

On the list of the remarkable array of foreign policy challenges President Obama will soon face, managing U.S.-Turkish relations rarely appears. The reason is clear: Turkey poses no security threat to the United States compared to the situations in Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan and Russia in and around the Caucasus. Turkey is not a key player like the European Union, Japan and China in dealing with the international financial debacle. It is not an energy exporter like Saudi Arabia. It does not harbor terrorists who want to strike the United States, and it is not a proliferation risk like Pakistan and North Korea. In short, Turkey doesn't make headlines in the *New York Times* or on CNN.

Yet trouble in every single one of these geographical and functional areas, and others besides, affects Turkish interests and engages Turkish influence. Turkey thus remains of great strategic importance to the United States. Indeed, its role is indispensable to the success of U.S. policy on several key fronts. At the same time, however, traditionally good working relations between the United States and Turkey have experienced significant difficulties.

On the one hand, the evolution of Turkish society and politics has brought forth in recent years a government that shares fewer natural affinities with the United States than those of the past. This creates a paradoxical situation. Even though the Justice and Development Party (AKP), the religiously inspired political force dominating Turkish politics, is less friendly with the United States on an elite-to-elite basis, it is arguably more genuinely democratic, more dynamic, in better tune with Turkish social mores, and friendlier to market economics than its traditional, often rigid "secular" competitors and forebears, some of whom also harbor anti-American attitudes.

On the other hand, the sheer complexity of the U.S.-Turkey foreign policy agenda has ballooned. Gone are the days when Cold War concerns organized U.S.-Turkish cooperation, and brought order, if not always harmony, to dealing with subsidiary issues from the Cyprus imbroglio to the regional complexities of the Kurdish issue. Now there are more issues to deal with than before, but the two sides do not assign the same priorities or have the same interests at stake in them. Moreover, insofar as any single issue has replaced the Soviet threat as an organizing principle for the relationship in recent years, it is one on which the two sides have not seen eye to eye: Iraq.

Taken together, the changing Turkish political landscape and the sharp alteration in the portfolio of U.S.-Turkey security concerns have created a bilateral relationship that is bound to be complex and volatile. That qualifies it as a relationship requiring serious U.S. tending and one that needs to be seen as a whole, lest U.S. policy on Turkey melt into incoherence.

The U.S.-Turkish relationship arguably reached its apogee in the decade after the Cold War ended. Both the Reagan and first Bush Administrations became enamored with Turkish leader Turgut Özal (1983–93) because of his free market reforms, admiration for the United

States and ability to act decisively. The defining event was the Gulf War, which Özal favored and supported over his countrymen's wishes. If diplomacy counts, it should be noted that before the war began Secretary of State James Baker visited Turkey three times to win Turkish support—three times more than any cabinet official prior to the “second” Iraq war.

Post-Gulf War developments shaped Turkey's still-enduring Iraq issue. To alleviate a massive humanitarian problem, the United States and its allies moved half a million Kurds fleeing Saddam's wrath from Turkey's mountainsides and returned them safely to northern Iraq. To persuade Kurds to return, the allies created a security zone and warned Saddam to stay away from it, backing up the warning with combat aircraft patrols.

Many Turks distrusted American intentions at the time, believing that the security zone formed the seed of an independent Kurdish state that would draw Turkey's own Kurds away from their bonds to the Turkish Republic. The U.S. government tried to convince Turks that this was not the case, and was sincere in so doing; the issue simmered on a low heat and did not disrupt bilateral relations during the Clinton Administration. The United States strongly supported Turkish membership in the European Union, and the U.S. government helped Turkey secure a customs agreement with the European Union. Unlike European countries, the United States supported Turkey's massive incursions into Iraq to hunt the forces of the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) in the mid-1990s, and later helped capture PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan. Despite great skepticism, Washington also made the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline a reality, and Turkey an energy transit player.

