
Turkish-American Relations in the 2000s: Revisiting the Basic Parameters of Partnership?

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Abstract:

This article studies developments in Turkish-American relations over the last decade. It starts with an analysis of the three parameters of the bilateral relationship that took shape at the height of the Cold War: Turkey's geo-strategic and geo-political importance; cooperation in return for external assistance; and pursuit of a pro-US political-ideological role at the regional level. While the alliance relationship underwent transformations in following years, the learned behavioral habits from this era continued to impact Turkey's foreign policy practices. The article argues that Turkey's policies over the last decade can be viewed as attempts to break those established behavioral patterns. In particular, it analyzes how the drive for autonomous action became a defining feature of Turkish foreign policy throughout the 2000s, as a result of which relations with the United States entered a new era, characterized by a growing number of frictions. Consequently, both cooperation and competition have become routine features of the bilateral ties, which is examined in various issue areas and regions.

Key Words

Turkish-American relations, strategic partnership, model partnership, geopolitical position, anti-Americanism, regional power.

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Introduction

Relations with the United States occupy a major place in Turkey's foreign policy agenda. Not only is the bilateral relationship undergirded by powerful systemic dynamics, it also cross-cuts Turkey's other foreign policy issues, which makes US-Turkish relations unique in many ways. Any analysis of Turkey's regional policies in the Balkans and Middle East, its problems with neighbors such as Greece and Syria, or its membership process into the European Union would be incomplete without taking into account the United States. At the same time, an analysis of US policies in the regions surrounding Turkey would remain incomplete without bringing Turkey into the equation. Turkish-American relations, thus, can be explained by reference to two interrelated dynamics: the place Turkey occupies in the US global and regional strategies, and Turkey's expectations of assistance from the US in order to reach its foreign policy objectives.¹

Turkey's importance in the US policy owes largely to the latter's needs to work with key regional powers to protect

its strategic interests worldwide. The United States relies on the cooperation of regional powers to maintain its presence in vital regions, or to intervene in local crises. As one of the crucial actors that can satisfy such strategic needs, Turkey's cooperation is crucial for the US interests in the Middle East, Eurasia and the Balkans. At the same time, the relationship it forged with the United States has been Turkey's most vital external connection. As a regional power with a capacity to exert military, political and economic influence in the surrounding regions, Turkey more often than not has cooperated with the United States to advance its security and interests. In many of its foreign policy initiatives, Ankara has had to receive either support or endorsement from Washington, and as a result this relationship has permeated almost all aspects of Turkey's foreign policy agenda. When Turkey stopped short of developing its bilateral and multi-lateral initiatives in coordination with the United States, it ran into disagreements with its senior partner in conducting its regional policies.

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In the final analysis, the Turkish-American relationship is the culmination of converging or diverging policies pursued by the two powers towards certain regions or issues. Washington's pursuit of a global grand strategy and its ongoing interests in the regions around Ankara form the foundations of this relationship. Despite Turkish decision-makers' occasional complaints about the lack of a 'Turkey policy' formulated by Washington, the relationship remains an outgrowth of US policy toward Russia, Europe, the Middle East, Eurasia, and the Islamic world, and of energy geopolitics.²

Traditional Parameters of US-Turkish Relations

The beginnings of Turkish-American ties can be traced back to the late-Ottoman period historically, but the formation of this relationship is a product of the Cold War years.³ Because the United States withdrew from world affairs in the wake of the First World War, its connections with the new Turkish Republic remained limited. With the appearance of the United States as an assertive power in the international system following the Second World War, the foundations of the alliance relationship were laid. Turkey took its place in the US-led international economic order and joined the World Bank and the IMF. It also conducted

its foreign policy on a pro-Western basis and became integrated into the US network of alliances worldwide through its membership in NATO. The policy convergence that was made possible by Turkey's threat perceptions from the Soviet Union gave way to a Cold War alliance and evolved as such in subsequent years. Turkey occupied a place in US foreign policy, in line with the role it played in the US 'containment' strategy.⁴

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As a result, the unique conditions of the early Cold War years acted as a decisive factor shaping US perceptions of Turkey, and that legacy affected the evolution of the bilateral relationship in the years to come. In particular, three interrelated parameters are worth emphasizing here: Turkey's geo-strategic and geo-political importance; cooperation in return for external aid and support; and pursuit of a pro-US political-ideological role at the regional level.⁵

First, decision-makers from both sides continuously emphasized

the strategic importance of Turkey's geographic position. Not only Turkey's geography but also its population and military capabilities helped Turkey's integration into US plans for containing the Soviets and maintaining stability in the Middle East during the Cold War years. Turkey's geopolitical position came to the fore once again in the post-Cold War era and was redefined in response to the changing geo-political reality, especially in the context of energy security, which underscored Ankara's continuing relevance for US interests in the region. The strategic value of Turkey's geopolitical position affected the other two parameters of the relationship.

Second, in order to escape the restraints imposed by its limited power capability, Turkey sought a patronage relationship with the West and pursued a pro-Western policy in return. In that respect, the United States developed military assistance programs towards Turkey and in this way hoped to bolster Turkey's military capabilities so that it could fulfill its responsibilities in NATO's overall defense strategy. On the Turkish side, a perception developed that Turkey's integration into the Western security architecture would hinge on the continuation of military assistance; hence, the assistance-cooperation formula became an integral characteristic of the bilateral relationship. As a result, Turkey allowed its geography to be used

by the United States, and many American military facilities were based on Turkish soil against the Eastern block. Moreover, in return for US assistance, Turkey acted in line with US policy in various international disputes. The Defense and Economic Cooperation Agreement (DECA) of 1980 illustrated very well the logic underpinning the assistance-cooperation formula. In subsequent years, Turkey received military and economic assistance worth around 500 million USD annually and continued to cooperate with the United States.

Lastly, as an extension of the assistance-cooperation formula, Turkey played a role in its own region in line with the priorities of the US and the Western alliance. While that role was largely military during the Cold War years, it was framed in political and ideological terms in the post-Cold War era. At times, Turkey was presented as a role model for newly independent states or countries going through regime change. At other times, Turkey was referred to as a bridge between the West and different regions. These functions ascribed from outside were also accepted by Turkish leaders, who were eager to consolidate their country's place in the Western security community by capitalizing on those role definitions.

