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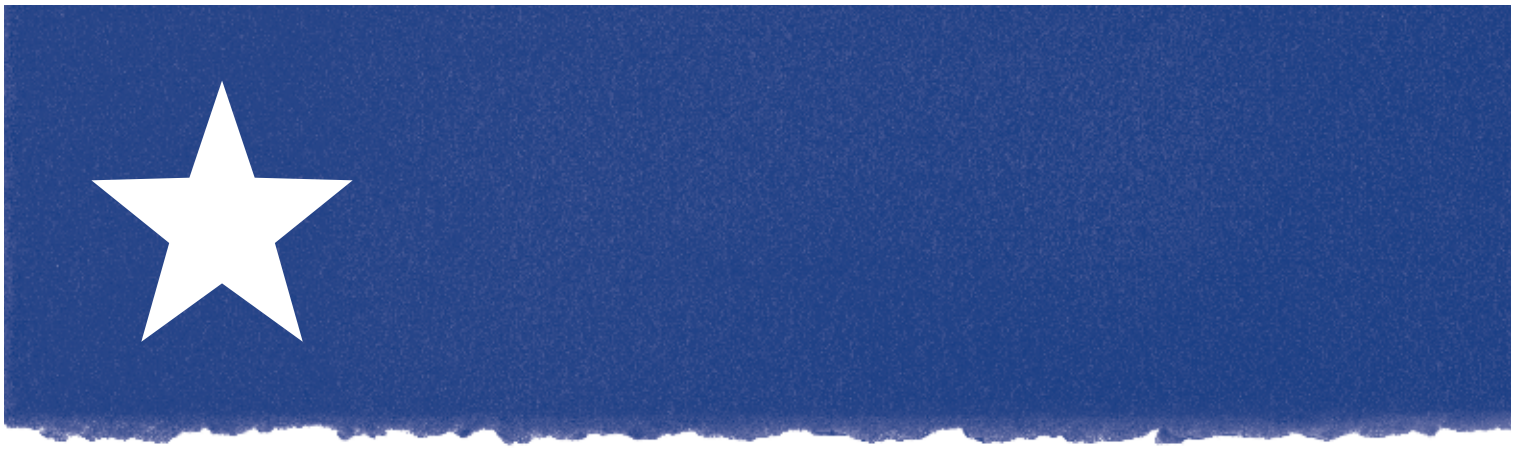

From Rhetoric to Reality: **Reframing U.S. Turkey Policy**

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BIPARTISAN POLICY CENTER

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Chapter 1: Executive Summary

Since its genesis during the Cold War, the U.S.-Turkey relationship has significantly evolved. Once in continuing need of foreign aid for development and to fend off Soviet encroachment, Turkey has risen to become the world's 17th-largest economy, a developing democracy, and a strong military ally and NATO member.

The foreign policies of the United States and Turkey have recently focused on the Middle East, and each has suffered serious setbacks. The region-wide political upheaval, which began more than two years ago, has given both countries an important interest in containing and minimizing the spreading instability and chaos. Today, to secure those interests, the United States and Turkey need a strong, cooperative partnership. But challenges to such a partnership have steadily mounted.

Over the past decade, the government of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) has impressively expanded trade and investment in regional economies while aspiring to replace the West as the major influence in the Middle East. It has sought alliances with regimes shunned by the international community, such as Iran, Syria, and Hamas; pursued sectarian policies supporting the Muslim Brotherhood across the region; given little support for important U.S. regional efforts, such as preventing a nuclear Iran; and broke off relations with America's other most important Middle Eastern ally: Israel. Washington, for its part, has hardly been a gracious partner, most recently misleading Turkey over its intentions in Syria, contributing to disastrous consequences for that country. Yet the reality of this underperforming relationship has been obscured by the effusive rhetoric American and Turkish officials alike deploy in describing their ties.

Although Turkey is politically and economically stronger and more dynamic than those countries caught up in the region's tumult, it does not stand apart. Due to its long border with Syria, government decisions by Ankara, and an already massive and growing refugee problem, Turkey has not been immune from the turbulence spreading through its neighborhood. This Syrian conflict, and the AKP's handling of it, has significantly divided the country and colored its approach to the rest of the region.

Indeed, Turkey's response to Syria forced a shift to sectarianism in the rest of Turkey's foreign policy, an approach that has only further diminished its influence in the region. And, with three elections—local, presidential, and parliamentary—looming in the next 18 months, Turkey faces growing political unrest, including among minorities badly affected by the Syrian civil war, and a faltering economy at home. Yet, the government's response to these challenges thus far does not inspire confidence; AKP officials have chosen authoritarianism and sectarianism over compromise and cooperation at almost every turn. In short, at precisely the time that the United States would most benefit from a strong and cooperative Turkey, Turkey's ability to fill that role has diminished. Meanwhile, the United States struggles, not too successfully, to articulate a coherent policy toward both Turkey and the broader region.

The United States needs to coolly examine these changing dynamics and adjust how it deals with Turkey. This task force—part of the Foreign Policy Project at the Bipartisan Policy Center—and report began as an examination of how Turkey was using its influence in the Middle East and how both countries could agree on and pursue shared objectives in the region. However, the events of the past year—the Taksim Square protests in Turkey, the Turkish government's incomplete peace process with its Kurdish minority, Turkey's deepening sectarian schisms, the military ouster of Mohamed Morsi in Egypt, and the deepening disaster in Syria and

Bashar al-Assad's use of chemical weapons, as well as the subsequent U.S.-Russian deal—have led the task force to conclude that, after a decade of focusing largely on Turkey's role in the region, American policymakers should focus more on the stability of Turkey's political institutions, the freedom of its society, and the dynamism of its economy. The state of Turkey's domestic politics is of vital importance to its future political stability, its economic growth, its ability to wield influence in the region, and, therefore, its ties to the United States.

Turkey's Current Situation

The AKP came to power more than a decade ago promising to carry out a "silent revolution" and to break with Turkey's Kemalist past—including the dominance of the military, strong ethno-nationalism, vigilantly guarded secularism, and a general reluctance to become involved in the Middle East.[1] During its first term, it largely lived up to this rhetoric. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the AKP government implemented some of the most thorough economic and political reforms in Turkey's history, which led to an extended period of high growth and broadened minority rights. It also, in a continuation of Kemalist policy, courted the European Union, beginning membership negotiations in 2005.

These early successes, however, are now in danger.

Foreign Policy

By 2007, the geographic focus of Turkey's foreign policy had shifted eastward. Under a strategy developed by its foreign minister, Ahmet Davutoloğu, and termed "zero problems with neighbors," Turkey began building relationships in the Middle East—with Alawite-dominated Syria, Iraq, Shiite Iran, Sunni Hamas, and other countries—seeking to establish itself as a regional power. Increasingly, Turkey's policies began to diverge from those of the United States, even when the two partners claimed to share the same goals. But, a wave of political upheaval swept through the region, seriously complicating Turkey's attempts to cultivate strong relationships with Middle Eastern regimes and forcing the AKP to chart a new foreign policy course.

Having to choose between supporting regimes—such as that in Damascus, which repressed its citizens or the crowds demanding its ouster—Turkey pivoted to supporting the people. Amid the political movements shaping the region, the AKP found allies among its ideological brethren: the Sunni Muslim Brotherhood and its various supporters. Worse, without any major international or, particularly, U.S. efforts to oust Assad or arm the rebels, Turkey has been lending support not only to the mainstream factions among the Syrian opposition but also to its most extreme elements, including the terrorist organization Jabhat al-Nusra, as the most effective anti-Assad forces in the country.

The AKP fully committed to its new sectarian policy, positioning itself as a "source of inspiration" for Sunni Islamist groups seeking, for the first time, to claim power in their countries. And when, Turkey hoped, the same political wave that carried the Muslim Brotherhood to victory in Egypt brought its other Sunni allies to power, Ankara would have a number of client states in the region looking to the AKP for political support and guidance.

Just as "zero problems" did not give Turkey the influence it expected, this sectarian turn has also borne little fruit. The failure to overthrow Assad and of the Muslim Brotherhood to hold on to power in Egypt has left Ankara with even fewer friends and less sway in the region than before, undermining its regional ambitions. One of

Turkey's few remaining functioning relationships is with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in northern Iraq. Yet, this sole success story of Turkish foreign policy puts it askew of current U.S. policy, which is to support the Iraqi central government in Baghdad despite its affinity for Iran and support of Assad.

Publicly at least, the Turkish government appears unconcerned about these developments. "This," in the words of Ibrahim Kalin, one of Erdoğan's chief foreign policy advisors, "is a worthy solitude."[2]

Domestic Policy

Turkey's domestic development has also suffered setbacks. After a decade of significant economic growth and considerable democratization, Turkey's reforms, European integration efforts, and economy have slowed considerably. At the same time, the unpopular Syrian war, the AKP's expanding Islamist political agenda, and Erdoğan's personalist and authoritarian ruling style are deeply polarizing the country.

Successive AKP electoral victories, Erdoğan's personal involvement at all levels of policymaking, and his proud, but mercurial, personality have led him to believe he has a mandate to remake Turkey, regardless of strong opposition to his views. From his decisions about urban design to his pronouncements about how Turks should conduct their lives, the Islamic orientation of his political vision has also become more apparent. The government has increasingly sought to muzzle any disagreement with its policies by reining in press freedom—by bringing criminal and civil cases against journalists, harassing media outlets with raids on their offices, charging fines, and friendly hands taking over or temporarily closing newspapers. Turkey is now ranked 154th out of 179 countries on the World Press Freedom Index, six spots behind Russia.[3]

Such politically motivated harassment, arrests, and convictions have not been limited to the media, however. The AKP has conducted several large-scale criminal trials for coup plotting—known as "Sledgehammer" and "Ergenekon"—targeting primarily the military, in an effort to diminish its political power in Turkish society and its frequent propensity to intervene in politics, including as recently as 1997. They have led to the arrest, detention, prosecution, and imprisonment of hundreds of high-ranking military officials and AKP critics. Not all were innocent; the senior military hated the AKP. But the trials have raised concerns about due process, civil rights, and judicial neutrality.

Erdoğan's style of rule—viewed by many Turks as an authoritarian swerve from the democratic reforms that marked AKP's first years in power—sowed the seeds of dissent. In May 2013, those seeds blossomed in Gezi Park. Protests initially sparked by the government's planned razing of this rare green space in Istanbul soon spilled into the adjacent Taksim Square and spread to many parts of the country.

But rather than calm tensions, Erdoğan chose to solidify his base and rally his very sizeable group of core supporters. His combative rhetoric cast the unrest in sectarian terms and himself as the bulwark protecting observant Sunnis from their enemies. Officials have blamed seemingly every ethnic and religious minority within Turkey for having a hand in the protests. Such narratives have only further polarized Turkish society, not simply between secular and religious, but between the conservative Sunnis whose interests the AKP government protects and all other segments of Turkish society who feel their rights are being trampled. Further social tension has been created by the Turkish government's aggressively pro-Sunni policy in Syria, as Erdoğan has at times accused Turkey's Alevis of

supporting Assad due to "sectarian solidarity" with Syrian Alawites, misleadingly equating the two sects.[4]

Turkey's domestic uncertainty, and its government's strong-handed response to recent protests, has also served to roil the economy. After nearly a decade of explosive growth, Turkey's economy has slowed dramatically, though it is still performing well compared with most of Europe, and faces several challenges. The prospect of climbing interest rates in the United States, investors' worries about the stability of Turkey's political climate, and Erdoğan's own tirades against bankers are reducing the short-term capital flows that Turkey's economy depends on and driving up exchange rates. These negative trends are intensifying structural problems—such as growing current account deficit and foreign indebtedness—that the government has ignored for too long. If Turkey's economy continues to worsen, it will weaken the government ahead of elections and further reduce Turkey's regional standing.

The major bright spot in Turkey, the ongoing peace process with the Kurds, remains politically volatile. The AKP's laudable effort to end the decades-long conflict with Kurdish militants has created an important opportunity not just for peace, but also for expanded civil and political rights for all of Turkey's minorities. The package of political reforms recently introduced by the government, although carefully orchestrated to keep this process from failing, has been dismissed by Kurdish representatives as not going far enough and by others as more beneficial to the AKP faithful than to Turkey's minorities.[5] These limited reforms and the inclusion of concessions for its Islamic supporters—such as lifting the ban on headscarves in public institutions—reflect the difficult political choice facing the AKP: continuing toward peace will anger Turkey's nationalists; but failing to live up to its agreement could lead to a new wave of Kurdish violence. So far, however, Kurdish leader Abdullah Öcalan has shown no sign of disrupting negotiations or returning to violence.

The AKP no longer seems invincible or inevitable, perhaps setting the stage for another period of uncertainty in Turkish politics, with the possibility of more outbursts of public frustration and more potential political challenges to its rule. With a series of elections looming—three in the span of the next 18 months—Turkey is approaching an inflection point. To one side lies the chance to finally address some of the republic's remaining democratic deficits—especially the role of ethnicity in national identity and civil rights—that have been made even starker by recent political protests. But the alternative is for Turkey to fall victim to some of its unresolved social tensions, potentially destabilizing the country and setting back its political and economic progress as well as its aspirations for regional influence. President Abdullah Gül neatly summed up the challenges facing Turkey in a recent speech, and hinted at a schism within the AKP, declaring, "polarization obviously has the potential to harm the social cohesion of our people."[6]

Implications for U.S. Policy

Turkey has been left with little political capital to expend on influencing events in the Middle East. After a period during which Ankara pursued the vision of "zero problems with neighbors," it now has nothing but problems. It has called for the ouster of Syria's Assad, refused to recognize the legitimacy of Egypt's new military government, cut off diplomatic ties with Israel, angered Iran with its acceptance of a NATO radar installation and its support for Syrian rebels, quarreled with the Iraqi central government in Baghdad, angered key Gulf states over its support for Muslim Brotherhood movements throughout the region,

and alienated Europe with unfounded accusations and conspiracy theories. In October, it shocked its NATO allies by announcing that it would procure a missile-defense system from a Chinese company that is under U.S. sanctions for its dealings with Iran.[7]

Yet, Turkey's ability to rebuild its regional standing will be affected by domestic considerations. This summer's domestic turmoil has cast some doubt on its social, political, and economic stability at a crucial period for Turkey's political development: three elections in the span of 18 months amid rising political tension, a historic attempt at peace with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), and a slowing economy. But it is precisely Turkey's blend—adroitly managed by the AKP at the beginning of its tenure—of democratic government, a diverse society, Islamic heritage, and strong economy that produced its enhanced standing in the region and the chance to serve as a source of inspiration for aspiring democracies. Unless Turkey is able to hold on to both the political and economic dynamism of the last decade, it is unlikely to regain its regional standing.

Whereas recent years have seen policy divergences between Washington and Ankara, a new dynamic has recently been added on top of these disagreements: a mismatch between the needs, capabilities, and ambitions of both partners. Just as America's need for a reliable partner in the Middle East has peaked, amid the political upheavals sweeping through the region, Turkey's ability to exert political influence in the area is ebbing.

Yet, American policymakers have not, publicly at least, recognized this new set of challenges facing the U.S.-Turkish relationship. Washington, for the most part, continues to lavish Turkey with praise, despite mounting disagreements and concerns with Turkish policies. Even Ankara's role in fanning the flames of extremism in Syria—one of America's chief concerns there—has elicited relatively muted response from Washington. Focusing instead on admittedly close cooperation on terrorist threats elsewhere, Secretary of State John Kerry recently announced a U.S.- and Turkish-led fund to combat violent extremism, declaring, "Turkey has been and will continue to be a very valued partner in this effort."[8]

The persistence of excessive U.S. rhetoric despite these concerns, and attention solely to other areas of partnership, is a testament to the importance Washington attaches to the relationship with Turkey. But it also serves to obscure the reality of a partnership that is underperforming and to hinder any attempts at improving it.

Inflated Turkish rhetoric has also contributed to the current state of the relationship. AKP leaders delight in pronouncements about their attachment to democracy, secularism, and the Western alliance, pronouncements that are increasingly divorced from reality. At the same time, Erdoğan and other influential AKP leaders continually indulge in inflammatory rhetoric and unfounded conspiracy theories. As President Obama made clear in his recent address to the United Nations General Assembly, such an irrepressible predilection for demagoguery has "a practical impact on the American people's support for our involvement in the region, and allow leaders in the region—as well as the international community sometimes—to avoid addressing difficult problems themselves."[9]

Recommendations

The Middle East remains a major foreign policy challenge for the United States, despite attempts to pivot away from it. A cooperative and strong Turkey could be an important partner in helping rebuild the Middle East. Indeed, there

is no other country in the region that the United States can turn to that could potentially play as constructive a role as Turkey might be able to. But for now the reality is different.

This is not the first time that Washington and Ankara have faced turbulence in their relationship, and the task force believes that, as they have in the past, these ties can be reforged. But we also believe accomplishing that now will require a different approach by Washington to the relationship with Turkey. American policymakers should recognize these differences and the challenges currently facing Turkey and their implications for greater U.S.-Turkish cooperation. Rather than eliding these concerns, U.S. policy should move away from rhetoric and toward a realistic assessment and dialogue about the state of the relationship with Turkey.

