

The Effect of US Policy in the Middle East on EU-Turkey Relations

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Turkey could not have a more vigorous advocate for its quest for European Union accession than the United States. Successive administrations in Washington have strongly asserted that Turkey is an intrinsic part of Europe, that historically and politically, Ankara has played a critical role in the defence of Europe against the Soviet Union and that now it is an indispensable country in bridging the civilisational divide. In the early 1970s, the United States decided to locate Turkey in Europe, bureaucratically speaking of course. Turkey, which used to be in the Near East bureau in the State Department and elsewhere in the bureaucracy, was transferred to the European divisions of the respective administrative agencies. Hence it is perhaps ironic that after arguing for decades that Turkey is a European country, the United States, through its Iraq invasion, has in one bold stroke managed to push Turkey back into the Middle East. Of course, other events, especially Turkish domestic politics, have also played a role in making this perceptual move possible. Simply stated, as United States security concerns shifted east and away from Europe, it was only natural, though far from intentional, that Washington would take Ankara along with it.

This article will analyse the impact of the United States' policies in the Middle East on European Union-Turkish relations. How has Washington's war on Iraq, its *bras de fer* with Iran, its pursuit of a democratisation agenda for the Middle East and its approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict helped shape EU views of Turkey's accession process? It should be stressed from the outset that there is no uniform answer to these questions as the EU is not a homogenous enterprise. In many instances, diverse stakeholders in each country may have reacted in different ways to these policy developments. The approach advanced here is anything but systematic: it starts out with a broad view of how US policies in the Middle East have affected Turkey. Only after that can an analysis of European reactions be attempted.

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US policies in the Middle East and Turkey

Starting with the end of the Cold War but especially with the first Gulf war of 1990-91, the United States found itself increasingly drawn into the Middle East. The post-Cold War containment of Saddam relied extensively on Turkey. In fact, one could make the argument that without Ankara, Washington would have had a terrible time keeping Saddam in a box. The no-fly zone that protected the Kurds in northern Iraq from Saddam's wrath was based in the Turkish Air Force base of Incirlik.

In fact, the official US policy was one of dual containment levied at both Iraq and Iran. Concerns about a Russian and Iranian chokehold over the emerging new oil states of Central Asia and the Caucasus inspired the US administration to champion new pipelines, the most important of which is the Baku-Tblisi-Ceyhan (BTC) line that brings Azeri oil to the Turkish Mediterranean port of Ceyhan. Although initially spurned as uneconomical and unfeasible by many, the completion of the BTC pipeline gave Turkey a boost in becoming an energy transit route to Europe.

That support for Turkey's European accession process was more about bolstering a pivotal state whose influence and power projection capabilities were indispensable for the United States, especially to accomplish its foreign policy objectives in the wider Middle East region, may have been a publicly unarticulated conviction among policymakers in Washington. Furthermore, an EU member Turkey would be more prosperous, more democratic, more self-confident and, therefore, more of a role model for the region.

In the Clinton years, the United States also spent an inordinate amount of time on the Arab-Israeli peace process. The 1993 Oslo agreements set the stage for a series of negotiations and initiatives designed to bring the parties together. Turkey played a small role in this, in part because it was not very enterprising and, to a much greater extent because it was bureaucratically unprepared for a major role.

It is the attacks of 9/11 and the Bush administration's decision to overthrow Saddam, however, that provided the final *coup de grace* pushing Turkey towards the Middle East. Washington needed Ankara to participate in its plans and pressed very hard to open a second – northern – front against Baghdad in 2003. Had it not been for an – unintentional – parliamentary debacle, Turkish troops would have entered Iraq to establish a *cordon sanitaire* behind the advancing US 4th Infantry Division. In a confusing ballot, the Turkish parliament voted not to allow for the transitioning of US troops.

