

# SETA Policy Brief



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## Turkey's Changing Internal and International Dynamics: From "Where" to "What"

Joshua W. Walker



## ABSTRACT

Prime Minister Erdogan's December 7th White House meeting with President Obama re-emphasized the importance of Turkey to both the United States and its Western allies. A variety of foreign policy issues such as Afghanistan, Iran, and Israel-Palestine were discussed with the emphasis placed on how much American and Turkish interests converge and potential areas of cooperation. However despite these positive developments and successful visit of the Prime Minister there still appears to be room for further improvement. Failure to appreciate the domestic challenges and issues occurring in Turkey has caused many Western actors—the European Union (EU) as a bloc and as individual countries, and in particular with the U.S.—to send the wrong messages that fail to fully account for recent domestic political realities. Turkey's struggle on the domestic scene with the remnants of the Cold War in its state apparatus and new attempts to solve the Kurdish problem, along with changing regional dynamics and a constructive foreign policy attitude must be taken into serious account by the US administration. Unfortunately, there has been a tendency for the U.S. to be reactive rather than proactive despite the dynamic nature of the internal and international changes being witnessed from Turkey. A critical account of US policy toward Turkey vis-a-vis Turkey's transformation would give a better idea about the fatal misperception towards "where Turkey stands" versus "what Turkey has become" and pitfalls in Western policy formulation towards Turkey.



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# TURKEY'S CHANGING INTERNAL AND INTERNATIONAL DYNAMICS: FROM "WHERE" TO "WHAT"

Joshua W. Walker\*

## Introduction: Common Western Perception is a Fatal Misperception

A common Western perception—shared by Turkish policy-makers and scholars derived from the US Cold War strategy of relying on Turkey's military prowess against the communist threat—is that, located in an invaluable geostrategic location, with great military strength, a secular political system, a Muslim population, and a commitment to fighting terrorism, Turkey can promote stability in one of the most unstable regions of the world.<sup>1</sup> Gunter Verheugen, formerly the EU enlargement commissioner, offered a critical observation regarding Turkey's changing strategic importance for the Western world: "before 9/11, the fundamental question was 'where' Turkey was located; after that date, the question turned into 'what' Turkey was in terms of her identity."<sup>2</sup>

This common perception, though, is in fact a fatal *misperception*. This premium placed on Turkey's role as a 'model' of secular Muslim representative democracy is based on a gross misunderstanding of the rules of the political game in Ankara, in Turkish society,

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1. The most recent proponent that summarizes this perspective and builds on the views popularized by authors such as Graham Fuller, Ian Lesser, and Heinz Kramer is Philip Gordon and Omer Taspinar's *Winning Turkey* (Washington: Brookings Press, 2008).

2. Quoted by Murat Yetkin, "Turkiyeye Bakis Degisti," *Radikal* (Istanbul daily), March 10, 2004.

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and in the region. In reality, the promotion of Turkey as a stable model for the region must stem from the quality of its own political principles, and from its own stability—not merely from its military strength, its ‘successful’ balance of religion with secularism, or its geo-strategic location. None of these properties, together or alone, has been able to create stability within Turkey in the last two decades. On the contrary, the politics and mindsets that have driven contemporary Turkish politics have failed to produce non-violent resolution of conflicts. Instead of promoting development, access to a broad spectrum of human rights, uncorrupt and accountable public administrations the status quo has continually hindered Turkey in these arenas. Therefore learning from the internal dynamics of Turkish politics and paying close attention to the balance of civil-military relations, Washington and Brussels must endeavour to formulate a unique Turkey strategy that calibrates “what” Turkey has and will become based on its dynamism and not just on an essentialist understanding of “where” it is located.

Placing Turkey in the modern international system continues to present challenges to policymakers in Washington and Brussels. As a result, rarely are Turkey’s domestic realities understood and seen in the context of its evolving international environment and role. This policy brief attempts to bridge this gap by focusing on Turkey’s changing internal and international dynamics with a particular focus on how this might affect the future balance of power. As this brief will emphasize, Turkey has both the potential and warning as a microcosm of the various regions and communities it finds itself a part of. Therefore moving beyond its geographic centrality, pigeonholing Turkey into any single regional grouping or community is not in any Western policymakers’ interest.

