

A N A L M A N A C

US-TURKEY RELATIONS UNDER THE AK PARTY

KILIÇ BUĞRA KANAT, SERRA DİPTAŞ
JACKSON HANNON, LESLEY K. DUDDEN



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INTRODUCTION

The AK Party came to power in the 2002 November election which gave a single party mandate to the newly founded party. This was the first time since 1991 that Turkey had a single party government. In the 11-year period of coalition governments, Turkey had faced serious government crises coupled with an increasing number of attacks by the PKK and an economic downturn which led to a major economic crisis in 2001. This coalition period also overlapped with the end of the Cold War and the emergence of the “unipolar moment” in the international system. While the fall of the Soviet Union and the independence of the Central Asian republics provided opportunities for Turkey, the absence of sufficient capacity in the Turkish state and economy resulted in low return in its foreign policy. Meanwhile, this change in the international system generated confusion and lack of direction in foreign policy. Especially after the Gulf War and the rise of PKK activity in the region, a sense of insecurity and an impression of the unreliability of Cold War allies became prevalent among foreign policy makers in Turkey. Following the refusal of the EU to add Turkey to its expansion process and protests from the ICO following Turkey’s rapprochement with Israel, Turkish foreign policy makers found it hard to adapt to this changing international and regional political atmosphere.

During this period, the relationship between Turkey and the U.S. suffered from an increasing degree of unpredictability and instability. Although the idea of strategic partnership dominated the discourse of bilateral relations, there was not much improve-

ment in relations in terms of military and strategic cooperation. Turkey was uncomfortable with the insufficient support by the U.S. administration in regards to its fight against the PKK and unfulfilled promises in the aftermath of the First Gulf War. The U.S. support for Turkey in regards to the EU accession process was one of the few positive developments during these years. With the new millennium two significant shocks generated a new form of partnership between Turkey and the United States. The U.S. support following the economic crisis in Turkey and Turkish support for the United States in the aftermath of the 9/11 terror attacks helped mend ties and improve the mutual trust between the two countries. Turkey contributed to the U.S. military operations in Afghanistan and many started to call the new direction of the bilateral relationship as a partnership in the war against terrorism. However, soon after the Afghanistan operation the U.S. administration started to consider another military operation against Iraq, which generated significant concern in the international community and among regional actors, including Turkey. The Turkish government repeatedly mentioned the necessity of a UN Security Council resolution in order to provide the legal basis for a military intervention. However, the coalition government in power demonstrated signs of unwillingness to support such a military venture, considering the major adverse effects the first military operation in 1991 had generated for Turkey and its concerns that the proposed U.S. venture would increase the PKK's sphere of influence in the region. Turkish public opinion also showed major opposition to any form of military operations in the region.

The AK Party won its electoral victory at this critical juncture of Turkish-American relations. It was a remarkable victory for a newly founded party and the first big test for the new government was the decision in regards to the U.S. operation in Iraq. This almanac provides a synopsis of the bilateral relations between the United States

and Turkey during the past fifteen years of AK Party rule in Turkey, starting with the March 1 crisis. During this period, AK Party governments have engaged with different U.S. administrations headed by presidents from both political parties (Presidents Bush, Obama and Trump) and different party majorities in the United States Congress. The relationship has at times undergone very serious crises and, at others, witnessed significant levels of cooperation. This almanac will selectively cover the major summits and main crises that impacted the bilateral relations, including the most important moments of the relationship between the two nations. We hope this volume will contribute to the research of observers and scholars in the field of United States-Turkey relations.

Burhanettin Duran
SETA General Coordinator

2002 TURKISH ELECTION AND AK PARTY CHAIRMAN ERDOGAN'S VISIT TO THE WHITE HOUSE

In November 2002, the Turkish Justice and Development Party (AK Party) won its first national election, attaining a clear parliamentary majority against rival political parties with 34% of the vote in an unexpected electoral outcome.¹ The party was formed a little more than a year ago and had to compete with other political parties in an early election. All of the political parties that were in coalition government failed to pass the threshold. In addition to the AK Party, the only other party to pass the required 10 percent threshold for joining the Turkish parliament was the Republican People's Party (CHP). In the aftermath of the election, countries around the world responded positively to the newly elected Turkish government.² Speaking in Greece, US Under Secretary for Political Affairs Marc Grossman declared that the US looked forward to working with the new Turkish government.³ Following the election, on November 7, US Ambassador Robert Pearson visited Erdogan and declared that "the themes of the election campaign, that is the EU accession date, economic prosperity, democratic reforms, government effectiveness, and anti-corruption" are exactly those themes which the United States supports."⁴ A Congressional Research Services report that was published on November 14 also approached the election results quite positively. The report stated that "for his part, Erdogan has referred to the United States as Turkey's natural ally." The AK Party's pragmatic approach to foreign policy regarding Iraq, Cyprus, and the European Union may be easier for the US administration to work with than the more rigid nationalism of the former Prime Minister Ecevit's government."⁵

A month after the November elections, then-AK Party Chairman Recep Tayyip Erdogan visited Washington, D.C. for

his first meeting at the White House. Welcoming Mr. Erdogan, President George W. Bush declared, “We [the US] join you [Turkey], side by side, in your desire to become a member of the European Union [EU]. We appreciate your friendship in NATO. You’re a strategic ally and friend of the United States, and we look forward to working with you to keep the peace.”⁶ Mr. Erdogan thanked President Bush for hosting him and for the US’ support, saying, “We consider accession to the European Union as the most important modernization element of our project. It is an important step for our democracy. This week is very important. It’s a turning point... We appreciate your support to us in this regard, thank you.”⁷



The invitation for Mr. Erdogan to meet at the White House was unprecedented as it came before Mr. Erdogan was able to stand for parliament. He faced a restriction on holding office due to his 1998 conviction for reciting a poem, which Turkey’s secularist military leaders as well as ultra-secularist judiciary claimed violated Turkish laws against inciting religious hatred. The Bush

administration's move caused something of a flurry in Turkey over the international recognition it accorded Mr. Erdogan.⁸ During the White House meeting, Mr. Erdogan not only met with President Bush but also with several of the top advisors in the Bush administration, including Vice President Dick Cheney, Secretary of State Colin Powell, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, and National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice.⁹ Mr. Erdogan was accompanied by Minister of Foreign Affairs Yasar Yakis, Turkish Ambassador to the US Faruk Logoglu, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Director of the Middle East Department Tahsin Burcuoglu, and AK Party Deputies and Representatives such as Omer Celik, Egemen Bagis, and Cuneyt Zapsu.¹⁰

The meeting came several days before a summit in Copenhagen where EU officials were due to decide if they would set a date for negotiations on Turkey's accession bid. It was a critical juncture for Turkey's attempt to become a full EU member. At the time, the US was seen as lobbying the EU on Turkey's behalf.¹¹ Responding briefly to a question by the media during his meeting with Mr. Erdogan, President Bush noted that his "administration is working hard on Turkey's behalf" with the EU.¹² In the days after the meeting, President Bush's Press Secretary Ari Fleischer repeatedly noted President Bush's belief that the EU should strongly consider Turkey as a candidate.¹³ Ahead of the EU summit, Mr. Erdogan expressed his gratitude for the US' support on the issue.¹⁴ However, at the summit later that week, negotiations were tabled until December 2004, after several EU countries argued against Turkey's accession.¹⁵

During the White House meeting, President Bush and Mr. Erdogan also discussed the Cyprus issue, one of the enduring issues in Turkish foreign policy for decades. The Turkish delegation asserted that Turkey sought a solution on the Cyprus issue and had encouraged Northern Cypriot President Rauf Denktas to take part in negotiations and not hold up the resolution process.¹⁶

Immediately after the elections, Erdogan also stated that he will make the resolution of the Cyprus issue one of the priorities of the AK Party government. He not only had a phone conversation with the Prime Minister of Greece but also gave interviews to the Greek TV channels about his plans on the resolution of the Cyprus problem.¹⁷

Perhaps the most important issue at hand during the visit was the question of a possible US invasion of Iraq and whether the AK Party government in Turkey would support such a move.¹⁸ Even before the elections in Turkey, the US started to court the Turkish government in regards to its possible support for its war efforts in Iraq. Since the Turkish elections, the question of possible Turkish support had been at the top of the agenda for the US. Speaking during a visit to Turkey the week before Mr. Erdogan's visit to DC, Deputy Defense Secretary Wolfowitz had pointed out, "Obviously, if we [the US] are going to have significant ground forces in the north, this [Turkey] is the country they have to come through. There is no other option."¹⁹ There was some speculation that the Bush administration hoped to use Mr. Erdogan's visit to convince the new Turkish government to support a war on Iraq.²⁰ Prior to the meeting, *The New York Times* wrote that, "The reason for Mr. Bush's invitation seems clear," referring to the US' goal of attaining Turkish support for a possible invasion.²¹

Despite the expectations regarding Iraq, the Bush administration did not offer much insight into the Oval Office discussions. White House Press Secretary Fleischer noted that President Bush and Chairman Erdogan had discussed the situation in Iraq and "ways that we [the US and Turkey] could cooperate," but did not offer any specific details.²²

During his time in Washington DC, Mr. Erdogan also attended meetings with Secretary Powell, Deputy Defense Secretary Wolfowitz and National Security Advisor Rice. Mr. Erdogan

stated that he met with Secretary Powell to get acquainted with Deputy Secretary Paul Wolfowitz to discuss the same issues that were addressed during his meeting with President Bush. Mr. Erdogan also attended several events with private organizations and civil society groups, such as the Jewish community in the US. He told the press that during this meeting, Jewish community leaders expressed their wishes for better Turkish- Israeli relations.²³ Mr. Erdogan also spoke at the Center for Strategic and International Studies on the 9th, where he gave a wide-ranging speech, covering both the US-Turkish relationship, Turkey's relations with the EU, and Turkey's political history.²⁴

MARCH 1 CRISIS (MARCH 1, 2003)

The first major test to US-Turkey relations under the AK Party has since come to be known as the “March 1 Crisis.” In 2002, the Bush administration began making overtures to the Turkish government asking for its support for the possible invasion of Iraq on the grounds that President Saddam Hussein possessed a stockpile of weapons of mass destruction. A number of high-level administration personnel were party to the courtship, including Secretary of State Colin Powell, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, Undersecretary of State Marc Grossman, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, and even Vice President Dick Cheney.²⁵ Negotiations gave way to a number of tentative agreements on authorization for the movement of US troops and equipment through Turkey for a ground and air invasion of Iraq and was put to the Turkish Parliament. The process of negotiations generated a major debate in Turkey in regards to the US policy in the region. A very large segment of the Turkish society – similar to Europe – was against a war in the region. The Turkish security establishment, on the other hand, was concerned about the aftershocks of such an invasion, which might trigger instability to the region and national security risks for Turkey.

On March 1, 2003, the Turkish Parliament stunned the Bush administration by not granting the US use of its territory and airspace for the invasion of Iraq. Previously, the US had an informal agreement whereby up to 62,000 US troops were allowed to be temporarily stationed in Turkey and where the US had access to Turkish airspace in exchange for direct aid, to the tune of \$6 billion, which could be further leveraged into \$24 billion in loan guarantees to assist the struggling Turkish lira. The tentative agreement also provided for a \$8.5 billion bridge loan until the larger sum of funds was accessible to the Turkish government.²⁶ Turkey was experiencing one of the most serious economic crises

of its history and the AK Party had placed the domestic economy at the center of its 2002 campaign. Thus, this aid package attached to assisting the US effort in Iraq was clearly an attractive option as the Turkish economy recovered from its worst recession in 50 years.²⁷ The US side considered such an offer hard to reject by the Turkish government.

The agreement was put to the Turkish Parliament after an intensive diplomatic push on the part of the US. The failure of the bill to pass Turkish Parliament was a shock to the US, but it was also not something expected by the AK Party leadership. A sizable portion of the AK Party participated in the vote against the authorization despite the agreement having been negotiated by its leadership. An absolute majority of 267 votes was needed to pass the resolution; the vote failed by a mere 3 votes [19 member of parliament also abstained from the vote].²⁸ Turkish leaders argued the US did not understand how unpopular the Iraq invasion was with the Turkish public. Approximately 94% of Turks opposed the coming war.²⁹ “If we are talking about the extensive presence of American forces in Turkey, we have difficulty in explaining this to Turkish public opinion,” Foreign Minister Yakis explained, “It may be difficult to see thousands of American forces being transported through the Turkish territory into Iraq or being stationed or deployed somewhere in Turkey and then carrying out strikes in Iraq.”³⁰

On the day of the vote, an estimated 50,000 Turks gathered outside the Turkish Parliament to demonstrate against the US’ intention to invade Iraq.³¹ There were several reasons for the Turkish public’s strong reaction to the resolution. As mentioned above, first, the Turkish people believed that a war would bring instability and tragedy to the region. This was part of a general atmosphere in Turkey and Turkish public was not willing to be part of a tragedy. Second, public memory of the first Gulf War and the unfulfilled promises by the international coalition and the US

to Turkey were still fresh in the minds of many Turks. The economic loss following the Gulf War and increasing PKK presence and threat in the region were considered as outcomes of this war and the public was wary of yet another conflict opening up along its borders while its economy continued to struggle with a recession.³² Despite these problems, the US administration is perceived as unresponsive when the Turkish governments in the 1990s asked for support. Third, many people believed that there should be a UN Security Council decision to authorize the war effort before Turkey gave its support. Especially President Ahmet Necdet Sezer mentioned in multiple instances the necessity of such a resolution. Finally, the widespread antiwar movement around the world and huge demonstrations against the US war effort significantly impacted the Turkish public. The public's attitude towards US invasion plans also influenced some of the AK Party representatives in the Parliament.

The Turkish government, for its part, viewed the possible US invasion as a likely boon for northern Iraq's Kurdish population in their pursuit of an independent nation state. They argued that, rather than an invasion, the international community should pursue a peaceful solution to the issue of Iraq's purported possession of weapons of mass destruction.³³ Yet another fear, on the Turkish part, was that an outbreak of war in its neighbor would result in a tide of refugees flowing into Turkey.³⁴ Following the war in Iraq in 1991, a large number of Kurdish refugees flowed to the Turkish border running away from a possible attack by Saddam Hussein and his army. Further, Turkey had to face this refugee inflow mostly by itself.

The negotiations culminating in the failed arrangement constituted a period of growing pains in the new relationship between the US and the AK Party. Tensions also ensued following cartoons published in American newspapers based on the financial aspects

of the agreement, which the Turks viewed as an ugly smear on their country.³⁵

More critically, the US administration laid “the blame” for the failure of the authorization at the hands of the Turkish General Staff which generated a significant reaction from the Turkish society as well as security establishment. In an interview, Deputy Defense Secretary Wolfowitz, who played a major role in the US diplomatic effort to secure Turkey’s permission to use its territory, criticized the Turkish military’s role in the proposal’s failure, “I think for whatever reason, they [the Turkish military] did not play the strong leadership role that we would have expected.”³⁶ This was seen as a major problem for US-Turkish relations. The fact that members of the US administration expected the military to determine the foreign and security policy of Turkey instead of a democratically elected leader angered a major segment of Turkish public, which still had scars from past military interventions and coups against the Turkish government.

The failure to gain access to Turkish land and air space was seen as a blow to the Bush administration’s goal of an easy invasion of Iraq, dubbed “Operation Iraqi Freedom,” whose stated goal was “to disarm Iraq of weapons of mass destruction, to end Saddam Hussein’s support for terrorism, and to free the Iraqi people.”³⁷ It also left four US naval vessels, stocked with tanks and other heavy equipment intended to buttress the US Army 4th Infantry Division in their push into Iraq, stranded off the Turkish coast. Prior to the vote, the US had operated out of Turkey’s Incirlik Air Base, located in the south east of the country, to contain Iraqi President Saddam Hussein’s influence in the north of Iraq during Operation Northern Watch.³⁸ With the failure to expand US presence, that mission also wound down.

Immediately following the vote, President Bush dispatched his Special Envoy for Iraqi Opposition Zalmay Khalilzad to Turkey

to try and salvage the situation.³⁹ The scales in the crisis shifted somewhat on March 10, 2013 when Erdogan was granted a seat in the Turkish Parliament, which paved the way for his rise to the post of Prime Minister. His elevated status renewed US hopes for access to Turkey as a transit point into Iraq. Previously, in his role as party leader, Erdogan, along with then Prime Minister Abdullah Gul, had endorsed the measure. In an interview on Turkish television regarding the possibility of again putting access for US troops to Turkey on the table, Erdogan responded, "It's hard to say anything about the timing... There is a UN Security Council meeting and the establishment of our next government on the way. These two things coincide. We will watch carefully and decide accordingly."⁴⁰ On the same day as newly minted Prime Minister Erdogan's elevation to his new position, President Bush and Vice President Cheney conducted a joint phone call with the new Prime Minister. According to reports of the call, President Bush again pushed for the authorization of US use of Turkish airspace, while Prime Minister Erdogan requested patience as he wanted to wait for the UN Security Council decision and moved to organize his Cabinet and pursue a new round of voting. A Bush administration official said of the conversation, "It was not a great phone call. The Turks weren't as responsive as we'd hoped."⁴¹ The US insistence on accelerating Turkey's decision on opening its territory and airspace to the US forces was seen as disrespectful and oppressive by some groups in Turkey, adding fuel to the growing anti-American and anti-invasion views among the Turkish public.⁴²

As plans for the invasion were developed, Turkey was concerned about the prospect of the formation of a Kurdish state in northern Iraq. On March 10, soon to be Prime Minister Erdogan confirmed that 50,000 Turkish forces had been deployed to the Turkish-Iraqi border, and that more were on the way.⁴³ The US maintained its opposition to a Turkish presence in northern Iraq

despite the fact that Turkish forces were already routinely transiting through the region. “We’re making it very clear to the Turks that we expect them not to come into northern Iraq. We’re in constant touch with the Turkish military, as well as Turkish politicians. They know our policy, and they know we’re working with the Kurds to make sure there’s no incident that would cause there to be an excuse to go into northern Iraq,” President Bush stated on March 10.⁴⁴

By March 17, the US rescinded its proposed \$6 billion aid package to Turkey, which led to a plunge in the Turkish stock market. The lure of an aid package, should Turkey reverse its decision, continued but US officials stressed that it was not a guarantee. One day after this announcement, the Turkish Parliament announced that it would bring a new resolution forward with the potential to pave the way for US warplanes to use Turkish airspace for Operation Iraqi Freedom.