Whereas many in Europe and certainly many people opposed to the war saw in the parliament's decision the emergence of a new Turkey more closely aligned with the EU, the details of the case paint a different picture. The new Turkish government, moderately Islamist, had already after long and sometimes difficult negotiations signed a memorandum of understanding with Washington on the modalities of

this second front. Every aspect, from the moment troops were to land in Iskenderun to how they were to transit through Turkish territory into northern Iraq, had been negotiated. Despite the recommendation that MPs vote for the resolution, a large number of AKP parliamentarians, who were in principle against or if they were of Kurdish origin anxious about Turkish troops entering northern Iraq were opposed to it. On the day of the vote, because it appeared that the government had a majority of close to a 100 votes many MPs, convinced that the resolution would pass and that their vote would be of little consequence, bucked their leadership and voted against it. Not surprisingly, therefore, the permission failed by a few votes.

The Iraq war also led to a crisis in transatlantic ties, with active opposition coming from some of its closest allies. As a consequence of the war, the perception of the United States in the public opinion of its allies tumbled precipitously. Turkey was not immune to this trend, in fact, public opinion surveys showed that Turks consistently had a lower appreciation of Americans than all of their European counterparts.

The Iraq war may have aligned Turkish and European foreign policies and therefore reduced fears that Turkey represented an American Trojan Horse left at the EU's gates. Yet, the fact is that Turkey has always relied on the United States to champion its cause in EU capitals. The post-Iraq unpopularity of the United States in Europe also weakened Washington's ability to lobby for Turkey and led to public controversies between the Bush administration and the French in particular. The most well known of these was when, on the occasion of the Istanbul NATO Summit, French President Jacques Chirac publicly rebuked President Bush for calling for special treatment for the Turks. "Mr. Bush," he complained, "not only went too far but went on to territory which is not his own." He added: "It's as if I were advising the United States on how they should manage their relations with Mexico."¹ Ironically, of the war's two effects, bringing Europe and Turkey closer to each other and reducing US influence on championing the Turkish cause, the latter is perhaps far more significant and likely to last longer.

War and consequences: the Iraq war and Turkey

The Bush administration's decision to go to war had three mostly predictable but unintended consequences for Turkey.

- First, it inflamed the East-West divide or the clash of civilisations, as some prefer to call it.
- Second, it brought the Middle East closer to Europe and, in the chaos into which Iraq sank, raised the Europeans' awareness of Turkey's geographic reality, a border state on the edge of mayhem, turmoil and violence.

¹*The Guardian*, 29 June 2004.

- Third, the chaos in Iraq or that country's transformation into a federal, or perhaps bi-national state with Iraqi Kurds assuming an important, if not critical, role unnerved Turkey's leadership which once again put much of its energies into preventing the emergence of a federal or independent Iraqi Kurdish state.
- All three factors have strongly influenced EU positions and views on Turkey's accession prospects.

Turkey and the clash of civilisations

The clash of civilisation argument had always been advanced to demonstrate how Turkey's inclusion in the EU would help defeat the very idea of it: the incorporation of an industrious Muslim society can only prove to the rest of the world that the West is not indelibly opposed to Islam. In fact, this is an argument that many supporters of Turkish membership on both sides of the Atlantic have articulated. This is also an argument that received an important boost from the ascendance to power in 2002 of the Justice and Development Party, AKP, a moderately Islamic party, willing to push for a European-inspired reform agenda that was far more ambitious than any its more secular predecessors had ever pursued. One can even argue that the very nature of the AKP as the governing party has increased the stakes for Europe because denying admission when such a party rules Turkey would, in fact, be proof of the anti-Muslim sentiments dominating the EU. It has been argued that if Europe accepts Turkey and Turkey's democracy thereby deepens, "... not only will Atatürk's – and even the Ottomans' – original dream of westernizing Turkey be fulfilled but also the twinning of Islam and democracy will have proven possible...".² In turn, this accomplishment would serve as a model for the rest of the Muslim world that is struggling with its transition to democracy.

