On April 2, 1992, Sabah, the largest circulation newspaper of Turkey, wrote in boldface, “Full Support from America!” Now almost a decade later the words are unremarkable. For nearly ten years, the United States seemingly has been giving Turkey “Full Support” on numerous issues deemed crucial by Turkish authorities, whether membership in the European Union, proposed energy pipelines from the Caspian sea, support for besieged Bosnians or most important, opposition to the separatist Workers Party of Kurdistan (PKK).

In retrospect, however, 1990s symbolize a turning point and a new era in US-Turkish relations. Although most Turks in early 1990’s recognized the United States as their pre-eminent ally and source of arms, surprisingly few saw Washington as a friend. The reasons for skepticism were largely historical, a residue of Turkish resentment over the 1964 “Johnson Letter”, which warned that NATO might forsake Turkey if it invaded Cyprus and the 1975-78 congressionally imposed arms embargo a response to Turkey’s 1974 armed intervention in Cyprus. Turkish attitudes were reinforced in subsequent years by various US actions, mainly initiated in the US congress; indexing of Turkish aid to Greek aid, efforts to link Turkish aid to progress on Cyprus and repeated attempts to memorialize the 1915-16 “Armenian genocide”. On all of these issues, Greek American and Armenian-American lobbies seemed to dominate the debate, convincing the Turks that the cards were stacked against them in Washington.
For several years after the embargo – at least until the mid 1980s – the Turkish government used the word ‘ally’ but never the word ‘friend’ to describe the United States in its public diplomacy.

In spring 1992, distrust of the United States seemed, if anything, to have intensified. The previous year Turkey had agreed to let US bombers use Turkish air force bases to attack Iraq during the Gulf War. This decision, made by President Turgut Özal, had gone against the popular sentiments, the reflexes of most Turkish foreign and security policy decision makers, and decades of tradition that dictated that Turkey should not involve itself in Middle Eastern disputes. Moreover, after the war, US, British and French warplanes stationed at Incirlik Air Base in southern Turkey enforced a “no fly zone” in northern Iraq in order to protect Iraqi Kurds from air assault by Saddam Hussain’s forces. Much of the Turkish public came to see the United States as abetting Kurdish independence in northern Iraq and facilitating PKK use of that region as a staging ground. Some Turks even believed the United States wanted to establish a Kurdish state in southeast Turkey.

With the PKK insurgency acquiring steady force, in March 1992 southeastern Turkey exploded in riots on the politically tinged Kurdish holiday of Nowruz. Caught by surprise, security forces reacted harshly, hundreds of casualties ensued, and international television caught ugly footage of Turkish repression of the riots. West European governments bitterly criticized Turkey. Germany, Turkey’s number two source of arms and aid, suspended arms sale to Turkey in response to apparent Turkish use of armed personal carriers against the rioters. Virtually alone among Turkey’s allies, the United States claimed to see the matter more or less the way Turkey did: as a reasonable and understandable response intended to preserve order and territorial integrity in the face of terrorism.
The Turkish press applauding the US response foreshadowed trends that would characterize much of the rest of the decade in US – Turkish relations; increasing US political support for Turkey's fight against the PKK, in large part as a trade-off for Turkey's acquiescence in US policies towards Iraq; a growing tendency in Washington, uniquely among Turkey's NATO allies, to accommodate Ankara's point of view on many regional issues, and an overall warming of bilateral relations, fostered on Turkey's side by its alienation from Europe.

**Bilateral Relations in the 1990s: From Angst to Exuberance**

The disintegration of the Soviet Union and the end of the cold war brought Turkey in a situation where its formally vulnerable borders with the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact lost most of their strategic importance. Ankara initially feared this development would eliminate Turkey's importance to the United States and the West, leaving it without security assistance and possibly security links to the West.

By the later half of the 1990s however, those fears had been put to rest. In addition to remaining a key member of NATO and serving as a base for enforcement of the no fly zone in northern Iraq, Turkey has come to play an important role in numerous US regional initiatives as: an ideological counterweight to fundamentalist Iran; a forceful, anti-separatist advocate of Bosnia and Kosovo and a participant in Balkan peacekeeping; a pro-Western influence and non-Russian line of influence for Georgia and the Turkic states of the former Soviet Union; an alternative to Russia and Iran as an outlet for Caspian Sea energy resources; a buffer against potential Russian aggression towards the Turkish straits and the Middle East; a catalyst in Muslim world normalization with Israel; a strong supporter of the Israeli – Palestinian peace process that has won the trust of both sides; an example of democracy (although with problems) in the Muslim world.
An anti-Western or neutral Turkey could not fulfill US aspirations in the region. Indeed, Turkey's very existence as a pro-Western state, interrupting lines of communication for fundamentalists, terrorists, and proliferators of weapons of mass destruction – and limiting Russia's reach into the Middle East - contributes substantially to US interests.

Turkey affects other US interests as well. It is crucial to settlement of the Cyprus dispute and by definition, resolution of its own dispute with Greece- both of which are fundamental to stability in the eastern Mediterranean and within NATO.