The second Bush Administration then set relations on a roller coaster. Washington's contribution to Turkey's rapid growth through the IMF, the earnings from the BTC pipeline and the help the United States gave Turkey to achieve EU candidate status were forgotten as successive internal crises over Iraq roiled the relationship. At the heart of these crises has been the law of unintended consequences, which has proved itself more powerful once again than the crisis-driven plans of mere men. Turkish fears from 1991 have proved more accurate than American assurances, for in the process of overthrowing the Iraqi Ba'ath regime, a *de facto* Kurdish state has set roots in northern Iraq, and it has affected the character of Kurdish ethnic sensibilities inside Turkey. This underlies the new AKP government's failure in 2003 to win parliamentary approval for U.S. forces to move through Turkey to Iraq before the war began. The Turkish people, most of the AKP, other political parties and the military disliked a war against a neighbor and feared the impact of war on Iraq's unity. A rabid anti-Americanism took hold, and relations plummeted despite efforts by both governments to mend fences.

America's four-year failure to seriously address Turkey's pleas to prevent the PKK from operating out of Iraqi Kurdistan produced another crisis in the autumn of 2007. Fearing unrestrained Turkish military operations in northern Iraq, President Bush finally approved limited Turkish air and land incursions into northern Iraq's remote areas and promised “actionable intelligence” to support them. This help and the ensuing Turkish military actions reduced the government's domestic political problems and modestly tempered hostility toward the United States, but Iraq still troubles relations. Turkey's biggest fear remains the possibility of Iraq's disintegration following a departure of U.S. forces, leaving an independent Kurdish state and the rest of Iraq dominated by Iranian influence. It would like a Status of Forces Agreement with Iraq concluded and approved. It also wants American basing restricted to locations outside of northern Iraq. As of this writing, these issues have not been resolved.

THE DOMESTIC MILIEU

All of these issues are cast across a political backdrop of increasing political weakness in Turkey, despite the AKP's majority government having been returned to power in July 2007 with a mandate for four more years, one it has failed to use aggressively. The AKP's popularity rests more on its buoyant economic record and its sensitivity to the poorer sectors of Turkish society than any religious appeal. All that is endangered by charges of pervasive corruption, but also, more importantly, by economic deterioration and the continuing slowdown of growth, which can revive the fortunes of the opposition parties. The world recession will be a severe test for the AKP government and its effectiveness.

Yet the issue for the country as a whole is broader than that: Turkish democracy needs a facial. Political parties operate like absolute monarchies unto themselves, lacking serious internal debate and effective mechanisms for change. Human rights abuses, religious discrimination and corruption still permeate the political system, and Turkey's Constitution is a relic from episodes of military rule in prior decades.

Nationalism has also reared its head, notably in animosity to the European Union in response to negative European attitudes toward Turkish membership. The AKP government has largely suspended the reform efforts necessary to further democratize Turkey and facilitate EU accession negotiations. It has also dropped its brave talk about facing the Kurdish issue as part and parcel of the larger issue of Turkish identity. Indeed, political pressures appear to have driven Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan into some sort of agreement with the military that has made the Kurdish issue effectively synonymous with the PKK.

The bruising struggle over religion in public life, a battle between the AKP and Turkey's "secularists"—very much including the still-politically powerful military—is far from over. The AKP, whose origins lie in political Islam, has leaders who are devout Muslims and an activist religious wing. Nonetheless, the Party declares itself to be conservative, democratic and secular, and its actions in power over the past half dozen years align well with that declaration. Turkey's "secular elites", however, totally distrust the AKP's ultimate intentions and during 2008 attempted to use the judiciary to close the Party down. The AKP has escaped closure so far, but it was warned it might wind up in court again for violating the principle of secularism. The issue with the highest symbolic profile in this struggle has been the right of women to wear a headscarf in universities. The government advanced constitutional changes permitting it, but they were struck down by the top court. For the time being, the government has backed off in light of the extraordinary animosity the matter generated in secular quarters.



Turkish students protest in February 2008 in favor of allowing headscarves on campuses.
[credit: AFP/Getty Images]

As for actual governance, the AKP has not only behaved as a mainstream party, it has been the best and most reform-minded Turkish government in twenty years. The United States and the European Union have voiced support for the AKP government as a democratic modernizing party; EU countries harshly criticized the efforts of Turkish secularists to close it down. Yet Erdogan, the dynamic, paramount and indeed indispensable leader, is a risk taker, a polarizer and increasingly intolerant of dissent. One gets the feeling that more chapters remain to be written in the saga of Turkey's version of culture-war politics.