Yet the very concept of the clash of civilisations, for which Turkey is offered as a potential panacea, may have had the opposite effect at the level of society by hardening perceptions of division and difference. The 9/11 attacks with their Hamburg-based cell of conspirators also had the effect of deepening such perceptions. The invasion of Iraq (together with Afghanistan) brought the conflict closer to home in both the Muslim and European worlds. In Muslim societies, the initial reaction was quite uniform: this was part of a grand anti-Muslim conspiracy to appropriate resources and the like. In Europe, it resurrected fears Christian Europeans had about the "other", and in this case the other was the Muslim immigrant or non-immigrant living in their midst. It was no longer an issue whether people could live side by side, but rather of the potential security threats these unintegrated and alienated migrant groups represented. The London and Madrid bombings further confirmed such fears among the public. The October

²Barkey and le Gloannec, "Strategic Implications of Turkey's Integration", 142.

2003 Istanbul bombings of two synagogues, the British consulate and a major bank, causing large numbers of casualties, led to greater counter-terrorism cooperation with Britain, in particular, but did not necessarily produce a sense of commonality between Turks and Europeans. This was due in part to the fact that the bombers were indigenous, that is, Turkish. Turks, of course, are not ordinary Muslims – their traditions and aspirations have always been different if not at odds with those of the rest of the Middle East. Still, the ghetto-bound settlement patterns of Turks in Europe, the difficulties involved in assimilation and the inability (or unwillingness) of the Turkish government to help the process of integration all served to raise doubts about the process of Turkish membership.³

In Turkey, the Iraq war may have strengthened pro-EU forces,⁴ but its media and other institutions have continued to pounce on any intended or unintended, real or imaginary European slight against it. This has gained momentum following the EU's refusal to open eight chapters for negotiations following Turkey's unwillingness to open its ports to EU member Cyprus and after the election of French President Nicolas Sarkozy.

The strong divergence between the public and leaders as to the possible contribution Turkey could make to narrowing the clash of civilisation makes this a particularly difficult issue to assess, especially as the argument can be forcefully argued from both sides.

Bringing the Middle East closer to Europe

The second consequence was to bring the problems of the Middle East closer to Europe. As the Iraq war did not turn out as expected, the resulting chaos and uncertainty have reminded Europeans that Turkish accession would in fact make Europe a neighbour of Iraq, Syria and Iran. One outcome of this has been to think of Turkey not as a bridge to the Middle East and beyond, but as a buffer between Europe and unstable and, in some cases, fundamentalist regimes.

Iran as a revisionist power presents problems for Western security, and in addition its interests in the region do not match those of Turkey, especially in Iraq. Much of the Iranian-Turkish rivalry is rooted in the Shia-Sunni divide and Iran's pursuit of a regional sphere of influence that would include a Shia dominated Iraq. Turkey would very much prefer Baghdad to look toward Ankara rather than Tehran. Iran has also historically eyed Turkey as a NATO dagger and Turks have accused the Iranians of interfering in Turkish domestic politics. On the nuclear

³To the consternation of many European leaders and also supporters of Turkey in Europe, Prime Minister Erdogan's stated in 2008 in opposition to efforts at integrating Turks living in Europe that assimilation was a crime against humanity. Turks he argued should maintain their identity. Forgetting perhaps that the Turkish state's policies since the inception of the republic forcibly and sometimes violently tried to force the assimilation of Kurds, this statement created doubts in the minds of many as to what the real aim of the AKP, Erdogan and Turkey were in regards to EU membership.

⁴Öniş and Yılmaz, "The Turkey-US-EU Triangle", 266.

question, there is a division in Turkey between the government and the security establishment, the latter being far more worried about Iran's nuclear ambitions. Is Iran's challenge to Turkey also a challenge to the EU? These are some of the questions that the EU decision-making elites and public have to consider.