Reframe U.S. Turkish Policy

- *Focus on Turkey's domestic stability and democratic process*: Which direction Turkey's domestic political development follows is an increasing concern not just for Turks but also for the United States. Practically, this means that Washington should be open with Ankara about its concerns about issues like press freedom, freedom of assembly, rule of law, and the Turkish government's increasing sectarianism. American officials should obviously also recognize, praise, encourage, and aid in any way possible positive developments in these areas.
- *Replace rhetoric on both sides with more candid discussion*: Sometimes, when the bloom is off the rose, it is better to stop gilding the lily. This is one of those moments. Failing to enumerate and discuss serious differences with Turkey at appropriate times creates the risk that they could come back to haunt either party at a later time. Moreover, too often the lack of U.S. criticism is interpreted in Turkey as implicit endorsement of the government in Ankara and its policies, leading the regime to believe that it will enjoy unwavering U.S. support regardless of its actions. The high regard that Turkey, and Erdoğan personally, places on U.S. praise, on the other hand, means that a frank discussion of disagreements, although it might not be immediately welcomed by Ankara, can help motivate greater cooperation—especially on Turkey's stalled democratization. The United States should also continue to point out to AKP leaders the damage their rhetoric does to Turkey's image.

Support Turkey's Development

The United States should support and encourage the continued improvement of Turkey's democratic institutions, opening of its civil society, and modernization of its economy. This should include:

- *Support for democratization*: American officials should publicly encourage the Turkish government's attempts to address its democratic deficit, especially in relation to minority groups and political freedoms. Improvement is essential. Particularly important is the ongoing Kurdish peace process, which American policymakers should continue to support and encourage. The positive impact its resolution could have on U.S. assistance in other matters, especially attempts to resolve energy disputes between the central government of Iraq and its Kurdish population, is critical to further Turkish economic dynamism.
- *Stand up for civil and economic freedom*: Washington should speak out against the imprisonment and firing of journalists, the targeting of businesses belonging to opposition figures for arbitrary audits and investigations, and other means of muzzling dissent that are being employed in Turkey. Turkish progress in these areas should be tied to U.S. support for including Turkey in international trade negotiations.

- *Engage a wider cross-section of civil society*: American officials ought to engage, at the appropriate level, with all segments of Turkish society—including minorities, youth, and all political parties.
- *Encourage EU membership*: Although Turkish EU membership is unlikely in the near future, the United States should nevertheless continue to support Turkish EU accession and to press both Turkey and America's European allies.
- *Include Turkey in transatlantic free trade*: The United States should work with Turkey to find a way to address its concerns about the ongoing Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) negotiations.
- *Help Turkey with Syrian refugees*: The United States should increase its contribution to United Nations' refugee funds, and top American officials should help generate greater humanitarian efforts from other governments, particularly those from Gulf countries.

Set Realistic Foreign Policy Expectations

The United States should moderate its expectations for Turkish assistance in the broader Middle East, focusing instead on areas where Turkey is realistically able to assist, notably Syria, Iraq, Israel, and Iran:

- *Encourage support for moderates in Syria*: The United States should continue to pressure Ankara to be accountable for its support of extremist elements within the Syrian opposition—support that Turkey denies but apparently is currently reconsidering—and redouble its own efforts to work with Turkey and other friendly states to build up and strengthen Syria's more moderate, pragmatic, and non-jihadist opposition. Realistically, American policymakers should understand that, in all likelihood, Turkey will only become more cooperative on this front if the United States increases the assistance it provides to the mainstream Syrian opposition.
- *Cooperate on common approach to Iraq*: The United States and Turkey share a common interest in bolstering a strong, stable, Western-oriented, autonomous Kurdish region—ideally, within the context of a unified Iraq where the influence of both Iran and al-Qaeda are severely constrained. Each country has pursued this goal in different ways; both have failed. The Syrian conflict has made this objective even more difficult. Washington and Ankara must engage in a sustained strategic dialogue on the future of Iraq with the aim of developing a common approach to such vital issues as the future of Kurdish energy exports to Turkey; the Kurdish region's political, economic, and military relations with the Iraqi central government; and the establishment of an effective government in Baghdad that is neither under the sway of Tehran nor in support of Assad. Failure here could be catastrophic.
- *Finish reconciliation with Israel*: Recognizing that the current Turkish government is unlikely to have cordial relations with Israel, American policymakers should nevertheless encourage Turkey to conclude the ongoing reconciliation talks and reestablish diplomatic ties with Israel—in accordance with the understanding that was personally brokered by President Obama during his visit to Israel earlier in 2013.
- *Engage Turkey on Iran*: American policymakers need to engage Turkey on the topic of Iran. Keeping Ankara informed of progress in diplomatic negotiations could avoid the sort of miscommunication that led to the 2010 failed Turkish-Brazilian-Iranian agreement, contribute to increased Turkish adherence to sanctions, and engender goodwill. The United States should also use this as an opportunity to raise the possibility that it might be required to use force to prevent a nuclear

Iran and discuss what that means for the U.S.-Turkish relationship and what help the Turks could provide in such an event.

- *Reopen dialogue on Cyprus*: The United States should use the recent discovery of significant gas reserves off the Cypriot coast as motivation for Turkey to offer a more conciliatory stance toward Cyprus. Similarly, it should leverage the recent fiscal crises in both Athens and Nicosia to overcome Greek and Greek Cypriot opposition to further negotiations, which has been the main obstacle recently. The United States should create a new high-level envoy to work with both sides and the United Nations to restart talks and seek a resolution to this issue.

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Chapter 2: Where Do U.S-Turkish Relations Stand?

After 65 years, Turkey remains a critical NATO ally of the United States. No longer, however, is Turkey a weak country desperate for foreign assistance. It has come into its own as a political and economic power, especially over the last decade under the rule of the AKP and Prime Minister Erdoğan.

The official ties between Washington and Ankara reflect this new dynamic. Turkey has emerged as an influential, vibrant, dynamic, and prosperous country in the region, and, recognizing this achievement, American policymakers have come to expect that Ankara would assume a role commensurate with its new standing. As Assistant Secretary for European Affairs Victoria Nuland told the Senate during her confirmation hearings, Washington's view has been that, "our alliance and relationship with Turkey is absolutely critical not only in the Eurasian space, but also in all the work that we're doing now in the Middle East and North Africa."[10]

History and Significance of U.S-Turkish Relations

The U.S.-Turkey relationship drew its early strategic importance from the emerging Cold War, but since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the relationship has developed to encompass more than just security concerns.

Alarmed by Soviet ambitions to expand their sphere of influence south of the Black Sea, the United States—in what would become the opening salvo of the Cold War—invested heavily in ensuring Turkey did not fall into the Soviet Union's orbit. At the time, in President Truman's words, Turkey was in the process of "effecting that modernization necessary for the maintenance of its national integrity." It was that integrity, which he believed was "essential to the preservation of order in the Middle East," that he sought to preserve with economic and military assistance.[11]

Turkey, for its part, readily joined the anti-communist alliance, becoming a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1952. This was a reflection not just of the perceived Soviet threat, but also of Turkey's general political orientation at the time. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the father of the modern Turkish republic, sought to create a Western-oriented, ethnically defined, secular, nation-state.

Kemalism, Atatürk's ideology, was founded on the premise that the Ottoman Empire's failures were due to its Islamic character and multinational composition, which impeded scientific progress and centralized bureaucratic rule.[12] In order for the modern Turkish state to be successful, in Atatürk's view, Turkey had to be remade into a "powerful, technologically capable, and centralized state in tight control of a territory containing a homogenous population."[13] Accomplishing this transformation required, according to Atatürk, not just importing Western political models and scientific knowledge but also a complete disengagement, geographically and culturally, from the Middle East. Turkey's Cold War leaders embraced this directive.

The end of the Cold War fundamentally altered Turkey's strategic environment, but not the importance Ankara and Washington accorded to their relationship. Nevertheless, the demise of the Berlin Wall and the bipolar world it had connoted challenged the Republic's traditional aversion to Middle Eastern engagement, beginning with the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. The crisis revealed deep divisions within Turkey's elite: the military establishment adamantly counseled against joining a military attack on Turkey's immediate neighbor; much of both elite and public opinion agreed. Yet President Turgut Özal saw the opportunity to help Turkey find a new role in the

post–Cold War world while advancing Turkish interests in maintaining a diversity of energy suppliers by preventing Saddam Hussein from gaining control over greater oil reserves. But, although he strongly supported joining the international war effort, Özal could not entirely override the military's objections to allowing Turkish troops to participate in the U.S.-led coalition. The extent of Turkish support for Operation Desert Storm, therefore, was to allow coalition forces to operate from Turkey's bases and airspace.[14]

This ushered in a new period of U.S.-Turkish security cooperation, with Turkey proving itself an important NATO ally due to both its robust military and critical geostrategic position. Turkey has lived up to this role, contributing to several NATO operations in the Balkans, including: Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Macedonia. It has also participated in NATO naval operations in the Mediterranean and off the Horn of Africa, as well as joining in Baltic air policing, training Iraqi security forces, and the Libya no-fly zone. Perhaps most importantly for the United States, Turkish troops not only joined NATO-led efforts in Afghanistan, they were the first to head the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) Operation in 2002 and again in 2005, but did not participate in combat operations.

Ankara has benefited from this alliance as well. It requested and received Patriot missile batteries during the Gulf Wars of 1991 and 2003, as well as in 2012 after coming under artillery fire from Syria. NATO has been, in the words of Turkey's foreign minister, "one of the main pillars in our strategic planning and vision in Turkey."[15]

But as Turkish institutions have matured and the geopolitical landscaped has evolved, the U.S.-Turkish relationship has extended beyond just security cooperation. Since the end of the Cold War, the United States has also seen Turkey as a political ally—a democracy in a region with a notable democratic deficit, a stable partner amid fast-shifting sands.

Following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, the Bush administration accorded significant importance to Turkey as a "moderate Muslim" country, demonstrated by a series of visits between Laura Bush and Erdoğan's headscarf-wearing wife, Emine Erdoğan, and Turkey's inclusion in the 2004 G8 Summit in Sea Island, Georgia, which produced the Partnership for Progress and a Common Future with the Broader Middle East and North Africa.[16]

The significance accorded Turkey in U.S. efforts to understand and influence Islamic societies would grow further under the Obama administration. President Obama's first foreign visit included Turkey, where he both acknowledged that trust in the United States "has been strained … in many places where the Muslim faith is practiced," and announced that "our partnership with the Muslim world is critical."[17] Indeed, Obama found a partner in Erdoğan, one of five world leaders with whom he built, in his words, the strongest "friendships and bonds of trust."[18] With Turkey as one of only two—and the only Muslim—democratic Middle Eastern allies, the United States hoped it would become an important wellspring of democratic values and stability, especially as political unrest seized the region.

Current Status of the Relationship

The strength and significance of the U.S.-Turkish relationship, however, have not shielded it from disagreements and turbulence. The United States has never found great favor in Turkish popular opinion. Indeed, support for the United States among the Turkish public has fallen steadily over the years. Occasionally public pressure, difference in perceived interests, or both have kept Turkey's leaders from backing their U.S.

partners. The United States, additionally, has hardly been a gracious partner, ignoring Turkish appeals if they did not suit U.S. interests.

The relationship entered just such a rocky period in 2003, when Turkey denied American troops basing rights ahead of the invasion of Iraq. Washington, or at least its rhetoric, recovered from this disappointment, both because it lacked other regional partners and because of Turkey's political and economic rise in the subsequent years. But the friendly pronouncements by both the Bush and Obama administrations have belied a lack of real cooperation. The United States was slow to assist Turkey with its major concern following the fall of Saddam Hussein—the resurgence of the PKK in northern Iraq. Erdoğan had to undertake a frantic trip to Washington in 2007 before the United States agreed to share actionable intelligence with the Turkish military. This was not an isolated case. Miscommunications and frustrations mounted on both sides on other issues, too: Hamas's assumption of power in Gaza; Iran's nuclear program; Israel; and, particularly, Syria.

The gulf between the rhetoric and reality of the U.S.-Turkish relationship continues today. But, whereas in recent years it resulted from policy divergences between Washington and Ankara, a new dynamic has recently been added on top of these disagreements: a fundamental mismatch between the needs, capabilities, and ambitions of both partners.

Just as America's need for a reliable partner in the Middle East has peaked, amid the political upheavals that have swept through the region, Turkey's influence in the region has ebbed. And, with three elections—local, presidential, and parliamentary—looming in the next 18 months, Turkey faces growing political unrest, including among minorities badly affected by the Syrian civil war, and a faltering economy at home. Meanwhile, the United States struggles, not too successfully, to articulate a coherent policy toward both Turkey and the broader region.

Both the United States and Turkey would benefit from moving their relationship back onto a more constructive track. Figuring out how to do so will first require better understanding the reality that underlies the official rhetoric.

Chapter 3: Turkey's Domestic Political Situation

After a decade of significant economic growth and considerable democratic reforms, Turkey is approaching an inflection point. To one side lies the possibility to finally address some of the modern Republic's remaining democratic deficits—especially the role of ethnicity and religion in national identity and civil rights—that have been made even starker by recent political protests and the spillover effects of the Syrian crisis. But the alternative is for Turkey to fall victim to some of its unresolved social tensions, potentially destabilizing the country and setting back its political and economic progress as well as its aspirations for regional influence. Recognizing these dangers, President Gül, in his last address to the Turkish Parliament, outlined the need for a politics of "normalization" in Turkey to increase social cohesion and avoid the problems plaguing Egypt and Syria.[19]

Whether Turkey is able to meet that objective and the direction that its domestic political development follows is a concern not just for Turks but also for the United States. Turkey's domestic vitality—its unique combination of secular, democratic governance, economic dynamism, and Islamic heritage—is also the source of its external strength. If this is compromised, so too will be Turkey's ability to conduct foreign policy and serve as a constructive partner for the United States.

Recent Developments

The AKP came to power more than a decade ago promising to carry out a "silent revolution" and to break with Turkey's Kemalist past—including the dominance of the military, strong ethno-nationalism, vigilantly guarded secularism, and a reluctance to get involved in the Middle East.[20] During its first term, it largely lived up to this pledge. Erdoğan's government implemented some of the most thorough economic and political reforms in Turkey's history, which led to an extended period of high growth, broadened minority rights, and allowed Turkey to officially begin negotiations for EU membership in 2005.

However, once the AKP's second term began, advances in Turkey's democratization and European integration slowed. These reversals, coupled with the AKP's increasingly Islamist agenda and majoritarian ruling style, led to Turkey's current domestic troubles and add to the uncertainty surrounding its upcoming elections.

The AKP's Rising Majoritarianism

The AKP's successive electoral victories, Erdoğan's personal involvement at all levels of policymaking, and his proud, but mercurial, personality have led to an increasingly majoritarian governing style. Erdoğan has interpreted the AKP's three electoral victories as a mandate to remake Turkey, regardless of strong opposition to his vision.

Turkey's progress toward EU accession and the political reforms required by that process have slowed. The brakes have been applied by both Europeans, particularly France and Germany, reluctant to let a Muslim nation into the Union, and the AKP, which came to view further progress on accession criteria as no longer in line with its own political vision. With no new chapters opened in 2011, Erdoğan declared that European nations were "determined to have Turkey give up its interest in joining the EU."[21] It appeared to do just that, as the AKP's focus shifted to consolidating its power and using the organs of the state to tamp down its critics, prosecuting the opposition on charges, not entirely unfounded, of coup plotting and exerting pressure on the independent media to toe the party line. Prime Minister Erdoğan publicly and repeatedly rebuked media outlets that criticized the government and urged the public to boycott them.[22] With control of the presidency, the AKP was able to put the

power of the state behind his admonitions, and, as a result, those media outlets that have not been co-opted by the state often practice self-censorship.

Without any strong opposition, Prime Minister Erdoğan has dominated the Turkish political scene. Called the "mayor of Turkey" by some, for his personal involvement at almost every level of governmental decision-making, Erdoğan wants to reshape Turkish society. From his decisions about urban design to his pronouncements about how Turks should conduct their personal lives, the Islamic orientation of his political vision has also became more apparent. Erdoğan has spoken of "the state's duty to raise religious generations," which has been coupled with legal reform to allow a greater role for Islam in the state and society.[23] The AKP has overseen a campaign to allow for more religious dress in the public sphere—including overturning the headscarf ban—while educational reforms in 2012 strengthened Islamic teaching in public schools, and, in 2013, the AKP passed several measures increasing restrictions on alcohol sale and consumption.

This style of rule—viewed by many Turks as an authoritarian swerve from the democratic reforms that marked the AKP's first years in power—forms the backdrop to the unrest that gripped Turkey in the summer of 2013.

Taksim Protests and Aftermath

As of May 2013, Prime Minister Erdoğan's continued dominance of Turkish politics seemed all but certain. Then, a minor protest over the pending destruction of a small, but rare, Istanbul green space—Gezi Park—was violently suppressed, unleashing a decade of pent-up political frustration. Those who felt excluded by the AKP's politics spilled into the adjacent Taksim Square to express their discontent. The protests spread across the country and lasted much longer than any observer could have predicted.

Almost as surprising as the protests was the government response. The protestors were met by riot police and even veiled threats from Erdoğan, who called the protestors "looters" who "burn and destroy," warned that the state's patience "had its limits," and invoked the AKP's widespread support and electoral victories, saying "we can assemble one million people where the opposition assembles 100,000."[24] The protests revealed potential fault lines among Turkey's leaders, as President Gül and Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç made more sympathetic statements.[25]

Rather than calm tensions and reach out to the opposition, Erdoğan has thus far chosen to solidify his base and rally the core supporters of the AKP. His combative rhetoric has increasingly cast the unrest in sectarian terms and himself as the bulwark protecting observant Sunnis from their enemies. At the same time, ruling officials have sought to undermine the legitimacy of the protests by suggesting that they were organized by any one of a myriad of shadowy groups, including the "interest rate lobby," German airlines, and Jews.[26] Another common conspiracy theory has been that the protestors were both secular extremists who attacked women in headscarves and Alevi agitators, possibly mobilized by Syria and Iran.[27]

Such narratives only serve to further polarize Turkish society, not simply between secular and religious, but between the conservative Sunnis whose interests the AKP government promotes and all other segments of Turkish society who feel their rights are being trampled. After Taksim, the AKP no longer seems invincible or inevitable, setting the stage for a period of greater uncertainty in Turkish politics, with the possibility of more outbursts of public frustration and potential political

challenges to the AKP, perhaps even from within the party. Still, it is hard to imagine at the current moment the emergence of any political force that could successfully compete with the AKP or would be able to govern any more competently, a profound obstacle to political change in Turkey.

