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# Turkish - American Relations in 2009

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## Abstract

*This article analyses Turkish foreign policy towards the USA in 2009. After putting the Turkish-US relations into historical and political context it focuses on a set of developments that affected bilateral relations in 2009. It argues that Turkish-American relations in 2009 were shaped and influenced more by “third party” problems and issues, than by bilateral ones. The set of such issues were categorized and examined under three levels- bilateral, global and regional. The year 2009 could be seen as a positively exceptional span of time for Turkish foreign policy, because of Turkey’s high level of cooperation with the USA. The term developed to describe this new era, model partnership, could be defined as extensive and intensive collaboration between Turkey and the USA to set up a new regional order in the countries and regions around Turkey. Thus, during 2009, Turkey and the USA actively cooperated for the resolution of crises pertaining to Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Armenia, and the Arab-Israeli conflict.*

## Key Words

Turkish foreign policy, American foreign policy, Turkey-USA relations in 2009, Model Partnership, regional order in Eurasia.

## Introduction

Turkish-American relations in general terms have always been shaped under the influence of two factors. The first is the set of structural and institutional factors, which can be regarded as the fundamental dynamic of the bilateral relations. It includes those enduring elements that helped the continuity of the relationship, despite all kinds of current or periodical challenges. Most important of those elements are the following: Turkey’s membership in, and position within, the military-political structure of NATO; her relations with global economic and financial institutions, the IMF and the World Bank; her diplomatic and political role stemming from UN membership; and finally, the U.S. sphere of influence policy in the regions around Turkey. All these can be seen as the bases of continuity in Turkish-American relations for more than sixty years, which ensure

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the maintenance and resilience of good relations in spite of crises and problems that emerge from time to time. However, the structural and institutional dimension is frequently tested by new developments and crises time and again, but revised and maintained continuously.

The second set of factors to influence Turkey's foreign policy towards the US is those national and international conjectural/periodical developments which closely relate to, and influence, Turkish-American relations. Thus, changing conjunctures from the 1940s up until now have caused an overlap of interests and policies of the two countries sometimes, and conflicts and alienation at other times. As a result, Turkey's foreign policy towards the US has shown different patterns in different periods.

In historical perspective, Turkey's policy toward the US was at the highest level in three periods, which can also be described as the golden ages of Turkish-American relations: the Menderes period of the 1950s, the Özal period of the 1980s and the Gül-Erdoğan period since 2007. In those periods Turkey's policy towards the US was intensive and extensive. It can be argued that the above-mentioned periods played a leading role in the formation of Turkey's perception of the US in general. Turkey's definition

and perception of the US as an 'ally', a 'friend,' and even a 'savior' resulted from its experience in those periods. Bilateral and multilateral cooperation between the two countries grew in those periods, too. They co-acted to form an order in the regions extending from the Middle East to Europe up to Korea. In those golden ages, a strong sympathy towards the US, i.e. pro-Americanism, developed at the social and bureaucratic segments of Turkey.

At other times outside the golden ages, Turkish-American relations witnessed serious problems, and even deep crises, from time to time. But two of these crises were especially critical because of their potential risks to destroy relations between the two countries. The first

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was the turmoil in the 1960-1970 period due to the Cyprus problem, which resulted in the notorious Johnson Letter in 1964, and unfortunate US military embargo against Turkey in 1975. The second period covered the time frame from 1 March 2003, when Turkey's Grand National Assembly (TGNA) refused to cooperate with the US on the invasion of Iraq, to 5 November 2007, when Prime Minister Erdoğan and President Bush met in the Oval Office to conclude an intelligence cooperation agreement against the PKK. In those years, a wide range of tensions and alienation erupted in Turkish-American relations. Turkey's

approach to the US became negative, especially at the social level; some people even came to the point as to consider the US a big threat for Turkey. In contrast to the golden ages, anti-Americanism was on the rise in that period.

It can be inferred from the above analysis that Turkey's policy toward the USA was shaped more by the situations in third countries or regions which were related to the interests of both countries than by the issues directly related to bilateral relations. In other words, Turkey's foreign policy toward the US and Turkish-American relations was rather heavily influenced by the periodic developments in third countries or other regions. As an overall principle, it can be argued that in those cases where both countries have common perceptions of interests about third countries and regions, Turkey's foreign policy toward the US has been 'good'; on the contrary, in those cases where interests of both countries conflicted or deeply differed the relationship has been 'negative' or 'in crisis.'

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Thus, when analyzing Turkey's policy towards the US, unlike her policy towards most of other countries, one should take into account not only bilateral issues but

also those situations and problems which concerned both countries' interests at the same time. Such situations may emanate not only from those developments at local, regional and global levels, but also from 'domestic' political issues of both countries. Consequently, Turkey's policy towards the US closely influences its foreign policy in general terms and its attitude toward other countries and regions. In other words, Turkey's foreign policy understanding and its policies toward other countries and international system is a derivative of Turkey-US relations. This is mainly because of the aforementioned structural and institutional factors.

From this perspective, we can analyze Turkey's foreign policy towards the US or Turkish-American relations in 2009 under three sections: firstly the general mood or atmosphere of Turkey-US relations; secondly, developments in bilateral relations; thirdly, approaches and practices by Turkey and the US toward third countries or other regions.<sup>1</sup>

## Turkey's US Policy before 2009

To understand Turkey's US policy in 2009, we should first of all recall the recent history of Turkish-US relations. Although Turkish-US relations in 2009 were based on recent developments, two of them must be emphasized in particular. The first one is the refusal by TGNA, on 1 March 2003, of the Gül

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government's decree to support the US-led invasion of Iraq, and the ensuing crisis in the relationship between Turkey and the US.<sup>2</sup> This decision, which can also be seen as Turkey's rejection of the US-led invasion of Iraq, shocked the Bush administration and American analysts. Turkey's refusal to open its bases and soil to the American use for the first time in long years (e.g. since 1975) caused deep sorrow and bewilderment in the US. Even though the government, despite the rejection of the decree by the TGNA, opened its airspace to the US for flights during the invasion operations, hence gave indirect support to the USA, it did not calm down the administration's frustration.

The emergence of chaos and instability in Iraq after the invasion caused further deterioration in Turkish-American relations. In particular, the growth of risks and dangers such as the fragmentation of Iraq, establishment of a Kurdish state and change of Kirkuk's status in Iraq led to an incremental increase of anti-Americanism at the social and political levels in Turkey. Additionally to that was ignorance by the Bush administration and neoconservatives of Turkey's fight against terror and sensitivities on security

matters, and their failure to take into account Turkey's views on Iraq and other regional problems, which resulted in a deep crisis in bilateral relations.

However, the gradual 'bogging down' of the US in the Iraqi crisis, after a few years of occupation, forced the Bush Administration to revise its Iraqi policy and to change its program to restructure Iraq. An important step in this context was the famous Baker-Hamilton Iraqi Report.<sup>3</sup> The report argued that the American policy towards Iraq and the region was in trouble, and suggested that there should be a policy change to reverse the process in a positive direction. One of the dimensions of the new policy was to integrate all Iraqi groups into the government; the other was the obligation to start cooperating with Iraq's neighboring countries, Turkey in particular.

To implement the second dimension of the report in particular, the Bush administration needed to make a radical change in its approach to Turkey. It realized the importance of Turkey's key role in the restructuring of Iraq and in the withdrawal of US forces from Iraq. Thus, the structural and institutional importance of Turkey-USA relations was suddenly discovered. In the following period, the Bush administration accelerated rapprochement with Turkey.

Meanwhile, Turkey was convinced to create a new US policy so as to

eliminate the negative consequences of the Iraq problem to Turkey. A terror attack by the PKK on a Turkish military post in Dağlica on the Iraqi border on 21 October 2007 played an important catalyst in this process. Turkey embarked on a new dialogue with the USA in order to launch a military operation against PKK terrorists who were infiltrating into Turkey from northern Iraq. This case paved the way for a new period in Turkish-American relations.