Turkey has already become a transit point for illegal immigration and has for decades been a trans-shipment location for drugs. Today, would-be immigrants, while easily entering Turkey, still have to cross one more frontier to get into Europe. Were Turkey to become an EU member, these immigrants would be in Europe once on Turkish soil. As has been noted, if for "reasons of political interest and identity", Europe were to "choose not to extend its borders to Iraq, Iran and Syria by refuting Turkey's accession", then this would mean that "the EU's borders . . . would [be] determined on the basis of their functional political utility in pursuing the Union's interests, defining a European identity and allowing the European polity to live in a comfort zone, protected by friendly buffer states such as Turkey".⁵ Under such circumstances, it is questionable whether Turkey would offer much cooperation in combating illegal migration.

On the other hand, Turkey, unlike many EU countries, takes security questions seriously and proportionally spends more of its national income on defence than any EU country. As a result, the security argument can be turned around. Indeed, Turkey can offer Europe the services of a robust military establishment to act as a deterrent or buffer in the region. In effect, Turkey then becomes EU's forward defence line. Supporters of Turkish accession use this security argument most prevalently. They also remind the Atlantic community of Turkey's role during the Cold War. To the extent that the United States is seen as weakened by the Iraq war, the saliency of Turkish military prowess becomes more relevant. Not only has the United States lost influence politically, it is also perceived as having neither the stamina for further military confrontation nor the ability to manoeuvre in more theatres of operations given the pressure on its military infrastructure caused by the combined wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Still the evidence at hand that Turkey will employ its military capabilities to serve European interests is not sufficiently convincing. Europeans have not responded encouragingly to Turkish concerns by increasing coordination of military and political responses to crisis situations or by inviting Ankara to participate in planning processes rather than just calling for contributions.⁶ Past Turkish foreign policy behaviour has exhibited a singularly independent and non-alliance dependent line. It has been argued that the fragility of the European-Turkish and Turkish-American military relationship exposed during the Iraq crisis, when France and Germany paralysed NATO institutions over Turkey, had been evident for a long time. Turkish understanding of national security has led to minimum

⁵Tocci, "Report Unpacking European Discourses", 21.

⁶Ülgen, "The Evolving EU, NATO and Turkey Relationship", 5.

cooperation with its US ally and European interests have always been trumped by regional concerns.⁷

Turkey, the war in Iraq and the Kurdish question

The Iraq war has dramatically changed the equation for the Kurds in Turkey and in Iraq, although other factors, such as the end of the Cold War and the influence of globalisation had already sparked the emergence of the Kurdish nationalist genie. An Iraqi Kurdistan state within a federal Iraq is the minimum the Iraqi Kurds will settle for. Even if Turkish Kurds are unlikely to seek secession from Turkey, the very existence of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Iraq has given them more confidence. There is no question that the Kurdish issue is the single most important challenge facing Turkey today. The Kurdish genie can no longer be put back into the bottle. Furthermore, having squandered numerous opportunities in the past, Ankara now faces a challenge that is no longer just a domestic conflict but one that has become completely internationalised. Ankara will also discover that the twin challenges of domestic Kurdish mobilisation and an incipient Kurdish state in northern Iraq are likely to alter its relations with friend and foe alike and have deep repercussions on its domestic politics. It is quite possible that the failure to develop a coherent strategy will result in ruinous consequences for Turkey's place in the Western alliance and the Middle East.

The Iraq war, therefore, has accentuated the challenges for Turkey that go to the very core of the definition and identity of the Turkish state. Much of the debate in Turkey about the EU has focused on the implications on the unitary nature of the Turkish state of reform measures and membership. The Kurdish problem is, of course, not new to Turkey as successive governments in Ankara have tried to deal with this troublesome minority over the years, sometimes by exiling leaders and populations, at other times using excessive force, but almost always adopting a state discourse that denied their very identity. Documents show that Turkish governments have been excessively worried about the Kurdish question even when the issue did not appear to be salient by international standards.⁸

The Iraq war has heightened Turkish self-doubt about its long-term ability to contain secessionist tendencies. The war came after Ankara's long struggle with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and, by giving rise to a federal Kurdish entity in northern Iraq with a great deal of clout in Baghdad, it deepened suspicions of the West. For many Turks, including powerful ones, the Kurdish state is a long-term project designed to continue the carving up of the Ottoman Empire – the so-called "Sèvres syndrome" as this line of argument, or more accurately, condition has come to be known in Turkey. In the process, the war coincided with the ascendance

⁷Rühl, "The Mediterranean and the Greater Middle East", 216.