Kurdish Peace Process

One positive development among the troubling backtracking on domestic reform has been the AKP's renewed efforts to resolve Turkey's Kurdish issue.

Following an aborted opening to the Kurds in 2009, the peace process was rejuvenated in 2013, with Erdoğan's government announcing negotiations with the PKK and its jailed leader, Abdullah Öcalan. The talks bore fruit, and, in a March 2013 letter to his followers, Öcalan declared an end to armed struggle and announced that the PKK sought a solution to the Kurdish issue through further democratization.[28] The rejuvenated peace process was envisioned with three phases: first, the withdrawal of PKK fighters from Turkey; second, the Turkish government undertaking reforms to address Kurdish concerns; and third, the reintegration of PKK members into Turkish society.

This peace process could be a major step toward fuller, more inclusive democracy and improved human rights in Turkey. It could also have significant impact on the shape of the region—opening the door for Turkey to deal constructively with Kurds in Syria and for an even stronger relationship with Iraq's Kurdistan Regional Government.

Success will prove a truly historic achievement for Erdoğan. But at least one of his motivations has been his own political ambition. Erdoğan saw the peace deal as critical to a proximate and personal goal—becoming the president with new, sweeping executive powers—one that has been made unattainable by the Taksim protests and erosion of the AKP's support.[29] With his ambitions to head a restructured Turkish government dashed, Erdoğan might lose interest in moving the peace process forward, as the votes of the Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) deputies will no longer suffice to secure his desired constitutional changes. Indeed, Erdoğan might decide that pushing for peace might cost him too many votes among Turkey's nationalists, who some believe strongly oppose greater recognition of Turkey's Kurds, in upcoming elections.

However, with the PKK threatening a new wave of violence if their deal with Erdoğan falls through, backing out now might also be politically dangerous.[30] Heading into the elections, resurgent instability will only hurt the AKP's chances of success. Turkish columnist Cengiz Çandar has captured this choice facing Erdoğan: "Will he deal with his stronger hand for a wider democratization to solve the Kurdish issue that will gain him enormous advantages especially in these most difficult days of his political career? Or, will he feel emboldened with his stronger hand and ignore the steps that will satisfy the Kurds but will get him into trouble with the nationalists just as he is courting them to form a new mass coalition?"[31]

Erdoğan cannot wait much longer to decide whether to proceed. The peace process is reaching a critical point with each side accusing the other of not acting in good faith and stalling the continuation of the process. The BDP has accused the government of inaction, asserting that Erdoğan does not believe "in a lasting peace," and the PKK has vowed to break their cease-fire if the Turkish government does not take action by October 15.[32] With this threat eliciting no response from the government, the PKK in early September announced that it would halt the withdrawal of its forces, though it would maintain the cease-fire.[33]

Yet, those closer to the peace process appear more optimistic. They suggest that government rhetoric is driven by Erdoğan's fear of losing electoral support among nationalists by being too conciliatory to Kurds and is meant to provide political cover while the peace process progresses under the radar. Studies finding broad public support, even among nationalists, for negotiations with the PKK might make it easier for Erdoğan to proceed.[34] Similarly, even if he is concerned about the political repercussions of a Kurdish deal, he need only stretch the process out several more months, until the local elections scheduled for March 2014, before he gains more room to maneuver. Öcalan, for his part, is likely motivated primarily by the desire to get out of jail and, therefore, will be loathe to sanction the PKK's return to violence. These dynamics suggest that the most likely scenario is slow movement on the part of the government and patience on the Kurdish side. Indeed, on September 30, Erdoğan unveiled a reform package intended to keep the peace process on track.[35]

Walking a political tightrope, the package included reforms designed to garner support among the AKP's Islamic base, such as lifting the headscarf ban for public institutions, as well as recommendations focused on keeping the Kurdish peace process from failing. The package includes: allowing for education in the mother tongue in private schools; restoring the original names of villages, districts, and provinces that were changed after 1980; removing the ban on letters included in the Kurdish alphabet but not the Turkish one; discontinuing the Turkish nationalist pledge said every morning in primary schools; and allowing for political campaigning in languages other than Turkish. Additionally, Erdoğan proposed, but did not make, several changes to the law on political parties and electoral law that would make it easier for Kurdish parties to enter parliament: either lowering the 10 percent threshold to enter parliament to five percent or eliminating it entirely in favor of a single member district system and lowering the threshold of electoral votes required for a party to receive federal funding from 7 to 3 percent.

AKP officials created soaring expectations for the reform package, promising a "continuation of the silent revolution" and lauded it as "the most comprehensive reforms" Turkey has seen and a "new, decisive phase in the democratization of Turkey."[36] However, in many areas, the reforms were seen as falling short. Those disappointed by the package point to both its content and its undemocratic creation, put forward unilaterally by the AKP without consultation with Kurdish and other minority groups.[37] The package failed to fully satisfy demands for Kurdish education, as critics point out that limiting Kurdish language education to private schools means that "only the rich Kurds can learn Kurdish."[38] Additionally, the reforms failed to touch Turkey's controversial anti-terror law and penal code or provide for the release of thousands of BDP partisans known as the Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK) detainees. Gültan Kışanak, BDP co-chair, said the proposals did not do enough to advance the peace process, and concluded that the package "is not a democratization package; it is an election package."[39] Another BDP lawmaker rejected the package as "just a maneuver" as "many of the changes were ones that the Kurds had already gained in reality."[40]

It remains to be seen whether the proffered reform package is enough to keep the peace process on track. If it is able to move forward despite the ongoing political tensions, it would signify a major accomplishment for Erdoğan and a significant step toward a more inclusive Turkey.

Prosecution of Military and Critics

The AKP has launched several large-scale criminal trials accusing primarily the military of coup plotting, in an effort

to diminish its power in Turkish society and its frequent propensity to intervene in politics. The investigations have led to the arrest, detention, and prosecution of hundreds of high-ranking military officials, journalists, and AKP critics. These interrelated trials dealt with, among others, the 2003 Operation Sledgehammer—an alleged military coup plot in response to the AKP's election—and an alleged secularist and ultra-nationalist terrorist network called Ergenekon.

In early August, Turkish courts handed down verdicts in the cases of 275 military and civilian figures accused of membership in Ergenekon. Out of the 275 defendants, who included both retired and active military personnel—extending to the highest levels of command—as well as government officials, members of the opposition, journalists, lawyers, and professors, only 21 were acquitted.[41]

In October, Turkey's Supreme Court of Appeals handed down verdicts on the appeals of 361 defendants sentenced in 2012 in connection with Operation Sledgehammer. The court approved the original acquittal of 36 suspects, overturned convictions for 63 defendants, and ordered the release of 25 suspects pending retrial.[42] The Court upheld the conviction of 237 defendants, including the most high profile military officers and opposition members.

At a particularly fragile time in Turkey's domestic politics, these cases have further split its already divided society. They have also revealed the ongoing weaknesses of the Turkish judiciary. While not all of those convicted in the Ergenekon and Sledgehammer trials were innocent, the Turkish military has a long history of intervening in government – as recently as 1997 – and senior military officials were staunchly opposed to the AKP, the proceedings were not impartial or exempt from political influence. The trials exhibited both evidentiary and procedural weaknesses, as well as raising concerns about due process, civil rights, and the freedom and independence of the press, undermining the AKP's assertions of judicial neutrality. The European Union, in its 2012 progress report, identified several concerns about the Ergenekon investigations and trials, including "lengthy pre-trial detention and long and catch-all indictments" and expressing concern over the role of the case in contributing to "the polarization of Turkish politics."[43]

The AKP has pronounced the trials a victory for democracy as they ended the military's historical immunity from prosecution and meted out punishment for those who would carry out insurrections against a democratically elected government. To many, however, the Ergenekon prosecutions were "politically motivated … an attempt to try to discredit and disable secularist opposition to the AKP and clear the way for … a more Islamic society and eventually an Islamic state."[44]

The Sledgehammer appeals verdict drew the same criticisms as the Ergenekon verdicts earlier in the summer: a political witch hunt carried out by the AKP against Turkey's military and secularists. Emine Ülker Tarhan, a CHP member of parliament, declared that the court's ruling "is not a verdict by the judiciary, it is a government verdict," and went on to assert that "justice has collapsed in this country."[45] Umut Oran, deputy chairman of the CHP added, "the Sledgehammer trial's outcome marks a definitive end to the notion of rule of law in Turkey and the establishment of the party state… it shows the party-state's ability to punish everyone with fake evidence that's contrary to intelligence, reason, and the law."[46]

Economy

The economy has been an important source of popular support for the AKP. It first came to power during a

financial crisis and soon oversaw an economic boom, with Turkey's gross domestic product reportedly growing at 8–9 percent annually. This strong growth, however, might be coming to an end. By 2012, the economy had begun to cool, growing by only 2.2 percent, which is still better than much of Europe. Problems both endemic to Turkey's economy and created by external dynamics could further slow growth in the coming year.

Turkey's explosive economic growth has been heavily financed by short-term capital flows from abroad and heavy borrowing by the government.[47] Now the former might be harder to obtain, due to both external and internal factors, and the latter becoming unsustainable.

In the five years since the beginning of the financial crisis, Turkey's economy has been aided by the large amounts of money that have been available for domestic investment. But the prospect of climbing interest rates in the United States is drying up this capital and driving up exchange rates. The Taksim protests, and the government's response to them, have also given investors reason to worry about the stability of Turkey's political climate. Government allegations that certain Turkish industrial conglomerates and banks helped orchestrate the protests, combined with probes into recent stock market transactions and currency trades that have been deemed suspicious, have rattled investor confidence. As a result, since the beginning of 2013, the Turkish lira has fallen more than 10 percent relative to the U.S. dollar.[48]

However, the macroeconomic challenges facing the Turkish economy are particularly salient. This year, the country's current account deficit has grown by almost 20 percent relative to last year. Turkey is a net-importer of oil and other energy sources, so while a weaker lira is making exports relatively cheaper, the falling Turkish currency is making imported oil more expensive. This, in turn, is driving up the costs of other imported goods. All of these bring concerns about inflation, which rose to 8.88 percent in August 2013.[49]

Since 2002, Turkey's foreign debt has nearly tripled to $350 billion in order to finance this current account deficit. Half this debt will have to be repaid or rolled over within the next year.[50] Fears about Turkey's ability to repay debt have contributed to the run on the lira and withdrawal of foreign capital. A $12 billion deal to develop a coal-powered project in Turkey, for example, collapsed recently when the project's foreign financiers pulled out of the deal.[51]

A growing economic concern for Turkish leaders is the negotiations for the U.S.-EU TTIP, which began in July without any formal mechanism for involving Turkey in the process.

Essentially a free trade agreement, TTIP would eliminate remaining customs duties, reduce non-tariff barriers to trade, improve the investment environment, and include new common regulatory standards to improve reciprocal trade and investment.[52] If enacted, it could have serious consequences for countries outside the agreement, especially Turkey.

Because of its Customs Union with the European Union and efforts toward EU accession, Turkey must abide by the European Union's commercial policies, even though it is not party to their creation. Thus, if TTIP were to come into force, Turkey would have to allow the United States preferential access to its markets, according to standards it was not involved in negotiating, without receiving similar access to U.S. markets in return. As it stands, Turkey is among the countries projected to experience a net loss of welfare from TTIP.[53]

If not addressed, Turkish frustration with the Customs Union—wider than simply TTIP—runs the risk of pushing

Turkey further away from the West. Turkey is reportedly considering leaving the Customs Union and considering membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.[54]

Turkey's economic performance will be an important consideration in determining its future. By rectifying the current negative trends—halting the depreciation of the lira and bringing the current account deficit under control—the AKP would address one source of political dissatisfaction and eliminate a potential political liability ahead of the upcoming elections. And if Turkey is included in an expansion of transatlantic trade, it might be better disposed to continue its cooperation with and connections to the West.

Erdogan's Political Future

In the aftermath of the Taksim protests and the lead up to the elections, Erdoğan's continued domination of the political sphere is by no means certain. As AKP rules bar him from running for Prime Minister again, Erdoğan planned to run for president in 2014, but only after significantly strengthening that position. However, the dramatically more powerful presidency that Erdoğan aspired to could only be created by either a super-majority in parliament or overwhelming victory in a popular referendum. The success of either of those tracks depended on strong Kurdish support that Erdoğan hoped to co-opt through the peace process. But his alarming response to the Taksim protests and perceived foot-dragging on the Kurdish opening only reinforced latent fears held by many Turks, including within the AKP as well as among Kurds, of his authoritarian tendencies. As a result, Erdoğan's hopes for an empowered presidency have withered.

What role he plays in Turkey's future will be determined by the three upcoming elections. Two factors will be pivotal: Erdoğan's personality, which will affect how he responds to Turkey's ongoing upheavals, and what position he decides to run for in the upcoming elections, which will determine how much power he will continue to wield.

Personality

There is broad agreement that Erdoğan has become not just personally involved in the minutia of day-to-day governance, but also increasingly less disposed to accept any disagreement with his decisions. There are, however, different assessments of the reasons behind this inflexibility.

Some argue that Erdoğan's strongman stance rests on the belief that his predecessors were destroyed because they were "soft." As Turkish Islamists would argue, Adnan Menderes (prime minister, 1950–1960) bent to pressures; he was hanged by the military in 1961. Turgut Özal (prime minister and president, 1983–1993) was pliable; he was poisoned in 1993 (though his death has remained unclear, his assassination is a common conspiracy theory accepted among Islamists). Necmettin Erbakan (Islamist prime minister, 1996–1997) did not stand up to the military; he was forced to resign in 1997. Erdoğan appears to believe that an unlikely assortment of domestic and foreign enemies was behind the Taksim protests; the obvious conclusion is that he must show strength and strike back hard to avoid meeting the fate of Menderes, Özal, or Erbakan.

According to this logic, his confrontational attitude, refusal to back down, and authoritarian streak are deep-seated, whether personality traits or, as others would argue, indicative of psychological pathologies. Those who question Erdoğan's mental health suggest that the conspiracy theories advanced by the government are a result of extreme paranoia and that Erdoğan's missteps in the handling of the Gezi protests are due

to pathologically extreme hubris and narcissism.[55] They also see these tendencies as reinforced by Erdoğan's position: distorted by ten years of power, surrounded by sycophants. If this view is correct, Erdoğan can be expected to continue flexing his political muscles, to an even larger degree than he has so far.

Others, however, view him as the ultimate political animal and interpret all his rhetoric and actions as aimed at securing the votes needed to remain in power. They see rhetorical excesses, whether during the Taksim protests, in stoking anti-Semitism, or on the Kurdish issue, as a calculated strategy to unify and rally the AKP base and conservative voters, with a conciliatory approach apparently deemed electorally counterproductive. In their view, Erdoğan is capable of change if the political dynamics demand it, perhaps if strongman tactics further fracture, rather than consolidate, the AKP coalition. If this explanation of Erdoğan's behavior is correct, he might be able to course-correct if his actions threaten to derail his political ambitions.

Ultimately, however, we believe there is little indication that such a course-correction will occur. It has been almost four months since the Taksim protests began, and so far Erdoğan has yet to show any sign of change, even though some in his coalition oppose his ways. He is strongly criticized by his once ardent supporters. There are even rumors that people in his party are not happy with the way things are. Indeed, Deputy Prime Minister Arınç tried to resign over the government's handling of the unrest but was later convinced to retain his position.[56]

In fact, similar predictions about the possibility for Erdoğan to change were made in the run-up to the 2011 elections. Already then, many Turkey observers expressed concern about the AKP's authoritarian turn and its increasingly conservative rhetoric. But defenders of the government deflected these criticisms, explaining away the AKP's alarming behavior as electoral posturing, and predicting that Erdoğan would change after the elections. This transformation never materialized. Even though Erdoğan won a landslide victory, it only helped to embolden him further.

Now, yet again, Westerners, and even some Turks, hold out hope that he changes. The only thing that might change, however, is the amount of power Erdoğan will wield after this series of elections. There exist several structural constraints on his ability to continue to unilaterally determine the course of Turkish politics. Here, Erdoğan faces yet another critical choice—either to play by the rules as they currently stand or seek to change them in order to retain his post as Turkey's most powerful politician.

Erdoğan's Next Act: President or Prime Minister?

The Taksim protests' most immediate implication is the end of Erdoğan's ambitions for a strong presidency. Not even his most ardent supporters now believe that Erdoğan could push through parliament the constitutional amendments—let alone a new constitution—needed to create the presidential system he desires.[57]

Moving forward, Erdoğan faces the novelty of having no good political options. As he clearly has no intention to retire, he essentially has two alternatives: seeking nomination to the presidency in 2014 under the current constitution, or staying on as prime minister and campaigning for a fourth term in 2015.

Seeking the presidency has two problems. First, while Turkey's president has considerable powers, the president does not control the government, the ruling party, or the flow of money in the country. Both Turgut Özal and Süleyman Demirel tried to appoint pliable placeholders as prime ministers, with mixed results.

Özal managed to run the country from the presidency for roughly two years. But in the end, both these presidents eventually lost control over their parties and the government. This is exactly why Erdoğan wanted to change the constitution.