On March 20 2003, Turkey granted the US access to its airspace, but only after the invasion was already under way. The vote passed with 332 votes in favor and 202 votes opposed.⁴⁵ Turkey saw the war as inevitable, a view that was on display in the text of the authorization bill, which read,

Recent developments in military intervention in Iraq show that the war in Iraq is inescapable. As a result of the failure of the UN process, peaceful solution efforts have failed and military intervention has become inevitable. Today, Turkey is faced with the conditions of the war situation in which the Iraqi lands will become a total military field.⁴⁶

The bill authorized US access to Turkish airspace for the movement of supplies and troops and allowed American technical military personnel to stay in Turkey for three months to improve infrastructure of the possible military facilities and bases that the US may use during its operation in Iraq.⁴⁷ However, it did not

allow US military planes to use aircraft bases in Turkey or to refuel within Turkish territory. It also authorized the deployment of Turkish troops to Iraq if necessary. Possible reasons for the deployment Turkish troops were listed as rising security threats due to the increased activities of terrorist groups in Iraq such as the PKK/Kurdistan Freedom and Democracy Congress (KADEK), increasing ethnic tensions in the country that could divide Iraq and lead to instability in the region in the future, protection of the Turkmen community living in Iraq, and the possibility of high number of refugees fleeing towards Turkey.⁴⁸

On April 1, 2003, Secretary of State Powell announced that Bush administration was preparing a request to Congress for a \$1 billion package to Turkey to defer the cost of Turkish support to US military operations in northern Iraq, as well as for food, medical, and other relief supplies transiting through Turkey. The bill successfully passed.⁴⁹ On June 24, 2003, the Turkish government moved to provide the US with an access authorization for one year to use Incirlik, Mersin, and Iskenderun military facilities for logistical operations.⁵⁰

Despite the new deal, the March 1 vote continued to be a thorn in the side of US-Turkey relations. In an interview with CNN Turk, Deputy Defense Secretary Wolfowitz enraged Turks by demanding an apology from the government for the failure of the March 1 vote. "Let's have a Turkey that steps up and says we made a mistake. We should have known how bad things were in Iraq but we know now. Let's figure out how we can be as helpful as possible to the Americans," he stated.⁵¹ Deputy Defense Secretary Wolfowitz's apology demand was also met with fierce rebuke from the Turkish press. Many journalists criticized the US for not respecting Turkish democracy and for talking about democracy only at times it benefited the US' side of the conversation.⁵² Politicians also responded negatively to Deputy Defense Secre-

tary Wolfowitz's words. Prime Minister Erdogan said that Turkey did not think only of personal gain when dealing with the US; Speaker of the Parliament Bulent Arinc stated that the Turkish parliament only pursued what the Turkish public wanted, rather than intentionally slighting the US, and Vice President of Saadet Party, Mehmet Bekaroglu, argued, "Turkey is not Panama, Deputy Defense Secretary Wolfowitz should take care with his words."⁵³ Deputy Defense Secretary Wolfowitz responded that his words were misinterpreted. He asserted that he had not actually asked Turkey to apologize, but instead that he only meant that Turkey should be critical of itself and recognize that the March 1 vote was a mistake.⁵⁴

THE HOOD INCIDENT (JULY 4, 2003)

In what was later dubbed as “the hood incident,” US troops from the 173rd Airborne Division arrested 11 soldiers of the Turkish Special Forces in Sulaymaniyah, Iraq on July 4, 2003. It was an unexpected and unprecedented event in relations between two NATO allies. The explanations from the US side was that the Turkish cohort was planning to assassinate the Kurdish governor of Kirkuk Province. However, no evidence was provided by the US military personnel about the plan of assassination. Turkish government and public reacted strongly to the incident. Deputy Chief of the Turkish Army General Yasar Buyukanit said that the US’ claims about the alleged plot were “groundless and nonsense.”⁵⁵ Since 1997, approximately 3,000 Turkish troops had been routinely stationed in Iraq at any given time to monitor the region’s intra-conflict prone Kurdish factions.⁵⁶

The relationship between the US and Turkey was already strained as a result of the March 1 incident. The detention of the Turkish soldiers, who were taken to Baghdad for 2 days of interrogations, brought the relationship to a new low. According to the arrested soldiers, on July 4, a group of US soldiers entered the Turkish base, saying they were there to pay a courtesy visit. Turkish soldiers offered the US soldiers tea and coffee, which the US soldiers drank before suddenly drawing their guns and announcing that they were detaining the soldiers. After this, a large group of additional US soldiers forcefully entered the base, shackled the Turkish soldiers, put sacks on their heads, and arrested them.⁵⁷ The Turkish soldiers claimed they were in northern Iraq in partnership with a Turkmen group. Indeed, a number of the non-Turkish personnel detained in the raid were Turkmen.⁵⁸

Turkish General Staff Hilmi Ozkok, speaking at a televised event alongside the US Ambassador to Turkey Robert Pearson,

described the incident as “the biggest crisis of confidence” between Turkey and the US.⁵⁹ It shocked the Turkish military as well. Especially the fact that the incident took place following the statements of Paul Wolfowitz accusing the Turkish military of not showing sufficient leadership generated a huge reaction against the US military and the administration. In the days following the raid, demonstrations occurred outside of the US Embassy in Ankara and the Consulate in Istanbul. It also sparked the ire of the Turkish government, which demanded the immediate release of its soldiers and a formal apology from the US government.⁶⁰ During a meeting with his Council of Ministers, Prime Minister Erdogan made his official statement about the event, “I did not expect this from the US, we supported them in Iraq but they took our support for granted, they made a mistake against us, against their ally. Treating an ally like they did is unacceptable. I do not have any expectation for the future of US-Turkish relations.”⁶¹ However, these strong statements failed to produce a formal apology from the Bush administration, although US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld did express “regret” over the incident.⁶²

The soldiers were eventually released on July 7, 2003. However, the US officers did not return the documents that were seized during the raid. According to Turkish newspapers, these documents contained information regarding the Turkmen population in Iraq, including population numbers, addresses, etc., as well as information on the activities of the PKK and KADEK in Iraq.⁶³ According to a senior US Pentagon official, the raid was conducted on “intelligence about possible illicit activities that were being planned against municipal officials in the region.” However, the nature of this intelligence and its content were never publicly released. Responding to American attempts to justify the raid, General Ozkok stated, “I do not know what the intelligence was but it is totally unacceptable that intelligence be investigated in this manner.”⁶⁴

The hood incident became a symbol of deteriorating relations between Turkey and the US, leading to a major public relations crisis for the US in Turkey. Negative opinions about the US and its military operations had reached an all time high in the aftermath of Iraq's invasion. The increasing number of civilian casualties in Iraq, the mayhem and the looting incidents and the descend of Iraq into chaos were all being watched closely by the Turkish public. Furthermore, the fact that there were no weapons of mass destruction left a more negative mark on the US image in Turkey.

On top of all these, a direct action against the Turkish state and the military further strengthened anti-American views. The hood later became a frequently used symbol in Turkish popular culture about US actions in the region. When the scandal surrounding the Abu Ghraib prison broke in April 2004, the images of detainees, again wearing hoods, were hauntingly familiar to the Turkish public. The new scandal produced a fresh wave of fierce criticism of the US regional policy in the Turkish press. Ankara was also uncomfortable with the CIA rendition operations in and out of Iraq and with the human rights abuses at detention centers in Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib.⁶⁵ Turkish newspapers published details and photos about the incidents at Abu Ghraib. They also conducted interviews with the prisoners who were tortured and released from prison. The widespread publication of the atrocities contributed to the deteriorating the image of the US in Turkey.⁶⁶

THE QUESTION OF TURKISH TROOP DEPLOYMENT TO IRAQ (OCTOBER 2003)

On October 7, 2003, the Turkish Parliament approved the deployment of Turkish troops to serve as peacekeepers as part of the US-led coalition in Iraq. The bill was debated over a two-and-a-half hour session and was approved by a wide margin of 358-183.⁶⁷ A previous vote on the deployment of Turkish troops had failed and sparked the March 1 crisis; yet another vote on March 19 was put to Parliament with the argument that Turkish forces in northern Iraq would prevent PKK attacks.⁶⁸ “We reserve both the option and intention of sending troops into northern Iraq. But we have to do this in consultation with the US administration, and hopefully with its consent,” Turkey’s Ambassador to the US Osman Faruk Logoglu stated on March 23. However, despite the fact that the Parliament successfully passed the authorization on this occasion, the deployment of troops never materialized; the US communicated that it was opposed to any Turkish military activity in Iraq at the time.⁶⁹

Speaking after the October 7 vote, Turkish Minister of Justice Cemil Cicek stated, “We will not remain there permanently. We hope that peace and stability will come to the region soon, and that we can return in less than one year.”⁷⁰ However, questions remained about the possible deployment. “The decision that came out of parliament is not one that will be executed immediately, this instant,” Prime Minister Erdogan remarked of the vote, “Time will decide. The process will depend on developments.”⁷¹

In the aftermath of the invasion Prime Minister Erdogan repeatedly stated that Turkey would not send troops into Iraq without an explicit invitation from the Iraqi governing council.⁷² On November 8, 2003, Ankara announced that it would not actualize a deployment into Iraq, despite the authorization to do so having

been granted. The decision was supported by the Bush administration.⁷³ Prime Minister Erdogan explained Ankara's decision, saying "After we passed the bill, we heard that our brothers and sisters in Iraq did not want Turkish military involvement in Iraq. Then, I spoke with President Bush on the phone about the issue, he said the Iraqi public did not want Turkish military involvement. I said, then, we will not enter Iraq forcefully if we are not wanted."⁷⁴ The Bush administration had previously lobbied Turkey to support the stabilization efforts in an effort to show that a Muslim majority nation supported the US occupation of Iraq. Some US officials were calling for the deployment of up to 10,000 Turkish soldiers into the country.⁷⁵ Both the Turkish government and the Bush administration's decision to back down from a Turkish deployment into Iraq stemmed, at least in part, from a desire not to cause further tensions in Iraq.⁷⁶

WHITE HOUSE MEETING BETWEEN PRIME MINISTER ERDOGAN AND PRESIDENT BUSH (JANUARY 28, 2004)

In January 2004, President Bush welcomed Prime Minister Erdogan for his second visit to the White House, and for his first as Prime Minister of Turkey. The visit occurred in the midst of the early stages of the Iraq War effort, as well as ongoing Cyprus reunification talks, which would dominate much of the Turkish-European relationship for the rest of the year. President Bush confirmed during this meeting his plans to visit Turkey in June for a NATO summit. “Turkey is a friend and an important ally of America. I have found that the Prime Minister is a person who is easy to talk to. He’s a straightforward man, which makes it easy to be able to deal with common issues.”⁷⁷

Prime Minister Erdogan stated that Turkey was pleased, “after listing the PKK and KADEK in the list of terrorist organizations, the United States has decided to list Kongra Gel [a PKK splinter group] among terrorist organizations.”⁷⁸ During the first half-hour of the meeting, Prime Minister Erdogan was accompanied by Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul and Egemen Bagis. The rest of the Turkish delegation, including State Ministers Ali Babacan and Kursad Tuzmen, Defense Minister Vecdi Gonul, AK Party Adana Deputy Omer Celik, Foreign Ministry Undersecretary Ugur Ziyal, and Washington Ambassador Faruk Logoglu joined the meeting later. Turkish press reported following the meeting that two leaders agreed on several issues, including the resolution of the Cyprus conflict, the territorial integrity of Iraq, and the fight against the PKK.⁷⁹

While in Washington, top diplomats of both countries also had separate meetings. Like the meeting between President Bush and Prime Minister Erdogan, in Powell-Gul meeting, the discussion focused on Cyprus and the future of the Annan II plan as well as the situation in Iraq and Turkish contributions to Afghani-

stan. “I also told him that we understand the difficulties associated with the PKK and that we would be taking appropriate action to demonstrate that we share Turkey’s concerns with respect to the activities of the PKK,” Secretary Powell remarked, showing that Turkey’s fight against terrorism continued to be acknowledged in Washington.⁸⁰ During the meeting, Foreign Minister Gul discussed Syria’s regional role with Secretary Powell, “They [Syria] want to have peace also with Israel. They think this peace process should be comprehensive, and it should include Syria, Lebanon. We should work on this.”⁸¹

By January 2004, Turkey was functioning as the main intermediary in the dialogue between Israel, the US, and Syria. The new role marked a continuation of a shift in Turkey’s relations with Syria, which had previously been frosty, if not outright adversarial, over Syrian regime’s support for the PKK on Syrian territory.⁸² Relations between two countries had first began to improve following the expulsion of PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan and the signing of the Adana Protocol between two countries. The arrest of Ocalan in Nairobi, Kenya launched the process of normalization between Syria and Turkey.⁸³



Another key issue for the Washington visit was the future of Iraq. For Turkey, ensuring the territorial integrity of Iraq and preventing the establishment of an autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan was of paramount importance. Speaking at a think tank event in Washington the day before the White House meeting, Prime Minister Erdogan made this view explicit, "The territorial integrity of Iraq has to be sustained."⁸⁴ During the meeting, Prime Minister Erdogan asserted that a federative structure based on ethnicity or religion would damage prospective democratic Iraq and might disintegrate the country in the future.⁸⁵ The Bush administration sought to reassure Prime Minister Erdogan that the US would not back down from ensuring Iraq's territorial integrity.⁸⁶ Prime Minister Erdogan stated, "President Bush has assured us that any speculation about the territorial integrity of Iraq would not be allowed." He also said that Turkey and the US shared common views in protection of international peace and stability.⁸⁷ According to reports, "Erdogan seemed satisfied with what he heard from Bush, privately and publicly."⁸⁸ Similarly, after meeting with Secretary Powell, Foreign Minister Gul said that the two countries shared the same view about the territorial and political integrity of Iraq and building a system which splits the natural resources of the country in an equal and fair way between all Iraqis.⁸⁹

The meeting between President Bush and Prime Minister Erdogan also occurred in the run up to a vote on the Annan Plan II, which was scheduled to be put to the Cypriot public for a vote on May 1, 2004. A resolution of the Cyprus conflict was seen as an important step toward Turkey's EU accession, which the US strongly supported. "As a guarantor state we are trying to do everything in our power in order to reach a solution," Prime Minister Erdogan stated the day before his visit to the White House.⁹⁰ Turkey had been expecting President Bush to appoint a special representative for the solution of the Cyprus issue, however such

an appointment never came. Instead, President Bush put the portfolio directly under Secretary Powell.⁹¹

The final important item on the agenda for Prime Minister Erdogan's trip to Washington was discussion of economic cooperation between the US and Turkey. Turkey hoped to boost trade opportunities with the US, a desire which Prime Minister Erdogan expressed directly to President Bush during their meeting, as well as in other meetings in Washington.⁹² Prime Minister Erdogan gave a speech at the US Chamber of Commerce, during which he highlighted trade relations between Turkey and the US and Turkish economic policies intended to attract foreign investment, underscoring the importance of bilateral economic ties.⁹³

PRESIDENT BUSH ATTENDS NATO SUMMIT IN TURKEY (JUNE 27 - 29, 2004)

In late June 2004, President Bush attended a NATO summit held in Turkey. It was his first ever visit to Turkey. As part of the trip, he spent two days in Ankara conducting bilateral meetings with Prime Minister Erdogan and President Sezer before flying to Istanbul for the summit. During his first meeting, which was with Prime Minister Erdogan, President Bush stated his belief that Turkey served as a model country in the region, as a Muslim country embracing democracy, the rule of law, and freedom. He said that he was grateful for Turkey's role and that he was looking forward to fruitful negotiations with Turkey and other NATO partners.⁹⁴ Regarding the PKK, President Bush stated that terrorist activities against Turkey were unacceptable. President Erdogan complained that PKK activities in northern Iraq were part of a broader international terrorism problem and that, although the US has given concrete statements acknowledging this, it had not yet taken any real steps toward solving the problem. President Erdogan also brought up the status of the northern Iraqi city of Kirkuk, asserting that Kirkuk is a Turkmen city and that it belonged under the administration of the government in Baghdad. He also expressed concerns about three Turkish citizens the US had in custody in Guantanamo, demanding that they be given a trial. On Cyprus issue, President Erdogan said that he expected the US to be a leader in the cause of ending the isolation of North Cyprus.⁹⁵

Speaking after high level meetings between President Bush and Turkish leaders, an American official told reporters, "These meetings today made clear that whatever the differences U.S. and Turkish governments had over Iraq, from this point forward - both the Turkish President and the Turkish Prime Minister in their meetings made this clear - Turkey sees its interests and American interests in Iraq as parallel and consistent."⁹⁶ The meet-

ing was considered a chance for a reset in the US-Turkey relationship, which had faced continual strains in the aftermath of the Turkish Parliament's refusal to grant US troops access to its territory for the staging of the 2003 Iraq invasion.

The NATO Summit focused primarily on the effort to stabilize Iraq in the aftermath of the US invasion. It was attended by President Bush as well as Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. Other topics of importance included an agreement to expand the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force [ISAF] in Afghanistan, of which Turkey had long served as a major contributor.⁹⁷

During his address to the NATO Summit, President Bush voiced his administration's unequivocal support for Turkey's accession into the EU. "America believes that as a European power, Turkey belongs in the European Union," he told the audience.⁹⁸ His remarks sparked ire from some EU member states; in particular, of French President Jacques Chirac who argued that those remarks "went into a territory that isn't his [President Bush]".⁹⁹ However, the Bush administration continued to be vocal in its support for Turkey's EU candidacy. Formal negotiations on Turkey's EU accession process were announced on December 17, 2004. Secretary Powell was quick to issue a statement welcoming the move. "A Turkey that is firmly anchored in Europe and sharing European values will be a positive force for prosperity and democracy. This is good for Turkey, for the broader European region, and for the United States, and that is why successive U.S. Administrations have consistently supported Turkey's European aspirations," the statement read.¹⁰⁰

TURKISH COMMAND OF ISAF (FEBRUARY-AUGUST 2005)

In February 2005, Turkey took command of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan under General Ethem Erdagi. From February to August of 2005, Turkey commanded 8,000 personnel from 30 different countries, contributing 1,450 of its own troops. Turkey also assumed responsibility for the Kabul Airport during this time. Speaking at the handover ceremony on February 13, General Erdagi declared that the first priority of the Turkish-led ISAF VII would be “to provide security in Afghanistan and to provide a safe and secure environment in which the government of Afghanistan can run the country.”¹⁰¹

Following the US invasion and defeat of the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2001, Turkey committed to support the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), sending an initial number of 300 troops on the condition that they are not used in either counterinsurgency or counterterror operations. Additionally, Turkey later contributed three helicopters in support of ISAF. Prior to NATO taking command of the ISAF mission in August 2003, Turkey had led ISAF II from June 2002 to February 2003, during which time they expanded their commitment to 1,400 troops.¹⁰²

In addition to the ISAF mission, Turkey contributed directly to the diplomatic effort. Hikmet Cetin, a Turkish politician, served as the first NATO Senior Civilian Representative (SCR) in Afghanistan from 2003 to 2006. Created in 2003, the SCR represents NATO’s political leadership in Afghanistan and works with the Afghan government and partner nations and organizations. Cetin oversaw the first parliamentary and presidential Afghan elections as well as a number of other landmark developments in his tenure.¹⁰³

In October 2003, the UN Security Council passed resolution 1510, authorizing the expansion of the ISAF “to allow it, as resources permit, to support the Afghan Transitional Authority and

its successors in the maintenance of security in areas of Afghanistan outside of Kabul and its environs,” laying the groundwork for the expansion of the ISAF mandate to include all of Afghanistan.¹⁰⁴ The initial stage of this expansion took place from December 2003 to October 2004 in the north of Afghanistan. The second expansion took place under the auspices of Turkey’s command in 2005. Beginning in May 2006, ISAF took command of two Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) in the provinces of Herat and Farah and an additional two PRTs in Chaghcharan, the capital of Ghor Province, and in Qala-e-Naw, capital of Badghis Province.¹⁰⁵ The expansion into western Afghanistan saw ISAF providing security assistance to 50% of Afghanistan.¹⁰⁶

Following the end of its ISAF mission, Turkey remained deeply involved in the Afghanistan mission. In November 2006, Turkey established a PRT in Wardak, a town west of Kabul. As part of this mission, Turkey helped train Afghan National Police and helped coordinate and administer various reconstruction and administration projects. Turkey also adopted a rotational command with France for operations in Central Afghanistan, starting in August 2006 for two years, then again took command of the Kabul Regional Command Capital in November 2009.¹⁰⁷ In 2010, Turkey established a second PRT in Jawzjan similar to the one in Wardak Province.¹⁰⁸

WHITE HOUSE MEETING BETWEEN PRIME MINISTER ERDOGAN AND PRESIDENT BUSH (JUNE 8, 2005)

On June 8, 2005, President Bush welcomed Prime Minister Erdogan to Washington D.C. for his second Oval Office visit as Prime Minister. According to the joint statement made by President Bush and Prime Minister Erdogan following their meeting, topics of discussion included the crisis between Israel and Palestine, continued efforts to resolve the ongoing Cyprus conflict, fighting terrorism and the PKK, and Turkey's commitment to playing a leadership role in Afghanistan.¹⁰⁹ Leaders also discussed increasing the US investments in Turkey.¹¹⁰

President Bush started his statement by praising Prime Minister Erdogan and Turkey's role in Afghanistan, noting that "Turkey's democracy is an example for the people of the Middle East. I would like to thank Erdogan for his leadership in this area. I would also like to thank the Prime Minister for Turkey's leadership role in Afghanistan." President Bush emphasized that his meeting with Prime Minister Erdogan had been very successful and that the strategic partnership between the US and Turkey continued to be of utmost importance. Prime Minister Erdogan reaffirmed the strategic partnership between two countries and added, "This strategic partnership will move forward with confidence into the future."¹¹¹ He also stated that President Bush had instructed Secretary of State Rice to work on ways to begin flights to Turkish Cyprus from the US at the request of the Turkish delegation.¹¹² During the meeting, Prime Minister Erdogan was accompanied by Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul, State Minister Ali Babacan, Defense Minister Vecdi Gonul, AK Party Deputy Omer Celik, and his diplomatic consultant Egeman Bagis. From the US, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, National Security Advisor

Stephen Hadley, head of the Congressional Defense Committee, Gordon England, and outgoing US Ambassador to Turkey, Eric Edelman, were present at the meeting.¹¹³

