



Turkey: An Increasingly Undependable Ally

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Executive Summary



Since the Cold War, the United States and Turkey have had a strong partnership based on shared strategic interests and aspirations towards sharing the same values. This alliance continued even after the collapse of Soviet Union, the geopolitical threat that Washington and Ankara faced together. For the last quarter century Turkey has been touted as the United States' closest partner in the Middle East, a status cemented by its participation in the 1991 Gulf War, and an example of democracy and stability for the rest of the region. Today, however, the reality is entirely different. No longer is Turkey a dependable U.S. ally; U.S. policy needs to adjust accordingly.

As the United States deals with an unraveling Middle East—particularly the threat of the terrorist group calling itself the

Islamic State (ISIS), but also a wider sectarian conflict in Iraq and Syria, an escalating civil war in Yemen, and a power struggle between Iran and Saudi Arabia playing out in all these arenas—Turkey is largely absent, at best, or directly undermining U.S. interests, at worst. Moreover, the ruling Justice and Development Party's (AKP) attacks on judicial independence, freedom of speech, and rule of law move Turkey further and further away from the democratic values that used to set Turkey apart in the Middle East. In light of these developments, the United States may have to look elsewhere for a reliable strategic partner in the region.

In 2013, the Bipartisan Policy Center's (BPC) Turkey Task Force released a report noting a growing mismatch in U.S. and Turkish priorities in response to a series of critical regional

challenges—most notably in Syria, but also in Iraq, Israel, and Cyprus—challenges that were not being addressed frankly by either side. Given these emerging differences on foreign policy and in the aftermath of the Gezi Park protests, the task force recommended that, for the United States to maintain this historic partnership, it would need to give up its practice of unilaterally praising Turkey, especially when that rhetoric did not correspond with reality. Optimistic that this rough patch in the U.S.-Turkish relationship could be managed, the report suggested that, “American policymakers should recognize these differences and the challenges currently facing Turkey and their implications for greater U.S.-Turkish cooperation. Rather than eliding these concerns, U.S. policy should move away from rhetoric and toward a realistic assessment and dialogue about the state of the relationship with Turkey.”¹

Since 2013, however, the rift between Washington and Ankara has only widened. It is the task force’s express hope that it be healed one day, but they are no longer sure that this can be done in the near-term. Nor is it certain that a change in rhetoric or even a period of “benign neglect” would suffice, at this point, to put the relationship back on track. Turkey’s leaders are increasingly charting a course that runs opposite that of the United States—centralizing power at home in a drive towards an Islamist, strongman authoritarianism with neither constitutional limits nor institutional checks and balances and supporting radical Sunni Islamists at the expense of peace and stability in the region.

With conflict spreading throughout the region, now more than ever, the United States is in need of strong and committed partners in the Middle East. Despite the strong relationship that the United States and Turkey once shared, Turkey’s more recent actions show that it can no longer be counted upon to be the ally it once was. Turkey, which has documented connections to extremist groups in Syria, has absented itself from the fight against ISIS. It has failed to secure the length of its 560 mile with Syria against the tide of extremists—though when Kurdish fighters wanted to cross Turkish territory in order to defend against ISIS, Turkey barred their way. Most notably, Turkey has refused to allow U.S. coalition forces

to use its airbase at Incirlik, even for combat search and rescue missions. This decision by Ankara, a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), not only reduces the effectiveness of the campaign against ISIS, but it places the lives of American and allied forces at risk. Even when Turkey seemingly cooperates with the United States, it does so for a different strategic purpose, allowing disagreements between Turkey and the United States to prevent robust cooperation on areas where they do agree. Though Turkey agreed in February to help the United States train Syrian fighters, it did so with a different interpretation of the program’s goals than the United States—that it would target the Assad regime and not just ISIS.

The divergence between U.S. and Turkish foreign policy continues outside the Middle East as well. Not only has Turkey refused to participate in the U.S. and EU sanctions regime against Russia in response to its aggression in Ukraine, but Turkey has also moved closer to Russia. Against prevailing Western sentiment, Turkey aims to increase trade with Russia—and strengthen their energy partnership. When worsening relations with Europe caused Russian President Vladimir Putin to cancel the proposed South Stream gas pipeline that would have traversed Bulgaria, Putin and Erdoğan announced an alternative pipeline, called Turkish Stream, which would transport Russian gas to Europe via Turkey. Additionally, Ankara continues to pursue a deal for a domestic missile defense system with a Chinese company that is under U.S. sanctions for its dealings with Iran and whose product would be incompatible with NATO systems already in place. And though Turkey remains committed to joining the European Union in rhetoric, its domestic policies have all but put EU accession out of reach.

Indeed, Turkey’s domestic politics also put it increasingly at odds with the United States. Since his election to the presidency in August 2014, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has made no secret of his aspiration to change Turkey’s constitution in order to create a strong presidency so that he can rule the country single-handedly and uncontested. The AKP-dominated parliament has helped lay the groundwork for Erdoğan’s vision

of a “New Turkey,” and eradicate any potential adversaries, by repeatedly increasing the powers of the government and eroding fundamental freedoms. Legislative changes in 2014 allowed Erdoğan’s government to assert its dominance over Turkey’s judiciary. Other new laws passed since then have greatly expanded police power, including allowing police to conduct searches, take suspects into custody, and conduct wiretaps without a court order. These changes have empowered the government to act against its critics—most notably in a series of arrests of members of the free press in January 2015—and to bury allegations against it, including widespread accusations of corruption and charges of using its National Intelligence Organization (MIT) to ship weapons to extremist groups in Syria.

Nor is this dismantling of Turkey’s democratic institutions the sole extent of the AKP’s plan. Demonstrating that he is not simply an aspiring dictator bent on power for power’s sake but rather one imbued with a unique ideological agenda, Erdoğan is also seeking to remake Turkish society to achieve an Ottoman-tinged Islamist state inhabited by a “pious generation.” He has already ushered in significant reforms to the educational system, expanding mandatory religious education in all schools and effectively forcing tens of thousands of students into religious schools without their consent. Next, he plans to require all students to learn Ottoman-era Turkish. The government has also watched and done little, except issue sexist statements, as protections for women have crumbled and domestic violence has exploded. Indeed, AKP actions are beginning to progress from politically polarizing to socially combustible as any attempt at free expression, let alone criticism, is systematically outlawed. Finally, with the country increasingly tense ahead of June 7, 2015 parliamentary elections that will likely determine whether Erdoğan will be able to achieve his “New Turkey,” government attempts to influence the Central Bank and major industrial groups are helping weaken Turkey’s remaining bright spot—its economy.

In recent months, U.S. policymakers have exerted considerable effort in bridging these ever-widening differences and securing Ankara’s cooperation on the most pressing strategic challenge

for the United States: defeating ISIS and restoring regional order. A revolving door of U.S. officials traveling to Turkey, including Vice President Joe Biden and Special Presidential Envoy General John Allen, have returned extolling the “depth” of the U.S.-Turkey relationship and reporting favorable and “constructive” talks, but with very little to show for their efforts. And, in the case of the train-and-equip program for Syrian rebels, what little cooperation the U.S. manages to achieve is marked by the same fundamental disagreements that color the U.S.-Turkey relationship more generally. The United States has also expressed its concerns with Turkey’s domestic policy, to little effect. Members of Congress have written several public letters expressing their concern over Turkey’s persecution of the free press, which the Turkish government responded to with accusations and conspiracy theories that the U.S. Congress is on the payroll of Erdoğan’s enemies.

These efforts, the task force fears, amount to too little, too late. The moment when the gaps between Washington and Ankara could have been bridged, if indeed there ever was one, has passed. Under Erdoğan’s guidance, the AKP has embraced and pursued a unified vision of both a Turkey and Middle East transformed. The party has now fully committed itself to pursuing Islamist, one-man rule at home and supporting ideologically affiliated groups and regimes regionally and cannot risk changing course. Even if there were elements within the government wary that these forces, particularly ISIS, have grown uncontrollable and unpredictable, after giving these jihadist free rein to travel through, recruit from, equip, operate, and recuperate in Turkey, they cannot pull back their support without risking significant blowback and potentially retaliatory attacks from within their own borders. Nor can they abandon the authoritarian trajectory Erdoğan has placed the country on. Corruption has become too entrenched and too pervasive among the top ranks of the AKP. Losing power would be a tantamount to a prison sentence, at best, and is simply not an option. Pressing ahead is the only way out now.

As long as this state of affairs persists, the United States needs to understand that the partnership with Turkey it once had, the

alliance it seeks and still speaks of, will remain a thing of the past. Neither the stronger rhetoric the task force has recommended in the past nor the calculated isolation some are now suggesting can serve, the task force believes, to restore a constructive and cooperative U.S.-Turkish relationship absent a drastic change in Turkey's domestic political scene. And if Turkey is no longer willing or able to help the United States achieve its strategic objectives, then U.S. policymakers would be better served using their time and resources to identify regional partners that both share their strategic interests and are more eager to cooperate, rather than continuing to court Turkish leaders for assistance that is clearly not coming. It is time to look beyond the U.S.-Turkish partnership.

