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An Anatomy of the Transformation of the US–Turkish Alliance: From “Cold War” to “War on Iraq”

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ABSTRACT *This essay examines the evolution of Turkish–US relations in three different time periods: the Cold War, the post-Cold War and the post-9/11 period. While the relationship was referred to as an “alliance” during the Cold War, established with a common interest to contain the Soviet communist threat, the post-Cold War period posed important challenges and transformed the relations first into an “enhanced partnership” and then into a “strategic partnership.” The post-9/11 period has put under scrutiny the viability of the strategic partnership as relations between the two countries have been going through a crisis with the war on Iraq waged by the United States from March 2003. The essay aims at analyzing the factors and dynamics behind this transformation in the alliance. It concludes that the *raison d’être* and the nature of the Turkish–US alliance have undergone considerable change as Turkey has in time started to pursue a more independent and multidimensional policy. Relations, in this period, seem to be entering yet another phase and converting from a “strategic partnership” to “partnership for democracy” in the greater Middle East.*

The Turkish–American Alliance in the Cold War Period

The origins of the Turkish–American alliance appear to contradict Ole Holsti’s argument that “geographic conditions do not appear to play a significant role in alliance making.”¹ Turkey’s strategic position was its main asset and was the major reason for the Turkish–American alignment during the Cold War period.

The end of the Second World War marked a watershed in Turco-Soviet relations as well as in Soviet–American relations. Towards the end of the war, on March 19, 1945, the Soviet Union gave notice to Turkey of its intention to abrogate the 1925 Treaty of Friendship and Non-Aggression signed between them, and on June 7, 1945 it claimed rights to some eastern provinces of Turkey (Kars, Ardahan and Batum) as well as to controlling passage through the Straits (Bosphorus and Dardanelles) by establishing a base there. Turkey’s objective to contain the imminent Soviet threat was coupled with a similar concern of the US, which feared Soviet expansion into the Middle East where oil was the most important strategic

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concern of the US. In this respect, Turkey's geostrategic position was crucial for the containment of such ideological and territorial expansion. As a result, US military analysts reached the conclusion that Turkey was "the most important military factor in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East" and that "the Soviet expansion would have a serious impact on the vital interests of the USA."²

The first concrete proof of effective American interest in Turkey was revealed in the statements of the Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, giving private assurances to the Turks that Soviet territorial demands extended into "spheres of world peace and security" in which the US took the "deepest interest."³ On another occasion, Acheson pointed out to congressional delegates that "the West had to keep Greece and Turkey out of Soviet hands—or be prepared to accept the subsequent loss of the strategic bases, lines of communication and resources of the Middle East."⁴

A series of developments followed this strategic convergence of interests and many signals were sent to the Soviet Union that Turkey and the US had established an alliance and that Turkey had been placed within the western security framework. These developments can be listed as follows:

- The Truman Doctrine, which emphasized the necessity of US assistance to the free peoples of Greece and Turkey, and the subsequent dispatch of the battleship *Missouri* to Istanbul bearing the remains of former Turkish ambassador, Münir Ertegün, who had died in Washington the same year.
- Marshall Aid to Turkey, which aimed at improving the economic situation in Turkey and thereby preventing it from being vulnerable to communist ideology.
- The Korean War in 1950, which marked further collaboration between Turkey and the US in which the success of Turkish troops put moral pressure on the US to establish even closer links with Turkey.
- Turkey's becoming a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1952, which became the basis for a Turkish–American defense relationship.⁵
- The development or participation of the US in the development of a large number of defense-related installations in the region. These installations (over 30, with 5,000 US personnel) collectively engaged in defense missions that ranged from basic logistics and supply operations to highly sophisticated communications and intelligence-collecting activities.⁶
- The Military Facilities Agreement signed in 1954 by Turkey and the US, formalizing the opening of US military bases in Turkey. With a Status of Forces Agreement, US military personnel, whose numbers were growing rapidly, were removed from the purview of the Turkish judicial system.

Although there seemed to be a perfect convergence in the interests of the two countries, the alliance from time to time suffered from the imbalance between a superpower and a medium-sized regional power. The alliance suffered from major drawbacks in the 1960s because of the Jupiter missile crisis,⁷ the Opium issue,⁸ and the Johnson letter.⁹ However, the major turning point in bilateral relations was

constituted by Turkey sending troops to Cyprus in July 1974 and the subsequent arms embargo imposed by the US. Although the administration was strongly opposed to the embargo and did not consider it an effective tool to achieve US policy objectives in the unstable Eastern Mediterranean,¹⁰ Congress insisted on the prohibition of arms sales to Turkey, stating that “80 to 90 percent of the equipment used in that aggressive military action was made, paid for and delivered by the United States” and that “this was an unconditional violation of their own laws, the UN Charter, the NATO covenant and agreements between the two nations.”¹¹

The arms embargo, which lasted for three years, was a slap in the face for Turkey and had very negative consequences for the alliance.¹² Turks viewed this as an intervention in their domestic affairs, and anti-American sentiment grew. Turkey responded to the suspension of US military aid by closing down all American military installations on its territory, including air bases, naval facilities, early warning radar stations and intelligence gathering facilities directed towards the Soviet Union.

This development was significant in the sense that it made Turkey realize how unidimensional its foreign policy had been so far and how dependent it was on US military aid. Turkey tried to improve its relations with the Soviet Union and ended up obtaining \$3.8 billion-worth of energy projects. The resentment and loss of confidence in the US transformed the alliance to a great extent and made Turkey focus on two important strategic priorities from then onwards: to diversify the sources of arms imports and to improve the development of a domestic arms industry.