One piece of the bilateral partnership that was notably passed over by President Bush was Turkey's call for enhanced US assistance for its operations against the PKK in northern Iraq. This issue has become one of the very frequently repeated agenda items during the summits between Turkish and American leaders; in every press release following the summits, there was strong emphasis placed on the fight against the PKK. However, the constant discussion of this issue also demonstrated that Turkey was not totally satisfied by the statements of support from the US administration in the absence of meaningful action. Some in Turkey had become critical of the US as they felt that the Bush administration was not steadfast in its commitment to Iraq's territorial integrity, and that it might be open to the idea of a separate Kurdish state being formed out of the northern provinces.¹¹⁴

During these years, another major agenda item was related to Turkey's increasing opening towards the Middle East. Turkey started to get involved in Middle East affairs in order to find a peaceful resolution to the conflicts in the region. While on that visit, Prime Minister Erdogan indicated that Turkey was prepared to serve as a mediator in the Middle East, including the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.¹¹⁵ Following the meeting, President Bush remarked, "one of the most important foreign policy initiatives of my administration — and I know the Prime Minister shares the same desire — is to work with the Palestinians so they can have their own state, their own democracy, living side-by-side in peace with Israel."¹¹⁶

During his visit to Washington, Prime Minister Erdogan also visited members of Congress. Speaking of his upcoming meeting with Prime Minister Erdogan, Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist

stated, “Some in the press speculate that Istanbul and Washington are going their separate ways. This is simply not the case.” He also praised Turkey as a leader in the Iraq reconstruction effort and for its leadership in Afghanistan. Most importantly, he spoke more directly to the issue of the PKK than President Bush saying,

And we must not forget that Turkey had been challenged by terrorism at home by the PKK for years before 9/11. Turkey is threatened today as well. Some PKK terrorists are seeking safe haven in northern Iraq, and so I urge the administration and the Iraqi government to take more aggressive action against the terrorists, and deny them any safe haven from which to launch attacks.¹¹⁷

However, according to Prime Minister Erdogan, US assistance in this field was not sufficient.¹¹⁸ Prime Minister Erdogan stated, “we don’t think it is sufficient. We want [the cooperation] to be taken further.” This sentiment was also reflected in a statement made by White House Spokesman Scott McClellan, who acknowledged that, for the US, fighting the PKK was one of many challenges the Bush administration was facing in Iraq.¹¹⁹

On the second day of his visit to Washington, Erdogan held a bilateral meeting with former Deputy Defense Secretary and new World Bank President Paul Wolfowitz. Following the meet-



ing, Wolfowitz stated, "I'm very pleased to hear that the World Bank has good relations with Turkey. In addition, I'm very glad to know that Turkey's economic reform program has had very good results and continues to bear fruit."¹²⁰ Erdogan also had a meeting with *The Washington Post's* editorial board and 13 leading decision-makers during a luncheon.¹²¹ He also had an interview with *CNN International* where he said that Turkish-US relations were built on a 50 year old strategic partnership, and the only problem between the two countries on Iraq was the Turkish parliament's March 1, 2003 denial of Turkish territory as a base for an offensive into northern Iraq. On this problem he asserted, "We couldn't get enough votes in Parliament. These things happen in a democratic system."¹²² Prime Minister Erdogan met with United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan in New York City where he asked Annan to end the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus' (TRNC) international isolation and push Greek Cypriots to resume talks for a settlement on the island.¹²³ Media agencies in Turkey viewed Prime Minister Erdogan's visit to the US as an important step in healing the tension in Turkish-American relations.¹²⁴

HAMAS DELEGATION VISITS TO ANKARA (FEBRUARY 2006)

The US and Turkey again faced a tense point in relations when Ankara invited a Hamas delegation to visit the Turkish capital following the 2006 Palestinian parliamentary elections. On January 25, 2006, Hamas roundly defeated its rival party Fatah, winning 76 out of 132 parliamentary seats comparing to Fatah's 43.¹²⁵ Hamas' victory was an unsettling turn of events for the US and Israel, given their repeated refusal to conduct diplomacy with any Palestinian government that included Hamas because it had been designated by both Israel and the US as a terror organization. After the election, President Bush characterized the results as a "wake-up call to the leadership," of Palestine but reasserted the US' position that it would not deal with "a political party that articulates the destruction of Israel as part of its platform."¹²⁶ Similarly, Secretary Rice stated, "Our [US] position on Hamas has therefore not changed."¹²⁷ Additionally, the "Quartet," which consisted of the US, the EU, Russia, and the UN, declared on January 30 that future aid to Palestine should be determinant on Hamas recognizing Israel's right to exist, giving up violence, and maintaining all previous agreements with Israel.¹²⁸ In Turkey, Prime Minister Erdogan responded to the election results by declaring, "the choice of the people must be respected," but also noted, "We have talked about the importance of the acceptance of the existence of an Israeli state, as well as a Palestinian state in the region."¹²⁹

Shortly after the election, a delegation from Hamas led by Khaled Meshaal took the Turkish government's invitation and visited Ankara on February 16, where they met with Foreign Minister Gul. The news of the delegation and meetings were met with concern in the US and in Israel. In the press briefing the day after the delegation met with Foreign Minister Gul, the US

State Department stated that the US position was to “strongly encourage and, frankly, expect them [Turkey] to only use such a contact to send a strong, clear message to Hamas that they have to meet the requirements of the international community.”¹³⁰ The US Ambassador to Ankara Ross Wilson said, “What is important is not the visit of the delegation, but what is the message.”¹³¹ According to the Turkish Foreign Ministry’s statement, the visit was not official, they did not invite Hamas representatives to Turkey, rather the invitation was sent by the AK Party and Hamas representatives.¹³²

Foreign Minister Gul defended the decision to invite Meshaal by arguing that Turkey hoped to contribute to the Israeli-Palestinian peace process by acting as a mediator between Israel and Hamas. He also asserted that Turkey had discussed the proposed visit with both Israel and the US and that both countries had initially responded positively.¹³³ According to the Turkish authorities, Hamas was open for negotiations with Israel and pleased with Turkey serving as a mediator on the issue. The statement of the Turkish Foreign Ministry read, “Hamas Political Bureau Chairman Khalid Meshal and his delegation were invited to come to Turkey. Within the constructive role of our country in the region, we allowed delegation’s visit to Turkey as they are the representatives of a group that had won the Palestinian Legislative elections. In this way we had the opportunity to directly address the international community’s expectations. As Turkey, we see it as part of our regional responsibility to contribute to developments that will advance the Middle East Peace Process in the transition period we are in. During the talks, the Hamas delegation was reminded of the expectations of the international community and the responsibilities of the new Palestinian Legislative Council and the government to the people of the Palestine. We also emphasized the importance of adopting a rational, realistic, conciliatory and

flexible attitude for them. The Hamas delegation stated that these suggestions are useful and will be taken into account.”¹³⁴

The State Department affirmed that, according to the readout on the meeting provided to them by the Turkish government, Turkey emphasized the international community’s position to Hamas.¹³⁵ While the reported tension between the US and Turkey over the meeting never boiled over into a larger issue, the incident was seen as a significant point by some observers of the bilateral relationship.¹³⁶

THE SHARED VISION AND STRUCTURED DIALOGUE TO ADVANCE THE TURKISH-AMERICAN STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP (JULY 5, 2006)

On July 5, 2006 Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul traveled to Washington to meet with US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who had just been elevated to her new position from the post of National Security Advisor. In previous meetings with Turkish officials, Secretary Rice had sought to assure the Turkish government that the US would do more to confront the influx of PKK insurgents from Iraq into Turkey. This included promises to share intelligence with Turkey on the movement of the PKK within Iraq. “We believe that it is important that we make a joint effort through information-sharing and other means to prevent any vacuum from being used as a way to inflict harm here in Turkey,” she stated during a trip to Turkey in April 2006.¹³⁷ However, Turkey continued to push that the US could be doing more to help its partner, “I think we have the right to expect this [US support against the PKK],” Foreign Minister Gul remarked at an event in Washington DC on July 6, 2006, “the Turkish people are expecting more, and they [the US] are well aware of this.”¹³⁸

When Foreign Minister Gul met with Secretary Rice at the State Department on July 5, 2006, the pair of diplomats sought to reinforce the existence of a “shared vision and structured dialogue to advance the Turkish-American strategic partnership,” which was established to create a more structured framework for consultations and dialogue between the two countries.¹³⁹ “The shared vision document sets a broad agenda between the two countries and launches a process of intensive dialogue on different levels,” Foreign Minister Gul stated in his remarks with Secretary Rice after the inking of the document.¹⁴⁰ In particular, its goal was

to increase communication between communities and industries outside of the historical military-civilian bilateral relationship. The document was the first of its kind signed by the US, and signaled Washington's view that Turkey was a strategically important partner relevant in many US international priorities. Furthermore, it marked a new era in the US-Turkish relationship where the two countries now envisioned each other as something more than a mere "strategic partner," the phrase which had been used to characterize the relationship since the late 1990s.¹⁴¹ The document read,

Turkey and the United States pledge themselves to work together on all issues of common concern, including promoting peace and stability in the broader Middle East through democracy.¹⁴²

Ultimately, the document continued Turkish calls for increased US efforts against the PKK in northern Iraq and led to the establishment of a Coordination Group for Countering the PKK in August 2006. Other areas of cooperation outlined in the document included joint international efforts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian and Cyprus conflicts, promoting stability and democracy in the Black Sea region, the Caucasus, and Central Asia, and Turkey's ongoing commitment to the war in Afghanistan.¹⁴³ However, not much was achieved in building a common ground or policy coordination in these fields. The document paved the way for the United States-Turkey Economic Partnership Commission (EPC), which was established to expand economic ties between Turkey and the US as "part and parcel of the strong and lasting friendship and strategic partnership that the peoples of the United States and Turkey enjoy."¹⁴⁴ The EPC met three times before May of 2007 and established an Action Plan including goals such as expanding cooperation in the fields of science and technology, education, regional leadership, and energy security.¹⁴⁵

APPOINTMENT OF THE SPECIAL ENVOY FOR COUNTERING THE PKK (AUGUST 2006)

On August 28, 2006, the Bush administration appointed General Joseph W. Ralston to serve as the Special Envoy for Countering the PKK, tasking him with “coordinating U.S. engagement with the Government of Turkey and the Government of Iraq to eliminate the terrorist threat of the PKK and other terrorist groups operating in northern Iraq and across the Turkey-Iraq border.”¹⁴⁶ The announcement came only days after several attacks on tourist destinations in Antalya, Marmaris, and Istanbul.

The PKK, under its various names, has been listed by the US as a designated Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) since 1997.¹⁴⁷ At the NATO Summit in June 2004, President Bush reportedly promised Prime Minister Erdogan that the US would take action against the PKK in Iraq.¹⁴⁸ This promise came on the heels of a reported agreement made in the fall of 2003.¹⁴⁹ Despite that designation and President Bush’s promise, US actions against the group were limited. Turkish General Ilker Basbug and Foreign Minister Gul both complained about the lack of US action. General Basbug stated outright in 2004, “the US’s fight against the PKK is not meeting our [Turkey’s] expectation.”¹⁵⁰

The position of Special Envoy for Countering the PKK was designed to help address these issues in the US-Turkish relationship. Speaking about General Ralston’s appointment in August 2006, Daniel Fried, then-Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian affairs told CNN Turk that the position of Special Envoy for Countering the PKK had been created in order to address the “common threat” that the PKK posed to the US, Turkey, and Iraq. According to Assistant Assistant Secretary Fried, part of General Ralston’s task would be to “coordinate U.S. government efforts and efforts we will make with the Iraqi government and our ef-

forts in cooperation with Turkey.”¹⁵¹ In prepared remarks to the Subcommittee on Europe of the House Foreign Affairs Committee in March 2007, he reiterated the need for the US to take further action to shut down PKK operations in northern Iraq.¹⁵² US State Department Spokesperson Tom Casey declared that General Ralston’s new position “reiterates the commitment that we [the US] have to be working with Turkey and working with the Government of Iraq to end the threat posed by PKK terrorism.”¹⁵³ General Ralston’s appointment and mission faced some initial difficulties due to misunderstandings concerning what his mission was and whether he would be meeting with the PKK in his capacity.¹⁵⁴



In his position as envoy on the PKK, General Ralston first visited Turkey in September 2006 to meet Turkish officials to discuss the Kurdish issue, including his counterpart, Retired General Edip Baser.¹⁵⁵ He visited Turkey several more times, as well as visiting Iraq to meet with national government officials and KRG officials. Speaking to Subcommittee on Europe of the House Foreign Affairs Committee in March 2007 alongside Assistant Secretary Secretary Fried, General Ralston asserted that progress had been made on the issue, including “the Iraqi government’s public condemnation of the presence of armed PKK militias in Iraq, the

order to close PKK offices in the Iraqi Kurdish region, and the facilitation of a PKK declaration of a cessation of hostilities that has lasted for almost six months.”¹⁵⁶

Turkish politician and military officers felt that the US had not backed up its commitments to combat the group’s presence in the region outside of repeating its usual mantra that to deal with the PKK terrorism, the trilateral mechanism between the US-Turkey and Iraq needed to be utilized.¹⁵⁷ Turkey was also in favor of handling the issue by utilizing trilateral mechanisms, but it was unhappy about this mechanism’s non functionality as a result of broken promises by Iraq and the US. In this regard, after one of her meeting with Iraqi Foreign Minister Zebari, the US State Secretary Rice claimed “We discussed with Zebari the issue of preventing the PKK, which used northern Iraq as a base to attack Turkey. We talked about the importance of the triple security mechanism between Iraq, America and Turkey. We emphasized the importance of accelerating the operation of this mechanism. Because Iraqis do not want their territories to be used for terrorist activities against their neighbor Turkey.” General Ralston also made similar statements about the PKK, expressing sympathy with Turkey in its insistence on ending terrorist activities of the PKK. During one of his speeches at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), General Ralston stated:

Everyone, including the US, should treat the PKK like a “killer”. Northern Iraqi Kurds should have a more effective attitude towards the PKK especially the Kurdish administration needs to pressure the PKK and expel the organization from the region. There is no reason why PKK terror can not be justified! This savagery must be over. Think that there is a terrorist organization in Mexico that is attacking to the US and Mexican government is saying that we have domestic problems thus we can not deal with your problem now. How do you think that the US respond to them or to this problem? The PKK is doing this. We have to understand the situation of Turkey and its rightful claims, and we must help

fight terrorism. Already, all units of the US administration are in a consensus for their commitment to end the activities of the PKK in northern Iraq and to support Turkey.¹⁵⁸

General Ralston identified the non-functionality of the trilateral mechanism in other speeches and pointed out political interests as the main reason behind the dysfunction. He said that Kurdish leaders were aware that the PKK was a great danger to themselves and that they were determined to fight it. However, they faced political considerations and thus they are unable to take final steps. He said the Iraqi government was helping, to some extent, in the fight against the PKK. However, Kurdish politicians did not want to be viewed as overly harsh against the PKK for political reasons.¹⁵⁹ As a result of this, possible Turkish military operations in Iraq against the PKK began to be referred to frequently by Turkish politicians and military officials. Foreign Minister Gul claimed that if the Iraqi government did not take concrete steps in this issue Turkey would do what was necessary, which he viewed as taking military action in Northern Iraq.¹⁶⁰ General Ralston worked as the Special Envoy for Countering the PKK for close to one year. During that time, PKK attacks increased and over 100 soldiers and civilians were killed.¹⁶¹

General Ralston eventually resigned from his position in October 2007, telling Turkish newspaper *Hurriyet* that he “believed no progress was being made on the joint efforts between Ankara and Washington to combat the PKK presence in northern Iraq.”¹⁶² Following his resignation, the issue of the PKK presence in northern Iraq remained a significant issue between the US and Turkey during the Bush administration. Speaking at the National Press Club in DC in November 2007, Prime Minister Erdogan again stated, “Turkey expects from the United States and the central Iraqi government concrete and urgent steps which will put a final end to PKK terrorism emanating from northern Iraq.”¹⁶³

WHITE HOUSE MEETING BETWEEN PRIME MINISTER ERDOGAN AND PRESIDENT BUSH (OCTOBER 2, 2006)

On October 2, 2006, Prime Minister Erdogan and then-President Bush met for the fourth time in the Oval Office. Prime Minister Erdogan was accompanied by Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul. During the meeting, the leaders reportedly discussed issues including countering terrorism, Turkey's efforts to join the EU, and other regional issues. Following the meeting, Prime Minister Erdogan and President Bush conducted a joint press conference. President Bush asserted, "We just had an extensive and important dialogue about how Turkey and the United States can and must work together to achieve peace. We talked about our determined efforts to fight terror and extremism. We talked about our common efforts to bring stability to the Middle East. We had an important discussion about both Iraq and Iran."¹⁶⁴ During his statement, Prime Minister Erdogan also emphasized the US-Turkish partnership to fight terrorism. He stated, "We share the same opinion with President Bush in forming a partnership with a common formula to curb terror." He also stated that they discussed Lebanon, Israel, Palestine issues during their meeting and once again thanked Bush's support for Turkey's membership to the European Union.¹⁶⁵ Prior to his meeting with President Bush, Prime Minister Erdogan visited New York on the 30th of September and also spoke at Georgetown University on the October 1.

The Oval Office meeting came as tension in Iraq continued to develop over the status of Kirkuk. There were numerous reports of efforts to forcefully change the demographics of the city ahead of a constitutionally mandated referendum planned for 2007 to determine if Kirkuk would fall under the control of Iraqi Kurdistan.¹⁶⁶ According to Turkish daily *Hurriyet*, Prime Minister Erdogan pressed President Bush to help infer a special status on Kirkuk in order to avoid negative consequences of the expected referendum and President Bush agreed with him.¹⁶⁷ Ac-

cording to the White House press secretary, President Bush and Prime Minister Erdogan also discussed the PKK, but did not address the possibility of Turkish cross-border operations against the group.¹⁶⁸

President Bush and Prime Minister Erdogan also discussed Turkey's efforts to join the EU, an aspiration that the Bush administration had voiced consistent support for. While formal negotiations had opened the year before, the process had encountered difficulties, particularly over the status of Cyprus.¹⁶⁹ Turkey's foreign policy toward Europe was mentioned during President Bush and Prime Minister's joint remarks. President Bush reiterated that he saw it as being in "the United States' interests that Turkey join the European Union."¹⁷⁰ In a later interview, Prime Minister Erdogan warned that the EU statements on the issue risked souring Turkish public interest in joining the union.¹⁷¹

Another issue that was addressed during the meeting was the Israel-Palestine conflict. Prime Minister Erdogan argued after the meeting, "Today Palestinian-Israeli conflict is a major factor in the rise of regional and global tensions. In order to establish peace in the Middle East and in the world, a permanent and fair solution to this problem must first be found primarily." Erdogan also pointed out the ongoing tragedy in the Darfur region of Sudan which he witnessed with his own eyes during his visit to the region. President Bush said that the US also shared the desire to help the people in Darfur and it was important that the UN work hard to find a solution to the tragedy.¹⁷²

Both the US and Turkish governments touted the meeting as a highly successful summit. After the meeting that ran nearly an hour longer than expected, White House aides characterized it as exemplifying the importance of the bilateral relationship.¹⁷³ In a press briefing after the visit, US State Department Spokesman Tom Casey stated that he would "categorize the relationship as excellent, and believe that the visit here was helpful in terms of continuing our close cooperation with Turkey."¹⁷⁴

2007 TURKISH ELECTIONS

On July 22, 2007, Turkey held early parliamentary elections after the AK Party's nomination of Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul to the presidency was blocked by opposition members in parliament.¹⁷⁵ Turnout in the election was high with 84 percent of the public casting ballots. The AK Party maintained its majority, winning 341 seats in Parliament, while two opposition parties, the CHP and MHP, won 112 and 70 seats respectively.¹⁷⁶

Following the general elections, the new parliament restarted proceedings to elect a new president. The AK Party again nominated Abdullah Gul for the Presidency; he won in the third round of voting in August 2007.¹⁷⁷ Gul was replaced as Foreign Minister by Ali Babacan, who had previously served as Minister for Economic Affairs.¹⁷⁸

