

The Anatomy of Anti-Americanism in Turkey

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Turkey must be a truly puzzling country for the Bush administration. The two countries have significant differences on Syria and the issue of anti-Americanism in Turkey. Washington is also confused about Turkey's reluctance to be strong against Iran on the nuclear energy issue. Despite such divergent views Turkey has considerable expectations from Washington in relation to Cyprus and the PKK. It appears that cooperative action on these issues depends on the formation of a common understanding on Syria and Iraq. The AKP needs to create a vision that serves the long term interests of Turkey rather than implementing policies solely to maintain public support.

Turkey must be a truly puzzling country for the Bush administration. In the wake of 9-11, Washington hailed the Turkish Republic as an ideal “model” for the Islamic world. With its Muslim, democratic, secular and pro-western credentials, this unique NATO ally instantly became the strongest case against the “clash of civilizations.” Ankara’s leadership at ISAF in Afghanistan gained it further praise with the administration, not only for the substantial military assistance that Turkey provided, but perhaps much more importantly in proving that the war against terrorism is not a war against Islam.

This rosy picture of Turkey, however, slowly began to fade in the lead-up to Iraq’s invasion. In March 2003, after six months of contentious military, political, and financial negotiations between Ankara and Washington, the Turkish parliament denied U.S. troops’ access to Iraq via southeast Turkey. The reaction in Washington was shock and disbelief. Turkey’s decision not only forced the Pentagon to change its original war plans – there was to be no northern front against Baghdad – but also complicated the post-war situation.

Recently, in explaining where the Iraqi insurgency draws its manpower and ammunition from, Secretary Rumsfeld argued that in the absence of a northern front during the war, Saddam’s Republican Guards were able to retreat to the north and blend in with the civilian population. At the end of the day, the Iraq episode turned into a hard to forget debacle in Turkish-American relations. Perhaps Turkey failed to fit in Rumsfeld’s “Old” versus “New” Europe, but Ankara certainly gained a place of its own with the distress it created for the Bush administration.

Today, more than two years after the invasion of Iraq, Turkey has yet to lose its potential to disappoint Washington. As the second Bush administration is stepping up its pro-freedom rhetoric in the Middle East, it is quite disconcerting that the most democratic Muslim country in the region shows no signs of solidarity with the United States. Quite the opposite, Turkey is often in the news for its rampant anti-Americanism and solidarity

with Bashar's Syria. Polls after polls confirm that growing numbers of Turks perceive their NATO ally more as a national security threat, rather than a strategic partner. One of the flashiest symptoms of Turkish distrust towards the United States is the best-selling novel in the country, which depicts a Turkish-American war over Kirkuk in northern Iraq.

What went wrong? Why has Turkey become the most anti-American country in the West? One needs to go beyond the generic and global phenomenon of Bush-bashing in order to fully grasp the dynamics behind Turkish anti-Americanism. In many ways, Turkey is a *sui-generis* case. Recent polls illustrate that while anti-Americanism is in relative decline in Europe, the trend in Turkey is in the opposite direction. Moreover, unlike past domestic trends, the current wave of anti-Americanism in Turkey seems to be embraced by all segments of Turkish society. For all these reasons, the Turkish case needs to be analyzed in a historical and comparative perspective. This essay is an attempt to do so.

Past Trends, New Facts

Turkish-American relations witnessed their fair share of ups and downs during the Cold War, mostly in the form of Cyprus-centered episodes. These problems occasionally escalated to "crisis" level, as in the case of the "Johnson letter" in 1969 and the weapons embargo in 1974. However, it is important to remember that they all took place in the larger context of the stability and predictability provided by the bipolar rivalry. To be sure, there was abundant drama and posturing. For instance, one can hardly forget the words uttered by Prime Minister İsmet İnönü in reaction to Lyndon B. Johnson's letter (warning that a Cyprus invasion would leave Turkey alone against the Soviet Union): "If conditions change and events make a new order necessary, Turkey will certainly find its place in this new global order."

Yet, Turkey stayed in NATO and anti-Americanism in Turkey never reached its contemporary levels. These were, after all, times when both the world and Turkey were divided into leftwing and rightwing ideological camps. In this bipolar world, Turkey was a neighbor of the Soviet Union and anti-Americanism belonged to the realm of the socialist left. The anger of university students against imperialist Yankees never galvanized large segments of Turkish society. These were also times when Turkish masses were mostly rural and detached from world events. The means of mass-mobilization of public opinion had also not reached current levels. Mass-media, the 24-hour news cycle and the cornucopia of talk shows often fueling disinformation and conspiracy theories had yet to be invented. Until the mid-1980s Turkey was a country with only one TV channel, which was officially controlled by the government. No such thing as the internet existed.