In his November 15, 1999, address to the Turkish parliament, President Clinton said unqualifiedly that “in the post-Cold War era, our (that is, US-Turkish) partnership has become even more important (than before)”.

Current US interest in post-Cold War Turkey has not been the product of a steady upward curve. During the first two years of the Clinton administration Turkey was viewed by many U.S. policy-makers as a declining asset. It was valued for hosting Operation Provide Comfort (OPC) - the operation to enforce a no-fly zone in northern Iraq - but many at that time assumed that Saddam Hussain regime would soon fall, rendering OPC obsolete. The United States generally demurred on Turkey's security concerns about post-communist Russia and was unresponsive to Turkey's importuning for a stronger NATO policy on behalf of Bosnia. Initial hopes that Turkey would prove to be an influential force in the Turkic states of the former Soviet Union were disappointing, owing mainly to lack of Turkish resources. Turkey also becomes an object of frequent US criticism for its Kurdish policies during the early Clinton years.

It was in the mid 1990s that the ramified US – Turkish strategic relationship of today began to evolve. It did so under the influence of American and Turkish
responses to changed international circumstances, accompanied by new personalities on the US side. The brutality of Russia’s 1994-96 war against Chechnya and the continued prominence of nationalist and Communist voices among Russia politicians sobered US policymakers about the prospects for Russia’s smooth, rapid integration into the Western family of nations. Turkey once again loomed large as a buffer against possible Russian expansion toward the straits of the Middle East and as a pole of pro-Western, non-Russian influence for the Turkic states of the former Soviet Union. Meanwhile, Washington stepped up its involvement in regional affairs, of which the Clinton administration initially had been cautious. US support for Bosnia, however belated, more closely aligned Washington’s policy with Ankara’s and raised American moral stature in Turkey. In 1995, US support for construction of a pipeline from Azerbaijan to Turkey as a Western outlet for Caspian Sea oil -one of Ankara’s pet projects – further enhanced Washington’s standing in Turkish eyes.

Turkey made its own policy adjustments. It softened a bit its hostility to Moscow with Russia’s emergence as a major Turkish trading partner. Particularly after Saddam Hussain threatened to invade Kuwait once again in Autumn 1994, Ankara came to accept that US efforts to contain Saddam would not soon ease. In parallel, Turkey’s increasingly close ties with Israel increased its stock with many US policymakers. Many of these changes coincided with – and some were partly the fruit of- the tenures of Richard Holbrooke as assistant secretary of State for European affairs and Marc Grossman as US ambassador in Ankara, which began in late 1994. Holbrooke, a highly influential administration official, was a champion of Turkey’s strategic importance and of robust US – Turkish relations. Only Richard Perle, a similarly influential assistant secretary of defence during the Reagan administration.
had previously exerted such strong influence in favour of US strategic bonds with Turkey.

Holbrooke and Grossman energized US foreign policy on Turkey’s behalf. Under their stewardship in 1994-95, the United States embraced the Baku-Ceyhan oil pipeline initiative favoured by Turkey, helped engineer Turkey’s successful effort to achieve a custom union with the EU, and firmly established a sympathetic view of Turkey’s fight against PKK “terrorism” as part of the US policy. The notion of the United States as “Turkey’s best friend” in the international arena began to take hold in Ankara in this era.¹

As assistant secretary, Holbrooke consistently referred to Turkey as a “front-line state” highlighting its importance before a congressional committee in March 1995. Holbrooke asserted that Turkey “stands at the crossroads of almost every issue of importance to the US on the Eurasian continent” – a phrase that subsequently became virtually a battle cry for advocates of strong US-Turkish ties.

But bilateral relations came under severe test in mid-1996, when a coalition government headed by longtime Islamist leader Necmettein Erbakan came to power in Turkey. Erbakan had a history of anti-Western, anti-Israel, and anti-semitic rhetoric. In opposition, he had denounced Turkey’s membership in NATO and its bid for EU membership. He argued that Turkey should ally itself with the Islamic world and take the lead in forming what he called an “Islamic NATO” and “Islamic common market”. He ridiculed Turkey’s traditional western elite as poseurs, mere “imitators” of a Western tradition not their own.

¹ Holbrooke, who left his assistant secretary post early in 1996, later claimed that all this happened according to plan “Soon after we (Grossman and Holbrooke) started our new jobs... we sat down to discuss what Turkey meant for US in the post-cold war era.” He said “we developed a new concept... fully backed by the Whitehouse and Pentagon, that Turkey was the new front state (SIC) for the west, and in that sense, she had taken up the role of Germany during the cold war.” Quoted from pp. 40-41 of Yasemin Congar, “The state of Turkish-American Dialogue,” Private View (Istanbul), vol. 3, no.7 (Spring 1999): 40-46.
Washington and Erbakan initially made tentative gestures toward one another, but relations never hit a smooth stride. Trips to Iran and Libya early in his term raised US concerns that Erbakan might be just as bad as feared. Bilateral relations were not derailed - Turkish generals and diplomats saw to that – but they stagnated, mired in uncertainty.