While Erdoğan is unlikely to be able to create the strong presidential system he desires, there are more attainable constitutional amendments that could allow him to wield more power from the presidency. Under Turkey's constitution, the president must give up their political party membership. Amending this provision would allow Erdoğan to maintain his leadership and control of the AKP while serving as president.

Second, Erdoğan faces the challenge of what to do about President Gül. The Constitutional Court has ruled that he has the right to seek a second term, and Gül has indicated that he will not simply stand back for Erdoğan as he has done in the past.[58] He may be amenable to swapping positions with the prime minister—but again, this would prevent Erdoğan from maintaining control over the party and the government.

Indeed, the increasingly clear schism between Erdoğan and Gül has been one of the most politically salient developments to emerge from the Taksim protests. Gül's much more conciliatory tone toward the protestors has clearly put him at odds with Erdoğan and been interpreted by most Turkish commentators as positioning for a potential political competition between the president and prime minister.[59] More than just a personal rivalry, this tension represents a growing dissatisfaction with Erdoğan by one faction of the AKP: the Gülen movement. With Gül the most public representative of this influential Islamist group, the biggest political fireworks of Turkey's upcoming elections are likely to come from within the AKP.[60]

To avoid this showdown with Gül, Erdoğan may decide to stay on as prime minister. The main obstacle to this course is his own decision to impose term limits to all offices in the AKP, a principle he has repeatedly pledged to honor. Yet in practice, he could have that rule changed overnight, freeing him to campaign for a fourth term in 2015. He would only have to mitigate the damage to his prestige that such a move would generate. Here, continued unrest blamed on foreign forces may provide exactly the excuse needed to "maintain stability" by ensuring continuity. At present, this is the most likely scenario, but an electoral victory is by no means guaranteed.

Areas of U.S. Concern

While there has been unmistakable progress in democracy and human rights in Turkey during the last decade, several areas of concern remain. The United States has not been a strong critic of Turkey's domestic politics. But it has expressed concerns about the Turkish government's harsh response to the Taksim protests, saying: "We believe that Turkey's long-term stability, security, and prosperity is best guaranteed by upholding the fundamental freedoms of expression, assembly, association, and a free and independent media. Turkey is a close friend and ally of the United States and we expect the Turkish authorities to uphold these fundamental freedoms."[61]

Treatment of Minorities and Opposition

As it currently stands, the Turkish constitution—which does not recognize national, racial, or ethnic minorities—does not provide significant protections for minority rights. Moreover, the Constitutional Court has the power to close political parties for unconstitutional activities—a power that has historically been used against Kurdish and Islamist parties, including attempts to close the

AKP in 2008. Both these worrisome trends have been exacerbated by the recent unrest.

The only recognized minorities in Turkey are religious: Armenian Orthodox and Greek Orthodox Christians and Jews. Turkey's unrecognized ethnic and religious minorities, such as the Alevis and the Kurds, among others, suffer from restrictions of their cultural, religious, and linguistic rights. Non-Muslim religious communities face numerous difficulties in establishing or continuing to use places of worship, and the Turkish policy of including religion on state identity cards opens minority faiths to discrimination and harassment.

While the government has attempted to reach a peace with the Kurds, it has not done enough to address growing dissatisfaction among Turkey's largest minority population, the Alevis. Historically, the Turkish state has been complicit in mass deaths of Alevis.[62] Now, they worry that the Turkish government's aggressively pro-Sunni policy in Syria foreshadows coming repression of Turkish Alevis at home. Indeed, the Syrian conflict has inflamed Turkey's historic mistrust of its Alevi population as Erdoğan has accused Turkey's Alevis of supporting Assad due to "sectarian solidarity" with Syrian Alawites, despite the inaccuracy of equating the two sects.[63] The AKP poured further salt in old wounds by naming the third bridge to be built over the Bosporus after Yavuz Sultan Selim, who Alevis see as "one of history's greatest slayers of their co-religionists."[64] Another project in an Alevi neighborhood in Ankara, of a joint mosque and cemevi (Alevi house of worship) funded by Fethullah Gülen and supported by the AKP, has sparked street clashes between police and Alevis, who reject the project as purely symbolic and an expression of a continuing desire to "Sunnify" Alevis.[65]

The government's response to these tensions has only enflamed them further. Officials have blamed seemingly every ethnic and religious minority within Turkey for having a hand in the protests. Erdoğan first accused the Syrians, with Iranian funding, of agitating Turkey's Alevi population to protest. Later in June, Erdoğan's Deputy Prime Minister Beşir Atalay blamed Turkey's "Jewish diaspora" for inciting the protests.[66]

Erdoğan's accusations extend to the AKP's political opponents, especially the leading opposition Republican People's Party (CHP). The AKP has recently returned to Turkey's tradition of banning political parties and individuals: one ethnic Alevi member of the CHP was banned from parliament in early July for criticizing President Gül's choice in naming the Yavuz Sultan Selim Bridge.[67]

The European Union found in 2012 that overall, "Turkey's approach to minorities remained restrictive" and that "full respect for and protection of language, culture and fundamental rights in accordance with European standards have yet to be achieved."[68] The recently introduced reform package contains measures to address some of these deficiencies, but many of the minority-rights provisions that were expected to be in the package—such as reopening of the Halki Greek Orthodox seminary and greater rights for Alevis—were not included.[69]

Disappointed by the reform package, Ali Balkiz, a leader of the Alevi community, issued a statement concluding that "the mountain gave birth to a mole hill," as the package contained no measures regarding Alevi houses of prayer, compulsory religion courses in schools, or the makeup of the exclusively Sunni Directorate of Religious Affairs.[70] In a period where Turkey's Alevi population is increasingly agitated, the reform package represents a missed opportunity to address longstanding grievances.

Tensions in Hatay province, on the border with Syria, are especially acute. A part of Syria until 1939, Hatay's ethno-

sectarian composition mirrors that of its war-ravaged neighbor. Arab Alawites and Turkish Alevis residing in Hatay are dominantly secular supporters of the CHP and remain staunchly opposed to the AKP's pro-Sunni Syrian policy.[71] Moreover, many among these groups have family in Syria that, being from the same minority as the Assad regime, have been killed or threatened by the Sunni opposition. Yet, because of Hatay's position on the border, many Sunni Syrian refugees that have been settled there. This mixture of Alawites, Alevis, Sunnis, and even Kurds, has caused tension and occasionally sparked conflicts between these factions that are at war across the border but must coexist in Hatay.[72]

Its continued struggle with the minorities in its midst exposes Turkey to the sort of identity-fueled instability that is spreading through the region. Inoculating it from such strife through the creation of more inclusive and representative political institutions is critical to both U.S. democratic values and U.S. interests in Turkish stability.[73]

Press Freedom

While Turkish society is overall more open, allowing for public discourse on a number of issues that were once taboo, freedom of speech—particularly as it relates to the press—is not adequately protected across all of Turkish society.

Turkish law allows for the restriction of press freedom in the name of protecting public order, allowing journalists—as well as other activists and opposition figures—to be arrested on charges of inciting the population to hatred; attempting to influence the judiciary; and insulting the Turkish nation, Atatürk, the republic, and state institutions. These articles are used disproportionately against those with certain viewpoints the AKP government finds objectionable. In addition to bringing criminal and civil cases against journalists, the press has been harassed through raids on newspaper offices, fines, or temporary closure.

In 2007, regulators seized the country's second-largest media group, Sabah/ATV, subsequently auctioning it off in a single-bidder auction to the Çalik energy company, whose media wing was run by Erdoğan's son-in-law.[74] The next year, Erdoğan targeted the country's largest media group, Doğan Media (DMG), after it reported on a corruption case in Germany in which the AKP was accused of siphoning off millions from charities to fund pro-AKP media outlets in Turkey.[75] Tax authorities slammed DMG with fines totaling almost $3 billion.[76] President Obama opted not to raise U.S. concerns about this case when Erdoğan visited Washington in December 2009.[77]

As a result of such tactics, the few media outlets that are not controlled by the AKP or do not already toe the government line have, for the most part, become increasingly prudent in their editorial policies. Those journalists who were not reined in by their editors—including many Kurdish activists—have been pursued individually by the regime. Turkey now has the unenviable reputation of jailing more journalists than China and Iran combined.[78] As a result, Turkey has fallen on the World Press Freedom Index compiled by Reporters without Borders. In 2008, Turkey was in 102nd place out of 173 countries; it fell to 154th out of 179 countries in 2013, six spots behind Russia.[79] The Turkish government contends that these reports are exaggerated and that journalists are imprisoned as private individuals guilty of serious crimes. But a 2012 report by the Committee to Protect Journalists found that out of 76 imprisoned journalists, "at least 61 were being held in direct relation to their published work or newsgathering activities."[80]

The recent political unrest proved the effectiveness of this crackdown on the media: coverage of the Taksim

protests in Turkish media was conspicuously absent, with Turkish TV channels airing innocuous and unrelated content instead.[81] Not satisfied with this accomplishment, the government only redoubled their efforts to muzzle the journalists following the protests. In July, the Turkish Journalists Union announced that at least 72 journalists had been fired, forced to take leave, or had resigned since the Taksim protests began in late May, including the prominent journalists Yavuz Baydar and Can Dündar.[82] The CHP claims that 64 Turkish journalists remain imprisoned and attribute the recent wave of firings and resignations to the fact that the journalists "write stories their bosses don't like."[83]

The U.S. Ambassador to Turkey, Frank Ricciardone, has, on several occasions, been vocal on the issue of press freedom in Turkey. The United States, the ambassador made clear shortly after his appointment, "[supports] freedom of expression and that means media freedom, full stop."[84] His comments drew ire from the Turkish government. "This," Erdoğan explained, "is called amateurish ambassadorship." Meanwhile, Atalay, who was then interior minister, asserted, "Turkey is a country where there is more press freedom than the U.S."[85]

In the uproar following Ambassador Ricciardone's comments, the State Department stood by his statement, saying, "We do have broad concerns about trends involving intimidation of journalists and we have raised that directly with the Turkish government and we'll continue to do so."[86] However, there is a disconnect between the rhetoric of the ambassador and the State Department and the rhetoric coming from the executive branch. President Obama has been perceived as reluctant to broach the issue with Erdoğan in their private conversations and publicly expressed his approval of the "government's efforts to advance universal freedoms, including freedom of expression."[87]

Stalled EU Accession

Recognizing its limited influence over the Turkish domestic scene, the United States has primarily used its support for the EU accession process as a proxy to push for its desired reforms. President Obama, addressing the Turkish parliament in 2009, on his first foreign trip as president, categorically stated, "The United States strongly supports Turkey's bid to become a member of the European Union"; acknowledged the efforts Turkey had made to become an EU member; and expressed a desire that Turkey continue to move forward in protecting freedom of religion, freedom of expression, as well as promoting rule of law and minority rights as part of its EU targeted reform path.[88]

However, progress toward accession has stalled and Turkey appears increasingly indifferent about the European Union. The recent difficulties of the euro zone have made EU accession a less desirable goal, and harsh statements from French and German leaders rejecting the prospect of Turkish membership have led many Turks to believe that accession is an unattainable goal and that the European Union is determined to not allow Turkey to become a full member.[89] Indeed, Egemen Bağış, Turkey's minister for European affairs, recently said that Turkey has been a victim of EU "prejudice" in both its membership attempts and its unsuccessful Olympic bid, and he predicted that it will likely never become a member of the European Union, instead ending up like Norway, "very closely aligned but not as a member."[90] As the European Union's attractiveness shrinks and accession negotiations grind to a halt, using the lure of EU membership as a means of encouraging domestic reform could bear less and less fruit.

Constitutional Reforms

The AKP came to power promising a new Turkish constitution, and as Turkey has moved closer to that goal, successive American officials have voiced their hopes that such a document would reflect U.S. and EU standards. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, in 2011, expressed America's wish that the constitutional reform process would produce "a document that deepens respect for human rights for all Turkish citizens, including the right to speak and worship freely. All minority groups need to have their voices heard and their concerns addressed."[91]

However, the opportunities presented by the drafting of a new constitution may be squandered due to the increased political tension in Turkey in the wake of Taksim. Disagreements abound on such issues as the right to education in one's mother tongue and whether the new constitution should include the first four articles of the current constitution—which the constitution defines as unable to be amended—that define Turkey as a secular, democratic republic, as well as providing that "no protection shall be accorded to an activity contrary to Turkish national interests, the principle of the indivisibility of the existence of Turkey with its state and territory, Turkish historical and moral values or the nationalism, principles, reforms and modernism of Atatürk."[92] These issues are drawing stark divisions between the CHP and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), who want to preserve those elements of the old constitution, and the BDP, who see amending these articles as necessary to protect the rights of Kurds. The Taksim protests, in which nationalists were heavily represented, have created a less conciliatory environment for the constitutional negotiations, with each side drawing strict "red lines" that are stalling—and could derail—the drafting process.[93]

If—through EU targeted reforms or through a new constitution—Turkey is able to enhance its protections of fundamental rights and freedoms, this would both strengthen its democracy and, in the long run, would lay the foundation for a closer, more cooperative relationship with the United States. Secretary Kerry, speaking in Turkey immediately following his appointment, expressed his belief in "the importance of strengthening the protection of fundamental rights, the freedom of expression, freedom of the media," on that grounds that "history has proven decisively that nations that work constantly to safeguard these rights, democracies, people who respect basic freedoms are far more successful, far more stable, and far more prosperous."[94]

The AKP's recent authoritarian course has helped inflame Turkish society. A renewed commitment to domestic reform would soothe ethnic and sectarian tensions by opening social and political space to all elements of Turkish society.

National Security Program
Foreign Policy Project

Chapter 4: Evolution of Turkish Foreign Policy

Kemalist foreign policy was defined by its Western focus and its desire to avoid entanglements in the Middle East. While the AKP continued the Kemalist establishment's courting of the EU, it shifted the geographic focus of Turkey's foreign policy, building relationships in the Middle East and seeking to establish itself as a regional power. Increasingly, Turkey's policies have diverged from those of the United States, even when the two partners claim to share the same goals.

AKP Foreign Policy Changes

While the AKP's desire to increase its regional influence has remained constant, its tenure has seen distinct shifts in foreign policy. It came to power focused on meeting the requirements of EU accession. As it became clearer, however, that certain European countries remained opposed to Turkish membership, the vision of Erdoğan's foreign minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu, of a Turkey more closely aligned with the Islamic world that had begun to gestate during the early years of AKP rule, took an even firmer hold. This phase of AKP foreign policy sought increased engagement with Middle Eastern regimes and the cultivation of good relations with their leaders. However, as Turkey's leaders grew more confident and regional circumstances forced Turkey to adjust its position, Turkey's foreign policy has taken on an increasingly sectarian character.

Zero Problems: 2007–2011

The "zero problems with neighbors" foreign policy advanced by Davutoğlu aimed to shift Turkey away from its traditional Western-focused policy orientation toward greater engagement and improved relations with its southern and eastern neighbors. The AKP's subsequent openings—to Iran, Syria, the Kurds of Iraq, and Armenia—were portrayed as the harbingers of a progressive, cooperative Turkey replacing the nationalist and distrustful attitudes of the past.

Syria, a country with which Turkey almost went to war in 1998, came to be what one expert called "the model success story for [Turkey's] improved foreign policy."[95] In addition to the Alawite regime in Damascus, Turkey courted other rogue actors—such as Sunni Hamas, Shiite Iran, and Sudan—while assuring its Western interlocutors that it would gain the influence they lacked with these regimes. Turkey welcomed Hamas leader Khaled Meshal to Ankara following Hamas's 2006 victory in legislative elections, while refusing to endorse the designation of Hamas as a terrorist organization.[96]

Similarly, instead of the suspicion and hostility that Turkey's Kemalist elite had traditionally felt toward Iran as an Islamic Republic, the AKP leadership initially saw Iran, as a result of its Islamic Revolution, as a kindred spirit. In 2009, Erdoğan was among the first to congratulate Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad on his fraudulent reelection and subsequently refused to take a stance on Iran's suppression of the Green Revolution, repeatedly stating Turkey's desire not to intervene in Iran's domestic affairs.[97] The next year, Turkey, together with Brazil, sought and failed to broker a deal with Iran on its nuclear program.

Motivated both by its new foreign policy outlook and the perceived threat of Iraqi Kurdish autonomy, Turkey also cultivated closer bilateral ties with Baghdad, establishing in 2009 the High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council.[98] These efforts bore fruit initially: bilateral trade and Turkish investment increased, the two countries agreed on opening another border crossing, they extended the contract for the Kirkuk-Yumurtalik pipeline, and agreed to the construction of new electricity infrastructure.[99] While relations began to deteriorate in 2010 following Iraq's national elections, where Turkey backed the losing Iraqiyah Party, cordial relations with the majority Shia government in Baghdad continued as late as 2011, when Erdoğan visited the Imam Ali Mosque in Najaf, one of Shiism's holiest sites.

At the same time as it was building ties with Baghdad, however, Turkey was also reaching out to the Kurds of northern Iraq. After a long history of hostility toward Iraqi Kurds and worries about their gaining of autonomy, Ankara worked to establish the same sort of relationship based on economic interdependence with Erbil as it was pursuing with Baghdad. Although seen as contributing to the weakness of the Iraqi central government, this policy has allowed Turkey to reap the economic and energy benefits of a close partnership with this dynamic region.

Amid this new policy of positive outreach to its neighbors, the one relationship that suffered was that with Israel. Beginning in 2008, with Turkish anger about not being warned about the imminent Israeli Operation Cast Lead in Gaza, and continuing with a public disagreement between Erdoğan and Israeli President Shimon Peres in January 2009 over the Gaza war, relations worsened until being officially cut off following the attempt by Turkish ships to run Israel's blockade of the Gaza Strip, in which Israeli soldiers killed nine Turks.[100]

Sectarian Drift: 2011–Present

Despite initial success, however, the AKP's foreign policy overtures foundered in the face of the popular unrest that seized the region beginning in 2011. With close ties with neighboring regimes no longer tenable, the AKP pivoted to supporting new political movements emerging from the political upheavals that surrounded it. The allies it chose were ideological brethren: the Sunni Muslim Brotherhood and its supporters.