Despite Turkey's political uncertainties, the Obama Administration will be dealing with a transformed country compared to that which greeted George W. Bush eight years ago. Over the past decade, Turkey has become economically dynamic, benefiting greatly from growing foreign investment. Its international trade is expanding exponentially. Diplomatically, it is ever more creative, thanks to a freer strategic hand following the end of the Soviet Union. Turkey is now a regional military power with influence in the Caucasus and Central Asia and growing involvement in the Middle East. It recently won Security Council membership, and the United States will be seeking its support on some difficult issues.

In short, the disparity in power and regional relevance between the United States and Turkey is diminishing. Turkey has choices it neither had nor generally sought during the Cold War. So on the one hand, Turkey has worked closely with the United States on counterterrorism, for that is in its national interest. Turkey still highly values its American connection, which is vital to its anti-terrorism efforts, its struggle against the PKK, the vitality of its defense establishment, its energy aspirations and more. A loss of American support would be politically costly for any Turkish government, whatever the public mood. But on some issues Turkey is likely to go its own way, as illustrated vividly by Turkey's reaction to the Russian invasion of Georgia in August 2008. Turkey did not interpret Russian behavior in Cold War terms, but rather in contemporary economic ones, since Russia is Turkey's main trading partner and supplier of energy.

All of this makes bilateral diplomacy harder, but also that much more important. It will be harder, too, for another reason: The U.S.-Turkish emotional bond, a remnant of Cold War security dependence, has been largely broken. Unlike many other Turkish elites, most AKP government officials have shown little cultural affinity for America. Many of the Party's

rank-and-file dislike or distrust the United States. Turkish leaders have not been willing to champion the American connection to a hostile public.

Nor has the American public much interest in the Turkish connection. Tourism is small, so is investment, and even within government there is now no broad constituency for building a deeper relationship. That is another reason why high-level consultations early in the Obama Administration are badly needed. The agenda of U.S.-Turkish relations will produce both headlines and probably headaches sooner or later, so it wise to establish effective working relations now, before it does.

THE AGENDA

Iraq: Iraq tops the list of challenging U.S.-Turkish issues. Turkey sat by as the United States invaded, watching its fears of a federal Kurdish state approach reality. Presently, it wants the United States to eliminate the PKK safe-haven in Iraqi Kurdistan and to prevent Iraqi Kurdistan from becoming independent. But Turkey itself has not been idle.

The government has recently embarked on a creative but politically difficult effort to improve relations with the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). The effort is in part designed to secure KRG cooperation to contain the PKK, but it also bears a broader strategic purpose. For now, the presence of U.S. forces sets limits on the political evolution of Iraqi Kurdistan, but the Turks know those forces will eventually leave, sooner or later, most or all. So they wish to establish, if they can, a political and economic relationship with Iraqi Kurdistan that bears some resemblance to a protectorate if Iraq disintegrates. Since both Turks and Iraqi Kurds are concerned about the possibility of growing Iranian influence over a Shi'a-led Iraqi government, there is a rationale for cooperation despite rivalry between Turks and Kurds over that area.



A Turkish soldier patrols in a predominantly Kurdish province on the Turkey-Iraq border. [credit: AFP/Getty Images]

The Bush Administration has welcomed such an approach. It has feared that Turkey's distrust of Iraqi Kurds might lead to actions that would undermine the region's fragile stability. Turkey's cooperation, trade, investment and pipeline are vital to Iraqi Kurdistan. Washington knows that Iraqi Kurdistan, surrounded by three suspicious neighbors with their own Kurdish problems, must have good relations with a democratic Turkey. More importantly, so

increasingly do the Iraqi Kurds. The United States has no interest in Iraqi Kurdistan's independence unless Iraq breaks apart.

Nevertheless, the Kurdish problem inside Turkey today seems to be worsening. Underlying Turkey's sensitivity to Iraqi Kurdistan has been its difficulties with its own substantial Kurdish population, which date back to the beginning of the republic. There was a time, not so long ago, when some Turks began to see that a less zero-sum attitude toward Kurdish ethnic assertiveness could bring both domestic and regional benefits—a more vital stable democracy and a partnership that could advance Turkey's interests in dealing with Iraq, Iran and Syria. That attitude, combined with the quashing of PKK militancy inside Turkey proper, seemed for a time to herald a new beginning. But not much changed. Long-standing fears that an independent Iraqi Kurdish state would drive its own Kurds toward “separatism” seem to have trumped this emerging view. The Turkish military, in particular, still refuses to recognize a Kurdish identity within Turkey. A PKK that seemed on the verge of dissolution made a comeback, not just because it enjoys sanctuary in northern Iraq, but because it still has some appeal among many Kurds in Turkey.