As the military led an extraordinary campaign to force Erbakan out of office, the United States watched the struggle mainly from the sidelines, confining itself to remarks of support for a “secular, democratic” Turkey\(^2\) – a formulation that left many wondering whether the United States cared more about secularism, which the military claimed to be defending, or democracy, in whose name Erbakan sought to defend his office. In fact, Washington cared mainly about Turkey’s pro-Western orientation, but it did not want democratic procedure disregarded either. In Erbakan’s waning days, as rumors of an impending coup swept Ankara, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright cautioned that any change of government must be “within a democratic context with no extra-constitutional approach”\(^3\). Since Erbakan’s departure, US-Turkish relations have become closer than ever. Nevertheless, the Erbakan era left an uncomfortable legacy of questions about the durability of Turkey’s traditional pro-Western orientation and about its internal stability, including the role of its military and the nature of its democracy.

Despite its growing strategic importance, Turkey has not been able to address satisfactorily US concerns about its human rights performance. Human rights abuses have blocked arms sales and undermined goodwill. Also, because of the Kurdish issue and the prominent political and policy roles played by the military, as well as other

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\(^3\) Transcript of Press remarks by secretary Albright during visit by Foreign Minister Valdis Birkaus of Latvia, June 13, 1997, as released by the office of the spokesman, US. Department of State.
democratization and human rights problems, few Americans see Turkey as a nation that fully share their values. In his November 1999 speech to the Turkish parliament, Clinton cautioned, “The future we want to build together begins with Turkish progress in deepening democracy at home.”

Few doubts that Turkish progress in human rights would boost bilateral links. Still, Washington priority looks like to preserve and build on the strategic partnership that had evolved by the end of the 1990s.

**Looking Towards the Future: Uncertainties**

The vast improvement in US-Turkish relations since the mid 1990s is rooted mainly in Turkey’s role in containing Iraq and in the near unequivocal backing the United States has given Ankara on a trio of issues: the PKK, the EU, and Baku-Ceyhan. As the twentieth century drew to a close, US standing in Ankara was at its highest point in decades as a result of Clinton’s November 1999 visit and the long US campaign for EU endorsement of Turkey’s membership candidacy, which was finally achieved in December 1999.

By the end of the 1990s, the US-Turkish alliance had successfully completed a transition from a single-issue Cold War paradigm to cooperation based on a multitude of issues. Both the paradigms can bear the necessary weight of bilateral ties, but the later is inherently more vulnerable and prone to strains.

Notwithstanding the bilateral gains of the 1990s, any number of possible developments could threaten the structure of the post-Cold War US – Turkish relationship. For example, the issues through which the United States consistently demonstrated its support for Turkey in the 1990s may soon disappear from the agenda – in at least two cases, for the “right” reasons. With rebel leader Abdullah Öcalan in jail and fighting in abeyance, the PKK is a diminishing threat. Turkey’s
achievement of EU candidacy ironically may push Turkey closer to Western Europe at Washington’s expense. At any rate, the United States will no longer be able to champion EU-Turkish relations as decidedly as it did when the relatively clearcut issue of candidacy was still outstanding. The next stages in EU-Turkish relations will be more complicated. If the third of the trio of the US support issues, the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline project, proves uneconomic or infeasible – in early 2000, its status was uncertain – some Turks might see its demise as a US failure. That might raise questions in Turkey about the value of US support and the need to accommodate Washington’s policy concerns. Collapse of the project also might decrease Turkey’s strategic importance for Washington.

Second, Turkey – now more powerful, prosperous, and self-confident than ever – may be tempted to behave more independently in its region, implementing policies at odds with US interest. Perhaps foreshadowing this project were Turkey’s threats against Syria in autumn 1998, which resulted in Öcalan’s expulsion from Damascus. Ankara’s posture in this instance clearly made Washington uneasy.

Third, Bülent Ecevit – who throughout his long political career promoted a foreign policy focused on “the region” rather than on the United States or Europe-could revert to form. As prime minister, he has been a pleasant surprise to Washington. His strong support for US-Turkish ties may be simply a recognition of Turkish foreign policy realities, but it runs counter to his historical record. Nevertheless, at time he shows flashes of the “old Ecevit”. As deputy prime minister in 1998, angered that the United States brokered an Iraqi Kurdish agreement without consulting Ankara, he announced that Turkey was raising its relations with Iraq to ambassadorial level. In 1999, within weeks of President Clinton’s well-received speech at the Turkish parliament, Ecevit surprisingly called for an easing of sanctions
against Iraq and signed an agreement with Russia strengthening Turkey's commitment to a trans-Black Sea gas pipeline project opposed by Washington. In the Turkish system, it is difficult in any case for a prime minister to change foreign policy on his own. The military and the Foreign Ministry tend to keep him on track, as Erbakan for example, discovered. Having staked so much on relations with the United States during his prime ministry, it is unlikely Ecevit would now want to undermine them, but the possibility of future misunderstandings cannot be discounted.

