

## Turkey's Strategic Model: Myths and Realities

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In the West, the classic image of Turkey has long been misleading: a secular country, a democracy, an unshakeable friend of the United States, a nation whose strategic outlook conforms with U.S. interests in the region ... a model to all Muslims. During the past 50 years, most of these descriptions have not corresponded to reality, presenting mainly a comforting but unexamined myth.

If the Western version of Turkey's past is a myth, however, the good news is that today's Turkey, based on the remarkable realities of its evolution during recent years, is in fact now becoming a genuine model that finally offers a degree of genuine appeal to the region. The new model is based on serious utilization of democratic process; a willingness to act not just as a Western power but as an Eastern power as well; a greater exercise of national sovereignty supported by the people; a greater independence of action that no longer clings insecurely to the United States or any other power in implementing its foreign policies; considerable progress toward the solution of a burning internal ethnic minority (the Kurdish) issue; and a demonstrated capability to resolve the leading challenge to the Muslim world today: the management and political integration of Islam. This newer model is much better for Turkey, better for the region, and better for Europe and the world, even if some in Washington still hope to preserve the mythical, old Turkish model. The key areas of change in Turkey that will drive the country's strategic outlook and policies over the next decade are Islam, prickly Turkish nationalism, its entry into the European Union, its role as a Middle Eastern state and as a multiethnic state, and its ties with the United States.

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## **Islam**

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Traditionally, Turkey's so-called secularism is what the West has loved most about the country, perceived as a sort of nod of recognition toward the superior political-cultural model of the West. Yet, Turkey's was never genuine secularism. Unlike the U.S. model of secularism that rigidly separates church from state and requires the state to stay out of religious affairs entirely, Turkish secularism has promoted absolute domination and control of religion by the state at nearly all levels. The old model established in the 1920s by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the remarkable reformer and founder of the modern Turkish state, was based on the French version of secularism. This French form emerged out of a French revolution that despised religion, perceiving it as a relic of backwardness and superstition to be swept away by a modern vision of scientific reason. The early Atatürkist reforms treated Islam in this same way: serious members of the new ruling elite rigorously avoided any public profession of religious belief.

Islam, although not banned, was marginalized by the state, and religiosity remained a backward identifying feature of only the traditionally minded masses in central Anatolia. The state decided what mosques would be built; who would head them; and even scripted the sermons for a single, nationwide uniform prayer on Fridays. The Turkish military in particular has been the zealous and jealous guardian of this Atatürkist ideology and has led the struggle in suppressing any form of organized religious strength or the involvement of overtly religious people in politics. This state of affairs has been rolled back considerably over the last few decades with growing democratization, culminating in the spectacular precedent—for Turkey—of an overtly religious party coming to power two years ago, even though it has been prudent and careful in not advertising its religious roots.

Turkey's famed pro-Western leanings have also moved in the direction of greater realism and have become more deeply rooted. Turkey was indeed pro-Western in the sense that the strategic requirements of meeting the Soviet threat during the Cold War led Ankara to embrace NATO strongly and search for Western security guarantees. Nevertheless, Turkey did not become Western overnight. The Turkish Ottoman Empire has long been the most Westernized of Muslim states due to its geographic proximity and close interaction with many Western states—more so than any other Muslim domain—for hundreds of years, both as a periodic enemy and occasional ally, and has been intimately involved in the workings of European politics. During the last hundred years of the Turkish-run Ottoman Empire, which finally collapsed at the end of World War I, Turkey underwent significant liberalizing or Westernizing reforms such as codifying the legal system, adopting par-

liamentary forms of government, attempting to reconcile Islamic and Western law, and making Western-style education reforms. Thus, although the Atatürkist reforms of the new Turkish republic after World War II undoubtedly represented a revolutionary new chapter in Turkey's Westernizing process, they were not unheralded.