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In this context, Prime Minister Erdoğan, accompanied by a large delegation of civilian and military officials, held a historic meeting with President Bush and his aides in Washington on 5 November 2007. At the end of this meeting, the two countries decided to cooperate on sharing intelligence against the PKK. This agreement was in fact the start of a new and comprehensive period of cooperation between Turkey and the US. They reached a consensus to cooperate for reconstructing, not only Iraq, but also the Middle East in general. This meeting can be accepted as the starting moment of a new period, not only for Turkey's US policy and Turkish-American relations, but also for Turkish foreign policy towards Iraq in particular

and towards the whole Middle East in general. The year 2009 is the span of time that should now be analyzed in this context.

## Basic Factors Shaping the Bilateral Relations in 2009

Turkish-American relations developed very positively in 2009. Before explaining this period, the basic factors generating this positive process will be briefly evaluated. At the top is the abovementioned atmosphere of the 5 November 2007 agreement. While Turkey and the US started having a common position against the PKK terror, the US extended more intelligence support to Turkey's struggle to combat terrorism. In this respect, Turkey and the US, alongside with the Iraqi government, formed a trilateral intelligence mechanism in order to target PKK terrorists operating from northern Iraq. Turkey also tried to draw in the northern Iraqi Kurdish administration in order to have its support for the process. Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoğlu, Turkish Interior Minister Atalay and a delegation of security officials went to Erbil to meet with the Kurdish regional representatives to realize the trilateral mechanism.

A related factor emerging in this atmosphere was the change of administration in the US. The inauguration of Barack Hussein Obama as president on 20 January 2009 played a decisive role in Turkish-American

relations. Obama's understanding of foreign policy, different from that of his predecessor Bush in terms of both its content and geopolitical conceptualization, accentuated Turkey's role.<sup>4</sup> The foreign policy of Obama, who had gained the presidency with the motto of 'change', aimed to develop a different and more positive relationship with the Islamic world and the Middle Eastern countries. In his Cairo speech on 5 June 2009, Obama stated that he wanted to open "a new page" with the Islamic world, terminating the mistaken practices of the past, and to develop a new kind of relationship based on mutual interests and respect.<sup>5</sup> From this and other statements of Obama, it can be concluded that he desired to follow a foreign policy which was peaceful and pro-dialogue in content, while still focusing on the Islamic world, Middle East, Caucasus, and Central Asia from a geopolitical perspective.

To implement his policy, Obama needed allies in the region to cooperate with and rely on, among which the first and the most important actor would be Turkey.<sup>6</sup> Thus Turkey's international structural-institutional position overlapped with the conjunctural conditions. In other words, the Erdoğan government's foreign policy coincided perfectly with the content and spirit of Obama's foreign policy. Just like Obama's foreign policy, the AK Party's seven-year foreign policy was based on a "vision of peace."<sup>7</sup> All of the AK Party's practices in the context of the EU's Copenhagen criteria, its

performance in the Cyprus problem and relations with Greece, and even its attitude to the American-led invasion of Iraq, were aspects of this vision of peace. Turkey's foreign policy within this content was supported both in the east and the west. Turkey's liberalism-oriented foreign policy was perceived well by the whole world, including the US and other Western countries in particular. As a result of such a growing sympathy, Turkey was elected (after a long time) as a non-permanent member to the UN Security Council for the period 2009-2010.

The coincidence of Turkey's election with the inauguration of President Obama can be seen as a factor contributing to the development of Turkish-American relations in 2009. The non-permanent Security Council membership assigned Turkey a significant role and responsibility around the UN principles. That the UN is principally a peace-promoting organization has been a contributing factor to the peace-oriented foreign policies of Obama and Erdoğan. Given the fact that all the problems on the international agenda from Iraq to Afghanistan and from Iran to Palestine are included one way or another in the agenda or scope of the UN Security Council, increased cooperation between the US and Turkey is easy to comprehend.

To implement such a foreign policy whose content and geopolitics overlapped, there needed to be a

leadership with the same vision and dynamism. Hillary Clinton in the US and Ahmet Davutoğlu in Turkey played a great role in this respect. While Clinton posed as a powerful foreign policymaker due to both her experience from her husband, former US president Bill Clinton, and to her own presidential candidacy, Davutoğlu had been both an adviser to Turkey's foreign policymaking elite since 2002 and the right person for the resolution of conjectural foreign policy problems.

We cannot know for sure whether Davutoğlu's appointment as foreign minister on 1 May 2009, just after Obama's visit to Turkey on 5-6 April 2009, was a coincidence or a result of the Erdoğan-Obama agreement. Either way, Davutoğlu's appointment was a very critical and positive step for the implementation of Turkish-American cooperation, because of the fact that he is an expert in the problems of the Middle East and Caucasus, a leading actor in the AK Party government's foreign policymaking toward the region, and an academic arguing that Turkey's 'strategic depth' requires her to concentrate on the Middle East, Balkans, Caucasus, and Central Asian "basin". Davutoğlu was the best choice for the implementation of the foreign policies of both the Obama administration and Erdoğan government as well as for their cooperation. Developments in 2009 clearly proved that.

## Turkey-USA Relations in 2009: Towards Model Partnership

The most striking aspect of Turkish-American relations in 2009 was the high level, reciprocal and formal visits and the ensuing new agenda. Of these visits, the most important indication of the importance that Obama showed toward Turkey was Obama's first formal visit to Ankara and Istanbul on 5-6 April. Obama's speech in the TGNA was the most important activity to start a new period in the Turkish-American relations. It was also striking to see that Obama held not only traditional and routine talks with the Turkish president, prime minister, and chief of staff as well as with opposition party leaders under the premises of the Assembly, but also 'civilian' meetings with religious, cultural and student groups in Istanbul. On these occasions, he practiced such public diplomacy as to give religious, cultural, strategic and political messages to gain the sympathy of Turkish society. The visit and its program, which would be mundane under ordinary conditions, turned out to be very important strategically and very meaningful due to the transformation of recent Turkish-American relations and to Turkey's new role in the current crises.

Obama's visit to Turkey was critical partly because of the fact that diplomatic and political rapprochement between the two countries started improving

again, and partly from the fact that the visit program included activities geared towards eliminating increasing anti-Americanism in Turkish society. Indeed, Obama's visit to Turkey was appreciated not only among Turkish officials but also by the 'man-on-the street'. Turkish public opinion, as revealed in the media channels, was such that the Obama administration was perceived differently from the Bush administration. Moreover, the Islamic origins of Obama's initial names (Barack Hussein) and the spread of such gossip that Obama was actually a 'Muslim in heart' boosted Turkish people's perception about Obama and the US.

Obama's speech in the TGNA in particular and his meetings with Turkish officials in general became the basis for a framework for Turkish-American relations for the year 2009 and the future. Obama's description of Turkish-American relations as 'Model Partnership' gave strong hints of the start of a new era between the two countries. Whereas in the past, concepts like 'strategic partnership' or 'durable alliance' were used mostly to describe Turkish-American relations, Obama's expression of a model partnership for the first time caused ambiguity in the beginning. What did Obama mean by a model partnership? How would Turkey-US relations develop in the following years? What would Turkey's contribution to, and role for, the partnership be? What would be Turkey's benefit and interests from the partnership? Such questions

were instantly asked. In response, some theories were spelled out, some positive and negative ideas were expressed, and speculation started from the first day.

The clearest answer to these questions was indeed given in practice in 2009. Namely, the details of the Turkey-US Model Partnership were partly seen in Obama's speech in the TGNA, but it was actually revealed more clearly in the implementation process. Obama's concept was partly related to Turkey's domestic politics but mostly to Turkey's foreign policy. The issue most wondered about regarding its relevance to Turkish domestic politics was the question of what would be the Obama administration's attitude towards democracy and secularism in Turkey. Obama, in his speeches in Ankara, tried to eliminate speculation by emphasizing the importance of Turkey's membership into the EU, the greatness of Atatürk, and Turkish secularism.

