

From the Desk of the Editor

The Turkey-US relationship has been very important for both sides for a long time. So much so, in fact, that perhaps the partnership was perceived as a constant in an ever changing environment. This does not mean that the relationship did not have its ups and downs in the past. One has only to recall the Johnson letter of 1964 or the US embargo on arms sales to Turkey after 1974 and Turkey's commitment to grow opium poppy around the same time. Nonetheless, all of these proved to be of a temporary nature and the relationship has been remarkably free of any serious or apparent friction since the late 1970s.

Against this backdrop, it is important to determine whether the downward spiral of relations over the past few years is conjectural or structural. Was the turning point indeed March 1st, 2003 and the fateful vote of the Turkish Parliament or were there other factors mitigating in this direction, with the Parliamentary vote merely providing an opportunity for eruption? Is the foreign policy of Turkey changing direction? If so, to what extent do the domestic constituency, the current government or the approaches of the EU play a role, and in what direction is the effect of these factors expected to evolve in the longer term?

Entering its fourth year of publication, TPQ takes a hard look at relations between the two countries, analyzing the dynamics which have led to this state of affairs: from the divergence of perceived interests, to the style of bureaucrats and leaders. In seeking answers to the above questions, the authors remind us of the successes of past cooperation and suggest new areas and new paradigms for rebuilding the relationship.

Occasionally suspicions that the Turkish government has hopes to play an enhanced role in the Middle East, independent from, and, in fact, as an alternative to US initiatives are voiced. Anat Lapidot-Firilla also hints, critically, at such a tendency in her article. According to the perceptions of US-Turkey relations in Iran, Iraq and Egypt, as related by Al-Marashi, Turkey is, in fact, "acceptable" to these countries only to the extent that it disassociates itself from the US.

Turkey has not come close to living up to its claim of being a regional leader in the Caucasus and Central Asia, a prospect the US supported strongly throughout the 90s. Turkey has also not played an effective role in the recent uprisings and "velvet" revolutions in its neighborhood, namely in Ukraine, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan. As Dülger notes, the sustainability of these initiatives is yet to be seen and the method may not be Turkey's "style," which begs the questions: what is Turkey's preferred method, traditionally and today, with regard to playing a central role in neighboring regions? In the changing world, how are Turkey's foreign policy tools evolving?

It is often claimed that Turkey's membership will enhance the EU's role in the Middle East and Eurasia. Will EU membership, with the political and economic stability it provides, actually render Turkey capable of fulfilling the expectations of being a model, an example, an inspiration or a bridge? Are Turkey's reservations in cooperating with the US connected to its goals of EU membership? What are the assumptions in Turkish foreign policymaking: That the US will fail with its initiatives in the Middle East? That the EU and the US will further diverge? And, finally, are the major makers of foreign and security policy in Turkey on the same page with regard to such basic assumptions?

Whether Turkey has an ambitious design for a regional role or whether foreign policy in Turkey is “drifting” without an anchor or direction, is one of the points covered extensively by several authors in this issue of TPQ. While celebrating some of the victories of US-Turkish partnership in the Caucasus, Elin Suleymanov admits that Turkey’s interest in the region has been sporadic and contradictory. Richard Giragosian points out that Turkey has missed opportunities in its relations with Armenia, which have had repercussions for its relations with the US, and suggests that Turkish policy needs to come about “as a result of sophisticated design,” implying that the right results will not emerge by “default.” Kemal Köprülü criticizes the foreign policy of the government with the old saying “When in Rome, do as the Romans do,” implying that the government tries to make all of the powers happy, yet does not commit to any one of them, thereby covering up its lack of real strategy or capacity for leadership. Ilhan Kesici also attributes many of the problems in the relations today to the ruling party, observing that government does not comprehend the new world order and does not have the skill to govern the country in challenging times.

This issue of TPQ also tries to identify Turkey’s options. Stephen Blank analyzes the recent developments in the Black Sea region and emphasizes the importance of multilateral initiatives to resolve regional conflicts and promote democratization. In this framework he envisions concerted efforts among Washington, Brussels and Ankara, and believes these relationships will be enriched rather than damaged by Turkey’s strengthening relations with countries like Russia and Syria. Other authors question the feasibility of Turkey simultaneously assuming the role of key regional player, building up new bilateral relationships with controversial neighbors, staying in tune with the EU, and maintaining its special relationship with the US. The extent to which transatlantic perspectives have diverged and the degree to which mutual interests are being reidentified, especially regarding Turkey’s neighborhood, are significant variables that our authors factor into their arguments.