Atatürk's crushing of religious power and prestige in the new Turkey of the 1920s, despite its important innovations, left some social and psychic scars that have only slowly been healing over the past 70–80 years. The vast majority of the Turkish population had not been strongly exposed to the West and hence did not share the Atatürkist elite's links with the West. They remained religious and proud of their Ottoman heritage even while becoming loyal citizens of the new republic. It took several generations for the inhabitants of the traditional Turkish Anatolian heartland to benefit from education, economic reform, privatization, and broader economic progress in the country and to emerge as important new players on Turkey's social, economic, and political scenes. Over the years, this new force, dubbed the "Anatolian tigers," has increasingly supported political parties that respect religious tradition and belittle neither Turkey's Islamic heritage nor the country's expression of that heritage.

The culmination of this process—begrudging acceptance by the elite of the increasing prominence of religiously oriented parties—was the spectacular victory of the Justice and Progress Party (AKP) in the 2002 elections. Now the broadly popular party that prudently describes itself as coming from an "Islamic background" has become the ruling party in the country. Yet, this development is the product of an evolving Turkish Islamist tradition that has grown ever more moderate as it has moved closer to the realities of politics and the requirements of pragmatism, especially under the watchful eye of the militant secularism of the army and old elite structure. Similarly, the largest popular movement in Turkey, the Nur movement (and its largest and most prominent branch, the movement of *Fethullah Gülen*), springs out of the same traditional Anatolian heartland and propounds an apolitical, highly tolerant, and open regeneration of Islam focused on education, democracy, tolerance, and the formation of civil society based on the moral principles of Islam. Indeed, these two important movements represent a new Anatolian elite, comfortable with its Islamic heritage while striving to be modern, technologically oriented, and part of the European system as long as that does not mean a total loss of Islamic identity.

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The fact that secular Turkey is the first state in the history of the Muslim world to freely elect to national power an Islamist party (or a party stemming from Islamic roots, as the AKP wisely prefers to describe itself) is therefore astonishing. The Turkish army, long the vigilant watchdog for any sign of religion in government, has had to accede to the reality that the public overwhelmingly elected this party and that the AKP has, by and large, worked within the ideological confines of the established Turkish political

order. Yet, perhaps this event in Turkey should not be so surprising in light of the fact that Islamist parties have been on the ascendancy across the entire Muslim world for the past two decades or more.

The very fact that religion has been heavily controlled, marginalized, and circumscribed by the state for so long—an abnormal social occurrence in a Muslim country—has led to Islam's gradual but persistent reemergence onto

Turkey's social, economic, and political stages. It was only natural that a key feature of the Turkish identity—its deep association with the protection and spread of Islam for hundreds of years—could not remain forever suppressed, even if Atatürk sought to excise Turkey's Islamic past from public awareness and expression. Despite the importance of so many of Atatürk's Westernizing reforms, his suppression of religion in the public sphere could not last, and Turkey has been reverting back to a "normal" expression of religious sentiment, even in politics. Ongoing democratization has been the key to that process, just as democratization has strengthened political Islam in nearly all other Muslim countries as well.

Thus, the first important way in which today's Turkey has now truly become a model for the Muslim world is that it is one of the few Muslim states in which truly representative and democratic politics have emerged. After several decades of fits and starts, Turkey's democracy has now reached a relatively mature stage. Turkey has arguably solved, to the extent that any political problem can be considered permanently solved, the problem of political Islam by a combination of just the right degree of pressures and freedoms to allow a vibrant and healthy, Islamic-oriented political party to emerge and even flourish. When the day inevitably comes that the electorate feels this Islamist party has run out of steam, it will of course face defeat at the polls and another party will replace it, all as part of a normal alteration of political power that will make Islamic parties just like other parties.