To communicate to Turkey that the United States will act in its strategic interests, with or without Turkish support or permission, there are several actions the United States could take:

- **Seek a base in KRG territory:** Seeking an alternative to Incirlik in KRG territory would reduce U.S. reliance on Turkey while also providing similar geographic advantages for operations in Iraq and Syria to combat ISIS.
- **Organize more airdrops to Syrian Kurds:** The United States airdropped weapons, ammunition, and medical supplies to Syrian Kurds fighting ISIS in the town of Kobani in 2014. Turkey vehemently opposed the operation, and there have been no such airdrops since. Organizing more airdrops when the United States has the best possible intelligence to ensure that supplies will not fall into the hands of extremists will have two benefits: first, the United States will be able to support and resupply Kurdish fighters on the frontlines in Iraq and Syria; and second, it will communicate to Turkey that the United States is determined to support its partners in the fight against ISIS, with or without Turkish permission or use of Turkish airspace and bases.
- **Discuss delisting Kurdish groups:** With the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) engaged in a political-solution process

with the Turkish government and emerging as a viable partner against ISIS, there is a growing chorus suggesting that the United States and Europe delist the PKK as a terrorist organization. Notably, PKK fighters earned Western approval after helping provide safe passage for tens of thousands of Yazidis stranded in Iraq's Qandil Mountains. To reflect this new reality, the U.S. government should open discussions on the PKK's role in the ISIS conflict, its peace process with the Turkish state, and whether or not it should still be designated a terrorist organization.

In response to criticism from Turkey over U.S. aid to the Syrian Democratic Union Party (PYD), considered to be an offshoot of the PKK, U.S. officials made clear that the PYD is considered different from the PKK under U.S. law and not designated a terrorist organization. When providing further aid to Syrian Kurds, such as by additional airdrops, the United States should stand by this position, and continue to make the legal status of the PYD clear to Turkey.

- **Look to other regional players:** Beyond Turkey, there are several other nations that are playing and could play larger roles in regional politics, such as: Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Jordan. By increasing investment in their stability and development, the United States could strengthen and expand its existing partnerships with these countries to meet a wider array of regional challenges.

This should not mean, however, turning a blind eye to developments in Turkey or remaining silent as Turkey's democracy continues to unravel. While the objective of U.S. policy toward Turkey should change, its mode need not. The brutally honest rhetoric the task force called for in 2013 is still needed. Engagement with Turkey should deepen, if anything, with a particular focus on its domestic policies. Even if Turkey cannot be counted on to support U.S. interests in the region, it still retains its strategic importance. Were it to complete its devolution from a model of Middle Eastern democracy to authoritarianism the consequences for both Turkey's stability and the region's political

development would be grim. Though the prospects for Erdoğan relinquishing his strongman aspirations are dim, he need not be the only interlocutor for the United States. Indeed, if Washington can move away from its dependence on Turkey as its main strategic partner in the region, U.S. policymakers might find themselves freer to express concerns about Turkey's domestic politics and engage a broader cross-section of Turkish society.

- **Stress shared values:** The United States should emphasize, in public and in private, the importance of Turkey's democracy to the foundations of our bilateral relationship and to hopes of repairing it. This should expressly include statements about the importance of Turkish officials sticking to the institutional structure provided by the Turkish constitution until and unless it is amended. The United States should continue to stress the importance it attaches to freedom of the press, rule of law, government transparency, and human rights, including the protection of women, children, and minorities.
- **Focus on electoral fairness:** With important parliamentary elections about to take place against a backdrop of tension and political uncertainty, U.S. policymakers should urge the Turkish government to invite international observers to assess the fairness and security of the vote. In light of the fraud claims arising from the March 30, 2014 local elections, such an invitation would reassure the opposition and Turkish citizens that the Turkish government means to conduct free and fair elections.

Foreign Policy



It might seem hard to believe now that Turkey once could aspire to, and almost achieved, having “zero problems with neighbors.” But the fallout of the Arab Spring unsettled the region and unraveled Turkey’s foreign policy. What were once policy differences between Ankara and Washington have stretched into fundamental strategic disparities, particularly when it comes to the conflict in Syria and Iraq.

ISIS and Other Extremist Groups

Since sustained opposition to the regime of Bashar al-Assad first took root in Syria four years ago, Turkey has been heavily involved in Syrian affairs. More recently, as the Syrian conflict has spread across borders, it has also taken an interest in Iraq. In both cases,

the AKP government has pursued a sectarian policy of backing Sunni groups while seeking to counter the Alawite Assad regime in Syria as well as the Shi’a-dominated Maliki government in Iraq. This policy has aligned the Turkish government with the interests of a wide range of extremist Islamist groups that have metastasized within the security vacuum of conflict-ridden Syrian. Far from an uncomfortable or incidental association, evidence from the past several years suggests that Turkey has, actively in some cases and tacitly in others, supported a variety of jihadi forces in Syria.

While it would appear that Turkey has never had a very close relationship with ISIS itself, it has maintained, through MIT,

a regular relationship with Jabhat al-Nusra, as well as other smaller extremist groups. It is highly unlikely, however, that Turkish intelligence does not have channels of communication with elements inside ISIS—a fact shown by its negotiation for the release of its diplomats in September 2014. These Turkish ties to extremist groups have gone through several phases that more closely correspond to the evolution of Turkey's own interests in Syria and relationship with various jihadi factions, rather than a response to Western concerns and pressure.

Turkey and Extremists: What is the Relationship?

Until early 2013, Turkey pursued an “open-door” policy toward anyone wishing to fight against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Extremists, including declared al-Qaeda affiliates, were able to operate openly in areas inside Turkey close to the Syrian border. There were “offices” in apartments in towns and cities close to the border that served as staging posts for foreign volunteers. Also during this period, Turkish artillery, stationed along the Syrian border, appears to have coordinated with extremists to fire on regime targets.

Starting in early 2013, however, the Turkish authorities began trying to make the extremist groups less visible, even while continuing to support their activities. Many of the staging posts were moved across the border into rebel-held territory inside Syria, though extremists remained active inside Turkey. From Turkey, they were still able to move freely across the border into and out of Syria and purchase equipment (e.g., clothes, boots, etc.) inside Turkey. They just did not advertise their presence. Maybe as a concession for making it harder for extremists to operate within its borders MIT provided them with significant material assistance directly in Syria. Throughout 2014, multiple trucks driven by MIT officers were found to be ferrying weapons into the war zone.²

Throughout this period, the AKP was confident that its support for the forces opposed to Assad would protect them against blowback by any of the terrorist and jihadi groups across the border. While

that attitude appears to remain in place with regards to al-Nusra, Turkey's approach to ISIS has definitely evolved.

Turkey's relationship with ISIS was complicated by the group's seizure of the Iraqi city of Mosul in June 2014, together with Turkey's consulate there and 49 of its employees.³ These hostages were released in several months later in September as a result of an agreement that still remains murky. Turkey has rigorously denied paying a ransom, but reports suggest that around 185 ISIS members and sympathizers—some of them being held in jails inside Turkey, others held captive by Syrian groups allied with Turkey—were freed in exchange.⁴ It is unclear what else Turkey may have given. Nevertheless, this episode established both growing Turkish unease with ISIS but also made clear that Turkish intelligence does have maintain some channels of communication with ISIS.

Indeed, even though the fears that Turkey might now be targeted by ISIS have led to some restrictions on the movement and equipping of the groups' fighters, Turkey appears wary of cutting off ties altogether. AKP officials are convinced that if they clamped down too hard on ISIS activities inside Turkey the risk of an ISIS attack inside the country would rise.

Transit Through Turkey

Turkey is the primary conduit for would-be mujahideen to the battlefields of Syria and Iraq.⁵ Though the Turkish government might not have actively sought to facilitate this jihadi-tourism, it was a tacit enabler, doing little, at least until recently, to prevent it. And any attempts made in recent months by Ankara to tamp down on foreign fighters transiting through its territory has been both limited and driven more by internal security concerns than a genuine desire to address the demands of Western allies.

There are currently two main transit routes to the Syrian border: one runs through Gaziantep/Hatay before crossing into Syria through the mountains on the far west of the Turkish-Syrian border

into territory controlled by non-ISIS groups, such as al-Nusra; the other runs through Şanlıurfa before crossing close to the border gate at Akçakale into territory controlled by ISIS.⁶

Nearly all would-be mujahideen arrive in Turkey by air, often after connecting through another destination. Most then travel onwards to Gaziantep/Hatay or Akçakale by intercity bus. Once they are close to the border, the would-be mujahideen are met in person by or have a telephone number of someone who will help them cross into Syria. Many of those who eventually join ISIS cross into territory in Syria controlled by other rebel groups—including, but not restricted to, al-Nusra—and then make their way to territory controlled by ISIS.

On the west of the border in particular, where several villages have long depended on smuggling for their livelihood, crossing the border is largely a commercial operation. The would-be mujahideen simply pay a smuggler to get them into Syria; in some villages close to the border, these aspiring fighters can easily be spotted openly waiting to be taken across. Farther east, infiltration into Syria is more likely to be organized by forces with close links with an extremist organization, most likely ISIS, which controls the territory on the Syrian side of the border.

To facilitate this flow of foreign fighters, all of the Syrian rebel groups have a presence among the refugee communities on the Turkish side of the long border area. In early 2015, for example, extremist Islamists were openly using one of the most upmarket cafes in Şanlıurfa as an office. Young recruits in their late teens and twenties, mostly in black or camouflage fatigues with army boots, were coming in and meeting with older men who seemed to be permanently based in the café. But Syrian refugees report that ISIS is also active in Şanlıurfa and account for its presence by claiming that it has struck some form of agreement—whether explicit or tacit—with the Turkish authorities. ISIS members propagandize and try to enforce conservative Islamic values, such as dress codes, among the refugee community as well as, until recently, keeping their families on Turkish side. After a

series of internal feuds and a wave of defections, however, ISIS leaders have been encouraging their members to move their wives and children into Syria or Iraq to make it more difficult for any defectors to flee into Turkey if they become disillusioned.