On the other hand, it would be misleading to blame the power mass media for the current scale and scope of anti-Americanism in Turkey. Similarly, blaming the unilateralism of the Bush administration would be reductionist. How can one otherwise explain the fact that George Soros, a Democrat financier-philanthropist who loathes the Bush

administration, is almost equally reviled in Turkish circles? Turkish distrust of the United States does not discriminate ideologically. Turks have simply become more suspicious and conspiracy-prone of American activities than the rest of the Western world.

Before trying to understand the dynamics behind the Turkish case, it is important to clarify a couple of points. First, let us define what we mean by anti-Americanism. In the Arab world, and increasingly in Turkey, anti-Americanism is primarily about disagreements with American policies and not about resentment against Americans per se, their values, democracy, or culture. Quite the opposite, a majority of citizens in the Muslim world and Turkey watch American movies, enjoy American food, and want their children to study in the United States. Long lines in front of American Embassies and growing applications for “Green Cards” tell the same tale: “We love your country, but we hate your policies.”

In Turkey, disagreements with American policies are far from new. As previously noted, it is the current scale and scope of anti-Americanism that is unprecedented. We already mentioned the most obvious “contextual” fact in explaining why resentment against the United States reached such levels in Turkey: Ankara and Washington no longer share a common enemy. This is an unprecedented situation in the short history of Turkish-American relations that often tends to be overlooked. It is thus important to remind readers that for Turkey the “Axis of Evil” is hardly a good substitute for the “Evil Empire.” The fact of the matter is that Iraq, Iran and, of course, North Korea never posed clear and present threats to Turkey. The Soviet menace, on the other hand, was all too clear. It brought predictability, as well as clear limits to Turkish-American differences.

Today, terrorism is the most likely candidate to create a common threat. Yet, terrorism is a generic and subjective term that fails to trigger a clear sense of purpose and unity between America and its allies. In the eyes of Turkey, and probably the majority of the rest of the world, the ill-named “global war” on terrorism is an American affair. Even after the Istanbul bombings of 2003, a shared perception of the terrorist threat and a collective sense of vulnerability failed to convincingly emerge between Turkey and the United States. The fact of the matter is that all politics is local and most Turks simply do not relate to the trauma that Americans experienced on September 11, 2001. Terrorism, at best, is defined locally and within the framework of domestic grievances. Turkey’s focus on the PKK, in that sense is a national concern and creates no solidarity with Americans who instead tend to focus on the al-Qaeda threat. Quite the opposite, Turkey’s concern about the PKK is often accompanied with conspiracies about American support for Kurdish nationalism that only exacerbate anti-Americanism.

Turks have also little sympathy for American unipolarism and unilateralism, especially when such unilateralism targets Turkey's neighbors such Iraq, Iran and Syria with no direct links with September 11. This explains the difference in how the Turkish public opinion reacted to Afghanistan versus the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. On the other hand, resentment against unilateralism is hardly specific to Turkey. It does not explain why the Turkish case of anti-Americanism is more pronounced and particular compared to Europe for example. As previously mentioned, Turkey’s resentment against the United States

appears to be more much more acute than in Europe according to polls who show higher levels of Turkish distrust of America. This is why one needs to look at the interplay between the United States and the domestic dynamics of Turkey. Needless to say, these have also changed significantly since the end of the Cold War.

Identity Politics During the Cold War and After

As in the realm of foreign policy, there was a larger sense of predictability in Turkish domestic politics during most of the Cold War. From the 1950s to the 1980s, the dynamics of Turkish politics were characterized by leftwing and rightwing ideological rivalries. It was ideological rather than identity cleavages that polarized the Turkish nation. This rightwing and leftwing bipolarization of domestic politics clearly reflected the fault lines of the bipolar system. The ideological positions were delineated with clarity and consistency: the left maintained its distance from the United States, while the right saw Washington as an ally in the anti-communist struggle. This, in many ways, was the straightforward equation in national politics.

The Turkish state apparatus was also by and large pro-American. As a NATO ally, sharing borders with the Soviet Union, the Turkish civilian and military bureaucracy had clear anti-communist proclivities. Most importantly, the state needed America's military and political support, especially if it hoped to resist the domestic and international power of communism. Under such atmospherics, unlike today, anti-Americanism could not transcend ideological lines and turn into a common denominator uniting all segments of Turkish society.

This is a phenomenon that came to be much better appreciated in the 1990s, as the domestic and international communist threat disintegrated, and Turkey once again found herself struggling to come to terms with political Islam and Kurdish nationalism. Few people during the Cold War realized that rightwing and leftwing cleavages masked Turkey's deeply rooted "identity" problems. In other words, Cold War political ideologies provided a useful cover-up for Kurdish nationalism and political Islam. The dynamics of ideological polarization worked in the following way: Kurdish discontent found its place within the socialist left, while Islamic dissent became part of the anti-communist struggle.