If the election of an Islamist party as the ruling party is a first for Turkey, it is also a first for Washington. The United States has always had serious

heartburn about Islamist politics, not without some justification, since the Iranian revolution of 1979, the hostage crisis, the devastatingly successful attacks of the Lebanese Shi'a Islamist guerrillas against the U.S. and Israeli presence in Lebanon in the 1980s, as well as the emergence of a number of other radical Islamist, guerrilla, and terrorist groups around the world, capped of course by the horrific Al Qaeda attacks of September 11, 2001. Nonetheless, Washington has come to terms quite successfully with the AKP's power, demonstrating that at least one Islamist party, or party of Islamic origins, in the world can be a viable partner for the United States in a drive toward regional stability. The party's prime minister has visited Washington, and the two states have maintained close consultation on a variety of issues such as Iraq, Cyprus, and bilateral military cooperation in certain spheres. Now that the AKP has crossed this threshold, hopefully the United States will feel that it can do business with Islamist parties in other countries in the future.

And why not? Whether the United States likes it or not, it simply cannot avoid dealing with the single biggest political movement across the entire Muslim world, Islamism, in all its diversity, differences, and ongoing evolution. Everyone knows the Muslim world is rife with grievances, frustrations, and anger. Today these grievances are expressed through a vehicle of Islamist rhetoric and ideology. Yet, these same grievances were articulated many decades ago through a different ideological vehicle—the radical Arab nationalism led by Gamal Abdul Nasser in the 1950s and 1960s—expressing much of the same strong anti-imperialist bent. When Nasserism failed to produce results, Marxism-Leninism and later Islamism became its natural successor. Thus, even if an ideological vehicle can be suppressed or destroyed, the grievances that create them will not vanish but will simply seek new vehicles. By accommodating rather than suppressing Islamist expression of many popular grievances, Turkey has set important precedents for the Muslim world.

### **Turkey's Prickly Nationalism**

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Any American who has ever negotiated with the Turkish government is well aware that Turks are tough and often exasperating negotiators. They tend to be highly sensitive about their own national dignity as well as national interests and wary of the motives of Western diplomats. These tendencies result from the fact that Turkey has suffered from several centuries of Western imperialism that systematically tore off huge chunks of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans, the Middle East, and the Caucasus. Even the new Turkish state was nearly dismembered by zealous European powers including Greece after World War I and rescued thanks only to the extraordinary war of resistance

led by Ataturk. These historical experiences have fostered a strong streak of anti-imperialist nationalism in Turkey's national composition, tempered only because the country has been able to retain its strength and independence after finally expelling hungry Western imperialist powers in 1921 (unlike most Arab states that gained true independence only after World War II.) A lasting, underlying suspicion of European and U.S. motives still re-

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remains just beneath the surface and emerges strongly from time to time. This suspicion is shared by the whole spectrum of Turkish politics—the army, Ataturkist nationalists, leftists, and Islamists—and even in the most Westernized circles.

The question of Ankara's current ties with Washington and the EU reflects two warring instincts within the Turkish national psyche: a desire to acquire the benefits of Western de-

mocracy, power, economic success, and modernization facing off against periodic suspicion of manipulation by the West. Strong nationalists will argue that Turkey's character and independence are compromised by the demands placed on it by the West for multicultural reform and deeper integration into the European economic order. One of the supreme ironies of history is that Turkey's most insistent and convincing quest for EU membership comes at a time when an Islamist party heads the country. The politics behind this development are complicated but important. Islamist, or Islamically oriented, politicians in Turkey have long complained that Turkish military influence over the political order has systematically suppressed Islamic expression from finding representation within that order. Thus, when negotiations for Turkey's entry into the EU began, Islamists as well as liberals perceived the demands for reform posed by the EU as conditions for Turkey's entry as very much in their own interests. Both the EU and moderate Islamists sought democratization, including the opening of the political order and diminution of the role of the military in politics. Indeed, many other Turks share these goals, but Islamists have been the primary beneficiaries.