Turkey did little to shut down these extremist highways until January 2015. The recent change can be seen in, for example, the “Hijrah to the Islamic State,” which was published online in early 2015. Apparently written by a British ISIS fighter in Syria, the document details how volunteers from Western countries can join ISIS, including detailing what clothes and equipment to bring and how to travel to the Turkish-Syrian border. The document explicitly states that it has recently become more difficult to transit Turkey.⁷

It appears, however, that Turkish attempts to clamp down on foreign recruits transit through their territory to fight in Syria and Iraq is driven particularly by the fear that ISIS now poses a threat to Turkey’s own security. As a result, the focus of the AKP’s increased sensitivity is very much on recruits to ISIS rather than other extremist organizations and, therefore, these efforts still fall far short of what is being demanded by the United States and the EU.

Foreign fighters traveling from Western nations are not the only ones using Turkey as a transit hub. Reports are plentiful and credible of the Turkish authorities allowing extremist Islamist groups from within Syria to cross into Turkey so as to more quickly, effectively, or quietly attack their opponents, whether regime forces or Syrian Kurds. Turan Yılmaz, the former sub-governor (kaymakam) of the border district of Yayladağı, has confirmed that he allowed a coalition of rebel forces, including al-Nusra and other extremist Islamist groups, to transit Turkey to strike at regime forces while he was in his post in June 2014.⁸ Additionally, there were numerous reports by Turkish and Syrian Kurds that Turkey was allowing ISIS militants to transit Turkey in order to conduct flanking attacks on the defenders of Kobani.

Artillery Support

Turkish government involvement with extremist groups unfortunately extends beyond just turning a blind eye to their travels. At least in the beginning phases of the war, the Turkish military appears to have actively coordinated with Islamist rebels to provide indirect fire support against Assad regime targets.

In 2012, the AKP changed the rules of engagement for its artillery units deployed along the Syrian border.⁹ They were authorized to respond immediately to any shells or rockets/missiles that crossed from Syria into Turkey. The impression that the Turkish public was given was that this was a defensive measure to protect Turkey from attack. In practice, whenever anything landed on the Turkish side of the border, Turkish artillery units struck at Syrian regime targets inside Syria, without first determining whether they had been responsible—much less whether Turkey had been deliberately targeted.

On numerous occasions, shells that have landed inside Turkey appear to have come from rebels engaged in fighting with regime forces rather than from the regime forces themselves. Yet in each instance, the Turkish response has been to target regime forces. There have also been cases when Turkish artillery has fired on regime forces inside Syria without any provocation. There have been numerous reports, including by eyewitnesses, that such Turkish artillery strikes have been used to support extremist Islamist groups engaged in fighting with regime forces inside Syria. But, until February 2015, there had been no concrete proof.

In March 2014, two members of the Turkish security forces were killed by Islamist extremists from Syria after they tried to stop a truck at a roadblock in Niğde province in southeast Turkey.¹⁰ The militants were subsequently captured. The full circumstances of the incident—not least what the militants were doing and why they opened fire—remain unclear. However, immediately after the incident, the Turkish security forces tapped the phones of everyone whose number was found in the cell phones of the militants.

In February 2015, the transcripts of these tapped telephone calls were included in the evidence presented to court during the trial of the militants. The intercepts include conversations between members of a Turkmen rebel group inside Syria and their liaison inside Turkey during the failed attempt by a coalition of FSA fighters and extremist Islamist groups to retake the town of Kassab in June 2014. It is clear from the conversation that members of the Turkmen group in Syria have been serving as spotters, calling in Turkish artillery strikes on regime forces.¹¹ In one of the intercepts, a Turkmen in Syria mentions having sent new coordinates for the positions of regime forces by WhatsApp, asking his interlocutor to forward them to the Turkish military and ask for more artillery strikes as the previous ones had been very successful. It is highly unlikely that the attack on Kassab was the only time that Turkey used artillery strikes to support an attack by rebel forces, including al-Qaeda affiliates. This incident fits into a broader pattern of Turkish support for Sunni Islamist groups fighting in Syria against both the Assad regime and Syrian Kurds.

Arms Shipments to Extremist Groups

Turkey has also been accused of using its intelligence apparatus to funnel weapons into Syria.¹² On January 19, 2014, a convoy of trucks carrying weapons to Syria and escorted by MiT personnel was stopped at a Gendarmerie checkpoint in the southern province of Adana. The MiT personnel contacted the government in Ankara, which ordered the gendarmes to release the trucks. Erdoğan later issued a statement claiming that the trucks were carrying “aid” to Turkmen groups in Syria. The government subsequently imposed a news blackout on the incident and has filed criminal charges against the officials who had stopped the trucks.¹³ On April 5, 2015, warrants were issued for the arrest of 34 of the Gendarmerie personnel involved in the halting of the trucks.¹⁴

In January 2015, materials related to the criminal proceedings against the officials, including the statements of the accused and witnesses, were leaked onto the internet (triggering another news blackout by the AKP).¹⁵ The documents leave no doubt that the three trucks were carrying weapons and that it was not

the first such convoy that MIT had sent to Syria. No Turkmen organization in Syria has confirmed receiving the weapons in the trucks detained in Adana, while some directly refute it, suggesting that they might have been destined for a more extreme group that enjoys AKP backing, such as al-Nusra.

Beyond such active provision of arms by the government, Turkey remains an important source of provisions for the Syrian and Iraqi conflicts. All the rebel groups, including ISIS, continue to source a large proportion of their non-lethal equipment from Turkish towns close to the border.¹⁶ Street traders in Reyhanlı report that members of extremist organizations such as al-Nusra and ISIS still cross into Turkey to make purchases, but are more circumspect than in 2013 and early 2014.

Treatment in Turkish Hospitals

There have long been reports of members of Islamist extremist organizations receiving treatment in Turkish hospitals for wounds received while fighting in Syria. There is no doubt that many are members of ISIS.

Several of the reports have been well-substantiated, including photographs of the militants in their hospital beds. What is less clear is the degree of official Turkish involvement. Turkish authorities are certainly aware of the practice, as there is a police officer stationed in every hospital. On March 5, 2015, the governor's office in the western province of Denizli issued a statement confirming that an ISIS commander—a Turkish national referred to as “Emrah Ç”—was currently receiving treatment at the Pamukkale University Hospital in Denizli for wounds received during the failed ISIS attempt to capture Kobani.¹⁷ The statement said that he “is being treated in accordance with the right of every one of our citizens to benefit from medical services.”¹⁸ It was the first official statement confirming that an ISIS fighter was being treated in a Turkish hospital. In contrast, there have been several instances of Turkish citizens who were wounded while fighting on the Kurdish side against ISIS—at Kobani and before—who were taken to hospitals in Turkey for treatment only to be arrested in

their hospital beds and charged with “membership in an outlawed terrorist organization.”

Recruitment

There is no single recruitment network for ISIS in Turkey. Many Turkish recruits find their own way to the border and cross into ISIS-controlled territory, such as through the Akçakale border gate. There are no visa requirements for Turkish citizens crossing into Syria; thus, provided that the border gate is open, Turkish nationals can simply walk across. Others are assisted by individuals active in conservative Islamic charities, associations, or publications who have contacts with members of ISIS, either in Turkey or in Syria. The charities often have genuine charitable works, such as the provision of humanitarian aid to Sunni Syrians displaced by the civil war, in areas in or adjacent to ISIS-controlled territory. Would-be mujahideen can cross into Syria with an aid convoy and never return.

Even more so than with foreign volunteers, it is extremely difficult for the Turkish authorities to filter out Turkish citizens going to fight for ISIS from those crossing into Syria to join other groups or to help to provide humanitarian aid to internally displaced people.

Since the beginning of 2015, there have been signs of a change in official attitudes toward Turkish nationals joining ISIS. On January 27, 2015, police in the southeastern Gaziantep Province made their first ever arrest of a Turkish national on charges of ISIS membership.¹⁹ On February 11, the Turkish General Staff posted a statement on its website stating that a Turkish national had been among 14 people detained by the Turkish military trying to cross into Syria to fight for ISIS, marking the first time that the Turkish security forces had reported arresting a Turkish national to prevent him from joining ISIS.²⁰ However, such efforts remain the exception rather than the rule. Estimates of the number of Turkish nationals who have joined ISIS range from 700 to more than 1,000.²¹

More revealingly, while the AKP readily bans websites critical of its policies, it has yet to impose any restrictions on the propaganda

outlets which are radicalizing young Turks to fight for ISIS. There are already signs of a rise in radicalization amongst the Turkish population. In January 2015, an opinion poll by the Metropoll research company found that 20 percent of Turks believed that the staff of the French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo deserved to be killed for insulting the Prophet Muhammad.²² Similarly, 20 percent believed that violence in the name of Islam was justified. Although the figure only represents a minority of the Turkish population, it represents a threefold increase on the findings of similar surveys five years ago.

Suleyman Shah Operation

The evacuation of the tomb of Suleyman Shah on the night of February 21–22, 2015, was another indication of the shift in Turkish attitudes toward ISIS and the growing tendency to see the organization as a threat.²³

In March 2014, as ISIS rapidly expanded the area of Syria under its control, the Turkish garrison guarding Suleyman Shah became surrounded. Initially, the AKP feared that the site would be overrun. Traditionally, it had been guarded by around 40 Turkish troops, who were changed every six months. In April 2014, Turkey sent a heavily armed convoy 30 kilometers across the border to Suleyman Shah with a fresh garrison and new supplies.²⁴ Over the following months, hard-line elements among the ISIS militants surrounding the enclave frequently threatened to attack it, kill the garrison, and destroy the tomb. They hesitated for fear of inciting a fierce military response, including Turkish air strikes. However, Ankara was also reluctant to send in yet another convoy for fear of an ISIS attack, which it believed could drag Turkey into the Syrian civil war.