Such a configuration of political actors was the product of a domestic and international context where ideologies surpassed national or religious identities. As the Cold War came to an end, so did the era of ideology. It was as if Turkey had suddenly once again returned to its formative decades of the 1920s and 1930s, during which Atatürk's Ankara faced multiple Kurdish-Islamic rebellions challenging the secularist and nationalist precepts of Kemalism.

The fledgling Turkish Republic had of course militarily suppressed the twin threats of Kurdish and Islamic dissent against Kemalism between 1925 and 1938. Later, with the transition to democratic politics in the late 1940s, and the onset of the Cold War, Turkey

had appeared to have totally surpassed Kurdish and Islamic threats to its Kemalist identity. In that sense, it was as if the Cold War and the leftwing-rightwing rivalry in domestic politics had provided only an interlude in Turkey's identity problems. In reality, the Kemalist identity problem of Turkey had never fully disappeared. As previously noted the twin threats to Kemalism – Kurdish nationalism and political Islam – during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s were vocal in ideological terms and within the context of a larger political struggle.

This point about Turkey's Kurdish and political Islam problem is worth exploring for the purpose of this study. This is mainly because the central point that I would like to emphasize is that Turkey's anti-Americanism essentially stems from Turkey's own identity dilemma. At its roots, Turkey's current wave of distrust of the United States is Kemalist identity problem.

Kemalist Identity, Kemalist ideology

It should be noted from the outset that defining Kemalism as an ideology is a problematic issue. There is little agreement among Kemalists themselves about what Kemalism exactly means as a contemporary political project. That Kemalism, in the context of the 1930s, represented a progressive political agenda based on establishing a secular Turkish nation-state is not contested. The modernization and westernization dimension of the original project, put forward by Mustafa Kemal himself, is also widely accepted. What is more problematic, however, is what Kemalism represents in the Turkish political context of the 21st century.

This difficulty in explaining what Kemalism truly stands for in the modern Turkish political context is understandable. In many ways, Kemalism is already a success story. Modern Turkey is a secular nation-state and a democratic republic. There is certainly room for improvement in terms of establishing a truly "liberal" democracy in Turkey. However, liberalism was never on the Kemalist political agenda, and it would be unfair to blame Kemalism for this. After all, liberalism was not on the global agenda of the 1930s. It is therefore possible to argue that Kemalism, as a secularist-nationalist political project aimed at nation building, modernization, and westernization, achieved its goal.

Today, in modern Turkey, it is this very success of Kemalism that transforms it into a conservative ideology. Kemalism, in other words, displays an understandable urge to protect what has been achieved. Especially for Turkey's politically powerful military, Kemalism represents a defensive political reaction against the perceived enemies of the secular Turkish republic: Kurdish nationalism and political Islam. Concerned about the ascendance of these forces, Kemalism has become a secularist and nationalist reflex, rather than a coherent ideology.

In the context of the country's official ideology and identity, Kemalism refers to the sacrosanct character of the Turkish republic as a unitary and secular nation-state. Therefore, any deviation from the Turkish character of the nation-state and the secular

framework of the republic presents a challenge to Kemalist identity. It is primarily within Turkey's military circles that this Kemalist identity and reaction is most discernible. As far as the Kurdish question and political Islam are concerned, there is no room for ambiguity in the Kemalist position of the military. On the Kurdish front, the threat is conceptualized in the following manner. Any public assertion, no matter how minor, of Kurdish ethnic identity is perceived as a security problem endangering Turkey's territorial and national integrity. A similarly alarmist attitude characterizes the military's approach to Islam. Islamic sociopolitical and cultural symbols such as headscarves in the public domain are seen as harbingers of a fundamentalist revolution.

Needless to say, such an alarmist approach to Kurdish and Islamic identity has been counterproductive for Turkish democracy. Especially during the 1990s, at a time when Turkey needed to demonstrate its post-Cold War credentials as a western democracy, the Kemalist Republic came to be seen as an illiberal country fighting its own ethnic and religious identity.

There is no doubt that Turkey's Kurdish and Islamic dilemma gained a new sense of urgency after the last military take-over in 1980-1983. But neither Kurdish nationalism nor Islamic dissent are products of the last two decades. They were both very much present in the 1920s and 1930s during the founding decades of the Kemalist republic. From the birth of the Kemalist Turkish Republic in 1923, to transition to democracy in 1946, Kurdish and Islamic dissent developed in reaction to Turkish nation-building and militant secularism. It is therefore not a coincidence that the most radical decades of the Republic also witnessed relentless Kurdish and Islamic rebellions.

When the Cold War ended and leftwing-rightwing ideological positions lost their relevance, Kurdish and Islamic dissent had a powerful comeback. This Kurdish and Islamic revival during the 1990s once again triggered a strong Kemalist reaction. After the long Cold War interlude, it was as if Turkey was back in the 1930s. The Kemalist military had to take the initiative against Kurdish-Islamic forces by forcefully reasserting Turkish nationalism and secularism.