Through the "zero problems" policy, Turkey had sought to increase its regional influence by building personal relationships with Middle Eastern leaders, seeking to mediate and resolve regional disputes, and increasing its investment in the Middle East. Under this policy, values, such as support for democracy, had no place in Turkey's dealings with Iran, Syria, and others. The shortcomings of this approach were made abundantly obvious by two developments. First, the sudden chasm that opened between the regimes Turkey had courted, on one side, and the people of the countries they ruled, on the other. Second, the United States and international community were, however slowly, siding with the people. Turkey, as a result, faced a choice between maintaining the friendships Erdoğan had developed—often through intense personal diplomacy—and risk losing its regional stature, or adapt its foreign policy to the changing political landscape.

At first, when Egyptians took to Cairo's Tahrir Square to demand the resignation of Hosni Mubarak, the decision was easy. Egypt had not been a priority for the AKP, making it easy for Turkey to cut ties with the Egyptian regime. Thus, Ankara was not only an early cheerleader of the Egyptian revolution but Erdoğan was the first world leader to call on Mubarak to step down.

When it came to Libya, however, the decision proved harder. Perhaps because Erdoğan had, just four months prior, in December 2010, received the Al-Gaddafi International Prize for Human Rights, the Turkish leadership initially opposed U.N. sanctions on the Gaddafi regime, rejecting calls for NATO involvement in the developing civil war.[101] Turkey had also invested heavily in Libya, between $8 and $13 billion, primarily through construction companies, and was wary of the effects of military intervention on Turkish investments and Turkish citizens in Libya.[102] Ankara eventually relented when some of its reservations were taken into account, approving the NATO operation and calling for Gaddafi's resignation.

The biggest challenge, and fatal blow, to the "zero problems" policy came in Syria. Here, Ankara saw an opportunity for its engagement with Assad to pay

dividends. By convincing Assad to undertake political reforms to address protestors' concerns, Turkey's leadership calculated, they could keep a friend in power, help address the concerns of the Syrian people, and demonstrate their regional leadership. But Ankara's friendliness, it turned out, had not translated into actual clout in Damascus. Despite Davutoğlu's frequent visits, Assad refused to compromise. Worse still, Iran's unconditional support for the Syrian regime increasingly pitted it against Turkey.

With its claims to regional influence deflated and the problems it had sought to avoid metastasizing in the region, the AKP swerved away from its previous foreign policy. In its stead, Turkey shifted to stand with the people opposing autocratic rule, but still with an eye on the mantle of regional leadership. Expecting international consensus to coalesce around intervention in Syria, just as it had done in Libya, Turkey resolved not to be late to the table again. Encouraged by statements made by American and other Western leaders demanding Assad's ouster, Turkey was early to advocate the use of force in pursuit of that end.

Though the military campaign Ankara anticipated never materialized, its commitment to ousting Assad and supporting certain elements of the Syrian opposition has come to define its foreign policy toward the rest of the region. In Syria, Ankara advanced the cause of the Sunni-dominated Syrian National Council and other Sunni groups, including al-Qaeda-linked extremists, at the expense of non-Sunni minority groups. This, in part, was a choice foisted upon Turkey—as the Syrian conflict devolved into a sectarian war, it was impossible to take sides in the civil war without also ending up on one side or the other of the inflamed Sunni-Shia schism. It was also a decision driven by one of Turkey's overriding geopolitical priorities: limiting the emergence of autonomous Kurdish political entities. By supporting Sunni, pan-Syrian opposition groups, Turkey sought out forces that would limit the political authority accorded to Syria's Kurds in any post-Assad settlement.

But as Turkey began engaging with other countries upended by political revolutions, it became clear that the sectarian bent of its Syrian policy was not just an aberration. In siding with the people against autocratic regimes, the AKP routinely chose groups that share its ideology. Turkish foreign policy in the aftermath of the Arab upheavals effectively became one of supporting various iterations of the Muslim Brotherhood—in Egypt, Syria, Tunisia, and Gaza—casting it as an increasingly Sunni-aligned sectarian force.

This sectarian swerve put Turkey in opposition to the region's Shia leaders, damaging the ties to Iran and Iraq's central government the AKP had previously cultivated. The rhetoric used by Ankara and Baghdad grew increasingly harsh and tense as Turkey took on the mantle of a protector of Sunnis—criticizing Shia Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's sectarian policies and sheltering Sunni Iraqi Vice President Tareq al-Hashimi, whom Maliki sentenced to death. Turkey's relationship with Iran also grew contentious, even if less overtly, as the two historical rivals found themselves supporting different sides in the Syrian conflict.

Nevertheless, the AKP fully committed to its new sectarian policy, positioning itself as a "source of inspiration" for the Sunni groups seeking, for the first time, to claim power in their countries. Turkey promoted itself as "a Muslim country that is politically, democratically, and economically advanced and 'an industrial and services tiger' with a high standard of living and national wealth based not on natural resources but on human potential"—an example of Muslim democracy, moderation, and prosperity.[103] And when, Turkey hoped, the same political wave that carried the

Muslim Brotherhood to victory in Egypt brought its other Sunni allies to power, Ankara would have a number of client states in the region looking to the AKP for political support and guidance.

But just as "zero problems" did not give Turkey the influence it thought it would accrue, this sectarian turn has likewise yielded few benefits. The failure to overthrow Assad and of the Muslim Brotherhood to hold onto power in Syria has left Ankara with even fewer friends and less sway in the region than before and severely tarnished Turkey's appeal. For new parties seeking to secure democratic legitimacy and maintain a hold on power, the AKP's growing Islamism in domestic and foreign policymaking casts doubt on the "moderate" aspect of the Turkish model, its increasingly majoritarian ruling style, harsh response to the protests, and crackdown on journalists leads to questions about whether Turkey can be held up as an example of democracy and stability, and its inability to successfully guide its protégé, Morsi, through the pratfalls of governance diminishes the AKP's allure as a mentor.

Part of Turkey's failure to realize its vision of itself as a regional Sunni leader is jockeying within the region's Sunni bloc for preeminence. Despite the appearance that the Middle East is caught in a sectarian conflict pitting Sunni against Shia, the reality is more complicated. Rather than a single cohesive unit, Sunnis are internally divided, with the major camps including secularists, the Muslim Brotherhood, Salafists, and jihadi groups. And different countries support each of those groups, using them as proxies for their own regional ambitions.

This divide between Salafi groups and Muslim Brotherhood affiliates plays out across the region. In Egypt's first post-Mubarak elections, the Muslim Brotherhood's major opponent was the Salafi Nour Party. While the Brotherhood came out the big winner, Nour won 25 percent of the seats in parliament.[104] This rivalry has played out across the region as local affiliates of the Muslim Brotherhood compete with Salafist groups for membership and influence among Islamist communities. Partly due to the perceived Brotherhood threat to its regime, Saudi Arabia has proved itself to be a munificent sponsor of Salafi groups, both in Egypt and Syria, while Turkey and Qatar have been prominent backers of the Brotherhood. This has created a perceptible tension within the Sunni bloc, even as it is joined in a fight against the Shia in Syria, and a noticeable competition between Turkey and Saudi Arabia for regional influence.

With Turkey's chosen horse in the Syrian opposition falling behind, Turkey's ability to influence the course of the Syrian revolution and formation of any potential post-Assad political configuration will likewise diminish. Similarly, Turkey's continued support for the ousted Brotherhood government in Egypt squanders whatever limited political capital it may have had there. Meanwhile, due to competition from the Saudis, Turkey has little sway in countries where the Brotherhood lacks a strong presence. Thus, with few friends and little influence left, Turkey's sectarian swerve has undermined its regional ambitions.

Areas of U.S. Concern

Turkey's sectarian foreign policy posture has put it at odds with the United States on several critical issues, including both conflicting visions of the region's future and disagreements about the best means to achieve shared goals.

Syria

According to the United Nations, since fighting began in March 2011, more than 100,000 Syrians have been killed, with 4.25 million more internally displaced and

more than two million refugees fleeing to neighboring countries.[105] As the conflict has continued, it has devolved from a fight for democracy against authoritarianism into a Balkan-style war including ethnic or sectarian armed groups, Islamist extremists, remnants of the old regime, and rebel militias.[106] Syria's neighbors, who have absorbed large numbers of refugees since the crisis began, are increasingly strained. If Syria becomes a Somalia-style failed state, it will be a breeding ground for Islamic extremism throughout the region, creating even more instability.

Turkey and the United States agree on the need for Assad to step down from power and are equally concerned about the potential for prolonged conflict in Syria to wreck havoc on the country and destabilize the region.[107] However, Turkey and the United States diverge significantly in their treatment of the Syrian opposition and visions of a post-Assad Syrian government. The Syrian conflict has become Ankara's chief foreign policy concern and, because of the threat it poses to Turkish stability, come to define how it approaches the rest of the region. This Syrian lens also impacts how Turkey views its ties with the United States currently. With little U.S. support either for the opposition in Syria or the refugees in Turkey, Ankara feels deserted by its largest ally.

Turkey was an early advocate of Assad's ouster and has long vocally campaigned for the arming of Syria's rebels. In dealing with the Syrian opposition, Turkey has supported the ideologically kindred Muslim Brotherhood and sought to increase their prominence. Without any major international or, particularly, U.S. efforts to oust Assad or arms the rebels, Turkey has been lending support not only to the mainstream factions of the Syrian opposition but also, without ever publicly acknowledging it, giving aid to Jabhat al-Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham, Sunni extremist groups opposing the Syrian regime, the former of which is seen as a front for al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQ-I) in Syria and was designated a Foreign Terrorist Organization by the United States.

Through its support of these groups Turkey is actively seeking not just Assad's ouster, but a post-conflict Syria that will best reflect its interests—a Sunni regime that will align itself closely with Turkey. A Sunni-led, Turkish-aligned government would increase Turkey's influence in the region and benefit Turkey economically by allowing Turkey to penetrate Arab markets through Syria.

Such a Sunni-majority government would also achieve another Turkish objective in Syria, clamping down on minorities, especially the Kurds. Turkey fears not just that autonomy for Syria's Kurds would intensify similar demands by Turkey's Kurds, but also that a Syrian Kurdish entity would likely led be by the PKK-affiliated Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD), providing the PKK a new patron and refuge.

Like in Iraq, however, the United States sees a pluralistic government as the only means of preserving the unity of the state and preventing a return to violence by creating government as a venue where the voices of all ethnic and religious groups can be heard. It is precisely the dominance of extremist and unrepresentative groups among Syria's opposition that has prevented the United States from giving them greater support. Also, in contrast to Ankara, Washington believes that the only meaningful settlement of the Syrian conflict must be political, not military. This disagreement about both means and ends has significantly limited U.S-Turkish cooperation on Syria, which is further hindered by the lack of public support in the United States for intervention. This combination of factors has led to Washington doing very little to help end the Syrian conflict and to its exclusion of Turkey almost completely from those efforts it has undertaken, such as recent U.S. negotiations with Russia regarding the elimination of Syria's chemical weapons stockpile.

Recently, however, Turkey appears to have begun shifting its position regarding Syria's Kurds—signaling a potential change in its Syrian policy in general. Whereas previously, Turkey was firm and unequivocal about the unacceptability of an independent Kurdish entity in Syria, it has begun, with KRG encouragement, to revaluate its stance by engaging with the PYD and its leader, Salih Muslim, and adopting harsher rhetoric toward Jabhat al-Nusra, accusing it of "betraying the revolution."[108] As yet, however, this has not led to a break between Ankara the more extreme elements of the Syrian opposition.

Nevertheless, Turkish willingness to rethink this approach and even consider outreach to the PYD is noteworthy. This evolution has been motivated by facts on the ground, both gains made by Syrian Kurds and growing unease in Turkey's relationship with jihadist groups. Over the summer, the PYD has gained de facto control over several towns in Syria's northeast, bordering Turkey. This was accomplished with tacit approval from the Assad regime, which had earlier withdrawn its forces from Syria's Kurdish region, putatively to consolidate its fighting force, but also as a means to buy Kurdish neutrality in the conflict, allowing the Kurds to take over much of northeastern Syria.[109]

However, Assad's withdrawal set the stage for clashes between the PYD and extremist rebel groups, driven by each faction's desire to gain control of territory as well as the view held by non-Kurdish rebel groups, jihadist and otherwise, that the Kurds had colluded with the regime.[110] Al-Nusra has launched several large-scale, albeit unsuccessful, attacks against Syria's Kurds, suffering major defeats at the hands of PYD forces, such as in the village of Ras al-Ain.[111] While Turkey initially supported these efforts as a means of containing Syrian Kurds' aspirations of autonomy,[112] these skirmishes have spilled across the border into Turkey, costing Turkish lives.[113] Even worse, car bombs in the border town of Reyhanli killed 51 in May in an attack attributed by Erdoğan to the Syrian regime—although evidence has surfaced that suggests an al-Qaeda-linked group might have been behind the attack.[114]

Other recent events have also reinforced to Ankara that jihadist groups are unpredictable and cannot be controlled. An attack on the Turkish embassy in Somalia that killed one and wounded three—carried out by al-Shabaab, who is affiliated with al-Nusra, as both are regional branches of al-Qaeda—"clearly [showed] Ankara where it should stand vis-à-vis the jihadists in Syria."[115]

The PYD has sought to cement its gains in Syria by capitalizing on these stumbles in Turkey's relationship with al-Nusra. It has also recruited the KRG's Massoud Barzani to help make its case. Despite their history of being at odds, solidarity in the face of jihadist violence against Kurds has brought the PYD and the KRG together. This new makeshift alliance has resulted in an increased willingness on the part of Ankara to at least hear the PYD out, including its pleas that Turkey should stop aiding al-Nusra.[116]

Turkey's goal vis-à-vis the Syrian Kurds is the same as it has been—to prevent Kurdish autonomy—but it has been mitigated by the more important objective of securing victory for Syrian rebels. The status quo is untenable for Ankara. Not only does the instability across its long southern border threaten Turkey and saddle it with ever more refugees, but the continuing conflict also increases the likelihood of de facto autonomy for Syria's Kurds. Thus, Turkey appears to be ready to change tactics, using diplomacy in an attempt to cajole the PYD into joining with other Syrian opposition groups.[117]

This rapprochement with the PYD is also occurring against the backdrop of Turkey's peace process with its own Kurdish population. A more welcoming stance

toward the Syrian PYD, seen as the "Syrian twin" of the PKK, could be a necessary step for the AKP to advance the peace process and signal to the Kurds that it is serious in its intentions.

Given these constantly evolving dynamics, while Turkey and the United States have had largely different visions of how to oust Assad and what should become of Syria once he goes, there appears to be momentum that could lead to a convergence of interests.

Iraq

The positions of the United States and Turkey on Iraq are today completely reversed from what they were in 2003. Then, just prior to the invasion of Iraq, Turkey denied U.S. forces basing rights, out of fear that deposing Saddam Hussein would lead to the breakup of the country and autonomy for Iraq's Kurds. Today, it is the United States that is worried that Turkish support for the KRG in Iraq is contributing to the destabilization of that country and threatening its territorial integrity. Meanwhile, Turkey counters that Iraqi instability is the result of a premature withdrawal of U.S. forces, which has allowed the Iranian-backed government in Baghdad to impose Shiite hegemony over Iraq's increasingly marginalized minority populations and use Iraqi airspace to provide weaponry and assistance to Assad.

Indeed, the security situation in Iraq has unraveled since the U.S. withdrawal in 2011, with increasing tensions between sectarian groups and between the central government in Baghdad and the KRG over territory and oil. Prime Minister Maliki has been accused of attempting to consolidate his rule by pushing Sunnis out of government. As a result, sectarian violence has once again been on the rise in Iraq, reaching over 1,000 deaths from political violence per month in May and July 2013, numbers not seen since 2006–2007.[118]

Baghdad is also at odds with the KRG over the exploitation and sale of oil. Revenue from KRG oil exports, rather than going to Erbil directly, goes into central government accounts, and Baghdad then pays international oil companies working within KRG territory as well as giving the KRG a share of the profits according to a predetermined formula. Baghdad, however, has frequently failed to pay these oil companies, leading to the suspension of Kurdish oil exports. In September 2012, an agreement was reached to address these problems, but the central government has not kept to its end of the revenue-sharing deal, leading to more suspensions of oil production.[119] A second source of tension over oil is whether or not the KRG is able to make independent deals with foreign energy firms. The KRG has signed deals with Exxon-Mobil, Chevron, French Total SA, and is in energy talks with Turkey. The central government has declared such deals to be against Iraq's constitution and has responded by threatening to blacklist companies that sign with the KRG from working in oil fields in other parts of Iraq.

In a twist that was unthinkable in 2003, however, the biggest supporter of the KRG's independent development of its energy resources has been Ankara, to the detriment of its relationship with Baghdad. Turkey's shift toward the KRG is largely pragmatic and primarily motivated by energy considerations. Turkey is energy-poor, importing 99 percent of the oil it consumes and 98 percent of its gas.[120] Additionally, Turkey experiences a 6 to 8 percent increase in energy demand annually.[121] This increase in demand, coupled with increasing U.S. pressure for greater compliance with the Iran sanctions regime, have forced Turkey to look elsewhere to meet its energy needs. In May 2012, Turkey made a deal with the KRG to build one gas and two oil pipelines that, although they will not reach into Turkey, will be used to supply Turkey and will be operational by early 2014.[122] One of the main reasons these pipelines are not being extended into Turkey is U.S. opposition.