## US Regional Approach and Turkey’s Place

Turkey’s geopolitical rise in recent years combined with *realpolitik* diplomacy under the current Justice and Development Party (AKP) government appears to be serving Turkey’s national interest in a powerful new way that makes some Europeans uncomfortable. At the same time this new approach has led to an alignment of U.S.-Turkish interests that are more closely shared than at any point in the past eight years. However, Turkey cannot be taken for granted. The lesson for Western policymakers is that Turkey’s identity and survival are not entirely bound up in the West anymore.

Today, Turkey has become more European, more democratic, more conservative and Islam-friendly, and increasingly more nationalist simultaneously. With dynamic domestic and international changes to its environment Turkey finds itself cast as a regional power not dependent on any one of its regions. It is not just Islam-friendly political power, Turkey’s diplomatic efforts in the region, or the sense that Turkey with its newly minted seat on the UN Security Council is a “player.” It is all of these things.

Turkey's rise coincides with the new US administration's focus on regional solutions to many of the nation's strategic interests around the world. Having expanded operations in Afghanistan to include Pakistan and appointing Richard Holbrooke as special presidential envoy to "AfPak," the administration is clearly seeking a broader political solution to the problems in a troubled region that cannot be settled solely by military force. In the same way, George Mitchell's appointment as special envoy to the Middle East has involved extensive shuttle diplomacy and demonstrated a new willingness to engage regional actors to help serve US interests. Finally, with Iran, the president's attempts to speak to the Iranian people directly and form an international consensus against an Iranian military nuclear program has been based on a regional strategy. US outreach to the Gulf States, along with attempts involving regional powers such as Egypt, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey demonstrates a new approach in the region from the previous administration's unilateral tones.<sup>3</sup>

This regional approach on the part of the Obama administration further necessitates a re-evaluation of Washington's policy towards Turkey. On Obama's three most urgent strategic issues - Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran - Turkey must be a critical partner. Fortunately, US-Turkish interests are more closely aligned now than at any point in the past six years. On Afghanistan, Turkey might still be reluctant to commit more combat troops, but as demonstrated in Washington, Ankara also recognizes the priority of extinguishing the Afghan-Pakistani fires before they spread. Turkey is well-placed to play a leading role in Kabul and in many respects is Obama's ideal partner on Afghanistan. On Iraq, the imminent US withdrawal is removing a central point of tension in the relationship. As the US withdraws, Turkish fears of a US-sponsored independent Kurdish region have faded and been replaced by a new impetus to resolve long-simmering Kurdish issues. Moreover, US cooperation with Turkey in the battle against the PKK (Kurdistan Worker's Party) has facilitated Turkish rapprochement with the Kurdish leaders of Northern Iraq, which will prove crucial if Ankara is to be successful in its attempts to resolve its own Kurdish issues. In turn, Turkish-Kurdish cooperation generates economic interdependence along the border, and also increases Turkish influence throughout Iraq at the expense of Iran. Short of military action, Ankara is equally determined to prevent a nuclear Iran<sup>4</sup> and will support Obama's attempts to resolve the standoff diplomatically.

With the advent of President Obama's administration, the power of US policy to influence Turkey's domestic political behaviour has reached a new high.<sup>5</sup> Given the legitimacy and popularity of Obama in comparison to the perceptions and antipathy

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3. Barack Obama, "Renewing American Leadership," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol.86, 4(July/August 2007)pp. 2-16.

4. Fulya Ozerkan, "Turkey Set to Host International Nuclear Talks," *Hurriyet Daily News*, September 15, 2009.

5. The most recent indicator of this was the Transatlantic Trends survey (<http://www.transatlantictrends.org/>) that showed a considerable "Obama Bounce" throughout Europe including Turkey that indicated the most positive public opinion on the new US president in the last four years of polling in Turkey.

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for the previous administration, the new administration's ability to appeal directly to the Turkish people and combat anti-Americanism has received a further boost. Unlike the Bush administration's reliance upon Turkey's powerful institutions and political elites, President Obama has demonstrated an ability to apply pressure on both Turkey's elected leaders and its undemocratic powerbrokers through his broad based personal appeal and charisma.