2007 WHITE HOUSE MEETING BETWEEN PRIME MINISTER ERDOGAN AND PRESIDENT BUSH (NOVEMBER 5, 2007)

In November 2007, Prime Minister Erdogan again visited the US to meet with President Bush. The meeting came at a sensitive time, with the issue of the PKK again frustrating the relationship. Furthering this tension, Congress was pushing forward on a resolution on the Armenian issue. Prime Minister Erdogan highlighted this in his remarks at the National Press Club after the meeting, where he told the audience, “There are two important issues currently for us [Turkey] on the agenda. The first one has to do with the resolution on the events of 1915 and the second one is the unacceptable presence of the separatist terrorist organization the PKK in northern Iraq.”¹⁷⁹ Prior to leaving for DC, Prime Minister Erdogan had also expressed his hope to see “concrete measures” as a result of the meetings.¹⁸⁰

The issue of the PKK had remained a pressing issue since the appointment of General Joseph W. Ralston as US Special Envoy for Countering the PKK in 2006. In October 2007, General Ralston had resigned from his position, citing a lack of progress in efforts to combat the group. Around the time of his resignation, Turkey was threatening to conduct cross-border strikes against the PKK in northern Iraq after the PKK carried out a number of attacks in Turkey. In a near unanimous vote on October 17, the Turkish Parliament voted to authorize the government to send troops into Iraq in order to address the threat of the PKK.¹⁸¹ Speaking after the passage of the bill, Cemil Cicek, a Turkish government spokesperson and member of Turkey’s Special Council Combating Terrorism declared that Turkey’s “patience has run out” on the issue.¹⁸²

Responding to the vote, President Bush suggested that it would not be in Turkey’s interests to send a large number of troops to Iraq.¹⁸³ Similar to the debate prior to the 2003 invasion and

in October of 2003, the US lobbied Turkey to not deploy military forces in northern Iraq, though it did call for further action from Iraqi Kurds to address the presence of the PKK. “Action is required here and it has been too long without meaningful action directed against this terrorist group,” said David Satterfield, the U.S. coordinator for Iraq on October 22. Secretary Rice also proposed a meeting of ministers from the US, Turkey, and Iraq at a conference in Istanbul on November 2 to discuss how to prevent further PKK attacks into Turkey.¹⁸⁴



After the meeting, President Bush said that they shared the same concerns with Turkey, “The PKK is a terrorist organization, the enemy of Turkey, the enemy of Iraq and the enemy of the US. We talked about how we could work together to make better intelligence sharing with Prime Minister Erdogan. We need intelligence to capture the killers.”¹⁸⁵ President Bush said that the US would expand intelligence sharing with Turkey to include “actionable intelligence” in order to help it combat PKK militants and that they had also agreed to establish a “tripartite arrangement” between their “number two guys” and General David Petraeus, then commander of the Multi-National Force in Iraq.¹⁸⁶ In practice,

this tripartite arrangement developed into consultations between Petraeus, Vice Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff General James Cartwright, and Turkish Deputy Chief of the General Staff General Ergin Saygun.¹⁸⁷ Prime Minister Erdogan noted that he was “very happy” to see that he and President Bush had agreed on the need to overcome regional difficulties such as the PKK.¹⁸⁸

Another issue of discussion during Prime Minister Erdogan’s visit was House Resolution 106 (110th Congress), which called for the US to recognize the events of 1915 as “genocide.”¹⁸⁹ Despite initial strong support, the resolution quickly began to lose steam in the middle of October, days before the Turkish parliament voted to authorize cross-border operations.¹⁹⁰ President Bush had called on Congressional leaders not to exacerbate tensions by voting on the resolution, “one thing Congress should not be doing is sorting out the historical record of the Ottoman Empire.”¹⁹¹ There were concerns that if the bill were passed, it would adversely affect US operations in Iraq. Key Congressional members sponsoring the bill eventually asked their peers to withhold a vote on the bill.¹⁹² Prime Minister Erdogan expressed “cautious optimism” about this development and his appreciation for the “commonsensical approach that has been presented by many members of Congress and the U.S. administration” in his speech at the National Press Club.¹⁹³

TURKEY FACILITATES ISRAEL-SYRIA NEGOTIATIONS

In May 2008, Turkey stepped up to act as a go-between in indirect peace talks between Israel and Syria. The talks were announced on May 21, and were the first negotiations between the two parties since 2000.¹⁹⁴ The announcement came at a time when the US was attempting to isolate Syria and, therefore, Washington gave only tepid support when the agreement was announced. While Assistant Secretary of State David Welch stated that the US supported “any expansion of the circle of peace” in the region and praised Turkey’s efforts, he was clear that the US would not play a role in the talks and would focus instead on the “Palestinian track.” He also noted, “direct negotiations are always the best way to proceed.”¹⁹⁵ Secretary Rice said that the US welcomed any step towards peace in the Middle East but argued the Palestinian track “is the most mature track.”¹⁹⁶

Despite the initial low expectations about the talks, in a very short period of time, there were encouraging signs of rapid improvement. During the negotiations, Prime Minister Erdogan personally filled the role as power broker. His agreement to work with both Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert stemmed from Turkey’s close relations with both countries. The Turkish President had a particular strong relationship with President Assad at that point and Prime Minister Olmert viewed Turkey as a valued partner in helping Israel achieve its security interests and regional goals, including his commitment to finding a peaceful solution to Palestine.¹⁹⁷

The first indirect meeting of the peace process was held in Istanbul in May 2008 and four subsequent meetings occurred between May and July. The talks were briefly suspended in July owing to a domestic Israeli scandal involving Prime Minister Olmert before continuing in December 2008. When Prime Minister Olmert met with Prime Minister Erdogan for the last time during peace talks, the

Turkish leader is reported as having conducted a separate, tandem phone call with President Assad as he worked to find solutions to the disagreements between the two countries.¹⁹⁸

While the indirect talks facilitated by Turkey were coming incredibly close to finding an agreement between Israel and Syria, President Bush was unhappy to see two of the US' closest allies marching toward a peace agreement with Damascus.¹⁹⁹ His distaste for Syria and for Turkey's facilitation of peace talks was on full display during his address to the Israeli Knesset on May 15, 2008. President Bush proclaimed, "We [the US] also believe that nations have a right to defend themselves and that no nation should ever be forced to negotiate with killers pledged to its destruction," and, "Some seem to believe that we should negotiate with the terrorists and radicals, as if some ingenious argument will persuade them they have been wrong all along."²⁰⁰ His comments pre-empting the announcement of the Turkish-facilitated negotiations, due to be announced less than a week later, were attributed to the fact that Prime Minister Olmert had briefed the American President on the ongoing negotiations during or prior to the American leader's trip to Israel.²⁰¹

Turkey's hard fought negotiations were brought to an abrupt end when Israel broke with the negotiated ceasefire and launched a full ground invasion into the Gaza Strip on December 29, 2008. "I consider these actions by Israel, while we are making an attempt for peace, as delivering a blow to the peace initiatives," Prime Minister Erdogan proclaimed after the operation began.²⁰² He stated, "Today I was planning to call Israeli Prime Minister Olmert regarding Israel - Syria talks but I cancelled it. I'm not calling because it [Israel's invasion] is also disrespectful to us. We are a country working for peace."²⁰³

With the renewal of conflict in Gaza, Turkey's mediation fell apart. However, it remained an example for those still wishing to find peace between Syria and Israel, and paved the way for the US led mediation between the two actors in 2012.

THE RUSSO-GEORGIAN 5-DAY WAR (AUGUST 2008)

When the conflict started between Russia and Georgia in August 2008, the international community was quick to call for a ceasefire, as American and European delegations headed to Georgia in an effort to resolve the crisis.²⁰⁴ Turkey also called for a ceasefire. Prime Minister Erdogan expressed Turkey's displeasure at the outbreak of violence, "As a country in the region, this conflict is a situation that disturbs us. We do not want to have such a situation in Georgia because we are a country with a priority for peace and we support the territorial integrity of Georgia. We hope that a ceasefire will occur as soon as possible through diplomatic channels."²⁰⁵

The US responded to Russian aggression in the region by dispatching naval forces toward the Black Sea as part of a NATO exercise. It also endeavored to send ships through the Bosphorus Straits to provide the Georgians with humanitarian aid. However, Turkey did not permit the ships passage by invoking the Montreux Convention, an international treaty which grants Turkey unilateral control over the Bosphorus Straits and thus access to the Black Sea. According to Montreux Convention, war ships passing through the Bosphorous Straits are subject to restrictions in weight, number, and time of arrival.²⁰⁶ The US ships were military ships with 140 thousand tonnage of total weight, exceeding the maximum tonnage outlined by the convention.²⁰⁷ The US was outraged that the Turks had invoked Montreux terms to block ships, while Turkey maintained, "Requests for naval transport of such materials will be evaluated under the Montreux Convention's provisions," citing that the ships exceeded the weight limit set forth in the Montreux convention. Questions were also raised by both Russia and Turkey about the cargo on the ships. The US State Department declared they were carrying humanitarian aid for Georgia such as blankets, hygiene kits, baby products and

child care materials.²⁰⁸ Turkish Foreign Ministry emphasized that Turkey valued its good relationship with Georgia and supported the sending humanitarian aid to Georgia and would ease all formal regulations within legal boundaries.²⁰⁹ In the end, the US was allowed to send three lighter ships through the Straits.²¹⁰

Russia's ambassador to Ankara Vladimir Ivanovsky reacted to Turkey's action on the US ships by saying, "Russia and Turkey have one hundred percent the same approach on the Montreux Convention. We believe that this agreement complies with the needs of the today's world. Both countries support the full implementation of the Montreux Convention."²¹¹ Later, when questioned about Turkey's role in resolving the Georgia crisis, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice told reporters, "Turkey is a terrific ally, including in this most recent crisis. We've been in touch several times, as I remember, with this situation because Turkey is a very important power force in the Caucasus and is trying to bring about a more peaceful Caucasus."²¹²

2008 US PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

On November 4, 2008, Senator Barack Hussein Obama was elected as the 44th President of the United States, defeating Republican opponent Senator John McCain.²¹³ As a candidate, Obama ran on a campaign promising a departure in US foreign policy from his predecessor, President George W. Bush. In a campaign speech, the candidate Obama spoke of his desire to “lead this country in a new direction” based on “ending the war in Iraq responsibly; finishing the fight against al-Qaida and the Taliban; securing all nuclear weapons and materials from terrorists and rogue states; achieving true energy security; and rebuilding our [US] alliances to meet the challenges of the 21st century.”²¹⁴

During the 2008 campaign, Obama was advised by a massive team of foreign policy experts, many of whom had previously served in the Clinton administration.²¹⁵ Among his top advisors were Denis McDonough, who served as the campaign’s national security coordinator, and previously as a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress and foreign policy advisor to Senate Democratic Leader Tom Daschle; Anthony Lake, a national security advisor to President Bill Clinton; and Susan Rice, a Brookings Institution senior fellow for foreign policy, global economy, and development, and a former Clinton administration assistant secretary of state for African affairs.²¹⁶

Following the election, President-elect Obama appointed his former competitor for the Democratic nomination Hillary Clinton as Secretary of State. Susan Rice, one of his key foreign policy advisors, was appointed to serve as ambassador to the UN. He kept the previous Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates, and appointed former Marine General James Jones to serve as National Security Advisor. Shortly after the inauguration on January 22, President Obama appointed former Senator George Mitchell to serve as special envoy for the Middle East, a sign of interest in

the Israel-Palestine peace process early in the administration.²¹⁷ Shortly after the announcement, Mitchell traveled to the Middle East and Europe, including Turkey, where he met with leaders to discuss the conflict.²¹⁸

The administration also announced that Richard Holbrooke, former ambassador to the UN, would be appointed to serve as special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan.²¹⁹ President Obama had campaigned on finishing the war in Afghanistan and Holbrooke's appointment was seen as a move towards burnishing US diplomatic efforts in the country, concurrent with an expected surge in troop numbers.²²⁰

In polling conducted on the eve of the election, twenty-two percent of Turks surveyed responded that they would rather see Senator Obama elected as president than Senator McCain. However, the highest percentage of those surveyed [70 percent] either declined to respond to the survey or didn't state a preference on who should win the election.²²¹ The election came at a time of shockingly poor public opinion about the US in Turkey. A Pew Research Center poll had found that in 2008, only twelve percent of Turks saw the US positively and an even lower two percent expressed any confidence in President George W. Bush.²²² President Obama entered office facing a bilateral relationship which had become highly strained during the past 8 years under his predecessor

BILATERAL MEETING BETWEEN PRESIDENT BUSH AND PRIME MINISTER ERDOGAN DURING THE SUMMIT ON FINANCIAL MARKETS AND THE WORLD ECONOMY (NOVEMBER 15, 2008)

On November 15, 2008, President Bush and Prime Minister Erdogan both participated in the Group of 20 (G20) Summit on Financial Markets in the World Economy in Washington D.C.²²³ While Prime Minister Erdogan's trip to Washington did not include a formal White House meeting, it came at a time of particular interest in Washington politics. Just 11 days earlier, the US had elected Senator Barack Obama as its next President. The purpose of the Summit on Financial Markets and the World Economy was to address serious challenges facing the world economy and financial markets in the aftermath of the global financial crisis.²²⁴

During his time in Washington, Prime Minister Erdogan also gave a speech at the National Press Club. During his remarks, he expressed his thoughts on the future of Turkish-American relations under the Obama administration. He spoke about global terrorism and expressed his willingness to combat terrorism in partnership with the US. He said, "We should not accept violence and the terror that transforms our earth into a fire in any way, nor encourage it in any way. No one can find justice, peace and tranquility anywhere in the world unless there is justice for all, prosperity for all, and security for all is provided. I cannot see any other way to deal global terrorism than fighting against it in partnership. In this respect, further developments and a deepening of our [US-Turkey] relationship and cooperation on the basis of strategic partnership and common vision are of great importance." He also said that Turkey would continue to cooperate with the US, but that it expected the new US administration to take into account its sensitivity to the issues of vital importance for the country, such as the fight against the PKK. In this context, Prime Minister Erdogan

added “It is pleasing that Mr. Obama announced that the support given by the United States to Turkey for its struggle to deal with the separatist terrorist organization will continue”²²⁵

PRESIDENT OBAMA VISITS TURKEY (APRIL 6, 2009)

In April 2009, just three months after assuming office, President Obama chose to visit Turkey as part of his first international trip as Commander in Chief. The visit was symbolic of the new President's appreciation for the importance of the US-Turkey relationship. In a speech to Turkish Parliament on April 6, President Obama stated,

Some people have asked me if I chose to continue my travels to Ankara and Istanbul to send a message to the world. And my answer is simple: Evet -- yes. Turkey is a critical ally. Turkey is an important part of Europe. And Turkey and the United States must stand together and work together to overcome the challenges of our time.²²⁶

He went on to detail his vision of a “model partnership” to be formed between the two countries. He also said that Washington would continue to support Turkey's efforts to join the EU, “Europe gains by diversity of ethnicity, tradition and faith - it is not diminished by it, and Turkish membership would broaden and strengthen Europe's foundation once more.”²²⁷



While in Turkey, President Obama met with Prime Minister Erdogan and President Gul. In remarks after the meeting, Prime Minister Erdogan outlined that he and President Obama reviewed the status of the US-Turkey relationship, as well as issues of importance to American-Turkish partnership, including ongoing conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, negotiations between Israel-Palestine and Israel-Syria, Turkey's membership to the EU, economic issues, and the fight against terrorism. President Obama again reiterated his view that "Turkey is a critical strategic partner of the United States."²²⁸ The day after President Obama departed Turkey, Prime Minister Erdogan presented his assessment on the US-Turkish relationship, the situation in the Middle East, the election of Obama and the new American president's visit to Turkey during an interview with the New York Times. He said that the US' policy towards the Middle East needed to change. Specifically, on the issue of Israel and Palestine, he stated that the solution to the conflict could not be reached by only working with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. He argued that western countries should also negotiate with Hamas. As for President Obama, Prime Minister Erdogan claimed that he could be the voice and guardian of millions of people that are silenced and vulnerable, and he added that the Middle East expected that from the new president.²²⁹

President Obama's visit to Turkey came at a critical moment for repairing the damage done to the image of the US in Muslim countries under the Bush administration.²³⁰ The new administration sought to make clear that the US was "not at war with Islam," as President Obama stated, "In our partnership with the Muslim world is critical in rolling back a fringe ideology that people of all faiths reject."²³¹ The visit succeeded in serving as a turning point for US-Turkey relations. It signaled that the new administration realized Turkey's growing economic strength and regional

influence, both of which rendered Ankara a valuable partner for the US.²³² The visit was met with positivity in Turkey, with one Turkish op-ed columnist reporting, “He [President Obama] made all camps happy, but he also gave everyone something to think about.”²³³ Anti-American feeling due to the Iraq war was a prominent feature in Turkish society during the Bush administration, but in the early days of the Obama administration, the new President’s approval ratings in Turkey reached above 50 percent.²³⁴ This optimism about the future of Turkish-American relations continued in the next couple of years.

PRIME MINISTER ERDOGAN VISITS OBAMA WHITE HOUSE (DECEMBER 7, 2009)

On December 7, 2009, Prime Minister Erdogan paid his first visit to Washington under the Obama administration. The visit came as the Obama administration was working to engage Iran in negotiations to limit its nuclear ambitions, including a push to tighten sanctions on the Iranian regime.²³⁵ Despite early renewed hope in the Turkish-American partnership, the US and Turkish leaderships were at odds on a number of pressing international conflict areas, including Iran, Sudan, and Israel.²³⁶



Prime Minister Erdogan and President Obama had two meetings; one bilateral and another accompanied by additional diplomatic personnel. The Turkish Delegation included Deputy Prime Minister Babacan, Foreign Minister Davutoglu, State Minister Bagis, Minister of Environment and Urbanization Demir, Deputy Chief of General Staff Gen. Guner, AK Party Deputy Chairman Kursad Tuzmen, and Turkey's Ambassador to Washington Nabi Sensoy. The American delegation was comprised of Vice President Biden, White House National Security Adviser James Jones and his assistant Tom Donilon, Foreign Secretary Hillary Clinton, Senior Director for European Affairs of the US National Security Council Elizabeth Sherwood-Randall, White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel, and US Department of State Senior Executive Responsible for European and Eurasian Affairs Philip Gordon.²³⁷

During Prime Minister Erdogan's time in Washington, President Obama acknowledged that Turkey had an important role to play in negotiations with Iran, "I indicated to the Prime Minister how important it is to resolve the issue of Iran's nuclear capacity in a way that allows Iran to pursue peaceful nuclear energy but provides assurances that it will abide by international rules and norms, and I believe that Turkey can be an important player in trying to move Iran in that direction."²³⁸ Prime Minister Erdogan responded that Turkey was ready to contribute on this issue, but that US should avoid a "double standard approach" about the nuclear program of other countries. Prime Minister Erdogan underlined the need for a similar pressure on Israel, which also had nuclear weapons.²³⁹

Terrorism in Iraq, the situation of Kirkuk, and the future of Iraq were some of the important issues that two leaders discussed in their meeting. On the PKK's terrorist activities, President Obama gave his condolences to both Erdogan and the Turkish people for the loss of lives in the last attack by the PKK. He as-

sented, “We [the US] have already recognized the PKK as a terrorist organization and put fighting the PKK to our mutual agenda. But, we could not have a consistent attitude towards terrorism yet.”²⁴⁰ Prime Minister Erdogan said, “the sharing of intelligence between the US and Turkey that started on November 5, 2007 lead to positive results, but it was not enough.” He wanted Obama to take more concrete steps to completely eradicate the PKK from northern Iraq.²⁴¹ On the issue of Kirkuk and the future of Iraq, Prime Minister Erdogan pointed out the importance of the continuation of stability in Iraq following the withdrawal of the US troops. He said that there was a need for ensuring a feeling of attachment to Iraq as one nation and that the status of Kirkuk needed to be resolved. President Obama responded positively to Prime Minister Erdogan’s request to “persuade Kurds in Northern Iraq on Kirkuk’s special status.”²⁴²

According to reports following the meeting, President Obama had two special requests for Prime Minister Erdogan. The first was on the opening of the Halki Seminary in Istanbul and the other was the ratification of bilateral protocols signed between Armenia and Turkey. Prime Minister Erdogan responded that the Turkish government was in the process of opening to religious minorities. As for the Halki Seminary, he added that there was an ongoing study in the Ministry of National Education on the fate of the building.²⁴³ About the bilateral protocols, Prime Minister Erdogan responded, “Turkey is a parliamentary democracy,” recalling the March 1 vote. “On 1 March, even deputies from my own party gave no votes. The same is true for the Armenian protocol. If voting is done without a solution in Karabakh, the protocols will be largely rejected,” Prime Minister Erdogan remarked.²⁴⁴

