

TURKEY: ON EUROPE'S VERGE?

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On October 3, 2005, a Turkish Foreign Ministry jet was idling on the tarmac in the capital city of Ankara waiting to see if Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül would show up for a historic ceremony in Luxembourg. The question was whether Turkey would finally start accession talks with the 25-member European Union (EU) after more than 40 years of trials and tribulations. The stakes were very high, not just for the EU and Turkey, but also for the U.S. Washington had been a strong supporter of Turkey's European vocation from early on. There were pertinent strategic reasons for this. As a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) ally neighboring the Balkans, the Caucasus and America's greatest challenges in the Middle East, namely Syria, Iraq and Iran, Turkey's geostrategic location is invaluable. Equally important, Turkey is a Muslim country with a democratic and secular system, a true rarity in the Islamic world. Particularly in the post-9/11 world, where many saw a "clash of civilizations" between Islam and the West, Turkey's European quest had therefore gained unprecedented significance for Washington. Europe, however, had a different take on Turkey. In the eyes of most Europeans, Turkey was too big, too poor and too different. Where Americans saw a strategic opportunity, Europeans perceived a daunting challenge. There was considerable reluctance before embarking on a political, economic and cultural marriage with a country like no other. Making things worse for the EU was the fact that it only recently, in May 2004, had expanded toward Central and Eastern Europe by absorbing 10 new countries. Turkey's population, alone, was almost as large as that of all the newcomers. As if all these factors were not problematic enough, the EU was also in the midst of a profound political crisis. French and Dutch voters had rejected the proposed European constitution, in no small part because they felt insecure about unemployment and immigration. Far from providing a solution to these concerns, EU acceptance of Turkey was only going to complicate matters in the eyes of a skeptical European public opinion. Under such circumstances, opening accession negotiations with Turkey had become an even greater challenge. It is thus all the more remarkable that after considerable foot-dragging, internal bickering and last-minute posturing, the EU proved up to the task. A major crisis with Turkey was averted in typical EU fashion, with an eleventh-hour deal on October 3, 2005. When Abdullah Gul finally showed up in Luxembourg, there was a clear sense that history was in the making. Everyone knew that Turkey's eventual membership was likely to take another decade, but a momentous journey had begun. After all, no country had started accession negotiations without successfully completing them. European multiculturalism, geographic borders and strategic horizons were from now on in literally new territories.

WHY IS THE EUROPEAN UNION SO IMPORTANT FOR TURKEY?

In many ways, Turkey's quest to become part of Europe predates the EU. Ironically, it even predates the establishment of modern Turkey. This may sound surprising because the Ottoman Empire was the intimate enemy of Europe. Historically, the Turk represented the "other" who played a crucial role in consolidating Europe's own Christian identity. Yet, as Ottoman centuries of splendor came to a close, the ruling elite of Istanbul sought salvation in one of the earliest projects of Westernization in history. Ottoman reforms in the military, legal and political fields were pragmatically modeled after Europe.

Yet Ottoman modernization proved too little too late to save the empire. Torn between Islamic pride and the imperative of Westernization, Ottomans developed a split identity in the 19th century, during which modern and traditional institutions ineffectively coexisted. A more radical version of Westernization came only during the first half of the 20th century, first under the Young Turks and later with Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881–1938.) As the founder of the fledgling Turkish Republic, Atatürk was firmly convinced that his country needed to become part of "contemporary civilization." During the 1920s and 1930s, he almost overnight decreed radical cultural reforms that abolished Islamic institutions, - established secularism, emancipated women, radically changed the dress code and imposed the Latin alphabet.

Having set the course toward the West, Turkey would become an integral and valued member of the Western alliance systems; a member of NATO, the 19-member security pact; and a frontline state against the Soviet Union. Sitting on the edge of Europe, the new Turkey's economy naturally gravitated toward Europe as well. Turkish trade and economic interests became anchored on the European edifice, which having started with only six countries was expanding rapidly through the 1980s and beyond. The impulse to belong to Europe gained further momentum with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Ankara increasingly felt that its place in the New World Order was in the progressive and increasingly democratic institutions that Europe represented. For many people in Turkey, joining the EU became synonymous with the final push toward Atatürk's dream to be part of contemporary civilization. For them, Turkey as a member of the EU would become economically prosperous as well as politically stable and democratic.

Europe's reluctance

Yet, all was not perfect with Turkey's journey toward Europe. An important part of the problem was political instability

within Turkey itself. Although Turkey had applied for European membership as early as 1963, a series of military interventions in 1960, 1971 and 1980 seriously undermined Ankara's chances. But Turkey had one major factor in its favor during these difficult decades: the cold war (1946–91). The bipolar design of the cold war divided the world into Eastern and Western blocs and within this division Turkey clearly belonged to the West. As a NATO country that shared borders with the U.S.S.R. and tied down some 24 Soviet divisions, Ankara's Western credentials went undisputed. Thorny questions concerning democratic standards, military interventions, human rights and Muslim identity were therefore largely set aside.