Without abandoning its EU membership, Ankara's engagement with its neighbours to the south and east, including Syria and Iran, has garnered the Turks newfound regional prestige. However, Turkey's role as a regional model is limited by two major factors, stemming from its own internal problems. The first of these is the unresolved nature of the Kurdish question. The second, which points to the still-uncertain status of Atatürk's legacy, is the unresolved question of whether Turkey will succeed in transforming itself into a secular European state in a turbulent neighbourhood and in the face of what some have referred to as an "Islamic threat."<sup>6</sup> While it is possible to debate and take issue with the notion that the Turkish regime faces the possibility of transformation into an Islamic state, it is impossible to argue with the conclusion that these two factors "tend to make Turkey—notwithstanding its constructive role as a regional model—also very much a part of the region's basic dilemmas."<sup>7</sup>

## US Role in Turkey's Transformation

US policies toward Turkey cannot alone be expected to fundamentally alter the political *zeitgeist* and operational principles of the nation. In fact the opposite is true: underlying Turkey's foreign policy formulations and recalibrations is a domestic power struggle to redefine the real parameters of Turkish politics. The primary focus of this struggle in the last few years has centered on a historic court case known as "Ergenekon" that is altering the status-quo framework and understanding of Turkish politics. Engaged in this struggle are, on the one hand, the secular establishment, led by the military<sup>8</sup>, and, on the other, the ruling AKP, a pragmatic conservative offspring of a banned Islamist party.<sup>9</sup>

6. Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Choice*, (New York: Basic Books, 2004) p. 62.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 63

8. The secular establishment is further comprised of the segment of the judiciary dealing with regime issues (i.e., public prosecutors and the Constitutional Court), some elements of the civilian bureaucracy (especially the foreign ministry), and a sizeable cluster of civil society actors.

9. The grand-predecessor of the AKP was the Welfare Party, founded in 1983 and closed down by the Constitutional Court in January 1998, on the grounds that it had become a focal point of anti-secular activities. The Welfare Party was succeeded by the Virtue Party in 1997, which itself was closed down in June 2001. The movement eventually split into the traditionalist Felicity Party founded in July 2001 and the reformist Justice and Development Party founded in August 2001.

Despite the softening impact of global changes, Turkey's internal dynamics are still tilted in favor of a strongly militarized state and a political army. In an international environment discouraging overt military intervention in politics, international observers often see little threat of a return to direct military rule in any respectable regime including Turkey's, but they fail to account for the ways in which military power is in fact exercised in most democracies. There is a need for better empirical understanding of what has gone wrong or right in the tendency to use this force in civilian decision-making areas, especially in a context like Turkey where a politically autonomous and secular military is pitted against a popularly elected Islamic government in the context of an electoral democracy.

The interaction between Turkey's domestically complex scene and its evolving international role presents a unique challenge for Washington. US policy has consistently reiterated that it does not get involved in domestic matters or take sides, however, Washington has continually spoken out of both sides of its mouth by concerning itself with domestic Turkish politics at specific moments in time. The prime example of this was the US administration's decision to invite then-party leader Erdogan to Washington for an official visit which conferred a sense of legitimacy that was extremely helpful in paving the way for his eventual rise as Prime Minister four months later. Many have subsequently credited this visit with paving the way for warm relations between the AKP and the US.<sup>10</sup> In addition, the silence from Washington over the military's "e-memo" in 2007 and present developments in the Ergenekon case have sent powerful signals in Turkey regardless of intent.<sup>11</sup> While some observers have extrapolated a grand plan from Washington over affairs in Ankara, a more realistic reading is that the US administration has become far more accustomed to reacting to developments in Turkey rather than being proactive.

Unfortunately, Washington's behavior has detrimental effects in Ankara and is continually used to dampen reform efforts and emboldened radical viewpoints. Rather than shying away from the nation's complex domestic scene, the US has the ability to embrace the flexible and ambiguous identities that Turkey's actors have carved out for themselves. By utilizing this strategic ambiguity the US can define its purposes in a mutually beneficial way that will ultimately result in a stronger partnership for both Ankara and Washington. Engaging both the AKP and the military simultaneously is key for any new strategy on Turkey, but must begin with the military given the new opening provided by Ergenekon.

10. Joshua Walker, "Re-examining the U.S.-Turkish Alliance," *Washington Quarterly*, Winter (2007-2008), pp., 93-112.

11. Unlike the EU which immediately condemned the e-memo, the State Department waited a week before issuing any type of statement which simply reiterated Washington's policy of non-interference in domestic Turkish politics and was widely interpreted in Turkey as being strategically ambivalent. For more on this see Walker, Joshua. "The Challenge for Turkey's True Friends" *Insight* April-June 2008 (Vol.10, No.2), 117-124.