Despite differences in the views of the US and Turkey’s on many regional issues, President Obama stated his optimism about ties between the US and Turkey. President Erdogan maintained,

“Turkey is a very big country that have influence on the countries around it, so I am very happy to say that Turkey is a friend for the US and Prime Minister Erdogan is a friend to me. I hope that the good relations between us will continue for many years.”²⁴⁵ Prime Minister Erdogan also presented an optimistic vision for his relationship with the American president, “The fact that the President visited Turkey on his first overseas trip and that he described and characterized Turkish-U.S. relations as a model partnership has been very important for us politically and in the process that we all look forward to in the future as well.”²⁴⁶



During his visit, Erdogan also attended different events organized by German Marshall Foundation, Johns Hopkins University and the SETA Foundation about Turkish foreign policy.²⁴⁷ At the SETA Foundation Washington DC office’s grand opening, Prime Minister Erdogan and Senator Hagel both delivered remarks emphasizing the importance of Turkish institutions in the US to promote Turkish-American relations. Senator Hagel also asserted that Turkey had been an indispensable ally to the US since World War II.²⁴⁸

MEETING BETWEEN PRESIDENT OBAMA AND PRIME MINISTER ERDOGAN AT 2010 NUCLEAR SECURITY SUMMIT (APRIL 13, 2010)

On April 13, 2010, President Obama and Prime Minister Erdogan held a bilateral meeting on the sidelines of the 2010 Nuclear Security Summit. Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu and the US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton also attended the meeting. During the meeting, a number of issues related to the Middle East and the Caucasus, especially Armenia and Iran, were discussed.²⁴⁹ According to the official White House readout of the meeting, “The President relayed his continuing support and appreciation for Prime Minister Erdogan’s efforts on normalization of relations with Armenia, and encouraged him to continue forward toward ratification of the protocols for the benefit of future generations.”²⁵⁰

The scale of the 2010 Nuclear Security Summit was unprecedented; it brought together leaders from 47 different countries over a two day period. President Obama outlined before the gathering, “The central focus of this nuclear summit is the fact that the single biggest threat to U.S. security -- both short-term, medium-term and long-term -- would be the possibility of a terrorist organization obtaining a nuclear weapon,”²⁵¹



The day before his meeting with President Obama, Prime Minister Erdogan, in an interview with CNN reporter Christiane Amanpour, said that Turkey would not back the American President's push to increase sanctions on Iran because of its nuclear program. "I am here for a diplomatic solution," he told Amanpour.²⁵² The position of Turkey on enhancing sanctions against Iran was particularly salient for President Obama, as Turkey was serving as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for the 2009-2010 session. Erdogan also alluded to Turkey's role as possible mediator between Iran and the international community, "What the Iranians have always clearly stated to us has been that they have no investment on nuclear arms, that they are involved in activities in peaceful means, and if Turkey is asked to be -- to act as an intermediary, we, I believe, can help and to find the solution, because the process should be resolved not through sanctions, but through diplomacy, in my view."²⁵³ Just one month later, Turkey, Brazil and Iran would announce the Tehran Declaration agreement. The deal would ultimately fall apart as President Obama continued to push for increasing sanctions through the UN.

During his interview with Amanpour, Prime Minister Erdogan also directly addressed the tensions between the US and Turkey as well as the perception that Turkey was, as Amanpour put it, "shifting from the pro-US, pro-Western, to a more pro-Eastern" mentality. Erdogan refuted the notion that Turkey was turning away from the western alliance, "We're facing toward the west. We are continuing and pursuing our foreign policy in the way of normalizing our relations in all directions. And this does not mean that we would leave the West and move in another direction."²⁵⁴

CONGRESSIONAL RESOLUTION ON 1915 (MARCH 2010)

Between 2010 and 2011, the US House of Representatives and US Senate moved through a series of resolutions on 1915 events.²⁵⁵ On March 4, 2010, the US House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee narrowly passed the resolution with a vote of 23-22.²⁵⁶

The Turkish government took swiftly expressed its displeasure at the Foreign Affairs Committee's vote to advance the bill. Ankara recalled its Ambassador to Washington and warned that if the resolution advanced any farther the US risked "adversely affecting our [Turkish] cooperation."²⁵⁷ Prime Minister Erdogan also commented on the event, criticizing the decision of the US Foreign Affairs Committee, "The development related to the so-called Armenian genocide really upset Turkey. The US is our strategic ally, our good partner. This decision is like a comedy since decision was taken by the US quickly without waiting for every member of the committee to vote." However, he also added that he did not believe the US would ultimately want to lose its partner Turkey, "Turkey will not let anyone to play with its honor. I do not believe that the US will sacrifice its strategic partner Turkey for the sake of simple political calculations. If they are accepting this, there is nothing more we can say."²⁵⁸

On December 20, Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoglu, in remarks to the Turkish Parliament said that Prime Minister Erdogan had sent a letter to President Obama concerning the vote on the Armenian question. Foreign Minister Davutoglu stated that, as soon as Turkey received the first news of the vote, Ambassador Tan contacted his counterparts in the US, and that he had personally spoke with Mrs. Clinton to warn against the passing of the bill. "The Turkish nation is determined to defend its national dignity in the face of these memory imperatives and slanders," he

told the parliament.²⁵⁹ He also added that the US State Department clearly stated that they were against this bill.²⁶⁰

After clearing committee, the resolution was formally introduced into the Congressional calendar on March 17, 2010; the bill was reported to the full 111th Congress for consideration. The bill was never voted on by the House of Representatives.²⁶¹ Some analysts viewed the resolution as a bargaining chip to encourage Turkey toward normalizing its relations and opening its long-closed border with Armenia.²⁶² In 2009, Turkey and Armenia had worked together to develop a “Protocol on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations” and a “Protocol on the Development of Bilateral Relations.” Following the signing of the protocols on October 10, 2009, the proposition was submitted to the Grand National Assembly of Turkey.²⁶³ However, Armenia suspended the process of normalization amidst domestic pressure against the endeavor; Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan stated during a national television address, “We consider unacceptable the pointless efforts of making the dialogue between Armenia and Turkey an end in itself; from this moment on, we consider the current phase of normalization exhausted.”²⁶⁴ The announcement came just over one month after the House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee’s vote to advance the US resolution on the Armenian question. As talks between Turkey and Armenia fell through, so did the momentum behind the US resolution.

TEHRAN DECLARATION (MAY 17, 2010)

On May 17, 2010, Turkey, Brazil, and Iran announced the Tehran Declaration. This percentage is below the level of enrichment required for weapons construction, but sufficient for energy production and research reactors.²⁶⁵ Thus, it was protecting Iran's right to produce and use nuclear technology for peaceful reasons under Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).²⁶⁶ The agreement was part of an ongoing international effort to curb Iran's nuclear ambitions.²⁶⁷ However, as a result of the dissatisfaction of the United States and Europe, declaration could not be implemented.²⁶⁸

For 8 months, Turkey had been pursuing an intermediary role between Iran and the P5+1 following the encouragement of President Obama himself. Turkey rejected the US strategy of isolating, sanctioning, and punishing Iran. In a statement after his December 7, 2009 meeting with President Obama at the White House, Prime Minister Erdogan explained, "We do not want to see a country in our region possessing nuclear weapons and we want the countries in the region who have nuclear weapons to be rid of them."²⁶⁹ However, Turkey also publicly acknowledged that Iran had the right to develop nuclear capabilities, so long as they were used for peaceful purposes, including enrichment.²⁷⁰ Turkish policy towards Iran's nuclear power was two pronged: Turkey was criticizing the double standard approach towards Iran and Israel in the Middle East by the Western countries and Turkey was prioritizing a diplomatic solution as sanctions did not produce any successful results in curbing Iran's nuclear policy in recent years. In an interview with CNN International, Erdogan explained the Turkish policy towards Iran, "We are here for a diplomatic solution, we can be a mediator country but the International Atomic Energy Agency and the member states of Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) should work together

on Iran". He also stated that Turkey will not support more sanctions against Iran.²⁷¹

The concept of a fuel swap agreement with Iran was first pitched by President Barack Obama to the P5+1 in October 2009. It is notable that, despite its own previous championing of a fuel swap solution, the Obama administration did not support the agreement reached 7 months later between Iran-Turkey-Brazil.²⁷² His administration faulted the agreement for not addressing Iran's refusal to halt further enrichment for four years or to answer questions posed by international inspectors. The US remained adamant that it would continue to pursue sanctions until Iran met UN-compliant obligations.²⁷³ In the run-up to the announcement of the Turkey-Brazil-Iran agreement, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was tasked with calling Foreign Minister Davutoglu to underscore the US view that Iran was utilizing negotiations with Brazil and Turkey as a stalling tactic. However, Turkey and Brazil had begun by this point to pursue the idea of a deal with Iran that could take place outside of UN politics and constraints.²⁷⁴



The Tehran Declaration came as the permanent members of the UN Security Council were finalizing a resolution to expand sanctions on Iran for its nuclear program. The White House immediately issued a disapproving statement on the announcement stating, “Given Iran’s repeated failure to live up to its own commitments, and the need to address fundamental issues related to Iran’s nuclear program, the United States and international community continue to have serious concerns [with the agreement].”²⁷⁵

The Obama administration was skeptical of the agreement and Iran’s intentions, seeing it merely as a tool for buying time for its nuclear program. It also was critical of the failure of the agreement to address core issues the UN had with Iran’s nuclear program, such as providing a formal cessation of uranium enrichment. However, Iran wrote to the P5+1 that it would accept the Tehran Declaration’s proposed uranium swap. Still, the US continued to push forward for enhanced sanctions against Iran. On May 18, 2010, Secretary Clinton announced that the permanent members of the Security Council would continue to push for new sanctions despite the Turkey-Brazil-Iran agreement. “And we don’t believe it was any accident that Iran agreed to this declaration as we were preparing to move forward in New York. With all due respect to my Turkish and Brazilian friends, the fact that we had Russia on board, we had China on board, and that we were moving, early this week—namely, today—to share the text of that resolution, put pressure on Iran, which they were trying to somehow dissipate,” she said in testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on May 18, 2010.²⁷⁶ Before the voting of imposing new sanctions to Iran at the UNSC, Erdogan criticized the double standard approach of the UNSC and stated, “The international community who is acting with justifiable sensitivity to the Iranian possession of nuclear weapons, should also react to the nuclear weapons of other countries in the region.” With these

words, Erdogan one more time demonstrated Turkish foreign policy's stand on this issue.²⁷⁷

When UNSCR 1929, which introduced new sanctions on Iran, proceeded to a vote on June 17, 2010, Turkey and Brazil both voted against the resolution; one other non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, Lebanon, abstained from the vote.²⁷⁸ Turkey criticized the vote as destabilizing the fresh chance for diplomacy it and Brazil had provided through their agreement with Iran.²⁷⁹ After the voting at the UN, Turkey stated that it was still behind the Tehran Declaration and wanted to implement it.²⁸⁰ The US expressed disappointment with Turkey's move, but Secretary Clinton also acknowledged that Turkey wanted to keep "The door open between themselves [Turkey] and Iran."²⁸¹ Some scholars and journalists named this divergence between Turkey and the US as an illustrator of the deteriorated relations between Turkey and the US. For instance, Zbigniew Brzezinski, a former US national security advisor, said that "US-Turkey relations have gradually deteriorated in the last years, it is becoming similar to the time when the former US President George Bush asked the support of Turkey in facilitating the operation against Iraq and Turkey declined on March 1st." He also criticized the US by "not having a wider geopolitical perspective and not benefiting from a more ambitious Turkey."²⁸² However, US State Department Spokesman Philip Crowley said that the US respects having a different point of view with Turkey and Brazil on the timing and influence of the sanctions that are imposed on Iran. He added that the US would continue to work in partnership with Turkey and Brazil.²⁸³

GAZA FLOTILLA (MAVI MARMARA) INCIDENT (MAY 30, 2010)

In the early morning hours of May 30, 2010, Israeli commandos boarded six aid-laden ships that were carrying humanitarian aid to Gaza in international waters. The flotilla intended to highlight the Israeli blockade of Gaza. The fleet of six ships carried 750 civilians from 37 different countries along with 6 thousand tons of humanitarian aid.²⁸⁴ Israeli commandos first descended onto the Turkish owned vessel Mavi Marmara, the largest ship in the fleet, fired on the passengers, killing nine Turkish activists (one of whom was Furkan Dogan, a 19 years old dual US-Turkish citizen) and wounding many others.²⁸⁵



The UN condemned the incident and set up an inquiry into the incident and countries such as Nicaragua, Ecuador, and South Africa recalled their ambassadors over the incident.²⁸⁶ The US response was more muted. While President Obama did call Prime Minister Erdogan to convey his condolences, he stopped short of faulting Israel for the violence that occurred.²⁸⁷ The initial White House statement read, “The President expressed deep regret at the loss of life in today’s incident and concern for the wounded....

The President also expressed the importance of learning all the facts and circumstances surrounding this morning's tragic events as soon as possible."²⁸⁸

The attack on Mavi Marmara placed the Obama administration in a precarious position as both Israel and Turkey were important allies in the region. Turkey was dismayed at President Obama's tepid response. "We would expect our American friends to ... be strongly condemning the Israeli action. So far we haven't heard that," Turkey's Ambassador to Washington, Namik Tank, told reporters.²⁸⁹ Turkey was again dismayed at the US response to the crisis, "We expect full solidarity with us. It should not seem like a choice between Turkey and Israel. It should be a choice between right and wrong, between legal and illegal," Foreign Minister Davutoglu said ahead of a meeting with Secretary Clinton at the State Department.²⁹⁰ Erdogan also criticized the Obama administration, pointing out Furkan, a Turkish-American citizen, had died during the incident. Erdogan said, "The US administration is very silent about this issue. This is thought provoking. Furkan Dogan, who died there, was a US citizen. Furkan was also Turkish, is it the reason of the US for not following Furkan's death. We will continue to fight against this cruelty within the boundaries of law."²⁹¹

Turkey immediately called for an emergency UN Security Council meeting to address the crisis. The Obama administration played an active role in negotiating with Turkey about the UN Security Council's statement on the issue. He criticized the instability in Gaza created by the blockade, "There should be ways of focusing narrowly on arms shipments, rather than focusing in a blanket way on stopping everything and then in a piecemeal way allowing things into Gaza," he said in remarks with President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority after their meeting in Washington on June 9, just a little over a week after the flotilla raid.²⁹²

Amid growing international pressure for the launch of an international inquiry into the Gaza Flotilla raid, Israel announced that it would undertake an internal investigation of the incident, and that the investigation would include two foreign observers. The White House called the move an “important step” in resolving the crisis.²⁹³ Earlier, it had backed the UN calls for a “prompt, impartial, credible, and transparent investigation conforming to international standards.”²⁹⁴

In March of 2013, during a visit to Israel, President Obama took part in what was seen as a first step in mending ties between Turkey and Israel. The White House announced that Prime Minister Netanyahu and Prime Minister Erdogan had spoken in a 30 minute phone call, which was made while President Obama and Prime Minister Netanyahu were standing on the tarmac of Tel Aviv airport immediately before President Obama boarded Air Force One to leave the country. This was the first call between Prime Minister Erdogan and Prime Minister Netanyahu since 2011 and President Netanyahu offered Prime Minister Erdogan an acknowledgement of “operational mistake” made by Israeli soldiers during the raid on Mavi Marmara and delivered an apology.²⁹⁵ This apology was one of the three conditions of Turkey to restore its relations with Israel. The other two conditions were compensation to be paid to the families of people who died during the incident and removal of the Israeli blockade of Gaza. These conditions aimed to ease the transfer of humanitarian aid to Gaza and open the city for investment. US officials had been working for two years to negotiate the restoration of ties between Turkey and Israel, two of the US’ closest allies in the Middle East. Speaking after the call, President Obama stated, “We attach great importance to the restoration of positive relations between them [Turkey and Israel] in order to advance regional peace and security.”²⁹⁶

PRESIDENT OBAMA AND PRIME MINISTER ERDOGAN MEET AT G20 SUMMIT (JUNE 25, 2010)

On June 25, 2010, President Obama and President Erdogan held a private meeting on the sidelines of the G20 summit in Toronto, Canada. In previous months, the US-Turkish relationship had been strained by both the Gaza Flotilla raid and the US' rejection of the Tehran Declaration. Erdogan was accompanied by Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, Finance Minister Mehmet Simsek, Washington Ambassador Namık Tan, AK Party Deputy Chairman Ömer Çelik and Ambassador Fuat Tanlay during the meeting. Foreign Minister Hillary Clinton, White House Secretary General Rahm Emanuel, White House National Security Adviser Tom Donilon, White House Special Representative for European Affairs Elizabeth Sherwood-Randall, and Assistant Secretary of State for Political Affairs Bill Burns attended the meeting from the US side with President Obama.²⁹⁷

During their meeting leaders discussed recent regional and international issues. Relations between Turkey and Israel, especially the aid to Gaza, the Flotilla incident were brought to the agenda. The Obama administration stated that the US attaches great importance to the relations between Turkey and Israel. It was declared that the US would continue to contribute to this issue by doing everything it can to restore relations between the two countries. Turkish delegation said that they had conditions for restoring relations with Israel: a formal apology from Israel, compensation payment and the removal of the blockade in Gaza. Prime Minister Erdogan thanked Obama for his contributions to bring Turkish citizens back to Turkey who were detained by Israel after the brutal attack on aid vessels in international waters. The PKK issue was brought to the agenda of the meeting by Turkey. Both sides confirmed that the trilateral mechanism and information sharing between Turkey, the US and Iraq would continue.

Turkey once again expressed the weakness of the Iraqi leg of the mechanism, as it did in previous meetings with the US. The cooperation between Afghanistan and Turkey and the security issues of the region were also on the agenda between Turkey and the US. The Turkish side and the US side presented their positions vis-à-vis Iran as well.²⁹⁸



The conversation between the two leaders in Toronto has been described in a range of adjectives such as “frank,” “straightforward,”²⁹⁹ and a “showdown.” After months of disagreements, the private two hour discussion allowed the two leaders to air some of the differences in their policies and strategies.³⁰⁰ The June meeting was seen as considerably easing tensions, with Prime Minister Erdoğan and President Obama both pressing to find a way forward in the bilateral relationship.³⁰¹

THE ARAB SPRING AND US-TURKISH RELATIONS

TUNISIA

On December 17, 2010, a Tunisian street vendor, Mohamed Bouazizi, self-immolated in the streets of Ben Arous, Tunisia in response to the confiscation of his vendor ware and the humiliation he suffered at the hands of Tunisian officials.³⁰² His actions are credited with sparking the beginning of the Tunisian “Arab Spring,” which would spread throughout the region. By January 14, 2011 the Tunisian revolution had succeeded in toppling the government of Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, who had ruled in a dictatorial fashion since his rise to the Presidency in 1987.

Prior to the revolution, the US considered Tunisia to be an important ally in its fight against terrorist organizations, particularly al-Qaeda in the Middle East. As the Tunisian revolution began to unfold, Secretary Clinton was in the region on a tour of several Arab countries. When asked directly about the US position on the events, the Secretary vaguely remarked, “We can’t take sides.”³⁰³ However, according to diplomatic sources, once widespread protests broke out in Tunisia against President Ben Ali, the US State Department began a campaign to quietly pressure the President to pursue political reforms.³⁰⁴

“We look to the Tunisian government to build a stronger foundation for Tunisia’s future with economic, social, and political reforms,” Secretary of State Clinton remarked following president Ben Ali’s decision to flee Tunisia on January 11, 2011.³⁰⁵ It was only as Ben Ali was losing total grip of the country that President Obama also released a statement on the events in Tunisia, which read:

I condemn and deplore the use of violence against citizens peacefully voicing their opinion in Tunisia and I applaud the courage and dignity of the Tunisian People. The United States stands with the entire international community... I urge all parties

to maintain calm and avoid violence, and call on the Tunisian government to respect human rights, and to hold free and fair elections in the near future that reflect the true will and aspirations of the Tunisian people.³⁰⁶

Even as this statement condemned the violence of the Ben Ali government, it stopped short of serving as an outright call for the embattled leader's departure from power.