What followed during the 1990s was very detrimental for Turkish democracy. Turkish versus Kurdish polarization on the one hand, and Islamic versus secularist polarization on the other, revealed an acute sense of blockage in the political system. This problem distanced Turkey from the European Union and eroded the country's image as a "Western" democracy. In turn, Turks were utterly disappointed with the fact that their country's Western identity went unchallenged as long as the Soviet threat existed. It became bitterly clear that affiliation with the anti-communist alliance in the framework of NATO membership was at the heart of Turkey's perception as part of the West. . After the collapse of the Soviet Union, however, Turkey's identity as a "Western" nation came to be subject to the much more complex and decisive test of "liberal democracy."

The timing of this liberal democracy test could not be worse for Turkey. In the midst of a Kurdish civil war and a political polarization between Islamists and secularists, it was impossible for Turkey to maintain even the semblance of a liberal democracy test. On the

contrary, Turkey projected the image of an authoritarian country with an identity problem. The worst was to come in relations with the European Union. At the 1997 Luxembourg Summit, to its great frustration, Turkey was left out of the enlargement process. During the 10 years that followed Turkey's application for full membership in 1997, the anti-democratic and anti-liberal political image of Ankara provided the EU with the excuse it had been long seeking to exclude Turkey.

While relations with the EU were worsening, interestingly, Turkey's post-Cold War relations with the U.S. fared much better. Ankara did not lose its strategic importance in the eyes of Washington, mainly due to problems and opportunities for cooperation emerging in the Balkans, Caucasus and especially in Iraq. Turkey still needed the United States, and Washington under the Bush and Clinton administration proved willing to continue and further cultivate a strategic partnership with Ankara. Yet, one area of cooperation, namely Iraq, proved more problematic than expected even when things appeared to be going really well between the U.S. and Turkey.

The post Gulf War situation and especially the protection of the Kurdish political formation in the Northern Iraq through the İncirlik airbase created a series of difficulties for Ankara. Even the 1997-1999 period, described as golden years in Turkish-American relations by former U.S. Ambassador to Ankara Mark Parris, was not immune to controversy. Turkey grew increasingly unhappy with the economic embargo against Baghdad. Lost trade and employment opportunities in the politically and economically deprived Kurdish southeast exacerbated Turkish resentment. But perhaps more importantly, the periodic renewal of deployment rights of U.S. forces at the İncirlik base for operation Provide Comfort in Northern Iraq proved more contentious. Each time the Turkish Parliament managed to pass the authorization for the continuation of these deployment rights, parliamentary debates illustrated Turkey's deep suspicions of America's protection of Iraqi Kurds.

In fact, the roots of the Turkish political and military distrust towards Washington regarding the Kurdish question dates back to this era. Yet, Turkey could not afford to create tension in its relations with the U.S. while being excluded by the EU. It is not a coincidence that one of the worst periods in Turkey-EU relations was also one of the best times in the Turkish-American partnership, as Ambassador Paris noted. On the other hand, it would be misleading to see the EU and the U.S. as alternative alliances for Ankara. Far from being mutually exclusive, these two entities are in fact complementary. The Clinton administration's lobbying effort within the EU on behalf of Turkey between the Luxembourg Summit of 1997 and the Helsinki Summit of 1999, which put Ankara's membership prospects back on track, is a case in point. An additional factor helping to improve Turkey's relations with the EU between 1997 and 1999 was the SPD's rise to power in Germany. Without these two external dynamics, Turkey's could probably have never recovered from the setback caused by the 1997 Luxembourg Summit.

September 11 and the Turning Point

Going back to problematic dynamics that we observe between America and Turkey today, we can claim that bilateral relations have entered a new phase in the post-September 11 terrorist attacks. In the initial phase that followed the attacks, Afghanistan created a valuable opportunity for cooperation. Nevertheless, circumstances changed with Washington's attention shifting from Afghanistan to Iraq and the transformation of the Middle East. At this point it is important to remember that the post-9-11 U.S. debate on the Islamic world and the causes of terrorism was of very close interest to Turkey.

Having experienced such a large-scale terrorist act on its own soil for the first time, and thus encountered a severe trauma, the United States witnessed polarization between two political groups. The first camp consisted of Democrats and moderate Republicans represented by the former Secretary of State Colin Powell, who served under the first George W. Bush administration. The second camp was mainly composed of hawks within the Republican Party and the neo-conservatives. The first group—Democrats and Powell supporters—argued that the roots causes of terrorism were primarily socio-economic. This argument, underscored the need to fight poverty and illiteracy in the Islamic world, instead of mainly relying on the use of force in the war against terrorism. Neoconservatives, on the other hand, never found the socio-economic roots argument sufficiently convincing. In their view, if illiteracy and poverty were root caused most terrorists would have been sub-Saharan Africans.