The standoff could not continue indefinitely. By mid-February 2015, calculating that ISIS—which had recently been driven back from the outskirts of Kobani and was focused on trying to avoid retreating any farther—would be unlikely to intervene, Turkey finalized plans for the tomb’s evacuation and relocation to a more easily defensible site 200 meters from the Turkish border.

ISIS’s goal had been to force the Turkish garrison to withdraw and to destroy the buildings at the site of the tomb. It had no reason to intervene when Turkey sent in a 100-vehicle armored convoy to evacuate the garrison, destroy the buildings, remove the bodies of Suleyman Shah and two of his companions, and rebury them on the Turkish-Syrian border.

An ISIS Threat to Turkey?

In late 2014, there was an increase in Turkish intelligence reports of a possible ISIS attack inside the country. For MIT in particular, the suicide bombing in Sultanahmet, Istanbul, on January 6, 2015 was the realization of these fears. As soon as the identity and background of the bomber, named as Diana Ramazonova, became known, they immediately labeled it the first ISIS attack inside Turkey. In fact, although Ramazonova’s husband appears to have fought and died for ISIS in Syria, there is no evidence that ISIS itself planned the attack.

Nevertheless, on January 26, 2015, the Turkish media quoted sources in MIT as reporting that they had uncovered a plot by a team of 17 ISIS militants to attack foreign diplomatic representatives in Istanbul.²⁵ On February 19, 2015, the Turkish media reported that MIT had issued a warning to the police and gendarmerie on February 3, 2015 that 3,000 IS militants were preparing to cross into Turkey from Syria to stage attacks.²⁶ None of these attacks have occurred. Indeed, although it is possible that MIT genuinely believes that these reports are genuine, no convincing evidence has appeared to suggest that ISIS really did have such plans.

The Syrian Conflict and the Kurds

Turkish support for extremist groups fighting in Syria and Iraq is informed by both ideology and realpolitik. President Erdoğan’s and Prime Minister Davutoglu’s aspirations for Turkish influence over the Middle East have led them to emphasize close relations with Syria, as a gateway to the Arab world and rest of the region. Under the policy of “zero problems with neighbors,” Ankara

was content to deepen its ties with the Assad regime. But the failure of the Arab Spring and the start of the Syrian conflict saw Turkey throw their backing to Syrian Sunni groups, who, if they seized the country, could align with the AKP both geopolitical and ideologically. The refusal of the United States and Western nations to support Turkey's calls for Assad's ouster helped solidify the AKP's decision to support its ideological brethren represented by al-Nusra and its ilk.

These Sunni Islamist groups also presented an opportunity for Turkey to achieve another of its most important strategic goals in Syria: absolutely preventing the emergence of an independent Kurdish entity there. Despite deepening ties with the Kurdish Regional Government in northern Iraq, Ankara viewed the Syrian Kurds—much more closely tied to the Turkish PKK than the KRG—as a major threat to its sovereignty. The willingness of al-Nusra, ISIS, and others to fight not just Assad's forces but also those of the Syrian Kurds, who had tried to remain neutral in the conflict, made them a major strategic asset for the AKP.

These dynamics of ideology and core interests have repeatedly thwarted U.S.-Turkish cooperation in Syria. It was concern about the predominant role played by Islamist groups in the Syrian opposition, groups backed by Turkey, that initially made Washington wary of a more muscular policy toward Assad. It has been Turkey's affinity for those same groups, and the even more radical incarnations that have sprung up since, as well as its resentment of the United States for backing away from its original pledges to oust Assad that has kept it from giving any support to the anti-ISIS coalition. And it has been Turkey's vehement opposition to the appearance of any sort of Kurdish autonomy in Syria that led it to block attempts to help lift the siege of Kobani.

Siege on Kobani

On September 11, 2014, Turkey refused to sign a statement drawn up by the United States and ten Arab states—including Saudi Arabia and Qatar, which had once been Ankara's closest allies in terms of policy toward Syria—pledging to combat ISIS.

It is perhaps no coincidence that two days later, on September 13, 2014, ISIS launched an offensive to take the Syrian Kurdish enclave of Kobani. ISIS advanced rapidly, displacing more than 200,000 civilians, who fled toward Turkey.²⁷ Initially, the AKP refused to open the border. However, on September 20, 2014, as ISIS moved closer to the city of Kobani, it relented and allowed the waiting refugees—mostly ethnic Kurds plus some Christians and Yezidis—into Turkey. However, it refused to allow either personnel or supplies to move the other way to support the People's Protection Units (YPG) of the Democratic Union Party (PYD), who were defending the city. The AKP's position remained unchanged even when, on September 22, 2014, a U.S.-led coalition began air strikes against ISIS positions in Syria.

The PYD is ideologically affiliated with, though organizationally distinct from, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which launched an insurgency for greater rights for Turkey's Kurds in August 1984. Publicly, President Erdoğan insisted that the U.S.-led coalition was focusing on the wrong target and that the rise of ISIS was a product of the failure to launch a successful military campaign to overthrow Syrian President Assad. He described ISIS and the PKK as being moral equivalents, insisting that Turkey would remain opposed to both.²⁸

However, most Kurdish nationalists suspected that the AKP was assisting ISIS. In late September 2014, a video began circulating on the Internet allegedly showing Turkish arms supplied to ISIS. The video has never been authenticated, but it remains widely believed to be true among Kurdish nationalists. On October 7, 2014, as ISIS advanced deeper into Kobani, Erdoğan publicly mocked Kurdish fears that it would overrun the city. "It has fallen. It will fall," he said.²⁹ Over the next three days, the predominantly Kurdish southeast of Turkey was swept by the most violent civil unrest in more than 20 years as Kurdish nationalists took to the streets to protest what they regarded as the AKP's support for ISIS. More than 40 people are believed to have been killed in the clashes.³⁰ In addition to targeting the security forces and government buildings, protesters also attacked premises

associated with the Kurdish Hezbollah, which is widely regarded as being sympathetic to ISIS.

Despite the AKP's efforts to seal the border, PKK fighters had succeeded in making their way into Kobani to reinforce the Syrian-Kurdish YPG. Gradually, aided by arms drops and air strikes by the U.S.-led coalition, the YPG and PKK defenders of the city succeeded in halting the ISIS advance.

On October 22, 2014, the AKP announced that it would allow 200 Iraqi Kurdish peshmerga to cross from Turkey into Kobani to reinforce the city's defenders.³¹ Most of the peshmerga were loyal to Masoud Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party, with whom Erdoğan and the AKP have formed a close relationship. The AKP appears to have hoped that the peshmerga's presence would serve as a counterweight to the PYD.

However, when ISIS was finally driven out of Kobani on January 27, 2015, it was the PYD and the PKK that took the credit both internationally and among the region's Kurds.

Turkey and Syrian Kurds

The AKP was disturbed by the emergence of three de facto autonomous Kurdish enclaves, known collectively as Rojava, in northern Syria in June 2012—not least because it feared that it could fuel similar ambitions among its own Kurdish population. Nevertheless, initially it engaged with PYD leader Salih Muslim in an attempt to weaken his ties to the PKK. Although they shared an allegiance to the teachings of Abdullah Öcalan, there were tensions between the PYD and the PKK—not least because the PKK believed that the more recently established PYD should look to it for leadership. However, the tensions dissipated through summer 2014 when the PKK rallied to the defense of the Syrian Kurds while—from the PYD's perspective—the AKP appeared content to allow northern Syria to be overrun by ISIS. The AKP's refusal to allow either personnel or equipment into Kobani in September and early October 2014 cemented the shift. Although they are aware of the economic benefits to Rojava of having a good relationship with

Ankara, the Syrian Kurds are unlikely to trust Turkey while the AKP and Erdoğan remain in power.

The effectiveness of Kurdish fighters has not only altered the regional alliances of the Kurds—who are working together in pursuit of a common enemy for one of the first times in modern history—but also the perception of the legitimacy of Kurdish groups, transforming their international perception from terrorists to allies in the fight against terrorism. For Kurdish nationalists in Syria and Turkey, the successful joint defense of Kobani by the YPG and the PKK has turned a sense of ethnic solidarity into something tangible and iconic. The willingness of the PKK to fight—and in many cases die—for Syrian Kurds has boosted its prestige to unprecedented levels both inside and outside the region.

It is now commonplace to see YPG slogans throughout the towns of southeast Turkey. In the rallies to mark the Kurdish New Year of Newroz on March 21, 2015, YPG flags were almost as widespread as those of the PKK. Instead of weakening Kurdish nationalist aspirations, the AKP's policy toward Syria—particularly relative to the siege of Kobani—has both strengthened the PYD and the PKK and driven them closer together.

Do the U.S. and Turkey Share Objectives in Syria?

After months of negotiations, Turkey signed a deal with the United States in February 2015 that would allow for moderate Syrian rebels to be trained and equipped in Turkey. The United States, with training sites in Turkey, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar, plans to train 5,000 Syrian fighters a year for three years.³² This agreement, however, obscures larger differences between Turkey and United States over policy and priorities in Syria.