The EU process is reassuring for many Turks and some neighboring nations because it has the potential to anchor Turkey, to serve as a constraining influence that minimizes mistakes, not only in domestic policy, but also in foreign policy. Aylin Seker Görener and Anat Lapidot have quite contradictory views regarding what the EU process offers Turkey in terms of strategic positioning. Roughly, Görener sees Turkey’s alignment with the EU as an added value in international effectiveness, noting, among other things, the decreasing credibility of the US in the international community. Lapidot, on the other hand, argues that the price Turkey will pay for distancing itself from Israel and the US is not sufficiently compensated for by the returns it will see from the EU, whether or not full membership is ever achieved. Mark Parris draws attention to the change of focus in Turkish foreign policy, noting the effect of the EU, but not attributing the shifts entirely to the effect of the EU dimension. He notes Ankara’s pursuit of a “multi-focal” policy, which implies a “de facto, if not declaratory de-emphasis of the U.S. relationship.” This issue of TPQ certainly voices a wide variety of opinions regarding the nature of policymaking in Turkey today, going far beyond the particular case of disagreement with the US over Iraq, or over the Middle East more generally.

Zooming in on how Turkish policy regarding Iraq left the country out of the playing field, Michael Rubin gives an overview of the disorganization of the government’s approach and relates the consequences of the disproportional attention and diplomatic capital spent on particular issues. On the other hand, Rubin also points out the misguided American diplomacy and failure to properly address some of Turkey’s legitimate concerns, such as PKK terrorism. As Parris follows up with the questions he posed in his TPQ contribution in Spring 2003, one

cannot help but wonder whether the escalation could have been contained, had both sides seen the risks in time. We observe that many of the elements of the worst case scenarios Parris had put forward were actualized over the past year.

The seeming lack of coherency or long term vision in Turkish foreign policy is certainly not the only reason Turkey-US relations have gone sour and Turkey is not the only country where the US is drastically unpopular. The US has also failed in terms of managing relations and in maintaining the trust of its allies. Analyzing the reasons behind the unpopularity of the US at a public level, and pointing out the challenges for policymakers working with the US, Mehmet Dülger goes beyond the incidents concerning Iraq, explaining that it is not Turkey but the US that needs to redefine its foreign policy style and vision. Characterizing the US approach as having imperialistic qualities, Dülger notes that the US could have instead practiced real leadership and created win-win equations. Dülger gives an overview of the global developments that have created negative sentiments among the Turkish public and notes the acts of the US that especially disillusioned the Turkish society. Dülger argues against the suggestion that Turkish foreign policy is without direction; he states that Turkey is merely adopting the flexibility and adaptability it needs given the unknowns of the current global order. He concludes that if the interests of the US and Turkey overlap, Turkey will not need to be a regional power. However, if not, Turkey will need to plan accordingly. Turkey's former Ambassador to Washington, Nüzhet Kandemir, points out that the interests of Turkey and the US cannot overlap consistently and that there need not be a strategic partnership between the two. He suggests that in moving forward, both Turkey and the US should take responsibility for their mistakes towards each other and cautiously redefine what they expect from each other. Kandemir adds that he hopes that the US has learned valuable lessons about dealing with the unique sensitivities of other countries through the mistakes it has made in relations with Turkey over the past few years. These lessons may serve the US well as it engages skeptical constituencies in the Middle East and beyond.

A number of authors in this issue note that the moves and attitudes of the US, both towards the Muslim world in general and Turkey more specifically, have rendered Turkish society skeptical about the sincerity of the US and put it in a defensive position. To this, some authors add the coinciding developments in Turkey-EU relations that made Turkey feel cornered, in multiple lose-lose situations.

The Cyprus issue is a thorny question that has affected the Turkish perspective. Neither the US nor the EU satisfies Turkey's sense of justice with regard to Cyprus. Having voted for reconciliation on the Island, the Turkish populace feels betrayed by both the US and the EU for not showing sufficient support. Certain segments of the Turkish military apparently still feel resentment about a perceived lack of US support with regard to Cyprus in the past. And today, as John Sitalides notes, the US has priorities that distract it from being intimately concerned with finding a solution to the Cyprus problem. The struggle in Turkey to redefine its "red lines" continues, with much confusion as to the rewards and cost of so-called concessions on not only Cyprus, but other issues of international nature, such as the normalization of relations with Armenia.