This somewhat uncomplicated Western image of Turkey lasted as long as the cold war did. To the dismay of Ankara, the Turkish bid for EU membership in 1987 came under increasingly critical democratic scrutiny after the demise of the Soviet Union. Moreover, by the early 1990s, Central and Eastern Europe had emerged as more pressing priorities for EU enlargement. At a time when Brussels (EU headquarters) seemed to regret its cold-war commitments to Turkey, Ankara urgently wanted to be anchored in the West, not least because of potentially destabilizing factors within Turkey, the Balkans, the Caucasus and the Middle East. Now that communism and the Soviets had vanished, deeply rooted ethnic and religious rivalries were no longer masked by left-wing–right-wing ideological cleavages. Most importantly, Turkey's own Kurdish and Islamic dilemmas were back to haunt the republic.

As a result, just as Europe was turning its back on Turkey, Ankara increasingly came to see its EU membership as the guarantor and litmus test of Western identity, national prestige and economic prosperity. Yet, instead of displaying the democratic and liberal credentials necessary for such membership, Turkey became politically polarized under the pressure of its own internal contradictions. As a result, Turkey began moving away from liberal democracy right when it most needed it for EU membership.

Internal contradictions

The 1990s turned out to be a lost decade for Turkey. Especially after the death of Turgut Özal (prime minister 1983–89, president 1989–93), political instability became permanent. Nine different coalition governments ruled Turkey in the 1990s alone. Such instability undermined the Turkish economy, which suffered from corruption, cronyism and a rate of inflation that was out of hand. For the most part, relations with the EU reflected this negative turn of events. By 1997 the EU had decided to exclude Turkey from its enlargement process, without even recognizing the candidacy of Ankara for full membership. It is therefore all the more remarkable that the current upturn in relations with Europe developed in such a short period of time. What went wrong in the 1990s? And what has happened in the last several years to put things back on track?

The most important challenge that came to haunt the Turkish Republic in the last 20 years is the Kurdish question. Starting with the mid-1980s, Ankara began to fight a bloody Kurdish insurrection in southeast Anatolia (the Asian portion of Turkey). The separatist challenge posed by the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' party), a terrorist guerilla movement with considerable regional support, proved extremely costly in political, economic and foreign policy terms for Turkey. Between 1984 and 1999, in addition to a death toll of 35,000, the conflict cost the Turkish economy an estimated \$120 billion in military expenditures alone.

But perhaps more importantly, the Kurdish conflict hijacked all prospects of democratization. To the dismay of Ankara, Europe saw in the Kurdish conflict the rebellion of an ethnic group whose cultural and political rights were denied by an authoritarian system, dominated by the military. By the mid-1990s, things went from bad to worse. As the war against the PKK continued to escalate, a second internal threat gained momentum with the rise of political Islam. The foundations of Kemalism (whereby the government maintained control over all things religious) appeared to be rigorously challenged by the victories of the Islamic Welfare party at local and national elections in 1995 and 1996.

Neither political Islam nor Kurdish nationalism were exactly "new" challenges for Ankara. In fact, Kurdish dissent and political Islam had represented the twin threats to Atatürk's project of creating a secular and homogeneous nation-state since the inception of the modern republic in 1923. In other words, political Islam and Kurdish dissent were very much reactions to secularism and Turkish nationalism. On both counts, the Turkish Republic was deeply influenced by the French model. Turkish secularism was modeled after anticlerical French "*laïcité*" rather than the less confrontational Anglo-Saxon secularism. This meant that religion in modern Turkey—as in postrevolution France—had to become part of private life. It also meant that the religious establishment was going to be controlled and administered by the state in order to prevent any political threats of an Islamic nature. Religious sects not controlled by the state (all sorts of Sufi brotherhoods, expressions of Islamic mysticism) for instance, were banned altogether and, in practice, had to operate underground.

As far as Turkish nationalism is concerned, the model was once again French. The Turkish Republic refused the concept of ethnic minorities; all citizens were to be assimilated into Turkish citizenship; the only officially recognized minorities were non-Muslims. Yet, Ottoman-style cosmopolitanism was anathema. There was to be no multiculturalism for Muslims either, since all Muslims were now considered as Turks. Not surprisingly, these policies of strict secularism and assimilation-oriented Turkish nationalism triggered a major Islamic and Kurdish backlash. From 1925 to 1938, a long

series of Kurdish and Islamic uprisings had to be suppressed militarily. Inevitably, such violent resistance to the Kemalist nation building traumatized the leaders of the young republic and led to their abiding suspicion of all things Kurdish and Islamic for years to come.