The United States intends for the program to train and equip Syrian fighters to fight against ISIS—and not the Syrian regime. Turkey, however, has been adamant that the international strategy in Syria should include ousting President Assad, not just combating ISIS. American and Turkish officials made this divergence clear in statements after the agreement was signed. "The aim of

the program is to ensure a political transition and strengthen the opposition in their fight against threats such as extremism, terrorism, and all elements that pose a threat to the opposition, including from the regime,” said Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu.³³ A Pentagon spokesman, however, insisted, “The fight is against [ISIS] and only [ISIS] as far as the coalition is concerned.”³⁴

Despite the U.S. focus on ISIS, it is unclear how the United States will be able to ensure that its weapons and training will not be used against Assad’s forces—a tactic that may have been a motivating factor in Turkey’s decision to participate.

The divide between U.S. and Turkish policy in Syria is made most obvious by the Turks’ ongoing refusal to allow the international coalition to use its Incirlik airbase. Without access to Incirlik, the United States has been forced to fly missions out of the Gulf, a distance of nearly 1,000 miles compared with Incirlik, which is 62 miles from the Syrian border and less than 300 miles from ISIS’s capital of Raqqa. Turkey has even refused to allow the use of Incirlik for rescue missions, including for an ultimately unsuccessful mission launched to rescue captured American journalists James Foley and Steven Sotloff, who were beheaded by ISIS militants in September.³⁵

While Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIS General John Allen has made numerous trips to Turkey to try and persuade Turkey to take a more active role in the coalition, especially by allowing U.S. and coalition forces to fly out of Incirlik, Turkey continues to hold Incirlik as a bargaining chip to secure U.S. cooperation in fighting Assad.

Differing Turkish and U.S. perspectives regarding Syria are nothing new, dating back to the early days of the conflict. Determined to shape a post-Assad Syria in its own image and minimize the Syrian Kurdish population, Turkey supported the Sunni Muslim Brotherhood—affiliated elements within the Syrian opposition—

including Sunni radicals.³⁶ The rise of ISIS has only further complicated the picture. Today, the gulf between Turkey and the United States is broader than ever.

Other Foreign Policy Issues

While the Syrian—and now Iraqi—conflict has been the major source of foreign policy disagreement between Washington and Ankara, it is far from the only one. On a number of important issues, both in the Middle East and beyond the region, the AKP government has increasingly pursued a foreign policy that not just diverges, but often clashes, with that of the United States.

Ukraine/Russia

Turkey, which initially echoed Western sentiments in defense of Ukraine’s territorial integrity, has since struggled to balance itself between Russia and Ukraine. Crimea is home to the Tatars, an ethnically Turkic community, and in the early days of the Crimean crisis, Turkey was a vocal defender of its Turkic kin in Ukraine against what it worried was an onslaught of Russian nationalism. Russia, however, is becoming an increasingly important ally for Turkey. Despite their disagreements over Syria and Ukraine, Turkey and Russia have moved closer together as energy partners, and those energy considerations have caused Turkey to deviate from the NATO stance on Russian aggression.

Notably, Turkey has refused to support sanctions against Russia. Indeed, while EU countries were imposing sanctions on Russia, Erdoğan was negotiating to increase Turkey’s trade volume with Russia threefold by 2020 and to expand their energy partnership.³⁷

However, despite closer ties with Russia, President Erdoğan traveled to Kiev in March and offered the country a \$50 million loan as well as an additional \$10 million in humanitarian assistance.³⁸ “We have expressed our support for the territorial integrity, political union, and sovereignty of Ukraine, including Crimea, in every platform,” said Erdoğan.³⁹

Turkey seems determined to chart a middle course between Ukraine and Russia by extending material and rhetorical support to Ukraine and particularly the Tatars, while remaining unwilling to take any concrete action that would jeopardize its growing economic relationship with Moscow.

Energy

As both a major consumer- and transit-rich state, energy plays an important role in both Turkish domestic and foreign policies. An energy importer, Turkey imported approximately 45.3 billion cubic meters (BCM) of natural gas last year, with Russia accounting for more than half of those imports.⁴⁰ In looking for partners to meet its energy needs and to take advantage of its strategic geographic position, Turkey has sought to build energy relations with Azerbaijan, Russia, and the Kurdistan Regional Government, both to acquire energy for itself and to position itself as a pipeline country for energy imports to Europe.

The Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline Project (TANAP) is a nearly 2,000-kilometers-long section of the proposed Southern Gas Corridor, which would extend from Azerbaijan's Shah Deniz II field through Turkey. The pipeline is slotted to send six BCM of natural gas to Turkish markets in 2018 as well as an additional 10 BCM to European markets by 2020, potentially posing a challenge to Russia's dominance of European markets.⁴¹ Construction of the pipeline began on March 17, 2015, and the deal offers Turkey the chance to both increase its importance as a transit state and diversify the source of its natural gas by boosting its partnership with Azerbaijan.

Regardless of the future of TANAP, increasing natural gas imports remain a reality of Turkey's future. In December 2014, Russia's Gazprom abandoned its South Stream Project, which would have run across the Black Sea to Bulgaria, and came to an agreement with the Turkish Energy Firm BOTAŞ that would potentially allow for a pipeline under the Black Sea to Turkey. On March 17, 2015, Presidents Erdoğan and Vladimir Putin discussed the Turkish

Stream pipeline, a key component of Turkish-Russian relations and Russia's energy strategy. The discussion comes after a 10.25 percent discount on Russian natural gas to Turkey in February, signaling the potential for a more robust gas partnership between Russia and Turkey going forward.⁴² With a capacity of 63 BCM (nearly double that of TANAP), the proposed Turkish Stream offers the potential to deliver larger quantities of gas imports to Turkey, but it increases Turkish dependence on Russia and means Turkey is less likely to diversify its gas sources by looking elsewhere, such as to its partnership with Azerbaijan.⁴³ The building of the Turkish Stream would not pose a direct threat to the construction of TANAP, a process that has already begun; but it would constitute a serious challenge for any efforts to get Central Asian gas resources, primarily from Turkmenistan, fed into the pipeline across the Caspian Sea.

Missile Defense System

In 2013, the Turkish government—shocking the United States and its NATO allies—announced that it had chosen the Chinese defense company China Precision Machinery Export-Import Group (CPMIEC) over NATO-nation-owned competitors for its long-range air and missile defense system.

The Chinese bid has its advantages, underbidding its competitors by \$1 billion and including generous technology transfers to Turkey.⁴⁴ But the deal also has numerous drawbacks. The Chinese FD-2000 system (the export derivative of China's HQ-9) will be incompatible with NATO's missile defense shield or early warning radars, which are already deployed in Turkey.⁴⁵ Effective anti-aircraft and missile defense requires accurate missiles and far-reaching, precise radars to identify incoming targets. By choosing the HQ-9 instead of the NATO-compatible Patriot or Aster 30 Samp/T, Turkey is depriving itself of one-half of that equation. It will not be able to take advantage of NATO early warning radars already deployed in Turkey or the NATO missile defense shield, hampering its own efforts to build a seamless, multilayered missile defense system.

Ankara has claimed that this objection is solely “technical” and that the system could be made inter-operational with NATO systems. However, both the United States and NATO reject potential efforts to do so, as they would create the risk of China being able to access NATO infrastructure and data. American lawmakers even put this into legislation, writing a provision into the National Defense Authorization Act stating that no U.S. funds could be used to integrate Chinese missile defense systems into U.S. or NATO systems.⁴⁶

In addition to defense concerns, the United States is particularly troubled by Turkey’s choice because CPMIEC is under U.S. sanctions due to accusations of illicit arms- and missile-technology sales to Iran and Pakistan. Should Turkey proceed with the Chinese system, Turkish companies who work with CPMIEC could come under U.S. sanctions as well.⁴⁷

In response to the pushback it faced after initially choosing CPMIEC in September 2013, Turkey has wavered. After announcing its intention to proceed with the CPMIEC system, Turkey extended the bidding period several times, allowing Western defense companies to rework their bids. In January, the deadline was extended for another six months, the sixth extension of the bidding window.⁴⁸ In February 2015, Turkish Defense Minister Ismet Yılmaz announced that, though Turkey had not made a final decision, its missile defense system “will be integrated with the national system for Turkey’s defense and will be used without integrating with NATO,” while a spokesman for President Erdoğan insisted that “of course” the two systems will be integrated.⁴⁹

EU Relations

With worrying developments in Turkey’s domestic policy, the European Parliament’s progress report on Turkey was released with a frank statement by the newly appointed Turkey rapporteur Kati Piri on the state of fundamental freedoms in Turkey. “The rule of law and the respect for fundamental freedoms form the core

of the EU negotiation process,” it read. “In this respect, Turkey currently does not meet the expectations that we have for an EU candidate country. The concerns of the European Parliament focus on the freedom of speech and the independence of the judiciary—both essential components of an open democracy.”⁵⁰

As Turkey has cracked down on freedom of the press, judicial independence, and rule of law at home, the European Union has voiced its concerns—and Erdoğan, in response, has lashed out. “Those who close their eyes to what happens in Syria, who turn their back on the massacres in Palestine, cannot preach to us about freedom, democracy, and human rights,” said Erdoğan, in response to EU condemnation of Turkey’s December raid against the media.⁵¹

However, despite charged rhetoric and tension in the relationship, Turkey remains an EU candidate state. Erdoğan has since extolled the European Union as a “strategic choice” for Turkey, and Piri has explained, “The most effective way to increase leverage on Turkey is, however, through the negotiation process.”⁵²

Accessions talks began in 2005 with the 35-chapter Accession Partnership for Turkey—but Turkey has only opened 14 out of 35 chapters, and closed just one. The European Union opened Chapter 22 in November 2013, the first chapter opened after a three-year hiatus. EU Minister Volkan Bozkir is now calling for the European Union to open additional chapters with Turkey. “In my contacts with the EU commissioners, I have always voiced this particularity: Put the numbers of the all unopened chapters in a sack and draw. Whichever number is drawn at random, we are ready to open that chapter in two months,” he said in January at the World Economic Forum in Davos.⁵³

Turkey has called on the European Union to open chapters 23 and 24, which cover issues related to the judiciary, fundamental freedoms, and security, a call that Piri echoed.