⁸Akçura, *Devletin Kürt Filmi*.

to power of a mildly Islamist party, AKP, which also unnerved the dominant military establishment. The soldiers have always seen themselves as the guardians of the Kemalist legacy as they interpret the ideology handed down from the founder of the republic, Kemal Atatürk. Their strict interpretation of Kemalism does not allow for much deviance, certainly not from the secularist principles. For them, the EU process is a recipe for hastening the dissolution of the Turkish state. It is worth noting that as recently as August 2008, both the incoming Chief of the Turkish General Staff, General İlker Başbuğ, and the new commander of the Land Forces, İsmail Köşaner, issued warnings against the EU and levelled blistering attacks on Turkish non-governmental organisations that get help from Europe and the United States because, in their view, they threaten the secularist principles and unity of the state by advocating the civilianisation of the military, which is a requisite condition for EU accession.⁹

The military has always complained about the lack of European follow-through on pursuing PKK nodes in Europe and perceived European tolerance for such establishments as Roj-TV, the pro-PKK satellite television channel that has a wide viewership in Turkey and beyond. The resurgence of the PKK after the Iraq war has, not surprisingly, increased Turkish sensitivities regarding the PKK presence in Europe. The deeper the conflict with the PKK, the more Turks become alienated from Europe and its liberalising agenda.

The PKK issue cuts both ways. Turkish-Kurdish tensions have already migrated to Europe, where Kurds constitute an important segment of the Turkish migrant community. As a result, Europeans are already familiar with the tensions associated with this problem. There are over 2.2 million people of Turkish extraction in Germany alone; most are non-citizens and tend to live rather isolated lives from the mainstream population. Of these, as many as 500,000 are thought to be of Kurdish extraction. Not all are politicised, but as with most Diaspora communities, those that are – on both sides of the divide – tend to be far more militant and uncompromising than their brethren in their countries of origin.

The European Kurds have been a major source of funding for the PKK. Despite the bans imposed on the PKK in Europe, the organisation has managed to create subsidiary associations to continue recruitment and fund-raising. As with the arrest of the PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan in 1999, the PKK is quite capable of mobilising large numbers of people throughout Europe and creating mayhem. Turkish-Kurdish tensions in Europe tend to flare up in parallel with developments in Turkey and the danger has been that this will assume a far more violent character. As the Kurds in the Middle East as a whole become more active and forceful about their demands, Europe is likely to become a battleground of sorts. Already, linkages

⁹Y. Congar, “Işık Köşaner’in Ulusalçı Manifestosu”, *Taraf*, 29 August 2008; and F. Bila, “İlker Pasa’dan Acik Uyarılar”, *Milliyet*, 29 August 2008.

between Turkish and other Kurds have grown, especially with the increase in Kurdish illegal migration into Europe.

European unease with this potentially explosive situation should not be underestimated. This is because the hostility to Turkish admission is rooted in the fear of “long-term, large-scale migration. Instead of creating a climate of empathy for the country of origin of these migrants, high levels of Turkish migration have created a climate of perceived threat to in-group resources and culture”.¹⁰

There is another way in which the PKK challenge affects EU-Turkish relations. This has to do with the Turkish preoccupation with preventing the emergence of an independent Kurdistan in northern Iraq and fighting the PKK presence there.