The United States can only effectively address the regional aspects of Turkey's Kurdish problem, notably the PKK in Iraqi Kurdistan, the critical issue of Kirkuk, and Turkish relations with Iraqi Kurdistan. But, obviously, Turkey's attitude toward its own Kurdish citizens casts a shadow over the entire complex of issues.

The PKK remains Turkey's biggest security concern, and the PKK presence in Iraqi Kurdistan is the most immediate destabilizing issue in Turkish-American relations. While the Turkish government and military have publicly declared their satisfaction with American cooperation against the PKK in northern Iraq, that can change quickly if casualties in Turkey mount, dominating Turkey's political scene and fomenting ethnic tensions. Turkey's present PKK strategy focuses on ending the safe haven in Iraqi Kurdistan. Many in the media and think tanks believe that military means alone are insufficient to deal with this painful domestic issue, and that Turkey must also better respond to the needs of its Kurdish citizens.

Meanwhile, continued Turkish bombing of PKK mountain hideouts has hurt the PKK and produced defections. But they have not stopped costly PKK bombings in major Turkish cities like Mersin and Izmir. The PKK remains popular enough among Kurds in the southeast that Kurdish politicians refuse to denounce PKK members as terrorists. Iraqi Kurds informally help them, and they are supported by Kurdish networks abroad as well.

In this light, the failure of the Iraqi Kurds to limit PKK operations from their territory could endanger their quasi-state. Turkey is unlikely to stop military operations there, and while it may not seem obvious at first sight, the PKK does not want it to. Turkish operations help the PKK roil the political waters inside Turkey, and PKK leaders see the political front inside Turkey as taking precedence over the military front in northern Iraq.

The complexity of the relationships among Iraqi Kurds, Turkish Kurds, the PKK and the factions of Turkish politics pose real challenges for U.S. policy. The United States must focus on achieving both Iraqi stability and a durable friendly relationship between Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan. It can influence the Iraqi Kurds to help promote such an effort. To hold things together, Washington must continually reiterate its dedication to Iraq's unity and opposition to an independent Kurdish state, and it must continue its support for limited Turkish military

operations against the PKK and continuing pressure on Iraqi Kurdish leaders to reign in PKK operations against Turkey from their territory.

Even with all that, U.S. policy may fail, and if it does it may do so over the excruciatingly difficult challenge of Kirkuk. Iraqi Kurds are deeply committed to oil-rich Kirkuk becoming part of Kurdistan, since it is at the heart of their ultimate objective: independence. Since this is exactly what Turkey fears, it rejects Kirkuk becoming part of Iraqi Kurdistan, professing to fear for the welfare of the area's Turcoman population. But in fact it is more worried that the oil money will fortify northern Iraq's *de facto* if not *de jure* independence.

Iraqi Arabs also reject Kurdish control of the Kirkuk area; Iraqi government forces recently attacked Kurdish forces in control of some mixed areas in the region. Turkey and Iraqi Arabs oppose a referendum on Kirkuk's status, too—now several times postponed—because they expect the Kurds to win. Arab nationalism will not let Kirkuk go easily into a possible independent Kurdish state.

It is doubtful that Iraq's Kurds and its divided Arabs can resolve the issue on their own. Helping them do so must be one of the first tasks of the Obama Administration in Iraq. That is no simple matter, since resolving Kirkuk's status will likely require resolution of other key Iraqi governance issues, such as the regional distribution of oil revenues, all of which are essential to establishing a reasonably stable unified Iraq. The best answer, though one difficult for Kurds to accept, is to make Kirkuk a federal area with power shared among the various groups. If the same formula is applied to Baghdad and Basra, such a proposition might have a better chance of acceptance.

