

The Future of U.S.-Turkish Relations

Dec 8, 1999



Brief Analysis

On December 2, 1999, Antony Blinken, special assistant to the president and senior director for European affairs at the National Security Council, delivered The Washington Institute's Third Annual Turgut Ozal Memorial Lecture. The following are excerpts from his presentation. [Read a full transcript. \(templateC07.php?CID=39\)](#)

"What seems an obvious point today was not so clear just a decade ago. With the end of the Cold War . . . Turkey's importance for the United States . . . has increased and will continue to do so. . . Together, we [the U.S. and Turkey] are adapting the NATO alliance to new challenges, new partners and new members. We are working to stabilize the Balkans after combating ethnic cleansing. We are partners for peace in the Middle East and the Caucasus. We are standing together against the threat Saddam Hussein's Iraq poses to its region and the world. We are developing new sources of energy for our common security. We are building a dynamic trade and investment relationship that can fuel jobs and growth in both our countries. Simply put, the relationship between the U.S. and Turkey has become so mature and so multifaceted that it will remain pivotal to the interests of both countries for the foreseeable future.

"Turkey sits at the crossroads--or, if you prefer, atop the fault lines--of the world. Because of its place . . . its history . . . its size . . . and strength, and most important, because of what it is--a nation of mainly Islamic faith that is secular, democratic, and modernizing--Turkey must be a leader and can be a role model for a large swath of the world.

"What is striking is that our common concerns are matched largely, though not always, by our common perspective. . . . Ours is a strategic partnership that is both strong and vital . . . even where we have some differences of approach, such as in Iraq.

Turkey's Internal Dynamics

"Since taking office last spring, Bulent Ecevit's coalition government has accomplished more in the areas of democratic reform, economic development, and relations with Greece than any of its predecessors since the tenure of Turgut Ozal. . . . That all of this was accomplished against the backdrop of two devastating earthquakes is all the more remarkable.

". . . To paraphrase Ataturk, it is hard to build peace abroad if you do not enjoy it at home. Here, the earthquakes are an instructive metaphor. They remind us that for all its impressive strength and rightful confidence, Turkey is not without fault lines. . . . Going forward, how will Kemalists relate to Islamists? The state to civil society? Nationalists to internationalists? The military to politicians? These questions are very much on the minds of the Turkish people, in the pages of their newspapers, on their televisions.

"This, in and of itself is an important development--Turkish society democratically debating its future. Because the power of Ataturk's central idea--the idea of Turkey--remains so strong among virtually all of Turkey's constituent elements, I am convinced the center will hold and Turkey will find even greater strength in its diversity.

"Turkey recently has taken important steps to strengthen its democracy and protect human rights. Now, with the success of its fight against terrorism, Turkey stands in a position of strength from which it can go even further.

Ending the state of emergency throughout the southeast . . . allowing freer expression on sensitive issues. Giving its citizens of Kurdish origin the right to greater cultural expression--what President Clinton has called the space to live a normal life.

Foreign Affairs

"There is no doubt in my mind that Turkey has and will continue to have the strength it needs to meet any threats to its security or stability. It will take a different kind of strength to fulfill its European vocation. The strength to reconcile fully and finally with Greece. The strength to embrace without reservation the community of values that is Europe.

". . . What has been called [Greek-Turkish] "seismic diplomacy" began before the earthquakes with the dialogue initiated by Foreign Ministers [Ismail] Cem and [George] Papandreou. If each side continues to take the small steps, we will find that, over time, they travel a great distance. . . . These small steps also help to build a more positive climate in which to address the bigger problems, like the Aegean and Cyprus.

"The other half of the equation is Turkey's relationship with the European Union and its member states. Next week, in Helsinki, the EU will decide whether to make Turkey an official candidate for accession. . . . We have a stake in this decision. As President Clinton told the Turkish National Assembly, our vision of a Europe that is undivided, democratic and at peace for the first time in history 'will never be complete until it fully embraces Turkey.'

The EU, Turkey, and Cyprus [from the question-and-answer session]

"We think Turkey should be given candidate status [in the EU], period. No ifs, ands or buts, no conditions, because that is the case for all other aspirants to the EU . . . We remain on record . . . favoring Cyprus' accession to the EU. We strongly support it. [Regarding] the start of accession discussions, I don't think it's our place to comment on the form that it takes, the timing, the criteria. That's for the EU to decide. Similarly, we said that we're strongly in favor of Turkey's candidacy, but again it's not for us standing outside the EU . . . how it should proceed with turning that candidacy into membership."

◆ This report was prepared by Levent Onar.

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◆
Simon Henderson

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Sana Quadri,
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