In short, the Turkish-American relationship started as a partnership

among unequal powers and was heavily conditioned by security considerations. The Turkish side internalized the roles expected of it over time and shaped its foreign policy accordingly. Turkey incurred two major opportunity costs because of the bilateral relationship which evolved on the basis of those parameters, namely the limitations imposed by the alliance upon Turkey's ability to take autonomous action, and setbacks to Turkey's regional policies. After a brief discussion of these factors, the article will discuss in greater length how this patronage-based relationship has been transformed in the 2000s.

Turkish-American Relations Prior to the 2000s

While Turkey's alliance with the United States emerged as the major component of its external relations and bolstered its security and defense, it came with significant costs in terms of its foreign policy. The relationship pattern that took shape in the early Cold War years underwent transformations in following years, but still the learned behavioral habits from this era continued to impact the evolution of the relations in subsequent years. Turkey's policies over the last decade or so can be viewed as attempts to break those established behavioral patterns.

The Legacy of the Cold War: The Costs of the Alliance

As a price for its pursuit of security against threats from the Soviet Union through integration into the US-led alliance structure, Turkey in most cases had to accept the limitations on its room of maneuver imposed by the alliance structure. No doubt occasional frictions existed in the relationship after the period of honeymoon that characterized the alliance in the 1950s came to an end, such as those over the Cyprus issue – including the notorious Johnson letter and arms embargo – or Turkey’s feeling of abandonment in the Cuban missile crisis. The many crises encountered between 1960 and 1980 reminded Turkey of the shortcomings of a uni-directional foreign policy. Such bitter experiences led Turkey to explore ways of establishing economic ties with the Soviet Union. In the final analysis, however, Turkey’s security and defense policies remained integrated with the Western alliance, as became even more evident with the reheating of the Cold War struggle in the 1980s. The 1980 DECA revealed those dynamics clearly.

Another shortcoming was that, as a relationship that was shaped largely by security considerations, Turkish-American relations evolved within

a realist paradigm. Although shared threat perceptions showed variations over time, the dependence generated by alliance dynamics, especially by Turkey’s integration into NATO’s military structure, continued to limit its autonomy. Beyond that, the relative weakness of the non-military dimensions of the relationship remained a major problem for years. Though both sides took notice of that imbalance, efforts to bolster economic and social ties achieved limited success. The quest for diversifying the relationship emerged as an urgent need in the post-Cold War era, but satisfactory progress has yet to be accomplished.

Yet another cost of the alliance with the West was incurred in Turkey’s relations with neighboring regions. Turkey, as reflected in terms such as the ‘frontline state’ or ‘southern flank’ of NATO, defined its external policies within the broader outlines of the Western alliance, and to the extent that it did so, could not develop independent regional policies. In addition, in an international environment where bipolar competition had placed the countries in the Balkans and Middle East in opposite camps, and the Black Sea, Caucasus and Central Asian countries had come under direct Soviet control, Turkey’s isolation from its neighboring regions was further deepened.

Post-Cold War Era: The Challenges of Multi-regionalism

Having been isolated from its immediate neighborhood, Turkey was caught unprepared for the new era. With the disappearance of the East-West rivalry, regional systems became more important and local dynamics played a major role in the foreign policy behavior of many countries. Turkey faced difficulties navigating these uncharted waters, given its poor ties with and lack of knowledge about these 'new' regions.

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More importantly, in many ways, Turkey was one of the countries that experienced the negative repercussions of the new international environment most immediately. Directly affected by this new setting, Turkey had to develop policies to respond to the challenges presented by many civil wars and conflicts such as the ones in the Balkans or the Azerbaijan-Armenian conflict, and to confronting new security challenges in the Middle East. Moreover, the bilateral problems it had been able to somehow freeze during the Cold War years, such as the Cyprus issue or problems with Greece, Syria or Armenia, emerged as matters requiring

immediate attention. At the same time, Turkey perceived many opportunities to expand its influence into the newly independent states in Eurasia.

As Turkey increasingly conducted its foreign policy as a regional power, its relations with the 'lone superpower' became affected by this new environment. In many ways, US policies in Turkey's neighborhood facilitated Turkey's adaptation to the new geopolitical reality. As the end of the Cold War was nearing, there emerged a widely shared perception that Turkey's geopolitical importance was in decline. Turkish policy-makers were concerned about being left on their own, losing Western patronage and navigating into an uncertain era. A major turning point helping Turkey outgrow this fear of abandonment was the Gulf War. The proactive policy advocated by President Turgut Özal helped Turkey reassert its strategic value inside Western policy circles.⁶ Later, as the post-Soviet space emerged as an area of interest to the United States, Ankara's role in US policy towards this region, and prospects of collaboration offered a renewed justification for the revitalization of the bilateral partnership, while the US support facilitated Turkey's penetration into the new nations. As a result, as Turkish foreign policy entered a new era of dynamism, relations with the United States were redefined on the basis of Ankara's multi-regional orientation.

Toward a 'Strategic Partnership' between a Global Power and Regional Power

Turkey managed to adapt to the new geopolitical environment of the early post-Cold War years, albeit in a painful manner, while regionally-driven activism became a defining feature of its foreign policy. As an aspiring regional power, Turkey overall sought to act in concert with the United States. Since the United States had direct or indirect interests in countries in Turkey's vicinity, bilateral relations became increasingly diversified and gained a multi-dimensional character, which was noticeable in the Balkans, Eurasia and the Middle East.⁷

Due to the activities of lobbies and human rights advocates, Washington's Turkey policy came under criticism occasionally, which led to fluctuations in bilateral relations. Such frictions aside, the multi-dimensional relationship came to be defined as a strategic partnership in the early 2000s. Throughout the first decade of the new century, the concepts used to describe the relations also went through major changes, reflecting oscillations in political ties. Currently, attempts at conceptual redefinition are centered around the term proposed by President Barack Obama: 'model partnership.'

Many factors can be recounted that facilitated the 'strategic partnership'

throughout the 1990s. Firstly, one has to mention policy convergence between the two sides, due to either shared threat perceptions or overlapping interests. Moreover, Turkish governments during the 1990s did not face major opposition at home or in the region for their collaboration with the United States. Given the overall consensus at the state and society levels, the governments faced a permissive environment as they undertook coordinated action with Washington. Perhaps the biggest exception to that general trend was the widely circulated speculation that the United States was secretly engineering the emergence of a Kurdish state in the Middle East, a suspicion which was shared by large segments of the public and some political circles. Such views formed the core of a growing skepticism towards the United States and feelings of 'anti-Americanism' which emerged as a major issue in the next decade.