The end of *détente* between the US and the Soviet Union, following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Iranian Revolution in the oil-rich strategic zone, once again reinforced the Turkish–American alliance. Turkey and the US signed a Defense and Economic Cooperation Agreement (DECA) on March 29, 1980. Maintaining a strong Turkish–American bilateral defense relationship as well as preserving US utilization of military facilities in Turkey were the objectives in negotiating DECA.¹³ It is interesting to note that the military’s intervention in Turkey on September 12, 1980 did not have any negative effect on these relations. In fact, with DECA, the US was concerned with regaining its status, at least reaching its level prior to the embargo years after the Turkish intervention in Cyprus. The US promised Turkey \$2.5 billion over the next five years, secured access to 26 facilities and obtained permission to modernize these to compensate for the neglect of the 1970s and the loss of intelligence facilities in Iran due to the revolution and anti-American sentiment there.

With DECA, both countries stated their desire to enhance economic, defense and related scientific and technological cooperation, both bilaterally and as members of NATO. The second phase of the Cold War, however, did not generate a strategic relationship as close as it used to be in the first phase. Turkey, in harmony with its new multilateral approach adopted after the arms embargo in the 1970s, carefully refrained from intensively associating itself with the US, being prompt to emphasize the “Turkish nature” of the US facilities in Turkey, for instance. Foreign Minister Hayrettin Erkmén stated that “the joint installations involved in a new defense

cooperation agreement being negotiated with the USA were not foreign bases but installations of the Turkish Republic ... They were not to be used for the purpose of US defense but for NATO defense."¹⁴

In the period following the signing of DECA, many Turkish–American joint ventures were established and implemented. For instance, in the 1980s, the American firm FMS and the Turkish firm Nurol Savunma Sanayii established a billion dollar joint venture project (FNSS) to manufacture approximately 1,700 armored infantry fighting vehicles (AIFV), over the following eight years.¹⁵ The three bases in Eastern Turkey—at Erzurum, Batman and Muş—were upgraded following a 1982 agreement to make them available for forward deployment of US tactical aircraft under conditions of a NATO alert. Aircraft operating from these bases could cover the entire Turkish–Iranian–Transcaucasian border region without aerial refueling.¹⁶

It can be concluded that the *raison d'être* of the alliance determined the course it followed and the policies and measures adopted.¹⁷ In other words, the urgent necessity to contain Soviet communist expansionism made the alliance cohesion dependent on an East–West agenda. The alliance's cohesion in terms of foreign aid and security assistance was higher in times of increased tension between the two superpowers and lower in times of *détente*. It is important to note at this point that there was no sense of reciprocity, as the alliance was not formed on an equal-partnership basis since there were no constant common interests.¹⁸ Turkey played the role of a smaller and weaker ally bound to the help of a superpower in military and security terms in order to protect itself from outside threats and therefore exposed its dependency on US military aid and support.

The End of the Cold War: From “Alliance” to “Partnership”

The end of the Cold War, marked by the disintegration of the Soviet Union, opened another phase in Turkish–American relations. American policy makers needed to find an alternative rationale for a policy of active global diplomatic and military engagement. A new threat definition was made as early as 1990 by President George Bush who stated that “Our enemy is uncertainty and instability.”¹⁹ This view was further strengthened by Colin Powell who stated that “the post-Cold War world will be a more dangerous place for the US than the Cold War world because of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in hostile states, anti-American regimes in the Third World, drug traffickers, anti-democratic insurgents and terrorism.”²⁰

Due to the changing priorities of the US and an increasing budget deficit at home, the US Congress made a major policy shift in the early 1990s by ending the grant military aid program for Turkey, as well as Portugal and Greece, converting what was previously grant military aid to low interest loans (at no less than five percent interest) for purchases of military equipment; and reducing the overall military aid levels of each of these countries by ten percent compared to the previous fiscal year.²¹ The reason for the cut in military aid was very clear from the words of a

former member of Congress, Edward Derwinski, who stated: “We provide military assistance to countries only when there is a common military purpose.”²²

Thus in 1991 a new phase opened in the Turkish–American relationship, referred to as an “enhanced partnership.” The basic nature of this new relationship can be defined as extended cooperation in the political field, an increase in diplomatic consultations and an emphasis on enhanced economic partnership in compensation for the decreasing emphasis on security and defense-related matters. The then Chairman of the Department of Southern European Affairs, David Ransom, argued that:

The whole relationship is changing from one that is focused on NATO and on security problems to one that has focused on the small states around Turkey and diplomatic cooperation. So, to some extent [the] Turkish General Staff will be a less prominent part of the relationship and [the] Ministry of Foreign Affairs will be a more prominent part. This is the tilting of the balance.²³

However, the first challenge to this new world order came with the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait on August 2, 1990. The US and its western allies formed a coalition against Iraq to force it out of Kuwaiti territory. For Turkey, which felt somehow resentful of the changing priorities of the US, this was a unique opportunity to reassert its geostrategic importance in the eyes of its ally. Thus, Turkey, without hesitation, immediately joined the coalition, the Turkish–Iraqi border was closed, cutting off one of the main land routes into Iraq, and the pipeline from the north of Iraq to the Mediterranean was blocked. On January 17, 1991, the day the US-led offensive started, the Turkish Parliament passed a government motion stating that the Turkish armed forces and foreign bases in Turkey could participate in military actions against Iraq, effectively signaling the opening of a second front from the north. In the meantime, Turkey agreed to open up Incirlik airbase to the disposal of the coalition forces to make raids on Iraqi territory.²⁴ Turkey’s policy during the Gulf War was mainly directed by Turgut Özal, the Turkish President, who made no secret of his wish to assume an active role in the war. However, opinion polls indicated that up to 88 percent of the Turkish population opposed Turkish entry into the fighting.²⁵ One of the main considerations of Özal was to urge the US to reconsider the geostrategic importance of Turkey and its role as a bridge between Europe and the Middle East. This, in turn, could bring Turkey US military aid to be used for an extensive army modernization program. Navaro argues that “a slice of the post-war economic windfall must have been also in Özal’s mind when he told his party delegates in regard to Turkey’s support of the US-led forces: ‘This is the most profitable business deal of my life. It is the first time that I am making such big profits with so little work.’”²⁶

The immediate result of the Gulf War was a decision by the first Bush Administration to leave at least two Raytheon-built Patriot air defense batteries in Turkey, with the possibility of at least eight more being delivered eventually. The Turkish Air Force would receive 40 F-4E Phantoms to augment its squadron of older Phantoms.

