

TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY SURVEY: DIRECTIONS AND DILEMMAS IN 2007

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Summary

Turkey faces continued difficulties in its accession process with the European Union and in its relationship with the United States, mainly concerning the Kurdish issue. Meanwhile, Turkey has strengthened its ties with Arab and Islamic regimes. Both the EU and the US cannot afford to ignore Turkey, but will have to await the consequences of Turkish realignment in the Middle East. For Turkey, stronger involvement with its neighbours can make it a mediator and it can strengthen its position in the region. A Turkey well-rooted in its ties with the West and Islamic regimes in the east can serve as a transponder for both sides, though it involves certain risks for Turkey. It remains to be seen if Turkey's strengthened dialogue with its neighbours has not come to serve as a mere legitimization for otherwise isolated radical regimes, but can actually benefit stability in the volatile region of the Middle East.

Keywords

Turkey, European Union accession, Cyprus, Middle East, Hamas, Iran, United States.

Introduction

On June 12th 2006, after months of delay, the European Union started the long awaited membership negotiations with candidate Turkey. Preceding that, last minute opposition to the commencement of the negotiations was voiced by the Republic of Cyprus. Diplomatic struggles have long been waged over this island, which is divided into a Greek and a Turkish side. While the Greek side was accepted as a member of the

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European Union in May 2004, as the Republic of Cyprus, the Turkish side continues to face international (economic) isolation. The diplomatic struggle Turkey encounters over Cyprus reflects its wider international position of this moment.

This paper reviews Turkish foreign policy, by analyzing the major diplomatic dilemmas Turkey currently faces in the international sphere: Cyprus, accession to the European Union, the war in Iraq, Iran, Syria and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This paper does not seek to examine the merits or disadvantages of Turkish membership in the European Union, but does review how this process interacts with other bi- and multilateral relations of the Turkish government. Turkey's stretch into Central-Asia and its role as an energy hub via the new Baku-Ceyhan oil pipe line, completed in July 2006, is beyond the scope of this research.

Since its rise to power in 2002, Turkey's Justice and Development Party (AKP) has shifted Turkey's foreign policy focus towards the Arab and Islamic world. I seek to understand how this policy has developed in the past year, in what direction it is going, and what this shift means for Europe and the United States. Is there a risk for the US and the EU of losing the alliance with Turkey? Will the strong Turkish military ally with different nations to form an Arab-Islamic power bloc?

I will begin by outlining the current status of negotiations between the European Union and Turkey, how the obstacle of Cyprus has come to play, and how this can be overcome. Then I will focus on the wider Middle East, consequences of the Iraqi war, Turkish entanglement with Syria, Iran, and Hamas. Finally I will present an overview of options Turkey has in the international sphere for the future, and conclude with a summary.

The European Union

After concluding on December 17th 2004 that Turkey fulfilled the Copenhagen criteria (the requirements for EU-membership), the European Union formally approved a framework for accession negotiations with Turkey on October 3rd 2005. These negotiations commenced in June 2006 but have already faltered, resulting in the decision by the European Union in December to partially freeze membership talks. The open-ended process for Turkey to become a full-fledged member of the EU will take approximately ten to fifteen years. During the initial phase, two issues have

come to play in the negotiations between the two sides. First is the process of reforms in Turkey, predominantly related to free speech, the judicial system and the role of the military. The second issue is Cyprus, regarding the actual status of the island, and the Republic of Cyprus' influence on the Turkish accession process.

Reforms

The issue of domestic reforms in Turkey, or lack thereof, has long underpinned the delay in Turkey's accession process with the European community. Turkey originally applied for membership to the EU's predecessor, the European Economic Community, in the late 1950s, but has been on hold ever since. In 1989, the European Community decided that Turkey could in fact apply for full membership, thereby acknowledging that Turkey is part of Europe. However, certain Turkish domestic laws and policies were ruled as unacceptable to the European community, and in need of reform, before membership would be granted.

Through reforms in the early 2000s, Turkey worked to resolve the most important of these issues. The government restricted the role of the military in politics and granted its Kurdish citizens cultural rights. For example, Turkey abolished provisions prohibiting the use of the Kurdish language, and offered Kurdish-speaking airtime on national television. Still, some areas have not seen the progress the EU hoped for, and European states remain critical of Turkey's domestic policies. Of particular concern are Turkey's prison system, freedom of speech restrictions (as came to surface during the trial against author Orhan Pamuk), freedom of the press, and the treatment of its history (the Armenian issue).

Turkey has started the negotiations with the EU to adopt the *acquis communautaire*, the inclusive framework of EU laws, with the chapter on 'science and research'. This is considered an easy chapter in the negotiations. However, ignoring earlier agreements, France, Austria, The Netherlands, and Denmark pushed for the inclusion of political criteria to that chapter as well. Receiving little support from the rest of the EU, political criteria were finally left out negotiations over that particular chapter.²

² Selcuk Gultasli, "Dispute Among EU Countries Surfaces on Political Criteria", *Zaman*. 30 March 2006. <http://www.zaman.com/?bl=international&alt=&hn=31475>. Spain for instance called the proposal for new political criteria 'discriminatory'. Spain is also leading the so-called 'Alliance of Civilizations' with Turkey.

Unlike previous accession processes, Turkey (as Croatia) must come to an agreement with each of the 25 European member states over each of the 35 chapters in the *acquis*. On June 12, 2006 the EU and Turkey came to an agreement on the first chapter, after overcoming strong opposition from Cyprus. Cyprus only compromised after receiving a pledge from the other members that negotiations would be halted if Turkey would prove lacking on other parts.³

Cyprus

Cyprus' opposition to Turkey is related to Turkish reluctance to implement the Ankara protocol, the customs union agreement it signed with the EU in August 2005. Under this agreement, Turkey would implicitly acknowledge recognition of all 25 member states, including Cyprus.