The Sea Change in the 2000s: Transformation of the Traditional Parameters

The drive for autonomous action became a defining feature of Turkish foreign policy throughout the 2000s, and the relations with the United States entered a new era, characterized by a growing number of frictions. Consequently, both cooperation and competition became a routine part of the

bilateral ties, as well as uncertainty and ups-and-downs. In this section, the 2003 Iraq war, which marked the transition to the new era, will first be discussed briefly and then closer attention will be paid to the factors behind the transformation.

The 2003 Iraq War: Friction Point in Alliance Relations?

In the first years of the new century, the bilateral relationship started on a cooperative trajectory. In the post-September 11 environment, Turkey, welcoming US efforts to define terrorism as a global problem, supported the war on terrorism. In return, the United States did not turn down Turkey's requests for support in its EU membership bid or its efforts to solve the Cyprus issue. Similarly, in an example that was the most vivid demonstration of the assistance-cooperation formula, the United States assisted Turkey both directly and through the IMF, when the latter faced a major financial crisis in the early 2000s. As such, Washington underscored the extent to which it valued Ankara's strategic position in the post-September 11 environment.

In the wake of disagreements over the 2003 Iraq war, the bilateral-

relationship formed during the Cold War years has gone through a period of major redefinition. In many respects, taking this year as the point of departure is meaningful, as many other nations also began to question their relations with the United States, which sparked a debate on the future of US alliances worldwide. While many observers expected Turkey to join the US-led coalition given the decades-old alliance relationship, due to the Turkish Parliament's failure to authorize a governmental motion, Turkey did not allow the opening of a second front through its territory. This development initiated a debate on the future of bilateral ties. While

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some called on the US administration to punish Turkey, others asked the Turkish government to reconsider its ties with Washington. Despite the occasional

confrontations in subsequent years, which according to many observers, risked bringing the relationship to a breaking point, the parties worked hard to manage such frictions.

Factors Behind the Sea Change

Granted, Turkish-American relations have moved beyond the old patronage dynamics and the accompanying

assistance-cooperation formula, and entered into more uncertain waters. In this section, the underlying reasons behind this change will be studied, by taking into account both the transformations in Turkey's external relations and the trends in US foreign policy.

i) The unilateral turn in US foreign policy and the questioning of unipolarity worldwide

In the debate that ensued from the 2003 Iraq war, Turkey was one of many Western and non-Western powers that started to reconsider their relationship to Washington. Unlike the Afghan campaign, the United States had failed to muster an international coalition behind its invasion of Iraq, an act whose legitimacy was increasingly questioned. To the extent that the Bush administration pursued a foreign policy that was based on unilateral action, power politics and American national interests, the rest of the international community expressed discomfort at Washington's role in the world. The hawkish policies symbolized in the 'preventive war' doctrine resulted in a questioning of the unipolar world order. Washington's assertive policies, which at times even disregarded the interests of its allies, came to be perceived as a source of

threat by other powers, which arguably engaged in new strategies, such as 'soft balancing,' to counter US influence.⁸

Moreover, a simultaneous debate on the sustainability of US global primacy gained pace. On the one hand, the inability of the United States to achieve its desired objectives in Iraq and Afghanistan led to the questioning of US military and political dominance, which gained a new dimension following the 2008 Russian-Georgian war. On the other hand, the global financial crisis, triggered by American housing and financial markets, raised serious doubts about the US ability to command the international economic order. Taken together with the projections that point to a shift in economic activities towards Asia, these developments sparked a debate over the global economic and financial institutions that formed the US-led international order. As a harbinger of this transformation, international efforts to tackle the financial crisis are discussed through new forums, such as the G-20, which also encompass new actors such as Turkey.

In that sense, Turkey can be seen as tuning in with a worldwide trend whereby several powers are developing a more distanced relationship with Washington. On the one hand, Turkey did not refrain from raising vocal objection to US policies in its region, when these policies contradicted its interests. On the other hand, Turkish leaders have questioned

US global preeminence and the unipolar world order. They emphasized the need for more participatory decision making mechanisms for international institutions, arguing that global problems cannot be tackled with from a single center. They highlighted Turkey's growing visibility in international institutions, such as the UN Security Council, the G-20, the Organization of Islamic Conference, and the Council of Europe, as indications of its determination to make such a contribution.

ii) Redefinition of Turkey's geopolitical positioning and increasing regional emphasis⁹

A distinguishing feature of the new Turkish foreign policy has been Turkey's deliberate effort to redefine its position in international relations, and the emphasis placed on regional dimension in such efforts. First, Turkey has increasingly 'rediscovered' its immediate neighborhood and started to redefine its regional policies on an ambitious platform.¹⁰

Regionalization is a major force in international relations, and Turkey's policies are in line with this trend.¹¹ On the one hand, states have exponentially integrated with their regions through economic and political cooperation schemes since the collapse of the

bipolar structure. On the other hand, some regional powers with a capacity to assume leadership roles in their neighborhood have become centers of attraction in global politics.¹² Yet another development that complements these trends is the declining weight of the West in the global economy.

Seen from this perspective, the emphasis on the regional dimension and Turkey's self-perception as a regional power is not unique to AK Party era. In the immediate aftermath of the Cold

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War, Turkey developed a proactive regional policy to advance its interests in the new geopolitics of Eurasia and the Balkans. Although this vision might have been given a backseat, it remained present and the new regional openings of the last decade are largely an outgrowth of it. Throughout the last decade, the AK Party governments have managed to make good use of the growth in Turkey's national power and mobilized Turkey's capacity to pursue an ambitious foreign policy. Turkey's new initiatives and its

efforts to promote economic and political interests, especially in the Middle East, can be seen as the continuation of this regional emphasis.

iii) Transformation of regional policies in the 2000s

Granted, one has to consider the differences between the regional power model of the last decade and that of the 1990s. First, while the regional approach of the 1990s reflected Turkey's quest to adapt to Western policies in its neighborhood, in recent years Turkey has been searching for a regional power model that would put its own priorities at the center.¹³ The emphasis on setting its own priorities in the formulation of regional policies, the degree of independent action from Western partners, and the daring attitude accompanied by a readiness to risk confrontation in pursuit of its priorities have been the defining characteristics of Turkey's regional policies in the last decade.