Turkey's position on the crisis unfolding in Tunisia did not mirror that of the US. The Turkish government was quick to declare its support for the popular uprising against President Ben Ali, because, as stated later by Foreign Minister Davutoglu, "We [Turkey] strongly believed that the Tunisian people - the demands and expressions of Tunisian people - are right."³⁰⁷

After the fall of Ben Ali, in September 2011, Prime Minister Erdogan visited Tunisia to build partnerships and enhance Turkey's salience as a role model for the transitioning governments.³⁰⁸ While Turkey embraced both the Tunisian revolution and the new government, the US response was more tepid. Secretary Clinton visited Tunisia in March 2011 to meet with the interim leaders of the country and said she would push for the US to provide financial support for the new government.³⁰⁹ However, financial support remained limited and President Obama remained largely mute on the transformations taking place in Tunisia. Unlike Turkey, which quickly stepped up to try and play a role in the Arab Spring, President Obama chose to have the US take a more peripheral stance, leading many to feel that the US missed an opportunity to play a role in the shaping and success of the new Tunisian government.³¹⁰

EGYPT

The Arab Spring reached Egypt on January 25, 2011. Millions of demonstrators, organized through various youth groups, took to the street to protest against increasing brutality of the government

of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak as well as the fledgling state of the economy, rampant corruption, and President Mubarak's authoritarian rule.³¹¹ Unlike in Tunisia, the US was quick to react to the demonstrations unfolding in Egypt. However, President Obama stopped short of calling for President Mubarak to step down, instead calling for the Egyptian leader to embrace democratic reforms, with White House Spokesperson Robert Gibbs qualifying that "now means now" when it came for US expectations for reform in Egypt.³¹² However, he later "hinted" Mubarak should go.³¹³ In contrast, Prime Minister Erdogan wasted no time in responding to the Egyptian revolution that was underway. Turkey was the first country to call on President Mubarak to step down.³¹⁴

Egyptians welcomed Turkish support for their revolution. When Prime Minister Erdogan visited the country on September 14, 2011 to kick off his "Arab Spring Tour" he received a "rock star welcome" from the Egyptian people. More than a thousand Egyptian males flocked to the Cairo airport to greet Prime Minister Erdogan chanting, "Egypt and Turkey are one hand."³¹⁵ In a further sign of growing Turkish influence in Egypt, President Morsi attended the AK Party Congress in 2012 and delivered a speech in which he thanked the Turkish government for its support during the Egyptian revolution, further underscoring the ripe environment for a prosperous relationship between Ankara and Cairo.³¹⁶

While Ankara was fast to form a partnership with the Egyptian government under President Morsi, the US was slightly more hesitant about the rise of an Islamist party in Egypt. "We believe in the importance of the new Egyptian government upholding universal values, and respecting the rights of all Egyptian citizens - including women and religious minorities such as Coptic Christians," White House Press Secretary stated during a press briefing following the election of President Morsi.³¹⁷ However, President Obama reached out to President Morsi and congratulated him

on his victory. “The two leaders [President Obama and President Morsi] affirmed their commitment to advancing the US-Egypt partnership and agreed to stay in close touch in the weeks and months ahead,” the formal White House readout of the call between President Obama and President Morsi stated.³¹⁸

LIBYA

By February 2011 the Arab Spring had spread to Libya. On February 14 anti-government protests broke out against Libya’s ruler Colonel Muammar Mohammed Abu Minyar Qadhafi. By February 18, revolutionary forces had taken control of the country’s second largest city, Benghazi, and by February 20, the protests had reached the Libyan capital of Tripoli. Faced with a widespread uprising, Colonel Qadhafi addressed the Libyan public vowing, “I’ll die a martyr.”³¹⁹

Unlike in Tunisia and Egypt, this time it was the US who was quick to call on Colonel Qadhafi to surrender power to a democratic transition. On February 25, President Obama levied unilateral sanctions against the Libyan regime, claiming that Colonel Qadhafi had lost his legitimacy to lead the country. The American president also began to lobby the UN to take similar action and sanction the Qadhafi regime. According to White House Spokesperson Jay Carney, the president was in touch with UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon regarding “the range of activities that the UN agencies and the international community can undertake to address the significant humanitarian needs created by this crisis.”³²⁰

Unlike the US, Turkey was more hesitant about immediate regime change in Libya. Turkish businesses were heavily invested in the Libyan economy and approximately 25,000 Turkish workers were employed in Libya for Turkish-led construction projects, totaling more than \$15 billion.³²¹ The Turkish government’s first

course of action was to act as an intermediary between Colonel Qadhafi and the leaders of the uprising as well as the West. “I called Qadhafi three times and I proposed to him that all the while he says that he is not a president, that he nominates someone picked by him who enjoys the support of the Libyan people to be the president for the coming period,” Erdogan outlined as Turkey pushed for Qadhafi to recognize his diminishing authority.³²²

The day after the Obama administration moved unilaterally, applying sanctions against the Qadhafi regime, the UN Security Council passed UN Security Council Resolution 1970, which condemned the Qadhafi regime’s use of force against civilians amid protests. The vote was passed unanimously on February 26, 2011, and imposed a series of international sanctions while calling upon the International Criminal Court to investigate and prosecute those parties involved in the violent crackdown.³²³ Following the resolution’s adoption, President Obama hosted the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon in Washington for discussions on the situation in Libya. The President used the opportunity to reiterate the US position that Colonel Qadhafi needed to step aside immediately and allow the Libyan people the chance to form a new government.³²⁴ The measures in the resolution were enhanced on March 17, 2011 by UNSCR 1973, which levied new sanctions on the Qadhafi regime, approved a no-fly zone over Libya to protect civilians, and provided the “legal authority for the international community to intervene to save lives in Libya.”³²⁵ It was the first time the UN invited international organizations to play a role in ensuring the security of an independent country. Yet the Turkish government was still skeptical about the intentions of some NATO members, saying it was “obvious” that some members saw it as an opportunity. We saw in the past such [military] operations increasing the loss of lives,” Prime Minister Erdogan stated, in an indirect reference to past US actions in the Middle East, particu-

larly in Iraq. Similar sentiments were expressed by President Gul, who told reporters, ““Some who until yesterday were closest to the dictators and sought to take advantage of them... display an excessive behavior today and raise suspicions of secret intentions.”³²⁶

President Obama spearheaded a campaign for NATO involvement to enforce the UN mandated no-fly zone. The President’s push for NATO leadership of the campaign garnered blowback from Republicans in the US, who chastised the President for “leading from behind” and entangling the country in a risky overseas campaign.³²⁷ The possibility of NATO involvement in Libya was also greeted with trepidation by the Turkish side. On March 14, 2011, Prime Minister Erdogan vocalized Turkey’s opposition to NATO involvement, “Military intervention by NATO in Libya or any other country would be totally counter-productive,” and “We need to give the Libyan people permission to chart their own course.”³²⁸ While the US was pushing for a quick turnover of operational forces in Libya to the NATO command, titled Operation Odyssey Dawn, Turkey’s resistance to the deployment of a NATO patrol and decision to call for a cease-fire instead of a military role, along with objections from France, led to the 28 NATO members being unsuccessful in initial debates over NATO’s military role in the conflict. The NATO framework stipulates that such decisions must be taken unanimously.³²⁹

NATO pushed ahead and responded to the UN’s call for international intervention in Libya. On March 22, NATO launched an arms embargo against the country, cutting off the flow of weapons and foreign fighters into the country. Two days later, the US and Turkey, along with Great Britain, agreed to execute a NATO commanded arms embargo, no fly zone, and airstrikes against Qadhafi forces. The deal was negotiated after a flurry of phone calls between the Secretary Clinton, Foreign Minister Davutoglu, British Foreign Secretary William Hague, and French

Foreign Minister Alain Juppe.³³⁰ Foreign Minister Davutoglu put the agreement before Turkey's Parliament, which authorized Turkish forces to participate in NATO military operations in Libya, assuring that the measure would secure the approval of all 28 member states.³³¹ On March 31, NATO members formally took control of the military effort in Libya. Air operations for the campaign were managed out of NATO's Air Command Headquarters for Southern Europe, located in Izmir, Turkey, while tactical efforts were conducted from NATO's Combined Air Operations Centre Poggio Renatico in Italy.³³²

As the NATO mission in Libya seemed to reach a stalemate in April 2011, Turkey put forward a plan for a ceasefire in Libya that would involve the withdrawal of Qadhafi forces from rebel cities and pave the way for humanitarian corridors and democratic reforms for the country.³³³

The Qadhafi regime's new Foreign Minister, Abdulati El-Ubeydi traveled to Turkey for discussions on the plan and a vow to take the proposal and present it to the embattled Libyan leader.³³⁴ In return, Ankara sent a special envoy to Benghazi to "identify areas of cooperation in order to contribute to the well-being of the Libyan people."

By May 3, 2011, Prime Minister Erdogan had had enough of trying to play intermediary, "Muammar Qadhafi, instead of taking our suggestions into account, refraining from shedding blood or seeking for ways to maintain the territorial unity of Libya, chose blood, tears, oppression, and attacks on his own people." Prime Minister Erdogan stated during a televised address before calling on Colonel Qadhafi to "immediately step down from power."³³⁵

From July 15-16, Secretary Clinton traveled to Istanbul to participate in a working meeting of the Libya Contact Group, which was chaired by Prime Minister Erdogan. The group brought together delegations from over 40 countries and many international

organizations for consultations on the situation in Libya.³³⁶ While in the country, Secretary Clinton held bilateral meetings with President Gul, Prime Minister Erdogan, as well as Foreign Minister Davutoglu to discuss Libya.

Libya was also a stop on Prime Minister's "Arab Spring Tour." The Turkish Prime Minister was greeted by cheering crowds and Tripoli's airport as well as at Martyr's Square. The Prime Minister addressed the chanting crowds, "You are the ones who showed the whole world that no administration can stand in the way of the might and will of the people."³³⁷

SYRIAN CRISIS (MARCH - NOVEMBER 2011)

In March 2011, Syrian citizens took to the streets protesting the policies of their government. These peaceful protests were met with violence, sparking even more protests in a recurring loop of protest, crackdown, funerals and protests, and further crackdowns. While both the US and Turkey criticized the government's response to the protests in cities such as Daraa, Homs, and Hama, they were hoping to persuade the Assad regime to change its course in handling of this crisis.

The Turkish government initially sought to push Assad to reform and temper his response. Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu made repeated trips to Syria while then-Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan called on Assad to implement reforms. On March 25, the Turkish Foreign Ministry issued a statement calling for the Syrian government to take steps to institute reforms demanded by the protesters. "We encourage the steps our Syrian brothers will take to improve the reform process. Turkey is ready to contribute to work on reform process in any possible way it can."³³⁸ On the 28th, Prime Minister Erdogan expressed optimism about reforms, "We did not receive a negative answer when we urged Mr. Assad to listen to the voice of people" after several telephone calls.³³⁹ By May however, the Turkish government had expressed dismay at the lack of reforms and the foreign minister called on Assad to institute rapid reforms in order to resolve the crisis.³⁴⁰

Similarly, the US offered a fairly limited initial response to the situation in Syria. President Barack Obama did not make an official statement until April 8 when he condemned the government's violent response. The statement read, "It is time for the Syrian government to stop repressing its citizens and to listen to the voices of the Syrian people calling for meaningful political and economic reforms."³⁴¹ On April 29, the US imposed sanctions on several high level Syrian officials, but still did not call

for Assad's resignation, as Obama and his administration "do not want to get out in front of the Syrian people," according to a US official quoted by *Reuters* news agency.³⁴² A notable incident occurred in the first week of July when Robert Ford, the US ambassador to Syria, made an unannounced visit to Hama, where there were large protests and gatherings.³⁴³ The ambassador's visit, days before planned large scale protests, was criticized by the Syrian government and seized as a sign of US support for the unrest, a charge the State Department denied.³⁴⁴

From July 15 to 17, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visited Turkey for the Fourth Contact Group Meeting on Libya as well as bilateral meetings with Prime Minister Erdogan, President Abdullah Gul, and Foreign Minister Davutoglu.³⁴⁵ Speaking to reporters on the 15th, the Secretary declared, "We have said that Syria can't go back to the way it was before, that Assad has lost his legitimacy in the eyes of his people," but declined to call for him to step down, instead saying, "the ultimate destiny of the Syrian regime and the Syrian people lies with the people themselves."³⁴⁶ In a joint press conference on July 16, both Secretary Clinton and Foreign Minister Davutoglu spoke of shared hope for peaceful change, reform, and transformation in Syria. Secretary Clinton noted the US' admiration for Syrians "trying to form an opposition that can provide a pathway, hopefully in peaceful cooperation with the government, to a better future," while Foreign Minister Davutoglu spoke of Turkey's desire to see a peaceful "reformation process which takes into account the demand of the public society" in Syria.³⁴⁷

Late in 2011, as protests and the crackdown continued, both the US and Turkey began to move away from their earlier positions on the Syrian crisis. On August 18, 2011, President Obama issued a statement where he called on Assad to step down "for the sake of the Syrian people."³⁴⁸ Concurrently, President Obama issued Ex-



executive Order 13582 on August 17 that targeted Syrian finances by freezing Syrian assets in US jurisdiction, banning the import of Syrian oil, and barring US citizens from having financial dealings with the Assad government.³⁴⁹ President Obama's statement came a week after he and Prime Minister Erdogan spoke via telephone about the situation in Syria on August 11.³⁵⁰

Similarly, in Turkey, the government's position was shifting away from its policy of patience towards the Assad regime, though at a slower pace than the US. Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu visited Syria on August 9 where he met with Assad as a last attempt to negotiate reforms and a cessation of hostilities, warning him that Turkey had run out of patience with the Syrian gov-

ernment.³⁵¹ Speaking a week later, Davutoglu spoke out against military operations against civilians, “if these operations do not stop, there will be nothing left to say about the steps that would be taken.”³⁵² On August 23, 2011, Syrian opposition figures met in Istanbul, a sign of growing Turkish impatience with the regime, where they established what would become the Syrian National Council that would represent “all the forces of the opposition from the left to the right.”³⁵³

A month later, speaking in Libya, Prime Minister Erdogan declared, “those in Syria who inflict repression on the people will not be able to stand on their feet because oppression and prosperity cannot exist together.”³⁵⁴ In November, Prime Minister Erdogan went even further, warning the embattled Syrian leader, “You can remain in power with tanks and cannons only up to a certain point. The day will come when you’ll also leave.” Turkey also offered its support for the Arab League’s move to suspend Syria’s membership.³⁵⁵

At this point, the US and Turkey had maintained closely-aligned positions on the Syrian conflict. Reportedly, Secretary Clinton had convinced the US White House to hold off on its August 18 statement and sanctions until after Foreign Minister Davutoglu’s visit to Syria.³⁵⁶ Ahead of his visit to Syria in August, Foreign Minister Davutoglu spoke with Secretary Clinton. The State Department spokesperson Mark Toner told reporters, “we’re pleased that he’s undertaking this visit,” calling it “another opportunity to send yet another strong message to Asad.”³⁵⁷ Following his visit, Foreign Minister Davutoglu again spoke with Secretary Clinton to discuss his visit. State Department Spokesperson Victoria Nuland noted on August 11 that both the US and Turkey were “working very hard to maintain tight coordination” on Syria and the issue of the continued military assault on Syrian civilians.³⁵⁸

TURKEY AGREES TO HOST NATO RADAR SYSTEM (SEPTEMBER 2011)

On September 15, 2011, the US officially announced that Turkey and Romania would host the final parts of a NATO missile defense shield. Turkey had agreed on September 2 to allow the deployment of a radar system. In the announcement on September 15, Turkish Foreign Ministry spokesperson Selcuk Unal said that the integral radar system would be located at a military base in Kurecik in the Malatya province.³⁵⁹ A US official was quoted as hailing the agreement between Turkey and the US as “the biggest strategic decision between the United States and Turkey in the past 15 or 20 years.”³⁶⁰ At the Lisbon Summit in November 2010, NATO had agreed to pursue “a missile defense capability to protect all NATO European populations, territory and forces,” which this radar would be a part of.³⁶¹

The missile defense system had been proposed by the Obama administration after President Barack Obama scrapped a plan for a long-range anti-missile system from the Bush administration in 2009.³⁶² In announcing the system, President Obama said, “this new ballistic missile defense program will best address the threat” of Iranian missiles. The initial decision was hailed by Russia, whose government noted that “a possible review of the U.S. position on missile defense would be a positive signal.”³⁶³ However, Russia did eventually come to criticize the missile shield system.³⁶⁴

When Turkey announced that it would host the radar system on September 2, the announcement from the Foreign Ministry did not mention Iran and insisted that the system was not targeting any specific country.³⁶⁵ Reportedly, Turkey had lent its support to the NATO missile defense system in 2010 on the condition that no country “be named as a threat or a target” for the system.³⁶⁶ Iran initially offered no comment on the system.³⁶⁷ Shortly thereafter, however, Iranian officials began to speak out against the proposed system. In September, Iran’s Defense Minister Ahmad

Vahidi said, “The West claims the radar system (in Turkey) is to confront Iranian missiles but they should be aware that we will not tolerate any aggression against our national interests.”³⁶⁸

Within Turkey, the proposed system had come under fire over concerns that its data would be shared with Israel, a sensitive issue after the Mavi Marmara incident. Turkey’s insistence that the data from the radar installation not be shared with Israel raised tensions with the US over the agreement.³⁶⁹ Both NATO and other experts on the issue repeatedly pointed out that there would be no data sharing with Israel in connection with missile systems. The US also made a parallel statement on the issue. During the NATO Defense Ministers Meeting in 2011, US Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta asserted that the sharing of information and radar images in missile defense would only be among the member countries.

Turkey’s decision to allow the deployment of the radar system on its territory was unsurprisingly welcomed by the US and NATO. An unnamed US official attributed Turkey’s decision “to stepped up efforts by Ankara to close ranks with NATO and improve relations with the U.S.”³⁷⁰ The U.S. State Department spokesperson Victoria Nuland stated that “The United States welcomes Turkey’s decision to host a missile defense radar in support of NATO’s common missile defense efforts and appreciates this significant Turkish contribution to a vital NATO mission.”³⁷¹ In a meeting between Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu on the 19th, Secretary Clinton reportedly also thanked her counterpart for Turkey’s cooperation on the issue.³⁷² President Obama highlighted Turkey’s decision in his remarks with Prime Minister Erdogan at their bilateral meeting on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in September.³⁷³ In a statement issued on September 2, NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen called the decision “a critical contribution to the Alliance’s overall defense against current and emerging ballistic missile threats.”³⁷⁴

UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY (SEPTEMBER 20, 2011)

On the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York City on September 20, 2011, President Barack Obama and Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan met in a bilateral meeting. Ahead of the meeting, both the Turkish Prime Minister and US President praised the relationship and expressed their hopes for continued future collaboration on issues such as the civil uprisings in countries such as Tunisia and Egypt.³⁷⁵ President Obama and Prime Minister Erdogan also each spoke at the UN in the days after their meeting. In an interview the day before he spoke at the UN General Assembly, Prime Minister Erdogan touted the “model partnership” that Turkey and the US enjoyed.³⁷⁶ He said, “Our recent visits to Egypt, Tunisia and Libya, as well as our partnership in Afghanistan, the evaluation of developments in Iraq, these are all our common steps. I hope that this model of partnership between Turkey and the United States will give a positive result and continue in the future.”