In April 2004, the UN-sponsored Annan-plan to reach a solution for the long-standing conflict between the Greek and Turkish sides of the island was rejected in a referendum by the Greek-Cypriots. Earlier, a large majority of Turkish-Cypriots had accepted it.⁴ Conditions as had been set beforehand by the European Commission stipulated that if no agreement had been reached between the two sides by the admission date for Cyprus of 1 May 2004, only the Greek-Cypriot side would be admitted as a member to the EU. Since the Turkish military intervention on Cyprus in 1974 and the subsequent self proclaimed statehood of the northern part of the island as the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), that part has been internationally economically isolated. The EU, however, promised economic concessions, including direct trade with the Turkish side, if it would support the Annan-plan.⁵ Despite the acceptance of the plan by the Turkish side, and though most other European nations are generally in favour of ending the isolation, economic relations have not been re-

Suleyman Kurt, "Spain: Political Criteria Would Mean Discrimination". *Zaman*. 29 March 2006. <http://www.zaman.com/?bl=international&alt=&hn=31457>.

³ James Kanter, "EU pushes its expansion forward", *International Herald Tribune*. 12 June 2006. <http://www.iht.com/articles/2006/06/12/news/eu.php>.

⁴ "Cyprus 'spurns historic chance'", *BBC News*. 25 April 2005. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3656753.stm>.

⁵ Soner Cagaptay, "Turkey at a Crossroads. Preserving Ankara's Western Orientation", Policy Focus # 48. October 2005. *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*. <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/pubPDFs/CagaptayBookWeb.pdf>. p. 7, and "Leaps of doubt; Divided Cyprus", *The Economist*. 14 May 2005. p. 54.

established. This is mainly due to opposition of the, by now EU member, (Republic of) Cyprus.⁶

Cyprus wishes to make (Turkish) Northern Cyprus a part of the Republic, while granting the Turkish-Cypriots some minority rights. The Turkish-Cypriots, however, want to see a federalized island, a position supported by the Annan-plan and earlier UN-resolutions on the matter.⁷ Since the failure of the Annan-plan, there have been no real negotiations between the two sides. The United Nations too is hesitant to re-engage in full-fledged negotiations on the issue.⁸ In order to end the stalemate, on January 24th 2006 Turkish Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül launched the ‘New Action Plan’ for Cyprus, which outlined recommended steps to resolve the outstanding dispute between the two sides of the island.⁹ Besides calling for a return to the negotiation table, and ending the economic isolation of Northern-Cyprus, the plan outlines the opening of Turkish sea- and airports to Greek-Cypriot carriers. That is the most concrete measure the EU expects Turkey to take in order to effectively implement the August 2005 customs union agreement.

Implementation of the Ankara protocol by Turkey could imply a formal recognition of the Republic of Cyprus, a position the European Union urges Turkey to adopt. In doing so, this would alleviate any possible pressure on Cyprus to compromise and come to an agreement with the Turkish side. Turkey would therefore risk forfeiting a powerful bargaining chip, with no guarantee of Greek-Cypriot reciprocity. For the EU, however, the Ankara protocol was already a compromise in itself, since it allowed for Turkey to merely implicitly recognise Cyprus.

The Greek-Cypriots have long refused to restart negotiations for a settlement on the island and threaten to veto any progress in accession negotiations with Turkey if Turkey does not implement the customs

⁶ “Turkey’s action plan for Cyprus still being discussed”, *BBC Monitoring*. 7 March 2006, and “Austrian minister says efforts being made to end isolation”, *BBC Monitoring*. 10 March 2006.

⁷ Warren Hoge, “Cyprus: Annan Offers New Plan”, *The New York Times*. 30 March 2006, and Carol Migdalovitz, “Cyprus: Status of U.N. Negotiations”, CRS Issue Brief for Congress. *U.S. Department of State*. 19 March 2002. <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/9418.pdf>.

⁸ “U.N sends letter to President Talat”, *Deputy Prime Ministry and Ministry of Foreign Affairs Public Relations Department*. 27 March 2006.

<http://www.trncinfo.com/tanitmadairesi/2002/ENGLISH/LETTERonCYPYRUSissue/L43.htm>, and Kirsty Hughes “Cyprus holds key to EU-Turkey talks”, *BBC News*. 20 March 2006. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/ft/-/1/hi/world/europe/4810444.stm>.

⁹ “New Initiative by Turkey on Cyprus”, *Republic of Turkey – Ministry of Foreign Affairs*. 2 February 2006. http://www.mfa.gov.tr/MFA/ForeignPolicy/MainIssues/Cyprus/new_init.htm.

agreement (a position supported by the European Union as such).¹⁰ This combined with the Turkish refusal to implement the Ankara protocol before isolation of Northern Cyprus is lifted, has put the situation in an apparent Catch-22 deadlock. In Turkish public opinion, European failure to deliver its economic promises to Northern-Cyprus, as well as the disadvantageous position it is in (while having been the compromising party in April 2004), incites resentment against the European Union.¹¹

The European Commission as well as officials of member states repeatedly stated that accession negotiations with Turkey would be suspended if Turkey would not implement the agreement by the end of 2006.¹² On July 8th 2006, renewed talks took place between leadership of the Turkish and Greek sides of the island.¹³ These talks offered an opening to resolve the long-outstanding issue of Cyprus, as well as a way to avoid a deadlock in the Turkish accession process. However, for the time being, no concrete progress was made to enable a solution to the issue.

In December 2006 the European leaders decided to freeze negotiations on eight of the negotiation chapters involved, until Turkey opens its (air)ports to planes and ships from all EU member states.¹⁴

The Middle East

Strategic depth

Following the elections of November 2002, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, came to power. The party, which has Islamist roots, did not have experience conducting foreign policy. Whether the AKP would follow the course of previous Turkish governments and remain staunchly pro-Western remained to be seen at the time.