For neoconservatives, the source of terrorism was purely political. In other words, the regimes supporting terrorism and political Islam had become the arch nemeses. Therefore, what needed to be done was to transform the tyrannical and anti-American regimes that supported terrorism, even if this process required military intervention. In this context, Iraq, Syria, and Iran had become the first targets in the Middle East among the regimes that needed to be transformed. Moreover, Egypt and Saudi Arabia were labeled as “problematic and dangerous regimes,” and included in the watch list. The common quandary with these regimes was perceived as the lack of political freedom and democracy. As a consequence, the ideas of freedom and democracy have become the primary concepts that both the Bush administration and neoconservatives valued most.

The rift between these two groups, which expressed utterly distant views on terrorism and fight against terrorism, was closed by the modernization theory. In this respect, the modernization theory regained its popularity in American world of thought and among policy-making circles for the first time since 1950s. The basic thesis of the modernization theory set forth that socio-economic development brought along a gradual democratization. According to this formula, which provided a third way, the concepts emphasized by the first group, such as the struggle against poverty and illiteracy, would result in the political change advocated by the second group.

Nevertheless, the problems that the U.S. is experiencing in Iraq today have been educational in the demonstration of the errors caused by the military alternative. The impossibility of spreading democracy to Syria or Iran through military intervention has been acknowledged by the Bush administration. Today, even the most eloquent conservatives in Washington cannot bring up involuntary regime changes in the Middle

East. At this point, all hopes are concentrated on the democratization process that will come to life only in light of economic, social and cultural development through the Greater Middle East Project. In other words, “social and economic development first, democracy later” has become the prevailing approach.

Therefore, in all the debates on the Islamic world and democracy, Turkey had new importance that it did not even possess during the Cold War years for the United States. Such incline in Turkey’s profile can be associated with its posture as the most successful model of the modernization theory, and much more importantly, with its large Muslim population. In effect, Turkey became important for the U.S. foreign policy in the aftermath of September 11 for the first time, not because of “where it was located”, but because of “what it was.” In other words, Turkey’s importance was increasing not only in geo-strategic context, but also due to its political and civilized identity. In an environment where the Arab geography appeared as a fundamental problem, Turkey’s democratic, secular and Western presence was accepted as a “model” by the neoconservative group.

But such perception did not last long. The United States soon realized that it was mingling with one of the vital dilemmas in Turkey by recognizing it as a “model:” identity. Being exposed as a model by the U.S. and the issue whether or not it indeed is a model were not welcome in Turkey, especially on the government level. The most vigorous illustrations of this are President Ahmet Necdet Sezer’s warning to President Bush last summer and similar statements issued by the Chairman of the Turkish General Staff, General Hilmi Özkok. These warnings can be interpreted in the following manner: Turkey is a secular republic. We do not sympathize with religion-based illustrations that contradict this concept.

What feeds and structures this view is Turkey’s concerns over the American administration’s vision in the Middle East. It would not be an exaggeration to state that America’s advocacy of “moderate Islam” against the “radical Islam” in the Middle East worries Turkey the most. Turkey being portrayed as a model within the moderate Islam project has been conceived as a support for the moderate Islam in Turkey, thereby led to a clash between America’s approach and Turkey’s laic and Kemalist identity. Already alarmed over the landslide victory of Justice and Development Party (AKP), the Republic’s laic reflexes have become overwhelmingly concerned with the “model” expression of the U.S., which allegedly promoted Turkey’s moderate Muslim identity. In the aftermath of his victory, Washington’s invitation to the AKP Chairman Tayyip Erdoğan, who was not confirmed as a Prime Minister then, was perceived [by the Turkish intellectuals] as the weakening of the secular foundations of Atatürk’s Republic by the United States.

As a result, the U.S. policy on the democratization of the Middle East has clashed with Turkey’s sensitive approach to secularism for the first time. One of the consequences of this was Turkey’s identity dilemma that was neither addressed by nor carried onto the U.S. agenda during the Cold War years. Washington, on the other hand, perceived this development as the insecurity of the Turkish regime and Turkey’s conflict with its own Muslim identity. Following these developments, the word “model” was immediately

exchanged with softer phrases like “source of inspiration,” or “example country.” Nonetheless, U.S. officials did fail overall in their attempts to create new formulas. Today, that the frequent utilization of terms like “model” and “moderate Islam” results in perceptions similar to “Washington pressed the button for AKP” should be taken as the indicator of the apparent confusion in people’s minds.