During the meeting, Deputy Prime Minister Ali Babacan, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, European Union Minister and Chief Negotiator Egemen Bagis, AK Party Deputy Chairman Ömer Çelik, Turkey’s Ambassador to Washington Namik Tan, Deputy Chief of General Staff Gen. Hulusi Akar accompanied Prime Minister Erdogan. US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Philip Gordon, Deputy Minister for Europe and Eurasia Elizabeth Sherwood-Randall, White House National Security Council Senior Vice President Susan Rice, White House National Security Adviser, and White House National Security Adviser Tom Donilon attended the meeting as part of the US delegation.³⁷⁷

Despite the tensions over the issue of Palestine and the rift between Turkey and Israel, both President Obama and Prime Minister Erdogan spoke warmly of each other and of the US-

Turkey relationship. In an interview with Fareed Zakaria, Prime Minister Erdogan said of Obama, “Barack Obama is someone I really like. Vis-a-vis his policies and his implementations, I want him to be much more successful.”³⁷⁸ Speaking with Charlie Rose, Prime Minister Erdogan offered a similarly positive reading of the relationship with President Obama and the US government as a whole.³⁷⁹ Before the bilateral meeting, President Obama spoke of the relationship in a similar manner.³⁸⁰

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton met with her Turkish counterpart on the 19th where she reportedly raised the issue of the growing distance between Turkey and Israel as well.³⁸¹ On September 6, State Department Spokesperson Victoria Nuland had spoken about the repeated efforts of the US to bring Turkey and Israel back together over the rift.³⁸² Despite those efforts, Turkey maintained its position regarding Israel. Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu stated on the 17th that “We do not need mediation” on the issue.³⁸³ Erdogan supported Davutoglu’s claim and said that “unless Israel apologize, pay compensation and remove the embargo on Gaza, there is no Turkey for Israel.”³⁸⁴ He also added, “the US confirms our rightfulness about the Mavi Marmara incident. But until now, we have not seen their legal support, we are expecting their support to us on this issue on legal grounds.”³⁸⁵

In his address on the 21st, President Obama delivered his speech titled, “the pursuit of peace in an imperfect world.” He hailed the uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and other states, and called on the international community to support the efforts of the Syrian people.³⁸⁶ Speaking on the 22nd, Prime Minister Erdogan warned that the UN was being tested in ways that it had not yet experienced and that it must reform itself to address the urgent crises it faced. Like President Obama, he spoke of the uprisings in the Middle East and stated the importance of the international community recognizing the will of the people in those countries.³⁸⁷

Erdogan also criticized the mechanism of the UN by giving the situation in Somalia as an example. He asserted that “I had to say that today, the United Nations cannot display a leadership that will overcome fears threatening humanity’ hopes and future. The UN has to be restructured and the vision of it has to be reformed in order to protect the law of all humanity, not in the interests of certain countries and tutelage. In the last month I witnessed personally in Somalia that the UN and the international community have a great difficulty in dealing with the urgent problems of our world. It is impossible to describe the poverty and pain I see in Somalia. It is a shame for the international community.”³⁸⁸

Following failures of the international community to restart peace negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas had announced on September 16 that he would ask the UN Security Council to approve full membership for Palestine.³⁸⁹ President Obama sought to stave off such an approach, warning that “Peace will not come through statements and resolutions at the United Nations” and reiterated the US’ commitment to Israel.³⁹⁰ President Obama told PA President Abbas during a bilateral meeting that the US would use its Security Council veto if necessary to block any move to recognize Palestinian statehood.³⁹¹

Prime Minister Erdogan meanwhile was outspoken both in his criticism of Israel and support of Palestinian statehood. In a visit to Cairo before the UNGA, Prime Minister Erdogan had called it “the cause of human dignity.”³⁹² In his address to the General Assembly, he called the Arab-Israel conflict the biggest obstacle to “an ideal which must uphold international law and justice over sheer force and oppression,” criticizing Israel for not following binding resolutions from the Security Council. He called on Israel to take steps to resolve the conflict through negotiation and reaffirmed the “unconditional” support that Turkey had for Palestinian statehood.³⁹³



Prime Minister Erdoğan also spoke at an event entitled “New Turkey and the Middle East,” hosted by the SETA Foundation where former national security advisor Brent Scowcroft and former Congressman Robert Wexler delivered remarks.³⁹⁴ During his remarks, Erdoğan mentioned the Arab Spring and the changing paradigms in the world system. He stated that “as security, welfare and peace have become indispensable in today’s world, international cooperation and solidarity have become more important than ever before.” He also criticized countries and leaders who play some political and military games in developing and underdeveloped countries and harm the peoples of these countries for their own benefit. He asserted, “With the new paradigms in the world system, hidden agendas have an important place and threaten the peoples of developing and underdeveloped nations. All world leaders must be open-minded, and none of them has a right to harm the peoples of these nations with hidden agendas. In this context, efforts have been made to reform the world’s international platforms to provide more open and democratic representation on global issues. Brute force actions are not bringing a result any more. We see this reality most strikingly in the Middle East. The public movements that have begun on Tunisia and spread to other countries are showing this.”³⁹⁵

GLOBAL COUNTERTERRORISM FORUM LAUNCH (SEPTEMBER 22, 2011)

On September 22, 2011, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu co-chaired the launch of the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) in New York City. The GCTF was launched as a 30-member organization crafted as “a major initiative within the [Obama] Administration’s broader effort to build the international architecture for dealing with 21st century terrorism.”³⁹⁶ Speaking at the launch event, Secretary Clinton called for the GCTF to be a venue where counterterrorism policy makers could regularly meet to “identify essential priorities, devise solutions, and chart a path to implementation of best practices.”³⁹⁷ Foreign Minister Davutoglu hailed the GCTF as a platform for the member nations to share their counterterrorism experiences and contribute to joint efforts.³⁹⁸

During the opening ceremony of the forum, both Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoglu and the US Secretary of State Clinton referred to the September 11 attacks and the terrorist organization PKK. Davutoglu recalled the September 11 terrorist attack and said that it was not an attack only against American citizens, it was an attack against humanity, thousands of innocent people lost their lives and Turkey shares the pain of the relatives of the victims. He indicated that Turkey has continued its struggle against the terrorist organization PKK, and he requested from all the neighboring countries to stop the activities of the terrorist organization PKK and its affiliated organizations. He said that this was an obligation under the international law. Clinton said that the cooperation and contributions of Turkey in the struggle against terror were well known and the US was thankful for it.³⁹⁹ Clinton remarked that terrorism is not a new threat but new technological developments have changed its nature in terms of its global reach. As a result, it threatens everybody in the world she said. Clinton

also stated that terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda and the PKK continue to take people's lives and anybody might be a target for these organizations. In this context, Clinton said that no country will be able to fight terror alone, and the GCTF will be an important expertise and experience sharing platform which would cooperate with both the UN and all regional institutions.⁴⁰⁰

In June 2012, Turkey hosted the second meeting of the GCTF's Coordinating Committee in Istanbul.⁴⁰¹ The ministerial meeting was attended by foreign ministers from half of the members of the GCTF which Secretary Clinton and Foreign Minister Davutoglu again co-chairing it. They both hailed the efforts taken by the members of the GCTF to address the threat of terrorism.⁴⁰²

PREDATORS AND HELICOPTERS (2011)

On September 20, 2011, President Obama and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan met on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York City. Ahead of the meeting, US officials had suggested to media outlets that President Obama would press his Turkish counterpart on the need to reconcile with Israel over the Mavi Marmara incident.⁴⁰³ For Prime Minister Erdogan, a more pressing matter was the question of continued deployment of US drones to support Turkey's efforts against the PKK. The Turkish Prime Minister reportedly raised the issue with President Obama at the meeting.⁴⁰⁴ Since 2007, the US had shared intelligence on the PKK in Iraq collected from Predator drones based in Iraq.⁴⁰⁵ There were concerns about the future of that intelligence sharing after the withdrawal of US forces from Iraq and it had been reported that the US was mulling whether or not to base Predator drones in Turkey in order to continue that coordination.⁴⁰⁶

Since the agreement signed between Prime Minister Erdogan and the former President Bush in 2007, video images of U-2, RC-135, EP-3 and RQ-4 Global Hawks reconnaissance planes as well as predators flying over PKK bases had been transferred to the Intelligence Fusion Center in Ankara. When the coordinates of the targets were to be bombarded selected from the video images and the time of the bombing was decided, the Turkish General Staff were reporting these to the US and the US army was lighting up the green light after making sure that no American power was available in the region. In 2008, Turkey conveyed its request from the US for the purchase of the MQ-9 Predator, which was used by the United States for identification and destruction of targets in Iraq and Afghanistan. Within the scope of the project, the Defense Ministry of Turkey, carried out the first official correspondence to obtain 5-6 MQ Predators in March 2009. At that

time, the request letter for direct purchase of Turkey was delivered to the US Government.⁴⁰⁷

Following the bilateral meeting, Prime Minister Erdogan announced that the US had agreed to deploy Predator drones on Turkish soil “in principle.” Erdogan also suggested that Turkey was open to possible purchase or leasing of Predator drones.⁴⁰⁸ Purchasing Predator drones had long been a goal of the Turkish military. While developing its own indigenous drone program, Turkey had previously purchased drones from the US and Israel.⁴⁰⁹ However, Turkish efforts to purchase either Reaper or Predator drones from the US had repeatedly run into congressional opposition over a number of reasons despite support from the Pentagon.⁴¹⁰ In 2010, there were reported concerns because of Turkey’s diplomacy over the Iranian nuclear issue.⁴¹¹ In November 2011, Congress had grown concerned about the tensions between Turkey and Israel over the Mavi Marmara incident. Speaking at a DC event, then-assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs Alexander Vershbow said that the sale of drones, “is influenced by the problems in Turkish-Israeli relations.”⁴¹² While the sale of Predator drones to Turkey continued to face congressional opposition and did not develop further, US-operated Predators were sent to Turkey. According to an unnamed Turkish military official, four US Predator drones arrived in Turkey in October 2011 to be stationed and operated out of Incirlik Air Base.⁴¹³

In late October 2011, the Pentagon proposed to sell three Super Cobra attack helicopters from the US Marine Corps inventory to Turkey.⁴¹⁴ Like the Predator drones that were sent to Turkey, the Super Cobras were supplied in support of Turkish efforts against the PKK. Ahead of the announcement, Francis Ricciardone, then the US Ambassador in Ankara, said that the helicopters would be supplied to replace those lost in operations against the PKK.⁴¹⁵ Despite some opposition from members of the House of Represen-

tatives, the sale was finalized mid-November. Reports suggested that the sale was approved in part because of the goodwill fostered by Turkey's earlier decision in September to host the NATO radar system at Kurecik.⁴¹⁶

The decisions to sell the helicopters to Turkey and to station the Predators at Incirlik came at a time of increased tensions in the Turkey-PKK conflict and as a sign of continued US support for its ally's efforts. In October, following attacks along the border by PKK forces, Turkey launched a cross-border operation on the 19th.⁴¹⁷ President Obama issued a statement on the 19th condemning the attacks by the PKK, declaring that "The United States will continue our strong cooperation with the Turkish government as it works to defeat the terrorist threat from the P.K.K. and to bring peace, stability and prosperity to all the people of southeast Turkey."⁴¹⁸ The US ambassador to Turkey similarly issued a statement expressing the US' continued cooperation and support for Turkey.⁴¹⁹ Speaking in Ankara in December, then-Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta stated, "I made very clear the United States will continue to assist Turkey in confronting this threat."⁴²⁰

Since the initial US invasion of Iraq in 2003, Turkish cross-border operations had been a sensitive subject between the US, Iraq, and Turkey. Discussing the possibility of stationing Predator drones in Turkey, a US military official suggested that the deployment of those drones and the intelligence supplied by the US to Turkey had helped ensure that cross-border operations remained small and did not cause a significant incident between Iraq and Turkey.⁴²¹

SYRIAN CRISIS (DECEMBER 2011 - DECEMBER 2012)

Following the shift in both of their stances towards the Assad regime in late 2011, both the US and Turkey became more active in efforts to force the departure of Assad as the head of the Syrian government.

On February 4, 2012, Russia and China both vetoed UN Security Council resolution S/2012/77 which supported the League of Arab States' plan of action on Syria from November 2, 2011 and would have called for the UN to consider further measures in the case of noncompliance. Both the US and Turkey had sponsored the bill, which had been crafted by Britain and France.⁴²² Following the veto by Russia and China, French President Nicolas Sarkozy and US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton called for a meeting of a contact group on Syria, which became known as the Group of Friends of the Syrian people.⁴²³ The initial group meeting was held in Tunisia, in which both Turkey and the US took part, along with 58 other countries and numerous international organizations. Prior to the meeting, the United Nations and League of Arab States appointed Kofi Annan as a joint peace envoy on Syria.⁴²⁴

The second meeting of the Friends of Syria group on April 1, 2012, where representatives from 83 countries and others attended, was held in Istanbul.⁴²⁵ Ahead of the meeting, President Obama and Prime Minister Erdogan met at the Nuclear Security Summit in Seoul in March where they discussed Syria. At the fourth conference of the group in Marrakech, Morocco, the group formally recognized the National Syrian Coalition as the legitimate representative of Syria.⁴²⁶ Even as the number of participants in the group continued to dwindle, the US and Turkey remained involved in the group. Along with 9 other countries, Turkey and the US sent representatives to several meetings of the group in 2013 in Rome, London, and Istanbul. In remarks to the press in Istanbul,

then-Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu commended the continued efforts of the group, asserting that “these 11 countries are determined to express a clear support to the Syrian National Coalition (SNC), and that they presented a political will to do all kinds of work to stop the massacres.”⁴²⁷ At that meeting, US Secretary of State John Kerry noted that the group members had all committed to increasing their support for the opposition as well.⁴²⁸

Similarly, both the US and Turkey continued to be involved in other efforts to address the Syrian crisis, such as the Geneva talks. On June 30, 2012, the UN convened a meeting with the Secretaries-General of the United Nations and the Arab League States, the Foreign Ministers of China, France, Russia, United Kingdom, United States, Turkey, Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar, and the European Union High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy.⁴²⁹ While Kofi Annan, then the UN-Arab League Peace Envoy, suggested that the participants had agreed to facilitate the establishment of a transitional government in Syria, there was almost immediate disagreement between the US and Russia over Assad’s future.⁴³⁰

The first real split between the US and Turkey seemed to have come in August 2012 when the US began to make comments suggesting a possible tougher response to the continuing conflict. In April 2012, US officials suggested that they were examining possible options for establishing “buffer zones” on the Syrian-Turkish border in order to protect civilians, saying that Secretary Clinton had discussed it with Foreign Minister Davutoglu.⁴³¹ After a meeting in Istanbul with Foreign Minister Davutoglu, Secretary Clinton suggested on August 11 that the US and Turkey were examining options to implement safe zones while FM Davutoglu called on outside powers to end the crisis in Aleppo.⁴³² Similarly, on August 20, President Obama made his now infamous ‘red line’ statement, warning that “seeing a whole bunch of chemical weapons

moving around or being utilized...would change my calculus.”⁴³³ Turkish and US officials met in Istanbul to discuss the issue of Syrian chemical weapons on August 23.⁴³⁴ These comments and suggestions came around the time that NATO was debating, and later approved, the deployment of Patriot missiles to Turkey. There was some speculation that the missiles could be used to enforce safe zones along the Syrian-Turkish border. The US and Turkey both denied that the missile batteries would be used to do so.⁴³⁵

Despite the president’s remarks about a possible red line and Secretary Clinton’s discussion about more active measures, the US maintained that such measures were not an immediate possibility. In an interview on the 14th, then-Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta told *The Associated Press* that no-fly zones were not on “the front burner.”⁴³⁶ Unknown publicly at the time, but reported later by *The New York Times*, a plan crafted by then-CIA Director David Petraeus, and supported by Secretary Clinton, Secretary Panetta, and then-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Martin Dempsey to support and arm Syrian rebels had been shelved by the Obama White House in the summer of 2012.⁴³⁷ The White House reportedly rejected the plan out of concern that it would draw the US further into the conflict and that the weapons could end up with groups that the US did not support.⁴³⁸

While the Obama administration chose to pull back from further involvement in Syria and the idea of safe zones, Turkey began to push for their establishment. In May of 2012, Omer Celik, the deputy chairman of the AK Party, said that Turkey hoped for the creation of “humanitarian corridors” in Syria to address the continuing and escalating crisis.⁴³⁹ At the UN, Turkey appealed to the Security Council to authorize the establishment of safe havens for Syrian civilians fleeing from the Assad regime.⁴⁴⁰ In September, Foreign Minister Davutoglu called for the international community to take action in order to head off further

deterioration, cautioning that “If you don’t take certain measures or certain steps on time in the future you will be facing more risks.”⁴⁴¹ Turkey was involved in other efforts to provide support to the Syrian opposition, hosting a so-called “nerve center,” which was directing “vital military and communications aid” to Syrian rebels according to media reports.⁴⁴²

Until President Obama’s move away from establishing safe zones, both nations had maintained similar stances on Assad and had supported international efforts to foster a sustainable opposition movement and bring about a transition. Ahead of Secretary Clinton’s visit to Istanbul, however, Turkish officials had suggested that they were concerned about a lack of coordination. Turkish officials suggested that they saw the secretary’s visit as a hopeful sign of further coordination between the US and Turkey.⁴⁴³ The Turkish government had also given its approval for the plan that Secretary Clinton and Foreign Minister Davutoglu discussed in August 2012.⁴⁴⁴ The lack of US action following Secretary Clinton’s visit to Turkey contributed to the growing distance between Turkey and the US on Syria.

SEOUL BILATERAL MEETING (MARCH 25, 2012)

Ahead of the 2012 Nuclear Security Summit in Seoul on March 26-27, President Barack Obama and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan met in a two-hour bilateral meeting on the 25th.⁴⁴⁵ Prime Minister Erdogan was joined by Hakan Fidan, the head of Turkish intelligence service MIT.⁴⁴⁶ The meeting was reportedly dominated by discussions about both Syria and Iran, two looming issues at the time. Both President Obama and Prime Minister Erdogan met with a number of other foreign leaders as well. Prime Minister Erdogan's bilateral meetings were reportedly focused on the issue of Syria and other Middle Eastern developments.⁴⁴⁷ President Obama discussed a number of issues with foreign leaders, including Syria.⁴⁴⁸



Speaking after the meeting, Prime Minister Erdogan told reporters that he and President Obama “had a chance to evaluate the situation in Syria. It made us happy to see that our opinions are similar on the matter.”⁴⁴⁹ President Obama similarly suggested common sentiments on the crisis, noting that Turkey would be hosting the next Friends of Syria group meeting.⁴⁵⁰ Ben Rhodes,

President Obama's deputy national security advisor for strategic communication, told reporters that the question of non-lethal aid, such as communications support, would be discussed at the upcoming meeting of the Friends of Syria group.⁴⁵¹ Anonymous US administration officials, however, told reporters that the US was already providing some non-lethal aid to the Syrian opposition.⁴⁵² Erdogan gave the same information during his press conference, "The US will be involved in giving more logistical support Syria. They even started it. They laid emphasis on discussing the support of Russia, Iran and China for Syria. In this context, I will have a meeting with Medvedev here. I will also have a phone call with Putin when I'm in Turkey regarding this issue."⁴⁵³

While the Nuclear Security Summit was focused on other nuclear issues besides Iran, namely promoting "cooperative measures to combat the threat of nuclear terrorism, protection of nuclear materials and related facilities, and prevention of illicit trafficking of nuclear materials," the issue of Iran's nuclear program was a clear topic of concern for President Obama.⁴⁵⁴ Speaking at the summit, President Obama intimated that Iran must begin to cooperate with the international community. "There is time to solve this diplomatically, but time is short," the president said.⁴⁵⁵ Reportedly, President Obama asked Prime Minister Erdogan to convey a message to Iran that the US would tolerate a civilian nuclear program if it can demonstrate that it will never pursue nuclear weapons, though a Turkish official dismissed the assertion.⁴⁵⁶ The Turkish Prime Minister was scheduled to visit Tehran for meetings with then-President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Iranian Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, and was expected to discuss the upcoming nuclear talks in Istanbul between the P5+1 (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States; plus Germany) and Iran.⁴⁵⁷

Besides Iran and Syria, Prime Minister Erdogan and President Obama discussed the stability of Iraq, the fight against ter-

ror, predators, Cyprus, Armenian issue and US-Turkish economic partnership. During his press conference after the meeting, related to the stability of Iraq, Erdogan asserted, “The Iraqi people should determine their future with their free will in the elections. We reminded Maliki here. Right now, the situation of Talabani, moderate Shi’a, Barzani and Sunni Arabs is obvious. We do not want a sectarian conflict there. For this reason, the will of the people must be reflected in the governance.”⁴⁵⁸ About fight against terrorism, he said Turkey and Iraq is in complete agreement and this solidarity will continue. He stated that the US indicated their commitment to support Turkey’s fight against the PKK. He also mentioned predators and asserted that the US is giving an important support on this issue, he said that “they started with 1 Predator. Then it became 2. Now they use what they have for us.” As always, one of the topics covered was Cyprus issue. Erdogan claimed that “I told Obama, we do not trust Christofias. He’s running away. He is thinking of the election process in his country and he is not sincere. Obviously, I am not very optimistic about the solution in Cyprus and the Turkish Cypriot Prime Minister agrees with me.”⁴⁵⁹ Lastly, Erdogan touched upon Turkish-American economic relations which he and Obama discussed during their meeting. He said, “Our trade volume has risen to 20 billion dollars. Now we expect that this will grow exponentially. We will work for this together.”⁴⁶⁰

P5+1 TALKS HELD IN ISTANBUL (APRIL 14, 2012)

On April 14, 2012 representatives from the member states of the P5+1 group (UN Security Council permanent members + Germany) gathered in Istanbul, Turkey for negotiations on Iran's nuclear program.⁴⁶¹ Just two years earlier, Turkey and Brazil had brokered an agreement with Iran on the exchange of some of its enriched uranium to be transported out of the country. However, the deal ultimately fell through, as the international community moved to impose sanctions against Iran, a product of their mistrust of Tehran's nuclear intentions.⁴⁶² The talks were hosted in Turkey at the request of the Iranians, a move that was interpreted as a gesture from Tehran toward Turkey. However, Turkish officials were not present in the negotiations.⁴⁶³

The Istanbul talks constituted the first gathering of the P5+1 in 15 months. The European Union High Representative Catherine Ashton released a statement after the nuclear negotiations saying the discussions had been "constructive and useful." In similar remarks given during a press briefing, White House Deputy National Security Advisor Ben Rhodes, who was leading the US delegation in Istanbul, told reporters, "Our message to the Iranians is in order to --that frankly, that those sanctions are going to move forward if they are not in line with their international obligations, so that, therefore, the onus is on the Iranians in the context of all this pressure to take steps to build the confidence of the international community."⁴⁶⁴ Both the European Union High Representative Catherine Ashton and Iranian Nuclear Chief Negotiator Jalili thanked Turkey for being the host country of the talks.⁴⁶⁵

2012 US PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

On November 6, 2012, US voters went to polls to decide between Democratic incumbent President Barack Obama and Republican candidate Mitt Romney. President Obama won both the popular vote and the electoral college, retaining his office. The 2012 US Presidential election was largely an election not focused on foreign policy. US voters regularly listed foreign policy issues lower than domestic issues, such as the economy, in polls.⁴⁶⁶ Additionally, most of the Republicans seeking their party's nomination were former and current governors, with little to no foreign policy experience.