In retrospect, since the AKP-government's rise to power, a re-orientation in Turkish foreign policy is apparent. There is a stronger

¹⁰ Hughes "Cyprus holds key to EU-Turkey talks".

¹¹ Quentin Peel, "Anti-west backlash is gathering pace, warns Turkish minister", *The Financial Times*. 20 July 2006.

¹² "EU ministers reach deal on Turkey talks", *International Herald Tribune*. 12 June 2006.

<http://www.iht.com/articles/2006/06/12/europe/web.0612eu.php>.

¹³ "Historic rendezvous in Cyprus", *Turkish Daily News*. 9 July 2006.

<http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/article.php?enewsid=48414>.

¹⁴ "Turkey EU membership talks 'partially on hold'", *EurActiv.com*. 12 December 2006.

<http://www.euractiv.com/en/enlargement/turkey-eu-membership-talks-partially-hold/article-160396>.

alignment with its Arab neighbours and other Islamic countries, exemplified by closer ties with Syria and Iran.¹⁵ The new direction Erdogan's government took is largely subscribed to Erdogan's chief foreign policy advisor Ahmet Davutoğlu, author of *Strategic Depth*.¹⁶ This title has subsequently been adopted to describe the renewed entanglement with both the Islamic world at large and the necessity to build close ties with all its neighbours, while maintaining close ties with the West. A case in point is the first-ever appearance of a Turkish Prime Minister at the summit of the Arab League in Khartoum, in March 2006.¹⁷ Turkey, which has seen its geopolitical importance wane after the Cold War ended, has offered to mediate in multiple conflicts in the Middle East. Most notably this includes the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Iraqi conflict of 2003, and currently Iran.¹⁸ Turkey has also offered to serve as a mediator between Israel and Syria, both of which currently maintain close ties with Turkey.¹⁹

Iraq & PKK

The United States has traditionally maintained very strong ties with Turkey, which has been its closest ally in the Middle East besides Israel. The US was Turkey's main supporter for joining NATO in 1952, and more recently has lobbied for it to join the EU.²⁰

In the build-up to the war with Iraq in 2003, the US required Turkish approval to deploy troops on Turkish soil in order to open a northern front to aid the invasion of Iraq. The request formed the first major foreign policy test case for Erdogan's government. After severe pressure from the United States, the Turkish government agreed to put the American request forward in parliament. The government by and large refrained from influencing public opinion, which strongly opposed lending any support to the United States for this effort,²¹ nor did it enforce party line voting in the

¹⁵ Cagaptay, "Turkey at a Crossroads", p. 13-14.

¹⁶ Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik* (Ankara: Küre Yayınları, 2001).

¹⁷ "Erdogan Speaks At Arab League Summit", *TurkishPress.com*. 29 March 2006.
<http://archive.turkishpress.com/news.asp?id=115732>.

¹⁸ "Foreign minister urges calm on Iran", *Turkish Daily News*. 26 June 2006.

<http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/article.php?enewsid=47249>.

¹⁹ Herb Keinon, "Rejected once, Turks still keen for Israel-Syria mediation role", *The Jerusalem Post*. 4 January 2005, and "Turkish PM arrives in Damascus, offers to broker talks with Israel", *The Jerusalem Post*. 23.12.2004.

²⁰ "Daily Press Briefing", *U.S. Department of State*. 3 October 2005.

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2005/54233.htm>.

²¹ Useful in this regard are the Turkish Anar and Pollmark public opinion polls conducted from December 2002 to September 2003, as reported in Nasuh Uslum, Metin Toprak, Ibrahim Dalmis, and Ertan Aydin "Turkish public opinion toward the United States in the context of the Iraqi question", *MERIA*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (September 2005), p. 75-107.

parliament. The vote in the Turkish Parliament on March 1 2003, ultimately led to a dramatic but small defeat for the proposal.²²

Iraq has in recent years dominated Turkey's foreign policy agenda in the Middle East. In the months preceding and following the coalition's invasion of Iraq, major concerns were raised in Turkey regarding the United States' policy in Iraq. Not by order of importance, these were: first, an unstable large border-country, with a large presence of radical Islamists, equally unfavourable to the secular Turkish regime as towards 'foreign presence' in Iraq or Afghanistan;²³ second, the presence of ethnic Turks (Turkmen) in Iraq, mostly in Kirkuk, who fear Kurdish domination;²⁴ third: this same Kurdish majority in Northern Iraq, and the potential example autonomy or independence for them could serve for Kurds in Turkey; fourth: militant Kurdish nationalists (PKK) using Northern Iraq as a base to carry out terrorist attacks inside Turkey; and fifth: an outside country, ally even (United States), operating unilaterally without taking Turkish concerns into consideration, and destabilizing the region. Such concerns with U.S. foreign policy have led to some anti-American sentiments in Turkey.²⁵

While tensions in recent months have risen in the region of Kirkuk concerning the position of Turkmen, the most pressing issue in the past year for Turkey has been the widespread resumption of PKK violence. Turkey believes the violence originates in Northern Iraq. Kurdish attacks, both in Eastern Turkey as well as in metropolitan centres such as Istanbul, claimed more than a dozen lives.²⁶ Turkey shares a 350 km long mountainous border with Iraq, through which it is relatively easy to enter the country, and relatively hard to track down infiltrators. At the same time it has pressured the United States, being the major military power in Iraq, to include the PKK in its global war on terror and fight them in Northern

²² Soner Cagaptay, "An Accident on the Road to U.S.-Turkish Cooperation in Iraq: Implications for Turkey", PolicyWatch #717. *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*. 3 March 2003. <http://washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=1595>.

²³ Ely Karmon, "The Synagogue Bombings in Istanbul: Al-Qaeda's New Front?", PolicyWatch #806. *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*. 18 November 2003. <http://washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=1684>.