As a result of this search for autonomy, which is summarized in Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu's concept of central-country, Turkey's willingness to play a regional role in tune with Western interests in its surrounding regions has been curbed. In that regard, the metaphor of 'central-country' rejects not only the Cold War concepts of 'frontline state' or 'southern flank'

but also the post-Cold War metaphors of 'bridge' or 'pivot' country. This new imagination puts at the center of Turkey's foreign policy its perception of the geographical and historical position of the country. Though it stops short of rejecting Turkey's ties to the West and the United States, it proposes to reconceptualize them as one of many external connections. In other words, in the new multi-dimensional regional policy, Turkey's relationship with the United States is reduced to one of many items on its foreign policy agenda, and downgraded from the privileged place it traditionally enjoyed.

Another distinguishing characteristic of Turkey's new regional policies is that security considerations have lost ground to cooperative policies. Although Turkey undersigned such cooperative security initiatives as the Black Sea Economic Cooperation in the 1990s, its regional policies were geared largely towards meeting the threats or instabilities posed by its neighbors or regional crises. This security-driven foreign policy set limitations on Turkey's ability to foster regional cooperation, and forced it to maintain its military-strategic alliance with the United States. Parallel to Turkey's domestic transformation in recent years, which saw the weakening power of the military in civilian politics, Turkey increasingly abandoned the security-centric worldview in its foreign policy. As a result, it rejected

defining its relations with neighbors on the basis of security parameters and came to perceive its region as an area of potential cooperation. At the same time, a parallel outcome of Turkey's domestic transformation has been the growing salience of economic and commercial factors in the making of Turkish foreign policy, which has resulted in a visible increase in Turkey's economic presence in the neighborhood. As a result of this 'trading state' approach, regional policies have been driven by economic considerations, as Turkey aimed to bolster regional cooperation and integration.¹⁴

Moreover, Turkey's new regional power approach is not based on geopolitical factors alone, for geo-cultural elements are also given major prominence in the making of Turkish foreign policy.¹⁵ The conceptual background is set by Davutoğlu, who highlights both geographic and historical depth in his redefinition of Turkey's international positioning. According to this view, Turkey holds a responsibility towards people beyond its borders due to historic-cultural reasons, and in order to fulfill this responsibility, it has to pursue proactive regional policies. For this purpose, Turkish political elites have to make peace with their historical

and cultural legacy, and work toward reintegrating Turkey with its natural geo-cultural hinterland as defined by not only its geography but also its culture, civilization and history.

According to this geo-cultural framework, Turkey's traditional Western vocation was ill-conceived, as it developed in disjunction with the country's historical and cultural environs, a situation evidenced by the fact that Turkey's cultural, social and economic ties with its neighbors remained extremely

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limited. Turkey's mental break with its region became obvious, especially in the context of Cold War geopolitical conditions, which further deepened a political disconnect with Turkey's Eastern

neighbors. The challenge today is to reverse this historical anomaly and help Turkey meet its geo-cultural destiny. In other words, in this view, what is needed is to facilitate 'normalization of history and geography' in Turkish foreign policy.¹⁶

Turkey's rapprochement with its neighborhood and its pursuit of regional-oriented foreign policy has led to occasional divergence with US policies. As will be discussed below, US policy towards the regions surrounding Turkey

more often than not has become an area of tension and competition, rather than an area of cooperation in bilateral relations. The US approach of relying on coercive instruments, including brute force and sanctions, contradicts Turkey's quest to create a stable and peaceful regional order. In search of deeper economic ties and enhanced social and political exchanges at the regional level, Turkey has called for dialogue and diplomacy to solve regional problems. These diverging positions on regional issues have further widened the rift in Turkish-American bilateral relations. In this environment, moreover, Turkey has become more averse towards US efforts to assign it regional roles. For instance, while in the 1990s and in the aftermath of September 11, Turkish leaders welcomed the idea of Turkey serving as a role model for Turkic or Islamic nations, such definitions have been rejected by the new government which prioritizes the concept of central-country.

Furthermore, in addition to flourishing ties with its immediate neighborhood, Turkey has sought to develop closer relations with rising powers such as China, Brazil and South Korea. Such 'openings' to new regions, as they came to be labeled by the government, served many purposes: diversifying Turkey's external relations on a global scale, lessening its dependence on the West and United States, and

stating clearly its readiness to prepare for the post-American world.

At the same time, Turkey took several steps that reflected the value it attached to its geo-cultural positioning. Turkey's growing involvement in the Arab-Israeli disputes, its advocacy of Palestinian rights on international platforms, or its reservations about the selection of Anders Fogh Rasmussen as NATO's chief were all important indications of the extent to which geo-cultural considerations played a role in Turkey's new foreign policy.

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The tensions with the United States caused by geopolitical or geo-cultural considerations led some circles inside the United States to argue that Turkey is moving away from its traditional axis and drifting towards the Middle East. The Turkish government rebuffed those charges, arguing instead that the new initiatives complemented rather than replaced Turkey's existing commitments. The new steps and the resulting multi-dimensional turn, in their view, signaled normalization for Turkey, by correcting

a unidirectional pro-Western foreign policy which largely was a legacy of Cold War conditions.¹⁷

Areas of Cooperation and Divergence in Bilateral Relations

With the revision of the traditional parameters of the US-Turkish relationship, the parties have run into confrontation on many issues. At the same time, the two sides have continued to cooperate in many areas. In this section, areas of cooperation and divergence will be discussed in greater length, and the phenomenon of anti-Americanism will be studied.