Additionally, the US Senate Appropriations Committee voted in March 1991 to extend \$200 million in aid to Turkey as direct support for the US-led coalition.²⁷ US Under-Secretary of International Security Affairs Bartholomew stated: “Our security assistance effort (\$625 million FMF, \$75 million ESF) is designed to assist the Turks in continuing the multi-year program to modernize their air-defense forces, and also in offsetting part of their military costs and economic losses, thereby deepening our relationship with this key partner for regional stability.”²⁸ However, Turkey had estimated that its support in enforcing sanctions against Iraq had cost approximately \$6 billion and the cost of deploying 100,000 troops to the border \$300 million.

A second problem concerned the use of the Turkish bases by Great Britain and the US, who were interested in striking militarily at Saddam Hussein again. Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel, however, stated that Turkey would not allow the use of its bases.²⁹ Demirel stated that Turkey believed the territorial integrity of Iraq should be respected and that creating a Kurdish state in Northern Iraq would be a regional disaster.³⁰ As Lesser argues:

[T]wo broad features of the post-Gulf war bilateral relationship had already emerged. First, the consensus for maintaining a viable defense relationship with the US, but little interest in the formal expression of existing arrangements. The second was Ankara’s emphasis on building a new and more diversified “strategic relationship” in which economic and political cooperation plays a leading role and defense issues are subjected to closer scrutiny.³¹

In short, it can be argued that the 1990s were years when both sides questioned the strategic importance of Turkey for the US. What is quite important to note is that Turkey also continued its multi-dimensional policy and made membership to the EU an important priority. Although the US supported this desire and hoped that the EU would consider Turkey as a future member of the EU,³² there was still important convergence in the views of Turkey and the US concerning an emphasis on NATO. While the EU was trying to form its own security and defense identity, one can observe that the US, the UK and Turkey were basically opposed to the idea of decreasing the role of NATO and the use of NATO forces for EU-led operations.

It is also important to note that the Cyprus problem has ceased to be a very important determinant of bilateral relations in the post-Gulf War period. This is because both sides have understood that they are indispensable to each other in this new security environment and that sanctions were not really a realistic option since relations were bound to return to normalcy due to the strategic conditions.³³

The US began in November 1999 to give the relationship a new title: “strategic partnership,” a concept that was first voiced during the visit of President Clinton to Turkey. According to the US ambassador to Turkey, Robert Pearson, this term represented a broad recognition in both the executive and legislative branches of the US government of the increasing responsibilities of Turkey regionally and globally. It also recognized that the US has a significant stake in Turkey’s ability to integrate into the global economy, moving closer to Europe, and contributing to the stabilization of

a troubled region.³⁴ In his words, it is also possible to see how the US visualizes Turkey in this new era:

The end of the Cold War, the rebuilding of the Balkans, the NATO and EU enlargement process and the 9/11 events have created a new strategic space between Central Europe and Central Asia and down into the Middle East. In this space, the country with the best combination of land area, youthful population, democratic experience, economic potential and military security is Turkey. The US stands ready to support Turkey in this great endeavor.³⁵

The Post-9/11 Period: The War on Iraq and Turkish–American Relations

The US's international strategy during the post-9/11 period has been characterized, to a great extent, by preventing rogue states from threatening the US, its allies and its friends with weapons of mass destruction, and the fight against terrorism, if necessary through preemptive strikes.³⁶ In this respect, in Colin Powell's words, the US strategy is one of partnerships that strongly affirm the vital role of NATO and other US alliances.³⁷ Turkey is seen as one of the most important forward bases through which these policies will be implemented. So, one can observe that Turkey has been given an important role in this new vision of the second Bush administration.

The war on Iraq waged by the US in March 2003 had very important repercussions for the long-lasting strategic partnership between the two countries by creating a serious crisis of confidence on both sides and eventually putting the alliance under scrutiny. Turkey was accused of throwing the Pentagon war plans into disarray.³⁸ The nature of the alliance has been linked to the extent to which Turkey fitted the new policy structure of the US towards the rest of the world and the extent to which Turkish perceptions converged with those of the US. This was what determined the alliance cohesion during this period.

It was quite clear from the beginning of the war that the US had complete trust in its ally of 50 years.³⁹ The high US expectations of Turkey were best revealed in the words of Paul Wolfowitz, the Deputy Defense Secretary, who stated that:

Turkish participation, if it does come to the use of force, is very important in managing the consequences, in producing the result as decisively as possible, and also in helping to make sure that post-war Iraq is a positive force in the region, not a destabilizing one. So, it is very crucial to have Turkey intimately involved in the war-planning process.⁴⁰

By invading Iraq from the north as well as the south, the US and its allies hoped to strike at Saddam Hussein's forces from different directions and quickly overwhelm them. The US also wanted to stabilize the Kurdish areas in Northern Iraq to preclude any confrontation between the Turkish military and Kurdish forces. By February 2003, the US was running out of time to persuade Turkey to permit the deployment of American ground troops in case of a war with Iraq. From the very

beginning, Turkey was suspicious of the American war plans and was reluctant not only to take part in the US-led war but also to ease the latter's military strike on Iraq by opening air bases and borders to coalition troops. The reasons for the reluctance were manifold:

Firstly, Turkey repeatedly pointed out its economic loss from the first Gulf War in 1991, for which it had never been compensated fully by the US. Second, Turkey feared that a military strike on Iraq could lead the Kurds to establish an independent state next door. A possible refugee flood—as had previously happened in the first Gulf War—and the possible Kurdish control of the oil-rich cities of Musul and Kirkuk—where a sizeable Turkoman minority lived—were also serious concerns for Turkey. Therefore, Turkey started increasing its military presence in Northern Iraq since it was deemed by the state authorities a necessary measure to protect the country's national interests there and to stop a possible refugee influx in case of a war.⁴¹

Third, the opposition to the war also stemmed from the stance of the newly formed government of the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*—AKP). The AKP government was facing great trouble over the possible operation against Iraq because of pressure from its grassroots. Having an overwhelming majority in Parliament with 363 seats made it difficult for the AKP to pass a decision on Iraq due to its Islamist political tradition, which opposes the declaration of war against another Muslim country. Actually, the strong public pressure urged the authorities to brush aside talks of negotiations with the US and launch instead an “active diplomacy for peace.”⁴² Prime Minister Abdullah Gül started a three-country tour in the Middle East in an effort to avert the war in neighboring Iraq and set up an anti-war coalition with Arab countries. Turkey also stated that diplomatic means for a peaceful solution had not yet been exhausted, that the legitimacy of such a war was questionable and that Turkey would wait for the United Nations' final decision.

Meanwhile, the US developed a “Plan B” through which they could conduct a successful attack to oust Saddam Hussein without access to land bases in Turkey, although such an attack would be, as one ranking official put it, “harder and uglier.” In the same line, some American officials stated that the new Turkish government has failed to prepare its public for a war since it was a new and inexperienced leadership that was feeling very much caught out by the situation. Influential American newspapers at the time reported on the anti-war sensitivities of the Turkish people and the indecisiveness of the Turkish government on taking a decision to cooperate with the US in a possible operation against the Iraq regime. In fact, however, the Turkish government's delay in deciding whether to host US troops for a possible invasion of Iraq mainly reflected the deep pessimism among Turks, namely that such a conflict would harm their country politically or economically. A nationwide poll found that 88 percent of Turks opposed a new war across the southeastern border and almost two out of three believed that Turkey should stay out of it if there was one.⁴³

Being aware of the fact that Turkey's stance would make a difference in the long term, the US President told the Turkish authorities behind closed doors that their

decision to cooperate would be decisive in determining how much Turkey would participate in Iraq's multi-billion restructuring in the aftermath of a possible war. This would provide great economic support to Turkey in struggling with the after-effects of a massive economic crisis that took place in February 2002. The US reassured the Turks that Congress was willing to pass legislation that would help Turkey absorb any economic shocks by providing a line of credit worth as much as \$14 billion. Yet the "carrot policy" was not welcomed either in Turkey or in the US. The offer fueled skepticism in Turkey since similar promises of compensation had been made before the Gulf War of 1991, which remained unfulfilled. On the US side, the view was generally that an alliance with a price tag was no alliance at all. If Turkey acted like a strategic ally rather than a nervous renter of bases, it would have an unwavering superpower on its side for decades to come.⁴⁴

The other component of the "carrot policy" was the evoking of Article 5 of the NATO Treaty, which regulated collective defense of a member coming under attack. The US made a formal request for limited help from the NATO alliance should war break out with Iraq and requested protection for Turkey from the threat of a counter-strike from the Iraqis. NATO's 18-nation Defense Planning Committee agreed to deploy AWACS early warning aircraft, Patriot air defense missile systems and chemical-biological response units in Southern Turkey, a likely launch pad for any US-led strike on Baghdad.

As time for a diplomatic solution ran out by February 2003, Turkey preferred to make a last diplomatic effort and invite the foreign ministers of Iran, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Syria to meet in Istanbul to seek ways to prevent war in Iraq. Yet the efforts proved futile as there were claims that some participating countries were trying to derail the gathering by offering to discuss other regional problems. Meanwhile, US frustration was growing that Iraq was apparently not disarming and the momentum for war was gathering pace.

The Economic Aid Package: Money for Blood?

At the end of a round of intense negotiations in the US capital during the same period, the Bush administration offered to expand its aid package, including about \$6 billion in grants and up to \$20 billion in loan guarantees, to secure Ankara's support for a possible invasion of Iraq. On top of an estimated \$6 billion in grants that would be provided to Turkey in the event of a war, the Bush administration offered backing for up to \$20 billion in loans that Ankara could secure through private banks. However, Washington demanded that the loans fall under the terms of the International Monetary Fund (IMF)-backed economic program. This latest package was well above the initial US offer of \$14 billion, which had included grants and the funds needed to support up to \$10 billion in loans. The increase underscored just how important Turkish basing was to US war-planners. Yet for Turkey the amount was not sufficient and at one point Ankara asked Washington for close to \$50 billion in aid - an amount US officials dismissed as excessive. On the other hand, the US also started to use the threat of a cancellation of possible military

aid to Turkey if the latter did not immediately allow the US army to deploy troops intended for the strike.⁴⁵

As time was running out for a Turkish decision, the forces to be used to set up a northern front against Iraq had left the US and were on their way to the region. It was claimed that if Turkey would not join in the operation and allow the northern front to function properly, the war could cause more American and Iraqi casualties than necessary, and that this would not escape the American public attention or the watchful eyes of the US Congress. Therefore, the US kept pressuring Turkey to make up its mind on whether or not to cooperate. The Turkish leaders, however, reiterated that such a decision would require authorization from the Turkish Parliament and emphasized the difficulty to get this in the absence of a clear resolution from the UN Security Council allowing the use of force against Iraq.