Today, the so-called pro-Western, adamantly secularist military remains anxious about the reforms stipulated by the EU because they would further legitimize moderate Islamists and even the Kurdish movement within the country. The good news is that the Turkish military itself, a highly respected and uncorrupted institution, has also evolved and broadened its democratic horizons over the years in keeping with the advances made in the civilian sphere. It has increasingly limited its previously interventionist role in politics, permitting the country to evolve toward more genuine democracy. In

this respect, Turkey's political and even social future seems brighter today than it has been in decades.

Despite internal bickering among Turkish politicians about the nature of the extensive political and economic reforms demanded by the EU, the country is moving in the right direction of accepting the need for reform to meet EU requirements. The broader public senses that the gains to be attained via EU membership outweigh compromises in sovereignty and maintenance of the old order. Indeed, reformers above all else clamor for the EU as the single most powerful way to attain political, economic, and legal reforms that would be harder to justify and implement were it not for Turkey's desire to enter the Union.

Within the EU itself, many are nervous about Turkey's possible future accession, however, and about whether Turkey can truly meet the preconditions for membership. Some Europeans even fear that Turkey's Islamic culture could be too alien for the EU to digest. Some legitimate European fears also relate to the size of the Turkish population and profile of Turkey's economy, both of which could impact the EU severely. Yet, finally and astonishingly, the AKP has also been behind the hard push for a settlement of the nagging crisis over the partition of Cyprus along lines proposed by the United Nations, offering hope of an imminent solution to a problem that has seemed irreconcilable for three decades or more. Here, Turkey's strategic progress is dramatic and heartening.

### **Strategic Implications of Turkish Membership in the EU**

Turkey's quest for EU membership has provided the vital incentive to undertake domestic political and economic reforms, and EU membership will probably come, despite much of the pessimism in some quarters of Turkey as well as misgivings within certain circles of the EU itself. If the logic of the EU's expansion allows for the inclusion of members such as Bulgaria and Romania that are far less advanced politically or economically, then Turkey will surely be included eventually as well. Exclusion for religious and cultural reasons is simply intolerable for a Europe with multicultural pretensions and global ambitions.

Yet, Turkey's aspirations for EU membership are adding to tensions in the U.S.-European relationship. The United States, predominantly interested in having Turkey as a strategic partner in the Middle East, has consistently badgered the EU to accelerate Turkey's accession, but the EU has maintained misgivings over how compatible Turkish membership is with Europe given its Muslim character and the country's large population, which could flood Europe with even more migrant workers. The EU recognizes that U.S.

interests are primarily strategic, with marginal concern for Turkey's economic or political impact on the EU itself. The EU is additionally nervous about importing the strategic problems created by Turkey's borders with unstable neighbors such as Iran, Iraq, Syria, and its neighbors in the Caucasus.

Finally, the EU is also concerned about possible U.S. efforts to sabotage the EU project to prevent it from becoming a rival to the hegemonic pre-

**Turkey has strategically become part of the Middle East, facilitating its role as a regional model.**

tenses of U.S. power. The EU perceives U.S. insistence on adding so many new states to the Union from the East, including Turkey, as aimed at compounding EU problems by further diluting any EU cultural homogeneity. Long latent U.S.-EU tensions emerged more clearly with the rise of neoconservative ideology in the United States and its explicit hegemonic ambitions that crystallized in the tensions over the war in Iraq—the biggest

strategic rupture across the Atlantic since the 1956 Suez crisis (when the Eisenhower administration denounced British and French military efforts to seize the Suez canal away from the Egyptian bid to nationalize it). Europe perceived U.S. secretary of defense Donald Rumsfeld's derogatory reference to "Old Europe"—the antiwar states of France, Germany, and Belgium—and "New Europe"—those states of the former Soviet bloc that would take their cue more readily from Washington than from Brussels—as purely mischievous.

