

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

RIGHTING THE COURSE: THE FUTURE OF THE U.S.-TURKISH  
RELATIONSHIP

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**Introduction:**

STROBE TALBOTT

President, The Brookings Institution

**Featured Speaker:**

R. NICHOLAS BURNS

Former Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, U.S. Department of State

**Moderator:**

DANIEL BENJAMIN

Director, Center on the United States and Europe

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## PROCEEDINGS

MR. BENJAMIN: Good morning. I'm Daniel Benjamin. I'm Director of the Brookings Center on the United States and Europe, and it's my pleasure to welcome you, both here in the audience at Brookings and at Sabancı University, to the Fourth Annual Sakıp Sabancı Lecture today.

The Sakıp Sabancı Lecture Series pays homage to the legacy of an exceptional man, one of great vision, extraordinary energy, and true wisdom.

His legacy is not only one of great achievement in business, but in education, philanthropy, and in public life, where he played a critical role in setting his nation's course toward democracy, free markets and the West.

It is a legacy that his niece, Güler Sabancı, has carried forward, and we are truly delighted that she is here again with us today in the front row.

The Brookings Sabancı relationship has deepened over these four years, thanks, in large measure, to your dedication to this event, which is at the heart of -- and to your support for the Brookings Turkey Program, which is the heart of what our Center does.

The fact that you believe that Brookings should be involved in honoring your father honors us as well. And we thank you for that.

Not only does this event call to mind the deeds of Sakıp Sabancı, it also recognizes the importance of Turkey.

Our intention at Brookings is to use this forum in order to

raise the level of discussion about Turkey, a nation that is fascinating in its own right and at the heart of a very complicated region that includes Southeastern Europe, the Balkans, Russia, the Caucasus, and, of course, the Middle East.

Turkey and the United States share many common interests in this very challenging region.

Our common agenda includes issues of regional peace, the enlargement of the European Union, and democratization.

It includes counter-terrorism, energy security, and economic cooperation in an increasingly interdependent world.

In a region where democracy and stability is in short supply, it is absolutely crucial for Washington to support what makes Turkey a success story.

And for all of these reasons, the fundamental strength of the U.S.-Turkish partnership is one of much more than bilateral significance.

It is no secret and we do no one any favors by pretending that this relationship has been an untroubled one in recent years, roiled as it has been by a range of issues, but above all by the War in Iraq.

That is why we sought to find someone who could deliver this year's lecture with an authoritative understanding of what has ailed and troubled this relationship and someone who's been intimately involved in trying to improve that relationship and set it on the proper course for the future.

I first met Nick Burns in 1994, when I first arrived in Washington. And, in fact, one of the first things we worked on -- at that point, he was Senior Director for Russia -- Russia-Ukraine. And it happened right at a crisis moment, right after the mid-term elections of 1994, something that most of us remember with a shiver.

And I have to say that I have seldom come in contact with someone who was as cool and as graceful under pressure as Nick has been.

He's been that way to those who know him in Washington for so many years, and it's been an extraordinary thing to watch Nick look younger with every passing year, while the rest of us seem to age.

However, this is not a Dorian Gray story, so we won't go there.

I don't have the privilege of introducing Nick. I just wanted to add a personal observation. I'm going to leave that to my boss, Strobe Talbott, the President of Brookings.

But let me just say in inviting Strobe to the podium, one of the things I greatly admire about Brookings is that when you go to work here, Strobe reminds you Turkey matters.

This has been a subject in one conversation after another that we've had here. It's something I've known about him for a long time, since we go back quite a ways.

And I think that it's part of setting a right course in the way

that Brookings does for treating our work on Turkey and the broader agenda in Washington on Turkey.

So, Strobe, if you would come up and replace me, I'd be most grateful.

MR. TALBOTT: I'm not about to replace you, Dan. You'll be glad to know. Quite the contrary.

I should say a word or two just about my own connection with Dan Benjamin.

He and I have been colleagues and friends twice earlier in our checkered careers, once was at *Time* magazine, and the other was when we were in government together.

And it's been a particular pleasure for me and a great boon to Brookings to have Dan leading our Center on the United States and Europe; and, in that capacity, to have him working very closely with Omer Taspinar and Mark Parris on our program that is dedicated to one of the most important countries in Europe, by which, of course, I mean Turkey.

Let me heartily endorse Dan's expression of gratitude to Güler Sabancı, who, over the past few years, has become a very good friend to Brookings, and I might add a good friend to me personally.

And I'm delighted that we meet again today, as we do every year, to honor the memory of her uncle, Sakıp Sabancı, who, as Dan said, was somebody of great vision and leadership in a number of fields, and among those fields, of course, was education.

And in that connection, it's a great pleasure to see you, Professor Ikatch here and to look down on a screen, which is in front of us here at the panel, and it's the same image, I hope, as the one up on the screens behind us, which represents our use of modern technology to connect us with your colleagues and students at Sabancı University, who are participating in today's events.

And let me -- although I can't quite see them -- offer special greetings to Professors Karamon and Kadiolu, who will be moderating the discussion in Istanbul.

By the way, as I mentioned a few minutes ago while we were waiting to come in here to Ms. Sabancı, my wife and I are coming to your city with several Brookings colleagues, a number of whom are here in the room today, in the not-too-distant future. And we're greatly looking forward to doing so.

My wife, Brooke, and I regard Istanbul quite simply as just about the most beautiful and fascinating city on earth. And I would ask the Turkish Press, which is so well represented here today, to please treat what I just said as a personal opinion, and, more than that, strictly off the record, not least because Brooke and I are going to be going from Istanbul to another European city, Paris. And we wouldn't want to offend anyone there by sharing intimately with you our view about Istanbul.

Now let me say a few words about our guest of honor and our speaker.

I wouldn't claim to be ahead of Dan in many things, but I would claim to be ahead of him in how long I have known Nick Burns.

I've known Nick since the 1980s, when I was a reporter, and he had a really important job. Now I would never, even off the record, reveal who any of my sources might have been back when I was in the Fourth Estate.

But I will say that I did have reason back in the 1980s to regard Nick as a public official of remarkable intelligence, insight, and skill, and I might pick up on something that Dan said and refer to another quality of Nick's.

Dan referred to grace under pressure. As I'm sure all of you know, that was Ernest Hemmingway's definition of courage, not irrelevant to a point I'm going to make.

When Nick and I ended up in government together in the 1990s, we were part of a team that worked on several of the most vexing, high stakes issues of the time, including several involving Turkey and its neighborhood.

Those issues included the transformation underway in Russia, the Caucasus and Central Asia; the troubles roiling the waters of the Eastern Mediterranean; the genocidal violence perpetrated against Muslim minorities in the Balkans; and, very importantly, the expansion of the Alliance, to which both the United States and Turkey belong, an expansion that we in Washington strongly believed should lead and will

lead to an expansion of the European Union that includes Turkey.

Now as you all know, Nick has, in his extraordinarily distinguished career, been Ambassador to Greece and to NATO. And in those capacities, he worked persistently and successfully for objectives that served Turkey's interests as well as those of the United States.

Until recently, Nick was Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, which made him the senior professional diplomat in the Administration.

But he was more than that. Nick was a key part of a much needed renovation in America's diplomacy over the last few years. It came after a period in which American statecraft had been downgraded, which led to a decline in America's standing in the eyes of the world.

According to a number of international polls, that decline was in President Bush's first term especially severe in Turkey.

Now there has been an improvement in the second term, and that's obviously first and foremost a credit to the President himself, and to Dr. Rice.

But it's also a credit to our speaker and my friend, Nick Burns. And that's for three reasons: first, Nick advocated within the councils of the Administration for a new and better tone and substance for American diplomacy.