Besides this there are other plausible developments that might weaken or challenge Turkish-US relations over time.

Deep deterioration in the quality of Turkish democracy – whether as a result of new restrictions on freedom of speech, a serious crackdown on the Kurds, or a military coup – well might limit the ability of the United States to sustain close security ties and to plead Turkey's case to the Europeans.

A return to power of the Islamists, which would raise internal and bilateral security questions and once again bring sharply into focus doubts about the durability of Turkey's pro-Western alignment.

Warfare, or renewed tensions with Greece on Cyprus, eventualities all likely to arouse formidable pro-Greek sentiment in Congress and possibly spark, calls for restrictions on security ties with Turkey.

Emergence of a Kurdish state in post-Saddam Northern Iraq or a Turkish occupation of northern Iraq following fall of the Baghdad regime. The former would anger the Turks, who would probably blame the United States. The latter, depending on circumstances, would be likely to upset the United States.

As is the case with the apparent decline of the PKK as a fighting force, even good news can have aspect problematic for bilateral US-Turkish relations. A change
for the better in Turkey's security environment – including the emergence of pro-Western regimes in Baghdad and Tehran or stability in Russia and the Balkans, or some combination of these developments – ironically might decrease Turkey's geostrategic importance to the United States.

However, probably the best way for determining or weathering, any future bilateral strains is to capitalize on current favourable trends to build the strongest possible structure of US – Turkish relations.

**Problems and Recommendations**

US–Turkish bilateral relations are founded on security ties – arms sales, military co-operation, NATO membership – and a common, pro-Western strategic outlook. Beneath this common outlook, however, lurk several areas of US – Turkish divergence. Only rarely conveyed in official statements these days, Turkish dissent from, even resentment of US policies occasionally emerges from surprising quarters. In 1996, a Turkish Foreign ministry official acknowledged that his country does not see eye to eye with the United States on many regional issues because each has its own distinct interests. A more senior colleague said Turkey has no desire to be America's subcontractor on regional issues. More recently in November 1999, the Turkish military issued a document called “Current Issues”, which contained a strong attack on US foreign policy motives. Turkey worries about the security implications of US policies designed to contain and possibly topple Saddam, isolate Iran, preempt a major Turkish-Russian natural gas deal, promote Syrian-Israeli peace, deprive the Turkish Cypriot – declared state of international recognition while backing EU

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5 See “Current Issues” as seen by the Turkish Military” *Mideast Mirror* (London), February 9, 2000.
membership for the Greek Cypriot- controlled Republic of Cyprus, and gradually push the Turkish system toward adoption of US norms of democratic governance.

Turkey’s strategic location dictates that its importance to the United States is often a function of US objectives in Turkey’s neighbouring regions. For purpose of the discussion here, continuity in US policy goals and priorities regarding Turkey’s neighbours will be taken as a constant. Thus, it will be assumed that Washington will continue to give primacy to relations with Western Europe, promote the Middle East peace process, seek to isolate the Islamic Republic of Iran and contain or overthrow Saddam Hussain, and encourage Russia’s integration into the Western family of nations.

Turkey is pivotal to the preservation or attainment of most US regional policy goals, and a productive relationship with Turkey is therefore in the United States strategic interest.

Islam and Islamism

Because of the sensitivities of the Turkish secular elite, no issue in US-Turkish relations is more delicate than Islam. US policy touches upon Turkey and Islam in at least three ways: projecting Turkey as a role model or representative of the Islamic world, dealing with political Islam, and considering human rights issues raised by Turkey’s internal policies toward religion.

United States projects Turkey in its policies as a secular, democratic, free market role model for the Islamic world, as well as an important representative of that world in its encounter with the West. In the words of former US President Clinton, “It is at Turkey where Europe and the Muslim world can meet in peace and harmony”. This is a theme played for Turkish and American audience but with little substantive content. With the exception of the few limited programmes undertaken in the Turkic
states of the former Soviet Union in the early 1990s, the United States has never actively encouraged other Islamic states to look to Turkey for guidance on political and economic matters. Probably that is because Turkey doesn’t enjoy much leverage outside the Turkic world. Arabs deeply resent Turkey for a perceived history of oppression during the Ottoman period. Religious Muslims in Iran and elsewhere are disrespectful of the uncompromising secularism of the Atatürk revolution.

Even the United States has an unequivocal attitude toward some structural aspects of Turkish democracy – for example, the Turkish military penchant for acting autonomously against Islamic fundamentalists and other perceived radicals. This role of the military as a fire wall might actually provide a useful model of transition to democracy for authoritarian, Muslim-majority regimes that fear democracy will lead to a fundamentalist takeover. Jordan has taken steps in that direction since the late 1980s, with the military - backed monarchy playing the role of guarantor and modulator of a limited democratic experiment. Because of its distinctly non-democratic dimensions, however, this type of “muscled democracy” is not something the United States would openly promote as a model.