At this point, the neoconservative agenda in Washington quite pointedly is perceived to seek to weaken the EU as strategically independent of the United States, a vision held by at least the core states of France, Germany, and Belgium. In this sense, Washington's advocacy of Turkish membership in the EU is, among other things, clearly perceived to be aimed at strengthening the Atlanticist nature of the EU against the Euro-centric view of the EU founders. Adding an additional twist, however, some neoconservatives in Washington openly belittle the chances and even the desirability of Turkey trying to join the EU, hoping to keep Turkey firmly in the U.S., as opposed to the European, camp.

Although Turkey's (or any other state's) membership in the EU is hardly incompatible with simultaneously close relations with the United States, the sense of rivalry that has emerged between Brussels and Washington (with Iraq being only the first major fissure) will require Turkey to make some difficult choices. An emerging divide is already apparent between those Turkish policy elites oriented toward the United States and those oriented



toward Europe. Those oriented more toward Washington tend to stem more from the old elites; the military with its Cold War ties to Washington; and those who believe that the United States probably will be less demanding of internal Turkish reforms, especially those that require accommodation to the ethnic demands of the Kurdish minority. The more European-oriented groups include those with a more socialist and/or anti-imperialist orientation; a younger generation that has had greater exposure to Europe, especially from the millions of Turkish families that have worked in or emigrated to Germany; those who are attracted to the European project; and those less fearful of the old Russian threat to Turkey.

Although Turkey's geopolitical situation still encourages maintaining its strategic ties with the United States, economic ties will grow stronger with the EU. How starkly the EU-versus-U.S. debate becomes will in part depend on how sharply U.S. and EU strategic interests diverge in the coming decades. In my view, the world will likely witness increasing tactical and even strategic divergence between the United States and Europe that to some extent will be natural, regardless of who holds political power in Washington. All parties should be alert to shifts in this area and work to limit any resultant tensions.

## **Turkey and the Middle East**

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Strategically, Turkey has become part of the Middle East. Understanding Turkey's new strategic relationship with the region requires recognizing that the essence of Atatürkism oriented Turkey firmly toward the West to transform it into an advanced and Westernized state. For well more than half a century under the rule of Atatürkists, Turkey behaved almost literally as if the Middle East did not exist. That region represented an unhappy association with Turkey's past, in which Arab and Turk viewed each other with mutual hostility—Arabs because of extended Turkish hegemony over the Arab world as well as the country's pro-Western policies and Turks because of Arab betrayal of the Ottoman Empire in joining with Great Britain in World War I. Atatürkist Turkey wanted little to do with the Arab world or with Islam. For a long time, the highly professional Turkish Foreign Ministry virtually took pride in not bothering to develop diplomats trained in Arabic.

Turkey's geography also played a key role in fostering ill will between Turkey and its Arab neighbors to the east and south. Russia threatened Turkish territorial integrity for 500 years or more and was a key player in the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire. Later, in its Soviet incarnation, Russia once again seriously threatened Turkey's independence and territorial integrity. Many Arab states, on the other hand, were angry at the West for its co-

lonial and imperial past in the Middle East as well as its creation of the state of Israel on Arab land and looked to the Soviet Union as a natural counterweight to Western power and hegemony. Territorially, the Arabs had little to fear from Russian aggrandizement because the Soviet Union was not contiguous to it. Turkey's situation was different.

In the post-Soviet era, however, the Middle East has grown in strategic importance to the world due to regional instability, and Turkey has felt compelled

to address its Arab neighbors with something more than defensive coolness. In fact, during the petrol-boom years of the 1970s, Turkey first became economically active in places such as Saudi Arabia and Libya, opening the door to slightly greater involvement in Arab affairs. After the 1979 Iranian revolution shifted regional Islamic politics in a radical direction, however, Turkey basically felt that it faced nothing but threats from Iran, Iraq, and Syria. Iran sought to export its Islamic revolution

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while Syria clashed with Turkey over Euphrates water-sharing issues and helped incite Turkey's Kurds to rebel (as did Iraq on occasion, although Baghdad and Ankara also cooperated to crush Iraq's own Kurds at times). These realities have driven Turkey increasingly closer to Israel during the past 20 years, with relations between the two countries reaching a high point in the mid-1990s. Tel Aviv and Ankara found value in their ability strategically to squeeze Iran, Iraq, and Syria to try to modify their hostile behaviors.