The lack of a decision by the Turkish government was seen as an indication of uncertainty, or even weakness in the longstanding alliance and that Turkey was attaching a dollar value to its support for the US. However, the Turkish government stated that “while the timelines and priorities may be different, our countries’ ultimate objectives are very much the same: the disarmament of Iraq in accordance with the will of the international community.”⁴⁶ It was also the case that three months previously, while the US Congress had been completing its debate and authorizing President Bush to use force if necessary against Iraq, Turkey had been in the midst of the general election campaign that had brought AKP to power.

Parliamentary Voting: Hitting Rock Bottom

In a historic session on March 1, 2003, the Turkish Parliament rejected a government motion empowering it to allow the deployment in Turkey of foreign troops and to send Turkish troops abroad. The result was a humiliating defeat for the ruling AKP government which had a 363-seat majority in the unicameral 550-seat Parliament. The vote was extremely close at 264–251 with 19 abstentions and was initially considered as signaling approval. However, this was challenged by the opposition Republican People’s Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*—CHP) and after a reconsideration the Head of the Parliament, Bülent Arınç, agreed that the “yes” vote was three votes less than the required 267 votes.

Dozens of American ships waiting off Turkey’s Mediterranean deep-sea ports started heading towards the Persian Gulf after the Pentagon formally abandoned plans to open a northern front through Turkey. The US also started pulling out logistical stockpiles in Southeastern Turkey. Soli Özel, one of Turkey’s leading experts on the United States, made an interesting point:

The defeat of the March 1 motion [was the reason] that Turkish–American relations were damaged. This damage had to do with the relationship between the Turkish armed forces and the US armed forces. When the motion wasn’t passed by Parliament, Turkish-US relations were hurt to a certain extent, but the real rupture took place between the Pentagon and the Turkish armed forces.⁴⁷

The “stick” policy of the US towards Turkey became harsher when President Bush stated that the US had contingency plans in place if the Turkish Parliament insisted on not allowing US combat troops, and made a veiled warning to Turkey that it might end up missing its chance to have a say in the future of Iraq and lose a multi-billion dollar aid package to protect its economy from the negative impacts of a war.⁴⁸ Stepping up the pressure to act on Turkey, the Bush administration warned that Parliament would forfeit the aid package if it balked at the deployment. If Parliament reversed course by reconsidering its decision and backed the US deployment, the administration would ask Congress to provide \$6 billion in direct aid, \$4 billion of which would secure loans totaling as much as \$24 billion. As a down-payment, the US would provide Turkey with an \$8.5 billion bridging loan from the Treasury’s Exchange Stabilization Fund, contingent on the Turkish Parliament approving a budget endorsed by the International Monetary Fund. The bridging loan would have to be repaid in a relatively short time, possibly as little as six months, using the proceeds of the longer-term loans once approved by Congress.

The failure of Turkey to pass the bill allowing the deployment of US troops dealt a serious blow to ties between Turkey and the US. Many people in the American administration were of the opinion that the AKP administration had failed to demonstrate good leadership and even had suspicions that they did not sincerely want to have the motion approved by the party’s 264 parliamentary deputies. However, it is interesting to note that although the Turkish government’s inertia continued, the US did not give up on Turkey as a springboard for American forces in a war against Iraq.

Eventually, in a long-delayed decision to give partial support to the US to open a northern front against Iraq in late March 2003, Turkish Parliament voted to pass a government motion allowing the US to use Turkey’s airspace to cross into Iraq for airborne attacks. Overflight rights would not allow the fully fledged northern front that the US had hoped to launch from Turkey, but it would allow warplanes to conduct bombing missions and land special forces in Northern Iraq to engage Iraqi forces and to secure the oilfields that Washington feared could be sabotaged. The proposal did not, however, allow US planes to use Turkish airbases or refuel in Turkey. In particular, the US would not be able to use Incirlik airbase, a sprawling facility that already housed the 50 US fighters used to patrol a no-fly zone over Iraq. In the event of a war, fighters at Incirlik would apparently not be able to fly over Iraq.

More importantly, the bill also authorized the Turkish government to dispatch troops to Northern Iraq, which became a major issue of contention between the two countries in the following days. The US was alarmed by the statement of Turkish Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül about Turkey sending troops into Northern Iraq to protect its national interests, since any fighting between Turkish troops and Kurdish groups could seriously disrupt the US military campaign to topple Saddam and damage their plans to keep a fragmented country together. In response to a reported warning by US President George W. Bush that a military confrontation between Turkey and the US was possible if Turkey, by itself, sent troops to Northern Iraq,⁴⁹

the Turkish Parliament Speaker said, “Nobody, even if his name is Bush, can talk to the Turkish prime minister or any other state official in a threatening-like tone.”⁵⁰ He maintained that Turkey would make decisions on Northern Iraq on its own and necessary measures would be taken when the time came.

While Ankara insisted, in a show of growing discord with the US, that it would not give up on its plans to send troops to the region, citing national security concerns, Bush said: “We have got more troops up north, and we’re making it very clear that we expect [the Turks] not to come into northern Iraq. They know our policy, and it’s a firm policy.” It was also implied that Turkish military presence in Northern Iraq could lead to friendly fire incidents between Turkish and coalition forces, since the friend and foe identification system would not allow the US forces to distinguish Turkish troops from enemy Iraqi forces. A Turkish presence could also lead to clashes with Kurdish groups which were de facto controlling the region and had made it clear that a Turkish incursion would not be welcomed and would in turn lead to further strains in Turkish–US ties.