Turkey itself traditionally does not claim any type of leadership in the Islamic world or any special ability to represent Islam in its engagement with the West. Members of Turkey’s elite consider their state more Western and secular than the rest of the Islamic world.

Political Islam in Turkey raises several difficult issues for the United States, although fewer now than when Erbakan was in power in 1996-97. In determining its approach, Washington takes into account several factors: its own views of Turkish Islamist, the views of Turkey’s traditionally pro-Western secular establishment, US democratic values, and US strategic interests. There is considerable debate in Turkey
and among US government analysts as to whether Turkey’s Islamists are moderates or radicals, democrats or closet sharia-ists, pro-Western or anti-Western. The issue is complicated by the fact that former Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan’s Refah Party was banned in 1998 and Erbakan himself has been suspended from politics until 2003. A defacto replacement party, the Fazilet (virtue) Party, has tried to present a more moderate, more pro-Western face than did Refah; it even endorsed Turkish membership in the EU, which was unacceptable to Erbakan. However, a significant segment of the Turkish secular establishments, led by the military, believes Fazilet is hiding its real fundamentalist aims behind the veil of legally safe pro-Western, pro-democracy rhetoric.

The United States usually treads carefully in the sensitive realm of relations in Turkey between state and religion even when they raise human rights concerns. For example, the United States has avoided direct criticism of the Turkish state’s military-driven, hard policies toward Islamism and Islamic practices. Actually a form of state control of religion, Turkish-style secularism does differ from US-style secularism. Some US officials may be pleased the military plays the role of fire wall against fundamentalism – which helps to ensure Turkey’s westward orientation - but most would prefer that the military played it in a less activist manner and with greater tolerance for manifestations of Islam and Islamism.

Without referring specifically to secularist-Islamist disputes, Clinton appeared to urge the Turkish parliament to support greater freedom of religious expression in speaking of his hope for a “a future in which people are free to pursue their beliefs and proclaim their heritage.” He added, “when people can celebrate their culture and faith in ways that do not infringe upon the rights of others, moderates do not become extremists, and extremist do not become misguided heroes”.

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United States concerns regarding state-versus-religion issue in Turkey makes sense. First of all, a strong Islamist movement, with its inevitable anti-Western themes, is contrary to US interest in Turkey. Second, many pro-US Turks, including liberals, are more sensitive about Islamism – and its potential to subvert the secular nature of the state – than about any other issue. (since the Erbakan period, the military has ranked Islamism ahead of Kurdish separatism as the "number one" threat to the state). Although many secularists favour more liberal attitudes – for instance, toward headscarves or even toward Erbakan’s political participation – the more uncompromising secularist view associated with current state policy is widespread and extends well beyond the military. Third, the US has relatively little credibility on these issues among Turkish secularists because it lacks their experience of trying to institutionalise Western values in a Muslim majority culture.

The United States, therefore, should keep Turkey’s Islamist leaders at a distance even while defending their right to participate in the democratic process. Washington’s ability to affect Turkish politics is limited, but US approval is something most Turkish leaders seek. The United States should refrain from statements or actions that would contribute to the benefit of Turkey’s Islamist movement or appear to assist in anti-secular, anti-western goals.

**Strengthening Turkey and Bilateral Ties**

**General Policy Recommendations**

Because of Turkey’s location and the strategic role it plays throughout the region, close bilateral ties are in the US interest. Most important, Turkey is an island
of relative stability in a turbulent region. Washington thus has good reason to favour its emergence as a regional military and economic power - a process well under way.\(^6\)

It is true that a more powerful Turkey is also one more capable of pursuing independent foreign policy initiatives, including some that may not be to Washington’s liking. However, the United States can mitigate that possibility, through a structure of close security and diplomatic ties.

The United states should establish a high-level commission, on the Gore-Chernomyrdin model, to spur bilateral relations and serves a clearinghouse for the growing number of “multiagency” bilateral topics, including trade, energy, security and regional issues, as well as human rights, Greece and Cyprus. This would assure that high-level attention to Turkey is sustained, that Turkish and US bilateral regional policies are coordinated and both Turkish interests and perennial US concerns such as Cyprus and Greek-Turkish relations receive their senior level due. The commission should meet in Washington atleast once a year, ensuring an annual official visit by the Turkish prime minister. Turkey merits this level of attention based on its strategic importance and its domestic uncertainties.

Trips to Turkey should be a regular part of a US president’s itinerary, undertaken atleast once in a four-year term. The Clinton trip, although initiated for the OSCE summit rather than for bilateral reasons, is a promising beginning. Regular visit of this kind would be a visible and reassuring sign of US support in a highly personal culture, particularly for the many Turks long bothered by their difficulty in attracting visits from prominent US officials. Presidential attention provides the United States some of its best opportunities for reinforcing bilateral bonds and influencing Ankara on a range of issues, including human rights. Turkey’s

enthusiastic response to President Clinton’s trip demonstrates the potential of such visits to transform both the Turkish political landscape and US-Turkish relations, provided presidential declarations are sustained by the post-trip, senior level involvement.