The tendency to believe the world is plotting against Turkey is strong and deeply rooted in the country, as evidenced by the common Turkish idiom, "The Turk's friend can only be a Turk." Recently, this feeling has been reinforced by the overlap of developments that affected the confidence of Turkish people in the principles of international law. The culmination of many such issues have no doubt affected the social psychology in the country and rendered the

society more sensitive and reactive. With regard to the Armenian issue, Turkey feels cornered, with claims of genocide being passed as resolutions in parliaments all over the world, on the one hand, and Turkey being accused by both the EU and US for not opening its border on the other. Naturally these events cause many Turks to feel the world conveniently forgets about the Turks who died in the same conflicts in the early 20th century, the occupation of Azeri land, the large number of people displaced as a result of Armenian aggression, and the Armenian terrorism that claimed the lives of 35 Turkish diplomats from 1973 to 1994. On the other hand, there are debates as to whether pragmatism dictates the normalization of relations. Giragosian makes an argument to this end. As Giragosian also notes, open discussions on this issue have increased in Turkey, in the media, among academics, as well as in the NGO and business communities. As the space for expression expands, the policies of the past are questioned more, yet conspiracy theories are also voiced ever more frequently. For the time being, neither trend is contributing positively to relations with the US.

Trends in Turkish public opinion regarding the US are covered by Emre Erdogan in this issue. Though chilling in ways, the data Erdogan analyzes suggests a certain optimism in that the Turkish public appears to have sympathy towards American culture, ideas about democracy and business practices. According to the studies analyzed in this article, the Turkish public maintains a distinction between the US as an administration or a state and the American people.

Public opinion has been taken into consideration more in Turkey as democracy has matured and political participation has increased. This means new responsibilities for leaders, not only of Turkey but of countries dealing with Turkey. It appeared at times that the reactions from politicians in Turkey was defensive, with not enough effort being made to give balanced messages to the public or share information with the leaders of society who could have influenced a wider circle of people. Perhaps more could have been done to make Turkish public opinion receptive to cooperation with the US. Dülger gives a broad perspective of the negative sentiments among the public towards the US with an overview of the perceived injustices over the years, factoring in the effect of the provocative voices in the media which led to oversensitivity. He also explains the difficult circumstances and narrow maneuver space under which the Turkish parliament was expected to make a decision about the March 1st vote.

Had the US both made a more significant effort to address Turkey's legitimate concerns and understood the value of symbolic gestures restoring the governments sense of being a respected partner, key figures would have probably been more enthusiastic to give stronger messages to their constituencies. Conversely, the resolution could have not been drawn up as was, had the government informed the US that Turkey would not be able to deliver such cooperation this time around. The inexperience factor which Richard Perle notes in this issue certainly plays a role in how the scenario played out in Turkey's case. Perle also adds in the interview with TPQ, that it will be the success of the Iraq experiment that eventually convinces the skeptics of the initiative. Perhaps time will be the best remedy, as Köprülü also suggests.

Until recently, Turkey and the US took their cooperation for granted, expending little effort to refresh individual relationships, understand changes in style, and see beyond the style into the essence of each other's challenges. With a long term global agenda and immediate security concerns, it may be natural for the US to view Turkish priorities, such as fighting PKK-

Kongra/Gel terrorism, as *petty fixations* in the grand scheme of things. It is also understandable that EU requirements and domestic challenges, both economic and political in nature, have overwhelmed the Turkish government, disoriented the usual checks and balances mechanism of the country, and left a gap at a crucial time in Turkey's relationship with its long time ally, the United States. A vicious cycle with emotional undertones caused the practice of giving the benefit of the doubt to the other to be abandoned.

We believe it is a good time to remember the support Turkey and the US have offered each other over the years and make an effort to understand each other's perspectives and concerns. It is also necessary to face the reality that the US and Turkey might not be as compatible at this time as the architects of the strategic partnership visualized. As Perle explains in his interview with TPQ, the Bush administration has adopted a policy of change, while Turkey seems to be more concerned with maintaining stability, though it may or may not have good reason for this conservatism. The next issue of TPQ will cover the effects of democratization on security, and vice versa, with a focus on the Middle East. In the meantime, it is in all of our interests for the United States to succeed in its effort to bring about sustainable change to this region. And as Parris notes in his article, "Washington will always find it easier to work with Turkey than around Turkey".

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