After the transition to multiparty democracy in the 1950s, neither Kurdish nationalism nor political Islam totally disappeared from Turkey's political agenda. Yet, from 1950 to the mid-1980s, these internal rivalries were overshadowed by the right-wing and left-wing ideologies of the cold war. In other words, Turkey's ideological divisions masked its identity problems. Kurdish discontent was often expressed in terms of left-wing "class struggle," while Islamism mobilized the anti-Communist right. During these decades the real threat was the Soviet Union. With the cold war raging and Moscow on Turkey's borders, the Turkish military was obsessed with communism—both domestic and international.

In fact, it was this anti-Communist agenda of the 1980–83 military rule that finally put an end to the ideological polarization in Turkey. The first victim became the leftist-Kurdish alliance. The army brutally suppressed Kurdish groups in the southeast while simultaneously targeting the left all over Turkey. Yet, by 1984 Kurdish dissent was violently back in the form of a nationalist-separatist insurrection. In retrospect, one can argue that the military did more harm than good in terms of fueling Kurdish nationalism. Equally damaging during the early 1980s was the military's unintentional support of Islam. Ironically, secular Turkish governments and the military at that time sought to promote Islam as a bulwark against the communism they feared was the real threat.

Once again, it was the anti-Communist nature of the 1980 military intervention that mobilized official state Islam against the left. For instance, the military tripled the budget of the Directorate of Religious Affairs from 1980 to 1983, supported the policy of establishing more Islamic (*Imam-Hatip*) high schools and introduced a course on religion to national education curricula. All these policies were aimed at depoliticizing Turkish youth. Such policies do not alone explain the rise of political Islam in Turkey, but they nevertheless played an important role in expanding the ranks of a Muslim youth that later sympathized with Islamist leader Necmettin Erbakan's Welfare party.

No one could have guessed that the Soviet Empire would soon come to an end and that communism would cease to represent a threat in Turkish domestic politics. Yet, by the late 1980s and early 1990s the international context had already begun to change dramatically. So did Turkey's domestic context. By the late 1980s, Turkey was now struggling with Kurdish nationalism and political Islam. After the cold-war interlude, it was as if the Kemalist republic was back to fighting the demons of its tormented past.

Kurdish nationalism and political Islam were these familiar threats now reemerging in a different global and national context. Ankara's official response, however, came with a counterproductive Kemalist determination to reject any cultural or political compromise with the enemies of the republic. The result was a lost decade of civil war, secular-Islamic polarization, authoritarian proclivities and economic crisis. At the heart of the Turkish predicament in the 1990s was the failure to adapt Kemalism for the 21st century.

The Kemalist success and paradox

Defining Kemalism is a problematic issue. 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 difficult, however, is to define what Kemalism represents in the Turkish political context of the 21st century. There is, in fact, little agreement between Kemalists themselves about what exactly Kemalism means as a contemporary political philosophy.

Today, in modern Turkey, it is the very success of Kemalism that transforms it into a conservative ideology. Having accomplished its goals, Kemalism today displays an understandable urge to preserve and protect what has already been achieved. For Turkey's politically powerful military that zealously safeguards Atatürk's legacy, Kemalism now amounts to "protecting" the republic from its "perceived enemies": Kurdish nationalism and political Islam.

As far as the Kurdish question and political Islam are concerned, there is no room for ambiguity in the Kemalist position of the military. Any political assertion, no matter how minor, of Kurdish ethnic identity is perceived as a major 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 in the public sphere—such as headscarves in public schools—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 by the EU as an illiberal country fighting its own ethnic and religious identity.

Given such deep-rooted problems, it is all the more remarkable that Turkey has managed to improve its badly tarnished relations with the EU in the last few years. How did that happen? The answer requires a closer look at two seemingly contradictory factors: (1) The Turkish state's success in defeating Kurdish separatism and "taming" political Islam; and (2) The external dynamics that led the EU to reconsider its position at the 1999 Helsinki Summit.

By the end of the 1990s, the unwavering determination of the Turkish military to deal with the twin threats of political Islam and Kurdish nationalism produced unexpectedly satisfactory results. The secular establishment first gained the

upper hand against political Islam and the electoral victories of the Welfare party. In 1997, the military—in a concerted effort with like-minded civil society organizations and the mainstream secularist press—forced the Welfare party and Prime Minister Erbakan out of power. The limits of Kemalist tolerance for an Islamic government therefore became abundantly clear with what came to be called a postmodern coup.