Turkey’s economy is now so large that any support the United States can realistically offer would only have a marginal effect. A marginal effect can nevertheless be a useful one. In that spirit, the United States should implement a package of measures to expand US–Turkish economic ties and assist the Turkish economy in compensation for nine years of Iraqi sanctions. This package might include eased quotas on Turkish textiles and incentives to US businesses to invest in Turkey, particularly in its Kurdish-majority southeast. Washington has a significant stake in the successful development of Turkey’s southeast, both because of its impact on overall Turkish stability and because it is the area through which the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline would pass. The United States also could explore the possibility of a free-trade agreement, as proposed in 1999 by senator Daniel Moynihan. To stimulate indigenous Turkish economic development, the United States should condition any of these measures on continued Turkish progress in opening its economy, including privatization of the still oversized public sector.

Prospects

As the calculus of benefits and liabilities for US-Turkish relations has changed over the years, it is not sufficient to assume that close ties in the past will assure smooth relations in the future. The alliance now faces greater challenges than at any time in the recent past. The US seems to have few ideas about how to head off major problems, and the Turks seem largely unprepared and oblivious to the danger bilateral
ties face. It will be a considerable accomplishment if US-Turkish relations can be kept fully on track over the medium term.

Considering how important US support is to Turkey, it is surprising that Washington rarely, if ever, succeeds in convincing Ankara to do it bidding on those issues that most trouble bilateral ties- Cyprus, Greek-Turkish relations, and human rights. The most famous US effort to pressure Turkey to achieve a major diplomatic goal, the 1975-78 arms embargo, was a colossal failure. By playing on its geostrategic importance – shutting down US bases on its soil-Turkey inflicted pain sufficient to convince the United States to end the embargo. For Washington, the lesson of the embargo was that it is difficult to pressure Turkey on issues of major national interests.

If anything, US ability to press Turkey has probably diminished in recent years, particularly with Turkey’s increased prosperity and the ending of foreign aid in 1998. Even before the aid programme ended, level of assistance were steadily shrinking in absolute terms and in economic impact. In 1983, for example, when the era of top-level US assistance to Turkey began, formal aid (that is, military grants and loans and economic military grants and loans and economic support funds) was $700 million – more than 1 percent of Turkey’s $50 billion economy. When the aid programme reached its peak in 1991 at $ 850 million (all but $ 100 million in straight grants), the total was little more than 0.5 percent of Turkey’s $140 billion GNP. In the final year of the programme, 1997, US aid amounted to $197 million (including only $22 million in grants, the remainder in loans), less than 0.1 percent of Turkey’s $200 billion economy – and less than one-tenth of its 1983 value to the Turkish economy.
Today, the major sources of US leverage on Turkey are influence in the international financial institutions (IFIs) – the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund – Weapons sales and support for Turkish diplomatic goals. Together, these factors create marginal but sometimes-meaningful influence, inclining Ankara to be supportive of US policies when possible and non-confrontational about those policies it dislikes. These factors mean little in terms of inducing Turkey to compromise on policies it deems crucial to its national interest, however.

US influence in the IFIs is considerable. Turkey has often turned for help to the IFIs – twice in late 1999 alone. Following the August 1999 earthquake, Ankara secured $420 million in loans from the World Bank. In December 1999, it signed a $4 billion standby loan agreement with the IMF. In both of those instances, the United States is believed to have worked behind the scenes for the most generous allotment and terms possible within the bounds of what could be justified economically. Ankara has healthy respect for and perhaps even exaggerates – the US role within the IFIs.

Washington's major lever of influence is its security connection to Turkey the most important aspect of which is Turkish access to US military equipment and know-how. Some eighty percent of Turkey's military inventory consists of US-origin equipment. Yet, as Ankara realizes, it is unlikely that the United States will again significantly curtail these sales for the purpose of forcing policy choices on Turkey, given how lucrative the Turkish arms market is, how miserably the 1975-78 arms embargo failed, and how much geostrategic importance and status Turkey has as a NATO ally. Turkish cognition of these factors limit the leverage Washington derives from arms sales. Occasionally, an arms sale may be rejected by Congress, but that will have little impact overall on Turkish policies, to the extent it does have an effect, it may be opposite to that intended.
In recent years, as the United States alone has stood by Turkey on issues of crucial importance to Turkish national interests – the PKK, the EU, and Baku-Ceyhan pipeline – more and more of the Turkish establishment has embraced the importance of close ties with Washington.

Even Bülent Ecevit, Washington’s longtime critic, now extols the value of US support. Gratitude for Washington’s backing has not compelled Turkey to make fundamental policy changes regarding Cyprus, Greek-Turkish relations, or human rights, however, and it will not. Aware that it is the junior partner in bilateral relations, Turkey is on guard not to be bullied. Ankara sees US diplomatic support mainly as functions of Turkey’s hosting Operation Northern Watch (ONW) and of a larger US interest in Turkish stability and co-operation.