Obama's main message was hidden in his views pertaining to Turkey's foreign policy and to the level of Turkish-American relations. Obama in his TGNA speech stated that "I am asked whether my visit to Turkey, an important ally of the USA, has any message." He replied that "my answer to this question is (in Turkish) 'Evet – Yes.'"<sup>8</sup>

The following were Obama's messages to the Turkish people with the motto "Model Partnership": The basic message was that the parties must resolve

the difficulties by working together. Obama described the difficulties and the ways of cooperation very clearly. First, “an open border helps Turkish and Armenian peoples to coexist in peace and welfare, which serve the interest of both countries. Therefore, the US supports a full normalization of relations between Turkey and Armenia.” Second, “the US and Turkey can help the Palestinians and the Israelis. Turkey mediated between Syria and Israel. She should extend her hands to the Palestinians as well.” Third, “Iran should make its choice: do they want to have a better future, or resort to the arms?” Fourth, “Iraq’s security is important in terms of regional security too. As US president and a NATO ally, I support neither the PKK nor any other terrorist organizations.” Finally, “Turkey is our strong partner; she is one of the powers in the region. We should define our goals together. I appreciate your help given to us...We extend our friendly hand to all...we should work together for building the future...”

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From his speech, the new regional strategy of the Obama administration could be divided into five categories, each of which is closely related to Turkey. First is to reverse President Bush’s ‘preemptive

strike’ policy which put US regional interests at risk, and instead to follow a strategy based on multilateralism, diplomacy, peace and dialogue. Second is try to stop Iran’s nuclear program by diplomatic methods, instead of war and conflict. Third is to restructure Iraq after the withdrawal of American troops. Fourth is to stop Iran’s influence over Syria and radical actors like Hamas and Hizbullah in order to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Fifth is to obtain Pakistan’s support to fight terror in Afghanistan. The reason for Obama’s interest in Turkey was his awareness that he could achieve great part of his strategy only by cooperating with Turkey.

Philip H. Gordon, U.S. Deputy Secretary of State for Europe and Eurasia Affairs, clarified the Obama administration’s expectations of Turkey’s role in the region in his speech at the Brookings Institution Sabancı Lectures:<sup>9</sup>

Few countries play such a crucial role in such a diverse set of important areas. How many countries have borders with as diverse an array of countries as Turkey – Greece, Bulgaria, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. With its combination of strategic, economic, and cultural links, Turkey’s influence touches such vital concerns of both our countries as the stability of the Middle East and relations with the broader Islamic world, relations with the Caucasus and Black Sea region, the transit of energy from the Caspian Basin to Europe, the security and development of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, and the maintenance of strong ties to Europe and the Trans-

Atlantic alliance. The geography that I have just mentioned spans some of the most sensitive and significant parts of the globe and in every one of these areas U.S.-Turkish cooperation can be a force for progress.<sup>10</sup>

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### From Turkish point of view, the Model Partnership was important in three respects.

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The Model Partnership concept of the Obama administration was explicitly welcomed by the AK Party government. Foreign Minister Davutoğlu bluntly expressed Turkey's willingness. Davutoğlu, in a speech he made before his departure to the US on 31 May 2009, soon after his appointment to the office on 1 May 2009, announced his support for the Model Partnership as follows:

The main point of my contacts is a kind of follow-up to President Obama's visit to Turkey and meetings with him thereof. In the following period there are many issues in the international agenda that Turkey and the USA must talk about. Such topics as Iraq, Caucasus, Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Middle East, and Cyprus are the issues on which Turkey and the USA should have a close coordination.<sup>11</sup>

In another speech Davutoğlu stated that "Turkish foreign policy and Obama administration's foreign policy fully overlap."<sup>12</sup>

From Turkish point of view, the Model Partnership was important in

three respects: first, struggling against the PKK terror, finding a durable and just solution to the Cyprus problem, and cooperating on energy and other issues which are directly related to Turkish interests; second, resolving concrete problems pertaining to Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and other issues which closely affect Turkish interests; and third, restoring peace and stability in the Middle East, Caucasus, Central Asia, and Balkans, of which the most important was the Palestine problem.

The Model Partnership was attempted to be implemented at three levels in 2009: first, in bilateral relations, a high level of activities and rapprochement took place; second, at a global level, Turkey's participation in global organizations and processes intensified; and third, at the regional level, Turkey followed an active policy towards the establishment of a regional order. This policy was almost fully supported by the USA. The implementation process of the Model Partnership will be analyzed in the following section.

## Increasing Activism in Bilateral Relations

The most important and primary dimension of the Turkey-US Model Partnership was the high level, intensive and reciprocal diplomatic contacts in bilateral relations. An important

indicator for understanding the state and the degree of international relations between any two states is to see the intensity and level of diplomatic relations between the states concerned. In 2009, diplomatic relations between Turkey and the US developed very intensively and at the highest level possible. In the intensive diplomatic traffic during the year, there were many important visits from the US to Turkey and from Turkey to the US at all levels. Secretary of State Clinton and President Obama visited Ankara and Istanbul in March and April, respectively, while Davutoğlu visited the US three times after his appointment as Foreign Minister and Prime Minister Erdoğan visited America twice in 2009.<sup>13</sup> Even though one of the Turkish visits was for the purpose of participating in the UN General Assembly, there were diplomatic talks between Turkish and American officials on this occasion. In addition, there were a series of formal talks between the Turkish and American chiefs of staffs, civil society organizations, finance ministers, treasury ministers, economy ministers, Assembly/Congress members, and different political actors. It must be stressed that the flow of visits from Turkey to the US was more than those from the US to Turkey. The reason for this was partly due to the intensity of bilateral relations, and partly due to Turkey's participation in international organizations such as the UN, IMF, World Bank, and G-20, which are located in the US.

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This intensity of the diplomatic agenda vindicated how intensified the relations between the two countries became. The main goal of such an agenda of bilateral, regional and global issues can be briefly summed as the implementation of the Model Partnership. The diplomatic process tried first of all to improve bilateral rapprochement in all fields possible to serve the interests of both sides. While Turkey expected support from the US in fighting against the PKK, promoting security, resolving financial and economic problems, and resolving foreign policy problems, especially the Armenian question, the Cyprus problem, EU membership, the US expected support from Turkey to play a role in the resolution of problems in Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan- in the process of withdrawal of American military forces from Iraq in particular- in the Arab-Israeli peace process, and in other regional and global issues.

The diplomatic traffic was not confined to the bilateral level only, but spilled over to regional and global issues. Moreover, if one takes the Model Partnership as the basis of cooperation between the countries towards third countries as well as regional and global issues, it can be argued that all bilateral

diplomatic relations aimed to achieve the implementation or operationalization of this cooperation.

## Global/ Structural Level of Cooperation

An important aspect in the implementation of the Model Partnership and the development of Turkish-American relations in 2009 was the participation in international and global institutions in which both Turkey and the USA are present. Considering that NATO, IMF, World Bank, and G-20- are critical in terms of the operation of the global system, the level of cooperation between Turkey and the US within these institutions should be investigated as well. In 2009, Turkish-US cooperation inside these institutions developed such that Turkey's position within these institutions improved visibly.

At the forefront was Turkey's election as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council. Although Turkey was elected to this position with as high as 151 votes of the UN General Assembly, we should not forget the support from the UN Security Council permanent members, the US in particular. It was clear that Turkey's recent 'peace-oriented' foreign policy and her critical geopolitical position in world politics played an important role in her election to this position. The election of Turkey, with its peaceful foreign policy objectives, to the Security Council was a very good match. When taking into account that most of

the regional problems being dealt with by both Turkey and the US are on the agenda of the UN Security Council in one way or another, the value of Turkey's Security Council membership can be better understood. Turkey's peace-oriented foreign policy toward such issues like Iran's nuclear program and the Arab-Israeli question made Turkey's membership of UN Security Council more meaningful and valuable.