Second, he effectively implemented that new tone and substance in his own spokespersonship for U.S. interests and in his personal



conduct of diplomacy.

And third, he personifies the qualities that we Americans, and our friends and allies abroad, most want to see as hallmarks of the way in which the United States defines and plays its role in the world.

Picking up on his topic today, which is “Righting the Course: The Future of the U.S.-Turkish Relationship,” I would turn the podium over to him by saying that Nick has helped right the course of U.S. foreign policy in general. Over to you, Nick.

(Applause)

MR. BURNS: Strobe, thank you so much. Ladies and gentlemen, good morning. It’s a pleasure for me to be here, a pleasure and really an honor to give this Fourth Annual Sakıp Sabancı Lecture here at the Brookings Institution.

In that regard, let me just return the favor and say to Strobe Talbott how thankful I am for his friendship and how grateful I think all of us are to see how well Brookings is doing under Strobe’s leadership. So thank you for that, Strobe. And thank you for believing so much in this U.S.-Turkish relationship.

There are a lot of friends here from the United States Government, Carlos Pascual – ex-officials of the United States Government, now officials of Brookings -- Carlos Pascual and Phil Gordon. My friend Omar Taspinar, who’s been such a great -- over the last couple of weeks -- guide to me on all things Turkish, and if you

haven't read his *Foreign Affairs* article, Omar's article in the November-December edition of *Foreign Affairs*, you should. I think it's the single best piece that I've written -- that I've read -- excuse me -- on Turkey over the last couple of months.

Others here. Jim Holmes, Ambassador Jim Holmes, who's been a great friend of Turkey for a long time. Ambassador Steve Pifer, way in the back, in the back row, also someone with whom Strobe and I have worked.

Güler Sabancı, thank you so much for being here. I know you're very busy. And you've got a lot on your mind. But you have helped to build this great university in honor of your uncle and this foundation that supports research, and we're happy to have you here in our capital, Washington, D.C., once again.

And may I say we have a lot of screens here. Too all of the faculty and students at Sabancı University in Istanbul, you are most welcome. I'm looking forward very much to our discussion afterwards, which I assume is going to be a lively and full discussion of U.S.-Turkish relations.

And I agree with Strobe, there isn't a prettier, more beautiful, more historic city than the city in which the university sits, Istanbul. And so it's a pleasure to have all of you with us today.

I think that Brookings and Sabancı are surely right to each year remember that extraordinary and visionary Turkish leader, Sakıp

Sabancı.

His advocacy and work for a Turkey that would embrace democratic and economic reforms, his call that Turkey should have a rightful place in Europe was certainly the right way for Turks to think of their own country, and it did so much to orient Turkey in the direction in which it's currently heading.

And I was intrigued to talk to Güler before we walked into this room that Sabancı University has done extraordinarily well for a university that opened its doors in 1999.

Güler's going up to Boston, my hometown, later on today, and there are 45 graduates of Sabancı in the Boston area universities alone -- Harvard and MIT and Boston College and others.

And that is quite a distinction, I think quite an interesting metric, evidence of the success that the university is already having.

So I'm delighted to be here.

I'm also delighted to be here for another reason. This is my very first speech since I've retired from the U.S. Government and the State Department, and so that, in itself, is a kind of uncharted and new territory for me.

When Strobe and Dan Benjamin asked me to give this Sabancı Lecture, I thought of how often in my own career, and in my work and that of the work of U.S. foreign policy, we intersected with Turkey.

And I think of that historical pattern as kind of a metaphor for

the vital importance that both countries have for each other in this U.S.- Turkish relationship.

I was a young diplomat 25 years ago in Mauritania in West Africa and then in Cairo in Egypt and then in Jerusalem. And I saw then, in the early to mid-1980s that Turkey was one of the very few countries in the world that enjoyed good relations with the Arab countries, as well as with Israel.

And during the first Gulf War in 1990 and '91, I had a front row seat at the White House. I was the National Security Council official responsible for Turkey.

And I remember the very clear and decisive intervention that President Turgut Özal made in the thinking of the Bush Administration, the Bush '41 Administration, about how we should look at the opportunities as well as the dangers of trying to rescue Kuwait, of assembling a major international coalition, and of defeating Saddam Hussein.

And I never thought since that President Özal received enough credit for his leadership, which was very clear; and I thought visionary at an important time not only in the history of the Middle East, the modern history of the Middle East, but an important time in the development of a strategic partnership that has since emerged, globally, and particularly in the Middle East between Turkey and the United States.

When President Clinton came into office, he asked Strobe and I to travel to Ankara, and Strobe may remember this, in September of

1993. And our mission in visiting Turkey was to encourage the Turkish government to extend its assistance, its attention, both through the Turkish private sector as well as the government, to the newly found independent countries of Central Asia.

Well, we didn't have to actually give any advice when we got to Ankara, because I remember very clearly Strobe and I being impressed by the clear strategic course that the Turkish government was already on to reach out to those countries diplomatically, economically, and through the Turkish private sector.

And you see that now. When you travel through Central Asia, you see it in South Asia. I certainly saw it in Afghanistan -- the presence of the Turkish private sector as a force for Turkish society in these new regions of the world.

As State Department spokesman in the mid-1990s, I found myself and my country caught between two great allies, Turkey and Greece, in the Imia, or, as the Turks call it, Kardak crisis in the Aegean Sea.

And then as ambassador in Athens, I saw, along with my colleague, Mark Parris, then Ambassador in Turkey, how those two horrific earthquakes, the first in Turkey, the second in Greece, led the citizens of the country first, and then the leaders to decide enough with Greek-Turkish tensions.

And I think it was the citizen-led movement in both countries,

followed by the governments, to reach out to each other and to create what I think since has become an historic rapprochement in modern times between the Greek and Turkish peoples and the two governments, and that is now led very ably by two leaders who've become friends -- Prime Minister Erdoğan of Turkey and Prime Minister Karamanlis, Kostas Karamanlis, of Greece.

And the last few years, as both Dan and Strobe mentioned, I sat at the NATO table in Brussels, and that's quite an experience, because there's no sovereign at that table. There's no government to which we are accredited. We're accredited to each other around that table.

And I had the great pleasure to sit in alphabetical order at the end of that NATO table with my Turkish and British counterparts, with Ahmed Azumshu , a really fine Turkish diplomat, with Oner Oyman , someone with whom I had a very close personal relationship and someone who stood up for NATO and the U.S.-Turkish relationship while he was ambassador.

And then in the last three years, I had the great pleasure, really an honor, to chair for the U.S. side our strategic dialogue with Turkey. And we would meet -- and I was last in Istanbul and Ankara in September of 2007. We would meet and we'd talk about not just the bilateral relationship. We talked about what concerned Turkey, about its strategic position in the world and what concerned us and how we could

work together.

And Strobe mentioned a phrase, Turkey matters to the United States. That's how I felt sitting at the NATO table with my Turkish colleagues. That's how I certainly felt as Under Secretary of State, thinking about the problems of Europe, of the Middle East, of Central and South Asia, of the Balkans, that Turkey matters to the United States.

Now I say that because I clearly remember and some of my colleagues who were U.S. officials at the turn when the Cold War ended, when communism melted away, and when democracy began to grow in Eastern Europe, I remember American pundits, and there may be even some of them still left in the room today, saying Turkey would be less important to the United States because the Cold War was ending, because Turkey, of course, had been a bastion of democracy during the Cold War itself.

That prediction turned out to be spectacularly wrong. I think any of us sitting here today, looking at Turkey objectively, looking at the relationship between our two countries objectively would have to say that Turkey is decidedly more important to the United States and to the European Union today than it was during the Cold War.