The Kemalist backlash did not end there. By 1998 a major blow was inflicted against Kurdish terrorism. The apprehension and incarceration of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan created a much-needed sense of victory against Kurdish terrorism. Soon after Öcalan's arrest, a militarily weakened and politically demoralized PKK declared a cease-fire. All these developments vindicated the logic of the Turkish military in rejecting political solutions to a conflict that had lasted for 15 years. With political Islam subdued and Kurdish nationalism defeated, the sense of siege that characterized the 1990s was coming to an end. The restoration of domestic political confidence eased the transition to a more reformist mindset and facilitated the conceptualization of democratization as intentional rather than imposed.

The EU incentive

The crucial catalyst for political liberalization came when the EU reversed course at the Helsinki Summit and restored Turkey's candidacy for membership. Since Turkish democratic standards had not improved between 1997 and 1999, the EU's change of heart had been motivated by factors beyond Ankara's control.

The first and probably most important factor was the arrival of a government sympathetic to Turkish membership in Germany. Unlike the Christian Democrats who ruled Germany between 1982 and 1998, the Social Democratic-Green coalition of Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder was not prejudiced against Ankara. Coming to power in 1998, the new government in Berlin not only changed Germany's antiquated citizenship laws—thus opening the possibility for German citizenship to some 3 million Turks in Germany—but also followed a positive approach toward Turkey's eventual EU membership. Having the EU's largest country and budgetary contributor on its side significantly improved Turkey's European hopes.

To the surprise of many within the EU, Greece emerged as a second factor in support of Turkey. A breakthrough occurred in bilateral relations between Athens and Ankara in 1999 as the government of Greece decided that marginalizing Turkey outside Europe would create an unstable, impoverished and potentially more aggressive and nationalist neighbor. Consecutive earthquakes in Istanbul and Athens during the summer of 1999 also triggered a great deal of goodwill and sympathy between the two countries' public opinions. As a result, Greece has turned from an ardent foe into a strong supporter of Turkey's European quest.

Finally, the third factor was the role of the U.S. Throughout 1998 and 1999, the Clinton Administration (1993–2001) lobbied on behalf of Ankara in all EU capitals in an attempt to bring some strategic sense to European leaders' shortsighted approach to Turkey. These were crucial efforts since they came at a time when Turkey had decided to suspend its political relations with the EU in the aftermath of the 1997 decision to exclude Turkey from enlargement. Needless to say, the fact that transatlantic relations under the Clinton Administration were much better than they are today greatly helped.

At the end of the day, Helsinki proved to be a crucial turning point in Turkey-EU relations. The positive result put Ankara on an equal footing with all other candidates provided that the political principles of the 1993 Copenhagen criteria for accession were fulfilled. These criteria consisted of stable institutions that guarantee democracy, the rule of law and human rights and a functioning market economy. For good measure, Turkey was also asked to avoid a potential Greek veto and show goodwill for the resolution of the long-festering Cyprus problem. Thanks to this important reconciliation with the EU, various Turkish governments used the incentive of EU membership as leverage in pressing for otherwise very difficult domestic reforms.

It was therefore with such new hope that Turkey began the 21st century. Yet, the country faced a severe financial crisis in 2001, which brought the end of all the political parties that had governed in coalition governments during the lost decade of the 1990s. Although quick and effective action under the new Finance Minister Kemal Dervis, backed by the International Monetary Fund (of which he had been vice president), restored economic stability in 2002, the political field was wide open in the general elections of November 2002.

The impact of improved relations became all the more evident during these elections when the moderate Islamic Justice and Development party (AKP) won in a landslide by running a campaign on a pro-EU platform. In doing so the newly established AKP managed to achieve two crucial objectives. First, the party gained a sense of legitimacy in the eyes of Turkey's Kemalist establishment. In other words, the military was much more willing to give the benefit of the doubt to a political party with a European vocation, rather than one with Islamist proclivities, as was the case with the Welfare party. Second, thanks to its pro-EU stance, the AKP became more appealing for Turkey's business community, the provincial middle classes and liberal intellectuals.

It is also important to note that the moderate and young leadership of the AKP had emerged by breaking ranks with the more Islamic Welfare party. It is the party's willingness to come to terms with the limits of Turkish secularism that substantially moderated its political philosophy. The Kemalist backlash against the Welfare party in 1997 had also created

a genuine sense of appreciation among moderately Islamic politicians for the benefits of liberal democracy.

This is also why after its landslide victory in November 2002, the AKP remained recommitted to the goal of joining the EU. The new government attacked corruption, supported compromise on Cyprus, and undertook further reforms of the Turkish judicial system, civil-military relations and human rights practices. By 2003, the Turkish economy had stabilized and inflation had been reduced to levels that allowed the authorities to lop off six zeros from the currency. By December 2004, the EU had concluded that Turkey had fulfilled the criteria necessary to begin accession talks, and the longstanding Turkish dream of joining the West seemed closer to fruition than ever.