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## Re-engaging the Military

The traditional bedrock of the US-Turkish alliance has always been the nations' militaries that are highly integrated through a common NATO framework and bilateral support. In addition to seeing itself as a guardian over Turkey's secular character, the Turkish military has also promoted itself as a guardian for the US in Turkey. However with the rise of the AKP and democratization within the country many formerly pro-American secularists have revealed an ultra-nationalist tilt that makes them instinctively anti-everything (an "anti" discourse) including American. Therefore the old Cold War calculus of trying to maintain strong relations with the Turkish military by remaining silent over various domestic issues no longer holds. The argument floated by the secularist bloc's allies in Washington that speaking out will cause the US to "lose" the military no longer carries weight, because in one sense, the military has already been lost as a result of Turkish political realities.

Having been created and geared during the Cold War as a wartime military, the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) would gain tremendously from the US model of a "peacetime" military. Helping the TAF to understanding the delicate balance in civil-military relations in the US<sup>12</sup> and the role available to it in Turkey would be of incalculable benefit and something that the US is uniquely equipped to offer.

Given the sullied image of the TAF in the wake of Ergenekon, the military seems to be impelled to define a new role for itself to preserve its unity and dignity. By pragmatically working with the US to transform the military into a modern 21<sup>st</sup> century peacetime security-producing institution the TAF is in an excellent position to reclaim much of its popularity and support in Turkey both from the secularist and AKP blocs. If the TAF can transform itself by redefining its role in Turkey, the polarization in present Turkish politics will be alleviated which will benefit all parties involved.

Following the lead of the EU, which has strongly and continually called for reforms to strengthen democratic controls over the military; Turkey's own reforms and improvements; as well as the sharpened public debate about the TAF, the US must abandon the double standards with which it has been treating the TAF. Additionally, while the US has gained great traction from its support of Turkey's EU membership process, it has often openly contradicted this support by not focusing on what the TAF can learn from Europe's new peacetime armies. The US' response to Europe's lack of troop commitments to Afghanistan is a typical example of this double discourse



in which the administration strongly promotes Turkey's EU membership while taking advantage of the TAF's ease of providing greater troop support in various trouble spots. This double discourse means that the US understanding that a Turkey in the EU may not be as pliable a security supplier as it has been in the past. However the benefit in supporting a new role for Turkey's military clearly outweighs any short-term costs in terms of lower troop levels in the form of stability in the nation. All signs are pushing Turkey towards a new recalibration in its civil-military relations, therefore the US must be a positive rather than a negative contributor in this process.

### **Cautious Optimism on "Openings" and Reforms in Turkey**

Today there is reason for cautious optimism on both the domestic level and the international level for the government's Kurdish Initiatives or so-called "Democratic Opening." The foreign policy and international environment for the settlement of the Kurdish issue in Turkey has never been riper for success. When paid sufficient regard, the EU conditionality has once more proven to be an effective instrument contributing to better governance. The revival of the AKP government's vision of full membership in the Union has been one of the central factors for the government's new engagement to introduce democratic reforms. Regarding the EU itself, there is no doubt that the Brussels bureaucracy needs to work harder to lend its strong support to the re-emergence of the AKP by overcoming considerable resistance inside the bloc and fully endorsing the message that Turkish democracy matters to the EU and to the broader international community. Without pursuing the EU reform agenda, the AKP will find it difficult to normalize civil-military relations, or anything else in Turkey's domestic politics, even if there is consensus on issues such as the Kurdish question.

The U.S.'s strong rhetorical support for Turkey's EU membership bid is politically popular, however articulating the need for the reforms on their own merit is equally important for Washington to emphasize. Given the mood in Turkey that mixes a scepticism towards Brussels' sincerity and self-confidence in forging new relationships with Ankara's eastern neighbours such as Iran, Iraq, Russia, and Syria it is important to strengthen and reinforce Turkey's Western aspirations. Resentment and disenchantment with the EU's 'shaming' rhetoric, which the country has been subjected to for a very long time, is partly responsible for xenophobia and for the revival of the conservative-nationalist instincts of the AKP government. Moreover, the accession process is caught up in a further set of problems: although the EU reform agenda is critical for the reappearance of the reformist side of the AKP government, in order to disentangle itself and alter

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the political power balance that has sustained the military's political influence, Ankara needs to break its pattern of behaviour and address the Cyprus issue as well as civil-military relations. Fortuitously with the arrival of a new prime minister in Greece and growing concern in the EU over various xenophobic statements by right-wing politicians, there is greater room for cooperation in the Aegean than at almost any point in the Republic's history. If the government put its mind to it, it could rebuild a sufficiently broad coalition on matters such as these and regain legitimacy among the disillusioned liberals who had supported it in its initial days in office, when it moved forward forcefully on reforms and freedoms.