The PKK has been a difficult adversary to defeat. After more than 20 years of fighting, the Turks, with one of the largest armies in NATO, have not managed to eliminate this insurgency. Perhaps as much as half of the PKK’s fighting force, some 2,000 insurgents, are based in remote parts of northern Iraq. Ankara has blamed its failure to defeat this insurgency on the PKK’s access to northern Iraqi territory. As a result, the Turks put a great deal of pressure on Iraqi Kurds and the United States to eliminate the PKK, threatening otherwise to intervene themselves in northern Iraq. Following some spectacular ambushes in Turkish territory in late 2007 in which Turkish soldiers suffered important casualties, the United States and the Iraqi Kurds relented and allowed the Turks to begin cross-border operations. In their attempt to prevent the KRG from becoming independent, Turks have also warned Iraqi Kurds that if the oil-rich province of Kirkuk were to be incorporated into the Kurdistan region, they would step in to prevent it.

Such threats and the cross-border operations begun in December 2007 have worried the Europeans enough to issue Ankara a warning in February 2008 “not to use disproportionate force” in its ground and air operations.¹¹ In effect, the EU realises that Turkey’s domestic problems, particularly the Kurdish question, increasingly risks involving Ankara militarily in Iraq. In turn, were Turkey to become an EU member, then the projection of Turkish power into an uncertain and unstable Iraq entails risks that are far too great for the Europeans to contemplate.

This is why the EU has insisted on Turkey improving its domestic record with its Kurdish minority. The size of the Kurdish population in Turkey, up to 20 percent of the total, is not insignificant and can no longer be ignored in an age of globalisation. The closer Turkey gets to Europe, the more intense the scrutiny it will be subjected to. Olli Rehn, the EU Commissioner for Enlargement, forcefully argued, “Ankara needs to improve the access of its Kurdish population to radio and

¹⁰McLaren, “Explaining Opposition to Turkish Membership”, 254.

¹¹“EU Presidency Statement on the military action undertaken by Turkey in Iraqi territory”, 25 February 2008. http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/CFSP_Statements/February/0225MZZturkey.html

television broadcasting and to support the teaching of languages other than Turkish.”¹² Therefore, it would be unrealistic to expect the Europeans to admit a Turkey incapable of solving its domestic divisions peacefully. In fact, because this issue goes to the heart of Turkey’s national identity, resistance to accession on European terms will also increase in Turkey.

In sum, US Middle East policy under the Bush administration has had a subtle, but overall negative impact on Turkey’s prospects for EU membership. This, of course, was an unintended consequence of US action. 9/11 in itself – without the American reaction – would likely have emphasized some of the divergence between Turkey and Europe, but the cumulative effect of opening a Pandora’s Box of sorts have not been to Turkey’s advantage.

AKP’s foreign policy ambitions

The United States may not have done Turkey any service with its Middle East policies, especially in Iraq, but paradoxically it has made it easier for the governing AKP to pursue an ambitious and uncharacteristic foreign policy for Turkey. Washington unintentionally created an opening for Turkey to play a bigger role in the Middle East, and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan was more than willing to oblige. The perception of a decline in US influence in the region has allowed AKP to engage in multilateral diplomatic venues, specifically between Israel and Syria and within Lebanon. It is too early to say whether these will be successful or fruitful ventures and, in fact, chances are that the United States will grab back the mantle of leadership following the US elections in November 2008.

Yet, the AKP was already intent on pursuing a new foreign policy that aimed at increasing Turkish influence, not just regionally but more globally. The AKP government not only used its Islamic connections to improve relations with its neighbours, including Syria and Iran, but also pushed for Turkey’s inclusion in international bodies to give it a greater international voice. After its success in winning the leadership of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, it has set its sights even higher: a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council. The last time Turkey served on the UNSC was in the early 1960s. To this end, the AKP leadership has spared no expense or effort. Erdogan and Turkish foreign ministers have criss-crossed the globe and Ankara has decided to open 15 new embassies in Africa alone. The chances are quite good that Turkey will succeed in its quest to win a seat, which it will undoubtedly use for further forays into international diplomacy.

