Conclusion

Turkish-US alliance has been tested over the years on a number of issues that have left both sides with lingering questions regarding the other’s political intent. During the cold war it was clear what the alliance stood for: a common front against the Soviet Union. Yet this did not prevent serious strains from occurring in the relationship.

The Gulf War of 1991 marked a turning point in the relationship because it convinced the US leaders that Turkey’s strategic value was more to be seen in respect of what came to be called the greater Middle East than in its classic NATO role. Turkey increasingly was regarded as an anchor of stability in a region of growing volatility and was expected to project that stability. This change of focus gave new momentum to the relationship but also brought new problems for US policy.

Images of Turkey as a bridge or a barrier in security terms have not lost their relevance, but they no longer capture the full scope of the debate about Turkey’s strategic role.

During the 1990s, Turkish external scene was transformed by the greatly expanded range of Turkish security concerns, a more active debate on external objectives, and a trend toward more assertive regional policies. As a consequence, the potential for friction with US and European security partners increased significantly. Even where interests are consistent, differences between Turkey and its partners in policy and approach are now more common and hold the potential to disrupt cooperation in core areas such as NATO policy.

Turkey’s post-Cold War, post-Gulf War strategic role is being shaped by the emergence of new trans-regional challenges that are eroding traditional definition of the European security space. European, Middle Eastern, and Eurasian securities are
increasingly interdependent, and Turkey is at the centre of this phenomenon. Turkish and US analyses in particular display a similar focus on this trend as a factor contributing to Turkey’s strategic significance. As NATO moves to broaden its geographical and functional concerns and as security challenges on the periphery come to the front, interest in Turkey as a new “consumer” of security within the alliance will increase, as will the demand on Ankara for security cooperation. NATO will be the key institution binding Turkey to the West, but vigorous reassertion of NATO’s commitment to Turkish security will be required to address Ankara’s fears about erosion of security guarantees.

Further, the long-standing assumptions about Turkey’s internal evolution and policy orientation can no longer be taken for granted. In this regard, the most important influence on Ankara’s regional behaviour may not be the struggle between secularism and Islam or East versus West in foreign policy terms, but rather the implications of a more assertive Turkish nationalism. Turkey’s troubled political relations with Europe fuelled nationalist sentiment and complicated prospects for stability in key areas, not least Cyprus and the Aegean. At the same time the primacy of internal security issues—specifically the PKK in the current Turkish calculation suggests a potentially more difficult relationship with security partners whose assessment of these issues may be inconsistent with Ankara’s.

Taken together these observations suggest a future in which Turkey can play a pivotal role as a security partner for the West, but only if Turks are convinced that their own judgments are taken seriously and the cooperation supports Turkey’s own national interests. Turkey is emerging as a more important, but also more independent and assertive actor at the centre, rather than the periphery, of Western security concerns.
Ankara is well aware of the necessity of foreign cooperation for security. The improved military-industrial cooperation with Israel has to be seen in this perspective, given a growing European reluctance in continuing defence aid to and military-industrial cooperation with Turkey and the continuing uncertainty over the US ability to fulfil its respective commitments to the country because of recurring disagreements between the administration and congress.

The signing of the Declaration of Principles between Palestinian Liberation Organization and Israel on September, 1993, freed Turkey to cooperate with Israel while maintaining its declared sympathies for the Palestinians. However, Israel and Turkey secretly engaged in intelligence cooperation for many years.

Since then cooperation has blossomed at many levels. While cooperation in other fields i.e. economic and political have proceeded smoothly, military cooperation became controversial between Turkey and the Arab states. Repeated Turkish assurances that this cooperation was not directed against any third party and was only one agreement among many others Ankara had signed, including many with Arab countries could not calm down Arab anxieties and anger. That Iran, Iraq and Syria have increased their cooperation with one another seems to be motivated by concern to pose a counterbalance to the perceivedly threatening posture of the Turkish-US-Israel triangle. For Washington, Turkish-Israeli relations present far more opportunities than problems. From US perspective, broadly speaking, Turkish-Israeli cooperation serves as an opportunity for deeper trilateral cooperation, enhancing Turkish and Israeli security and increasing weapons interoperability for US forces at times of regional crisis. It also serves as a potential nucleus for pulling other pro US states, such as Jordan, into a wider Middle Eastern regional security regime.

It is possible to argue that the Turkish-Israeli military alignment represents an internal transformation of the security complex by changing the distribution of power
among the regional actors. More specifically, it is possible to identify a growing political and strategic polarization in the regional security system. The Turkish-Israeli axis has provided Iran, Iraq and Syria with further stimuli to reinforce their long-standing collaboration. Diplomatic manoeuvres were launched which aimed at creating a military political alignment that would provide a credible countermeasure to the ‘threat’ posed by Turkey and Israel.