One potential lever of influence the United States generally has abstain from, is consistent attention from the president and secretary of state. On that score, 1999 was an aberrational year. Demirel and Ecevit each visited Washington and met with Clinton, and Clinton, thanks to the OSCE summit, found his way to Turkey. However, no secretary of state has made a substantive visit to Turkey during the Clinton administration. Madeleine Albright was in Turkey twice in 1999 – once on a symbolic visit to inspect earthquake damage the other time accompanying Clinton to the OSCE summit. Warren Christopher ignored Turkish plea for a stop in Ankara – despite nearly two dozen trips to neighbouring Syria. An exception to the general pattern occurred during the 1990-91 Gulf Crisis and war when President George Bush was in constant touch with Turkish President Turgut Özal and secretary of state James Baker made several trips to Turkey- to positive effect for US interests, as Turkey became a leading supporter of the United States anti-Iraq effort.
Accumulated experience suggests that US-influence may, at most help convince Turkey to make a concession it is already open to making. Resumption of Cyprus negotiations in December 1999 is a good example. For months, Rauf Denktash had insisted he would not resume talks unless the Greek Cypriots withdrew their candidacy for EU membership and "acknowledged" the existence of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. He reversed that position in the face of several external incentives given to Turkey. In meetings in Washington and Ankara, Clinton personally appealed to Ecevit for a resumption of Cyprus talks just as Turkey was negotiating a standby agreement with the IMF and receiving strong US backing for its bid for EU candidacy. Most important, the EU, which was to decide on Turkey's candidacy at its December 1999 Summit in Helsinki, was also urging Turkey to show flexibility on Cyprus.

But the convening of Cyprus talks in early December 1999—just one week before the crucial EU summit—required no major concession of Turkish Cypriot interests. No substantive charges in Turkey's or Denktash's approach to the Cyprus problem were demanded or offered. Denktash even refused to meet face to face with his Greek Cypriot counterpart Glafcos Clerides at the New York based negotiations; instead, UN officials shuttled between rooms conducting "proximity talks". Also per Denktash's wishes, the exchange was publicly described as non substantive and merely laying the groundwork for future rounds.

Despite their limited scope, the Cyprus talks met US and EU minimum requirements. The Clinton administration was satisfied. The EU summit declared Turkey a candidate for membership, after which Denktash agreed to a second round of Cyprus talks early in 2000. And with happy timing, the IMF and Turkey came to an agreement on a standby loan. Without the influence of these factors, there would
probably have been no Cyprus dialogue at all, but the price Turkey and Denktash paid, non substantive proximity talks, was minimal.

Use of Incirlik Air Base for ONW, crucial to Washington’s Iraq policy, fits into a similar pattern. Contrary to a common impression, Turkish willingness to host the operation serves larger Turkish interests and is not simply a concession to the United States. Certainly Turkish decision-makers take into account the negative impact on bilateral ties that would result were Turkey to expel the operation. But Turkey also shares the US goal of preventing another heavy flow of Iraqi Kurdish refugees towards its border, which could again include large numbers of PKK infiltrators or subject Turkey to international pressure and criticism if it chooses to block its border.

As an IFI decision on a Turkish application – or a US decision on a Turkish arms sale request – draws close, Turkey is more likely to be responsive to US requests. But Ankara is aware that US support is the result not of American charitable impulses but of Washington’s strategic interest in encouraging a Turkey that is stable and Western aligned. Therefore, Turks do not feel they must compromise on basic national interests – Cyprus, Greece, human rights issues- in order to please the United States. And, as the arms embargo showed at a time when Turkey was weaker, poorer, and more dependent on the United States, Turks are willing to sacrifice for the sake of national interest and pride.

Turkey would make concessions on issues of vital national interest only if it were rewarded with a benefit of greater value that would otherwise be withheld, such as EU membership. The prospect of full EU membership – provided Turkey sees it as a real possibility and is serious about pursuing it – is now the strongest external incentive for changes in its traditional domestic and foreign policies.
As a result of its strong support for Turkey, the United States can usually count on Ankara’s taking into account crucial US interests. But Turkey is unlikely to compromise on its own perceived areas of fundamental national interest simply to show itself responsive to US desires. Rather than leverage, the best assurance of Turkish support for US policy initiative—particularly in an era of growing Turkish power and prosperity—resides in Washington’s persistent cultivation of a climate of genuine partnership, mutual interest, and respect. That will continue to be so, barring some dramatic shift in Turkey’s fortunes or in the regional or international landscape.