Resolving Kirkuk is also essential for better managing Turkey's domestic Kurdish difficulties. With political progress in Iraq and better relations between Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan, the AKP government could put more resources into the poverty-ridden southeast and begin to allow greater expression of a Kurdish identity. The United States should offer quiet encouragement for that policy, but any public statements to that effect will be resented by the Turkish public, since most continue to believe that the United States favors the Kurds and wants Turkey divided. A more fulsome approach would be better left to the European Union, which does not hesitate to raise the Kurdish issue and relate it to EU accession requirements.

T*he Armenian Genocide Resolution:* For decades now, the U.S. Congress has rejected the resolutions that arise almost annually condemning the Ottoman Empire for genocide committed against Armenians in 1915. This ritual, however, is becoming harder and harder for Turkey and its supporters to tolerate. It is a fundamental issue for Turkey in relations with the United States.

The Armenian-American community is determined that Congress adopt a genocide resolution. For them, the issue is an existential one. They pushed hard last year in the House of Representatives, but Democratic support fell away for fear that the Turkish reaction would be to disrupt supply lines to Iraq. They will certainly push again, encouraged by Democratic gains in both houses and a Democratic President committed to recognizing the genocide. But they also fear that developments in Iraq or elsewhere can again change congressional views,

and that campaign promises can fade when “responsibility” takes over. Turks perceive the threat as greater than ever, since no U.S. president has ever supported a genocide resolution.

In 1990, during a major Senate effort to pass a genocide resolution, an exasperated President Özal whispered to me, “Let them pass the damn thing and be done with it.” Whether he meant it or not (I don’t think he did), all Turkish governments have mounted strenuous efforts to defeat such resolutions, employing numerous lobbyists and threatening dire consequences should it pass. Prime Minister Erdogan has called for an impartial investigation by historians, which Armenians have rejected. The Armenian diaspora will surely refuse to acknowledge any doubt that genocide took place. And nothing that Turkey does of a practical nature—in September, for example, President Abdullah Gül held talks in Armenia on normalization of relations, which would open the Turkish border for much needed trade for the Armenians—will make any difference to supporters of a resolution, although it may have some impact on the new Administration or undecided congressmen.



Recep Erdogan

What Turkey would do if a genocide resolution passed is hard to say. It would feel compelled to react, as it did after the French Assembly passed a similar resolution in 2006. It could curtail American use of Turkish military bases, but almost any move would compromise Turkish interests as well U.S. ones. Mr. Obama is a man of conviction, but he will not find it easy early in his presidency to butt heads with a needed ally while Iraq remains precarious, the Transatlantic community seeks a new Russia policy and a worldwide recession deepens. He may find it prudent to advise the Armenian community to delay offering a genocide resolution in April 2009. This issue, however, will not die, and Obama will have to face it at some point.

The Middle East: Prime Minister Erdogan has dramatically shifted Turkish policy in the Middle East. He now seeks to establish broad friendships with all regional countries (“zero problems with neighbors”) and gain political influence, using a common basis in Islam to help him. He has established personal relations with Middle Eastern leaders that no Turkish leader has had. More concretely, the Middle East is one place where the money is, and Turks have vastly expanded trade and investment with the region. Erdogan, just like some of his predecessors, spends plenty of time playing the part of a commercial officer in the Gulf, Africa and Russia.

Turkey has developed close relations with Syria and, despite its suspicions of the Islamic government, has improved relations with Iran. The three countries, each with large Kurdish populations, have a common interest in Iraqi Kurdistan. Turkey has mediated a high-level, indirect Israel-Syria dialogue as well, persuaded that a settlement would help transform the whole area. Turkey is committed to peacekeeping in Lebanon and has tried to help that country resolve its difficulties. Ankara’s willingness to talk to characters whom the Bush Administration has considered beyond the pale has alarmed some American conservatives who see it as dangerous to American policies and indicative of the AKP government’s Islamist nature.

The U.S. government has not always viewed Turkey’s involvement in Arab-Israeli issues as a positive development. Erdogan angered Washington by allowing his foreign minister to receive Hamas military leaders in Turkey. He has indicted Israeli policies in the Palestinian territories in ways that many Israelis and American Jews consider inflammatory. His efforts to mediate a Syria-Israel deal at Israel’s behest has temporarily assuaged concern. But since that effort is unlikely to get very far, the benefits will be only temporary.