I think Richard Holbrooke put it best. He was last year's Sabancı speaker and a good friend. Dick Holbrooke has said that Turkey is now to our national security what Germany was in the Cold War to American national security. It's a front-line state.

And that front line is no longer in Europe. That front line is in the Middle East. And that is the first and primary reason why Turkey, in my judgment, is so clearly and so vitally now the pivotal European ally in a literal and figurative sense for my country.

During the last decade, I think the most important single shift in American strategic thinking has been this: that we've migrated from a singular focus on Europe and the problems of Europe and the vital challenge they pose to us in the 20th century to now what is pretty much a singular focus on -- in this city -- the Middle East and its problems and challenges to our country in the 21st century.

And as we Americans struggle and debate in our political campaign what to do about Iraq, what to do about American involvement in Iraq, how do we stop the Iranian government from becoming a nuclear weapons power, how do we prevent Iran from continuing to arm and fund nearly all of the Middle East terrorist groups that are shooting at us and our friends -- Israel, the moderate Palestinians, the Arab states, how do we make sense of the problems that 60 years after the creation of Israel -- and we commemorate that next week -- Israel and the Palestinians are still not at peace.

Israel doesn't have security and the Palestinians don't have what they deserve, a home, a state that they can call their own. And Israel does not have a state of peace with most of the Arab world.

These are the problems that are the forefront of American



strategic thinking, along, of course, with the opportunities, positive and negative, in South Asia, and, of course, as we look at a rising China, with what that means for strategic stability in the Far East.

This is where American foreign policy is currently heading. And if that is the case, and I believe it is, then I think we have to argue, and I will certainly argue this morning, that Turkey is going to be a singularly important ally for us, and partner.

In the Middle East, as I've already said, Turkey really is the only country that I can think of that has built bridges to all of these countries that I just named -- Iraq and Iran, Syria, Israel in the modern Middle East.

Turkey's importance is self evident. It's also a function, as Dan and Strobe both mentioned, of its geography, of its clear influence in the Balkans, the Black Sea, the Caucasuses, and in South and Central Asia.

It's in this part of the world that the United States finds itself as a partner militarily of Turkey in securing the peace in Bosnia and Kosovo, as President Clinton did, I think, so bravely in the 1990s with Turkey and the other European allies; and of now supporting the independence of Kosovo as Turkey and the United States did together just in the last few months.

Both of us support the sovereignty and independence, the true and effective independence of Georgia from intimidation by Russia. And finally, both of us are acting politically, but also militarily and

economically to support the Afghan people and the Afghan government in its struggle to protect itself from the sordid influence of the Taliban and Al Qaeda.

Turkey is also one of the leading players in what has become, in my mind, probably the leading international issue of 2008, and that's energy.

Turks and Americans share a common interest in preventing the domination by one country, Russia, of the oil and gas sources and pipelines for Western Europe. Turkey is, of course, the gateway for the exports of oil and natural gas from the Caspian region to Europe as the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline and now the Turkey-Greece-Italy Interconnector so aptly demonstrate.

And finally, I think Turkey's important for a normative reason and perhaps even an existential reason.

Turkey is, in many ways, the most successful Muslim state in the world. And this point, I think, cannot be underestimated.

Turkey's development since the extraordinary vision and leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk is historic and it's unique among all Muslim countries of the world.

Atatürk gave, before many of the European countries did, political rights to women. Atatürk led the way towards the economic renaissance in Turkey, of which the Sabancı Group, of course, is a great representative.

Atatürk established the Turkish Republic as a secular democracy.

And now, another generation of Turkish leaders, led by President Gül and Prime Minister Erdoğan, are demonstrating that a democratic, pro-market, secular and globally integrated country can succeed in our time, in the 21st century, and in some cases succeed in spectacular fashion.

In this sense, there is no question whatsoever in my mind that both President Bush and President Clinton have been right over the last 10 years to argue, and many times to argue with our European friends, West European friends, that Turkey must accede to the European Union.

With Turkey as a member, the European Union will have united Europe geographically and in its democratic values for the first time in its history. Without it, Europe will have passed up a unique opportunity in its modern history and that's to have the benefits of Turkey inside the Union as the literal and figurative bridge between Europe and Asia and between the peoples of Europe and the peoples of the greater Middle East.

And so if we agree on Turkey's importance to the United States, we must then agree that Turkey and the United States should continue to act to rebuild a partnership and an alliance that was weakened considerably since the start of the Iraq War in March of 2003.

I hope that Turks and Americans will agree that we must never again permit a legitimate difference of opinion and strategy on an issue of war and peace to drive a wedge between us and to lead to what was arguably the lowest point in our relationship over the past 50 years.

That's what happened in the spring of 2003. And in its wake, we talked less. We cooperated fitfully. And we reached a point of estrangement and even distrust at times that reflected poorly on both of us.

Fortunately, we began in 2007 to climb out of that diplomatic hole that we had dug together. We resurrected the relationship, and it all started with the PKK.

Now, we Americans have known how neuralgic and emotional and important the PKK issue is not just for the Turkish government, but for the Turkish people as well.

And I believe that President Bush met his commitment to Prime Minister Erdoğan in the past six months. The United States has given Turkey unprecedented support in its fight inside Turkey and along the Turkish-Iraqi border.

And in my view, President Bush acted decisively and resolutely to support Turkey in its hour of need, from an American perspective, but I'll be interested to hear from the students and faculty at Sabancı if they agree with this.

The United States' decision to deliver substantial assistance

to the Turkish military has begun to transform this relationship for the better.

In doing so, the United States hopes that Turkey and the Iraqi government, including the Kurdish regional authorities, can find a way to cooperate to reduce the terrorism there so that military operations at some point will no longer be needed, because, in the final analysis, peace and stability, as well as justice, and true understanding will only come about when Turkey and Iraq are working fully in common cause and when peaceful discourse takes the place of violence and terrorism practiced by the PKK and of the need for a response.

And so as we look ahead to 2009 and a new American Administration, I believe a very high priority must be the continued recovery of our Turkish-American alliance.

And with that in mind and remembering that diplomacy is a two-way street, I offer the following proposals for what both governments can do to continue and accelerate the progress that we see over the last several months.

Whoever is elected by the American people must decide that our alliance with Turkey is a priority and that the United States should set out to support Turkey in some very specific ways.

Here's what I think the Americans should do -- we Americans.

First, the next American President must make a basic choice

and that is to continue to support Turkey in its struggle against the PKK, and not to stand on the sidelines, as so many of Turkey's other partners in Europe have tended to do.

Second, the next American President must continue the efforts of President Bill Clinton and George W. Bush to support resolutely and unequivocally Turkey's aspirations for EU membership.

Now I find it ironic, indeed, that two of America's strongest friends in Europe, Chancellor Merkel and President Sarkozy, have slowed and weakened the EU's commitment to Turkey. In any Administration, and in our country, our President must often make the toughest decisions on what signals to send to the rest of the world about our priorities.

Among the hundreds, literally hundreds of issues, on the U.S.-European agenda, I hope the next American President will signal to Germany and to France that the issue of Turkey's accession to the EU is among the very highest American priorities.

And the message that a President Obama or a President Clinton or a President McCain should put to Chancellor Merkel and President Sarkozy is this: what a colossal strategic and historic mistake it would be if Europe chose to close its doors to Turkey, if Europe to deflect Turkey's legitimate EU aspirations.

Third, we should continue to support in our country -- I think without involving ourselves in Turkish domestic politics, if that is hopeful and helpful -- I think we should continue to assert publicly that we do

believe in a modern, democratic, secular, and civilian-led Turkey for the future, because look at the enormous progress that Turkey has made under such governments in the past decade or so.