Two of the UN Security Council meetings in 2009 to which Turkey also attended could be discussed in this context: the 31 March International Conference on Afghanistan under the auspices of UN in the Hague and, the 11 May Conference on the Middle East in New York which was chaired by Davutoğlu. In the New York meeting, it was suggested that there should be a two-state solution to the Palestine problem, and the dialogue between different Palestinian groups, i.e., Hamas and Al Fatah, should be improved. These were the suggestions shared by both Turkey and the Obama administration. Another project in which Turkey played a role within the UN context was the Alliance of Civilizations process. This process, co-chaired by Turkey and Spain, was supported by the Obama administration and the Alliance Summit in Istanbul on 6-7 April was attended by many world leaders, including Obama. Obama's participation in the Istanbul Summit and the US support of the process was very interesting, because the Alliance of Civilizations was originally formed as a protest and alternative to the Clash

of Civilizations thesis produced by an American scholar, Samuel Huntington, and almost put into practice by the Bush Administration. The Obama administration has a different attitude than its predecessor on this issue, standing consistent with Turkey's approach in the Summit.

Another development, which strengthened Turkey's international structural position, was her increasing participation and position in global financial-economic organizations. Turkey's involvement in the G-20 process, which started in 2009, was particularly important. She participated in two G-20 summits in April and September where Erdoğan and Obama held bilateral as well as multilateral talks, all of which helped improve Turkey's position in the global financial-economic system. By being part of this system, Turkey tried to resolve, on the one hand, her problems generated by the globalization process in general and current international financial-economic crisis in particular, and to be influential in the formation of decisions and policies of the global organizations on the other. As a result, Turkey started to have a say in the restructuring process of the global system.

A very important development in this context was the convening of the annual meeting of the governors of the IMF-World Bank on 4-8 October in Istanbul.<sup>14</sup> More than fifteen thousand people, including the most influential finance and economy ministers of the global economy, heads of central banks,

and heads of states and governments, visited Istanbul for this occasion. The Istanbul Declaration was issued at the end of this meeting where a set of important decisions was made for the restructuring of the IMF and the World Bank. If these decisions will be put into practice, it can be argued that the Istanbul Meeting could be seen as a historic turning point for these institutions.

Although these meetings focused basically on financial-economic issues, a number of debates took place on international political and security issues to make an effort to form common positions on these problems. This is not a surprise if one considers that economic, political and security issues are interlinked. For example, in the G-8 meeting in Trieste, Italy on 25-27 June, where Davutoğlu participated, despite its economic character in essence, a seminar was held on 'Afghanistan and the Regional Dimension.' Measures for the resolution of the Afghanistan problem and its implications for the region were debated. Davutoglu's participation in this meeting was due to Turkey's contribution to the resolution of the Afghanistan problem and its contribution to the NATO-led ISAF operation.

Another aspect of Turkey's importance for the US is its role and policies around NATO membership, which is very critical for the establishment of Turkey's international position and foreign policy. This role required Turkey to join peacemaking operations in

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Afghanistan. As a member of the ISAF force formed under the leadership of NATO, Turkey served twice as the head of the command. Turkey continued to play an active role by participating into all NATO meetings in 2009 that tried to resolve the Afghanistan problem.

The most important of all these meetings was the NATO Summit of Heads of States and Governments in Brussels on 3-4 April.<sup>15</sup> In the Summit, where Turkey was represented by President Abdullah Gül, apart from such decisions as the election of the Secretary General of NATO, the Afghanistan problem was discussed. Moreover, in the Defense Ministers Council meetings on 11-12 June in Brussels and 22-23 October in Slovakia, Afghanistan and the ISAF issue was debated. Finally, in the Foreign Ministers meeting on 3-4 December in Brussels where Turkey was represented by Davutoğlu, such issues as increasing the number of NATO soldiers in Afghanistan and NATO's new strategy in this respect were debated. The conclusion issued in the Afghanistan Declaration was that the member countries should send more combat troops to Afghanistan.

Turkey gave a negative response to the NATO demand which had been made in parallel to Obama's new strategy

on Afghanistan. Turkey opted to send peace-making forces only, but declined to send additional combat forces to Afghanistan. This Turkish policy, although it appears as a refusal to the US request, was appreciated by the US administration. Turkey's 'soft power role' in Afghanistan, namely training Afghan soldiers and police while constructing infrastructure, made a great contribution to the restructuring of Afghanistan, and a 'soft contribution' to the war on terror.

All these meetings and issues show that the organizations around which the US global hegemonic power is formed and where Turkey's role has increased, sought to tackle a set of problems from Afghanistan to Iraq, Iran, and Israel. Given its performance, Turkey's role and influence improved not only within the context of global bodies but also in Afghanistan and other regional problems.

## The Quest for Security, Stability and Order at the Regional Level

One of the main reasons for the start of the Model Partnership was both countries' converging positions on the need for the resolution of regional security problems. Turkey and the US focused on concrete and specific security problems which directly affected both countries: Iraq, Armenia, Afghanistan, Iran, and the Israel-Palestine peace process. Each of these problems, although having its own peculiar characteristics and importance,

had an element of regional and global security. Therefore, these problems were very closely followed not only by global actors such as Russia, China, and the US but also by the regional countries such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Pakistan, India (to some extent), and Turkey, most obviously.

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**The most important issue for Turkey and the US since 2007 has been the Iraqi problem.**

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As mentioned above, the geopolitical perspectives of Turkey and the Obama administration overlapped to a great extent. The reason for this overlap comes from their shared goal to establish a stable order in the region. Both countries try to not only improve stability in the region but also to form a new regional order for the sake of regional security. These issues and problems under the Model Partnership can be divided into six groups:

- the process of restructuring Iraq,
- the process of Turkey-Armenia cooperation,
- the fight against terror in Afghanistan-Pakistan sub-region,
- efforts to have a two-state solution for finding a peaceful resolution of the Israel- Palestine problem,
- Turkey's mediation between Syria and Israel, and

- efforts to improve cooperation among Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Serbia, and Croatia for peace in the Balkans.

The rapprochement aimed to strengthen Turkish-US partnership in the region against Iran and the groups partly supported by Iran from within the region and partly by Russia, China and the EU from outside the region. This process will be briefly examined in the following section.

## Iraq

The most important issue for Turkey and the US since 2007 has been the Iraqi problem. Domestic conflicts, instability, and other problems ongoing in Iraq were having a negative impact on the security and economic interests of both countries. Therefore, Turkey and the US visibly improved their cooperation on Iraq in 2009. They broke through very critical and vitally important issues by acting collectively. At the top of the list of these developments was Turkey's increasing rapprochement with Iraq. Previously, especially after the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, Turkey was hesitant about having diplomatic relations with Iraq due to President Celal Talabani's Kurdish identity and his stance on the presence of the PKK in northern Iraq. But in 2009, Turkey changed this attitude and started cooperating with Iraq.

We can divide the developments within this context into three groups. The first was the formation of a Turkey-

US-Iraq Trilateral Security Mechanism and the convening of meetings on 11 April and 28 July in this context.<sup>16</sup> In line with this, work was carried out in order to curb terrorist camps in Iraq.<sup>17</sup> Even if this cooperation could not produce any concrete outcome in 2009, it started a fresh process for the future.