Iran/Yemen

Turkey is also looking further afield in the region, beyond just the Syrian and Iraqi conflicts along its border. In particular, Iran's growing assertiveness—and perceived U.S. toleration thereof—has led President Erdoğan to react more vocally to Iranian ambitions than ever before. This has been facilitated in part by a growing rapprochement between Turkey and Saudi Arabia, who had previously fallen out over the crisis in Egypt when Turkey supported the Muslim Brotherhood regime while Saudi Arabia endorsed its removal from power.

In response to Iran's activism and increasing influence in the region—in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen as well as the prospect for reentry into the international community of nations if a comprehensive nuclear agreement is reached with world powers this summer—the new Saudi leader, King Salman, appears to have sought to improve ties with Turkey and to reduce Saudi opposition to the Brotherhood. While Saudi Arabia is heavily focused on Iran's role in the Yemen civil war, Ankara appears more concerned by Iran's very overt role in Iraq, particularly Iranian boots on the ground in the fighting around Tikrit. In a recent interview, Erdoğan referred directly to al-Quds brigade commander Qassem Soleimani, stating that “this person is someone I know very well . . . he is part of all operations being conducted in Iraq . . . what do they want to do? To further increase the power of the Shi'a in Iraq,” adding that “they want to fill the places vacated by [ISIS].”⁵⁴ On a separate occasion, Erdoğan emphasized that “it is no longer possible to tolerate” Iran's ambitions in Yemen and Iraq.⁵⁵

The U.S.-Iranian rapprochement appears to be one of the factors affecting Turkish calculations, and Erdoğan's reactions fit with the growing apprehension in the region against U.S.-Iranian ties. Turkish leaders have for decades worried that Washington would one day return to the pre-1979 situation by making Iran America's main ally in the Middle East, a shift that would undermine Turkey's regional importance. Turkish reactions to the April 2 agreement on Iran's nuclear program were mixed at best. The pro-AKP

newspaper *Yeni Şafak* blasted the deal as inferior to what Turkey negotiated already in 2010, when then-Prime Minister Erdoğan and Foreign Minister Davutoğlu sought to position themselves as mediators between Washington and Tehran in cooperation with Brazil.⁵⁶

Turkey's reaction suggests that the United States' dance with Iran is realigning the Middle East in more ways than the Obama administration may have expected. Erdoğan is unlikely to steer Turkey into direct confrontation with Tehran, which Erdoğan once described as his “second home,” as economic and other ties remain important.⁵⁷ Indeed, despite their competing regional ambitions, Erdoğan visited Iran in April 2015, where he was spotted walking hand-in-hand with Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and the two leaders vowed to increase their trade volume to \$30 billion.⁵⁸ Yet Turkey is increasingly wary of Iran's regional ambitions, and less inclined to see alliance with the United States as a way to counter-balance Iran.

Domestic Policy



The authoritarianism of the AKP government has been on display ever since its violent crackdown on the Gezi Park protests in June 2013. But though that episode of violent suppression of political opposition might have been the most visible assault on Turkey’s democracy, it was far from the only or even most damaging one. Following Gezi and then the December 17, 2013 corruption investigation launched against Erdoğan’s close associates, the AKP has been working hard to systematically dismantle the institutional and legal protections against abuse of power. This erosion of civil liberties, rule of law, and checks and balances—when coupled with the government’s social and economic policies—are clear indicators of the “New Turkey” Erdoğan is seeking to create: a totalitarian, Islamist state, with power in the

hands of a single man, controlling state and economy in pursuit of a “pious generation.”

Legislative Changes

Perhaps the most far-reaching changes to Turkey’s democracy have been wrought by the AKP-dominated parliament, which has passed multiple laws over the course of the last year changing the face of fundamental Turkish institutions: the judiciary, security apparatus, and media. Though fought at every turn by the opposition, quite literally in some cases, and challenged by the courts, the AKP has been largely successful implementing these legal changes.

December Security Package

In December 2014, the Turkish Parliament passed legal amendments that would allow police to carry out searches based only on “reasonable suspicion,” as well as extending the courts’ power to seize assets, expanding courts’ wiretapping authorities, restricting lawyers’ access to evidence against their clients, and designating “making threats” against public officials a criminal offense subject to five years in prison.⁵⁹

The bill reversed reforms—made in February 2014, while several government officials were under investigation for corruption—that required “strong suspicion based on concrete evidence” for searches of people and property.⁶⁰

The bill took effect on December 12, 2014. Only two days afterward, the government carried out a massive operation against its critics in the media, indicating that the law was part of a concerted strategy to silence its opponents and stifle free speech.

February Security Package

On March 27, 2015, the Turkish Parliament passed the “Legal Package to Protect Freedoms,” a comprehensive set of security laws that greatly expanded police power, eroding fundamental freedoms in Turkey.

First introduced in February 2015, the package of laws, originally containing 132 articles, was met with strident opposition in Turkey’s Parliament.⁶¹ On two separate occasions in February brawls broke out on the floor of the Parliament that left lawmakers hospitalized. However, despite the opposition’s disapproval and delaying tactics, the legislation continued to be pushed through the AKP-dominated Parliament.

In mid-March, after passing 67 of the proposed articles despite strong opposition, the AKP withdrew another 63 articles, leaving

only two for further consideration. These final two articles passed on March 27 after a parliamentary session lasting more than 16 hours. Out of a total of 231 deputies who took part in the voting, 199 voted in favor while 32 voted against.⁶²

Among its most controversial provisions, the package:⁶³

- **Expands police power** to carry out searches, including those of people and their cars, based only on “reasonable suspicion” and the ability to conduct strip searches.
- **Allows police to wiretap** individuals for up to 48 hours without a warrant.
- **Allows police officers** to “take under protection” anyone considered to be a public disturbance, threat to security, or threat to private property without a court order or approval from a prosecutor.
- **Allows police officers** to keep people in custody for up to 48 hours without a prosecutor’s approval.
- **Increases prison sentences** for demonstrators:
 - With fireworks, slingshots, and iron marbles;
 - With Molotov cocktails, blades, or other tools that could be used to injure;
 - Who partially or fully cover their faces.
- **Mandates that in case of any damage** during protests, the individuals responsible for the damage will have to provide compensation, rather than the government.
- **Gives police officers the ability** to use force, allowing them to shoot at protesters to prevent them from harming property without first using less harmful measures.
- **Expands the powers of governors**, who are appointed by government, to include some of the powers of prosecutors, such as giving orders to police to investigate crimes.

Freedom of Speech

Freedom House demoted Turkey's press freedom from "partly free" to "not free" in 2014 in the wake of the Gezi Park protests and the Erdoğan government's attempts to suppress corruption investigations against it. Since then, press freedom in Turkey has only continued to deteriorate.

On December 14, 2014, the Turkish government carried out a massive operation against its opponents. In a series of pre-dawn raids, Turkish police arrested 31 people, including senior members of the media, top executives, and former police chiefs.⁶⁴

The arrests came nearly a year to the day after the massive graft probe of December 2013, believed to be instigated by members of the Gülen movement, which implicated several government officials as well as Erdoğan himself in widespread allegations of corruption. Since the December 17 operations last year, Erdoğan has sought to bury both the allegations against his government and debilitate the Gülen movement—which is believed to be well-represented in the police, judiciary, and media—by firing or reassigning police officers and jurists involved in the case, silencing the media, and passing legislation weakening the Turkish judiciary.⁶⁵

Suspects were detained on charges of establishing, heading, or being a member of a terrorist organization, with some suspects also taken into custody on charges of fraud and slander. The detentions also came after the government passed a judicial package enabling prosecutors to detain people based on "reasonable suspicion."

The government crackdown on freedom of speech continued in 2015, notably with the arrest of journalist Mehmet Baransu in March. Baransu was arrested for publishing classified documents in 2010 that prompted the "Sledgehammer" coup trials, which implicated major military figures in Turkey.⁶⁶

In response to criticisms of his government's restrictions on speech, Erdoğan remained unmoved, insisting in January 2015 that "nowhere in the world is the press freer than it is in Turkey."⁶⁷

Kurdish Issue

In February, the jailed leader of the PKK, Abdullah Öcalan, called for continued progress in the settlement process between the Turkish state and the PKK. "I invite the PKK to convene an extraordinary congress in spring months to make the strategic and historic decision on the basis of ending the armed struggle," Öcalan was quoted as saying.⁶⁸

He repeated this call in a letter read aloud at March Nevruz celebrations in Turkey's southeastern Diyarbakir Province. "History and our people are demanding from us a democratic solution and peace in line with the spirit of the age," said Öcalan, calling once again for a special conference to discuss laying down arms in accordance with a ten-point framework for peace—a framework that includes a new constitution.⁶⁹

However, tensions have erupted between the Kurdish side and the government, as well as within the government itself, over the issue of establishing a monitoring committee to oversee the peace process. Öcalan and the PKK have demanded the creation of such a committee, and officials in the AKP have been supportive of its creation. Erdoğan, however, has insisted that it is unnecessary and that the settlement process should proceed as it has been, carried out by the government and the MIT.