Areas of Cooperation

i) Turkey-EU relations

Europe-related issues constitute a major dimension of the US-Turkish relationship. Traditionally, Turkey often used its ties with the United States as leverage to overcome the problems it encountered with the European powers. Seen from that perspective, US administrations have continued to support Turkey's EU membership bid. In its first years, the Bush administration extended its support to Turkey, especially when the AK Party government solicited help from the White House. But, one

has to mention the reshuffling of the trilateral dynamics between Turkey, the United States and Europe in the context of the 2003 Iraq war. In the run-up to the war and in its aftermath, Turkey's policy converged with that of France and Germany, which joined the worldwide opposition to the unilateral course followed by the United States. In a situation where the Turkish-American relationship was going through a troubled phase, this conjectural convergence facilitated Turkey's pursuit of autonomous foreign policy and had positive repercussions for the EU membership process. The drift towards Europe triggered the Europeanization of Turkish foreign policy culture, and facilitated Turkey's adoption of soft power and diplomacy, characteristic of the European approach to international relations, as opposed to Washington's hard power approach.¹⁸ As a result, Turkey distanced itself from the United States on the Iranian nuclear program issue, thus coordinating its position with European powers.

Despite such divergence, US support for Turkey's EU bid continued in various forms during the Bush era. But, in spite of the opening of accession negotiations in 2005, the accession process became increasingly complicated in subsequent years. One reason why US support failed to have a decisive impact on Turkish-EU relations was embedded in the fact that

the arguments used by the Americans to justify Turkey's entry into the EU were based on geopolitical rationale. They definitely made some sense, but over time they lost their appeal for many Europeans. Given the widening trans-Atlantic gap and the problems Turkey encountered in its relations with the United States and the EU, that argument became largely dysfunctional. Furthermore, with the onset of accession negotiations in 2005, the Turkey-EU process gained rather a technical character and the ability of the United States to meddle in 'internal European affairs' through geopolitical justifications was constrained.

The geopolitical competition over energy resources and transportation routes in Eurasia has been another area of overlapping interest in the bilateral relationship.

Another tendency that began during the second Bush term and has continued through the Obama administration was the association established between the membership process and the 'axis shift' debate. For many Americans, Turkey's exclusion from the West and the EU pushed it toward the Middle East and Russia. To prevent this, the EU had to be pressured so that it would be

more welcoming towards Turkey. Such calls also remained largely ineffective. One reason for this was the changing landscape of European politics in the second half of the 2000s, where the French and German governments increasingly became critical of Turkey, raising questions about its prospects of ever achieving full membership. Operating in an intolerant environment where the negative mood inside the EU coincided with the changing priorities of the Turkish government, Washington was left with limited room of maneuver to move the stalled membership process forward.

ii) Energy security

The geopolitical competition over energy resources and transportation routes in Eurasia has been another area of overlapping interest in the bilateral relationship. Throughout the 1990s, Turkey defined its energy policies in a pro-Western direction and sought to gain a place in oil and natural gas transportation through its integration into the US-led East-West energy corridor. While the first leg of the corridor was completed with the realization of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline owing to coordinated action between Turkey, the United States and other stakeholders, the parties failed to deliver on the second leg, pertaining to natural gas transportation from the

Caspian basin. In particular, no major progress has been achieved in regards to the Trans-Caspian or the Nabucco pipeline project that would form the vital pillars of the East-West natural gas corridor. It seems that rather than a function of Turkish-US competition, the poor state of cooperation was due largely to a lack of interest in these projects on the part of the United States, which was increasingly embroiled in Middle Eastern affairs, resulting in limiting room for joint action in Eurasia. Moreover, the failure of the EU to assume a resolute leadership, despite the fact that many European countries would be the direct beneficiaries of the proposed natural gas pipelines, is yet another factor that has bedeviled these projects.

With the Obama administration's appointment of Richard Morningstar as special envoy for Eurasian Energy, US-Turkish coordinated action in this realm gained pace. Nonetheless, the US policy toward Iran, based on sanctions and exclusion, set important obstacles to Turkey's efforts to deepen ties with that country in the energy sector, a situation most vividly observed in Turkey's plans to include Iran into the Nabucco project which have been thwarted by the United States. Moreover, some circles in the United States view with suspicion Turkey's growing ties with Russia in energy sector, arguing that they risk derailing Western energy security.

iii) Afghanistan

Following the international intervention in Afghanistan, Turkey assumed a major role in this country, and the ongoing partnership there has remained a major area of collaboration, despite persistent differences over the choice of specific policy instruments. The Turkish government of the time provided logistical assistance to the coalition operations against the Taliban, in line with Turkey's declared policy of supporting the global fight against terrorism. Although Turkey refrained from sending combat troops, it joined the UN-mandated International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) that was first established as a coalition of the willing and was later transferred to NATO command. In different time periods, Turkey assumed the command of the ISAF, while its troop contributions fluctuated between a few hundred and over 1,500. Despite its role in ISAF, Turkey continuously expressed discomfort at the loss of civilian lives due to US or NATO attacks, and sought to maintain brotherly ties with the Afghan people.

Over time, Turkey redefined its policy on Afghanistan, arguing that the problem could not be solved by military means alone, and that therefore its contributions would be concentrated in the social sphere, especially in the reconstruction of the country. Under this

approach, Turkey reorganized its military presence as part of the Kabul regional command, and assumed responsibility for the provincial reconstruction team in Wardak. In this context, in addition to the establishment of social and administrative infrastructure, its activities focused on training and educating Afghan police and soldiers. The transformation in Turkey's approach, which began during the Bush years, continued into the Obama era, leading even to occasional frictions with the new administration.

Turkey objected to Obama's calls for fresh troop contributions from several allies, including Turkey, as part of his troop surge strategy in 2009. While declining to contribute combat troops, Turkey highlighted the non-combat military functions it was already delivering in the country. Moreover, Turkey found the US policy of singling out Taliban problematic, and argued that a lasting solution would require the inclusion of all factions into Afghanistan's political processes. In line with this policy, Turkey spearheaded many regional initiatives such as RECCA, which brought together representatives from various Afghan groups as well as Afghanistan's neighbors. The support such initiatives received from the Western powers is an important indication of the receptivity towards Turkey's *sui generis* approach, as is Washington's acknowledgement that it would maintain bilateral relations by taking into account Turkey's priorities.

iv) The Balkans

Another region where Turkey has enjoyed relatively seamless relations with the United States is the Balkans. While the Balkans formed the stage for proactive Turkish foreign policy throughout the 1990s, by the mid-2000s, this region took a backseat in Turkey's foreign policy agenda. One reason for this development was a decline in international interest, as the hot conflicts in the region subsided. Moreover, as South Eastern Europe came under closer scrutiny by the EU and the countries of the region started to be integrated into European institutions, Turkey's potential influence declined. Nonetheless, Turkey maintained its presence in the international missions under NATO and the EU's lead which were established for the stabilization or reconstruction of Bosnia, Kosovo and Macedonia. Through such contributions, Turkey gained a chance to bolster ties with the United States and the EU. Furthermore, Turkey slowly gained an economic foothold in the Balkan nations, albeit a limited one.