²⁴ Turkish involvement there has drawn the ire of the Iraqi president, who warned against Turkish interference in Iraq's domestic affairs. "Talabani talks tough against Turkey, Iran", *Turkish Daily News*. 18 May 2006. <http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/article.php?enewsid=43731>.

²⁵ The vast popularity of the 2006 Turkish film *Valley of the Wolves Iraq*, scenes in which are considered strongly anti-American and at times anti-Semitic, is exemplary of this. Sarah Rainsford, "Turkish rush to embrace anti-US film", *BBC News*. 10 February 2006. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/4700154.stm>. See also the previously mentioned public opinion polls, note [21].

²⁶ "Fighting on; Turkey and its Kurds", *The Economist*. 15 April 2006. p. 54.

Iraq.²⁷ The United States, facing a strong insurgency in other parts of Iraq, but enjoying relative quiet in Northern Iraq, has not responded with military action. Though the United States and Turkey both agree that Iraq should become a peaceful federal democracy, and Turkey has welcomed the ascension of the first Iraqi government,²⁸ the Kurdish issue continues to be an important point of discrepancy between the two sides. The US does not support Kurdish independence, but is unable or unwilling to use its military clout to influence events in Northern Iraq. The US has used mainly soft power to combat PKK. It has done so for example through efforts to stop PKK fundraising in the US and Europe.²⁹ Ross Wilson, the US Ambassador to Turkey, nevertheless admits it has not achieved all that Turkey would have hoped for.³⁰ Another step the US has taken is to appoint General Joseph Ralston as Special Envoy for Countering the PKK. According to Turkey, this has not resulted in concrete measures being undertaken against the PKK. Subsequent Turkish expressions of concern have included voicing the option of a Turkish invasion of Northern Iraq.³¹

The cease-fire the PKK declared on October 1, 2006, though reinstating calm for the time being, has not much credibility in light of the unannounced break of the previous cease-fire. Also, calm appears to threaten the PKK's livelihood, and is therefore inherently fragile.³² Several foreign policy analysts have suggested that it would be beneficial to the alliance between the United States and Turkey to include the country in trilateral talks with Iraqi Kurds. This would appease Turkish disgruntlement

²⁷ Steven A. Cook, Elizabeth Sherwood-Randall, "Generating Momentum for a New Era in U.S.-Turkey Relations", CSR NO. 15, *Council on Foreign Relations*. June 2006. <http://www.cfr.org/publication/10796>. p. 10-12, Bulent Aliriza and Seda Ciftci, "The US-Turkish Alliance at the Iranian Junction?". *Center for Strategic and International Studies*. <http://www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/tu060413.pdf>. p. 3, 6, and Ümit Enginsoy, "Row over antiterror fight mars Turkish-US relations", *Turkish Daily News*. 20 July 2006. <http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/article.php?enewsid=49399>.

²⁸ Recep Tayyip Erdogan, "Turkey Is Committed To the New Iraq", *The Wall Street Journal*. 30 August 2006.

²⁹ Ümit Enginsoy, "US urges closure of PKK media outlets in Europe", *Turkish Daily News*. 6 May 2006. <http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/article.php?enewsid=42647>.

³⁰ "Ambassador Wilson Unsure US did Utmost on PKK Issue", *Zaman*. 27 June 2006. <http://www.zaman.com/?bl=hotnews&alt=&trh=20060627&hn=34331>.

³¹ "Başer says Iraq operation possible under 'right conditions'", *Turkish Daily News*. 8 January 2007. <http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/article.php?enewsid=63375>.

³² Soner Cagaptay, "Can the PKK Renounce Violence? Terrorism Resurgent", *The Middle East Quarterly* Vol. 14, No. 1 (Winter 2007). <http://www.meforum.org/article/1060>, "Lonesome rebels", *The Economist*. 13 December 2006. http://www.economist.com/displayStory.cfm?story_id=8422447, and "Ralston asserts PKK still a threat despite cease-fire", *Turkish Daily News*. 13 October 2006. <http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/article.php?enewsid=56550>.

over inability to control events it perceives to be crucial.³³ Until now, however, Turkey is reluctant to enter into talks with Iraqi Kurdish leaders.³⁴

Iran

A country which has become increasingly relevant in Middle East diplomacy is Iran. In a continuously anti-American environment, and while US pressure on Iran is reminiscent of the earlier lead-up to the Iraqi war, Iran has tried to engage Turkey to strengthen their relations.³⁵ In April 2006, news reports claimed that Iran had bombed Kurdish strongholds in Northern-Iraq; a move welcomed by the Turkish media, though questioning its motives.³⁶ Moreover, Iran and Turkey's economic ties have grown substantially in recent years. Today Turkey imports 22% of its oil from Iran, and is a major supplier of refined gasoline for Iran.³⁷ Annual trade between the two countries reached over \$4 billion in 2005.³⁸ The current tensions surrounding Iran's nuclear programme serve as a reminder for Turkey of its strong support for the Gulf War in 1991, when it provided logistical support for the coalition forces. Ultimately, however, Turkey suffered from the war's consequences when the economic sanctions imposed on Iraq stripped Turkey of a significant economic partner.³⁹ Turkey fears a conflict between the 'West' and Iran would disrupt another trading partner for the country, as well as a major source of tourism.

Since the AK-Party's ascension to power, Turkey has engaged in an active dialogue with Iran. Prime Minister Erdogan and Foreign Minister Gül have recently made trips to meet with the internationally beleaguered Iranian president Ahmedinejad. During these visits, the Turkish expressed support for a peaceful nuclear Iranian programme. At the same time they have urged Iran to take the Western nuclear proposals seriously, and

³³ Cook and Sherwood-Randall, "Generating Momentum", p. 26-27.

³⁴ Ali H. Aslan, "Dialogue at Home, Dialogue in the World", *Today's Zaman*. 29 January 2007.

<http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/yazarDetay.do?haberno=101321>.

³⁵ "Erdogan Advocates Peace to Ahmedinejad", *Zaman*. 6 May 2006.