Iran stands to become a more difficult issue in U.S.-Turkey relations. Ankara would welcome a change of perspective from the new Administration. It has not liked the American hard line on not talking to Iran but has kept its counsel. Turkey is itself conflicted over Iran, and relations at times have been rocky. The government dislikes Iranian support for terrorist groups, strongly opposes Iran’s acquiring nuclear weapons and fears that Iranian influence is dominating an unstable Iraq. But it shrinks from confrontation and believes military action will make things worse. Turkey will oppose military action against Iran and not likely permit American use of its bases for that purpose.

Meanwhile, the Bush Administration has leaned on Turkey to support tougher sanctions, but its own economic interests and Iran’s proximity make it difficult for Turkey to embrace them without greater Iranian provocations or explicit UN approval. Additionally, and much to the outgoing Bush Administration’s displeasure, Turkish officials have been seriously discussing major investments in Iran’s energy industry. They see Iranian gas as an important source of badly needed energy and good profits from lucrative transit rights.

The Obama Administration needs to take a fresh look at Turkey’s role in the Middle East. It is not a major player, whatever its media’s encomiums about a new Ottoman presence. But it has clout, and the AKP government is respected in the area. Direct opposition to American goals by Turkey is unlikely but cannot be entirely discounted. Turkey’s growing economic interests in the region, formidable military, its ties with Western countries and its religion are all important factors for countries of the region as history recedes.

The United States will obviously want to pursue closer cooperation with Turkey on Middle East issues. That requires a serious, sustained dialogue. More specifically:

Turkey can serve as a reliable supporter of new American initiatives. It can also be a responsible interlocutor for cases in which the United States or Israel does not talk with certain parties. (Hamas comes to mind.) The United States wants Turkey to enhance its already significant trade and defense ties to Israel. This connection also enables Turkey to act as a credible conduit between Syria and Israel or, less likely, between Israel and the Palestinians. More broadly, in any peace effort the United States would want Turkey to help integrate Israel into the regional economy and alleviate decades of animosity between Israel and the wider Muslim world. The rubber has not yet hit the road on our Iranian policy. Whether or not Turkey invests in Iranian energy production (which seems likely), depends on how much American pressure is brought to bear and what counter-incentives are offered. Breaking Turkey's Iranian energy tie will not be easy, given that the United States has also wanted Turkey to reduce its supply from Russia. The United States will obviously not make decisions on Iran based solely on Turkish interests, but it might gain cooperation or limit damage through consultations at the highest level and sensitivity to Turkish concerns.

Pipe Dreams: By serving as the land bridge between Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia and the Middle East, Turkey has become an energy transport hub. As energy security concerns have grown, so has interest in diversifying transit routes. This is keenly felt in Europe, where Russia-dominated pipelines transmit half the European Union's gas and a third of its oil. With several major Russian projects under construction or in advanced planning (such as the South Stream pipeline to Europe through Turkey), Russia wields significant influence.

Supporting Turkey's role as an energy transit hub has been a part of the American effort to dilute Russian dominance. The Turks know this, of course, and welcome it. But it also poses a problem for them. On the one hand, Turkey benefits financially from being an energy transport hub; on the other, Turkey wants to minimize antagonisms with Russia, particularly as Russian influence has grown in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Thus, Turkey appreciated the intense American lobbying and concerted efforts to secure political and financial backing that made the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline possible. [1. That pipeline transports a million barrels of oil daily to tankers at the Mediterranean port of Ceyhan.](#) The more ambitious Nabucco pipeline project, intended to move Caucasus and Central Asian gas through Turkey to Europe and in planning since 2004, arises in a different geopolitical context after the Georgia war.

Right now the pipeline situation is very much up in the air, as regards both the Russian and the Western projects: South Stream is questionable because of its costs. Nabucco lacks dependable sources of supply. Gas suppliers Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan are being wooed by Russia but have yet to commit. Iranian gas raises political problems for the United States, and there are serious doubts about Iraq's capabilities. The Georgian war may have undermined transporting more energy through Georgia. Moreover, Nabucco has mixed support from Europe, and it is weakened by red tape and politics in participating governments and companies. (Construction is now delayed at least until 2013.)