And I think that's where America should be, not equivocal, not sitting on the fence, but stating as a friend and partner that Turkey's vision for modernity, for secularism, democracy, and civilian-led government, that of many Turks, is one that we can certainly support.

Now Turkey is also responsible, along with the United States, for the health of our relationship.

In that spirit, I hope that the new American President can expect the following from the Turkish leadership.

First, Turkey has one of the largest militaries in the NATO alliance, and it's also one of the least reformed -- and I say this with great respect -- and least deployable, as are the militaries of many of the European members of NATO.

We need a greater Turkish commitment to NATO's mission in Afghanistan. We need Turkey to continue to invest more in the flexibility and sustainability of its armed forces, particularly its land and air forces.

NATO has learned, through some bitter recent experiences in the Balkans and Afghanistan that we all need to do much more to modernize our armed forces.

Turkey's lead in this effort, I think, would go a long way to

push the West European allies to make the same commitment. Where Turkey has done very well is in contributing a very high percentage of its gross domestic product to its national defense among the leaders in the NATO alliance.

And I think in that sense, Turkey is a positive military example for governments like Germany and Italy and Spain and France, who are now spending 1.2 or three percent of their gross domestic product on defense. Turkey is far above that, far above three percent.

Second, Turks reminded me often when I was in government, particularly on my last job as Under Secretary, that their country had substantial influence in the Middle East. True.

Undoubtedly true. I would ask that Turkey now try to exert that influence more directly and more effectively than it has been willing to do to date, especially concerning two countries, Iran and Syria.

It is to our decided advantage that the Turkish government can speak directly to those very difficult regimes in Damascus and in Teheran.

It would be extraordinarily helpful to the efforts currently being led by Russia, China, Britain, France, Germany, and the United States if Turkey would now join the sanctions effort against an increasingly recalcitrant and difficult Iranian government.

And on Syria, Damascus should hear from Ankara and not just from Riyadh and Washington and the European capitals that the



Syrian government's support for Hezbollah in Lebanon will have consequences for Turkey's relations with it.

And finally, while I understand full well the sensitivities surrounding and the historical legacy surrounding Turkey's relations with many of its immediate neighbors, I think there are steps that President Gül and Prime Minister Erdoğan can take to create a region of greater stability and of greater future promise.

For instance, if Turkey could make a bold opening to Armenia, my judgment is that the Armenian government and people would respond positively to that gesture.

If Turkey could reach out to the ecumenical Patriarch, Bartholomew, in Istanbul and decide to reopen the Halki Seminary, it would be the most fair and judicious decision to heal the wounds and misunderstandings between the Orthodox Christian community in Istanbul, and in Turkey, and its government. And I say its government.

When I was in His All Holiness' office, Bartholomew's office in Istanbul, last year, I remarked that there is a photograph of Atatürk and the Patriarch reminded me that, of course, he's a Turkish citizen, loyal the Turkish state. And that's a problem and an issue that we Americans believe can and should be overcome.

And if Turkey can work with Greece, the Republic of Cyprus, and the Turkish Cypriot Authorities, then 2008 might be a year of breakthrough in the decades-long Cyprus conflict. Two thousand nine

could then be the year that the Cyprus problem is resolved once and for all.

Now, you might be surprised to hear me say that. You might think that's a bit positive and optimistic considering the length and difficulty and complexity of the Cyprus problem going back many decades.

Well, we need sometimes to dream big dreams in international politics. We've all witnessed in the last two decades that the seemingly impossible can be accomplished. Communism met its downfall in Eastern Europe and 350 million Europeans were liberated in 1989 and '90 and '91.

The Warsaw Pact disappeared, followed by the end of the evil apartheid regime in South Africa. Peace came to Northern Ireland. And the wars in Bosnia and Kosovo they were stopped, and peace has come to both of those places as well.

So it is simply not acceptable in my judgment or tolerable in this day and age that Cyprus should be consigned to eternal division.

Turkey should join us in calling for peace and justice and a final resolution of a Cyprus conflict, knowing that it's not just up to Turkey to make that peace. It's up to Greece. It's up to the Republic of Cyprus. It's up to the Turkish Cypriot Authorities as well.

Ladies and gentlemen, the United States and Turkey have weathered an unusually difficult time in our long friendship and long relationship. It is now time for us to resurrect that alliance.

Turks can count on the United States, the current Administration and the next one, to believe in this alliance, to support Turkey in its struggle against the PKK, and Turks can count on our continued belief, strong belief, that Turkey's place is with the future of Europe.

And I hope that we Americans, in turn, will see a sustained Turkish campaign to join us in our efforts to bring peace and stability to an exceedingly troubled region in the Middle East and to transform our own -- transform that region through bold and creative Turkish diplomacy.

I am not pessimistic. In fact, I am optimistic about the future of this relationship. I admire Turks. I admire the energy of the Turkish people, the patriotism of the Turkish people and what the Turkish people have built, an extraordinarily successful country whose best days, we believe, are yet to come.

And in that sense, I believe that 2009 can represent a new start for our long friendship, so vital to the Turkish and American peoples alike.

Thank you very much for listening to me. I look forward especially to hearing from our colleagues, students, and faculty at Sabancı, but also from all of you in this room. Thank you.

(Applause)

MR. BENJAMIN: Well, Nick, thank you for a very, very impressive true de raison, a speech that took us from really the dawn of

the Turkish Republic through the present and into the future and that looked at Turkey from the West, from the East, and from the perspective of many of the different key issues that challenge us in the realms of non-proliferation, regional peacemaking and the like.

I first of all want to welcome you to speechifying outside of government, and I think it's a testimony to how much your colleagues at the State Department think of you that they are still showing up at your speeches, even after your retirement.

I also want to say that if you continue to give speeches of that quality, you will dispel the belief in the State Department that speechwriters are required, and you will only be adding to the work of your -- of the colleagues you've left behind.

I'm sure that we now have many different questioners, and I'd like to without delay move on to them. Why don't we take a question here and then a question from Istanbul? Sir?

MR. KERRS: Ambassador Burns, thank you very much for your remarks. My name is Jonathan Kerrs. I'm a graduate student at Georgetown University in the School of Foreign Service.

I was wondering if you could provide your point of view on how you feel the U.S. is reacting to and how the U.S sees the current problem the AK Party is having in Turkey with the constitutional challenge.

MR. BENJAMIN: Well, it didn't take long for that to come up, did it?

MR. BURNS: Yeah, I should say.

(Laughter)

MR. BURNS: You know, we have a -- I don't know if baseballs terms translate for our friends at Sabancı, but thank you very much for that softball question.

(Laughter)

MR. BURNS: You know, here's what I'd say, and I'm no longer in government. I'm a private citizen. I don't speak for the U.S. Government.

I think it's very important that Americans be very careful about how we talk about another country's internal politics.

Now, I made some comments today that people may have agreed with our disagreed with, and I try to select my words very carefully and sensitively. Lord knows that the situation in Turkey is complicated enough without someone like me barging in with errant thoughts.

But I just say this: a couple of points that I hope that strung together might make some sense.

It is up to the Turks to define their own future, and Turks are having that debate right now. But from an American perspective, what has been happening in Turkey in recent decades to us is encouraging.

In the last decade or so, Turkey has become -- Turkey is -- Turkey has been democratic. Turkey is secular. Turkey is civilian-led. Turkey has turned to the private sector to be the engine of Turkish

economic growth, as the Sabancı Corporation has exemplified.