Looking to the Twenty-First Century

Relations between widely different states with different agendas are difficult to sustain even if the states are friendly and allied. Turkey is in the middle of rapid internal change, while its external environment is unstable and can change dramatically in ways difficult to predict and understand at times. The strategic underpinnings of the US-Turkish relationship are not likely to be undermined, certainly for the next decade, unless Turkey’s basic orientation toward the West were somewhat to change. Indeed, the area’s continuing instability should serve to cement those underpinnings. Turkey’s three eastern and southern neighbours—Iran, Iraq and Syria—also can be expected to change, perhaps radically in the next decade. Military cooperation will remain a key element in the thinking of policy makers on both sides, and Turkey will need the United States to address its concerns over weapons of mass destructions in the hands of unfriendly neighbours. It is more on domestic and diplomatic issues than on basic security ones that the uncertainties—old and new—are presently greatest:

Turkey has enormous potential, but its internal problems have prevented sustained, rapid growth and complicated relations with friends and allies. Many
believe or hope that the EU accession process will give Turkish government an opportunity to do what previous governments could not do: to carry out often unpleasant and politically difficult tasks like reducing public sector borrowing and getting rid of restrictions on free speech. If Turkey can get on the road to sustained, high levels of growth, it will significantly increase its influence over a wide and difficult area of the world, have greater scope and confidence for diplomatic initiative, and change the quality of its relations with the United States and Europe. That would indeed create a new geopolitical situation. Clearly, however, for some time to come, Turkey's management of its political Islam and Kurdish issues will remain an important part of the US policy dilemma.

The single most important external factor shaping Turkey's foreign and domestic policies will probably be Turkey's accession into Europe. At this point it is not clear how far and how quickly EU integration will go. Much depends on a continuing Turkish consensus to reform and on improvement in relations with Greece. But the accession process, if and as it moves along, will not only force internal reforms in Turkey, it also will change policy perceptions in both the United States and Turkey and ultimately complicate their dealing as Turkey looks increasingly to its new European partners and meeting EU requirements for admission. New Turkish bureaucratic institutions are being set up to guide the EU accession process, and they could well become engines for slow, subtle change in existing US-Turkish relations, for example, arms purchase could begin to shift away from US sources. Given their vastly greater security confidence in the United States, however, the Turks-like the British - will try to maintain a special security relationship with the United States.

The new states of the Caucasus and Central Asia are in bad shape and are likely to remain so for a long time to come. The combination of stagnant economies,
income inequalities, ethnic, religious, and other international problems, and authoritarian leaders will breed continuing instability. Nevertheless, these countries have become important interests of both the United States and Turkey and a major consideration in their policies towards Russia. Efforts by Washington and Ankara to foster independent states in the area that are relatively unconstrained by Russia will continue to run into major problems and severely complicate both countries, dealings with Moscow, which has the means to undermine or create serious difficulties for such states as Georgia or Azerbaijan or Kazakhstan. Turkey seems to be pursuing a high-intensity role in the area that is at present inconsistent with its capabilities. Domestic political pressure pull it in that direction; Chechnya, for example, is a much more public issue in Turkey than in the United States because of a large Chechen population. But Turkey also has developed a major economic stake in Russia and depends on it for much of its energy and substantial exports. Managing this complex set of relationships with their high nationalist resonance in Turkey and longstanding Russian-Turkish animosities will test both Turkish and American policymakers and could become highly contentious. The proposed Baku-Ceyhan pipeline is an important aspect of this larger issue, one in which politics has dominated over economics. Failure to build it after so much hype could significantly affect the tenor of US Turkish relations.

Iraq is another problem area. Efforts to promote a strong internal opposition to Saddam Hussain, difficult enough, falter also because of Turkish opposition. What happens to Iraq if and when Saddam Hussain departs from the scene is a dangerous uncertainty. A democratic, decentralised, but united Iraq is a nice construct – but its likelihood is dubious. Another dictatorial regime is more likely to be needed to keep Iraq together. What worries many in Turkey and in the Middle East is that the end of
Saddam Hussain will lead to chaos in Iraq and the country will simply split or end up a loose, defacto confederation of sorts. If that were to happen and the Iraqi Kurds, who have gotten used to running their own show, were to try to establish a new entity in northern Iraq, it would starkly reopen the complex and sensitive Kurdish issue for the whole region and for US-Turkish relations. There is another, much different uncertainty: that Iraqi leadership will emerge with weapons of mass destruction bent on regional dominations.

The continued influence of ethnic lobbies on US-Turkish policy will depend mostly on whether there is serious movement toward resolution of at least one major Greek – Turkish issue. If the improved atmosphere in Greek-Turkish relations generated by the Turkish earthquake and the constructive approach of two foreign ministers does not go beyond rhetoric and second-order meetings, US policy is likely to continue to be constrained on specific Greek-Turkish issues by domestic ethnic lobbies. Barring a breakthrough, much diplomatic and political attention will have to remain focused on the Cyprus issue.

The United States and Turkey are headed for a more complex relationship, largely co-operative but with some old and new contentious issues. Much depends on Turkish internal developments and what happens to Turkey’s EU candidacy. The uncertainties are bigger if only because Turkey could change significantly over the next decade and because it touches on so many areas of the new world in important ways. American policymakers are clearly going to have to focus more on Turkey, continue to secure the basic relationship, vigorously sort out US interests on specific issues, and be inventive in dealing with occasional clashing perspectives.