Unfortunately the issue does not end here. The second problem that has surfaced in the Turkey’s relations with the U.S. in light of Turkey’s identity crisis, which triggered by Washington’s Northern Iraq policy, consists of the Kurdish issue at large and the future of Kirkuk. The debate on Turkey’s role in the promotion of “moderate Islam” and as a “model” had already created anti-Americanism within the Turkish elite. The Kurdish issue, in contrast, has carried this anti-American sentiment to public and rejuvenated nationalist reactions. Today almost everyone in Turkey—of course we also include the intellectuals in this category—thinks that Washington supports a Kurdish state in Iraq. The ones who do not necessarily believe that Washington pursues this policy on purpose are nevertheless inclined to think that America’s policies will eventually result in a similar scenario.

Once more, the main concern here is the lack of trust in Washington. Nobody believes the redundant messages of Washington on the preservation of Iraq’s territorial integrity. Even the lack of evidence regarding the U.S. interest in a Kurdish state to assure Turkey’s suspicions does not change the situation. Moreover, it is almost pointless to prove that the U.S. is not interested in a Kurdish state to those who strongly see the United States as an oil-chasing imperial force that desires to weaken and divide Turkey. That Washington pursues a close alliance with Talabani and Barzani is a sufficient evidence for most people.

Such misgiving is not based on rational foundations. Those who assume that America makes each of its calculations according to oil and energy resources do not realize that it is easier and cheaper for Washington to purchase oil than to invade a country or follow pointless foreign policy adventures. It is not surprising to find out that those who believe that the U.S. invaded Iraq for oil are also convinced of Washington’s oil-based, pro-Kurdish policies.

Those that are in favor of the thesis “the U.S. wants to found a Kurdish state because of political and strategic reasons” fail to apprehend that the chaos and potential wars originating from such development will contradict with Washington’s interests. However, an integrated and strong Iraq is much more valuable for Washington in balancing the real strategic threat from Iran. Hence, Iraq’s ability to sustain its territorial integrity and to increase its military capability juxtaposes with America’s interests.

For all these reasons, the U.S. views the Kurds’ effort to establish their own state as a destabilizing factor that will worsen the current situation in Iraq. Washington fears a possible turmoil in a quiet region like Northern Iraq due to the unrestrained nationalism expressed by the Kurds and Kirkuk; therefore, it does not welcome the idea of an independent Kurdish state. For instance, that the Kurds refer to Kirkuk as “our

Jerusalem” causes disturbance. In this context, not only Turkey’s reaction evokes fear, but there is also a legitimate anxiety over a potential civil war following from Kirkuk’s uncertainty.

In brief, the U.S. acknowledges that an independent Kurdish State in Northern Iraq will drag the entire region into a war. It is also well-known that Turkey is the most sensitive country in the region as far as this issue is concerned. Furthermore, the fear of a Kurdish state results in an undesired closeness between Ankara, Damascus and Tehran. Thus, the governance of Kirkuk under a special status will be a less troublesome alternative for the United States.

However, the situation looks different when one views such developments from Turkey, where significant distrust towards the United States prevails. Most analyses that emphasize Washington’s failures in the region accentuate the PKK issues. It is apparent that the PKK camp in Northern Iraq is not a primary threat for Washington. That the American military is stretched thin in Iraq is also visible. Moreover, those who restlessly accuse Washington seems to have forgotten U.S. assistance in delivering Abdullah Öcalan to Turkish special forces in Kenya in 1999.

Paradoxically, the Kurds are the only group that is genuinely aware of U.S. resistance to an independent Kurdish state. The most feared scenario of the KDP and PUK representatives in Washington is a potential diminishing of U.S. support. Consequently, despite their persistence on Kirkuk, they are reluctant to use the word “independence” as they lobby for a confederation and political autonomy.

Kurdish representatives in Washington continuously deliver the following sentiment to their American colleagues: “We hope that the support we have given to you will not result in another tragedy.” Such sentiments reflect the psychological tension the Kurds have been experiencing. Turkey, has argued that “the West always supports the Kurds.” In contrast, the Kurds claim that, the West has always deserted them and never kept its promise.”

The Kurdish issue plays an important role vis-à-vis Turkey’s distrust to the United States. Moreover, when this issue is combined with the debates over “moderate Islam” and Turkey’s role as a model, the outlook of Turkish-American relations becomes worrisome. Washington’s policies in relation to the democratization of the Middle East and Iraq have brought about concerns in Turkey over the secularist and nationalist principles of the country. In general, U.S. foreign policy in the post 9/11 era contributes to Turkey’s deep anxieties on political Islam and the Kurdish issue. These problems and the preferences of U.S. foreign policy are perceived as threats against the founding principles of the Turkish Republic for they closely deal with the traumas of the early years of the Republic. As a result, there are serious misalignments between Turkey’s identity problems and the priorities of U.S. foreign policy.

The anti-Americanism that we face today is a different phenomenon. As the post-Cold War era we currently live in is marked by the resurfacing of the identity problems of the

Republic without the ideological covers of the past, relations with the United States are defined in a crisis atmosphere.

