

Outlook for Turkish-U.S. Relations

Sep 11, 1998



Brief Analysis

On September 2, 1998, H.E. Baki Ilkin, Turkish ambassador to the United States, addressed The Washington Institute's Special Policy Forum. The following are excerpts from his opening remarks and a rapporteur's summary of the subsequent question-and-answer session. [Read a full transcript. \(templateC07.php?CID=32\)](#)

Transformation of Bilateral Relations

"We are no longer only NATO allies whose relationship, until a decade ago, was mainly based on cooperation in defense and security fields....Our relationship has now reached an advanced stage which we define as 'enhanced partnership.' This leads to closer political consultations on regional and global matters as well as a much deeper level of economic cooperation."

Bilateral Priorities

"[Last December when Turkish Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz visited Washington, he and President Clinton] identified certain priority areas for expanding bilateral cooperation....These areas are:

1) Trade: "A much higher degree of economic and trade cooperation is imperative for the success of our enhanced partnership. In fact, Turkey's philosophy for the last ten years has been to promote 'trade, not aid' in our partnership with the United States. Our trade volume has almost doubled in the last decade, reaching its current level of about \$6 billion....I must also refer to some bottlenecks and difficulties which we need to overcome. Turkey faces a trade deficit of some \$1.5 billion vis-a-vis the U.S. We have to find ways and means of placing our bilateral trade volume on a more balanced footing....There are certain import restrictions in both countries. We must try to mutually eliminate all these restrictions so that we can pave the way to a much bigger trade volume and closer economic cooperation."

2) Energy: "We welcome and highly appreciate the strong U.S. support for the Baku- Ceyhan oil pipeline project. This pipeline will serve a number of different, yet equally important objectives. First, it will provide a secure and reliable oil transport route to Western markets. Secondly, it will diversify the supply of a major energy resource. Thirdly, it will help to consolidate the independence, sovereignty and economic well-being of the newly independent states. This will have a very positive effect on promoting long-term regional stability and prosperity. The same things can be said about the Trans-Caspian gas pipeline projects."

3) Defense and Military Cooperation: "Both Turkey and the U.S. have no choice but to maintain strong defense capabilities.... Within both the framework of our NATO partnership and on a bilateral basis, Turkey has long relied on the U.S. as a trusted and dependable source for its defense procurement....The [weapons] modernization program we are undertaking creates numerous possibilities for joint ventures and business opportunities in Turkey. As the U.S. is the traditional and preferred supply source [of military equipment] for Turkey, we hope that U.S. defense contractors will be able to tap into this potential as well."

4) Regional Cooperation: "Developments in the Balkans, in the Caucasus, in the Middle East, and in Afghanistan, where we share common or similar strategic interests, demand closer Turkish-U.S. regional cooperation..."

- Balkans: "U.S. leadership has [been] and remains crucial in containing and resolving current conflicts and preventing future ones. Turkey, as a regional power, is doing its utmost to contribute to all efforts to this end...We played an active role, along with the U.S., in stopping the annihilation of the Bosnian Muslims at the hands of Serbian aggressors. We still maintain a brigade in Bosnia...within the Stabilization Force (SFOR)..."
- Middle East: "We hold the same views as the United States on the stalled Middle East Peace Process. In supporting the role the U.S. plays as an honest broker in the Process, we continue to offer our assistance and lend our support to any effort aimed at breathing new life into the Peace Process...Speaking of Israel, like the U.S., we have forged close ties with this country, the only other democracy in our southern neighborhood. We hope that Turkish-Israeli cooperation will provide the nucleus from which long-term regional cooperation and dialogue will spring. We also maintain close historical and cultural ties with the Palestinians, encouraging them to build viable democratic and economic institutions..."
- Iraq: "We continue to seek the removal of all weapons of mass destruction from Iraq....Turkey remains the key country enforcing UN sanctions against Iraq, even at a staggering cost which has now reached almost 35 billion dollars. On the other hand, we still participate in the Northern Watch Operation based in Turkey to ensure the well-being of the inhabitants of Northern Iraq...Turkey will not allow Northern Iraq to become a safe haven for terrorism in general and PKK terrorism in particular..."
- Azerbaijan-Armenia: "As members of the OSCE's Minsk Group, Turkey and the U.S., along with a number of other countries, are working together to bring about a just solution to the Azeri-Armenian conflict destabilizing the Caucasus....We feel that the U.S. might be able to convince the new Armenian administration to see the realities and realize its long-term interests by adopting a peaceful and friendly course of action towards both Turkey and Azerbaijan."
- Afghanistan: "Certain areas under Taliban control have the potential to become a hotbed of international terrorism and drug-trafficking. The international community cannot and must not allow this to happen..."

5) Cyprus: "We appreciate U.S. interest in helping to find a solution to the Cyprus question....There are certain realities on the island which can no longer be overlooked -- the most basic of which is the existence of two separate peoples living under their own respective administrations. The other reality is that by applying unilaterally for European Union membership in violation of international agreements and by opting to fully militarize the island, the Greek Cypriot administration has effectively abandoned the search for a mutually-agreeable solution....Lately, the Greek Cypriots have further escalated the tension in Cyprus by attempting to deploy Russian-made S-300 missiles on the island. If installed, these missiles would have a range covering the entire southern coast of Turkey, where the Incirlik Air Base, a Turkish facility jointly used with the U.S., is also located..."

Strategic vision for bilateral relations

1) "[Turkey and the U.S.] should...develop... policy options in close and regular consultation with each other." 2) "We should identify new avenues of economic cooperation in areas of mutual interest." 3) "We should launch a concerted effort to fight all forms of domestic as well as international terrorism and all their political and economic infrastructure and extensions without exception....We could formulate a common approach and adopt a common stand in dealing with countries that harbor or support terrorist groups." 4) "We could also develop a better understanding for the different needs and requirements pertaining to the political, economic and social developments in our respective countries and nations."

Summary of question-and-answer session

U.S. aid. The ending this year of nearly fifty years of U.S. military and economic aid to Turkey reflects "a process that has come to its natural end," based on Turkey's growing prosperity.

Relations with Europe. Turkey never expected to be rapidly accepted as a full member of the European Union (EU). Rather, it wanted to be treated equally with other candidates and is disappointed that it has not been. Turks are particularly upset that, after contributing to the fall of the Iron Curtain and the reunification of Europe, they are seeing the former Warsaw Pact states move closer to Europe while Turkey is just marking time. Turkey deeply appreciates U.S. support for its efforts to be part of the EU. Whether or not Turkey becomes a member of the EU, it will continue its Western and European orientation.

Russia-Cyprus S-300 deal. Turkey is displeased with Russian plans to sell S-300 ground-to-air missiles to the Greek Cypriots, but that sale alone will not determine the future of bilateral ties. Turkey and Russia have been building strong bonds of friendship and cooperation for 2-3 decades -- including more than \$4 billion in official trade currently -- and those good relations will continue. Russia sees the sale as merely a commercial transaction, but Turkey hopes that Russia will realize the problems this sale would create for Turkey and will cancel it.

Relations with Syria. The biggest problem in Turkish-Syrian relations is the fact that Syria allows the PKK to operate from Syrian territory. On the water issue, Turkey has been providing Syria more than 500 cubic meters of water per second -- more than Syria can use -- for the past fifteen years. Syrian authorities, however, demand that Turkey sign a binding, long-term agreement on provision of water. Turkey is unwilling to do this, especially while Syria is trying to use terrorism to force Turkey to do so.

This Special Policy Forum Report was prepared by Sulay Ozturk.

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