The Turkish Parliament’s decision drew immediate reaction from Kurdish members of Iraq’s Governing Council, whose 24 members had been appointed by the US. Analysts argued that the Shiites of Southern Iraq might also have reservations about Sunni Turkish troops, partly because of several centuries of imperial rule of Iraq by the Ottoman Turks. The strong opposition of the Iraqi groups to the deployment of Turkish troops also raised doubts about the wisdom of the US proposal to install Turkish peacekeepers. It seemed that the US in time changed its mind and was no longer so enthusiastic. Taking into account the strong objections of the Iraqi Kurds in general and some Governing Council members in particular and feeling that the presence of Turkish troops in Iraq might upset the delicate balance within Iraq and create new complications in an already rather confused situation, the US appeared to drop the idea of inviting the Turkish troops. These doubts were finally put into words by the US Secretary of State, Colin Powell, who said the US was trying to overcome difficulties associated with Turkish troops. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld indicated a final solution might take time, characterizing the issue of a Turkish military contribution as a “complicated” one.⁵¹

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan stated that Turkey would scrap plans to send peacekeeping troops to Iraq if the Iraqis proved to be insistent on their desire not to have Turkish soldiers in their country. “The demands of the Iraqi people are very important for us,” Erdoğan said. “We are not longing to send soldiers to Iraq. There was a request from the United States, and we are evaluating it.”⁵² In a sign that Washington was becoming disheartened with the idea of receiving Turkish troops, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, originally one of the most fervent supporters of a Turkish military contribution, admitted that Turkish troops might pose too many risks.⁵³

The crisis of confidence deepened as became evident from the statements of Turkish government officials who were dissatisfied with the oscillating position of the US regarding the deployment of troops in Iraq. Turkey criticized the ineptitude of US policy and emphasized that Turkey needed to know very clearly under what

conditions its troops would be sent to Iraq. Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül stated that Turkey would not talk to the Iraqi Governing Council on the troops issue since it was the United States that had requested troops from Turkey and therefore it should be the one to convince the council.⁵⁴

On the other hand, Turkey is quite sensitive on the Kurdish issue in Northern Iraq and from time to time complained strongly about what it saw as “preferential” treatment given to the Iraqi Kurds by Washington, demanding a reversal of Kurdish gains. Turkey expressed its doubts about US policy towards Kurdish groups in Iraq, stating that “the US was giving excessive favors to Kurdish groups in Iraq, at the risk of encouraging civil war and Kurdish secession in the future ... Kurdish representation is far in excess of their real standing in the society.”⁵⁵ Ankara also complained that the Turkomans did not get a good hearing in Washington.⁵⁶ Erdoğan stated that “Turkey remains opposed to greater autonomy being granted to Kurds in northern Iraq or to any ethnically oriented federation in postwar Iraq.”⁵⁷ Turkey was also concerned that the Kurds wanted to take control of the rich oilfields of Kirkuk, a claim denied by the Kurds. The Kurds said they did not want to run the oilfields but stressed they wanted full guarantees that they would get a share of Iraqi oil revenues to develop their region. The US had given assurances to Ankara that this would be the case. Ankara also told the Americans that it wanted better and greater representation of the Iraqi Turkomans in the new interim administration that would take over power in Baghdad in late June 2004.

One other important Turkish sensitivity was regarding the position of the PKK. The US-led administration in Iraq said that the so-called People’s Congress of Kurdistan (KONGRA-GEL), the brand new organization which had replaced the terrorist Kurdistan Freedom and Democracy Congress (KADEK), was a terrorist organization and would be treated as such by US forces in Iraq. During his visit to Washington, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was reassured that KONGRA-GEL had been designated as a terrorist group by the US administration.⁵⁸

Nevertheless, high tension in Turkish military headquarters was revived over reports of a Kurdish advance to Kirkuk backed by US special forces. In contacts with US officials and representatives of the two Kurdish groups that had de facto control of Northern Iraq, Turkish military officials stressed that Turkey’s “red lines” were still in effect. The Turkish army would directly send troops to Northern Iraq if Kurds declared administration over the city, or if the Turkoman population based in the region was attacked by Kurdish fighters or in the event of any attempt to change the “demographic structure of Kirkuk,” a reference to any massive Kurdish inflow into the city.

From “Strategic Partnership” to “Partnership for Democracy” in the Greater Middle East?

The account of the crisis in US–Turkish relations given above makes it clear that, as there was no longer a common threat perception regarding communism or the expansion of the Soviet Union, the cohesion of the strategic partnership between the

US and Turkey has been greatly damaged in the post-Cold War and post-9/11 periods, as the war on Iraq revealed. This fact was also pointed out by Wolfowitz at the beginning of 2004:

Our strategic partnership has changed. It is no longer as it was before. In the past, this relationship was based on a military basis. Only military relations used to be discussed. This era is now closed. Military relations, of course, do exist but the new strategic partnership is not based on a military field but rather on democracy and politics.⁵⁹

In fact, both sides clearly failed to see that the other had changed in important ways since they cooperated during the Gulf War in 1991. More broadly, the two countries that had forged a Cold War alliance against a common Soviet threat found their interests diverging sharply in the case of the war in Iraq.

It is important to note that Turkey's strategic location dictates that its importance to the United States is often a function of US objectives in Turkey's neighboring regions.⁶⁰ However, in the post-9/11 period, the parameters of the relationship have considerably changed and Turkey has started to pursue a more realistic approach regarding its relations with the US. For instance, in recent years, Turkey has imposed restrictions on US operations out of Incirlik since it is particularly sensitive about the use of the base for combat operations in the Middle East and the Gulf. Thus, as Stephen Larrabee argues, "the USA can not automatically assume that it can use Incirlik air base for purposes beyond those spelled out in the 1980 DECA."⁶¹ The Bush administration has been exploring options for basing 48 F-116s at Incirlik as part of its overall restructuring of the US defense posture. Turkey, however, has been uneasy about that and has insisted that their use be coordinated closely with the Turkish military and be used only in NATO-related contingencies. Turkey has also been opposed to any permanent stationing of US troops on Turkish soil.⁶²

It can be concluded that the March 1 event was a major shock to the US, which misread the politics in Ankara and took Turkey for granted, as in the Cold War years. The US also underestimated the degree of democratic decision-making mechanisms in Turkey and overestimated the role of the military in Turkish politics. Analyzing political conditions in Turkey, most US officials took comfort in the assumption that Turkey's political establishment, especially the influential military, could be relied on to support the US. The US also failed to recognize the tremendous changes that have swept Turkish society, including the military, over the past decade, as well as the depth of Turkey's frustration after the 1991 Gulf War.