And I think all those things have been important and are hopeful for Turkey itself. I wouldn't want to interfere in Turkey's -- in that Turkish debate except to say from an American perspective, Turkey's come a long way and that the recent, over the last decade or so, growth and evolution in its democracy ought to be continued. And the civilian-led nature of that government, in my own personal view, is very important for the future of Turkey.

Second, I'd say, without again making partisan comments, we have worked very effectively with President Gül and Prime Minister Erdoğan. They are held in great respect in this city, both of them, because they are leaders who are, I think, bringing Turkey more broadly onto the world stage in the role that Turkey has designed for itself in Europe, in the Middle East, and beyond.

And they are trusted partners of the United States, in my judgment as a private citizen. So I'd make those two comments, hopefully successfully avoiding the more dangerous parts of your very good question.

MR. BENJAMIN: Sabancı University in Istanbul, can you hear us? Please respond.

SPEAKER: Yes, we can.

MR. BENJAMIN: Yes, great. Do you have a question?

MS. KADOLÜ: Okay. Yes. I'm Isha Kadolü at Sabancı

University. I will be monitoring with my friend Hasan and my colleague Hasan (inaudible) the question and answer part here.

First of all, we'd like to send our greetings from this end of the world, Istanbul in spring at its best.

And here at Sabancı University we have distinguished guests in the audience. We have our students and faculty members. We have the Dilek Sabancı, daughter of Sakıp Sabancı, with us. And, Ambassador Burns, it was a great privilege to hear your views regarding the past, the current status and your visions regarding relations with, you know, Turkey, your perspective pertaining to Turkey as a key strategic partner in the area.

And I think with this lecture, we will be having some questions from our audience, so I'd like to turn to our audience for that.

SPEAKER: Greetings from here to Brookings there, and the most difficult part is not asking questions or making comments, but collecting the questions. So let's see who will be the first -- who will ask the first question. And a question here.

MR. BENJAMIN: I think you answered all the questions, Nick.

SPEAKER: Yeah, I think so. So it's better get another question from your side.

(Laughter)

MR. BENJAMIN: Okay. Professors can always call on students, too, of course.

(Laughter)

SPEAKER: We will. We will eventually.

MS. KADOLÜ: We will do that in the meantime.

MR. BENJAMIN: Well, let me just say that we're delighted that the technology is working so well. For those who have been at this event in the past, this has often been the most difficult --

MR. TALBOTT: Don't brag too soon. We're not finished yet.

MR. BENJAMIN: Okay. How about another question from the audience here. Sir? Please wait for the mike and please do introduce yourself.

MR. SIGER: I'm Izer Siger, World Bank retiree, also a retiree from the Foreign Service of Turkey.

Our national security council meets every two months, formerly every month. They issue statements on many topics. Probably you haven't heard I believe any time any support for our membership to the European Union.

How do you explain this? Is there a lack of support from the military in Turkey, our national security council? You served at NATO. You had a lot of contacts with our military. Are you surprised that there is no such strong support from our military to our membership to the European Union?



MR. BURNS: Thank you very much. I -- my strong impression from my own interaction with the Turkish government, including President Gül and Prime Minister Erdoğan is that they strongly support the EU track for the future of Turkey.

And I looked at the public opinion polls and I know there's been a sharp reduction in support among Turks for the EU, but I -- perhaps the Sabancı students can tell me about this; they're the experts, not me -- I assume that's just because there have been so many mixed signals from the Europeans and so many false starts from the Europeans.

The door opens. The door closes. The door is slightly open. The door is slightly closed. And if I were a Turk, I'd be confused about what Europe wants.

And, as I said before, the Europeans, who have done so well to construct the European Union over the last 25 or 30 years, now need to look -- their strategic vision needs to be beyond Europe, their conception of a limited Europe towards a greater Europe, including Turkey.

That's my strong personal view. I can't speak for the views of the Turkish military, except that I know in my interactions with some of those senior officers, I have not -- I have not picked up any outright opposition to it from individuals.

But you would be better -- you'd know better perhaps, Ambassador, about the institution as a whole.

MR. BENJAMIN: Am I correct that we're getting a signal from across the ocean; that you have questions now?

MS. KADOLÜ: Yes, we do have questions.

SPEAKER: Go ahead.

MS. KADOLÜ: We have one of our students.

SPEAKER: You want that?

SPEAKER: What do you think about the (inaudible) of Iran worldwide, about the topic of strategic partnership countries, Which is less powerful and the most powerful? Could it be?

MR. BURNS: I didn't catch the beginning words of your question. If you wouldn't mind just repeating it.

SPEAKER: Okay. What do you think about the (inaudible) of (inaudible) wide about the topic of strategic partnership between countries. Which is less powerful and the most powerful? Could it be?

MR. BURNS: Yes. Thank you very much for your question. I'm not -- I apologize that I'm not specifically familiar with that particular speech.

But let me just take your question and answer one that I would like to answer.

(Laughter)

MR. BURNS: Which is something I learned when I was working with the press.

(Laughter)

MR. BURNS: When I was State Department spokesman, I was working for Strobe. He would send me out every day to do battle with the press in a live unrehearsed press conference. And I quickly learned --

MR. TALBOTT: No fool I?

MR. BURNS: -- when the press asked a question that you didn't like, you simply answered the question you would have liked them to have asked in the first place. So let me just say there's a point that I didn't raise in my remarks that I wanted to raise. I think it might be pertinent for both Turks and Americans.

I think that the nature of strategic partnership and leadership is changing around the world. Turks and Americans grew to become allies at a different time in history, during the Cold War, when there was a bipolar order in the world.

And now we live, I think, in the 21st century, maybe the defining characteristic of the global landscape now is that bipolarity has passed. America's unipolar moment I think is passed.

And we have to learn to deal with each other in a different way. And by that, I mean -- and I'd be interested to hear from the students at Sabancı on this -- when I think personally about the global issues that are truly most frightening, I think of global climate change. I think of terrorism and the possibility that terrorist groups might get a hold of nuclear or biological or chemical weaponry. I think of trafficking of women and children. Institutional drug cartels. International criminal cartels.

Those are just five. You could probably contribute five or six more.

What's the common denominator of all those problems? They are multilateral in their dimensions. None of them can be resolved by a country acting alone, so unilateralism is out as a way forward for American foreign policy.

And none of them can be resolved by countries sitting at home. If Turkey or the United States chose not to engage to support the U.N. on climate change, to support the European Union on trafficking of women and children, then we wouldn't succeed in combating those problems.

And I think that especially for Americans, we need to understand that that change has occurred, and that, for us to be effective leaders and effective partners of countries like Turkey, we need to think more about rebuilding the multilateral institutions -- the U.N., NATO, the EU, the ASEAN, the Arab League, the African Union -- that are the heart of the resolutions of these problems.

Strobe has just written a book that traces historically this international attempt to think globally, and to organize globally, if I can put it that way. And I think it's a really prescient book, because I think the time has arrived we've got to think more about international governance, world governance and regional governance than we've been -- than we were able to do in the Cold War, perhaps we're inclined to do in the 1990s,

which was a strange, unusual period where we found ourselves, Americans, supremely powerful. And now we find that power is checked. That power is limited; and that in the most critical problems, we can't succeed -- we Americans if we don't work more effectively with countries around the world.

And that's why Turkey, in many ways, in my own judgment is so important to us, so much more important now than it was during the Cold War, because Turkey is part of the solution to so many of these challenges that we face in its region -- the Balkans, South Asia, the Caucasus, that broader region I should say and the Middle East.

So thank you for letting me digress and answer the question that I had in my mind as you started.

MR. BENJAMIN: Why don't we take another one from Istanbul.