Yet, it is too early to celebrate. The tormented saga of Turkey-EU relations is likely to continue in the near future. Ankara has yet to embark on a long and challenging process that may very well last a decade. In the short run, the most pressing problem facing Turkey is the unresolved conflict of Cyprus.

FOREIGN POLICY CHALLENGES

Having secured an opening of negotiations with the European Union, Ankara faces three foreign policy challenges: Iraq, Cyprus and the Armenian question. These challenges are made difficult because they are intertwined with domestic political considerations that sometimes go to the core of Turkish identity. Of these three challenges, Iraq is the one that can prove to be the most difficult and yet, in the long run, perhaps, the most rewarding.

The stakes in Iraq

Turkey has always been concerned about the future of northern Iraq, with its large Kurdish population, for two primary reasons: the activities of the Turkish Kurdish insurgent group, the PKK, and the growing self-confidence among Iraqi Kurds, especially after the U.S. invasion in 2003, and their desire and even small steps toward self-determination.

In the years since the onset of the Iran-Iraq War in 1980, northern Iraq was transformed into a zone where the central government in Iraq had little if any control. This benefited not only the local Kurds with their two respective political parties and militias, the Kurdistan Democratic party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), but also the PKK. As the PKK-led insurgency gained steam in Turkey in the 1980s, the group made use of northern Iraq as a rear base of operations and training. Turkish forces periodically crossed the border in hot-pursuit operations. Ankara has continuously complained about the inability of the Iraqi Kurdish groups to control the PKK's movements and infiltration into Turkey.

Following the end of the 1990–91 Persian Gulf war, Iraqi Kurds found themselves under attack once again by Saddam's troops. As Kurdish refugees streamed to the Turkish and Iranian borders, the victorious allies decided to establish a "no-fly zone" over northern Iraq and forced Saddam's regime to withdraw its troops from the area. This enabled the refugees to return to their towns and villages. From that point on until the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, the Iraqi Kurds have lived free of Baghdad's direct rule. U.S. and British warplanes flying from the Incirlik base in southern Turkey were used to implement this no-fly zone north of the 36th parallel in Iraq. Despite the occasional internecine fighting between the two major Iraqi Kurdish groups, the PUK and KDP, the Kurds of northern Iraq for some 12 years were able to develop their own institutions, build an educational system and, after the post-1996 UN administered oil-for-food program, even improve their economic environment.

In the absence of Iraqi authority and given the limited abilities of Iraqi Kurds to fight a battle-hardened PKK, the latter continued through the 1990s to use northern Iraqi territory. In 1999, the PKK leader residing in Damascus, Abdullah Öcalan, was forced out of Syria and, after an international odyssey, captured and brought to Turkey for trial. The PKK, in order to save their leader's life, decided to unilaterally declare a cease-fire and pull the bulk of its fighting forces out of Turkey into the remote and mountainous parts of northern Iraq. Today there are 3,000–4,000 PKK fighters remaining in Iraq. Recently, the organization has renounced its cease-fire. The resulting increase in violence and casualties has made the Turkish government increasingly concerned about the threat that the PKK presence in Iraq constitutes. With the Kurds in charge of northern Iraq under U.S. auspices, Ankara has multiplied its demands for the PKK to be eliminated, by force if necessary. Preoccupied by an Iraqi insurgency it cannot contain, Washington has declined to act against the PKK for the time being.

On the other hand, the no-fly zone has helped the emergence of a quasi-independent Iraqi Kurdish state. Turks are alarmed by Iraq's descent into chaos and the growing specter of the country splitting into three constituent parts: a Shi'a, a Sunni and a Kurdish region. The Kurds, having been the one group that unquestionably welcomed the American invasion of Iraq, have a great deal riding on making sure that future Iraqi institutions protect the rights of minorities such as themselves. With American help and as the best-organized group, they made sure that the new Iraqi state is slated to be a federal one that accords the Kurdish regional government significant powers over the north at the expense of the national government.

Initially Turkey opposed the creation of a federal arrangement in Iraq that provided robust powers to the Kurds for fear that Turkish Kurds would one day demand the same. Developments have forced Ankara to accept the realities on the ground. Now, the line Ankara claims it will not allow the Kurds to cross is outright Kurdish independence in northern Iraq. Complicating matters for the Turks is the existence of a Turkish-speaking Turcomen minority in northern Iraq. Although the Turcomen tend to exaggerate their numbers (in fact no more than 2%–3% of the total population), this

minority became an instrument through which Ankara could prevent Iraqi Kurds from gaining control of the oil-rich city of Kirkuk. During his rule, Saddam Hussein had deliberately engaged in a policy of ethnic cleansing by removing Kurds and Turcomen from strategically sensitive areas such as Kirkuk and replacing them with Arabs from other parts of Iraq. Both the Kurds and the Turcomen claim the city of Kirkuk.