More important, however, is Ankara’s venture into the Middle East. With its NATO membership and links to the United States and Israel, Turkey has always

¹²Associate Press wire, “EU enlargement chief urges Turkey to promote cultural rights, reduce poverty of Kurds”, 3 March 2008.

been viewed suspiciously in the Middle East. Past Turkish leaders had deliberately turned their backs on the Middle East as they have focused on the West. AKP's Muslim credentials, its ability to stand up to the arch-secularist establishment, its criticism of Israel and its willingness to buck US pressure on numerous instances has helped increase its cache in the region. At a time when Washington was trying to isolate Syria, Erdogan offered a warm embrace to the beleaguered president, Bashar Asad. For Asad and Syria, Turkey emerged as an important lifeline providing relief from the post-Hariri assassination pressure. Similarly, following the Hamas victory in the Palestinian elections, the Turks invited Hamas hardliner and unelected leader Khalid Meshal to Turkey, despite the fact that by inviting the leader of Hamas, long considered a terrorist organisation boycotted by both the United States and the EU, they undermined their own discourse on terrorism and the PKK. More importantly, the invitation raised questions in Washington as to Turkey's true intentions and willingness to adhere to certain principles and weakened Turkey's supporters in the United States. Graham Fuller had predicted a far more independent Turkish foreign policy, not because of Washington's weakness but because "the more hegemonic and unilateral Washington's policies become, the greater the tensions and the greater the likelihood that Turkey will find itself more sympathetic to an EU also striving for strategic independence".¹³

Irrespective of the underlying reasons, these were risky ventures. They were, however, quite popular with the Turkish public, which has become more important in foreign policy decision-making than ever before. AKP astutely used its newly built foreign policy capital to support the deployment of a Turkish force to Lebanon following the 2006 Lebanon war between Israel and Hezbollah. What the AKP has also understood is that it is its relations with the United States and Israel that give it a winning hand. Erdogan is now the co-president of the UN-supported Alliance of Civilisations together with Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Zapatero. Ankara also sponsored a secret dialogue between Syria and Israel when the United States had almost no contact with Syria and, in fact, was discouraging the Israelis to hold such talks. Enhanced Turkish influence means that Ankara has enough clout to push for initiatives of its own choosing without being rebuffed. As one senior Turkish foreign policy advisor has argued, public expectations have changed dramatically as a result of AKP diplomacy, so much so that there is now an expectation that Ankara should become more active in crises in its neighbourhood.¹⁴

Yet, as Erdogan's August 2008 foray into the Georgian crisis demonstrated, Ankara can push things a little too far. Not only was there a certain naïveté in his approach,¹⁵ but also his proposed Caucasus Stability Program had not been

¹³ Fuller, "Turkey's Strategic Model: Myths and Realities", 62.

¹⁴ Interview, Ankara, 8 July 2008.

¹⁵ Jenkins, "Ahmedinejad Visits Turkey".

coordinated or vetted with Turkey's principal allies, the United States and the EU. Ironically, even Erdogan's fiercest critics in the establishment media feted his "accomplishments", stating that he was more successful than Sarkozy, who had been to Moscow and Tblisi before him.

Will Turkey's increased influence and profile as an active mediator in the Middle East and elsewhere help it with the Europeans? Certainly. However, Turkey would be well advised to act prudently for three reasons. First, there is the possibility of over-confidence and over-reach. Although Turks often remind the foreign visitor that they know the Middle East best, having ruled over that region for centuries, the fact of the matter is that the Ottoman past and legacy is largely irrelevant to policy formulation in the modern Middle East, which has been buffeted by many different currents and forces since the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. Turkey has actually invested very little in the study of that region (though more in study of the Caucasus) in its educational and government institutions. Over-confidence, which manifests itself in freelancing on the periphery without proper consultations with the allies, is likely to alienate European decision-makers. It would be a mistake for Turkey to think that transatlantic problems are significant enough to play the EU off against the United States. In the final analysis, the EU and the United States are condemned to cooperate, though not necessarily in harmony, for the foreseeable future.