MS. KADOLÜ: Okay. We take. Ambassador Burns, Dilek Sabancı, Sakıp Sabancı's daughter, would like to ask you a question.

MS. SABANCI: Hello. My name is Dilek Sabancı. What would be the next step or (inaudible) of the United States towards Iraq from now on, and generally on Islamic states, like Iran, Afghanistan and so forth?

MR. BURNS: Well, thank you very much. And thank you for being present today. It's a pleasure to see you in Istanbul on the screen.

You've asked a very broad question, and I guess I would just

say the following. When, on January 20th of 2009 and a lot of us who've worked for the U.S. Government can visualize this, at some point in the late afternoon or early evening when the President-elect has been -- well, the President has returned from that inaugural -- inauguration and the parade down Pennsylvania Avenue, his or her national security advisor will walk into the Oval Office and say, Mr. President or Madam President, here is the list of problems that you now have to confront beyond our shores.

And I would bet that among the first five or six, the majority will be the ones that you just mentioned. We have 150,000 American soldiers in Iraq. We've lost over 4,000 of them dead. Multiples of that Iraqi dead. I think most Americans I certainly believe we cannot just walk away, having gone into that country and overthrown the government of that country five years ago.

We have to figure out a way to do our job to be good friends to the Iraqis to help to cement security on their borders and on the streets of the country, and that's going to be a very difficult task for the next President, especially as we will inevitably want to begin to draw down those troop levels.

On Iran, I think I've mentioned the dual problem that everyone around the world is concerned about Iran seeking a nuclear weapons capability which I believe they are, but also disrupting the Israel-Palestinian situation by arming Hamas, disrupting the democratic

government in Lebanon by arming Hezbollah; arming the Shii'a militants in Iraq, arming the Taliban in Afghanistan.

And you also mentioned in Afghanistan we have 30,000 American troops there. The Turkish Government has troops there. I think all of us understand we're going to be there for some time many years to come to help stabilize that country.

So on my imaginary list of problems for the new President on January 20th, '09, I think those three will be at the very top of the list.

MR. BENJAMIN: Okay.

SPEAKER: A hypothetical question to you, Mr. Burns. In case of military intervention in Turkey, what would the reactions of, for instance, Obama or McCain?

MR. BURNS: Or Clinton?

(Laughter)

SPEAKER: In case when they --

MR. BENJAMIN: I'm just trying to be fair.

SPEAKER: -- when they are -- one of them in the White House?

MR. BURNS: Well, thank you very much. You're sitting next to a friend of mine, Dimitrius Sapokus, who's a Greek journalist, and he will remember that every time when I was spokesman in the State Department journalist would ask me a hypothetical question, I'd say I never answer hypothetical questions.

SPEAKER: But you are a private citizen now.

MR. BURNS: I know. That's the problem. So let me just say a personal view from a private citizen. I hope the days are over in Turkey when the Turkish military feels it needs to intervene in the politics of the country.

As an outsider, as someone who understands your government and society imperfectly, but nonetheless as a friend, my own impression is that Turkish democracy is strong; that civilian-led democracy is strong; and the society is strong.

I happened to be in Istanbul the day and the hour that Harant Dink was killed, and I remember -- I was actually sitting in a Turkish television studio waiting to be interviewed about another issue, when this came on the screen. And I remember being so impressed by how the Turkish people, not just the Armenian community, but the Turkish community reacted in such a civil way, going out to peacefully manifest their thoughts in the streets, showing respect for a great man.

And I thought there -- here is a strong society. It's a diverse society. It's a complicated place, just as my country is complicated. But it's a strong society.

So I would hope that those days of the '70s and '80s are over and that Turks and the Turkish military will not have to believe that their place is to intervene military in such a strong country and a country with such strong prospects for growth and for democracy. That's my view.



MR. BENJAMIN: Yes.

SPEAKER: Okay. We have a question here. Professor Agudar will ask a question to you.

MR. AGUDAR: Ambassador Burns, thank you very much. I enjoyed your speech tremendously.

I'd like to switch gears a little bit and I assume that you are retired, if I understood right, correctly I think. And I'd like to ask you something about American politics.

What kind of impact would the elections have on Turkish-American relations, depending on the outcome, you know, different scenarios?

MR. BURNS: Professor, thank you very much for your question. I think there's an easy answer to that, and I'll bet that Dan and Strobe agree with that answer, and maybe they might even want to contribute this answer.

I don't worry about the U.S.-Turkish relationship after our election. If any of the three candidates -- McCain, Clinton, or Obama -- whichever one is elected, I should say -- I believe that that person will strongly support the U.S.-Turkish partnership because you just have to look around at where America is embattled and Turkey is a positive part of the solution to I think all those problems in the greater Middle East and the Caucasus, the Balkans, South and Central Asia.

So I think strategically, whether it's a Democratic Administration or Republican, I would think this relationship would be at the very top.

MR. TALBOTT: Yes. I would just not only endorse what Nick has said, but having been out of government for even longer than Nick, and, therefore, having gotten over some of the habits that come with diplomacy or had more time to get over those habits, I would make the following remark.

I think that the innate wisdom and good sense of American foreign policy is least evident when we are in the process of picking our next leader. And we are, of course, now, in the midst of the longest, most expensive presidential campaign in our history.

The good news is that the three candidates who have emerged are all very, very qualified to be excellent presidents of the United States.

However, what I would say more directly in response to your question is that what any country in the world should hope, and particularly any country that takes its relationship with the United States seriously should hope, is that it gets virtually no mention in the campaign in this country. And by that excellent standard, I think it augurs well for U.S.-Turkish relations once our government gets back to governing, which will happen on the 20th of January next year.

MR. BENJAMIN: We hope. Actually, Nick, if I can sharpen

that question that was put to you, because I've been out of government even longer, so my politesse has declined entirely.

Do you foresee there being, if the polls hold up and if there's a Democratic President, do you foresee there -- the potential of a flashpoint being the issue of withdrawal from Iraq. Turkey was, or is often to said, to have been against it the invasion to begin with, but now is concerned about a premature departure.

MR. BURNS: I think that's a really excellent question and put acutely.

I do sense in the Arab countries, in the European allies, including Turkey, a great desire that the United States stay long enough to be part of the stabilization of Iraq, and not leave in a sense prematurely before that can take place.

I think a lot of people around the world fear that an early and precipitous withdrawal of American troops might lead to chaos in Iraq. A lot of Americas fear that, too.

And so I would say that that is a concern that I have heard from Arab and European governments alike.

Now having said that, and, again as a private citizen, I don't think how the next American President, whoever it is, can avoid the question of when we begin to think about drawing down, given the tremendous commitment that we've made. It's been five years at these historically high troop levels. It's a strain on our military, a strain on our

own society about this. A strain in families. I think every American family that I know knows someone in it who's served. That's how deeply felt this Iraq issue is. So I think that -- I don't think the next American President can avoid that question.

But he or she is going to have to do it in such a way that promotes stability and promotes the encouragement and confidence of the countries surrounding Iraq, like Turkey. And Turkey is a front-line state, a border state.

So we Americans understand that what we do in Iraq has consequences for the Turkish people. We're very mindful of that.

MR. BENJAMIN: Okay. You were next. You've been patient. Thank you.

MS. ZIAT: Awar Ziat from CNN Turkey in (inaudible).

Mr. Burns, you've outlined a couple of points that you see Turkey to move on forward, one of them being perhaps a model for the Middle Eastern states.

Can you outline that? Is there an American policy to make Turkey a model for the other Middle Eastern states, Muslim states?

And if yes, don't you think it is contradictory to U.S. support for Turkey's EU accession? Do these two work together or they are water and olive oil, as we say?