Second, intensive and high-level diplomatic relations developed between Turkey and Iraq. A very important step taken by Turkey was President Gül's visit to Baghdad on 23-24 March 2009, which was the first visit at the presidential level in 33 years. In addition, there were several visits at different levels from the Turkish side, especially from the foreign minister and the interior minister to Baghdad and Erbil, the center of the Northern Iraq Kurdish Administration. The visits to Erbil in particular showed the degree of change in Turkish foreign policy. In response, there were a number of formal and informal visits from Iraq to Turkey during 2009. In addition to Iraqi officials such as the vice president, deputy chief of staff, and deputy prime minister, visits to Ankara were also made by the leaders of Shia, Sunni, Turkoman and other ethnic groups. These reciprocal visits were indeed an outcome or an indication of improving cooperation between Turkey and the US on the reconstruction of Iraq. Therefore, all these visits were supported and appreciated by the US administration.

The aim of these visits was partly to implement the agreement on trilateral

security mechanism among the three countries. In this respect, General David Petraeus', US CENTCOM Commander, visit to Ankara on 30 June-1 July and his meeting with Foreign Minister Davutoğlu was very important for the implementation of cooperation and intelligence assistance to Turkey. These visits could also be seen as an indication of the appreciation for Turkey's role and efforts to ensure stability and order during the parliamentary elections in Iraq in 2010. Turkey was working hard to motivate the Sunnis and other groups to participate in the election process, so as to resolve Iraqi problems and promote stability in the country. Turkey's grand aim was to instigate a dialogue between Sunnis, Shias, Kurds, and all others in order to build up Iraq's central integrity. In doing so, Turkey tried to resolve disagreements among these factions. In order to strengthen Iraqi central authority after the elections, Turkey urged all groups to integrate into the mainstream system. Another aim of these visits from the Turkish point of view was to motivate the Kurdistan Regional Government to fight against PKK terrorism and eradicate terrorists from the area.

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*Turkey's grand aim was to instigate a dialogue between Sunnis, Shias, Kurds, and all others in order to build up Iraq's central integrity*

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The third dimension of Turkish-Iraqi relations in 2009 was the formation

of a High Level Strategic Cooperation Council. After preparatory work during 2009, the two countries signed 48 agreements in Baghdad on 15 October in a ceremonious meeting with the participation of the two prime ministers and ten ministers from both sides. These agreements aimed to improve cooperation between the countries in several areas. From the Turkish point of view, the rapprochement with Iraq was important for such goals as cleansing PKK terrorists from northern Iraq, preventing the establishment of a Kurdish state, and promoting the territorial, national and political integrity of Iraq. It was important from the US point of view for such goals as ensuring an easy withdrawal of US military forces from Iraq, ensuring Iraq's stability after the withdrawal, and reducing the influence of Iran in particular or any other country in general in Iraq's domestic affairs.

These developments were to a certain extent an extension and implementation of the Turkey-US Model Partnership process. Turkey's close relationship with Iraq, the struggle to form a new order, and the launch of military operations in northern Iraq were all implemented in coordination with, and support from the USA. Remembering that Turkey's relations with Iraq were almost non-existent from 1 March 2003 until 5 November 2007, it can be concluded that Turkey's increasing relationship and cooperation with Iraq after 2007 was a product of the 5 November agreement,

and that its continuation by the Obama administration in 2009.

## Iran

Probably the most critical and sensitive issue in the Turkey-US Model Partnership process was the objective to stop, or take under control Iran's nuclear program. First of all, it should be stressed that in terms of general objectives, Turkey and the US have had almost similar policies about Iran's nuclear program. Both stated that, in principle, Iran can have a nuclear program for peaceful aims, but must not be allowed to develop nuclear weapons. Yet they differed on the methods and means to reach this point; the US tends to use coercive methods, all kinds of forceful instruments including sanctions, or even to consider the launch of a military operation against Iran if other measures are not effective. Turkey on the contrary, believes that coercive and military methods will be not only ineffective but will also cause greater problems. Turkey instead supports the use of soft-power, -persuasive methods such as diplomacy and dialogue, as well as just and equal treatment of all countries on the issue of non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and the elimination of all nuclear weapons in the Middle East, including that of Israel.

To cope with the difference in methods, Turkey struggled to have an informal 'mediation' between the US and Iran during 2009 so as to prevent a

US military operation or tough sanctions against Iran. The aim of the mediation was to pull the US and Iran to the negotiation table and to prevent each side from taking extreme actions that could lead to an escalation of the conflict. In this respect, there was intensive diplomatic traffic between Ankara and Teheran. Prime Minister Erdoğan and Foreign Minister Davutoğlu, accompanied by a number of officials, visited Teheran on 26-28 October and 20 November 2009 respectively.<sup>18</sup> In response, President Ahmedinajad, Foreign Minister Muttaki and a large contingent of Iranian officials visited Ankara.

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An agreement was reached on Turkey's mediation in swapping enriched uranium between the Vienna Group and Iran.

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All visits partly tried to improve bilateral relations, and more importantly to thaw the international tension generated by the Iranian nuclear program. It is possible to argue that Turkey made a considerable contribution to the holding of the meeting between the P5+1 and Iran in Geneva on October 1. In that process, an agreement was reached on Turkey's mediation in swapping enriched uranium between the Vienna Group and Iran. Even though all these efforts did not brought about a final resolution of the nuclear crisis, there is a consensus that Turkey has played an important role in Iran's communication with the US and the Western countries on this issue.

Moreover, it is certain that Turkey's role was appreciated by the US and other Western countries.

An important mechanism effective in Iran's communication with the Western world was the intensive commercial, economic, financial and political relations between Turkey and Iran. A number of agreements were signed in 2009. The most striking of all was the visit to Tehran on 26-28 October by Erdoğan, accompanied by Davutoğlu and a large number of ministers, bureaucrats, businessmen, and media representatives. Agreements between Turkey and Iran in a number of fields such as economy, oil, commerce and terror not only improved bilateral relations but also contributed to Iran's dialogue with the West/the USA by means of Turkish good offices, and to the formation of a peaceful order and cooperation in the region. Finally, no doubt Turkey-Iran relations were related to the developments in the Middle East and in Central Asia as well.

## Afghanistan-Pakistan

Another dimension of the Turkey-US Model Partnership in the context of regional order, probably the most important issue for the Obama administration, was the goal to continue the fight against terrorism in Afghanistan to restructure this country and to integrate Pakistan into this process. While the first objective of the Obama administration's foreign policy was to withdraw US troops

from, and consequently restructure, Iraq, the other was to continue fighting Al Qaeda and Taliban in Afghanistan. Unlike his predecessor Bush, Obama focused more on Afghanistan.

NATO countries have been making substantial contribution to achieving US objectives in Afghanistan, in which Turkey's role is very critical. As a NATO member, Turkey has been primarily involved in Afghanistan as part of the ISAF since its inception. Through this involvement, Turkey supports the US/NATO strategy, but the US came to the conclusion at the end of this eight-year struggle against terror that the stabilization cannot be achieved by military instruments only. There is a consensus on the fact that to be successful in the fight against terrorism, there is a need to get support from neighboring as well as other countries such as Pakistan and Turkey. Pakistan is a key actor because both Al Qaeda and the Taliban have strong roots and sources of support there. Obama thinks that Pakistan should be integrated into the war on terrorism process in order to cut off this linkage.

Turkey's support to the US on the Afghanistan issue can be discussed in two categories. The first category includes Turkey's participation in ISAF, contribution to the training of Afghan soldiers and police, and construction of a number of civilian facilities. During 2009, Turkey continued all such work, not only actively participating in meetings on the Afghanistan problems of NATO,

the UN, and the G-8, but also assuming the ISAF Central Command in Kabul for the second time on 1 November 2010. Turkey's role within NATO is not a fight on the ground, but it makes a peaceful contribution to the civilian restructuring of Afghanistan. Turkey had a positive reaction to Karzai's reelection as president in 2009.