Particularly after 2008, the Balkans gained a renewed visibility in Turkish foreign policy. Having highlighted the risks posed by the West's neglect of the ongoing inter-communal tensions and inability to establish a sustainable peace in Bosnia, Davutoğlu initiated preventive diplomacy in an effort to prevent the outbreak of a new conflict.

The most concrete step in this direction was Turkey's hosting of two separate trilateral summits through which Turkish leaders brought together the leaders of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia on the one hand, and the leaders of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia on the other. Both this initiative and Turkey's policy on Kosovo's declaration of independence underscored the extent to which Turkey continues to act in close coordination with the West in the Balkans.

Areas of Divergence

i) The Middle East

The dynamics of divergence in Turkey-US bilateral relations has been most visible in the Middle East. Having objected to US war plans, Turkey continued its opposition to the United States in the aftermath of the 2003 war, and Iraq-related issues emerged as a topic of confrontation with the United States. The most immediate causes for contention concerned the close relationship the United States forged with the Kurdistan Regional Government in Northern Iraq, and the regional instability caused by the invasion. Nonetheless, the dynamics of cooperation gained ground over time. A major reason that prepared the ground for convergence between Washington and Ankara over Iraq was Turkey's need to ensure the political and military

backing of the United States in its fight against the PKK formations taking refuge in Northern Iraq. With the resurgence of the PKK's violent campaign in the second half of the decade, Turkey's dependence on the intelligence provided by the United States increased, which led to the formation of the Turkey-United States-Iraq trilateral mechanism.

Another factor facilitating policy convergence in the context of Iraq has been both sides' joint stakes in ensuring Iraq's stability. Aware of the security risks that might have been posed by Iraq's descend into total chaos, Turkey moved to support US efforts for Iraq's reconstruction. In this regard, by expressing its readiness to field peacekeeping forces in Iraq as part of an international mission in the initial months following the invasion, Turkey signaled its readiness to cooperate with the United States. Similarly, Turkey offered its mediation services to bridge differences between different Iraqi factions, and worked to convince the Sunni Arabs to join political processes. Later, through its continuing commitment to working in coordination with Washington following Obama's announcement of his plans for withdrawing US troops from Iraq, Ankara reiterated once again how it places a high premium on Iraq's stability.

As Iraq ceased to be the main issue of contention, the Iranian nuclear program emerged as yet another area

of confrontation. The United States increasingly expressed concerns over Iran's reactivation of its nuclear program, especially its underground activities. While initially Turkey's argument for the resolution of the dispute through dialogue and diplomacy resonated with the European powers' position, over time Turkey increasingly diverged from the West. Such an outcome was inevitable, as the Europeans increasingly adopted a position similar to that of the United States, by agreeing to support Obama's policy of sanctions and coercive instruments to stop Iran's nuclear program.

Turkey insisted on its earlier stance, arguing that if military instruments were employed to solve the dispute over Iran's nuclear program, it could create another source of instability similar to the situation in Iraq. Instead, Turkey called for engaging Tehran in order to allay security concerns and build confidence on both sides of the dispute. Towards that end, Turkey has argued that both its efforts to mediate between Iran and Western powers and the swap deal it brokered in coordination with Brazil constituted the most concrete steps toward the solution of this dispute. Turkey voted against the new US-sponsored sanctions package at the UN Security Council, which created another crisis of confidence in bilateral relations. While ultimately agreeing to implement the new round of sanctions authorized

by the Security Council, Turkey declined to join the unilateral sanctions initiated by the United States and some European powers. Similarly, through its diplomatic initiatives in the run-up to the Lisbon summit of November 2010, where NATO adopted a missile shield project, Turkey sought to ensure that this project would not be specifically developed against Iran. Such moves on Turkey's part underscore the severity of the differences of opinion between Ankara and Washington, and the degree to which Turkey was determined to pursue policies autonomous from the United States.

In the same period, Turkey's policy on the Arab-Israel problem emerged as another source of tension in bilateral relations. Following Hamas's victory in the Palestine Legislative Council elections, Turkey advocated recognition of Hamas as a legitimate political actor, and hosted Hamas leader Khaled Mashal in February 2006. This approach led to frictions with the United States and West, which viewed Hamas as a terrorist organization. Neo-conservative groups and the pro-Israeli lobby capitalized on this development to spark a debate on the axis shift in Turkish foreign policy.

In the following years, Turkey not only insisted on the same policy, but also started to vocally criticize Israel's blockade over Gaza and the inhumane treatment of the Palestinians on international platforms. Despite Turkey's

facilitation of proximity talks between Israel and Syria, Israel's aggressive policy on Gaza undermined the Turkish-Israeli relationship. Israel's attack on Gaza in late 2008 and early 2009 invited Turkey's harsh reaction, epitomized by the 'Davos incident.' The Mavi Marmara raid of summer 2010 brought bilateral relations on the verge of collapse. Although the Obama administration differed from earlier administrations in its approach to Israel, the United States largely sided with Israel's interpretations of the events, as was demonstrated by the US position on the UN investigation into the Mavi Marmara raid.

In spite of these areas of contention in the Middle East, Ankara and Washington also found common ground to cooperate there on other issues. Overall, Turkey adopted a constructive approach toward US projects to shape the region in the aftermath of the Iraq war. Following the Greater Middle East Project proposed in 2003, the Greater Middle East and North Africa Initiative (GMENA) was adopted in June 2004 during the G-8 Summit, which sought to stimulate economic, political and social reconstruction in the region.¹⁹ Welcoming this development, Turkey assumed a role in the projects pertaining to social policies, women's rights, and democratization. Yet, following the US reaction to Hamas's election victory, the Abu Gurayb scandal, the deepening of communal conflict in Iraq, and the

reluctance of Arab reformers to being associated with the United States, the GMENA was rendered dysfunctional, lost its credibility, and was given a backseat in US regional policies.