<http://www.zaman.com/?bl=international&alt=&hn=32850>, and "Rafsanjani: Iran, Turkey have common regional security concerns", *The New Anatolian*. 18 May 2006. <http://www.thenewanatolian.com/tna-6999.html>.

³⁶ "Turkish press applauds anti-Kurd move", *BBC News*. 6 May 2006.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4979798.stm>.

³⁷ Kenneth Katzman, "Iran: U.S. Concerns and Policy Responses", CRS Report for Congress. *U.S. Department of State*. 21 June 2006. <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/67845.pdf>. p. 6.

³⁸ Cook and Sherwood-Randall, "Generating Momentum", p. 20.

³⁹ Aliriza and Ciftci, "The US-Turkish Alliance at the Iranian Junction?", p. 5.

offered to serve as mediators between the parties.⁴⁰ The Turkish military is wary of these new alliances, and suspects Iran of fermenting radical-Islamic subversion within Turkey.⁴¹ As a key military power in the Middle East (in addition to Israel), Turkey eyes Iran's nuclear programme with suspicion, fearing it will lag behind as a 'mere' conventional power if Iran gains nuclear weapon capabilities.⁴²

Syria

Turkey has a troubled history with its neighbour Syria. Both nations were on the brink of war in 1998. Only after the Syrian expulsion of PKK-chief Abdullah Öcalan, who operated from Syria, did tensions ease. Damascus' opposition to Turkey has been one of the factors contributing to strong Israeli-Turkish ties; a fear of being ostracised was the reason Turkey regarded Israeli-Syrian peace talks in the 1990s with suspicion.⁴³

Today, Syria appears to share Turkish concerns towards PKK nationalism, and has engaged in efforts to deal with the PKK more firmly, for example by arresting local PKK activists.⁴⁴ It has become evident over the past few years that both nations now share a closer bond. For example, Damascus hosted important dignitaries from Ankara, and vice versa.⁴⁵ Economic relations between Turkey and Syria are also on the rise, signified by increased trade between the two countries, and the recent implementation of a free trade agreement.⁴⁶ Furthermore, both countries

⁴⁰ "Foreign Minister urges calm on Iran", *Turkish Daily News*. 26 June 2006. <http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/article.php?enewsid=47249>.

⁴¹ Speech by Prof. Barry Rubin (Interdisciplinary Center, Herzliya, Israel), at the conference on "Turkish Accession to the European Union, and its Consequences for the Middle East", 21 June 2006, The Hague.

⁴² Speech by Prof. Huseyin Bagci (Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey), at the conference on "Turkish Accession to the European Union, and its Consequences for the Middle East", 21 June 2006, The Hague.

⁴³ Aysegul Sever, "Turkey and the Syrian-Israeli peace talks in the 1990s", *MERIA*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (September 2001), p. 87-99.

⁴⁴ "Syria clamps down on Kurd parties", *BBC News*. 3 June 2004.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3774055.stm, and "Syria Shocks PKK", *Today's Zaman*. 8 November 2006. <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/detaylar.do?load=detay&link=38083>.

⁴⁵ "Sezer maintains delicate balance on Syria mission", *Turkish Daily News*. 15 April 2005.

<http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/article.php?enewsid=10838>.

⁴⁶ "Turkey's regional trade on the rise", *Turkish Daily News*. 25 April 2006.

<http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/article.php?enewsid=41678>, and "Details of Turkey-Syria FTA come to light", *Turkish Daily News*. 4 January 2005. <http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/article.php?enewsid=2914>.

maintain an open dialogue, regularly exchange views on regional affairs, and make joint efforts to combat crime and (PKK) terrorism.⁴⁷

In a telling sign of closer contacts with Iran and Syria, Turkey has welcomed the Iraq Study Group's November 2006 recommendations for the US to talk to both Iran and Syria.⁴⁸

Israel, Hamas and Lebanon

Turkey was the first Muslim country to recognize Israel as a state, and established representation on the ambassadorial level in 1991. In 1996 both countries concluded an important military agreement. The relationship between them has remained strong, though strained at times during Erdogan's tenure. Most noticeable were the unprecedented harsh words Erdogan used against Israel in 2004, claiming it was the cause for the rise of anti-Semitism worldwide, and accusing it of conducting state terror.⁴⁹ The next major setback was when in a striking foreign policy move, Turkey invited the Hamas leadership, which had just won the Palestinian elections on 27 January 2006, to come to Ankara. This was controversial in light of Turkey's longstanding alliances with Israel and the United States, as both felt the invitation impeded international efforts to isolate the Hamas government.⁵⁰ The invitation also drew criticism from the Turkish foreign and military policy elite, as well as from some within the public debate. Israel publicly reprimanded Turkey for the move. Israel's comparison to extending an invitation to Öcalan drew Turkey's ire, but relations were quickly smoothed over in the following months.⁵¹ While Turkey expects support for its tough stance on PKK actions, its invitation to the Hamas leadership marked a breach with previous coordinated policies with Europe and the United States.

⁴⁷ Cook and Sherwood-Randall, "Generating Momentum", p. 18-19, and K. Gajendra Singh, "Turkish-Syrian summit affirms historic changes in the region", *Turkish Daily News*. 14 April 2005.

<http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/article.php?enewsid=10798>.

⁴⁸ Christopher M. Blanchard et al., "Iraq: Regional Perspectives and U.S. Policy", CRS Report for Congress. *Federation of American Scientists*. 12 January 2007. <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33793.pdf>. p. 12.

⁴⁹ "Erdogan's well-timed visit", *The Jerusalem Post*. 2 May 2005.

⁵⁰ Soner Cagaptay, "Hamas Visits Ankara: The AKP Shifts Turkey's Role in the Middle East", Policy Watch #1081. *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*. 16 February 2006.

<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=2445>.