Just as important as its need for energy, has been Turkey's realization that autonomy among Iraqi Kurds is not an incitement of its own Kurdish population. To the contrary, the KRG has been an important ally in combating the PKK, allowing Turkey to pursue the PKK into its territory.

These improved relations with the KRG and ongoing sectarian differences between Ankara and Baghdad have damaged Turkey's relationship with Iraq's central government. Maliki and Erdoğan exchanged harsh words in 2012: Erdoğan accused Maliki of fanning sectarian tensions with his "self-centered" ways, and, in response, Maliki accused Erdoğan of attempting to interfere in Iraqi affairs and branded Turkey a "hostile state."[123] Erdoğan has also been critical of Iraq's growing ties to Iran, allegedly telling Obama in 2012 that he "left Iraq in the hands of Iran once [he] withdrew."[124]

The United States fears that tension between the KRG and central government will fuel sectarian tensions and further split Iraq along ethnic and sectarian lines. The spread of Iranian influence in Iraq is another chief U.S. concern, especially Baghdad's granting of permission to Iran to use Iraqi airspace to transport weapons to the Assad regime in Syria.[125]

At the same time, however, the United States is committed to preserving Iraq's territorial integrity. An unstable Iraq strengthens Iraqi terrorist groups, such as AQ-I, which also help sow conflict elsewhere in the region, especially in Syria, creating, in the words of Secretary Kerry, "a two-way street and it's a dangerous street."[126]

Turkey shares these U.S. concerns over Maliki's recent sectarian policies and his close alignment with Iran on the Syria issue and has endorsed the importance of Iraqi unity. But Turkish leaders would argue that it is U.S. policy, including its withdrawal of forces and support for Maliki, that has most contributed to Iraqi instability, leaving the country susceptible to sectarianism and Iran's influence. Foreign Minister Davutoğlu has hinted as much, stating that "Turkey was in accord with the U.S. on the vital need to preserve the territorial integrity of Iraq on the basis of a political dialogue, which foresees a sharing of power and natural resources by all the parties concerned."[127]

As seen from Washington, however, it is Turkey's growing ties with the KRG, fueled by its need for energy and Kurdish quiescence, that is undermining Iraqi unity. In particular, American policymakers, agreeing with Maliki, have argued that "separate arrangements with Turkey, with anybody else, any other country, undercut the unity of the country."[128] In Iraq, thus, Ankara and Washington superficially agree on a policy objective but differ significantly both on how they define that objective and on how to pursue it.

Iran

During the last decade, the United States and its international partners have grown increasingly concerned about Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons capability—steadily attempting to ratchet up pressure on Iran through diplomacy and economic sanctions. In the same period, Turkey's relations with Iran have wavered between warm and diffident. Although there is a centuries-old history of rivalry between Iran and Turkey, stretching back to the contests between the Ottoman and Safavid empires for regional hegemony, it has resulted in a grudging modus vivendi, rather than outright antagonism. This historical détente combined with ongoing economic interests has led to Turkey doing little to provide assistance to the international coalition determined to prevent a nuclear Iran, sometimes even impairing, whether intentionally or not, those efforts.

The AKP's "zero problems" policy originally produced a climate of warmed relations with Iran guided by economic goals. Iran seeks to maintain economic stability amid mounting international sanctions while the energy-deficient Turkey remains dependent on energy imports from its neighbor. These interdependencies have proved hard for both countries to break, even as the relationship has cooled over time.

In 2010, Erdoğan and then–Brazilian President Lula da Silva tried to broker, with then–Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a diplomatic deal that would restart stalled negotiations over Iran's nuclear program and proclaim Turkey and Brazil's arrival as global powers. Due to lack of clear communication from Washington about its concerns, Turkey and Brazil proceeded with the negotiations under the belief that they had the blessing of the United States and invested significant amounts of political capital in achieving a deal. However, Brazil and Turkey's accomplishment was swiftly undercut by Washington, which rejected the deal and pushed ahead with a U.N. Security Council resolution for more sanctions. Since then, AKP officials have disengaged from international efforts to prevent a nuclear Iran and spoken out against any potential military action.

As Turkey shifted away from "zero problems" and took a more sectarian posture in the region, its carefully cultivated relationship with Iran began to sour. First, Ankara's relationship with Iran was severely damaged in 2011 when Turkey agreed to place a NATO missile-defense system within its borders. The move provoked accusations from Iranian military officials that Turkey was acting on U.S.-Israeli orders, followed by threats of attacking the Turkish defense system if the United States or Israel were to attack Iranian nuclear facilities.[129] More recently, diplomatic tension between the two countries has mounted over Ankara's abrupt opposition to Assad's regime, a key regional ally for an increasingly isolated Iran. Nevertheless, the economic relationship between the two governments established under Turkey's "zero problems with neighbors" initiative remains largely intact to the present.

While the United States and the European Union have imposed increasingly strict sanctions on trade with Iran, particularly focused on oil imports, commerce between Ankara and Tehran has continued largely unabated. The linchpin of the commercial relationship between these two countries is energy. According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, Turkey depends on Iran for 44 percent of its crude oil needs (in second place is Iraq, with 15 percent) and 19 percent of its natural gas imports (second only to Russia, with 58 percent).[130] These numbers have remained largely unchanged, even under the new sanctions regime. Indeed, there have been reports that Turkey has paid Iran in gold bullion out of its reserves as a way to avoid sanctions targeting transactions with Iran's Central Bank.[131] Moreover, Iranian banks appear to operate freely in Turkey, allowing them to get around sanctions.

There are no indications that these economic ties are likely to abate in the future. While Turkey recently announced its intention to comply with Iran sanctions and reduce its oil imports by 22 percent, it will also continue to ship gasoline to Iran.[132] Turkey's Foreign Ministry has also acknowledged its intention to double its trade volume with Iran to $30 billion by 2015,[133] a position that further indicates conflicting interests between the United States and Turkey with regards to Iran.[134]

Turkey's trade with Iran, however, should not be the most pressing issue for the United States. Given its energy dependence, it is unlikely that Ankara could be easily convinced to find another, perhaps more expensive, supplier. Even if it did, the benefit would not be commensurate with the effort that would have to

be expended to secure this achievement. On average, Turkey's imports from Iran amount to 140,000 barrels per day—or, approximately 11 percent of Iran's total exports of 1.25 million barrels per day.[135] Curtailing this trade would have a negligible impact on Iran's revenues but a significant one on Turkey's energy mix.

A more critical question is the role Turkey would play in a potential military confrontation with Iran, whether by the United States or Israel. Although the election of the seemingly moderate Hassan Rouhani as Iran's new president has given some hope that a diplomatic deal might still be struck, Iran's centrifuges nevertheless continue spinning. With Iran fast approaching the nuclear threshold,[136] American and Israeli policymakers will soon have to decide whether they are committed, as both have repeatedly stated, to preventing a nuclear Iran by all means necessary.

If, in fact, it becomes necessary to use military force to thwart Iran's nuclear ambitions, Turkish air space would be critical to the mission. Given the border that Turkey shares with Iran and the fact that Iran's most significant nuclear installations—at Natanz and Qom—are closer to that border than the Persian Gulf, access to Turkish airspace would facilitate any military operation. Against the backdrop of Turkey's decision in 2003 to deny the United States basing rights for the Iraq War and its still strained relations with Israel, Ankara seems unlikely to be well-disposed to granting such access.

Israel

Relations between Israel and Turkey have been frigid for the last three years, but a recent U.S.-brokered reconciliation attempt opens the opportunity to repair ties between two of America's closest regional partners. Especially with instability sweeping the rest of the region, restoring relations between Turkey and Israel is an important U.S. objective.

Good relations between Turkey and Israel are a historical anomaly. Prior to the 1990s, ties between the two were informal and often tense. But shared threats—particularly from Syria and Iran—led to greater military and intelligence cooperation that turned into ever closer ties.

However, as Turkey pivoted to become a greater Middle Eastern power, relations with Israel suffered. It returned to its traditional stance of championing the cause of the Palestinians and began to loudly criticize Israel's policies in Gaza. Erdoğan has referred to Israeli action in Gaza as "a crime against humanity" and "state terror," a position that earned him popularity with the Turkish public.[137] Relations between the two countries took a turn for the worse in 2009, when Erdoğan walked off stage in anger during an appearance with Israeli President Shimon Peres at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.[138]

But the worst blow to the relationship came a year later, in the aftermath of an Israeli military operation against the Gaza Freedom Flotilla. The flotilla, organized by the Free Gaza Movement and the Turkish Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief, which is believed to provide funding to terrorist groups, was attempting to draw international attention to and break through the Gaza blockade. In the raid, nine Turkish citizens aboard the Mavi Marmara were killed. After the raid, Turkey suspended military agreements with Israel, expelled Israel's ambassador, and downgraded diplomatic ties to the level of second secretary.

President Obama actively promoted reconciliation between Israel and Turkey, and the United States wants relations to continue to improve. This would allow cooperation between the United States and two of its primary regional allies on Middle Eastern issues, especially on the issue of Syria. In his March 2013 visit, Obama urged rapprochement between Israel and Turkey,

stating that "the United States deeply values our close partnerships with both Turkey and Israel, and we attach great importance to the restoration of positive relations between them in order to advance regional peace and security."[139] Under U.S. pressure, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called Erdoğan at the conclusion of Obama's visit, apologizing for "any error that may have led to the loss of life" during the flotilla raid.[140]

Netanyahu's apology has opened an opportunity for renewed relations between Turkey and Israel; however, several issues related to the flotilla incident must be agreed on before relations can progress any further. In the multiple rounds of Turkish-Israeli talks, compensation for victims has been the largest sticking point. In April, both sides were reportedly devising a framework for compensation that considered the victims' age, family circumstances, and other factors.[141] However, these talks stalled in late May as Israel offered $100,000 to each family while Turkey demanded $1 million.[142] In addition to compensation, Turkey has demanded an easing of the Gaza blockade, and Israel demands dropping lawsuits against Israel Defense Forces officers and Israeli officials over the flotilla incident.

Additionally, Turkey's support for Hamas is one of the biggest sources of tension with Israel—and a concern for the United States. Erdoğan has repeatedly stated that he does not see Hamas as a terrorist organization and has characterized Hamas instead as "a resistance movement trying to protect its country under occupation."[143] He hosted the leader of Hamas and Gaza's prime minister in Turkey on June 18, and, despite several delays, Erdoğan still seems intent on visiting Gaza. The United States has been unequivocal in its position of opposing "engagement with Hamas, a foreign terrorist organization which remains a destabilizing force in Gaza and the region."[144]

Thus, although attempts to mend relations between Israel and Turkey are encouraging, there remain serious obstacles to the process and limitations on just how friendly the two countries will be with each other.

National Security Program
Foreign Policy Project

Chapter 5: Recommendations

Turkey has been left with little political capital to expend on influencing events in the Middle East. After a period during which Ankara pursued the vision of "zero problems with neighbors," it now has nothing but problems. It has called for the ouster of Syria's Assad, does not recognize the legitimacy of Egypt's new military government, has cut off diplomatic ties with Israel, angered Iran through the acceptance of a NATO radar installation and through its support for Syrian rebels, quarreled with the Iraqi central government in Baghdad, angered powerful Gulf Arab states with its aggressive support for the Muslim Brotherhood, and alienated Europe with unfounded accusations and conspiracy theories.

Yet, Turkey's ability to rebuild its regional standing will be affected by domestic considerations. It should tread gingerly to avoid further inflaming internal ethno-sectarian tensions that mirror those engulfing the region. With a slowing economy and looming political struggle—three elections in the span of 18 months amid significant political discontent—the ruling AKP might not have much bandwidth for foreign policy. For the foreseeable future, then, other than a close relationship with the KRG in northern Iraq, the United States will be one of Turkey's very few remaining friends. A friend, however, that it is doing little to keep. The recent Turkish announcement that it would procure a missile-defense system from a Chinese company under U.S. sanctions for its dealings with Iran has been a particularly puzzling blow to Turkey's NATO allies, one of its strongest ties to the West.[145]

Washington, for its part, has done little recently to assist Ankara or address its concerns. Despite early rhetoric and pleas from Erdoğan, the United States has refused to intervene in the Syrian civil war, the single-most critical issue for Turkey, or to even consult with Ankara in developing its own policies, such as the recent deal concluded with Russia for the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons arsenal. Nor has it done enough to help Turkey bear the burden of Syrian refugees. And it has so far done little to include Turkey in negotiations of a U.S.-EU free trade agreement, despite Turkish concerns about the negative impact such a deal could have on its economy. Yet, other than Israel, Turkey remains the only relatively stable country and democratic U.S. ally in the region. Indeed, because U.S. policy in the Middle East has not necessarily been any more successful than Turkey's, Washington needs Ankara as much as Ankara needs Washington.

Instead of using the U.S.-Turkey relationship as an opening for robust and frank discussions about their disagreements, Washington has, for the most part, restrained its criticism, preferring to praise the relationship itself. The persistence of excessive U.S. rhetoric despite these concerns is a testament to the importance both sides attach to the relationship. But it also serves to obscure the reality of a partnership that is underperforming and to hinder any attempts at improving it. It also creates a kind of political moral hazard by convincing the AKP government that it is "too big to fail" and, therefore, need not pay too much attention to those instances when it is criticized—by the United States and others—on human rights, rule of law, and other sensitive domestic issues.

Inflated Turkish rhetoric has also contributed to the current state of the relationship. AKP leaders delight in pronouncements about their attachment to democracy, secularism, and the Western alliance, pronouncements that are increasingly divorced from reality. At the same time, Erdoğan and other influential AKP leaders continually indulge in inflammatory rhetoric and unfounded conspiracy theories.

To move the relationship back to serving a more constructive purpose for both nations, Washington will first have to recognize Turkey's changing political

dynamic and the limitations that dynamic imposes on it. On the basis of such an understanding of Turkey's situation, American leaders should adopt a more open dialogue with Ankara that is honest about U.S. concerns, especially when it comes to Turkish domestic policy. By thus reframing U.S.-Turkish policy away from rhetoric and toward reality, American policymakers can focus on how Turkey can contribute to U.S. interests and on how the United States can better help its ally.

Reframing U.S.-Turkish Policy

The recent region-wide political upheaval in the Middle East has given both the United States and Turkey an interest in containing and minimizing the spreading instability and chaos. Although Turkey is politically and economically stronger and more dynamic than those countries caught up in the region's tumult, it does not stand apart. Due to its long border with Syria, decisions by the government in Ankara, and the lack of U.S. assistance, Turkey has not been immune to the turbulence that is spreading through its neighborhood.

The United States needs to recognize these changing dynamics and adjust how it deals with Turkey accordingly. A cooperative and strong Turkey could be an important partner in helping rebuild the Middle East. Indeed, there is no other country in the region that the United States can turn to that could potentially play as constructive a role as Turkey might be able to. But for now the reality is different.

Focus on Turkey's Domestic Stability and Democratic Process

Until very recently, Turkey aspired to regional leadership and could claim to have valuable influence in the Middle East. Indeed, this task force and report began as an examination of how Turkey was using that influence and how it could be put to use to achieve shared objectives with the United States. However, the events of the past year—the Taksim protests in Turkey, the military's ouster of Morsi in Egypt, Assad's use of chemical weapons in Syria and the subsequent U.S.-Russian deal—have significantly changed the landscape.

The collapse of first its "zero problems" policy and then its Sunni-centric approach has left Turkey few friends and little political capital in the Middle East. This summer's domestic turmoil has also cast doubt on its social, political, and economic stability at a crucial period for Turkey's political development: three elections in the span of 18 months amid rising political tension; a historic attempt at peace with the PKK; a slowing economy. But it is precisely Turkey's blend, adroitly managed by the AKP at the beginning of their tenure, of democratic government, a diverse society, Islamic heritage, and a strong economy that granted it enhanced standing in the region and the chance to serve as a source of inspiration for newly democratic Muslim regimes.

As a result, we have come to conclude that after a decade of focusing on Turkey's role in the region, American policymakers should, for now, focus more on the stability of its political institutions, freedom of its society, and dynamism of its economy. For the long-term, the state of Turkey's domestic politics is of vital importance to the future political stability, its economic growth, its ability to wield influence in the region, and, therefore, its ties to the United States. Thus, given the U.S. need for a strong and stable democracy as a partner, U.S. policy for the near-term needs to focus on Turkey's domestic politics so as to return Ankara to a position where it can once again play a more positive role in the region.

Unless Turkey is able to recapture the political and economic dynamism of the last decade, it is unlikely to regain the regional standing it has lost. Thus, absent a change in its domestic trajectory, Turkey is unlikely to be the partner the United States wants it to be. And without Turkey as a successful example and positive influence, the chance that the people of the region will choose to address their grievances through the creation of a free, fair, and pluralistic political system, rather than through violence and extremism, will be that much smaller.

For Turkey to regain its prior dynamism, strength, and regional position, advancements in the areas of freedom of expression, press freedom, due process, judicial independence, and rights of minorities are required. Indeed, concerns—among both the American public and lawmakers—about the authoritarian tendencies Ankara displayed over the summer could complicate the relationship regardless of White House policies, especially as Congress prepares to consider yet again legislation that would recognize Turkey's 1915 massacre of Armenians as "genocide." Thus, while Washington has largely refrained from commenting on Turkey's domestic politics, it is important to engage them now to preserve a dynamic relationship.