MR. BURNS: Well, first, there's been no conscious policy to promote it. I think a lot of Americans from the Clinton and Bush

Administration officials have simply reflected the obvious, and that is Turkey in our minds, from our perspective, is the perfect demonstration of what a secular Muslim country can be for other countries thinking about their future and thinking about their own internal transformations.

And secondly, I don't see any contradiction between Turkey being effective and involved in the Middle East, but also being in the European Union.

In fact, I think the reverse: that Europe will be so much weaker if it doesn't have a country in it, a big powerful country, like Turkey, that can bridge the divides between Europe and the Middle East, particularly as the Europeans reflect on their own internal composition.

I lived in Belgium. I saw thousands of Moroccans and Algerians not have access to education or to social advancement in that society. I lived in Greece and saw the difficulty of integrating the Albanian Muslim minority into Greek life.

And so a question for the Europeans in the future, for the Germans and the Dutch and the Danes and the Belgians is how do they integrate in a democratic way their Muslim populations, in some cases that have been there for two and three generations.

Right now, it's not happening the way I think that all of us would like to see it happen. In that sense, Turkey inside the European Union would be a great strength to the Europeans. That's where I think the German and French leadership's frankly and respectfully are so

wrong.

They kind of look at Turkey as a weakening influence. We see -- I see Turkey as a strengthening element in European politics for the future.

MS. KADOLÜ: Ambassador Burns, you'll be happy to hear that the ice has broken here in a major way, so now we're worried whether we're going to have enough time for questions. I for one think I'm convinced that the world may indeed be flat, you know, talking to you like this.

So we're going to turn to one of our students here.

SPEAKER: I had a quick question --

MS. KADOLÜ: Oops.

SPEAKER: (inaudible) is isolating Iran and imposing some (inaudible).

MS. KADOLÜ: We need a microphone there. Can you wait for the microphone, please?

(Laughter)

MS. KADOLÜ: Say, it's that kind of situation we have here now.

SPEAKER: Don't you think isolating Iran and imposing sanctions on them time after time actually that unites the Iranian people behind the mullahs and makes things worse for the U.S.? Why do you

think Turkey has to forgo his or its economic interests and not deal with Iran?

MR. BURNS: Thank you very much.

SPEAKER: You just said yourself that -- (inaudible) no other peoples' business.

MR. BURNS: Thank you very much. Well, I guess I'd say that the business -- if the business of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is to construct a nuclear weapons future for his country, that is our business as well as his.

But I'd answer your question more directly by saying the following: we have to operate I think on dual tracks here with the Iranians, and this is a very tricky question.

First, there is a separation in my mind between the views of a lot of Iranian citizens and that of their government. There's a tremendous amount of disaffection inside the country about the government. It's a nation in some turmoil politically. Just over 50 percent of the people are Persian. It's a nation filled with minority groups who don't always feel that their government is doing the best by them. I'd make that distinction.

Secondly, in my view we have to try to reach out to the Iranians and talk to them. So I think you're right, if I can gather that from your question, that if the United States went another 28 years without a way to formally and energetically talk to the Iranian leadership, that would

be a strategic mistake.

Now we have a channel between our ambassador in Baghdad, Ambassador Crocker, and the Iranian Ambassador in Baghdad, but the Iranians have cancelled most of meetings planned for that channel unfortunately.

And two years ago this month, our Secretary of State Condi Rice proposed, along with Russia, China, and the three European countries -- Britain, France, and Germany -- that we have a negotiation on the nuclear weapons issue; that it be quite transparent and open, and she said she'd be there, and the Iranians have said no to that.

So we've tried to talk. But I think the next American Administration is going to have to try perhaps even more creatively to find a way to the negotiating table.

At the same time -- and here's where I think you'll probably disagree with me, and I'll end on this point -- as long as such a radical government, like Ahmadinejad's, is seeking a nuclear weapons future, and as long as there arming and funding all these terrorist groups, we simply can't turn away, and if they're not willing to talk with us right now, and they're not, then I think sanctions is inevitable and the U.S. Security Council was right to pass those three sanctions, resolutions.

What I try to suggest in my speech is that Turkey's absence from the effort being led by Russia, China, the European countries, Japan, South Korea that absence is quite glaring, and if Turkey wants to use its



influence I think right now Turkey should think about leveraging its influence to push the Iranians. I'm not saying militarily, through economic and political means, push them to the negotiating table, help us do that.

That's the challenge I'd put to you in Turkey.

MR. BENJAMIN: Sir?

MR. INWASH: Akun Inwash from the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

Mr. Ambassador --

MS. KADOLÜ: Like would ask a question. Can we go ahead. Oh, no? Okay.

MR. INWASH: I got a question on United States support for Turkey (inaudible) EU membership.

In the late 1990s, the United States helped Turkey a lot in terms of EU membership, more so after 1997 Luxembourg Summit. And in 1999, Turkey was given the status of candidate.

This was, of course, welcomed in Turkey, but many European countries argued that it strengthened their belief that Turkey was a Trojan horse of the United States and to the European Union.

Also, one of the U.S. ambassadors had made a claim that we got Turkey into the European Union. How do you think the United States will alter its approach for Turkey's EU membership by strengthening Turkey's case as a candidate and also not aiding anything in some other EU member states?

MR. BURNS: Thank you, and if Strobe's willing, maybe both of us could answer this question, because you referred to the time when Strobe was Deputy Secretary of State and led these efforts.

My own view is that this is, as we say in the United States, a no brainer. And there's no question the United States should -- it's in our strategic interest to support Turkey inside the European Union and my guess is that most Turks agree with that.

And I guess I don't see -- foresee a substantial change in the way that a new American Administration in 2009 would pursue that question. I think there's been a unity between President Clinton and President Bush on this issue over the last decade, and I believe that will continue.

MR. TALBOTT: I just would briefly and totally support that. For obvious reasons, there tends to be a concentration, both among politicians and in the press and public, to accentuate the differences between Administrations, particularly after a hard-fought election in which one party replaces another in the White House.

But as Nick says, there have been several important points, a very high degree of continuity between the Clinton Administration and the Bush Administration.

This is a particularly important example and not just because we're talking with all of you here, and with you in Istanbul. And I think while, as a famous American philosopher, Yogi Berra, once said, "It's

extremely difficult to make predictions, especially about the future.” It can be predicted with almost total confidence that there will be equal continuity between for the Bush '43 Administration and the McCain, Obama, or Clinton Administration.

MR. BENJAMIN: Okay. We're happy to take one from Istanbul.

SPEAKER: Okay.

MR. BENJAMIN: Yes.

SPEAKER: There is one question here. Could you please pass the mike here? There's one here. Let's start with that lady.

SPEAKER: Thank you very much, Mr. Burns, for your lecture. My question is about the Russian-American relations in the near future, 'cause, you know, the government has changed in Russia, but we all know that Putin's influence will be heavily remain the same on the Middle East political decisions, and otherwise we have -- we are seeing a rapprochement between Iran, Russia and China, and especially within the Shanghai Corporation organization. And we can perceive it as a sort of alliance to prevent the U.S. to settle in the Central Asian region.

So how do you see the relations between Russia and the United States in the near future, because tomorrow Putin's going to show us the military effective of Russian Federation and this is the first since the end of the Soviet Union.

And maybe this is showing off. Maybe this is a kind of threat

because we know that he is against the unipolarization of the world by the United States. He just said it out loud in the Munich speech and to the NATO Summit.

And would it be a new Cold War period? What do you think about it? Thank you very much.

MR. BURNS: Well, thanks very much for a really excellent question and a lot of depth to your -- the way you asked it, and I'll try to do justice to it very briefly.