As US troops continue their withdrawal from the region, it is clear that the integrity of Iraq can only be guaranteed through closer cooperation between regional and national authorities in Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria. The comprehensive agreement reached between the US and Turkey in 2007 on the sharing of actionable intelligence on the PKK terrorist organization has created the military conditions under which a lasting political solution can now be found on the domestic level. Perhaps for the first time in Turkish history outside players, international factors and the government are actually contributing to a lasting solution and not being the source of further Kurdish agitation.

The US Ambassador in Turkey in recent months has met with all opposition parties to reiterate American support for the solution of the "Kurdish Question."<sup>13</sup> Speaking in Turkish directly to the Turkish people and its leaders, the ambassador has been warmly received and applauded for his efforts. These encouraging efforts suggest that if Secretary of State Clinton and President Obama get involved even by simply acknowledging the progress and opportunity that currently exists in Ankara, this support from the highest level of the US administration would go a long way towards supporting the process underway and put further pressure on Turkey's notoriously status-quo domestic constituencies to finding a solution.

Being Turkey's strategic partner, the U.S. has the responsibility, but more importantly the opportunity to work with the region and Turkey in finding a lasting solution to the "Kurdish Question." Given the fact that the resolution of the Kurdish issue is a key component towards Turkey's EU membership and the US has a comparative advantage in this area in terms of providing loans, security, and training, it is a natural area for further cooperation. Given the Turks' inherent suspicion of outsiders, this will be a difficult challenge and balancing act for Washington to get right. If bungled, US-Turkish relations could deteriorate to the point that they did after the second invasion

13. See "US Ambassador Jeffrey Meets with Kurdish Politicians," *Today's Zaman*, August 8, 2009 and "Turkey's Pro-Kurdish Party To Open Office in Washington," *Hurriyet Daily News*, 7 August 2009..

of Iraq when Turkey became the most anti-American country in the world.<sup>14</sup> However if handled correctly, support for Turkey's Kurdish opening would serve all regional interests of the U.S. and the Turks would not forget who helped them achieve their goals.

In addition to the US component of Turkey's changing neighbourhood, the very fact that the northern Iraqi autonomous zone has become a haven of relative peace and prosperity for Kurds has altered the regional dynamics. Rather than being the source of instability for the Kurds in the Middle East, the Kurdish Regional Government in Iraq has become a regional business and economic bright spot, which has begun to serve as a source of inspiration. The response from Turkey's own Kurds has been to demand far more from their government than just security. Given the AKP's ambitions to transform Turkey into a global energy hub for pipelines moving East-West and South-North, there is an intersecting economic incentive to invest in Turkey's underdeveloped southeast. As a result, the AKP has prioritized Turkey's own Kurdish region so as to prevent the domestic rise of resentment over the uneven levels of development between Turkey's southeast and Iraq's northwest and serve its own international interests.

In this context, the recent signings of bilateral pacts between Turkey-Syria and Turkey-Iraq, regardless of substance or rhetoric, have already ushered in a new era of regional foreign policy for Turkey. Having studiously avoided the Middle East in favor of Europe for the majority of its history, Turkey now finds itself in a novel position. In contrast to the situation less than ten years ago when Syria and Turkey were on the brink of war over Syrian support of Kurdish separatist movements and Turkey supported Western sanctions against Saddam Hussein's Iraq, Turkey now finds itself as the leader of a new Kurdish and regional initiative. The cooperation pacts signed evidently will allow the free movement of goods and people between the three countries and is even expected to include Iran at some point in the future, an unprecedented regional development by any standards.<sup>15</sup> The mere discussion of an economic union between Turkey, Syria, and Iraq would have been unthinkable in any other period of Turkey's modern history, which further illustrates the intersecting nature of domestic and international events in the region.<sup>16</sup>

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14. In the Pew Global Attitudes Survey taken in 2007 Turkey was ranked the most anti-American of all 47 countries surveyed. For more see: <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?pagename=JPost/JPArticle/ShowFull&cid=1184168563444>

15. Announced on September 15, 2009 as the "High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council Agreement" the heads of states and foreign ministers of Turkey, Syria, and Iraq agreed to a new level of unprecedented cooperation. <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/detaylar.do?load=detay&link=187372>