Second, the conventional mindset that Turkey can be co-opted by money did not work and merely deepened the crisis.⁶³ In particular, because of the remark by President George W. Bush, comparing the tough bargaining between Turkey and the US to "horse trading the Texans have been very good at," the nature of the economic and political relations between the two countries were placed at the center of discussions. The debate was fueled by media coverage in Turkey and the United

States and caricatures where Uncle Sam was depicted shoving dollar bills down the cleavage of a Turkish belly-dancer. It brought about discussion of “money for blood” and it backfired as the Turkish public perceived the attitude as a matter of honor and therefore rejected the monetary aid offered by the US.

Third, and most important of all, the crisis of confidence in both countries made Turkey remain cautious towards the plans of the Americans and the British. There was the same perception on the other side, as the intention of Turkey to enter Northern Iraq for humanitarian and self-security purposes was persistently obstructed by the Americans and the British with the assumption that Turkey had some other calculations.

A very important consequence of the crisis between the US and Turkey could be that the US may soon greatly reduce or eliminate its military presence in Turkey, while considering a long-term US military presence at bases inside Iraq. Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz said on May 7, 2004 that the US could not find the support that it was looking for from the Turkish army during the Iraq war, and that it seemed Turkey’s Incirlik airbase would lose its importance, though the US had not reached a decision to leave this airbase yet. This means that Turkey may lose its strategic importance in the Middle East since the US presence in Iraq will eliminate the necessity of Turkish cooperation in case of a future crisis. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that the relationship seems to have entered into a new phase with an increased emphasis on the Greater Middle East project as put forward by the US administration. The interests of Turkey and the US still seem to converge in this respect, since the Turkish AKP government too, from earlier on and at various international political platforms has expressed its desire to see neighboring countries democratizing.⁶⁴ However, the reservation of Turkey is that it does not want this democratization to be imposed by outside powers like the US since these countries would not understand the sensitivities and peculiarities of this region.

In addition, Turkey rejects a “moderate Islamic” tag for Turkey, stating that it is a secular and democratic state. Therefore, apparent efforts to boost Turkey as a country where Islam and democracy can successfully coexist and could play a central role in the US-led Greater Middle East Initiative was challenged by the Turkish secular elite. For this elite, although the initiative, aiming at encouraging democratization in the Muslim geography, was useful and appropriate, Turkey would not be a model of a moderate Islamic country in the project and Turkey had no claim to be a model country.⁶⁵ Secretary of State Colin Powell’s reference to Turkey in April 2004 as an “Islamic Republic” once again revealed Turkey’s sensitivity regarding the matter. The statement provoked widespread criticism from Turkey and American officials were reminded that Turkey was a secular democracy in which religion was a private affair. This crisis ended when Powell retracted his statement.

It is possible to conclude that the dynamics of the Turkish–US alliance have changed to a great extent especially in the post-9/11 period. Turkey seems to be pursuing a more independent and assertive policy and seems to be very sensitive to allowing the use of the bases in actions in the Middle East and the Gulf, except when these operations are seen clearly to serve Turkish national interests. In short,

Turkey is becoming an independent security actor in the region.⁶⁶ As Erickson argues, “the clear goal of the new Turkish defense policy is to develop a dominant regional military capability with an autonomous military production system capable of supporting unilateral action in pursuit of national security. The end is a force structure that can project power outside of Turkey and to develop an internal production system that can free Turkey from the restrictions of arms suppliers.”⁶⁷ In short, Turkey wants to see a more balanced partnership; one that would rest upon pillars that would benefit both sides, not only the US.⁶⁸ This approach, of course, is quite contrary to the perception of the alliance during the Cold War years.

The Kurdish issue, in particular, will continue to pose the most significant challenge to US–Turkish relations in the near future as the uncertainty in Iraq regarding the status of the Kurds continues. Although Turkish political leaders have stated their support for US policies in Iraq, one can observe that the Turkish military has had certain complaints and reservations. The deputy chief of the Turkish General Staff stated that “Turkey and the United States are in consensus that the PKK must be eliminated. The only problem which remains is that we cannot yet say the United States has taken the necessary steps to do so. We are now awaiting concrete steps.”⁶⁹ Turkey has moved 13 reinforcing brigades to the VI Corps border area of Northern Iraq, which included armored, mechanized infantry and commando formations capable of deep penetration into Northern Iraq. The future course of the relations and “partnership for democracy” if there is one, will be determined to a great extent by the US ability to keep the Kurds under control and understand Turkish sensitivities in the region. As G. John Ikenberry argues, US power would be more balanced and made more legitimate if, rather than inventing new grand strategies, the US reinvigorates its older strategy: i.e. the view that America’s security partnerships are not simply instrumental tools but critical components of an American-led world political order.⁷⁰ Thus the future transformation of the Turkish-American alliance will depend to a great extent upon the compatibility of mutual interests in the partnership for search of a new order in the neighboring regions of Turkey.