For Nabucco to happen, the Obama Administration must mount an intensive effort to ensure gas supply from Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan, bring divided Europeans along, help find the

necessary financing, and talk to the Russians about a deal. It will also probably have to resolve the protracted logjam in policy toward Iran. As Turks see it, America's failure to deal with Iran jeopardizes efforts to diversify energy pipelines and Turkey's economic interests with them. Turks hope a reversal might be possible with the new U.S. Administration, but cannot count on it. In light of all this, Turkey supports Nabucco and hopes it becomes a moneymaker. But no one in Ankara is holding his breath waiting for it to happen.

G*eorgia, the EU and Cyprus:* The Georgia war raised a new issue in bilateral relations:

how to deal with Russia. NATO membership is a pillar of Turkish foreign policy and Turkey supported NATO expansion. While Turks remain wary of Russia, relations have changed as Russia has become Turkey's major trading partner and energy supplier. The Turkish government's response to Georgia was not exactly the American, "We are all Georgians" line. Although Turkey has provided assistance to Georgia for years, it does not admire Georgian President Saakashvili or salute his ill-fated military venture. Certainly, as world recession takes hold, the Turkish government will be cautious in managing relations with a critical economic partner. Nor does Turkey think the time is right to proceed with the NATO membership process with Georgia. There is a potential major dilemma here if an Obama Administration concludes that, indeed, the time is right to proceed. German Chancellor Angela Merkel may save Turkey from getting out in front. An agreed new Western policy toward Russia would help enormously.

Turkey's efforts to enter the European Union have floundered over the past few years. The Europeans have not been helpful, and popular Turkish interest has flagged, while the military and opposition political parties have grown skeptical, thinking that the European Union (as well as the United States) supports the AKP. Moreover, the AKP government has done little in the last two years to implement its promised reform program to carry out accession requirements, fearful of making even more domestic political waves. While the United States supports Turkish accession, its influence in Europe on this issue has declined. Possibly a new and more popular Administration might have influence with Europeans on this issue, and if the United States can help, it should.

One important EU issue on which the United States surely can help is the ever-durable Cyprus problem. Turkish accession will certainly not happen if Cyprus or Greece blocks it, so accession means resolving Cyprus. The United States has influence on all parties to the issue and needs to use it. The American interest is not direct; it is rather the contribution of a Cyprus settlement to general stability, to progress on thorny issues between Greece and Turkey, and, most important, to a new climate in Turkey and Europe on Turkey's EU accession.

New negotiations between the Cypriot parties began this summer, the first in four years after the Greek Cypriots rejected Kofi Annan's proposed settlement in an April 2004 referendum and the Turks, in a stunning reversal of thirty years' practice, accepted it. Greek Cypriot leaders have always felt sure that, because they hold a veto over Turkey's EU membership, the Turks will eventually capitulate to their terms. They may be sure, but they are mistaken—and they must be made to realize that. American pressure from the highest levels of government, coupled with pressure from Britain and other major EU members, will be indispensable in adjusting the attitudes on both sides on key issues. A major American political figure dedicated to the negotiations as a special envoy might help significantly.

Since the end of the Cold War, the American approach to Turkey, whatever its mistakes, has tried to ensure that this increasingly powerful country becomes a successful democratic state anchored in the West and a contributor to important mutual objectives. While Turkey has come a long way, it has a long way still to go. Nevertheless, Turkey today contributes in numerous constructive ways to international stability. In an era of diffusing power both countries should want to find ways to deepen relations and reduce abrasions. The most practical way to do that is through more regular high-level discussions, not frantic episodes of crisis management. Washington should bring Turkey into the Transatlantic dialogue. Also needed to better underpin relations are more tourism to Turkey, greater investment and continuing access for Turks to our educational system.

Given the growing complexity of the bilateral relationship and diminishing U.S. influence, the Obama Administration should review relations and all the thorny issues that attend them at an early time with top Turkish leaders. While the United States cannot much help in resolving Turkey's internal difficulties, we have many opportunities to help shape the environment that is so crucial to Turkey's development. We have a great stake in Turkey's stability and success, and we need to equal the measure of that stake with our effort.

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1. That pipeline transports a million barrels of oil daily to tankers at the Mediterranean port of Ceyhan.

Kaynak: <http://www.the-american-interest.com/ai2/article.cfm?Id=527&MIId=23>