16. Mahir Zeynalov, "Turkey To Spearhead Union in the Middle East: Nations Laud the Move," Today's Zaman, September 22, 2009. See online: <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/news-187630-turkey-to-spearhead-union-in-middle-east-nations-laud-move.html>; Bilal Y. Saab, "Syria and Turkey Deepen Bilateral relations," Talk in Brookings Institute, May 6, 2009. See online: [http://www.brookings.edu/articles/2009/0506\\_syria\\_turkey\\_saab.aspx](http://www.brookings.edu/articles/2009/0506_syria_turkey_saab.aspx); and Robert Olson, "Turkey-Syria Relations since the Gulf War" *Middle East Policy*, Volume 5 (2, 1997), pp., 168 – 193.

As US troops continue their withdrawal from the region, it is clear that the integrity of Iraq can only be guaranteed through closer cooperation between regional and national authorities in Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria.

## Conclusion

While the US withdrawal from Iraq has created positive momentum on the Kurdish issue and regional cooperation with Turkey's neighbours, Turkey's new self-confidence and regional prominence has transformed a static Cold-War bulwark into a potential catalyst for regional stability. However, the Ergenekon affair; the series of alleged coup plots that preceded it, and the TAF's attempts at acting like a political party in reaching out to and aligning with both organized and unorganized sectors of society have all been unprecedented enough to lead significant segments of Turkish society to begin questioning those measures' compatibility with the hallmarks of twenty-first century democracy.

The reemergence of a democratic "civilian" perspective on a fundamental issue, the Kurdish one, represents a change in this tradeoff. The steps taken by the secular alliance led by the military institution against the AKP have encouraged the government to restrain its traditional impulse of simply following along with the powerful military. Instead, they enable the government party to highlight its strategic ambiguity and dual identity, one conservative-nationalist, the other liberal-democratic. Taking democratization further in a EU- and war-weary country not only helps stabilize domestic politics but enhances the regional role and international status of Turkey. This is a major step toward realizing the maxim that Turkey does not "automatically" foster stability in one of the most unstable regions of the world simply because of where it is located but because of what she stands for.

## Summary of Policy Recommendations

### US Policy Recommendations

- Reorient Western understandings of Turkey from an essentialist "where," to a dynamic "what" it does and will represent.
- Reinforce Turkey's new regional clout and role by including it within Obama's regional approach.
- Engage the Turkish military and help to foster closer military-military interaction to transform the TAF onto a peacetime footing.
- Re-energize the reformists in Ankara by acknowledging Turkey's domestic transformations.
- Reiterate support for Turkey's democratization efforts and EU membership by seeking further European commitments towards the sincerity of Brussels' engagement with Ankara.

## **Turkish Policy Recommendations**

- Rejuvenate the push for more active domestic and reforms with creativity and transparency.
- Remove deep-seated interests and old habits learned during the Cold War, they may die-hard but must be confronted to unleash the potential of Turkey's full democracy and progress.
- Continue regional engagements and positive international role.
- Refocus the debate on Turkey's EU membership onto the merits of the reforms being pursued and sought.
- Recognize the strategic ambiguities available on the domestic scene in Ankara as a result of investigations and "openings" and capitalize in a mutually beneficial way for government and military.





Prime Minister Erdogan's December 7th White House meeting with President Obama re-emphasized the importance of Turkey to both the United States and its Western allies. A variety of foreign policy issues such as Afghanistan, Iran, and Israel-Palestine were discussed with the emphasis placed on how much American and Turkish interests converge and potential areas of cooperation. However despite these positive developments and successful visit of the Prime Minister there still appears to be room for further improvement. Failure to appreciate the domestic challenges and issues occurring in Turkey has caused many Western actors—the European Union (EU) as a bloc and as individual countries, and in particular with the U.S.—to send the wrong messages that fail to fully account for recent domestic political realities. Turkey's struggle on the domestic scene with the remnants of the Cold War in its state apparatus and new attempts to solve the Kurdish problem, along with changing regional dynamics and a constructive foreign policy attitude must be taken into serious account by the US administration. Unfortunately, there has been a tendency for the U.S. to be reactive rather than proactive despite the dynamic nature of the internal and international changes being witnessed from Turkey. A critical account of US policy toward Turkey vis-a-vis Turkey's transformation would give a better idea about the fatal misperception towards "where Turkey stands" versus "what Turkey has become" and pitfalls in Western policy formulation towards Turkey.

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