From a Turkish perspective, doubts about and differences with US policy in the Gulf region have motivated Ankara to pursue closer ties with Israel which may support Turkey’s position in Washington, while, at the same time, ensuring that alternatives will be readily available, if needed. May be, these were the consideration that Özal had in mind in 1986, ten years before Turkey concluded the alignment with Israel, when he explained the necessity of keeping contacts with Israel, which he regarded as ‘a window on future events’. For Turkey to play a role in the Middle East, he maintained ‘that window must remain open.’

Another issue that has increasingly come to cast a long shadow on all of Ankara’s foreign policy concerns, ranging from relations with the US and Europe to the Middle East and even Russia and the Caucasus is the Kurdish question in Turkey. This is largely by Ankara’s own choice, for it has decided to extend its usual domestic practice of associating anything Kurdish with the PKK, including in the realm of foreign policy. While Turkey has succeeded in equating the PKK primarily with terrorism and other ills in the minds of Americans and most Europeans, it has also steadfastly refused to acknowledge the existence of moderate Kurdish groups. As the Kurdish issue gains more currency internationally, this may become a problem that will yet haunt the government, because it risks alienating international opinion.

For the US, Turkey’s Kurdish predicament poses a stark dilemma. Ankara is too valuable a strategic ally to pursue a policy that it’ll interpret as being hostile. On
the other hand, Washington faces a moral and practical dilemma if the repression in
the southeast continues unabated: while the moral problems are obvious and
multiplied by the fact that the Turkish military is primarily equipped with US-made
material. At the practical level two issues emerge. The first is the distinct possibility
that continued conflict could result either in chronic political instability or in severe
domestic unrest; second, Turkey has been the United States’ most trusted and vital
ally in the areas bordering this country, not just as an actor but also as an example of
democratic and economic success. Both of these factors would be endangered by a
prolongation or intensification of the conflict with the Kurds.

On the other hand, the seeming double standard the United States applies to
the Kurds, of course, is really explained by perceived US national interests. In the
case of Kosovo, the United States felt that it was necessary to stop ethnic violence in
Europe before it escalated and expanded. The Kurds, in Turkey, however, do not
present such an immediate threat. Therefore, the Kurdish problem can be left to fester.

As the Arab-Israeli dispute slowly winds down, the Kurdish issue will bid to
replace it as the leading factor of instability in the geo-strategically important Middle
East. Furthermore, since the Kurds sit on a great deal of the Middle East’s oil and
possibly even more important water resources, the Kurdish issue will become even
more important in the future. When this is done, it will be found that most Kurds
would probably still be satisfied with meaningful cultural rights and real democracy.
If these legitimate demands were instituted, most Kurds would be willing to accept
the current state boundaries. However if the status quo of nothing for the Kurds
continues to be the policy, the frustrated Kurds will continue to be alienated and
increasingly becoming violent. Eventually they will explode and jeopardize the
regional security.
Unfortunately for the alliance, US human rights concerns are moving into high gear. With the addition of religious persecution as a possible topic of dispute, the human-rights agenda important to the US has become more intensive. European states have been urging Turkey to improve its human rights record and changes in its policy towards the Kurds. These criticisms seemed to have had an adverse affect on the Turkish leadership. In particular, the threat to suspend Turkey from the Council of Europe when it aspired to join the EU rekindled the belief that Europe did not want a Moslem Turkey in Europe. Europe's insistence on the need to find a political solution to the Kurdish question evokes suspicion in Turkey that Europe was seeking the fragmentation of the country.

US Turkish differences are more clearly visible in the Middle East policy, although superficially there is a consensus. Washington and Ankara agree that the existing regional balance has to be kept and stabilized under continued supervision of Western interests. The rise of any regional hegemonic power must be prevented. The regional spread of weapons of mass destruction must be limited and finally undone. The peace process has to be brought to a successful conclusion. The establishment of a multinational peace and stability-oriented regional network has to be promoted.

But beyond these common general goals, Turkish and US regional policies differ. This is most obvious in attitudes toward the Iraqi regime and the handling of the situation in northern Iraq. Washington wants to oust Saddam Hussain and use a common Kurdish front in northern Iraq for that purpose. The Turkish leadership wants to keep Iraq intact even at the cost of continuing Saddam's reign, and prevent the establishment of an autonomous Kurdish political entity in northern Iraq, which would be expected to destabilize Turkey's own Kurdish area.

As a consequence, Turkish-American cooperation in dealing with Iraq has often been accompanied by thinly veiled Turkish mistrust of American moves.
Should the recent American moves to organize Iraqi opposition against Saddam prove successful but result in political turmoil in Baghdad because of the inability of the opposition to form a stable new Iraqi regime, a breakaway of the Kurdish province in the north is possible. In such a situation Turkey's intervention would be inevitable, most likely upsetting the political geometry of the region. Thus Washington would be well advised to continue its close contact with Ankara in shaping and executing Iraq policy and to develop a clear idea of where and how Turkey should fit in American designs for a political restricting of a post-Saddam Iraq.