The Turcomen are a domestic problem for the AKP government as hard-line political groups, including some in the military, have made it a litmus test by which the Turkish government's Iraq policy is to be judged. Tensions between some Turcomen groups, primarily the ones supported by Turkey, and the far more numerous Kurds threaten to involve Turkey directly in northern Iraq, especially if Kurdish attempts at repopulating Kirkuk lead to clashes. The government of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, therefore, has had to walk a thin line on Iraq and feels vulnerable to the vagaries of Iraqi political developments.

There are also opportunities for Turkey in Iraq. Iraqi Kurds are anxious to have good relations with Ankara. Turkey represents their only connection to Europe and the West. They, unlike their Sh'ia and Sunni compatriots, tend to be secular and Western oriented. Hence a policy of Turkish support for Iraqi Kurds can in the long run provide important dividends. It could convince the Kurds to give the new Iraqi constitution a chance for success before bolting from the federation and provide Ankara with a buffer zone between Turkey and the more fundamentalist Iraqis, as well as an important trading partner.

Cyprus

Ever since the 1974 Turkish intervention in Cyprus, that island nation has been divided into two sections: a Greek and a Turkish Cypriot one. Turks had intervened following a coup by extreme nationalist Greek Cypriots supported by the Greek military junta in Athens. The island had already suffered from interethnic conflict almost since gaining independence in 1960.

Since 1974 different intermediaries have tried to bridge the gap between the two sides. For many years, it was the Turkish Cypriot side, usually backed by Ankara, that proved to be intransigent. The Turkish Cypriot leader, Rauf Denktash, had mastered the art of saying no by insisting on the recognition of a separate Turkish Cypriot state alongside the Greek one. No one except for Turkey recognized Denktash's Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). Instead, the international community treated the TRNC, with its 30,000 Turkish troops, as occupied territory and a pariah and refused to trade with it. By contrast, the Greek Cypriots were officially recognized as the legal government on the island. In the years since 1974, the Greek Cypriot side has flourished economically, whereas the Turkish side has languished. As Turkish Cypriots emigrated in pursuit of jobs and a better life, Ankara replaced them with settlers from Turkey not to undermine the roughly 80%–20% ethnic balance.

Two developments provided an impetus for a change in the stalemate. The first was the EU's decision to offer membership to Cyprus. While made to the legal Greek Cypriot government, this offered the prospect of membership to the Turkish Cypriots provided the two sides agreed to resolve their dispute peacefully in time. In effect the Europeans were gambling that the prospect of EU membership would provide a solution to the security concerns of both sides. For the Turkish Cypriots this also represented an inducement in the form of significant economic progress.

A second impetus for change came from the AKP's victory in the November 2002 elections. Under Erdogan, the AKP government was far more willing to compromise on Cyprus than previous governments. Erdogan and the AKP saw Cyprus as an impediment to Turkey's own accession prospects. The AKP was far more serious about joining the EU than its predecessors had ever been. The EU had made it clear that as long as Ankara proved to be a barrier to a solution on the island, it had little chance of opening accession negotiations.

Simultaneously, the UN was actively working to negotiate a final resolution before the May 2004 entry of Cyprus into the EU. Dubbed the Annan Plan, a series of UN-sponsored packages were negotiated. The final Annan Plan called for a loose confederation on the island, made up of the two constituent parts of Cyprus that promised them complete autonomy in most matters. The plan was put to a referendum on both sides of the island with the understanding that were both sides to approve it, then they would both enter the EU as one.

An overwhelming majority of the Turkish Cypriots approved the plan. By contrast, the Greek Cypriots, who had just elected a hard-line president in Tassos Papadopoulos, did the opposite and turned down the plan. However, a rejection of the Annan Plan did not prevent the Greek part of Cyprus from joining the EU. The overwhelming no vote in southern Cyprus revealed that the Greek Cypriots were having difficulties in accepting their Turkish counterparts as anything but a minority on the island.

This is where the new challenge lies for the Erdogan government. Having gambled a great deal on Cyprus, it has little to show. The Turkish Cypriots, despite their accommodating stand, remain shut out of international markets, which makes their economic recovery difficult, if not impossible. Moreover, the EU-member Greek Cypriots can influence the EU-Turkey accession negotiations and try to extract concessions from Ankara at every possible occasion. Turkey can no longer count on the EU to remain neutral in its dispute with Cyprus. Although Turkey has been reluctant to extend Greek Cyprus customs union privileges, as it should to every member of the EU, Brussels has ruled that Turkey has no choice

but to open its ports to Greek Cypriot commerce and merchant vessels. By contrast, Turkish efforts to relieve the pressure on Turkish Cypriots have fallen on deaf ears. The EU has even been unable to release the funds earmarked for aid to the Turkish Cypriots.