Turkey also lost enthusiasm for the project, initially in tandem with its embroilment in the security risks posed by the resurgence of PKK terrorism and later by its initiation of the economic integration project in the Middle East. Later, Turkey welcomed the Obama administration's announcement that it would seek to revitalize the peace process, and argued in particular for the building of channels of dialogue and diplomacy with Syria. The popular uprisings that swept the Middle East and North Africa in 2011 reiterated once again the two countries' mutual stakes in acting in concert to ensure regional stability and facilitate social and economic transformation in the region.

ii) Relations with Russia and Eurasia

While Turkish-American cooperation in Eurasia provided a venue for forging a strategic partnership in the 1990s, Turkey acted hesitantly when it was called to coordinate its policies with the West against Russia throughout the 2000s. As the United States focused its attention on the Middle East following the Iraq war, Russia increasingly consolidated its power in Eurasia.

Despite the West gaining advantage by advocating democratic regimes, epitomized by the colored revolutions, such gains were soon reversed. The United States was generally acquiescent toward Russia's attempts to regain influence and to balance US power in Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Black Sea basin in the second half of the decade.

Turkey acted hesitantly when it was called to coordinate its policies with the West against Russia throughout the 2000s.

In the same period, Turkey's ties with Russia flourished in economic and political realms. Partly reflecting this new mood, Turkey took a 'neutral' position in the undeclared competition between Russia and the West, and, in contrast to the 1990s, avoided taking actions that could be perceived as anti-Russian. Both Turkey's self-conscious distancing from the US agenda in its neighborhood, and its concern to dampen political tensions with Russia in order to maximize gains from commercial exchanges, played their roles in producing this outcome. Turkey's preference for neutrality was most clearly observed in the Black Sea region, especially during the Russian-Georgian war of 2008. This changing Turkish policy triggered debates within the US political community, especially during the second term of the Bush

administration, which questioned whether Russia and Turkey were forming an anti-Western axis.

Beyond that, over time, Turkey's initiatives in Eurasia were freed from the immediate post-Cold War perception of being extensions of the US agenda in the region. As a matter of fact, some commentators found the AK Party's interest in the region lacking. It was only after 2008 that Turkey refocused its attention on the region in a serious way. In this context, Turkey has recently moved to revitalize platforms to facilitate cooperation among Turkic nations. Notably, in coordination with Kazakhstan, Turkey spearheaded multi-lateral initiatives to contribute to regional stability. Such initiatives in Central Asia were not directly coordinated with the United States, and were shaped on the basis of Turkey's own priorities. In the Caucasus, Turkey took steps towards the resolution of the problems with Armenia, and its relations with the United States have exhibited both elements of cooperation and divergence in this region.

Although the United States welcomed Turkey's normalization efforts with Armenia, due to the parties' inability to conclude this process, the Armenian issue remains a potential flashpoint in Turkish-American relations. The Obama administration prevented a debate in the House of Representatives on draft legislation regarding Armenian claims of

genocide in March 2010, reflecting the importance attached to Turkey's strategic value. However, this issue might be brought to the US agenda depending on the changing political climate, and hence poison bilateral relations.

iii) Relations with NATO and cooperation in the defense industry

The dynamics of a US-Turkey divergence became visible throughout the 2000s even in NATO, which traditionally had provided an institutional platform for Turkish-American partnership. Turkey has continuously stated that NATO remains the backbone of its security and defense policies. In this regard, for instance, it became a major contributor to peace support operations, took a lead role in the Partnership for Peace program and supported the Alliance's transformation. Yet, Turkey simultaneously came to be seen as thinking and acting differently from the rest of the Alliance. On the one hand, there have been concerns over Turkey's hindering of EU-NATO cooperation due to the unresolved Cyprus issue. On the other hand, Turkey has been at the center of discussions for its controversial stance on France's return to NATO's military organs, the election of a new Secretary General, the development of the missile shield under

NATO framework, and the transfer of the coalition operations in Libya to NATO.

The growing volume of such instances of divergence led some circles in the United States to question Turkey's commitment to the Alliance. Reminding its partners that it has equal rights just as they do, Turkey reiterated that it wants its voice heard in the Alliance's decisions. Moreover, it is instructive to note that in all these 'crises,' in the final analysis, Turkey dropped its objections, especially after the United States stepped in. As such, Turkey has underscored how it values maintaining the Alliance's unity as well as its relations with Washington.

Meanwhile, defense cooperation, which constituted a major component of the alliance relationship, has gone through significant transformation in the last decade. Turkey has pursued ambitious military modernization programs, initiated in the 1990s. Despite the continuation of joint projects with and defense procurement from the United States, Turkey has increasingly moved in the direction of developing a domestic defense industry and reducing its dependence on imports. Raising the share of domestic contributions, and facilitating technology transfers in joint production projects with foreign suppliers have been the driving themes of Turkey's military procurement

policies. Given the limitations imposed by US regulations on some technology transfers, US arms producers failed to compete in tenders for supplying arms and equipment to the Turkish army.

Turkey has undertaken joint projects with Italy and South Korea to produce attack helicopters and main battle tanks, respectively, as well as developing national warship and unmanned aerial vehicle projects. Partly as a reaction to the exclusion of US producers from defense contracts, the United States is said to be reluctant to sell some advanced weapons systems to Turkey, which arguably has led to deficiencies in Turkey's anti-terrorism struggle. Turkey's military dependence on the United States still continues, especially in intelligence gathering, anti-missile defense systems, and attack helicopters. This dependence remains a major factor that acts as a brake against a total breakdown in bilateral relations.

iv) Rising anti-Americanism in Turkey

The rapidly declining popularity of the United States in Turkish society has emerged as yet another issue in bilateral relations. The arguments that anti-Americanism is taking permanent roots in Turkey are often heard in the United States. As such arguments coincide with Turkey's controversial initiatives towards Hamas or Syria, the Turkish government has come under criticism for either

keeping silent, or acting in a populist manner, or even supporting anti-American sentiments in the society. The government has denied those claims, and instead argues that this phenomenon is a product of the repercussions of misguided US policies in the region, and can only be remedied by the United States revising its Middle East policies.

The rapidly declining popularity of the United States in Turkish society has emerged as yet another issue in bilateral relations.

