regardless of their referendum result, however, and on May 1, Greek Cyprus entered the EU while the Turkish side remains unfairly punished by international sanctions. The destiny of the Turkish Cypriots should not rest in the hands of the Greek Cypriots, and the world has begun to recognize this. Now, lifting the sanctions on the Turkish Cyprus is Turkey's priority.

European Union

Although resolution of the Cyprus issue was not officially part of the EU's accession rules, the so-called Copenhagen Criteria, Turkey nevertheless pushed for an agreement between the Turkish and Greek Cypriots. In any case, Turkey has fulfilled the political requirements of the Criteria. Therefore, at the EU's December 2004 summit, when the EU is set to make a determination about Turkey's accession, Ankara deserves to obtain a date on which to begin accession talks. Turkey's AKP government in Turkey carried out the recent political reforms not only to fulfill the EU requirements, but also because the Turkish people deserve to live in a better country with more democratic attributes. Any answer from the EU in December less than an unconditional "yes" will be seen as a negative in Turkey. Even so, the AKP will continue to further liberalize Turkish democracy.

U.S.-Turkish Relationship

Turkey has always enjoyed serving as a bridge between different cultures. For this reason, if Turkey becomes an EU-candidate country in December and continues to move along the EU path, it will remain allied with the United States. Relations between Washington and Ankara have had their ups and downs, yet the United States has remained Turkey's best ally by far. The two countries have cooperated in their fight against terrorism (both Kurdistan Workers Party [PKK] and al-Qaeda terror), in energy issues (obtaining oil and gas from the Caucasus basin), in dealing with Turkey's financial crisis in 2001, and in Ankara's quest to join the EU. Despite this positive history, opinion polls in Turkey reveal a negative attitude toward the United States. Only a few years ago, the stance of the Turkish people toward America was much more positive. Still, since the two nations do not share any mutual hostilities, the current

situation can be fixed. The United States has to do a better job of promoting itself. Increased parliamentary contact between the two nations and high-level visits -- such as Erdogan's recent visit to Washington and the upcoming visit of President George W. Bush to Istanbul -- carry a lot of weight with the public. Turkey not only anticipates better relations in the realm of security, but also improved economic ties and better relations in the energy field.

Iraq

Turkey has supported the United States before, during, and after the Iraq war and still backs America and the international community in establishing peace and stability in that country. Turkish-Iraqi trade, which stopped before the war, is now booming, with Turkey exporting \$1 billion worth of goods to Iraq annually. The best solution to the current problems in Iraq is to hand over leadership to the Iraqis and not impose it from the outside. Iraqis have been brainwashed into thinking that Western countries hate them. The Iraqi people must understand that democracy is a long-term project and be made aware of the long timetable awaiting them.

The pictures taken in the Abu Ghraib prison had a very negative impact on Turkey's view of the United States, similar to the impact of the pictures elsewhere around the globe. However, the fact that America was courageous enough to share these pictures, and that the U.S. leadership has strongly condemned the incidents, represents a positive American response to the crisis.

The Greater Middle East Project

Turkey is affected by events in the Middle East. Stability, good governance, and accountability in the region, as well as free and open societies whose economies are run efficiently, are in everyone's interest. However, if these initiatives are not carried out or received well, new and unintended problems could arise. In approaching these issues, careful planning, partnership, and inclusive and voluntary participation are needed. Too much emphasis on security might be unhelpful; instead, more focus should be placed on cultural and social factors of the individual countries. Moreover, we have to be realistic about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, since it has a significant impact on the Middle East and on bringing democracy and stability to the region.

NATO

Turkey has spared no effort in fostering dialogue between Europe and the Muslim world. In October 2004, Turkey will host the second Joint Forum between the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the EU. Also, by NATO's June 2004 Istanbul Summit, Turkey hopes to foster a common position with NATO on the Middle East. The Middle East should not have to witness more differences emerging between Europe and the United States. NATO is the organization best qualified to bring stability to troubled areas and should therefore be protected from the negative effects of the transatlantic split.

Ambassador Sukru Elekdag, former Turkish ambassador to the United States and current deputy chairman of the Turkish parliament's Turkey-U.S. Friendship Caucus from the opposition Republican Peoples Party (CHP), was present at this Special Policy Forum and made the following comments during the question and answer period:

Cyprus. To the extent that the United States and EU help Northern (Turkish) Cyprus to integrate into the international community, and to the extent that the embargo on Northern Cyprus is lifted, the Greek Cypriots will change their position and will accept the Turkish Cypriots as equal partners.

Iraq. Turkey wants democracy in Iraq as much as the United States does. However, a solution in Iraq cannot be reached by force. Although America is capable of exerting more force on both the Sunnis and the Shi'is, such action will only make Iraq a center for terrorism. The United States would be better served to work with the UN, as well as with European and Arab countries, to create stability in that country. Iraqis need to create new political legitimacy in Iraq for the emergence of peace and stability after the June 30 transition.

The Greater Middle East Project. For this project to be successful, three conditions need to be satisfied:

Democratic change should come from the inside, and Arab countries should endorse this process.

Iraq should not be viewed in isolation from the rest of the region.

The Israeli-Palestinian issue must not be left unresolved.

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