Practically, this means that Washington should be more open with Ankara about its concerns about issues like press freedom, freedom of assembly, rule of law, and the Turkish government's increasing sectarianism. All discussions need not be public; indeed, the president might take better advantage of his relationship with Erdoğan to raise these issues in private. Further, American officials should communicate their support for a vibrant and pluralistic political environment, including by meeting with, at the appropriate level, Turkish opposition and civil society leaders. Finally, the United States should recognize, praise, encourage, and aid in any way possible positive developments such as the ongoing Kurdish peace process.

Replace Rhetoric On Both Sides with More Candid Discussion

A major obstacle to the United States and Turkey addressing policy disagreements and moving the relationship forward has been the lack of forthright communication, especially as the AKP's authoritarian and sectarian leanings have begun to emerge. It is only natural that the two countries do not agree on all issues. Rather than fixating on the strength of the relationship as a whole, however, progress can also be made by cooperating on areas of policy convergence while recognizing and openly discussing disagreements.

The danger in the inflated rhetoric coming from both sides comes when it causes the United States to overlook differences with Turkey, as it has often done of late. Failing to enumerate and discuss serious differences with Turkey at appropriate times creates the risk that they could come back to haunt either party at a later time. Not addressing and resolving these areas of concern only makes it more difficult to cooperate on other issues important to either side. This is especially true because too often the lack of U.S. criticism can be interpreted in Turkey as implicit endorsement of the government in Ankara and its policies, leading the regime to believe that it is either working in support of U.S. interests when it is not, as happened with the 2010 Turkey-Brazil-Iran deal, or that it will enjoy unwavering U.S. support regardless of its actions. To combat this, it is best to discuss differences—sometimes necessarily in public—and try to narrow them.

Indeed, evidence suggests that such frank discussion of disagreements, although it might not be immediately welcomed by Ankara, can help encourage greater cooperation between the United States and Turkey. The history of embellished U.S. rhetoric regarding its relationship with Turkey coupled with Erdoğan's pride mean that frank assessments from the U.S.

government—when it has proved willing to make them—have carried great weight. Erdoğan has repeatedly demonstrated that U.S. rhetoric matters deeply to him. Indeed, the case of Turkish-Israeli reconciliation, one of the few examples of the United States being forthright with Turkey about its concerns, suggests that Washington and Ankara are best able to work together when they are honest with each other.

In the aftermath of the Gaza flotilla incident, Erdoğan made a series of inflammatory statements, including calling Zionism a crime against humanity at a Vienna U.N. conference. The United States responded by snubbing Erdoğan. When Secretary Kerry visited Turkey in March, Erdoğan expected to be extended an invitation to visit the White House, one that he had been requesting for some time, but did not receive it. Following this slight, Obama made his first official trip to Israel, where he pushed for Netanyahu to call Erdoğan and apologize for the Turkish lives lost in the flotilla raid.

Having made it clear that his anti-Israeli rhetoric had hurt the highly valued U.S.-Turkey relationship, the United States inspired Erdoğan to tone down his rhetoric and qualify his earlier comments,[146] paving the way for Netanyahu's apology, Erdoğan's acceptance of it, and the start of negotiations about restarting diplomatic relations between Israel and Turkey.

That thaw was once again threatened by Erdoğan's anti-Semitic comments about Israel's supposed involvement in the ousting of Morsi's government in Egypt. In response, White House spokesman Josh Earnest appeared before reporters and called Erdoğan's accusations "offensive, unsubstantiated, and wrong."[147] The White House's comments outraged Erdoğan, who declared in another AKP meeting, his intention to raise the issue with Obama, on the grounds that, "as two members of NATO, that one ally shows this kind of approach to the other is not appropriate."[148] Yet U.S. frankness yielded another positive effect, as Turkey welcomed an Israel envoy to its August 30 Victory Day celebration, and now reports have surfaced that talks are on track and may be concluded at any time.[149]

More recently, however, the Obama administration adopted a slightly different policy: shunning Turkey. As President Obama first deliberated how to respond to Syria's use of chemical weapons and then Secretary Kerry negotiated a deal with his Russian counterpart, American officials did not consult with Turkey.[150] While such treatment is noticed in Ankara, it does not have as clear an effect as direct criticism. Firstly, without communicating to Turkish leaders the reasoning behind such neglect, it does nothing to suggest a path toward improving cooperation. Secondly, it stokes resentment, feeding a Turkish narrative of abandonment and reinforcing a determination to go it alone. Instead, as American officials were able to do in the case of guiding Turkish-Israeli relations back on track, an honest explanation of policy disagreements should contain explicit reassurances of the benefits of cooperation.

It will not be enough, however, to change U.S. rhetoric. The irresponsible pronouncements of AKP leaders in the months since the Taksim protests began have done more to polarize Turkish society and alienate foreign opinion than any action taken by the government. Turkish officials should be made to understand in private that, as President Obama warned at the United Nations, such reliance on conspiracy theories has "a practical impact on the American people's support for our involvement in the region, and allow leaders in the region—as well as the international community sometimes—to avoid addressing difficult problems themselves."[151]

For U.S.-Turkish relations to improve, then, both sides will have to move beyond rhetoric. Officials in Washington

should realize that honest dialogue will be more constructive than continued rhetoric. And they will have to work to convince the AKP to relinquish its demagogic impulses.

Areas for Cooperation

Support Turkey's Development

The United States should support and encourage the continued improvement of Turkey's democratic institutions, the opening of its civil society, and the modernization of its economy. This should include:

Support for Democratization

The United States should support Turkey's continued democratic reforms and attempts to create a more representative political system, especially given the disappointing democratization package unveiled by the government. In particular, American policymakers should monitor, support, and encourage the Kurdish peace process. Ankara's opening to the Kurds is probably the most promising domestic development of recent years. It could potentially not only bring to a close three decades of conflict but also create the framework for a more inclusive Turkish state, a benefit that would accrue not just to the Kurds, but to all Turkish minorities.

Related to this, there is a pressing need for decentralization of power, to enable better governance on the local level. To get beyond a legacy where transfer of power happens by coup, there is a need to support real political pluralism.

While the peace process is primarily a matter of domestic Turkish politics, American officials should publically encourage the Turkish government's attempts to address its democratic deficit, especially in relation to minority groups and political freedoms. American policymakers should make known the significance of a successful deal, proclaim their support to a speedy resolution, and offer any assistance that Ankara might ask for. With Erdoğan's concerns that a Kurdish deal might cost him popular support ahead of three important elections, U.S. backing could prove an important consideration in favor of concluding the process.

Further, in private consultations, American officials should explain to their Turkish counterparts the positive impact the successful completion of the Kurdish peace process could have on the ability of the United States to effectively advocate for Turkey in other matters, including the Erbil-Baghdad energy impasse.

Stand up for Civil and Economic Freedoms

The limitation on civil liberties, such as the freedom of expression and assembly, and government violations of property rights have been among the most blatant examples of democratic backtracking in Turkey. In keeping with the principle of creating a more open dialogue with Ankara, Washington should speak out against the imprisonment and firing of journalists, the targeting of businesses belonging to opposition figures for arbitrary audits and investigations, and other means of muzzling dissent that are being employed in Turkey.

Turkey's overbroad anti-terror laws and penal code empower the government to stifle legitimate dissent and are a main hindrance to Turkey's EU aspirations. The United States should make it clear to Turkey that it stands with the European Court of Human Rights in its many indictments of Turkey's repressive laws surrounding press freedom. In expressing its concerns to the Turkish government, Washington should focus on Turkish laws that conflate newsgathering and reporting with terrorist action and make punishable criticism of

the Turkish state. Such articles include: committing a crime on behalf of a terrorist organization, aiding and abetting a terrorist organization, making propaganda for a terrorist organization, breaching the confidentiality of an investigation, influencing a fair trial, and denigrating Atatürk or the Turkish nation.[152]

Moreover, the United States should speak out against violations of property rights of both the media and businesses of opposition figures—such as the politically motivated raids and audits of the Doğan Group and Koç Holdings. These rights, while essential to democratic expansion, are also fundamental to a well-functioning economy, and their invasion threatens Turkish prosperity. Turkish promotion of free markets and reduced interference with private businesses and the media will make it easier, American officials should explain, for the United States to make the case for including Turkey in expanded international economic institutions, like TTIP.

Engage a Wider Cross-Section of Civil Society

This summer's events showed that Turkey has a thriving and dynamic civil society. But what it also revealed is that there is a dearth of productive channels for communication between civil society and the government, which leaves taking to the streets as the most viable option for presenting grievances. As the United States has done in other countries at pivotal points in a democratization process, there is a need to invest financially in civil society, democracy, and governance assistance. If there is only talk and criticism, without assistance efforts to build trust and ties, the impact will be hollow.

American officials ought to feel free to engage with all segments of Turkish society—including minorities, youth, NGOs, human rights watchdogs, media outlets, and all political parties—to learn about their views of Turkey and present U.S. support for a democratic and vibrant Turkey. This could include monitoring, supporting, and engaging with Turkey's recently created, but not yet fully operational, ombudsman institution.

Such engagement with Turkish civil society can be modeled after the EU-Turkey Civil Society Dialogues, which, since 2007, have focused on youth, towns and municipalities, professional organizations, universities, media, and cultural exchange. In doing so, Washington should assure Ankara that such engagement is not aimed at undermining the AKP, but instead aimed at deepening and strengthening the Turkey-U.S. partnership.

Encourage EU Membership

The AKP had already soured on the EU accession process several years ago, due in large part to unwelcoming comments by European leaders. The Taksim protests—and Europeans' critical response to it—only introduced more acrimony into the EU-Turkish relationship and further delayed the next round of accession talks. Recognizing that Turkish EU membership is unlikely in the near future, the United States should nevertheless continue to support it. The United States should publicly express its continued support for Turkey's EU membership, and, as Washington negotiates free trade with its European allies, it should make it clear that Europe's economic vibrancy would be enhanced if Turkey were to become a full member.

First, the EU accession criteria proved the most successful source of Turkish political reform. Restarting the process and the reforms required by it is still the best way to continue Turkey's democratic growth. Second, although most recently the European Union has suffered economic crises while Turkey prospered, the tables could soon turn. EU membership could be an important step to ensuring Turkey's continued economic development.

Include Turkey in Transatlantic Free Trade

Turkish officials have undertaken a concentrated lobbying effort—including Erdoğan's visit to the White House, conversations between Secretary Kerry and Davutoğlu, and a personal letter from Erdoğan to Obama—to seek inclusion in the current TTIP negotiations between the United States and the European Union. Policymakers should seek a way to allay Turkish concerns and find a way to include it in efforts to expand transatlantic free trade.

The minimal efforts made thus far, where either side has assured Turkey that it will be kept informed of developments in the negotiations, have been insufficient. The United States is not capable of unilaterally including Turkey in negotiations. But it has several mechanisms to address Turkish concerns, including: get EU agreement for including Turkey in TTIP talks, give Turkey observer status in the negotiations, allow Turkey to accede to TTIP after negotiations are concluded, or negotiate a parallel free trade agreement. Providing Turkey with an opportunity to further grow its economy, especially at a potentially precarious moment, while further enmeshing it in the European and international system of laws and regulations would serve both U.S. and Turkish interests.

Help Turkey with Syrian Refugees

The Syrian conflict is one of the gravest humanitarian disasters in recent years. Ensuring that displaced persons can escape the violence is a priority but so should be helping receiving nations bear the burden. Indeed, dealing with its large number of Syrian refugees, both in terms of cost and the political and social tensions they create, is one of Turkey's most pressing problems. So far, the United States has pledged significant amounts of humanitarian aid to help displaced persons within Syria, but little of that aid has made its way to the neighboring countries that have taken in refugees. Out of pledged U.S. assistance, $9.5 million is being provided to Turkey specifically, a number staggeringly lower than the nearly $43 million provided to Jordan and $32 million sent to Lebanon.[153] Nor has the United States helped alleviate the number of Syrians teeming at the borders, having only admitted 33 refugees in the last year.

First, the United States and its aid agencies should work with the Turkish government to ensure that the border with Syria remains open. But it should also help Turkey bear the costs of caring for the refugees by increasing its contribution to the United Nations' refugee funds as well as having our top officials help generate greater humanitarian efforts from other governments, particularly those of Gulf countries. Cooperation between Turkey and the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which has the expertise and resources to increase the efficiency of refugee operations, should also be encouraged.

American policymakers should allow greater numbers of refugees into the United States and hasten any asylum requests originating in Turkey due to the Syrian conflict; the United States should also encourage its EU allies to do the same.

The United States should publicly and effusively recognize the heroic efforts the Turkish government has made in admitting huge numbers of Syrian refugees and echo recent comments by the UNHCR Turkey ambassador praising Turkey's "very consistent, very commendable humanitarian response."[154]

Set Realistic Foreign Policy Expectations

The United States should moderate its expectations for Turkish assistance in the broader Middle East. Within the framework of a relationship based on open and honest

dialogue, the United States should focus instead on the areas where Turkey is realistically able to assist, notably Syria, Iraq, Israel, and Iran.

Encourage Support for Moderates in Syria

Turkey has been a strong supporter of the Syrian opposition, and the United States and Turkey share the same end goal—the removal of the Assad regime. However, the situation in Syria remains uncertain and U.S.-Turkish cooperation elusive, at least in part due to Turkish support for extremist elements among the rebels and hostility to Syria's Kurds.

Turkey has provided, although it might deny it, aid to some of the most brutal and ideologically odious groups fighting against Assad. Although Turkey has not been alone in this, such support has done much to aggravate the sectarian nature of the Syrian conflict and undermine international support for the opposition.

Recently, however, Turkey has felt some blowback from this strategy—as extremist groups have contributed to violence that has spilled into Turkey. American policymakers should seize on this opportunity to drive a wedge between Ankara and al-Nusra, and seek to convince it to forge closer ties with the Syrian Kurdish group PYD. But this will require calling Turkey out and holding it accountable for its engagement with jihadists in Syria, not ignoring such behavior. The recently announced joint U.S.-Turkish fund for countering violent extremism, by omitting any mention of Turkey's role in fanning the flames of such extremism, does little to incentivize Turkey to change direction.

Instead, American policymakers should condemn Turkey's ties to al-Nusra and other extremist groups, but also be prepared to address some of Turkey's concerns, such as by providing greater humanitarian assistance for Syrian refugees (see above), if it can help moderate Turkey's approach to the conflict and spur it to come to terms with Syria's Kurds. Realistically, U.S. policymakers should understand that Turkey will only likely become more cooperative on this front if the United States increases the assistance it provides to the mainstream Syrian opposition.

Cooperate on Common Approach to Iraq

The United States and Turkey share a common interest in bolstering a strong, stable, Western-oriented autonomous Kurdish region—ideally, within the context of a unified Iraq where the influence of both Iran and al-Qaeda are severely constrained. Each country has pursued this goal in different ways; both have failed. The Syrian conflict has made this objective even more difficult.

But, given the outright hostility that historically characterized Turkish-Kurdish relations, we applaud the strong economic and political ties that have recently developed between the KRG and Turkey. If properly handled, this relationship could deliver major economic benefits not only to the KRG and Turkey but also to Iraq more broadly. The continued deepening of Ankara's relations with the region's Kurds could also be important for the long-term future of the Turkish nation as it seeks to reach a peace deal with its own Kurdish population. Finally, bolstering the emergence of a pro-Western Kurdish region in Iraq that is economically vibrant and politically stable can serve as an important hedge and buffer against what appears to be Iran's growing and worrisome influence in Baghdad.

The United States and Turkey should recognize that they share the same strategic goals in Iraq and commence a sustained dialogue that seeks to reach some common understandings on how they can most

effectively cooperate to advance that vision. The more confident the KRG feels that its future economic well-being and security will not again be subject to the dictates of Baghdad, the more at ease it will be working to advance the long-term success of a unified Iraq—rather than devote the majority of its energies to the high-risk proposition of formal secession. Washington and Ankara should clearly communicate the purposes and limits of their strategy to both the KRG and Baghdad, while continuing to encourage negotiations that resolve tensions surrounding the issues of oil and gas development, exports, revenue sharing, and territorial disputes.

Finish Reconciliation with Israel

It is unlikely that Turkey and Israel's relations can return to the friendliness of the 1990s. But it is not too much to expect that America's two main Middle Eastern allies would at least maintain a diplomatic relationship. The United States has already proved that it is willing to use its relationship with the Turkish government to influence Israeli-Turkish relations. It should continue to do so. American policymakers should encourage Turkey and Israel to resolve their differences and conclude the ongoing reconciliation talks.

Engage Turkey on Iran

Turkey's Iran policy has a mix of pragmatic and ideological underpinnings that may prove difficult to impact. Sectarian differences have increasingly driven a wedge between Turkey and Iran, but Turkey's energy needs preclude it from becoming a greater partner in isolating the Iranian regime and pressuring it to give up its nuclear program.

Fully recognizing these limitations, American policymakers should nevertheless engage Turkey on the topic of Iran. This includes keeping Turkey informed of ongoing diplomatic efforts, both because of its position as Iran's neighbor and to avoid the sort of miscommunication that occurred in 2010, as well as beginning discussion about the possibility of using force to prevent a nuclear Iran, what that means for the U.S.-Turkish relationship, and what help the Turks could provide in such an event.

Reopen Dialogue on Cyprus

Despite initially promising developments when the AKP came to power, little progress has been made on the question of Cyprus since 2004. The current circumstances might make it possible to restart talks and move to resolve this long-standing issue. The discovery of significant natural gas reserves off the Cypriot coast could help motivate Turkey to take a more conciliatory stance in order to benefit from these resources.[155] It could also, given Israel's role in the Eastern Mediterranean energy picture, help patch up the relationship between Israel and Turkey, as suggested above. Likewise, the United States should leverage the recent fiscal crises in both Athens and Nicosia to overcome Greek and Greek Cypriot opposition to further negotiations, which has been the main obstacle to their resumption and resolution.