Turkish and US policies especially differ on relations with Iran. Here, Ankara works against the declared US interests by seeking to keep normal relations with Tehran and to use Iranian resources for satisfying Turkey's growing energy needs. All this clearly breaks continued US efforts to isolate Iran from international politics. Ankara's policy of normal relations is not something specific to Turkish Islamists, as some people think, although the spectacular Iran gas deal - that evades if not contradicts Iran-Libya Sanction Act (ILSA) was concluded during the administration of Turkey's first Islamist prime minister, Necmettin Erbakan from the Refah (Welfare Party). But with the exception of the military leadership, which maintains a certain reservation toward Tehran, all Turkish political forces advocate normal relations with the neighbour to the east that serves as another important conduit to the Central Asian region besides the routes that pass through the politically unstable Caucasian states.

Of course, normal relations with Iran also include political differences at times and competition with regard to developments in the Caspian Sea area. However, these would never lead to a policy of total disruption of relations or other forms of containment toward Iran. To keep Turkey as an ally to realize broader US strategic
regional interests, Washington does not complain too loudly about Ankara’s independent policy toward Iran.

Similarly, Ankara expresses its irritation only mildly about US policy toward Syria. “Many Turkish decision makers tend to believe that the United States is more concerned about gaining Syria’s goodwill to obtain its support for the peace process rather than pressing Syria to quit sponsoring terrorism.” For Ankara, the Syrian regime has been the most potent supporter of Turkey’s most important internal threat, the PKK. Even after Turkey pressured Damascus in October 1998 to oust PKK leader Öcalan and officially stop supporting the organization or risk a military invasion of Syrian territory, Ankara is still suspicious concerning the long-term reliability of Syria’s commitment.

Furthermore, Turkish political circles fear that United States and Israel may put pressure on Ankara to accommodate Syrian requests to share the water of the Euphrates in exchange for Syria’s leaving the water resources of the Golan Heights to Israel within the framework of an overall Israeli-Syrian arrangement. Turkey does not want to become a victim of the peace process in that manner as long as the Turkish military and political elite continue to consider its various disputes with Syria a serious security threat. However, these apprehensions do not influence Ankara’s general strong political support of US efforts in achieving peace in the Middle East.

The United States reckons Turkey as an important state in the geostrategic development of Eurasia, especially the newly independent states (NIS) in the former Soviet south. The United States and Turkey favour the establishment of pro-Western, secular, and if possible democratic states in Central Asia and the Caucasus.

Ankara is of even greater value for Washington regional strategic interests as the crucial link within the east-west energy corridor, which is promoted by the United States as the best solution for bringing Caspian and Central Asian energy resources to
market. The strategic idea is to prevent a re-emergence of Russia as the dominant political and military power in the region. The plan is part of the American strategy of double containment because it also prevents Iran from a stronger engagement in the Caspian region's emerging energy transportation plans.

The US interest perfectly meets Turkey's own interest of establishing itself as a major regional force in relations with the NIS and especially the energy rich countries of the area. For this to happen, it is necessary to limit Russian influence and to restrain Iranian aspirations with regards to transport routes for oil and gas. Given Turkey's own limited strategic leverage, this can only be accomplished with US support.

However, Ankara may have relied too much on US strategic interest in designing a convincing concept for its own part in the energy corridor politics. Turkish political leaders underestimated the influence of the international oil companies and consortia in the final decision on pipeline. As a consequence, for sometime Ankara failed to put enough emphasis on developing a sound and convincing financial scheme for the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline, although it had been clear early on that the economic viability of this proposition would meet with considerable opposition from consortia. Ankara did not heed carefully enough Washington's early warning that the solution not only had to be strategically rational but also economically feasible and that this part of the deal had to be fulfilled mainly by the regional states through which the pipelines would run; hence Ankara's disillusionment increased when the project ran into serious difficulties in late 1998.

On analysing, it is also clear that the US administration unintentionally sent unclear political signals to Ankara as to what it would contribute to the realization of Baku-Ceyhan and what is expected from Turkey. The complications surrounding the realization of the pipeline project show that despite close and intense cooperation,
misunderstandings can arise because of insufficient mutual knowledge. It also shows that US and Turkish strategic culture and their broader political attitudes toward regional issues are not fully congruent.

If the Baku-Ceyhan project should falter or be postponed for a considerable time because of its bleak commercial prospects Turkish disappointment could easily express itself in a new wave of anti-US feeling. It would be difficult for its political leaders and especially for the public to understand that even the US government may not be able to enforce its strategic goals on the decision making bodies of international oil companies.

Taken together, these observations suggest that the more Ankara is convinced that Turkey has to design its own future based on a more assertive pursuit of its national interests and security requirements, the more problems will arise for US-Turkish alliance. The re-nationalization of Turkey’s political orientation that is an unavoidable side effect of the policy of “re-enforced” Kemalism under the leadership of the military and state elites will inevitably also refocus Turkey’s foreign policy on a more strictly national agenda, gradually pushing international bonds and commitments into the background. The increasingly narrow Turkish approach to international political affairs will often confront broader US strategic requirements.