Whereas many Turks supported the EU process, the Cyprus imbroglio has soured feelings and undermined confidence in both the government and Brussels. It is quite possible that this new stalemate will continue for another decade until Turkey gets closer to EU accession, at which point Greek Cypriot perceptions of Turkey might change.

Armenian question

This challenge is on a much lesser scale than the preceding two. Armenian diaspora communities, with the backing of Armenia, have scored a number of symbolic victories against the Turks in their desire to get the Armenian genocide of the early 20th century recognized by different groups around the world. Ankara, which hitherto had completely dismissed Armenian claims, has recently changed tack, arguing that many Armenians lost their lives in 1915 but that this did not constitute genocide and that during World War I many Turks and residents of eastern Anatolia had also perished. And the Turkish government has actually called on scholars to ascertain the facts.

This has done little to stem the flow of Armenian requests for recognition, forcing Turkey to continuously mount a rearguard defense. Resulting diplomatic incidents are embarrassing, to say the least, as when ambassadors are recalled to protest the action of one parliament or another. The most serious incident occurred in 2000 when the U.S. House of Representatives almost passed a resolution recognizing the Armenian genocide, prompting threats of retaliation from Ankara. It was only President Bill Clinton's last-minute intervention that averted a showdown. While individual Turks support the Armenian arguments—and there are very few indeed who would—no Turkish government can do this for fear of opening a Pandora's box of restitution claims and the like.

Complicating matters even further is Turkey's solidarity with Azerbaijan. Armenia occupies some 20% of Azeri territory as a result of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. As long as this conflict remains unresolved, Ankara is unlikely to establish diplomatic relations with Armenia or open its borders as a gesture of goodwill.

The greater danger that the Armenian question poses for Turkey, apart from souring relations with the country, is that there is the potential of it becoming, in the hands of Turkey's European opponents, a powerful tool to resist Turkish accession to the EU. Already, demands that Turkey ought to recognize the Armenian genocide before it can ever join the EU are being articulated with increasing frequency.

U.S.-TURKEY RELATIONSHIP

Despite occasional ups and downs, the Turkish-American relationship has been a robust one. Until the end of the cold war, this relationship was anchored on NATO and the containment of the U.S.S.R. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Turkish-American relationship became more complex, richer and more nuanced. In Turkey, Washington saw both problems and enormous potential. Some of the problems were in part new. In the post-cold-war world new issues had emerged: greater ethnic and religious revivalism created problems for many nations around the world. Turkey suffered from both: the conservative secular establishment was confronted with both Kurdish and Islamic challenges. The preoccupation with these two challenges cast a shadow over all other issues and undermined core institutions. Continuous high inflation and a propensity for economic crises further accentuated Turkey's predicament.

These shortcomings stood in the way of Turkey's promise. For Washington, Turkey's geopolitical position—its presence at the cusp of three strategic regions, the Middle East, the Caucasus and Central Asia and the Balkans—meant that it had the potential to play a stabilizing and leadership role there. Turkey was a democracy—though in need of help given the country's predilection for military coups—with a market economy and an industrial base waiting to be unleashed. The U.S. as a longstanding ally had tried to nudge Ankara forward. In the 1990s, Washington included Turkey among the 10 big emerging markets (BEMs) that would get special attention for improved economic ties and investments, advocated the building of oil and gas pipelines from the Caucasus to the Turkish Mediterranean coast and pushed for improved human rights practices. These persuasions had limited impact.

It is in the EU accession process that Washington saw an opportunity for Ankara to achieve what it had been unable to do in recent decades: democratize its political structure, improve its human rights record and liberalize and modernize its economy. Moreover, Turkey's EU path would also help resolve the age-long disputes with Greece over the Aegean Sea boundaries and the Cyprus issue. To that end, Washington actively championed Turkey's right to get a date for accession negotiations from a very reluctant EU. Most EU countries were dubious that Turkey could even implement the necessary reforms to become eligible for opening negotiations, much less ever become a member. For Washington, this push became one of the two most important foreign policy challenges vis à vis Turkey.