Turkey's second and more important role was to form a trilateral mechanism by mediating between Afghanistan and Pakistan. In this context, the third summit meeting of the presidents of Turkey, Afghanistan and Pakistan, i.e., Gül, Karzai and Zerdari respectively, convened in Ankara on 1 April 2009. All these summits, where the parties agreed to cooperate on such issues as fighting against terrorism and promoting stability and security, were convened under Turkish leadership and within the scope of the US/NATO strategy.

Turkey showed a high level of interest towards Afghanistan and Pakistan during 2009. Foreign Minister Davutoğlu declared Turkey's support for the development of both countries and their fight against terrorism on his visit to both countries on 9-13 June, soon after he had visited the US, where he met Secretary Clinton on 31 May. An important step by Turkey in this context was Prime Minister Erdoğan's visit to Pakistan where he was joined by a group of ministers, bureaucrats, businessmen and media on 25-26 October. On this occasion in which the High Level

Strategic Cooperation Council was formed, the two countries signed a number of agreements on several issues from economy to health, from the fight against terrorism to military cooperation, and from education to cultural cooperation. The aim of these agreements was to ensure their cooperation not only for improving bilateral relations but also for eliminating sources of terror in Pakistan. Turkey and Pakistan consider cooperation in soft power in the fight against terrorism in order to resolve the terror problem through education. To this end, initiatives were undertaken to implement the Turkish model of Imam Hatip religious schools, so as to foster a moderate understanding of Islam in Pakistan.

## Armenia

There are many bilateral problems between Turkey and Armenia.<sup>19</sup> However, they are not limited to bilateral relations only, but they also negatively affect the Caucasus region and global politics as well. Regionally speaking, Armenia's geographical proximity to Russia facilitates Russian influence in the region. The Russian invasion of Georgia's breakaway province of South Ossetia in 2008 showed once more Russia's increasingly expanding influence over the Caucasus. This development also showed that the Caucasus was a center of global power politics. The Russian invasion and its consequences alarmed not only regional countries but also the US and

other Western/NATO countries. By sending warships into the Black Sea, the US showed its determination to support Georgia's security. The attitudes and positions of other regional countries on that issue were also important. Turkey's timely initiative, named the "Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform", drew the attention of other countries, the USA and Russia in particular.

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Obama's Armenian strategy overlapped with Turkey's goal to improve its relations with Armenia.

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The resolution of Turkish-Armenian problems is important for Obama for three reasons. First, the administration can be relieved of pressure from the lobbies in domestic politics; by ending the Armenian lobby's attempts every year to get a resolution passed by Congress, it would help the administration get rid of being squeezed between the Congress and Turkish Realpolitik. Second, the development of Turkish-Armenian relations may facilitate Armenia's move away from the Russian sphere of influence towards the US/NATO sphere of influence with the help of Turkey. Third, Armenian rapprochement towards Turkey would facilitate the flow of the region's energy resources to the West.<sup>20</sup>

For these reasons, Obama's Armenian strategy overlapped with Turkey's goal to improve its relations with Armenia, motivating Turkey's opening toward

Armenia which, as mentioned above, had been stressed by President Obama during his visit to Ankara. Therefore, the start of diplomatic traffic between Turkey and Armenia soon after Obama's visit was not a coincidence. The first, and perhaps, the most important example of the traffic, was a trilateral meeting among than Turkish Foreign Minister Ali Babacan, Armenian Foreign Minister Edward Nalbandian and Obama in Istanbul on 7 April, on the occasion of the Second Forum meeting of the Alliance of Civilizations. This meeting was very important, not only as an indication showing Obama's interest in the problem, but also as the start of Turkey's opening to Armenia. Soon after that, Babacan and Nalbatyan met once more in the Foreign Ministers meeting of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation in Erivan on 16 April.

The goal of these meetings and talks was to prepare an agreement for improving Turkey-Armenia relations. The first step for such an agreement was the signing of protocols and their implementation. Two protocols were prepared at the end of diplomatic negotiations held behind the closed doors with the mediation of Switzerland. Finally, two protocols entitled "Start of Diplomatic Relations" and "Improvement of Diplomatic Relations" were signed in Zurich on 10 October. The scene at the signing ceremony of the protocols showed how important Turkey's opening to Armenia was for regional and global politics, considering

that the ceremony was attended by US Secretary of State Clinton, along with Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov, EU High Commissioner Solana, and French Foreign Minister Kouchner.

## Arab-Israeli Question

Another critical issue for the Model Partnership was to revitalize the Arab-Israeli peace process to find a solution to the problem. It was noticed that the Obama administration and Turkey had a common view and approach on two points for the resolution of the conflict.<sup>21</sup> The first point was to implement the "two-state solution" to the question; however to achieve this there is a need to first end Israeli occupation and second to reconcile two Palestinian foes, Hamas and El Fatah, under the same banner. The second point was the conclusion of peace negotiations between Israel and the Arab states, the most critical of which was Syria. Syria is one of the keys actors to the peace process, not only because of its geopolitical position in the region, but also because of its support to the radical groups Hezbollah and Hamas. Another reason for including Syria in the peace process was its alliance and strong relations with Iran. Iran's influence in most of these regional issues, including the Arab-Israeli conflict, makes Syria's position critical and invaluable. Iran and the US compete to have Syria on their side due to its critical position. All Western countries, led by the US, want Syria to decouple from Iran and move

towards the US-Western axis, and want Turkey to play a role in this strategic process.

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Turkish-Israeli relations passed through its worst time ever, witnessing many crises one after another during 2009.

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Turkey had already undertaken certain initiatives in both issues before 2009, namely, trying to mediate between Palestinian groups and between Israel and Syria. But, the process, also supported by the US, derailed to a great extent in 2009, because of Israel's large-scale military attack on Gaza in December 2008-January 2009, just before the inauguration of President Obama. The ensuing problems destroyed Turkey's position and efforts. Afterwards, Turkey's efforts to reconcile Hamas and El Fatah were severely damaged, and its position as mediator between Syria and Israel almost ended.

Turkey showed a very strong reaction against Israel's invasion of Gaza. As a result, Turkish-Israeli relations passed through its worst time ever, witnessing many crises one after another during 2009. An important development in this process was the "one minute crisis," which erupted because of Prime Minister Erdoğan's reaction to Israeli President Peres for Israel's attacks and killings of Palestinian people, when the two leaders were together on the stage at the

meetings of the World Economy Forum on 29 January 2009 in Davos. After this affair, a series of skirmishes continued, resulting in a confrontation between Turkey and Israel.

In the midst of the "one minute crisis," most people expected that Israel or the US would react severely to or punish Turkey, but no such action followed. Neither Peres nor the majority of the Israel public nor the US and the Obama administration took steps to break relations with Turkey. There occurred no crises in Turkey's relations with the US or Israel at the official level. The strongest reaction came from US and Israeli media and other civil society organizations. Some US media channels, such as the Wall Street Journal, argued that improving Turkey-Iran relations, in contrast to declining Turkey-Israeli relations, showed that Turkey was in a shift of orientation away from the West toward the East/Islamic world. Because of that, they harshly criticized Erdoğan and his government. What is worse, some pro-Israeli columnists argued that Erdoğan was moving to be an Islamofascist.

Some argued that the US would have punished Turkey if it did not improve its relations with Israel. Yet, the Obama administration and US elites in general continued supporting Turkey. It can even be argued that Turkey's harshness against Israel because of the Gaza invasion was supported, or at least

tolerated, by the US. There was a need to increase pressure on Israel to persuade it to accept the “two state solution”, and both Turkey and the US needed to play a role for this objective. Indeed, as was seen in the following year, the Obama administration, too, followed a “distanced” and reserved policy towards the Netanyahu government. This vindicated the belief that both Turkey and the US had a similar approach towards Israel.