The United States should seize this opportunity by nominating a new high-level special envoy to work with both sides and the United Nations to restart talks and seek a resolution to this issue, along the lines of the 2004 Annan Plan, which was approved in referendum by Turkish Cypriots but rejected by their Greek counterparts.

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Appendix: Glossary

Adelet ve Kalkinma Partisi (AKP): Known in English as the Justice and Development Party, the AKP is the majority party in Turkey led by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Officially founded in 2001, the AKP is a center-right party that is often described as having Islamist roots or of being Islamic-leaning. The AKP ascended to power in 2002, where it received 34% of the vote in the general elections, gaining over two-thirds of parliamentary seats. The AKP went on to receive 46% of the vote in 2007 and nearly 50% of the vote in 2011.

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad: He was the 6th president of Islamic Republic of Iran from 2005-2013 who during his presidency resided over the expansion of nuclear facilities and an increasingly hostile Iranian state. He was a vocal critic of the US, the UK and Israel and once publically called for the obliteration of the state of Israel.

Ahrar al-Sham: Meaning "Islamic Movement of the Free Men of the Levant," Ahrar al-Sham is a coalition of Islamist and Salafist units fighting in Syria, comprising between 10,000 and 20,000 fighters. In 2012, the group formed an umbrella organization called the Syrian Islamic Front, of which it is the most prominent member.

Alawism: An Islamic sect that adheres to many beliefs and traditions of Shi'a Islam, while also incorporating aspects of Christianity, Islamic mysticism, and other religions. Based primarily along Syria's Mediterranean coastline and south-central Turkey, Alawis (also referred to as Alawites) constitute between 10 and 15 percent of Syria's population. The Assad family and many members of the regime's upper echelons originate from tribes following Alawi Islam.

Alevis: A religious, cultural and sub-ethnic community in Turkey who follow a unique set of practices under Twelver Shi'a Islam combined with influences from the Turkish Bektashi Sufi Order. They constitute around 15% of Turkey's population but have historically experienced repression from the Sunni-dominated Turkish government. Since the 1990s, the Alevi have mobilized political demands for the equal treatment of Alevis and Sunnis, including the recognition as Alevism as a distinct faith. While Alevis are almost entirely located in Turkey and religiously distinct, due to both being heterodox sects of Twelver Shi'a Islam, Alevis are often grouped together with Alawis.

Bülent Arınç: Deputy Prime Minister of Turkey since 2009, Arınç previously served as the speaker of the Turkish parliament from 2002-2007. Arınç has a long history with Turkey's Islamic movement, he was previously a member of the Welfare Party and the Virtue Party, and went on to form to Justice and Development Party with Erdoğan after the Virtue Party was closed by the Constitutional Court.

Bashar al-Assad: The current President of the Syrian Arabic Republic who inherited the presidency following the death of his father Hafez al-Assad in 2000. The Peoples' Council of Syria voted in Assad's favor in 2000 and 2007, securing his power over the Baath party and the government. Assad is an Alawite (a Twelver Shia denomination) and describes himself as 'anti-Israel' and 'anti-West'. His legitimacy has been called into question due to his brutal role in the Syrian civil war, including the use of chemical weapons in August 2013.

Beşir Atalay: Deputy Prime Minister of Turkey since 2011, Atalay previously served as Minister of the Interior from 2007-2011. Atalay is a member of the Justice and Development Party.

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1888-1938): Founder of the modern Turkish Republic, his title, which means "Father of the Turks," was officially bestowed on him in 1934. An officer in the Ottoman military during WWI, after

the conclusion of the war he led the Turkish national movement and established the modern state of Turkey in Ankara. Atatürk then undertook a series of drastic reforms to build Turkey into a modern, secular nation state. The founding principles of the Turkish Republic, known as Kemalism, remained influential in Turkey after his death and Kemalist elite governed Turkey until the Justice and Development Party's ascent to power.

Egemen Bağış: Member of the Justice and Development Party, Bağış has served in the Turkish parliament since 2002 and as the Minister for EU Affairs since 2009.

Mahmoud Barzani: The current President of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region and leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). Under his leadership he has aimed to encourage democratic institutions and economic development, whilst at the same time fostering relations with western powers including the US, the UK and Italy.

Çalık Holding: A Turkish conglomerate active in the media, energy, textile, finance, and construction sectors. In 2008, Çalık's media group, of which Erdogan's son-in-law is CEO, acquired Turkey's second largest media company, Sabah/ATV after it was seized by the Turkish government in an auction in which it was the sole bidder.

Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (CHP): Known in English as the Republican People's Party, the CHP is Turkey's oldest political party and main opposition in the Grand National Assembly, receiving 26% of the vote in the 2011 TGNA elections. The CHP describes itself as social democratic political party adhering to the founding principles of the Turkish Republic (Kemalism). The CHP held power in Turkey from 1925-1945, during Turkey's single-party period.

Ahmet Davutoğlu: Foreign Minister of Turkey since 2009 and member of the Justice and Development Party. Davutoğlu was the architect of Turkey's "zero problems with neighbors" foreign policy and, among his scholarly works, Strategic Depth has been particularly influential in Turkey's foreign policy formulation.

Süleyman Gündoğdu Demirel (1924 -): Turkish politician who served as Prime Minister of Turkey seven times and served as president from 1993-2000. Throughout his career, Demirel has been a member/founder of several Kemalist parties: the Justice Party, the True Path Party, which would later be known as the Democratic Party. Demirel was serving as Prime Minister during the coup of 1980, and was subsequently banned from politics for ten years. A 1987 referendum allowed him to return to politics, when he became the chairman of the True Path Party and assumed the Presidency after the death of Turgut Özal.

Doğan Holding: An industrial conglomerate in Turkey operating in the industry, energy, trade, media, insurance, and tourism sectors. In 2009, Doğan's media outlet's criticism of the AKP drew government censure in the form of $2.5 billion in fine for alleged tax evasion.

Necmettin Erbakan (1926-2011): Prime Minister of Turkey from 1996-1997, Erbakan was an Islamist politician, who set forth his ideology in a manifesto titled Millî Görüş (National View) – also the name of an organization he founded. A longtime member of Turkey's Islamic Movement, Erbakan became Prime Minister in 1996 in a coalition between the Islamist Welfare Party and the conservative Correct Path Party. In 1997, Erbakan was pressured by the military to step down in what some refer to as a "soft coup" and was later banned from politics by the Constitutional Court when the Welfare Party was dissolved. When his ban ended, Erbakan founded the Felicity Party, which he was involved with until his death.

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan: Prime Minister of Turkey since 2003 and chairman of the Justice and Development Party (AKP). From 1994 to 1998, Erdoğan served as Mayor of Istanbul, but was banned from office and sentenced to ten months in prison for reciting a poem during a public address in 1997 that was judged to be an incitement to religious hatred. Erdogan went on to found the AKP in 2001, which won a landslide victory in the 2002 elections.

Ergenekon: Named after a mythic valley in a Turkish nationalist origin story, Ergenekon is an alleged clandestine nationalist, secularist group with links to the military that has been trying to overthrow Erdogan's AKP government. This group is supposedly responsible for numerous acts of state-sponsored terrorism (including Operation Sledgehammer) and extends throughout the Turkish political and military institutions. After years of arrests and investigations, in August 2013, verdicts were handed down for 275 accused of membership in Ergenekon – only 21 were acquitted.

EU-Turkey Customs Union: Established in 1995, the Customs Union allows for goods to travel between Turkey and EU member states without customs restrictions. Originally intended as a temporary measure until Turkey could achieve full EU membership, the Customs Union was aimed at enhancing Turkey's economic development and bringing Turkey further in line with the EU's acquis communautaire.

Free Syrian Army (FSA): The largest informal organization of Syrian rebel paramilitary forces, the FSA receives assistance from Turkey and major Arab supporters of the Syrian opposition. In addition to engaging regime forces, the FSA has fought deadly battles with Syrian Kurdish units.

Abdullah Gül: President of Turkey since 2007, previously serving as Prime Minister from 2002-2003 and Foreign Minister from 2003-2007. Gül's history as the deputy leader of the banned Islamist Welfare Party and comments against Turkey's secularism caused Turkey's Constitutional Court to deny his first bid for the presidency, but he later ascended to the presidency after the constitution was amended to allow direct election of Turkey's president.

Hamas: Acronym of Ḥarakat al-Muqāwamah al-ʾIslāmiyya, meaning "Islamic Resistance Movement," Hamas is a Palestinian Islamist organization denounced by the United States, the EU, and others as a terrorist group. It won Palestinian parliamentary elections in 2006, defeating the Palestinian Liberation Organization-affiliated Fatah party, which governs the West Bank, and has governed the Gaza Strip since then. Fighting between Hamas and Fatah in 2007 led to the collapse of a Hamas-Fatah unity government and the ousting of Fatah from Gaza, and for Israel to impose an economic blockade on Gaza. Under Hamas governance, regular rocket attacks from Gaza reach Israel, which have escalated into large-scale conflict, such as in the 2008 Gaza War.

Tariq al-Hashimi: The former vice President of Iraq and former general secretary of the Iraqi Islamic Party. An important figure in the pro-Baath and pro-Sunni faction, he opposes federalism and the allowance for the Kurdish Regional Government to control its own oil wealth – wealth he argues that should be distributed by population. In 2011 he fled to Iraqi Kurdistan was sentenced in abstentia to death by the Central Criminal Court of Iraqi on charges of murder. He now resides in Ankara under a non-extradition agreement with the Turkish government.

International Security Assistance Force (ISAF): Established in 2001, ISAF is a NATO-led security mission in Afghanistan engaged in training Afghan National

Security Forces, rebuilding institutions, and counter-insurgency.

Jabhat al-Nusra: Meaning "The Support Front for the People of the Levant," Jabhat al-Nusra, also known as the al-Nusra Front, is an al-Qaeda affiliate operating in Syria since January 2012. Denounced by the United States, United Nations and others as a terrorist organization, al-Nusra has claimed responsibility for the majority of suicide attacks that have occured druing the Syrian conflict and has clashed repeatedly with Syrian Kurds and PYD forces.

Ibrahim Kalin: Serves as Erdoğan's chief foreign policy advisor.

Gültan Kışanak: Pro-Kurdish politician and member of the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) in Turkey. She became an MP for the Diyarbakır region in 2007 and has urged democratic reform, respect for equal minority rights and the legal protection of journalists in Turkey.

Koç Holding: The top industrial conglomerate in Turkey, led by the wealthy Koç family, involved in a wide array of fields: from energy, tourism, trade, finance, and defense to food, durables, and automobiles. During the Taksim protests, the Divan Hotel – owned by Koç – provided refuge to protestors escaping tear gas. In what is perceived as revenge by the AKP, the Ministry of Finance raided nine provincial offices of Koç's energy-sector companies as part of an audit of Koç's activities.

Koma Civakên Kurdistan (KCK): Meaning "Kurdistan Communities Union," the KCK is an organization founded by PKK leader Abullah Öcalan along his vision of Kurdish democratic confederalism and includes regional Kurdish armed groups and political parties. In Turkey, since 2009, thousands of individuals have been detained, mainly politicians from the BDP and the banned Democratic Society Party (DTP), on charges of being members of KCK.

Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG): The Kurdistan Regional Government is the ruling body of the autonomous Kurdistan region of northern Iraq. It has built diplomatic and economic ties with Turkey under the AKP and has sought to broker a power-sharing agreement among Syrian Kurdish factions to limit the influence of harder-line elements in Kurdish populations in Syria, Iraq, and Turkey.

Kurds: The Kurdish people are an Iranian people concentrated primarily in Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. Adherents largely of Sunni Islam, Kurds form an ethnically and linguistically distinct community constituting approximately 18 percent of Turkey's population and roughly 9 percent of Syria's population.

Nouri al-Maliki: The incumbent Prime Minister of Iraq and the secretary general of the Islamic Dawa Party in Iraq. He was originally a Shi'a dissident against Baathist rule in Hussein's Iraq and now serves to ease internal tensions with religious factions and external tensions with Iran and Syria.

Adnan Menderes (1899-1961): The first democratically elected Prime Minister of Turkey, serving from 1950-1960. He was a founding member of the Democratic Party (a different party than the party created by the merging of the True Path Party and the Motherland Party), and his election ended Turkey's one-party era. Less militantly secularist than Turkey's previous leaders, Menderes as seen as betraying the Republic's Kemalist principles and was overthrown in a military coup in 1960 and sentenced to death for violating the Constitution.

Khaled Meshal: The current leader of the Hamas political bureau who assumed control after the assassination of former leader Abdel Aziz al-Rantissi in 2004.

Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (MHP): Known in English as the Nationalist Movement Party, the MHP is a nationalist, far right political party in Turkey. The MHP won 14% of the vote in the 2011 parliamentary elections, making it the third largest political group in Turkey's parliament.

Mohammad Morsi: The 5th President of Egypt, elected to office after the revolution that overthrew his predecessor, Hosni Mubarak, in 2012. He is considered the first democratically elected president of Egypt, but was ousted by the Egyptian military after mass protests in 2013. He now is under detention by Abdul Fatah al-Sisi's interim military government and awaits trial.

Hosni Mubarak: Former president of Egypt who served from 1981-2011. He resigned from power in February 2011 following mass protest and dissent, to be replaced by Muslim Brotherhood candidate Mohamed Morsi. In June 2012, Mubarak was found guilty for the premeditated murder of protestors during the Egyptian Revolution and sentenced to life imprisonment. However, in August 2013, following the overthrow of the Muslim Brotherhood government, an appeals court overturned his sentences and ordered a retrial. The court ordered him transferred from prison to house arrest at a military hospital – due to his myriad health problems – during the course of the retrial.

Muslim Brotherhood: The Society of the Muslim Brothers is an Islamic organization founded in Egypt in the 1920s as a religious, political, and social movement advocating the use of Sharia law and the unity of all Islamic states. Previously outlawed under the Assad regime, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood has become one of most prominent opposition groups in the Syrian rebel coalition.

Salih Muslim Muhammed: The leader of the Democratic Union Party in Syria, a political party set up in 2003 in northern Syria and an affiliate of the PKK. Since the start of the Syrian civil war in 2011 he has been operating in northern Syria to secure Kurdish interests in the region.

Benjamin Netanyahu: The Prime Minster of the state of Israel since March 2009 and the leader of the centre-right, secularist Likud political party. In 2013, he publically apologized to Erdogan over the 'operational mistakes' during the Gaza flotilla raid.

Abdullah Öcalan: The founder and leader of the Kurdistan's Workers Party (PKK) who was arrested in 1999 by Turkish authorities and has since been incarcerated in on the prison-island of İmralı. From there, he still directs the PKK and writes frequently on matters of Kurdish independence and nationalism. The EU has requested a re-trial but this has been rejected by the Turkish authorities. Securing such re-trial is a current objective of the PKK.

Operation Sledgehammer: An alleged ultra-nationalist and secularist coup planned by Ergenekon and the military after the 2003 elections. Over 250 Turkish military officers were convicted of plotting a coup in a trial which the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (UNWGAD) deemed a violation of international human rights law.

Halil Turgut Özal (1927-1993): Prime Minister of Turkey from 1983-1989 and President of Turkey from 1989-1993. Özal founded the center-right Motherland Party. A half-Kurdish politician, Özal initiated negotiations with the PKK in the early 90s. Özal died of a suspicious heart attack in 1993, which many believe was the result of poisoning.

Partiya Aştî û Demokrasiyê (BDP): Known in English as the Peace and Democracy Party, the BDP is a Kurdish

political party in Turkey, succeeding the Democratic Society Party (DTP) in 2008 following its closure by Turkey's Constitutional Court.

Partiya Karkeran Kurdistan (PKK): Known in English as the Kurdistan Workers' Party, the PKK is a Kurdish separatist group based in Turkey that advocates for the establishment of an independent Kurdish state. Designated as a terrorist group by the United States and others, the PKK has waged a decades-long military campaign against Turkey and has strong political and security ties to Syrian Kurdish communities.

Partiya Yekitiya Demokrat (PYD): Known in English as the Democratic Union Party, the PYD is a Syrian Kurdish nationalist party affiliated with the PKK. Through this affiliation and its influence in key Syrian Kurdish militias, the PYD is the most powerful Syrian Kurdish group.

Shimon Peres: The current President of the state of Israel who assumed power in 2007 and important member of the Kadima party. He has attempted to placate Turkey by publically downplaying the Armenian genocide, arguing how it was not comparable to the Holocaust.

Hassan Rouhani: The current President of Iran who has held power since his successful election in June 2013. A supposed moderate, in public statements Rouhani has offered a more conciliatory approach to relations with Israel and the West.

Salafi Movement: Drawing its name from Salaf, meaning "predecessors," Salafism is a fundamentalist interpretation of Sunni Islam that advocates literalist interpretations of the Qur'an parable to Wahabism and using the community of the earliest Muslims as a model. It is not synonymous with jihadist interpretations of Islam but almost all jihadis have had affiliations with the broader Salafi movement.

Syrian National Council (SNC): An umbrella opposition group of anti-regime Syrian groups based in Turkey and formed in August 2011, the SNC is composed primarily of Sunni Arab parties, including a significant Muslim Brotherhood presence. The SNC's lack of representation of Syrian minority groups convinced the Friends of Syria to recognize the Syrian Opposition Coalition (National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces) as the sole legitimate Syrian government, in which the SNC holds a plurality.

Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP): A set of U.S.-EU free trade and investment deals that seek to reduce trade tariffs, technical regulations, standards and certification procedures. This deal is worth billions of dollars to both the EU and the United States and will increase levels of trade between the two dramatically (e.g. European exports to the United States may increase by up to 28%).

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