Academic analyses on the subject demonstrate that anti-Americanism is largely a reaction to US actions in Turkey's neighborhood. Large segments of Turkish society are troubled by the humanitarian tragedy and instability unleashed by the Iraq war. Washington's close ties with the Northern Iraqi administration and the resurgence of PKK terrorism in the wake of the Iraq war have exaggerated Turkish skepticism towards the United States. In addition, several other incidents, including the US mistreatment of Turkish military personnel in Sulaymaniyah, bred the perceptions that the United States disregards Turkey's interests.²⁰

Obama's election was welcome worldwide, raising expectations that

the ‘Obama effect’ would repair the negative image of the United States created during the Bush years. While such an improvement was recorded in polls worldwide, those Turks who have a favorable outlook toward the United States remained low compared to other Western nations.²¹ This ‘Turkish exceptionalism’ is important, as it indicates an ongoing lack of trust at the societal level, which remains a hurdle to be overcome in the bilateral relationship. In addition to Turkish concerns triggered by alleged American involvement in the Kurdish-question, the perceptions that the Obama administration, having pushed for Turkey-Armenia normalization, continues to use the ‘genocide legislation’ as leverage against Turkey serves to perpetuate deep skepticism towards the United States.

In any case, given the negative public perceptions, all Turkish governments will have to conduct their relations with Washington carefully. In a rapidly democratizing domestic political setting, Turkish-American relations are no longer shaped by military-civilian bureaucrats or political elites; rather, public opinion has emerged as a major force in foreign policy making. Just as Turkish governments take people’s views into account, the United States too will be well advised to pay due attention to the trends in Turkish public opinion, in order to define the relations on a more realistic basis.

Conclusion: From ‘Strategic Partnership’ to ‘Model Partnership’?

Throughout the first decade of the new millennium, Turkey has increasingly sought to conduct its foreign policy autonomously, paralleling the growing number of tensions with the United States. As a result, the traditional parameters of Turkish-American relations have gone through a period of redefinition. First, encouraged by the expansion of its economic, political and military power, Turkey expressed discomfort with the definitions of its place in the Western world based on geographic position. Similarly, Turkish leaders questioned the patronage relationship based on the assistance-cooperation formula. Moreover, Turkey ceased to shape its relations with not only the Western world but also the surrounding regions, based on roles prescribed from outside. Increasingly, Turkish leaders endeavored to determine the country’s partnership with the West and relations with the region in line with their autonomous role perceptions. In this new setting, the concept of ‘strategic partnership’ was no longer suitable to describe the nature of the relationship, while various efforts to base the partnership on a new concept bore limited fruits.

Indeed, parallel to the declining prestige of the United States in the eyes

of the Turkish people, it remains an open question as to how bilateral ties will be redefined at the level of political elites in the wake of the oscillations observed in the last decade. It has been emphasized earlier in the article how both sides were restrained from severing the ties completely even during the height of the post-Iraq war woes in the Bush era. With the election of Obama, the expectation of betterment in bilateral ties was partly realized as the parties expressed on many occasions their shared vision in the Middle East and other regions.

As a result, the Arab-Israeli peace process, the opening of Syria to the international community, the withdrawal of coalition forces from Iraq, the Iranian nuclear program and the stabilization of Afghanistan have emerged as issues of overlapping interests, which further elevate hopes for policy convergence. Indeed, in high level meetings between officials from both sides, the areas of potential cooperation were often discussed. Through joint action, it was argued, not only would the parties be able to advance their interests in those issues areas, but they also would be able to instrumentalize such cooperation to mend the bilateral relations.²²

Obama's visit to Turkey in April 2009 and his idea of a 'model partnership' injected fresh hope to revitalize the relations, but the contours of this concept have yet to be fully defined.

Yet, both during the Bush and Obama years, the parties failed to recapture the spirit of cooperation conveyed by the term 'strategic partnership.' Their inability to agree on a term to replace 'strategic partnership' attests to this observation. In 2006, the parties made an attempt to elevate the ongoing political cooperation, which at times was labeled as 'enhanced partnership.' While the United States solicited Turkey's support on the issue of Iran, Turkey hoped to receive US assistance on the issue of resurgent PKK violence. Through the joint Strategic Vision Document signed in July 2006, the parties expressed their determination to act in closer coordination. While signing a document was expected to set the bilateral relations on a more solid foundation, they soon took steps that apparently undermined whatever 'shared vision' they agreed on, rendering the document irrelevant.

Obama's visit to Turkey in April 2009 and his idea of a 'model partnership' injected fresh hope to revitalize the relations, but the contours of this concept have yet to be fully defined. Moreover, the frictions that broke out during the Obama administration show that the announcement of a 'model partnership' has failed to offer common ground

or eliminate differences of opinion. Despite policy convergence in various fields, some tensions from the Bush era have been carried into the new term, as discussed above. One reason for this development has been Obama's failure to fully realize his promise of setting American foreign policy on an entirely new course. At the same time, as Turkey's desire to pursue autonomous regional policies has taken root, Turkey did not shy away from objecting to US policies when they contradicted its priorities.²³

The most concrete steps undertaken in the context of the 'model partnership' were the activities of the Turkish-American Business Council to bolster economic and commercial ties. Through a new forum bringing together representatives from the business community and chaired by ministers from both sides, the parties wanted to improve the coordination of economic activities. The need for a new forum has been questioned, given the presence of several other mechanisms devoted to the same purpose. Nonetheless, the parties hope to further economic ties by developing new projects under this framework. As underlined at the outset of this article, the economic and social pillars of the bilateral relations have always remained underdeveloped. If the economic ties can

be elevated to new heights through the model partnership, it will mark a major step towards the diversification of the relationship, moving it away from its security-dominant origins.

At the current juncture, it is difficult to base the Turkish-American relationship on a pre-defined partnership paradigm. Such definitions will be faulty because they usually assume that Turkey will eventually cooperate with the United States even at the expense of own interests. But, competition and differences have become characteristics of the Turkish-American partnership, side by side with the cooperative dynamics, and the future of the relationship needs to be defined on this basis. Considering the regional crises and rapidly changing international environment, the interests of Turkey and the United States will diverge and convergence, depending on the specific contingency at hand. Therefore, in the coming years, the relations will evolve case by case and can hardly be expected to be governed by a pre-defined partnership model.²⁴ While the parties will continue to cooperate in cases of overlapping interests, in cases of interest collision, they will have to work hard to develop mechanisms to manage disagreements, lest they escalate into crises.

Endnotes

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