Turkey-US relations did not face any serious crisis in 2009 or in 2010, except the case of the non-binding Armenian resolution that the US Congress Foreign Relations Committee voted favorably in March 2010. On the contrary, despite all criticisms, the Turkey-US Model Partnership process continued. Turkey's efforts in the case of Syria and on uniting the Palestinian groups sustained during 2009. Turkey also continued arguing that Hamas, Hezbollah and Syria should be more peaceful, and worked hard to decouple them from the Iranian sphere of influence. The Obama administration supported Turkey, simply because Turkey's efforts were compatible with the US general strategy and interests.

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**Turkey also continued arguing that Hamas, Hezbollah and Syria should be more peaceful, and worked hard to decouple them from the Iranian sphere of influence.**

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## Economy-Energy-Finance

Among the issues concerning Turkey and the US at both the bilateral and multilateral levels was their common goal to overcome the international economic crisis and to improve cooperation on energy. There were significant developments on these issues in 2009. First of all, we must stress the continuity of US support to Turkey's relations with, and position within, the IMF. In fact, because Turkey did not face great difficulty at the time of the world-wide international financial-economic crisis, American support to Turkey played a role to a certain extent. The reason was that despite some positive aspects, the Turkish economy is still fragile due to its dependence on the international financial-economic system. This fragility did not turn into a crisis, mainly because the US and international institutions had a positive attitude toward Turkey. Most importantly, there was no outflow, but more inflows, of American capital into the Turkish stock market and economy. Such a performance can be interpreted as continuing support from the US capital for Turkey's economy, politics and foreign policy.

Turkey's regional importance emanates not only from her economic and political role, but also from her proximity to sources of energy, i.e., her geo-economic position.<sup>22</sup> Turkey's key position as a country at the crossroads of oil and gas transfers from the neighboring

regions to the West gained a new dimension in 2009. A very significant agreement was signed in Ankara on 13 July for the Nabucco gas pipeline project. The US also participated at the ceremony. Supporting the transfer of gas originating from Central Asia, the Middle East and Caucasus through Turkish territory, was indeed an indication of US trust in and support of Turkey.

Another economic dimension of the Model Partnership was the goal to improve bilateral economic and commercial relations between Turkey and the US. At least, Turkey thinks that the Model Partnership should include an economic dimension. Erdoğan and Turkish economy officials stressed this point to Obama during their talks with him in Washington on 4-5 December. Obama responded positively, stressing that the US also wanted to improve bilateral economic relations between the two countries, and the necessary steps could be taken as early as possible. In this context, both sides agreed on having joint meetings of their economy and commerce ministers, together with their staffs. However, there was no such meeting during 2009, or even in the first half of 2010.

A point on this issue in historical perspective should be mentioned. Turkey has long been aiming to diversify its relations with the US, from the military and strategic fields into the economic and commercial fields. During the 1980s, the Özal governments tried to

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**Turkey thinks that the Model Partnership should include an economic dimension.**

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sign an agreement with the US to form a Free Trade Zone; yet, all attempts failed. Sometimes US economic lobbies and international economic partners played an obstructive role; at other times political problems in the Turkey-US relationship prevented such attempts. Even though the US administrations made some rhetorical gestures to this end, they failed to implement their promises. This was mainly because of the fact that US administrations perceive Turkey mainly as a military-strategic partner, not as an economic one. As a conclusion, we should be cautious about achieving the economic and commercial aspects of the Model Partnership.

## **Domestic Politics Dimension: Turkey's Democratic Openings and the US**

Another important dimension of the Turkey-US Model Partnership in 2009 was the US attitude towards Turkey's efforts on democratization, democratic openings and civilian rule. From a historical point of view, we can see that the US has played a role in Turkey's democratization process- sometimes positively, sometimes negatively.<sup>23</sup> The positive role was its considerable

contribution to Turkey's transition to democracy after the Second World War. In contrast to this, the US played a negative role in Turkey's democratization with its stance towards the execution and aftermath of military coups in Turkey. This was partly due to Turkey's membership in NATO and the intimate relations between armed forces of the two countries.

As for 2009, there were two key issues on the agenda regarding Turkey's democratization. The first was the Ergenekon and Balyoz cases accusing retired and serving military officers of allegedly planning a military coup in Turkey. Technically speaking, because the cases are related to Turkish domestic law and politics they are not supposed to be an issue for any country, nor for Turkey-US relationship. However, honestly and realistically speaking, the cases are being closely followed by all countries including the US, based on rule of law concerns. It is unclear how these cases will affect the Turkish democratization process, but the following comment analyzing the US position on the Ergenekon case is worth quoting:

The Ergenekon issue is not on the top of US's Turkey agenda. Nor an issue in the official negotiations. The US is not involved in the issue, so long as the developments come to the point to seriously threaten Turkey's domestic stability or democracy. [US's] emphasis on democracy and reform process may be perceived as US support to those

reformists dealing with the Ergenekon problem; the US attitude can be evaluated as a message for Turkey to handle the Ergenekon case in such a way to suit a democratic country, more transparent for instance. On the other hand, America's wording on laicism can be understood as a US show of sympathy towards the laicist groups who are concerned about the Ergenekon case.<sup>24</sup>

From this comment, it is possible to deduce that in principle the US is not against the Ergenekon case. However, the US is critical of the procedures of arrests and violation of human rights during the Ergenekon process. The U.S. Human Rights Report of 2009 pointed to this concern, too.<sup>25</sup>

Another issue about Turkey's democratization was Turkey's "democratic opening" process which formally started after a meeting between Prime Minister Erdoğan and Ahmet Türk, the Chairman of DTP (Democratic Society Party) in Ankara on 5 August 2009. This process can be regarded as Turkey's domestic issue, because in essence it aims to resolve such intricate problems as the Kurdish question by peaceful means and to improve the level of Turkey's democratization. However, because the resolution of the Kurdish problem in particular is closely related with Iraq, and directly related to the trilateral mechanism which had started to fight against PKK terrorism in parallel with the withdrawal of American troops from Iraq, the democratic opening process

can be included within the scope of Turkish-American relations. Due to this connection, the US administration looked very positively towards Turkey's democratization efforts, and even motivated Turkey to this end, according to some sources. That means, just like Turkey's foreign policy openings, the democratic opening can be regarded as a part of the Model Partnership process.

US support to the Ergenekon case, the democratic opening and Turkey's democratization in general is not a surprise. Actually, in the new international system which emerged after the September 11 attacks, Turkey's democratization efforts were increasingly supported by the US. This was mainly because Turkey was seen as an example of the coexistence of Islam and democracy on the one hand, and of being against radical and extremist countries on the other. Some American authors argued that Turkey as a "moderate Islamic country" could be shown as a model or an example for a number of Islamic countries in the world.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, the sympathy and support for those Turkish parties and groups in favor of democracy has increased.

These arguments were criticized in Turkey as a "violation of laicism" and "moving toward an Islamic order." In particular, the fact that majority of the governing AK Party's members had Islamic identity and practices has heightened the laicist debate. Some of this criticism was targeted to the US,

due to widespread allegations that the latter supported AK Party and moderate Islam.

The US and the Obama administration's views of Turkey are based on Realpolitik perspective. The matter for US interest is to maintain stability and continuity in Turkey's domestic politics and foreign policy. The US is not interested directly in Turkish domestic politics so long as internal stability is not in danger. However, it can be argued that it is closely interested in the orientation of Turkey's foreign policy or about Turkey's international position. It can be even argued with certainty that the US would try to prevent any unwanted change in the latter dimension. Indeed there were some examples of this in the past.<sup>27</sup>

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The matter for US interest is to maintain stability and continuity in Turkey's domestic politics and foreign policy.

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Obama sharply clarified his views about Turkey's domestic politics and foreign policy in general terms in his speech to the TGNA. His mention of Atatürk's greatness and his support to Turkey's membership into the EU could be accepted as important hints about his views. From this, we can deduce that the Model Partnership is based on such points as laicism, democracy, liberal and other Western values, the resolution of problems in religious freedoms, respect

for ethnicity and identity, the fight against PKK terror in terms of domestic politics, and finally on an axis of EU, NATO and IMF values in terms of international politics.