Washington's Analysis of Turkey

So how does Washington perceive the current situation? What shapes policy towards Turkey? When addressing Turkey, it is hard for American policy makers to admit that there is tension between the two countries. Generally speaking, Turkey is not a priority for U.S. foreign policy. One can view this situation with a positive or negative approach.

Turkey's absence from the agenda may not be such a bad thing because those countries, which do have priority, are usually countries with problems. Iraq is always the first priority on the agenda, followed by Syria, Lebanon, Iran, and the Israeli-Palestinian issue. As Turkey is located in a region that dominates major U.S. foreign policy issues; Turkey's secondary importance on the U.S. agenda may be interpreted as a negative development as well. In fact, the only major American foreign policy issue, which does not affect Turkey directly, is North Korea.

Undoubtedly, the ideal scenario for Turkey would be to be on the U.S. agenda in a positive way. Yet, today we are far from this ideal point. Since Turkish expectations from Washington range from the PKK issue to Cyprus, there is nothing positive about being excluded from the U.S. agenda. On the other hand, it appears necessary to clarify why Turkey is does not figure more prominently on the U.S. agenda in the first place. This absence is not due to the fact that Turkey's Parliament rejected the resolution on March 1, 2003, which would have allowed the U.S. to station troops on Turkish territory and invade Iraq from the north. If the U.S. had been given the right to station troops, Turkey would have insisted on having meaningful influence in Northern Iraq. Such an influence would have caused even greater tension between the two countries.

If the resolution had been passed, Turkey would have expected to be at the table influencing American policy, rather than a passive onlooker. This desire to be an active participant would have possibly brought along unrealistic expectations. Since Turkey would not expect any territory or oil, the most important political expectation would have been the prevention of the creation of a Kurdish federation in Northern Iraq. This issue was included in the *kırmızı çizgiler* (red lines) proclaimed during the pre-war period. There is no doubt that such a scenario would have seriously strained the Ankara-Washington relationship.

The fact that Turkey does not figure prominently on the U.S. agenda is not because Washington is angry or wants to punish Turkey for the March 1st decision. It is true that there have been tensions between the two militaries. In fact, the Pentagon's civilian personnel have questioned whether the Turkish military really supported the passage of the resolution. However, the issue that was not entertained was the issue of Turkish democracy and Parliament's will. The Bush administration came to the conclusion that punishing Ankara's decision which was

embedded in the democratic process would be in conflict with U.S. goals for democratization in the Middle East. Therefore, U.S. policy towards Turkey did not change. The U.S. continued to lend support to Turkey's EU drive; Washington continued to support Turkey in the IMF; Congress passed a bill authorizing the administration to offer USD 1 billion grant to Turkey as compensation and the U.S. continued to portray Turkey as an inspiration for democracy in the region.

In the U.S. there is a fairly broad community of political opponents to the war in Iraq. Among these circles Turkey did not lose its prestige. On the contrary it gained prestige. Also, those who support the Iraq War on the basis of the war as a means to promote democratization in the Middle East, Turkey's rejection of the resolution raised a serious question: If democracy really does take root in the Middle East one day, are things going to turn out in favor of the United States? Although there is a lot of discussion within the Bush administration on this issue, there has not been a satisfactory answer to this question because democratization sometimes may lead to unwanted results. The most dangerous thing for the United States in the Middle East would be the victory of Islamic extremists as a result of free and truly democratic elections. This of course would be a nightmare. In view of this potential, the United States does not want to take the risk of pushing its own enemies towards democratization. Hence, Egypt and Saudi Arabia are excluded from these pressures.

Under such circumstances, while Washington is under a great deal of pressure to make decisions, Turkey neither creates a crisis nor enters the agenda in a very positive way. American professionals that deal with Turkey are concerned of the anti-Americanism in Turkey. More senior U.S. officials look at the big picture and view the situation vis-à-vis Turkey much more optimistically.

The Bush administration naturally questions why the AKP government is not putting more effort to quell anti-Americanism within Turkey. Prime Minister Erdoğan's accusation that the Israeli assassination of Hamas leader Sheikh Ahmed was "government-sponsored terrorism", his declaration that the people killed in Falluja by the United States were martyrs, and his distance and skepticism of the legitimacy of the Iraqi elections, were not received well in the United States. All of these were considered concessions for Bush's opponents and sometimes even encouragement. However, at the same time, the Bush administration has developed immunity to global anti-Americanism. The nomination of John Bolton as ambassador to the UN and Paul Wolfowitz as head of the World Bank is proof that the Bush administration does not pay much attention to global anti-Americanism.