Furthermore, remarks from Erdoğan that "there has never been any problem called the 'Kurdish issue' in this country," have also drawn ire from Turkey's Kurdish population.⁷⁰ Co-chair of the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) Selahattin Demirtaş retorted, "I just wonder why he has been carrying out this settlement process if there is no Kurdish issue," and denounced Erdoğan's remarks as pandering to the AKP's nationalist base ahead of the parliamentary elections.⁷¹

Rhetoric between Demirtaş and Erdoğan has grown even more heated as the HDP prepares to run as a party in this summer's elections for the first time, subject to the 10 percent threshold. The AKP is "the most urgent problem" facing Turkey, Demirtaş said. "We will, God willing, settle this problem [at the elections] on June 7."⁷²

Social Issues

Erdoğan, first as prime minister and more recently in his role as president, has been so forceful in centralizing power through a major transformation of Turkish political institutions that fundamental, but less obvious, changes in social policy have gone unnoticed. Indeed, while it has become common to refer to Turkey's authoritarian slide under the AKP, Erdoğan's critics have largely remained silent on the Islamist ideology that undergirds and informs his vision of a "New Turkey." Yet, the AKP government has also significantly increased the role of religion in the education of all Turkish students and effectively forced thousands of them into religious educational institutions. At the same time, the AKP government has largely ignored, if not inflamed, the worsening plight of women in Turkey. These changes will alter the makeup and fabric of Turkish society, and therefore drive its politics, for years to come.

Education Regulations

Erdoğan, who has spoken of his desire to raise a "pious generation," has passed several educational reforms promoting compulsory religious education in Turkey. Educational reforms in 2012 increased the duration of mandatory religious classes to nine years, from grade four to grade 12, and lowered the age at which students are able to attend imam hatip schools, which specialize in religious education.⁷³ Originally limited to high school level, students are now permitted to enter imam hatip (which literally means "imam and preacher") after four years of primary schooling.

Additionally, the 2012 reforms implemented a standardized exam for school admissions. For students who do not sit for the exam or who fail to attain a certain score on the exam, they have only one option—an imam hatip school. Students who do not get into their top-choice schools are often assigned to the schools closest to their homes. With the number of imam hatip schools increasing as much as 73 percent since 2010, for many families, the closest school is an imam hatip school.⁷⁴ In 2014, it was reported that around 40,000 students were placed in imam hatip schools against their families' wishes.⁷⁵

In February 2015, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) rejected Turkey's appeal of a previous ECHR ruling that stated that high school students must have the option to opt out of religious classes. The court reiterated its previous verdict that "the compulsory Culture of Religion and Knowledge of Morality courses are in violation of the right to education."⁷⁶ Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu defended the compulsory religious courses as helping to stem radicalization, and President Erdoğan warned that removing the classes would cause a spread of violence, drug use, and racism.⁷⁷

In December 2014, Erdoğan vowed that Ottoman-era Turkish would become compulsory in high schools. "There are those who do not want this to be taught," said Erdoğan. "This is a great danger. Whether they like it or not, the Ottoman language will be learned and taught in this country."⁷⁸ Prime Minister Davutoğlu, however, was much less firm, stating that the course would be an elective instead of mandatory. Both Erdoğan and Davutoğlu advocated the classes as essential to understanding Turkey's history. Erdoğan decried Founder of the Turkish Republic Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's decision to switch Turkish from the Arabic to the Latin alphabet as "equal to the severing of our jugular veins."⁷⁹

Education has also become yet another front for the government's battle with the Gülen Movement. Erdoğan has sought to shut down

Gülen-affiliated schools both in Turkey and abroad, telling African leaders on a visit to the continent that, if they shut down Gülen-affiliated schools, the Turkish Ministry of Education would offer the same services.⁸⁰

In March 2014, the Turkish Parliament voted to close *dershanes*, private tutoring centers frequently affiliated with the Gülen movement that help students prepare for high school and university entrance exams. Erdoğan supported closing the *dershanes* on the grounds that they violate the principle of equal opportunity in education. However, proponents of the tutoring centers said that the low-cost services provided by the *dershanes* are an educational equalizer, arguing that, “with *dershanes*, a student from a rural part of the country is able to enter to Turkey’s most prestigious universities. With the education provided in rural public schools, it is almost impossible for rural-based students to enter those universities.”⁸¹ *Dershanes* will be permitted to operate until September 1, 2015, at which point they will be converted to private schools.

Women’s Rights

In February 2015, 20-year-old university student Özgecan Aslan was brutally murdered by a minibus driver, who stabbed her to death after attempting to sexually assault her.⁸² Aslan’s murder sparked a national conversation on women’s rights and soaring rates of violence against women in Turkey and the AKP’s policies toward women.

Erdoğan and his government have made sweeping moral pronouncements on how women should live their lives. Erdoğan has repeatedly called on women in Turkey to have three children, and in December 2014, he went so far as to declare that birth control was treason.⁸³ Turkey’s Health Minister echoed Erdoğan’s sentiments in January 2015 when he said, “Motherhood should be women’s sole career.”⁸⁴ Advocates for women’s rights most often point to remarks Erdoğan made in 2014, in which he declared that women were not equal to men. “You cannot put women and men on an equal footing. It is against nature,” Erdoğan said in

Istanbul in a speech where he also accused feminists of rejecting motherhood.⁸⁵

A Turkish human rights monitor reported that 281 women were murdered in Turkey in 2014, a 31 percent increase from the year before.⁸⁶ Figures from the Ministry of Justice show that the murder of women increased a startling 1,400 percent between 2002 and 2009.⁸⁷ Though attracting widespread national attention in Turkey, human rights monitors also pointed out that Aslan’s case was an outlier—the majority of women slain in Turkey (66 percent in 2013 and 56 percent in 2014) were slain by their husbands, ex-husbands, or lovers.⁸⁸

Economy

Over its time in power, the AKP has tripled Turkey’s GDP per capita, helping to secure an increasing monopoly on political power in Turkey. Due to the importance of economic growth for the AKP’s electoral success, maintaining a rapid pace of economic growth has become a central priority for the party. However, the AKP’s emphasis on short-term growth for the purpose of maintaining political power paired with increasingly illiberal policies toward its opponents is starting to pose risks to Turkey’s economy. These factors, coupled with the fact that the external economic environment is growing unfavorable towards emerging markets, could push Turkey into a steep economic downturn if not mitigated.⁸⁹

At the broadest level, risks posed to Turkey’s economy can be broken down into two main categories: structural economic issues and political risk. Structural economic issues are generally quantifiable and include debt and reliance on foreign investment, while political risk arises from deteriorating rule of law and the lack of the fundamental freedoms that are not only the foundation for democracy but also for a functioning market economy. Turkey remains dependent on investment from abroad and has a major current account deficit. Turkey’s dependence on foreign investment makes the potential hike in U.S. interest rates a threat to its future economic performance. Furthermore, struggles

between the Turkish Central Bank (TCMB) and President Erdoğan's government have hampered the bank's ability to respond to the lira's depreciation.⁹⁰ While Turkey's economy has its woes, recent performance is not without a few upsides. The fall in the price of oil has helped to improve Turkey's current account deficit and has lowered fuel prices within Turkey. However, all of these structural issues play a role in heightening Turkey's overall economic risk. In terms of political risk, one of the most central issues is the lack of independence of the TCMB. While independent in name, the Erdoğan government's politically motivated interference in monetary policy has undermined the bank's effectiveness. With high inflation and a depreciating currency, the TCMB has pushed for higher interest rates. However, Erdoğan denies the standard economic convention of higher interest rates lowering inflation and has pushed the TCMB to instead cut interest rates.⁹¹ Additionally, the tendency for favoritism and AKP connections to lead to construction and other business contracts highlights the high current level of corruption in Turkey. The Turkish judiciary is becoming increasingly less independent and rule of law is increasingly questionable. All of these factors create inefficiencies and scare off current and potential investors.

Economic instability comes at a time, months before the parliamentary elections, when the AKP particularly needs the economy to be strong. Additionally, with Turkish elections typically categorized by high spending, election season might further exacerbate Turkey's current economic difficulties.

Recommendations



In 2013, the Bipartisan Policy Center’s (BPC) Turkey Task Force released a report noting a growing mismatch in U.S. and Turkish priorities in response to a series of critical regional challenges—most notably in Syria, but also in Iraq, Israel, and Cyprus—challenges that were not being addressed frankly by either side. Given these emerging differences on foreign policy and in the aftermath of the Gezi Park protests, the task force recommended that, for the United States to maintain this historic partnership, it would need to give up its practice of unilaterally praising Turkey, especially when that rhetoric did not correspond with reality. Optimistic that this rough patch in the U.S.-Turkish relationship could be managed, the report suggested that, “American policymakers should recognize these differences and

the challenges currently facing Turkey and their implications for greater U.S.-Turkish cooperation. Rather than eliding these concerns, U.S. policy should move away from rhetoric and toward a realistic assessment and dialogue about the state of the relationship with Turkey.”⁹²

Since 2013, however, the rift between Washington and Ankara has only widened. It is the task force’s express hope that it be healed one day, but they are no longer sure that this can be done in the near-term. Nor is it certain that a change in rhetoric or even a period of “benign neglect” would suffice, at this point, to put the relationship back on track. Turkey’s leaders are increasingly charting a course that runs opposite that of the United States—

supporting radical Sunni Islamists at the expense of peace and stability and centralizing power at home in a drive towards an Islamist, strongman authoritarianism with neither constitutional limits nor institutional checks and balances.