And, again, I don't want to drag Strobe into this if he doesn't want to. But he is one of the great experts in our society, in our country, on Russia. And I'm sure he'll have a point of view.

My own point of view is that I think the next American President is going to have to think very deeply about how to handle Russia. It's going to be a difficult, complex relationship for us from two perspectives.

There's a positive element that Americans can't forget -- cannot. And that is unarguably the two most vital global issues -- the struggle against terrorism, and the struggle to contain the proliferation of nuclear weaponry, technology, and nuclear powers in the world -- Russia is going to be a partner of the United States. Russia has -- President Putin was the first world leader to call President Bush after 9/11. And the Russians have been good partners with us on counter-terrorism.

On proliferation, I think Russia -- and I was the Bush

Administration point person on Iran -- I think Russia has been a very good partner of the United States on Iran.

We don't always see eye to eye on the tactics, but strategically we see pretty much the same thing. And on North Korea, they've been part of the Six-Party Talks.

That's all positive.

Where it gets difficult is when we Americans inevitably look at what's happening inside Russia, at the centralization of power and the Kremlin, at the repression of press freedoms and political freedoms in the country, and particularly as we look outside in the so-called Russian Near Abroad at how the Russians treated Estonia two years ago this spring in that very mysterious cyber attack on Tallinn and then how the Russians more recently have tried to openly and clearly intimidate the Georgian government and make life difficult for that government and its leader, a friend of ours Sakash Vily .

And so I think that you refer to the Putin speech at Verkunde in February 2007, an objectionable speech from my perspective; then to follow by a series of outright objectionable statements by him and by other Russian leaders. You didn't see President Bush respond. He played it very cool. He didn't engage in a rhetorical war for words.

So I would say we are not headed for another Cold War. Russia is too highly integrated economically and politically with you, with

the Europeans, with us, to disrupt the global balance of power in that fashion, but I think it's going to be a very difficult period for us to manage.

MR. TALBOTT: I would only add two points to what Nick has said, while agreeing with absolutely everything that he said.

The first, the lady asking a number of rapprochements that Russia has been conducting with other states, particularly in its own region. There has also been a rapprochement between Moscow and Ankara. Up to a point, I think that is an entirely welcomed and healthy thing.

My only concern about that rapprochement is that it may have been motivated to some degree on the Turkish side in part from the feeling of being double dealt by and excluded from Europe. And on that subject, I'm on Turkey's side and agree with everything that Nick has said on that subject.

The other point has to do with the transition that's underway in Moscow in the leadership of the Russian government. I think a genuine transition is underway. I think it is premature and very possibly mistaken to treat Mr. Medvedev as a clone or a puppet of Mr. Putin.

Russia does have a constitution. That constitution invests in the office and the person of the President of the Russian Federation a huge amount of power. That power is not like a coffee table or a credenza or a book shelf that can be picked up and moved a couple of miles across town to the office of the prime minister.

Moreover, while we don't know a great deal about Mr. Medvedev, we know he is at least half of a different generation. We know that he has a different, shall I say, institutional alma mater than President Putin, and let's give him time. I think we may see some changes. And I think those changes may constitute a new opportunity for U.S.-Russian relations of a positive sort.

MR. BENJAMIN: We're pretty much at the end of our time. I'd like to just take one more question, if that's okay with you?

Back there. We haven't had much representation from the back of the room. No, you, sir. Yes.

MR. MAHDI: My name is Zhary Mahdi with the Syrian media. I'm glad that I'm here that I could speak for the subject that Mr. Burns has touched on about the Middle Eastern countries and the need for Turkey to play this role to influence the policies in there.

There is no doubt, and I agree with so much, and thank you for mentioning the role of Turkey as role model for the Middle Eastern countries of Syria, Lebanon, all of these countries. They look up to Turkey as a role model where Islam can grow and be free in these countries, but in a very moderate way; that they can stand up to the radical Islam.

That's on one side. You have mentioned the need for Turkey to play a role, to influence the policies of countries like Syria toward the enemies of the United States in the area.

But the equation for success for Turkey to accomplish

success and its role in there it takes -- it is two-way street, I believe. It takes also a balanced American policies in the area when it comes to the Palestinian issues, when it comes to the Golan Heights issue, and we know that that this government in Turkey, the current government, no other government has succeeded in building bridges with Arab countries as this government has, Mr. Erdoğan and Mr. Gül. They are negotiating right now the peace agreement or some steps toward peace between Israel and Syria.

But yet how balanced do you think that the American policy has been toward the Palestinian issues or peace, you know, with -- between Arab and the Israelis. And what -- how much do you think that it has been hampered or hindered by a letter of American president given to the ex-prime minister of Israel, Mr. Sharon, that is accepting the built of the settlements, the Israeli settlements to continue and considering the -- the discontinuation of these settlements as impractical.

How much would this help Turkey really to play a -- to succeed in its role when it comes to peace and war in the country, in the area?

MR. BURNS: Thank you very much. I'd answer your question this way: I don't -- I think that the Turkish people have in President Gül and Prime Minister Erdoğan two very accomplished international statesmen, impressive people, who know what they're doing, and probably don't need a lot of specific advice from someone like me to



conduct their policy first.

Second, I try to suggest in my remarks -- I knew this would get a lot of attention -- to say that Turkey having influence is not enough. Turkey has to decide when to exercise when to exercise that influence and that's a particular set of decisions that only the Turks can make for themselves. When do you use the influence that you've built up, the capital you've built up?

I do think in the case of Iran there is a role for Turkey to play in convincing the Iranians that unless they talk to Russia, China, the United States and Europe, they're going to be further isolated.

The moderate Arab countries agree on that. Europe agrees on it. Russia and China agree. We do and I think that Turkey could be helpful the nudging Iran forward.

I think the same thing about your country, Syria. I do think the United States has carried out a balanced policy. I think your country is one of the major -- your government, I should say -- is one of the major impediments to peace between Israel and the Arab countries; and has not helped in trying to push along the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

And it seems to me that your government still has a hangover from your 299-year occupation of Lebanon. You can't -- your government and particularly your -- the security services of your government can't seem to keep their hands off Lebanon.

And so if Turkey can play a role in trying to convince the

Damascus leadership to act more resolutely for peaceful solutions that will be a good thing. I was trying to suggest that.

And finally, I'd just say I don't doubt the --in fact, I know that the Bush Administration is very sincere in its efforts to try to push this Annapolis process forward. I know Secretary Rice believes personally that there has to be peace. There has to be the creation of a Palestinian state, but in peace with Israel. And Syria has an obligation to be part of that process, not to set itself up in some kind of rejectionist front confronting that process.

I say that very respectfully to you, and that's how I'd answer your question.

MR. BENJAMIN: Nick, I feel like we're just getting going. Continue for a while.

Well, I want to thank you very much for being here today and for your candor and for your breadth of vision.

I said at the beginning of this event that we felt honored that the Sabanci's have given Brookings this opportunity, both to honor the legacy of Sakıp Sabancı and also to carry forward a very high-level discussion of U.S.-Turkish relations, Turkey's role in the region and in the world.

I want to say we're also -- we feel quite honored that you chose your maiden voyage into private citizenship and commenting on public affairs here at Brookings. You said that -- you were modest in

saying that some countries don't need specific advice from someone like you. I would say that we here look forward -- we hope to a lot of both general and specific advice as you take up your career in the private sector. And we hope you'll be back frequently. Thank you for coming today.

MR. BURNS: Thanks. Thanks, Don.

(Applause)

MR. BURNS: Thank you very much.

(Applause)

MR. BURNS: Thank you.

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