Notes

1. Ole R. Holsti, *International Politics: A Framework for Analysis* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1967), p.111.
2. Richard C. Campney, *Turkey and the United States* (New York: Praeger, 1986), p.80.
3. George S. Harris, *Troubled Alliance: Turkish–American Problems in Historical Perspective, 1945–1971* (Washington DC: AEI-Hoover Policy Studies, 1972), p.12.
4. John C. Campbell, *Defense of the Middle East: Problems of American Policy* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958), p.34.
5. The most significant NATO command had been the Turkish-led headquarters for Land Forces Southern Europe, to which three Turkish armies were assigned. The 1st Army (Group) was located in Western Turkey (the Bosphorus), while the 2nd Army (Group) facing Syria and Iraq and the 3rd Army (Group) facing Georgia, then part of the former Soviet Union, have been in Eastern Turkey. Turkey also provided two tactical air forces (1st and 2nd) to NATO’s 6th Allied Tactical Force. The Turkish Naval Forces Command contributed to the Northeast Mediterranean regional naval command. In sum, the Turkish armed forces constituted the largest force after the US in NATO.

6. Foreign Affairs and National Defense Division, *U.S. Military Installations in NATO's Southern Region* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1986), p.1.
7. The crisis had to do with the removal of Jupiter missiles from Turkey during the 1962 Cuban missile crisis without prior consultation of the Turkish government, which regarded the missiles as a guarantee of security and as a sign of the alliance between itself and the US. The issue became a "matter of honor" in Turkey, led to the rise of anti-American sentiment and the questioning of the reliability of the commitments in the alliance.
8. When the Johnson administration concluded that about 80% of the heroin illicitly introduced into the US was derived from opium from Turkish production, during the early 1970s, economic sanctions were imposed on Turkey to shut off the opium traffic. Then a complete ban was imposed on poppy production and the US agreed to give Turkey \$35 million compensation over a three-year period. This amount was found to be insufficient in Turkey and this attitude was seen as an intervention in Turkey's domestic politics.
9. President Johnson sent a letter to Prime Minister İsmet İnönü regarding Turkey's decision to send troops to Cyprus where communal strife occurred between Turkish and Greek Cypriots in 1963. In the letter, the US President stated that neither do NATO allies nor the US have an obligation to protect Turkey against the Soviet Union, if such a military intervention by Turkey led to subsequent Soviet involvement. He also warned Turkey that US military equipment could not be used for intervention purposes.
10. Congressional Research Service, *Congressional–Executive Relations and the Turkish Arms Embargo* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1984), p.33.
11. Paul Y. Watanabe, *Ethnic Groups, Congress and American Foreign Policy* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1984), p.113.
12. For a detailed analysis of the arms embargo, see also Nasuh Uslu, *Türk–Amerikan İlişkilerinde Kıbrıs* [Cyprus in Turkish–American Relations] (Ankara: Yüzyıl Yayınları, 2000).
13. Comptroller General of the United States, *The Defense and Economic Cooperation Agreement—US Interests and Turkish Needs*, 1982.
14. Hayrettin Erkmen quoted in Richard C. Campany, *Turkey and the United States: The Arms Embargo Period* (New York: Praeger, 1986), p.65.
15. Alan Capps, "A Turkish Wish List from NATO," *Defense and Diplomacy*, Vol.9, No.7–8 (July–August 1991), p.39.
16. "Turkey Military Cooperation with the United States," http://www.photius.com/countries/turkey/national_security/turkey_national_security, p.2.
17. Military assistance has been an intrinsic feature of the defense relationship between Turkey and the United States. Between 1950 and 1991, the United States provided military assistance valued at US\$ 9.4 billion, of which about US\$ 6.1 billion was in grant form and US\$ 3.3 billion was on a concessional basis. "Turkey Military Cooperation with the United States," http://www.photius.com/countries/turkey/national_security/turkey_national_security, p.4.
18. Bruce R. Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980), p.52.
19. President Bush's May 4, 1990 speech at Oklahoma State University.
20. Colin Powell quoted in Ted Galen Carpenter (ed.), *America Entangled: The Persian Gulf Crisis and its Consequences* (Washington DC: Cato Institute, 1991), p.13.
21. Richard F. Grimmet, CRS Report for Congress: Military Assistance to Base Right Countries (Washington DC: Library of Congress, January 28, 1993), p.5.
22. US Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Security and Development Assistance: Hearings before the Committee of Foreign Relations, 100th Cong. 1st Session, Part 1, February 24, 25, 26 and March 10, 1987, p. 394.
23. David Ransom, Director of Southern European Affairs. Interview by the author, April 8, 1993, US Department of State, Washington DC.
24. Dario Navaro, "Turkey and the Gulf War," in Haim Bresheeth and Nina Yuval-Davis (eds.), *The Gulf War and the New World Order* (London: Zed Books Ltd, 1991), p.80.

25. Ibid.
26. Ibid., p.81.
27. Capps (1991), p.37.
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29. *Briefing*, "Prospects of Further Division of Iraq Disturb Ankara," No.902, August 24, 1992, pp.8–9.
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34. United States Mission to the European Union, "Ambassador Robert Pearson on US-Turkish relations," <http://www.useu.be/Categories/US&EUEnlargement/Nov1402USTurkeyRelations.html> (November 14, 2002).
35. Ibid., p.5.
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38. "America and Turkey: A Friendship on Hold," *The Economist*, March 29, 2003. See also Bülent AliRıza and Seda Çiftçi, "The US-Turkish Alliance at the Iraqi Junction," *CSIS*, Turkey Update, February 14, 2003, <http://www.csis.org/turkey/TU030214.pdf>.
39. United States Mission to the European Union, "US Official: Turkey is Among 'Most Reliable' of US Allies," <http://www.useu.be/Categories/US&EUEnlargement/Dec0202USTurkeyWolfowitz.html> (December 2, 2002), p.1.
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54. Ibid., October 29, 2003.
55. Ibid., November 6, 2003.
56. Ibid., January 28, 2004.
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58. Ibid., January 30, 2004.
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