Second, since Turkey's current diplomatic success is partially conditional on American weakness or imperial hubris, a change in the US administration and policies could undercut Ankara's saliency. Even now, as the Turkish-sponsored Syrian-Israeli negotiations demonstrated, the final heavy lifting will still have to be done by Washington. A Democratic administration in Washington would probably seek, first, to repair the tarnished transatlantic relations and obtain Europe's support for its exit policy in Iraq. It could be far more accepting of Turkish "diplomacy", but would also be more demanding that Ankara undertake domestic reforms and, thus, align itself more closely with the EU. By contrast, a Republican administration is more likely to pursue a traditional security-dominated policy *vis-à-vis* Ankara. It would probably look to bolstering Turkish security objectives in Iraq and be less assertive on domestic reforms. However, on Iran and specifically Iran's nuclear program, a Republican administration is likely to clash inadvertently with Turkey contributing to the civil-military divide in the country.

Thirdly, should Europe develop a coherent and cohesive foreign policy, how would Turkey participate in it? Although the AKP declares its willingness to become a member of the EU, it actually has foreign policy ambitions that transcend the EU. It is quite conceivable that the AKP, if it looks that far ahead, imagines Turkey's foreign policy role within the EU to be akin to that of one of the big powers, such as France and Britain. Its desire for an ascendant global role could easily put it on a collision course with Brussels.

Finally, the European public is not going to be convinced by arguments underlining the utility of Turkish accession to the Union: “a strategy highlighting the likely benefits of Turkish membership may hardly impress those already against Turkey’s accession”.¹⁶ In fact, the sensitivities to non-utilitarian arguments for Turkey are such that even the French business sector, which has invested \$23 billion in Turkey and scores more in the pipeline, is unable to articulate a strong pro-accession position for Turkey. As Philippe de Buck, secretary general of BusinessEurope, the main umbrella organisation for EU business, points out, “[w]e are in favor of a strong economic relationship . . . [b]ut the political issues are not for us to judge. It’s not up to us to judge membership.”¹⁷ This does not augur well for Turkey. Even the return of Russian hardline policies on NATO’s periphery and Europe’s uneasiness with its reliance on Russian energy supplies, for which Turkey offers an alternative conduit, is unlikely to change the perceptions of EU citizens.

By way of conclusion

So where does this leave Turkey after the forcible US intrusions into the Middle East? There is no question that Turkey has undertaken a far more activist and discernible foreign policy; it has, in the words of its architects, attempted to build its “soft power”. This should help bolster its security argument in negotiations with the EU; it is no longer sheer muscle power that it has to offer. This is a far more subtle security argument. However, Turkey’s problems with the EU would have a better chance of being resolved if Turkey and its supporters were to highlight its accommodation with what have been called “post-national visions” of Europe. In other words, Turkey needs to re-brand itself and change public perceptions in Europe.¹⁸ It has to convince Europeans that its inclusion in the EU would help build the European idea and ideal. In the words of the well-known diplomat and intellectual, Robert Cooper, Turkey has to make the transition to the European post-modern state and politics.¹⁹

It may be that even without the US invasion of Iraq, Turkey would have found itself in this contradictory situation in the Middle East. While trying to exert diplomatic influence over its neighbourhood, Ankara also finds itself pulled into a region still in the throes of “modern” politics, characterised by an emphasis on nationalist values and the importance of boundaries. As long as the fundamental security issue in Turkey is defined in national terms, which are basically zero-sum

¹⁶Ruiz-Jimenez and Torreblanca, *European Public Opinion and Turkey’s Accession*, 23.

¹⁷P. Taylor, “In Turkey’s Potential, a Bonanza - but not for France”, *International Herald Tribune*, 11 February 2008.

¹⁸Barysch, “What Europeans Think About Turkey”.

¹⁹Cooper, *Post-Modern State and World Order*.

in nature and it is, therefore, unwilling to make an accommodation with its Kurdish citizens, Turkey will find that developments in Iraq will continue to pull it away from Brussels. What the Iraq war has done is to hasten the moment of decision for the Turks.

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