The Bush administration views PM Erdoğan, not as an ideological opponent but as a populist leader. Washington understands the Turkish military's sensitivity about secularism and is aware of the AKP's limited ability to maneuver on issues such as the headscarf and religious schools issues. That said, many acknowledge the fact that a great deal of political and economic reform has been accomplished by the AKP. Turkey's determined efforts to meet EU criteria have been recognized. Speculations about "Washington pulling the plug of the AKP" are far from reflecting the realities.

From Washington's point of view, Turkey's identity question is the most important issue facing Turkey. The Administration has come to realize that it was a mistake to portray Turkey as a successful model for the Islamic world after September 11. The Kemalist establishment was not impressed by such calls. Subsequently, it became problematic to use Turkey and the Islamic world in the same sentence. Problems arising from the war in Iraq revealed that Turkey is still struggling with its own Kurdish identity.

A Solution?

Washington believes that Turkey's identity problem regarding the Kurds and issues pertaining to political Islam can only be solved through a liberal democratic understanding. It is precisely because of such a conclusion that Turkey's membership into the EU carries such significance for the United States. Washington is convinced that a Turkey that is excluded from Europe would halt liberal and democratic reforms. Moreover, these circumstances would provoke tensions regarding the Kurdish question and PKK terrorism.

In believing that there is a strong connection between the future of liberal democracy and Turkey's EU membership, the Bush administration is uncomfortable with recent developments in the EU. According to the analysis by Washington, the strong "no" votes in France and the Netherlands to the EU Constitution is partly due to opposition to further enlargement. It was very telling that one week after the referenda in these two countries, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice stressed the importance of Turkey's EU accession – on two occasions in one week.

Prime Minister Erdoğan's visit to Washington on June 8th, a week after the referenda in France and the Netherlands offered a good opportunity for shaping U.S.-Turkish-EU relations. Unfortunately, this opportunity could not be used effectively.

The AKP is far from realizing how much support it is going to need from Washington for Turkey's EU membership. Given the strong likelihood of a Christian Democrat Germany in the fall Turkey needs to realize that Germany's Christian Democrats are also very keen to improve their relationship with Washington. Hence, Turkey needs to develop a strategy with the U.S. vis-à-vis Germany and the EU. Likewise in France, Nicolas Sarkozy is also keen on establishing a good relationship with the U.S. Yet, developing a transatlantic strategy was not on the Bush-Erdoğan agenda. Turks are very enthusiastic about Turkey's EU drive but fail to realize the importance of American support.

The two countries have significant differences on Syria and the issue of anti-Americanism in Turkey. Washington sees Turkey's Syria policy as a policy in favor of the status quo. In contrast, Turkish public opinion views American policy towards Syria, not Syria itself, as a threat.

U.S. policy towards Syria has a very different tone. Washington does not aim to change the Syrian regime through a military intervention. The

U.S. aims to isolate the country politically and economically because it holds Syria responsible for much of the terrorism within Iraq. Washington knows that Turkey disagrees. Washington is extremely surprised about Prime Minister Erdoğan's perception of President Assad. Also, Washington is perplexed about Ankara's contention that Turkey has greatly influenced the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon.

Washington is also confused about Turkey's reluctance to be strong against Iran on the nuclear energy issue.

Despite such divergent views Turkey has considerable expectations from Washington in relation to Cyprus and the PKK. It appears that cooperative action on these issues depends on the formation of a common understanding on Syria and Iraq. In order to initiate such a common understanding the following three proposals may be useful:

-Iran: Prime Minister Erdoğan can invite Iran and the EU's 'Group of Three' to an international meeting in Turkey, which can be hosted by the Turkish Foreign Ministry in Istanbul. The meeting may seek to identify new means of crisis communication. Such a meeting could put Turkey back on the transatlantic agenda.

-Syria: Along side the U.S., Ankara can implement a carrot & stick strategy towards Syria aiming for democratization and anti-terrorism. The Turkish-Syrian relationship can be linked to whether Syria continues to support terrorism and pursues undemocratic policies. Ankara can declare that Turkey will only join the U.S. isolation policy if Syria does not comply with these demands.

-Iraq: In line with previously agreed NATO agreements, the AKP can announce that Turkey is ready to train 5,000-10,000 Iraqi military and security forces. In return, Turkey may request commercial flights to and from Northern Cyprus and joint operations against the PKK in Northern Iraq.

The AKP is unlikely to pursue such initiatives because of its preoccupation with Turkish public opinion. In the event, the AKP may be torn between Turkish public opinion and the U.S.

Unfortunately, the AKP does not have the luxury to shape its foreign policy with such a heavy impact of public opinion. Practicing populism in foreign policy is dangerous business. Of course, a successful foreign policy would desire the backing of the Turkish public. However, real leadership entails the ability to steer the population in the right direction. That is why today the AKP needs to create a vision that serves the long term interests of Turkey rather than implementing policies solely to maintain public support.