In many respects, this was a successful policy. Washington's pressure was critical in reversing the 1997 EU Luxembourg decision that by snubbing Turkey provoked a serious crisis between Brussels and Ankara. Without constant U.S. prodding, it is unlikely that the EU would have reversed this decision two years later. U.S. support for Turkey in the EU, which often antagonized the Europeans as interference in their domestic matters, was a bipartisan endeavor. The Clinton Administration's policies were pursued by its successor. Along the way, the Greek government's complete shift

from opposition to Turkey's accession negotiations to full support—for exactly the same reasons as the U.S.'s—was critical in swaying European opinion.

If support for Turkey's European vocation was one pillar of U.S. policy toward Ankara, the second was anchored in Iraq. From the end of the 1990–91 Iraq war to 2003, without Turkey's acquiescence, Washington's policy of containing Saddam Hussein would have been difficult, if not impossible, to implement. By providing a base for U.S. air operations over northern Iraq, Ankara enabled the U.S. to keep the Kurdish areas free of Iraqi repression and a haven for Iraqis fleeing the regime. This policy was quite controversial in Turkey, primarily because its opponents saw that Ankara was indirectly sowing the seeds of a future Kurdish state in northern Iraq. Washington, in appreciation of Turkish sensitivities, supported Ankara's policy against PKK violence and especially the efforts to shut down PKK operations in Europe that helped the organization mobilize resources and recruits. Ultimately, U.S. intelligence in 1999 found the PKK leader hiding in Kenya and delivered him to the Turks.

9/11 and Iraq war

U.S. preoccupations changed with 9/11. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq required Ankara's help. Ironically, this coincided with a change in government in Ankara as the Islam-influenced AKP assumed power. Although both military operations were extremely unpopular in Turkey and caused a rise in anti-American sentiment reminiscent of the 1960s, the Turkish government decided to cooperate with Washington. Turkish troops, under the NATO banner, rotated into the leadership of the peacekeeping operations in Afghanistan. However, the real crisis occurred over Iraq.

On the eve of the 2003 invasion, the Bush Administration sought to open a second front against Saddam Hussein. Washington went out of its way to court the AKP and its leader Erdogan despite the misgivings the Turkish military had about their Islamic origins. In view of the public mood, the Turkish government was at first reluctant to agree to Washington's demands. After arduous negotiations, the Turkish and U.S. governments came to an understanding for the 4th Infantry Division to traverse from Turkey's Mediterranean ports into northern Iraq. In exchange, the U.S. agreed to allow a significant contingent of Turkish troops to enter Iraq in its wake and take up positions in northern Iraq and also offered a significant aid package designed to offset the expected economic losses from the conflict. All that was left to do was for the AKP-dominated Parliament to approve what its government had agreed to. On March 1, 2003, to everyone's surprise, the Parliament turned down the agreement by an extremely narrow margin. The AKP government, which had pushed for the resolution, had misjudged how its own Parliament would vote. The rejection led to a crisis in Turkish-American relations; the Iraq invasion went ahead without a northern front and the U.S. came to rely heavily on Iraq's Kurds. Ankara effectively lost much of its bargaining power in determining the future course of developments in Iraq. Turks have cited perceived American support for Iraqi Kurds and Washington's refusal to take action against the PKK forces in northern Iraq as explanations for the March 1 rejection.

The current state of affairs in Iraq, however, is not a welcome development for Turkey. In reality, both the U.S. and Turkey share the same objectives in Iraq. They both would like to see the emergence of a secular and unified Iraq that is democratic and prosperous. They both fear the rise of fundamentalist ideologies, whether they be Sunni or Shiite in origin. Where Washington and Ankara disagree is on the contingencies. Turkey's greatest worry revolves around an independent Kurdish state, especially one supported by a U.S. Administration anxious to rescue something constructive from Iraq's ashes. For Washington, of course, failure in Iraq will have far wider consequences.

In the medium term, with success in the starting of EU accession negotiations, Washington hopes that a more self-confident Turkey will focus less on the Iraqi Kurds and more on resolving some of its domestic limitations. There is ample room for cooperation between the two in Iraq. Once Iraq is stabilized, Washington will want Turkey to play a greater political and economic role. Turkey is Iraq's most direct access to the West.

Finally, Iraq is not the only country where Turkey's role could be helpful to Washington, and ultimately the West in general. Iran and Syria, both direct neighbors, have proven to be difficult states. The Syrian regime has been weakened by its own miscalculations in Lebanon and is under intense Western pressure. Iran, with its attempt to build a nuclear infrastructure and a long record of obfuscation, is also the subject of combined Western pressure. What posture Turkey adopts with them could be critical. The Bush Administration was sharply critical of Ankara when Turkish leaders appeared to be backing Syria's president, Bashar Assad. Similarly Turkey has been reluctant to voice much criticism of the Iranian government. Here, too, Washington and Ankara need to establish a better dialogue and make sure they do not stray too far from each other because the stakes are high.

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