## Conclusion

Turkey's US policy and Turkish-American relations witnessed a wide range of developments in 2009. It is of course impossible to evaluate each of these developments in detail in this article. However, as mentioned above, this period can be analyzed by categorizing these into actions at the bilateral, global and regional levels. Even though the main agenda of Turkey-US relations was about the promotion of security and stability at all levels, other issues like economy, commerce, diplomacy and the military were equally important. The main theme of the relationship in 2009 can be summed up as cooperation and mutual action. From this perspective it was one of the most positive and golden ages of the history of Turkish-American relations.

No doubt, the primary goal of this cooperation was to promote the national interests of each side. However, their partnership aimed to go further in order to form a new "order and mechanism" for resolving regional and global problems. Those problems and crises concerning Iraq, Iran, Palestine, Afghanistan, and Armenia could not be dealt with

by focusing on these countries only. Additionally, there was the necessity to reform regional and national relations and order, so as to improve stability and security of the above mentioned countries and their environs. In this context, the main expectation was to ensure that the regional countries concerned act in cooperation, to eliminate the regional influence of such actors as Iran and Russia in particular. Turkey's role and position was, thus, critical in this regard. It was this critical role and position which strengthened Turkey-US relations. In this way, Turkey and the US tried to form a stable and orderly region by mutually supporting each other.

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**Their partnership aimed to go further in order to form a new "order and mechanism" for resolving regional and global problems.**

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The process which started in 2009 has not been completed yet. How will it be finalized and what kind of, positive or negative, outcomes will result can be seen only in the coming years. Just as a forecast, the following estimate can be made: In the coming period, the state of Turkey's US policy and/or Turkey-US relations will depend in great part on how Iran's nuclear program, Russia's Caucasus policy, and the Palestine question will develop, and on how Turkey and US will handle these "third party" developments.

## Endnotes

- 1 Most of the data used in this work was gathered from Turkish daily newspapers and other media sources. The data dated in the text refer to the corresponding daily newspapers, *Hürriyet*, *Zaman*, *Radikal* and *Milliyet*.
- 2 For the 1 March 2003 decree see Ramazan Gözen, “Causes and Consequences of Turkey’s Out-of-War Position in the Iraq War of 2003”, *The Turkish Yearbook of International Relations*, Vol.36 (2005), pp.73-99.
- 3 James A. Baker III. and Lee H. Hamilton, “The Iraqi Study Group Report 2006”, pp. 27-28, at [http://bakerinstitute.org/Pubs/iraqstudygroup\\_findings.pdf](http://bakerinstitute.org/Pubs/iraqstudygroup_findings.pdf) [last visited 10 January 2010].
- 4 For a report showing the level of importance that the Obama administrations paid to Turkey see: Spencer P. Boyer and Brian Katulis, *The Neglected Alliance: Restoring US-Turkish Relations to Meet 21st Century Challenges*, Center for American Progress, Washington D.C., 2008.
- 5 Scott Wilson, “Obama Calls on Muslims for a ‘New Beginning’ With the US”, *Washington Post*, 5 June 2009.
- 6 Boyer and Katulis, *The Neglected Alliance* , pp. 1-3.
- 7 Ramazan Gözen, *Türk Dış Politikası Barış Vizyonu*, Ankara, Palme Yayınları, 2006.
- 8 “Obama’dan Tarihi Konuşma”, *Hürriyet*, 7 April 2009.
- 9 Philip H. Gordon visited Ankara and met with Erdoğan and Davutoğlu on 12-13 November 2009. See Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Dış Politika Kronolojisi Kasım 2009”, at <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/kasim-2009.tr.mfa> [last visited 15 October 2010].
- 10 Philip H. Gordon, “The United States and Turkey: A View from the Obama Administration”, The Brookings Institution Sabancı Lecture, Washington DC, 17 March 2010, at <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/rm/2010/138446.htm>; on the importance of the regions for Turkey-USA cooperation, see Boyer and Katulis, *The Neglected Alliance: Restoring Turkish-US Relations to Meet 21st Century Challenges*.
- 11 Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Sayın Bakanımızın ABD Ziyaretleri Öncesi Havaalanında Yaptıkları Basın Toplantısı”, at <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/sayin-bakanimizin-abd-ziyareti-oncesi-havaalaninda-yaptiklari-basin-toplantisi.tr.mfa> [last visited 31 May 2010].
- 12 Bülent Aras, “A Golden era for US-Turkey Relations”, *Guardian*, 4 April 2009.
- 13 Erdoğan’s and Davutoğlu’s visits to the USA on the occasion of the UN 64<sup>th</sup> General Assembly on 22-30 September in New York, and exclusive meeting with Obama on 6-8 December, Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Dış Politika 2009”, at <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/eylul.tr.mfa> [last visited 23 September 2010].
- 14 US Secretary of Treasury Timothy Geithner and his delegation visited Istanbul to participate at the IMF-World Bank meeting of Governors, 4-8 October 2009, at <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/ekim.tr.mfa> [last visited 12 September 2010].

- 15 Davutoğlu participated at the NATO Foreign Ministers meeting in Brussels on 3-4 December 2009 for a series of regional conferences. See Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “No: 223 NATO Dışışleri Bakanları Toplantısı Hk.”, at [http://www.mfa.gov.tr/no\\_-223-01-aralik-2009\\_-nato-disisleri-bakanlari-toplantisi-hk\\_.tr.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-223-01-aralik-2009_-nato-disisleri-bakanlari-toplantisi-hk_.tr.mfa) [last visited 16 September 2010].
- 16 Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “The Turkey-Iraq-US Trilateral Mechanism met in Ankara”, at <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/temmuz.tr.mfa> [last visited 28 July 2009].
- 17 Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “The Turkey-Iraq-US Trilateral Mechanism met in Baghdad”, at <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/aralik.tr.mfa> [last visited 20 December 2009].
- 18 Davutoğlu met Ahmedinejad and Muttaki in Tehran on 20 November 2009. See Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Türk Dış Politikası Kronolojisi- Kasım 2009”, at <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/kasim2009.tr.mfa> [last visited 15 September 2010].
- 19 For example, alleged “genocide” claims on Turkey, problems regarding the closed Turkish-Armenian border, Armenian demands from Turkish territory or re-drawing the border, and Armenian occupation of Azerbaijani territory.
- 20 Boyer and Katulis, *The Neglected Alliance*, pp. 21-26.
- 21 Davutoğlu participated in a meeting on the Middle East in the UN Security Council, arguing a two-state solution to the Palestinian problem. Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Dış Politika 2009” at <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/mayis.tr.mfa> [last visited 11 May 2009].
- 22 Boyer and Katulis, *The Neglected Alliance*, p. 21.
- 23 Ramazan Gözen, *İmparatorluktan Küresel Aktörlüğe Türkiye'nin Dış Politikası*, Ankara, Palme Yayınları, 2009; Ramazan Gözen, “Türk-Amerikan İlişkileri ve Türk Demokrasisi: Realist Bağlantı”, *Liberal Düşünce*, Vol. 4, No. 13 (Winter 1999), pp.87-108.
- 24 Ali H. Aslan, “ABD Ergenekon'un Neresinde”, *Zaman*, 12 January 2009.
- 25 Sedat Ergin, “Amerika Ergenekon'a Nasıl Bakıyor?”, *Hürriyet*, 16 March 2010.
- 26 For instance, Graham Fuller, *Yeni Türkiye Cumhuriyeti*, İstanbul, Timaş Yayınları, 2008.
- 27 Gözen, “Türk-Amerikan İlişkileri ve Türk Demokrasisi : Realist Bağlantı”, pp. 87-108.