That situation is now changing throughout the region. During the past several years, Syria has modified its strategic hostility toward Turkey and, under Turkish pressure, expelled the leader of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, a separatist, violent revolutionary movement in Turkey, leading to his subsequent capture. Syria is under greater pressure to reform and moderate its support for regional radicalism. A hostile Saddam Hussein is now gone in Iraq (although that country may now pose a new threat of internal instability or even possible civil war in which Turkey fears that Iraqi Kurds could encourage separatism among Turkey's own Kurdish population). Iran too, for the past decade, has been increasingly pragmatic and made halting steps toward greater, although deeply flawed, democratic processes. All three of these regimes thus now constitute far less of a danger to Turkey. Any possible military threat from them could be overwhelmed by the Turkish military's superior strategic capabilities.

Ironically, the very success of the U.S. role in directly or indirectly reducing the strategic threats posed by each of these three Middle Eastern states

changes the calculus of former Turkish dependence on the United States for strategic protection in the area. Turkey is almost surely moving toward improved relations with all three, deepening bilateral relations and developing economic interests that far transcend its once exclusively defensive concerns. Turkey's ties with Israel, furthermore, are declining from their peak in the mid-1990s. Turkey will still seek Israeli military technology unavailable elsewhere and will court the powerful Israeli lobby's influence in the U.S. Congress to serve as a broker with the U.S. administration, but the old strategic imperative no longer exists, and the Turkish-Israeli relationship is diminishing. This is due to the greater Islamist sympathies of the AKP and the Turkish public's sympathies with the Palestinians against the harsh policies of Israel's Likud leadership. Turkey now has good reason to seek independent relations with several Muslim neighbors whose political evolution will be complex and difficult but who are no longer likely to be Turkey's enemy. In turn, these same states view Turkey more charitably as it demonstrates a rediscovery of its Islamic roots and an increasing sense of independence from Washington. In particular, Arabs sat up and took notice that a democratic Turkey could say no to Washington on assisting the U.S. invasion of Iraq, something despotic Arab rulers dared not do.

**Yet, the paranoia over the Kurdish issue has not faded away.**

In short, Turkey's shift toward greater independence from Washington, improving ties with its Arab and Iranian neighbors, improved ties with Russia, and more open acknowledgment of its Islamic past all serve to make Turkey more a part of the Middle East than ever before. Now that Turkey's profile is more sympathetic to Muslim states, its own domestic accomplishments are viewed with greater sympathy and respect and thus facilitate Turkey's serving in part as a regional model—unthinkable when Turkey was deeply involved in NATO and at strategic loggerheads with an Arab world that looked to Moscow for support.

## **The Kurdish Issue**

Beyond ideological and Cold War concerns, Turkey's relations with Iran, Iraq, and Syria have also been strongly influenced by the Kurdish issue. Turkey has a larger Kurdish population than any other state in the region and has been long obsessed with fears of Kurdish separatism within Turkey. These fears gained strength during the 1980s and 1990s when Turkey's crude policies toward the country's own Kurds (e.g. the banning of Kurdish-language

press, broadcasts, and songs as well as the Kurdish language itself on public occasions, and the denial of even the existence of a distinct Kurdish identity) in fact led to the creation of an armed, violent separatist movement. Turkey's policies toward Iran, Syria, and especially Iraq have been shaped by its Kurdish problem. Moreover, any state that has wished to destabilize or weaken Turkey over the years—Great Britain, Russia, Armenia, Greece, Iraq, Iran, Syria—has played the Kurdish card against Turkey at one point or another.