With conflict spreading throughout the region, now more than ever, the United States is in need of strong and committed partners in the Middle East. Despite the strong relationship that the United States and Turkey once shared, Turkey's more recent actions show that it can no longer be counted upon to be the ally it once was. In recent months, U.S. policymakers have exerted considerable effort in bridging these ever-widening differences and securing Ankara's cooperation on the most pressing strategic challenge for the United States: defeating ISIS and restoring regional order. A revolving door of U.S. officials traveling to Turkey, including Vice President Joe Biden and Special Presidential Envoy General John Allen, have returned extolling the "depth" of the U.S.-Turkey relationship and reporting favorable and "constructive" talks, but with very little to show for their efforts. And, in the case of the train-and-equip program for Syrian rebels, what little cooperation the U.S. manages to achieve is marked by the same fundamental disagreements that color the U.S.-Turkey relationship more generally. The United States has also expressed its concerns with Turkey's domestic policy, to little effect. Members of Congress have written several public letters expressing their concern over Turkey's persecution of the free press, which the Turkish government responded to with accusations and conspiracy theories that the U.S. Congress is on the payroll of Erdoğan's enemies.

These efforts, the task force fears, amount to too little, too late. The moment when the gaps between Washington and Ankara could have been bridged, if indeed there ever was one, has passed. Under Erdoğan's guidance, the AKP has embraced and pursued a unified vision of a Turkey and Middle East both transformed. The party has now fully committed itself to pursuing Islamist, one-man rule at home and supporting ideologically affiliated groups and regimes regionally and cannot risk changing course. Even if

there were elements within the government that are wary that these forces, particularly ISIS, have grown uncontrollable and unpredictable, having at the very least given these jihadist free rein to travel through, recruit from, equip, operate, and recuperate in Turkey, they now cannot pull back its support with risking significant blowback and potentially retaliatory attacks from within its own borders. Nor can they abandon the authoritarian trajectory Erdoğan has placed the country on. Corruption has become too entrenched and too pervasive among the top ranks of the AKP. Losing power would be a tantamount to a prison sentence, at best, and is simply not an option. Pressing ahead is the only way out now.

As long as this state of affairs persists, the United States need to understand that the partnership with Turkey it once had, the alliance it seeks and still speaks of, will remain a thing of the past. Neither the stronger rhetoric the task force has recommended in the past nor the calculated isolation some are now suggesting can serve, the task force believes, to restore a constructive and cooperative U.S.-Turkish relationship, absent a drastic change in Turkey's domestic political scene. And if Turkey is no longer willing or able to help the United States achieve its strategic objectives, then U.S. policymakers would be better served using their time and resources to identify regional partners that both share their strategic interests and are more eager to cooperate, rather than continuing to court Turkish leaders for assistance that is clearly not coming. It is time to look beyond the U.S.-Turkish partnership.

To communicate to Turkey that the United States will act in its strategic interests, with or without Turkish support or permission, there are several actions the United States could take:

Seek a Base in KRG Territory

Turkey's continued refusal to allow access to its Incirlik airbase has forced the United States to fly missions out of the Gulf, dampening the effectiveness of the U.S. air campaign against ISIS. Furthermore, it has put American pilots at increasing risk. While Turkey has proved itself a reluctant ally against ISIS, the

Kurdish government in Iraq has been a willing partner. Seeking an alternative to Incirlik in KRG territory would reduce U.S. reliance on Turkey while also providing similar geographic advantages for operations in Iraq and Syria to combat ISIS.

Organize More Airdrops to Syrian Kurds

The United States airdropped weapons, ammunition, and medical supplies to Syrian Kurds fighting ISIS in the town of Kobani in 2014. Despite being located only miles from the Syrian border town, Turkish authorities refused to allow Kurdish fighters and supplies to cross through its territory to come to Kobani's defense. Faced with Turkish intransigence, the United States turned to the KRG, airdropping supplies provided by the Iraqi Kurdish government in cargo jets flown from KRG territory.

"What was done here was wrong," said President Erdoğan after the operation, taking fault with the fact that one of the 28 bundles of supplies had reportedly fallen into the hands of ISIS militants.⁹³ Erdoğan also noted that United States proceeded with the airdrop despite Turkey's objections, on the grounds that the Syrian PYD and the PKK are "the same."⁹⁴

However, after Erdoğan's objections to the airdrop, Turkey relaxed its stance on allowing Kurdish fighters to cross into Syria through Turkey, allowing peshmerga fighters from Iraqi Kurdistan to enter the fight.

Organizing more airdrops when the United States has the best possible intelligence to ensure that supplies will not fall into the hands of extremists will have two benefits: first, the United States will be able to support and resupply Kurdish fighters on the front lines in Iraq and Syria; and second, it will communicate to Turkey that the United States is determined to support its partners in the fight against ISIS, with or without Turkish permission or use of Turkish airspace and bases.

Discuss Delisting Kurdish Groups

With the PKK engaged in a political-solution process with the Turkish government and emerging as a viable partner against ISIS, there is a growing chorus suggesting that the United States and Europe delist the PKK as a terrorist organization. Notably, PKK fighters earned Western approval after helping provide safe passage for tens of thousands of Yazidis stranded in Iraq's Qandil Mountains. Western media reported favorably of the group's secularism, noting that women and men fought alongside each other in the PKK's ranks, painting the designated terrorist group as an antidote to extremism rather than an extremist group.

While the rise of ISIS has made the PKK look like an attractive partner, Erdoğan has declared that, for Turkey, ISIS and the PKK are the same. However, while Turkey fears the PKK gaining legitimacy that might strengthen its hands in negotiations with the Turkish state, forcing greater concessions, Turkey's non-action against ISIS is helping bring about the very outcome it is trying to avoid. With Turkey absent, the United States has, and should, turn to more willing partners.

To reflect this new reality, the U.S. government should open discussions on the PKK's role in the ISIS conflict, its peace process with the Turkish state, and whether or not it should still be designated a terrorist organization.

In response to criticism from Turkey over U.S. aid to the Syrian Democratic Union Party (PYD), considered to be an offshoot of the PKK, U.S. officials made clear that the PYD is considered different from the PKK under U.S. law and not designated a terrorist organization. When providing further aid to Syrian Kurds, such as by additional airdrops, the United States should stand by this position, and continue to make the legal status of the PYD clear to Turkey.

Look to Other Regional Players

Beyond Turkey, there are several other nations that are playing and could play larger roles in regional politics, such as: Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Jordan.

An aspiring member of NATO, Georgia has been a staunch ally of the West, at one point contributing the third-largest numbers of troops in Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom. To support partnership with Georgia, the United States should continue and increase its support for Georgia's NATO membership, economic development, and democratization. Azerbaijan has, in the past, supported U.S.-led counterterrorism efforts, and has served as a critical supply point for U.S. troops in Afghanistan. Strategically located at the intersection of the Middle East and Asia, Azerbaijan is not only developing into an energy powerhouse, but also a potential national security partner of the United States and bulwark against creeping Russian and Iranian influence.

Another longstanding ally of the United States in the Middle East is Jordan. Like Turkey, Jordan is also heavily affected by the influx of Syrian refugees. Unlike Turkey, Jordan is one of the few Arab states participating in the anti-ISIS coalition. In January 2015, ISIS released a video showing the gruesome execution of captured Jordanian pilot Mouath al-Kasaesbeh. To fortify Jordan against regional instability, the United States announced that it would increase aid to Jordan in February 2015, boosting aid from \$660 million per year to \$1 billion per year for three years. In this vein, the United States should continue to invest in Jordan's stability and look to expanding the U.S.-Jordan partnership.

Stress Shared Values

Seeking new partners should not mean, however, turning a blind eye to developments in Turkey or remaining silent as Turkey's democracy continues to unravel.

While the objective of U.S. policy toward Turkey should change, its mode need not. The brutally honest rhetoric the task force

called for in 2013 is still needed. Engagement with Turkey should deepen, if anything, with a particular focus on its domestic policies. Even if Turkey cannot be counted on to support U.S. interests in the region, it still retains its strategic importance. Were it to complete its devolution from a model of Middle Eastern democracy to authoritarianism the consequences for both Turkey's stability and the region's political development would be grim. Though the prospects for Erdoğan relinquishing his strongman aspirations are dim, he need not be the only interlocutor for the United States. Indeed, if Washington can move away from its dependence on Turkey as its main strategic partner in the region, U.S. policymakers might find themselves freer to express concerns about Turkey's domestic politics and engage a broader cross-section of Turkish society.

The United States should emphasize, in public and in private, the importance of Turkey's democracy to the foundations of our bilateral relationship and to hopes of repairing it. This should expressly include statements about the importance of Turkish officials sticking to the institutional structure provided by the Turkish constitution until and unless it is amended. The United States should continue to stress the importance it attaches to freedom of the press, rule of law, government transparency, and human rights, including the protection of women, children, and minorities.

Focus on Electoral Fairness

With important parliamentary elections about to take place against a backdrop of tension and political uncertainty, U.S. policymakers should urge the Turkish government to invite international observers to assess the fairness and security of the vote. In light of the fraud claims arising from the March 30, 2014 local elections, such an invitation would reassure the opposition and Turkish citizens that the Turkish government means to conduct free and fair elections.

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