

# Managing U.S.-Turkish Relations

by [Mark Parris \(/experts/mark-parris\)](/experts/mark-parris)

Apr 19, 2001

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

[Mark Parris \(/experts/mark-parris\)](/experts/mark-parris)

Mark Parris was United States ambassador to Turkey from 1997 to 2000. He has also served as deputy chief of mission at the U.S. embassy in Israel and political counselor at the U.S. embassy in Moscow. During the Clinton administration, he was special assistant to the president and senior director



Brief Analysis

**O**n April 17, 2001, Mark Parris, former U.S. ambassador to Turkey, delivered The Washington Institute's Fourth Annual Turgut Ozal Memorial Lecture. The following are excerpts from his remarks. [Read a full transcript. \(templateC07.php?CID=41\)](#)

"Let me relate . . . some lessons I learned while holding down what is arguably the best job to which a career foreign service officer can aspire."

Lesson One "Turkey is important ... The new administration, based on what it has said and done since January, understands this."

"One reason [for Turkey's importance], of course, is its location and the issues that come with that geography-big issues; issues that have literally made or broken past administrations' foreign policies: Russia; the Caucasus and Central Asia; Iran; Iraq; post-Asad Syria; Israel and the Arab world; Cyprus and the Aegean; the Balkans; the European Security and Defense Initiative (ESDI); drugs, thugs, and terror. I would submit that no administration can achieve its objectives on any of these issues unless the Turks are on the same page.

"A second reason Turkey is important is as a paradigm-Western and Eastern. European and Asian (and Middle Eastern to boot). Muslim and secular. Democratic and authoritarian. Market oriented and statist. Turkey combines within itself characteristics that anywhere else would be assumed to be incompatible. And that makes it a unique role model for a large number of states in the region and in the world . . . Finally, Turkey is important as an economic partner . . . [it has] a large, young, skilled population; a \$200 billion economy; plentiful water and other natural resources; a great location; an increasingly business and investment-friendly legal and bureaucratic environment; and sophisticated entrepreneurs with increasing regional and global reach . . .

". . . The United States is far more often than not the demandeur in this relationship. There are very concrete things we need from Turkey for our policies in the region to succeed . . . there [is not] any fundamental inconsistency between American and Turkish interests. Like at no time before in our history, this is a relationship of equals. Equals who, free of the distortions of foreign aid and other dependencies, have remarkably overlapping interests. We have truly become, to use the term Bill Clinton coined in November 1999, 'strategic partners.'"

Lesson Two "One cannot assume the Washington foreign policy apparatus will consistently accord Turkey the time, attention, and expertise warranted by its intrinsic importance."

"U.S. policy toward Turkey is far too often driven, and ultimately made, through a series of ad hoc decisions, and as a function of disparate, frequently contentious issues . . . What easily gets lost is the big picture . . . Turkey has become more, not less, important to the U.S. since the end of the Cold War."

Lesson Three "To manage relations with Turkey successfully you need an unusually well-defined policy framework."

"In the second Clinton administration . . . the existence of an authoritative [five-point] policy framework encompassing the full range of U.S. interests in Turkey was a constant reminder to our bureaucracy and our general public of what the United States stood to lose if it allowed any one issue or set of issues to dominate our agenda. It helped focus officials on both sides. And it empowered those responsible for keeping balance in the relationship vis-a-vis those whose duties naturally led them to focus on individual issues."

Lesson Four "No matter how well intentioned or adept the U.S. side of the equation, you will only get so far without a coherent, effective Turkish partner."

". . . The government formed by Bulent Ecevit mid-way through my tour proved during the final months of 1999 to be the most productive and effective of any since the time of Turgut Ozal . . . During this period, Turkey passed laws and constitutional amendments that eliminated longstanding disincentives to foreign investment; overhauled its social security system; passed deflationary budgets; began to dismantle the state of emergency regime; tackled reform of the criminal and penal code; found ways to release significant numbers of persons jailed on expression charges; supported important diplomatic initiatives in the Caucasus and Middle East; passed legislation to facilitate construction of the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline; concluded a stand-by agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF); and achieved European Union (EU) candidacy on the same basis as other aspirants . . . for six months, Turkey confounded its perennial skeptics with a display of national unity, purpose, and resolution that will long be remembered. As the new millennium dawned, its prospects looked bright indeed."

Turkey's Crisis "The [current] difficulty, as so often in Turkey's past, is not in diagnosing its economic ills and prescribing a cure. It is in reestablishing confidence that, this time, the course of treatment will be followed to completion . . . It would be just plain wrong for Turks to fall into the trap of laying the blame for the current crisis on the IMF or other imagined enemies abroad. Playing the nationalist card might produce short-term partisan gains. But it can only obscure the honest, fact-based self-analysis that will be necessary to pass the program that Minister [Kemal] Dervis has proposed as quickly as possible, and to put Turkey back on the road to recovery.

". . . [Dervis'] reform package is not passed-and soon-the costs to Turkey are almost certain to be greater than in past crises, and probably much greater . . . In contrast to previous downturns, the November and February crises have affected not just those at the bottom of the economic ladder, but much wider strata throughout Turkish society, and representing all its institutions.

". . . If Turkey's Parliament and government in the days ahead do take the steps necessary to establish confidence and transparency in the nation's economic institutions, there is every reason to expect enthusiastic support by international financial institutions and friendly governments. And there is every reason, under these circumstances, to expect Turkey's remarkably resilient economy to bounce back powerfully in the months and years ahead."

◆ This Special Policy Forum Report was prepared by Niyazi Günay.

Policy #530

---

**RECOMMENDED**



BRIEF ANALYSIS

## [Iran Takes Next Steps on Rocket Technology](#)

Feb 11, 2022



Farzin Nadimi

[\(/policy-analysis/iran-takes-next-steps-rocket-technology\)](#)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

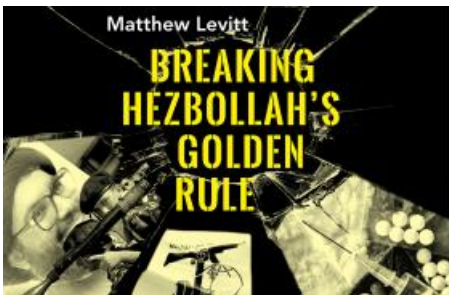
## [Saudi Arabia Adjusts Its History, Diminishing the Role of Wahhabism](#)

Feb 11, 2022



Simon Henderson

[\(/policy-analysis/saudi-arabia-adjusts-its-history-diminishing-role-wahhabism\)](#)



ARTICLES & TESTIMONY

## [Podcast: Breaking Hezbollah's Golden Rule](#)

Feb 9, 2022



Matthew Levitt

[\(/policy-analysis/podcast-breaking-hezbollahs-golden-rule\)](#)

### TOPICS

[U.S. Policy \(/policy-analysis/us-policy\)](#)

### REGIONS & COUNTRIES

[Turkey \(/policy-analysis/turkey\)](#)