⁵¹ Aluf Benn, "Livni arrives in Turkey for first talks since Hamas leader's visit", *Ha'aretz*. 28 May 2006.

<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/objects/pages/PrintArticleEn.jhtml?itemNo=720601>.

The AK-Party's sympathies towards Hamas could signal an identification with Hamas as both being Islamic (the latter Islamist) parties viewed with suspicion by secular elements within their own societies, and Western countries. In the past Turkey has tried to be an interlocutor between Israelis and Palestinians, but some analysts expect it to lose that position because it will not be perceived as an honest broker by Israel anymore.⁵² Mediation efforts are more predominantly fulfilled by Egypt, which is still a major player amongst the Arab countries, and has successfully mediated a ceasefire with Palestinian terrorist groups before.

There is, however, one realm of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict where Turkish influence is generally welcomed: Syria. In the past years, Turkey has made repeated overtures to mediate between Israel and Syria, in order to negotiate a peace treaty between the two countries that are officially still at war.⁵³ Besides their bilateral disagreements, Israel has long accused Syria of supporting and sponsoring unrest on its northern border (through Hezbollah) and hosting terror groups (most noticeably Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal and Islamic Jihad leaders). Whereas peace talks have not received clear support from either side, Turkey is introduced by both the United States and Israel as a mediator when crises occur, such as the one that started at the end of June 2006 regarding the fate of the abducted Israeli corporal Gilad Shalit. In that case Turkey was pressed to convey the message to Damascus (not for the least reason because of Mashaal's presence there), that Syria should take Israeli warnings to stop its support for terror groups seriously.⁵⁴

However, after the crisis evolved into a full-scale war between the Lebanese Hezbollah faction and Israel, Turkey reneged on its role as mediator and took a public stance against Israel.⁵⁵ After the war's ending, Turkey reaffirmed its role in the region substantially by pledging to send up to a thousand soldiers to contribute to the renewed UNIFIL mission in Lebanon. The Turkish government's decision was much contested at home. To allay domestic fear that the Turkish presence in Lebanon would merely

⁵² Cagaptay, "Hamas Visits Ankara", and Cook and Sherwood-Randall, "Generating Momentum", p. 23.

⁵³ See note [19].

⁵⁴ Metehan Demir, "Turkish envoy conveys Israeli, US messages to Syria", *The Jerusalem Post*, 7 July 2006, and Ümit Enginsoy, "US, Israel wanted Turk envoy's Damascus visit, Gül implies", *Turkish Daily News*, 6 July 2006. <http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/article.php?enewsid=48095>.

⁵⁵ "Turkish premier slams Israel in OIC address, warns "clash of civilizations"". *BBC Monitoring*, 3 August 2006.

serve to protect Israel, Prime Minister Erdogan stressed that the troops would not be used to disarm Hezbollah.⁵⁶

Another area where Turkey wants to and serves as a mediator is between Israel and non-Arab Islamic countries. It has successfully initiated first contacts between the Israeli government on the one hand, and the Azerbaijani and Pakistani governments on the other.⁵⁷

Analysis and Options

Vis-à-vis the United States and the Transatlantic Bond

Ever since the March 1, 2003 vote, ties between Turkey and the United States have appeared to be frailer than before. The Iraqi war, its turbulent outcome as was predicted by Turkey, and Kurdish hostility, are all factors determining problematic relations with the United States. Moreover, the Turkish public is increasingly negative about the United States; its favourability amongst the public descended from 52% in 2000 (following US assistance for the earthquake struck Turkey), to 12% in 2006 (which is even lower than in 2003).⁵⁸ On the other hand, besides differences on policies in the Middle East, the bilateral relations between the two countries have not been threatened by either side. And even though the Turkish public by and large opposes US foreign policy in the Middle East, it also by a strong majority opposes a nuclear armed Iran, which offers a perspective for cooperation on that matter.⁵⁹

Since the Second World War, Turkey has been an active participant in the Western military alliance. In 1950 it sent over 5,000 troops to Korea, and two years later it joined NATO. In recent years it has twice led the

⁵⁶ “Turkey approves Lebanon troops”, *BBC News*. 5 September 2006. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/5315712.stm.

⁵⁷ Soner Cagaptay and Alexander Murinson, “Good Relations between Azerbaijan and Israel: A Model for Other Muslim States in Eurasia?”, Policywatch #983. *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*. 30 March 2005. <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=2365>, and Sonja Pace, “Israel, Pakistan Ministers Meet in Historic First”, *VOA News*. 1 September 2005. <http://www.voanews.com/english/archive/2005-09/2005-09-01-voa36.cfm?CFID=17991230&CFTOKEN=85143119>, Simon Henderson and Soner Cagaptay, “Engaging Israel: The Significance of the Istanbul Meeting between Israel and Pakistan”, *Peacewatch #513. The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*. 2 September 2005. <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=2365>.

⁵⁸ “America’s Image Slips, But Allies Share U.S. Concerns Over Iran, Hamas”, *PEW Global Attitudes Project*. 13 June 2006. <http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=252>.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

ISAF international forces in Afghanistan, and, until recently, the senior civilian representative in that country for NATO was a Turk, Hikmet Çetin.

For Turkey, its NATO membership offers a strong opportunity to engage in dialogue and policy making with the EU and the United States, especially as the partnership is increasingly a forum to discuss other issues relating to transatlantic politics, such as energy security.⁶⁰ Moreover, NATO forms the security umbrella under which Turkey hopes to find protection from outside forces whose strength surpass Turkish defence capabilities, for which involvement and cooperation with the United States remains crucial.

Both the United States and the European nations share equal responsibility to keep Turkey within the long lasting alliance. For the European Union this is particularly difficult because of its 25 member states, each with their own reservations and considerations and for some major domestic opposition to Turkey's role in Europe. The United States as a singular foreign policy entity can more easily adapt its ways towards a stance more inducing for Turkish rapprochement, though it has its own difficulties, mostly in Iraq, and is unhappy about Turkish previous refusal to cooperate in the Iraqi invasion. With all the opposition it faces there it needs to muster the political will to pressure the Kurdish autonomous region to keep the PKK in check, or take action against its fighters there.