**Turkey is growing more independent-minded and less enamored of Washington.**

In simple terms, an unhappy Diyarbakir, the unofficial capital of Turkey's Kurdish region, represents a constant threat to Turkey's stability and renders the country permanently vulnerable to external manipulation by enemies. A content Diyarbakir, or a Kurdish population happily integrated into Turkey and enjoying the state's many benefits, actually reverses the dynamic. Turkish Kurdistan, in this scenario,

then represents a threat to the other three states with large and discontent Kurdish minorities as Turkey then becomes the magnet for all Kurds—a center of advancement, of a multicultural and democratic life linked with Europe. The other states then fall under pressure to offer their Kurds what Turkey can offer or intensify separatist sentiments among their own Kurdish populations.

During the past five years or so, Turkey has begun to recognize the wisdom of this approach and has taken considerable, although not yet fully sufficient, steps toward meeting Kurdish desires for cultural security, cultural autonomy, linguistic rights, and recognition of the Kurds as a separate people. The problem seems to be evolving in the right direction, further encouraged by the EU's stipulations for reform in this area. The outlook for defusing this conflict with the Kurds has never been more promising.

Yet, the paranoia over the Kurdish issue has not faded away. Turkey's number one concern in Iraq, for example, remains the status of the Iraqi Kurds, a situation in which Turkey will have to accept the reality that it is nearly powerless to change through external, especially military, intervention. Neither the United States nor Iraq would support Turkish intervention, and Turkey could have a long and ugly guerrilla war on its hands in the Kurdish regions of Iraq, possibly spilling over into Turkey itself. Furthermore, its opposition to political evolution and liberalization in Iraq that would improve the lives of the Iraqi Kurds is simply internationally unjustifiable. Turkey needs to gain full self-confidence about its own Kurds; recognize the changing realities of a multicultural world, particularly in Europe; work to

improve the situation in Iraq for all Iraqis; and have full relations with all of Iraq and not just with a portion of the country. If Turkey can bring itself fully to implement its program of minority rights for Kurds within Turkey, it will be one of the few Muslim countries that will have successfully resolved an internal problem between differing Muslim ethnic groups.

## **The Role of the United States**

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Should Washington's policies continue to be driven by a desire to keep Turkey firmly in the U.S. camp and fully responsive to the United States' own policy goals in the region, its tensions with Turkey will rise. Turkey is growing more independent-minded and less enamored of Washington and has less need for a systemic type of security guarantee because today it lacks enemies who can seriously threaten Ankara's security as long as Turkey remains domestically stable.

Washington must recognize that Turkey will play an increasingly strong role in the Middle East but along lines designed to serve Turkish national interests. It will likely be less responsive to Washington's shifting and transient needs at any given moment. The prospect of Turkey developing further in the direction it is currently headed—politically, with its neighbors, in managing a democratic form of political Islam—is more likely to contribute to a stable region in the long term than a Turkey that conducts its foreign policy as a U.S. proxy as it has largely done in the past. An independent-minded Turkey will encounter periodic friction with the United States, but this need not be damaging. Obviously, 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.

Of all the states in the broad region, from the southern Balkans to the Middle East and the Caucasus, Turkey is making the greatest progress and evolving more satisfactorily and soundly in its growing democracy, improving relations with neighbors, economic development, and dealings with political Islam. This new independent-minded Turkey, moving toward resolution of its traditional Islamist and Kurdish issues and away from the old, hackneyed vision of a secular pro-U.S. state, is on its way to becoming a genuine model for the Muslim world and gaining acceptance among many Muslims as such.

Turkey's national interests are changing to strengthen Turkey's regional and EU ties and to lessen the centrality of the U.S. role. These trends are not unique to Turkey at all but reflect the massive ongoing global strategic shifts since the end of the Cold War. U.S. flirtation with global hegemony

has created its own natural counterweight in the greater independent-mindedness of once allied states. Turkish-U.S. relations will flourish, and Turkey will be more likely to contribute to stability in the region as a whole if the United States does not try to maintain the old model of the reliable U.S. ally and instead allows Turkey to develop its own independent regional relations.