In the meantime, the United States, paying lip service to the continued strategic importance of Turkey,⁶¹ has decided to reduce its military presence in the country. It thereby recognised the diminished practical usability of such forces in light of the Turkish policy shift.⁶² Turkey will have to realise, that as it explores other foreign policy options, it can decrease its own attractiveness as a (military) ally.

Vis-à-vis the European Union

A widening gap between Turkey and the United States would not be a positive development for the European Union. The Turkish public and government feel continuously chastised by the EU because of the way

⁶⁰ *The NATO Forum on Energy Security Technology*. <http://www.energy-security.org>.

⁶¹ "Turkey and US aim to boost ties", *BBC News*.

⁶² "U.S. Military to reduce operations in Turkey", *Middle East Newline*. 10 July 2006. http://www.menewline.com/stories/2006/july/07_10_1.html.

accession talks are proceeding. Continuous new demands and the negative scrutiny of domestic Turkish politics contribute to this. Moreover, even though the Turkish political elite strongly desires EU-membership, there are steps it is not willing to take to attain that. A political alliance with the European Union is therefore not axiomatic.

On strategic terms there are also differences to be recognised. The Turkish military ties to the West are still strongly supported within the Turkish military. Even when this does not mean they will always be as sturdy as in the past it is unlikely Europe could step in to take the US' place if the Turkish-American alliance was severed. This has not only to do with the lack of military capacity building and responsibility the European Union is taking as a collective, but also by the way France, Belgium, and Germany in the days preceding the Iraqi war, indicated their reluctance to defend Turkey even though it is part of their Article 5 NATO obligations. Conversely, though Turkey is strongly committed to NATO, its invitation to a widely recognized terror group (Hamas) while NATO is fighting a war on terror, is, to say the least, dubious.

Then remains the economic realm, the original guise of institutionalized European cooperation, and the first and foremost area in which Turkey has sought to attain integration with Europe. The Turkish economy is too intertwined with the European one to be able to find alternate economic partnerships.⁶³ So while relations with a single, though important partner such as for example Iran can, if absolutely necessary, be put at risk, Turkey cannot risk losing its economic bonds with the European Union.

Under these circumstances it is therefore likely for Turkey to continue pursue integration with the European Union, for this will be the only way its vital economic ties can progress. At the same time, Turkey cannot forgo to recognize the different political climate within the EU. Whereas support for the institution as such still exists, there are highly diverging views as to how it should operate and what its boundaries should be. Consequently, Turkey will have to make many efforts to convince the political leadership as well as the public in EU member countries of the benefits it can offer for an expanded Union. Failure to appease the former

⁶³ Turkey's six major export partners are members of the European Union. "Turkey", *CIA World Fact Book*. 11 July 2006. <https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/tu.html>.

will lead to top-down opposition to Turkish accession. Failure to convince the latter will lead to a failure to ratify Turkish accession, or to domestic political ploys over Turkey's back. It is possible that to achieve its goals, Turkey will have to take domestically unpopular steps.

Regarding the current negotiations: if both the Republic of Cyprus and Turkey refuse to compromise on this issue, it would be advantageous for the European Union, provided it has the political will to proceed with the negotiations, and not the intent to suspend Turkish accession to decouple the issue of Cyprus and Turkish accession. The preferred solution would be a simultaneous lifting of the economic isolation of Northern Cyprus, and implementation of the customs union agreement. This appears to be unachievable, because the EU does not want to link the isolation issue to the Turkish accession process, and Turkey does not want to recognize Cyprus if the isolation is not ended. As appeared by the partial suspension of talks last December, there is not much political will in the European Union to compromise more over this issue with Turkey. The EU feels the Ankara protocol was already a compromise in itself. In the months to come the EU will have to engage in creative diplomacy with the Greek Cypriot and Turkish sides, in order to find a way allowing for the customs union implementation to be postponed. Only by doing that will it make sure that the feared "train crash" EU Commissioner for Enlargement Olli Rehn has famously referred to, will be averted, and the important negotiation process with Turkey can continue in full. The process itself is at least as crucial to achieve the desired 'Europeanization' of Turkey in economic and judicial sense as is the outcome of the process.

Vis-à-vis the Middle East region

Of the new friends on Ankara's list of partners on the rise for Turkey, Syria and Iran are the most noticeable. Both share a porous border with Turkey and are therefore a natural point of 'concern' for Ankara, mainly projected in relation to the Kurdish issue. By engaging them in direct talks and increasing economic cooperation, Turkey enables the possibility to address issues it deems important in a diplomatic manner instead of the more vigilant ways opted before.

In its dealing with its direct neighbours, Turkey has to take into account both the fruits of such cooperation, as well as the possible risk it entails to its relations with its traditional allies such as the United States and

Israel. Both countries are for example unlikely to maintain the same level of military cooperation with Turkey if it would engage in military cooperation or true strategic partnership with one of the mentioned regimes. Not only would it obliterate the strategic value of the traditional alliances, it would also put the advanced weapon systems both the United States and Israel supply to Turkey at risk.⁶⁴

On the other hand it is noticeable that after the public condemnation by Israel of the Turkish invitation to Hamas, Israel quickly patched the public quarrel. This is largely because Israel needs a party to talk to Hamas when the 'going gets rough(er)', and Turkey, through its contacts with Syria and Hamas, can play that role.

Turkey's outreach to its neighbours provides it with new opportunities. It can gain importance in the international field by securing a role as a mediator for the numerous conflicts in the region. Also, it would be able to wield more influence if it is involved on two sides. If this really holds up is yet to be seen the effects of diplomatic mediation with Iran have so far appeared fruitless, and Turkey's involvement is new. The eagerness of Turkey nonetheless is a showcase of the weight it attaches to such a role.

Turkey is taking into consideration its own geopolitical future in the region. It realizes that its ally the United States (witnessing its domestic debate) is not likely to stay in the region forever. Turkey's residence in the region, however, is permanent, and so it needs to bear in mind the role of other stayers, such as Iran. The latter is likely to have a major influence on developments in Iraq, Turkey's large and unstable neighbour. Also due to its posturing as a potential nuclear power, Iran's regional influence is unlikely to wane in the near future. It is therefore understandable for Turkey to approach this country.

The question remains how the West (Turkey's NATO allies) should view the Turkish re-orientation. It can see Turkey's new entanglements as a sign of a growing swing eastwards, away from its traditional alliances. However, it can also benefit from Turkey's new assertiveness in foreign

⁶⁴ "Efforts to block Turk missile deal fail", *Turkish Daily News*. 18 May 2006. <http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/article.php?enewsid=43779>, and "Turkey mulls new F-16s instead of F-4 upgrades", *Turkish Daily News*. 29 March 2006. <http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/article.php?enewsid=39346>.

policy. If it ensures that Turkey will not renege on its traditional alliance, it can gain influence on countries on which European and American governments historically have little effect through Turkey. Insofar as solving Middle East conflicts, two outcomes are possible. On the one hand, the Turkish shift can serve as a break of isolation efforts of 'rogue states', as Iran and Syria are regularly described. For Syria, facing slight domestic opposition, and scolded by the international community for its alleged part in the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Al-Hariri in 2005, official business with a high profile country as Turkey formed a way out of the international isolation. On the other hand, and that is the scenario Turkey does and the West could hope for, it can convince these regimes to actually amend their policies. As such the Western NATO alliance can stretch its wings across a wider range than previously deemed possible, at the same time as Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan can pride himself on securing a larger international power base. It is with such hopes that Turkey has endorsed the recommendations of the Iraq Study Group to talk directly to Syria and Iran, but it is unlikely such proposals will be adopted by the current American administration.

Ultimately, however, whichever policy Turkey pursues in this respect, true international weight can only be tested if Turkey is actually able to persuade its partners into policy changes. The results of that have so far been unimpressive. While the AK Party invited the internationally isolated Hamas leadership to Ankara, it promised to the rest of the world to pass on the internationally adopted position of three conditions (end of violence, recognition of Israel, and recognition of past treaties). Hamas nevertheless manifestly refused to move an inch from its stance. Ankara's risqué political step was therefore unsuccessful, and served as an embarrassment for Turkey's ambitions in the Middle East. Such embarrassments, which simultaneously risk alienation from traditional allies, should serve as a warning for Erdogan's government that though the fruits of its 'strategic depth' approach can be attractive, it is still a play depending on willingness to compromise by sometimes intransigent actors. Some of these actors have long survived without the western support which Turkey has enjoyed.

Conclusion

The past year has shown increasing difficulties for Turkey in its accession process with the European Union, mainly concerning the issue of Cyprus. These difficulties have resulted in a partial suspension of negotiation talks by the European Union. At the same time, Turkey is experiencing a low tide in its long historical connection with the United States, mainly as a result of the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Turkey's worries particularly relate to the Kurdish issue, and have been exacerbated by recent PKK violence, for which Turkey holds the United States partly responsible. Meanwhile, Turkey has strengthened its ties with Arab and Islamic regimes, such as those of Iran, Syria, and the Palestinian Authority under Hamas.

In the coming months the future outlines Turkish foreign relations will take a more visible shape. Although there have been a number of 'fail safe' points in recent years before; a number of critical points will become clear. The European Union will decide whether the professed train crash can be averted, and if this is the moment it will want to put Turkey to test. Prime Minister Erdogan will at the same time make a decision whether he prioritizes EU accession over Cyprus. US President Bush will have to decide what the final period of his administration will mean for the American presence in Iraq, in a period where both the new Democratic majority in Congress, as well as some of his own backers and military personnel call for the start of a 'redeployment' out of Iraq. Also, it is an occasion for the Bush administration to decide on its long term commitments to Turkey.

Whatever the differences between Europe and the United States are with Turkey, both cannot afford to ignore it. Turkey has a lot to offer the West: large in size, large in population, economically and militarily strong, and, most importantly, an ally in a political hot spot in the world. At the same time the outcome of Turkish realignment in the Middle East region will have to be awaited. For Turkey, stronger involvement with its neighbours, especially the ones not on good terms with Western countries, can make it a mediator between entities who do not maintain regular contact. It also wishes to use potential leverage gained by such a role for its own interests. It is by taking a mediating role that Turkey can secure its own goals, such as stability in the region and combating PKK forces.

A Turkey well rooted in its ties with the West and Islamic regimes in the east can serve as a transponder for both sides, though it does involve a certain risk. If it overplays its hand it can be ignored by the West, while not reaping fruits from stronger ties with players like Iran and Hamas, which in the end are not persuaded into other positions by Turkey, as we have seen when Hamas blatantly refused to change its position in Ankara. At the same time, the European Union and the United States need to keep in mind that for Turkey, perceived rogue states as Iran, Syria, are neighbours.

As Prime Minister Erdogan states: “When we took office there was a Turkey which was not having talks with its neighbours. Now Turkey is having a dialogue with all of them. That’s why we don’t want any bombs to fall anymore in our region.”⁶⁵ It remains to be seen if these dialogues have not come to serve as a mere legitimization for otherwise isolated radical regimes, but can actually benefit tranquillity in the volatile region of the Middle East.

⁶⁵ Robert L. Pollock, “After Ataturk. Talking Turkey with Ankara’s Islamist Prime Minister”, *The Wall Street Journal*. 18 March 2006. <http://www.opinionjournal.com/editorial/feature.html?id=110008111>.