In Turkey, however, the US election was an event to watch. Early in the election, Rick Perry, the governor of Texas, declared in a Republican debate on January 16 that Turkey was run by Islamic extremists and that the US should cut off all aid to its ally. The Turkish government hit back, calling his statements “baseless and improper.”⁴⁶⁷ The US government similarly pushed back against the candidate's remarks. State Department spokesman Mark Toner called Turkey a “stalwart member of NATO and a strong ally of the United States,” and that the US government “ab-

solutely and fundamentally” disagreed with Mr. Perry’s characterization.⁴⁶⁸ Despite the uproar his comments caused in Turkey, Mr. Perry was already far behind in the race for the Republican nomination and dropped out of the race only days later on the 19th.⁴⁶⁹

In September 2012, then-Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan suggested that the election was keeping the US from taking the initiative on Syria.⁴⁷⁰ While the election in the US hinged largely on domestic issues, questions about the future of US foreign policy after the election loomed large. The reelection of President Obama was seen in Turkey as promising a continuation of a foreign policy that had largely been in line with Turkish interests. Mitt Romney, the Republican nominee, offered a fairly standard Republican Party foreign policy position, promising strong American leadership and strong ties with Israel.⁴⁷¹

The question of Syria loomed large over Turkey watchers during the 2012 debate, with some expecting that no matter who won the election, continued conflict in Syria would further highlight the differences between the US and Turkey.⁴⁷² In an October 2012 speech, Mr. Romney slammed President Obama for having “failed to lead in Syria,” noting that “our ally Turkey” had been attacked and that extremists were joining the fight.⁴⁷³ Despite a position that seemed closely aligned with growing Turkish concerns about the Syrian conflict and the lack of US support, President Obama was widely preferred over Mr. Romney in Turkey. For some, there were concerns that a return of a Republican president to the White House would adversely affect the positive developments in the bilateral relationship under President Obama. Others were concerned about Mr. Romney’s unequivocal support for Israel, given recent tensions between Israel and Turkey.⁴⁷⁴

Turkish columnists offered a variety of reactions to President Obama’s reelection. Some, like Mehmet Barlas, the lead editorial writer at *Sabah*, expressed satisfaction at the “continuity in

Washington” that his victory promised. He claimed that “The dialogue that Prime Minister Erdogan and President Obama have established would provide positive contributions, such as the stabilized Turkish-US relations in the first term of Obama.”⁴⁷⁵ Sami Kohen, a foreign affairs commentator at *Milliyet*, noted that President Obama was likely to continue to push “peaceful and conciliatory approaches to issues” such as Syria, some others like Murat Yetkin of *Radikal*, commenting on the reasons why Obama was elected, “Obama did not win only because he is for social justice. He won because he was close to women, to non-whites and to the marginalized.”⁴⁷⁶

Prime Minister Erdogan welcomed President Obama’s reelection and offered his hope for further coordination in the future, “I believe that we can take more productive steps and improve the relationship between Turkey and the U.S because we know each other well.”⁴⁷⁷ An unnamed Turkish official was quoted by *The Guardian* suggesting that Turkey hoped for more direct US leadership in the region following the election. “We expected more from them. Even now, I’m not sure they want to lead. Let’s hope they do.”⁴⁷⁸

PATRIOT MISSILE DEPLOYMENTS (NOVEMBER 2012)

On November 7, 2012, the Turkish government publicly raised the possibility of having NATO Patriot missile batteries deployed along its Syrian border. Then-Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu indicated that Turkey would request batteries from fellow NATO alliance members be stationed along the in order to address cross-border fire.⁴⁷⁹ Since the beginning of the Syrian conflict, there had been repeated instances of cross-border shelling and clashes. The US and NATO had repeatedly expressed their support for Turkey and concern about the growing threat to its territorial integrity.

In one of the most publicized incidents between Turkey and Syria, two Turkish pilots died after their F-4 jet was shot down by Syrian anti-air systems in June 2012. Amid initial confusion over whether or not the Turkish jet was in Syrian airspace, with Turkey claiming that the jet had briefly passed over Syria at high speed but had been shot down over international waters and Syria claiming that it had been shot down in Syrian territory, Turkey called for a NATO meeting under Article 4 of the Washington Treaty.⁴⁸⁰ Article 4 allows NATO member states to call for consultations if they feel that their “territorial integrity, political independence or security” is threatened.⁴⁸¹ Speaking after the NATO meeting, then-NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen declared the shoot down of the jet “to be unacceptable and [condemned] it in the strongest terms.”⁴⁸² In a readout of a call between US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, the US expressed its strong disapproval of the shoot down, “The United States condemns this brazen and unacceptable act in the strongest possible terms.”⁴⁸³ Other Turkish allies such as the UK and the EU expressed similar outrage over the act and their support for Turkey.⁴⁸⁴

A second major incident between Turkey and Syria occurred early October. On October 3, 5 Turkish civilians died after Akcakale, a border town, was shelled. The town was again shelled a week later on October 7. The Turkish government unequivocally blamed the Assad regime for the shelling, stating that it was “artillery fire belonging to the Syrian regime forces” that struck Akcakale.⁴⁸⁵ Turkey responded by shelling locations in Syria where it said the shelling originated from.⁴⁸⁶ The night after the initial attack, then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton spoke with her Turkish counterpart Ahmet Davutoglu and condemned the attack and offered US support. The US further stated that it viewed Turkey’s response to the attack as “appropriate” in a State Department briefing on October 4.⁴⁸⁷ Similarly, George Little, Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, said that the attack only further demonstrated that “it is time for the Assad regime to step down,” and suggested that the US respect the Turkish response, “we respect the inherent right of self-defense displayed by Turkey.”⁴⁸⁸ Following the incident, NATO reiterated its support for Turkey and met once again for a consultation based on Article 4. In the statement released following the meeting, the alliance condemned the shelling as “a flagrant breach of international law and a clear and present danger to the security of one of its Allies.”⁴⁸⁹ Following the second shelling on the 7th, Turkey sent additional fighter jets to southern air bases while NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen told reporters on the 9th that “We [NATO] have all necessary plans in place to protect and defend Turkey if necessary.”⁴⁹⁰

As noted, Foreign Minister Davutoglu first publicly suggested that Turkey was seeking NATO Patriot missile batteries on November 7, a request which was confirmed by the NATO Secretary General on November 21.⁴⁹¹ Following an authorization by NATO’s North Atlantic Council allowing Supreme Allied Com-

mander Europe to coordinate the deployment of Patriot missiles on December 4, then-US Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta signed the official order for 400 US service members and two US Patriot batteries to be deployed to Turkey on December 14 at Incirlik Air Base in Turkey.⁴⁹² The US batteries would be joined by two batteries from Germany and the Netherlands each, to be deployed around Kahramanmaras, Adana, and Gaziantep.⁴⁹³ On January 26, 2013, the first of the six Patriot batteries was activated.⁴⁹⁴

TURKEY PURSUES ENERGY AGREEMENTS WITH THE KRG

In 2013, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) of northern Iraq joined together with Turkey to construct a new stretch of oil pipeline that would connect the region's northern oil fields to the Ceyhan Pipeline. The Turkish-Kurdish energy deals were criticized by both Baghdad and the US, who felt that the deal went against their "one-Iraq" policy.⁴⁹⁵ The agreement also paved the way for the construction of a new pipeline linking oil fields in the region to Turkey and for the signing of a multi-billion dollar energy package between Turkey and the KRG.⁴⁹⁶

While both Turkey and the US supported the territorial integrity of Iraq, Turkey's increasing demand for energy had led Ankara to explore options to diversify its access to natural gas and oil resources. In northern Iraq, Turkey saw an opportunity to secure not only access to energy resources, but also to serve as a political player in Iraq's most stable area. In January 2013, the Turkish Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs Feridun Sinirlioglu met with the US State Department officials to try to calm some of Washington's fears about a Kurdish-Turkish energy partnership.⁴⁹⁷ US Secretary of Energy Ernest Moniz weighed in on the Obama administration's policy toward the issue at the Atlantic Council's 5th Energy Summit in Istanbul. When asked about the US position on the agreements he stated, "We [the Obama administration] support the discussions, and companies being engaged, within the constitutional structure [of Iraq]."⁴⁹⁸ Moniz's statements reflect a shift in tone in Washington, which had previously adopted a hard stance against a KRG-Turkey deal to avoid antagonizing Baghdad. However, US officials continued to express their concerns that oil deals between Turkey and the KRG should only be implemented with Baghdad's consent.⁴⁹⁹ This was a principle Washington adhered to even when the KRG announced on January 9, 2014 that it

had reached a bilateral deal to start sending crude oil to Turkey. Vice President Joe Biden followed up the announcement with a same-day phone call to President Massoud Barzani of the KRG, urging the Kurdish leader to work with Baghdad to settle disputes over oil sales from the region.⁵⁰⁰ During the parliamentary meeting of the Kurdistan Regional Government, Iraqi Prime Minister Nечirvan Barzani answered the US's fears on this issue:

The agreement we made with Turkey in the field of energy is for 50 years. This period can be extended further. Our agreement is not intended to divide Iraqi lands. We have one goal, which is to take our 17 percent share from the Iraqi budget.⁵⁰¹ We do not see the sale of oil as a way or a method for achieving our independence. We want our rights that were set forth in the Constitution which was adopted for the establishment of a new Iraq in 2003 to be granted and implemented.⁵⁰²

Even though the US stayed staunchly in line with its one-Iraq policy, and against the KRG's independent oil exports via Turkey, with the blitzkrieg of ISIL forces through Iraq in 2014, Ankara began to push Washington on the issue of Kurdish oil exports. "This is urgent: ISIS is now selling its oil, but the Kurds are not allowed to sell their oil," a Turkish official stated in lobbying for Washington to accept Kurdish oil sales, "Our message for the US is always very clear," said the senior Turkish official.

THE TRANSATLANTIC TRADE AND INVESTMENT PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT (TTIP)

In June 2013, the US and the European Union announced that they would begin negotiations on a Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) agreement. The purpose of the agreement would be to create a framework to expand trade and investment between the US and EU member states. According to the Obama administration, “The launch followed a vigorous domestic consultation process with relevant stakeholders on the Obama Administration’s goals and objectives for a negotiation with the EU, which were publicly described in a March 20, 2013 letter to the U.S. Congress.”⁵⁰³ As discussions intensified surrounding TTIP, flaws in Turkey’s Customs Union with the EU were laid bare for Ankara. Under TTIP, Turkey would not only be excluded from receiving benefits enjoyed by EU countries under the agreement, but it would also be opened up to an unbalanced trade relationship. TTIP would effectively allow the US to continue to impose duties on Turkish imports while Turkey would not be capable of imposing its own customs duty on US goods and services in return.⁵⁰⁴ A number of studies conducted on the financial impact of TTIP on Turkey estimated that, without modifications in its trade partnerships, Turkey could stand to lose anywhere between 130 million USD and 3 billion USD annually.⁵⁰⁵

In 2012, trade with the EU and US accounted for 40 percent of all of Turkey’s foreign trade. The EU and Turkey top receivers of Turkish foreign investment, accounting for two-thirds of all Turkish foreign investment.⁵⁰⁶ These statistics exemplified how high the stakes were for Turkey’s inclusion, or exclusion, from TTIP. Deputy Prime Minister Ali Babacan and Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu both made statements underlining that Turkey should be allowed to either join the EU-US free trade talks or that a parallel agreement with the US should be reached. The EU

Minister and Chief Negotiator Egemen Bagis also indicated that Turkey might consider re-evaluating its Customs Union with the EU in order to mitigate the negative impact of TTIP.⁵⁰⁷

The potential harm of the agreement was strong enough that Prime Minister Erdogan wrote a personal letter to President Obama advocating for Turkey's considerations to be included in the agreement, most likely through a parallel bilateral agreement between the US and EU.⁵⁰⁸ During remarks in the Rose Garden following a bilateral meeting between President Obama and Prime Minister Erdogan in May 2013, the American leader proclaimed,

As the United States pursues a new trade and investment partnership with the EU, I want to make sure that we also keep deepening our economic ties with Turkey. So we're creating a new high-level committee that will focus on increasing trade and investment between our two countries and will help fuel Turkish innovation.⁵⁰⁹

Prime Minister Erdogan also referred to the prospect of a mechanism for ensuring Turkey's safety from unilateral impositions from TTIP,

Bilateral economic and trade relations between Turkey and the United States will continue to develop. And as we carry forward with these efforts, we need to strengthen this [US-Turkey] relationship with free trade agreements and other agreements.⁵¹⁰

Seemingly on the same page on the need to factor Turkey's concerns into TTIP negotiations, President Obama and Prime Minister Erdogan called for the establishment of a High Level Committee to "deepen Turkish American economic relations and liberalize trade." Independent organizations also advocated for the inclusion of Turkey in TTIP. The US Chamber of Commerce and The Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey (TOBB) asserted, "Turkey's large and growing market and its expanding ties with regional neighbors also make Turkey a very attractive candidate for its inclusion in TTIP" and that "excluding

Turkey from TTIP could also harm Turkey's economy and its status as a global economic center."⁵¹¹

Despite these steps, the status of Turkey's role in the TTIP framework remained unclear as negotiations continued between the US and the EU. As explained by the US Department of Commerce in July 2016,

The United States and the EU continue negotiations in the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). Given Turkey's Customs Union with the EU, Turkey has noted its desire for a Free Trade Agreement with the United States. While an FTA is not in the cards at this time, the U.S. and Turkey consult frequently on TTIP through the High-level Committee.⁵¹²

However, as the EU and US struggled to come to an agreement on key policy areas such as agriculture exports and trade moving through 2014 and into 2015, 2016, and 2017 the urgency for addressing Turkey's status in the agreement lessened.⁵¹³ With the election of Donald Trump in the 2016 Presidential election, the agreement was considered off the table.⁵¹⁴

PRIME MINISTER ERDOGAN VISITS WASHINGTON (MAY 2013)

On May 16, 2013, Prime Minister Erdogan traveled to Washington DC to meet with President Obama. The visit occurred in the midst of several developing issues of importance for Turkish-American relations, including growing pressure on the Obama administration to alter its Syria policy, strife in the Turkish-Israeli relationship in the aftermath of Mavi Marmara, ongoing negotiations and sanctions on Iran's nuclear program, and tensions between Ankara and Baghdad over KRG oil sales. During the meeting, Prime Minister Erdogan was accompanied by Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Arinc, Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoglu, EU Minister and Chief Negotiator Egemen Bagis, Minister of Energy and Natural Resources Taner Yildiz, Minister of National Defense Ismet Yilmaz, Minister of Economy Zafar Caglayan, AK Party Deputy Chairmen Numan Kurtulmus and Mevlut Cavusoglu, MIT Undersecretary Hakan Fidan, AK Party Group President Aysenur Bahcekapili, Foreign Ministry Undersecretary Feridun Sinirlioglu, and Turkey's Ambassador to Turkey Namik Tan.⁵¹⁵

President Obama highlighted his relationship with Prime Minister Erdogan during Rose Garden remarks following the Oval Office visit, "This visit reflects the importance that the United States places on our relationship with our ally, Turkey, and I value so much the partnership that I've been able to develop with Prime Minister Erdogan." He also mentioned Turkey's role in working with the Syrian opposition and pressuring the Assad regime to step down from power, "Turkey is going to play an important role as we bring representatives of the regime and opposition together in the coming weeks. We both agree that Assad needs to go."⁵¹⁶ Prime Minister Erdogan also emphasized that Syria was the number one issue of their meeting:

We are in complete agreement with the United States on the need to terminate the bloody war in Syria and on the construction of a new administration that meets the legitimate demands of the people. At this point, our primary concerns are supporting the opposition, to stop Assad, to prevent Syria from being an open area for terrorist organizations' activities, to prevent the use of chemical weapons, and to ensure the safety of all minorities.⁵¹⁷

He also claimed that the US and Turkey had similar desires for the future of Iraq and praised the US-Turkish partnership, "In regional and global affairs, the Turkey-US partnership will support peace, security, and stability."⁵¹⁸

Prime Minister Erdogan highlighted the delegation of businessmen traveling to the US alongside him:

I am here with close to a hundred business people, and they are holding meetings with their counterparts in the United States, and they will continue to talk and meet with their counterparts this afternoon as well. Bilateral economic relations between Turkey and the United States have to be improved, and we both have this aim. Ten years ago, our trade stood at \$8 billion; at the moment, trade stands at \$20 billion.⁵¹⁹

Following his discussions with President Obama, Prime Minister Erdogan sat down for a formal lunch with Vice President Biden and Secretary Kerry at the State Department. During the lunch, Secretary Kerry noted,

We all know that there is a distance we have to take to make our world safer and more stable. The effort to take this distance has never been as important as it is today. Thus, when we face the most challenging problems, we have Turkey who is able to face that problem with us, this is giving us confidence.⁵²⁰

Vice President Biden made similar statements, "We have the same goals, and we need to work as closely as possible to achieve them. When the United States and Turkey stand shoulder to shoulder, no difficulty is too great for us."⁵²¹

Prime Minister Erdogan later returned to the White House for a working dinner with President Obama.⁵²² During the din-

ner, Prime Minister Erdogan pushed for the establishment of a no-fly zone over northern Syria to assist the rebel-held areas. He was pointed in saying, “Our aim is to accelerate this process and I will be visiting other countries and my foreign minister will do the same just to see how we can speed things up to prevent the deaths of more people.”⁵²³ However, the Obama administration remained reluctant about the possibility of implementing a no-fly zone, as well as on evidence presented by the Turks that the Assad regime had violated President Obama’s “red-line” on the use of chemical weapons in Syria. President Obama stated, in regards to Turkey’s insistence that chemical weapons had already been deployed, “I’ve said in the past, we have seen evidence of the use of chemical weapons inside of Syria. It is important for us to make sure that we’re able to get more specific information about what exactly is happening there.”⁵²⁴



While in Washington, Prime Minister Erdogan also had several speaking engagements during which he discussed US-Turkey relations. During an event at The SETA Foundation at Washington DC on “Justice and Global Order in the 21st Century,” he

outlined for the American audience the necessity of having a fair system in the world. He mentioned pressing issues such as the famine in Somalia, massacres in Myanmar, the unjust occupation in Palestine, and cruelty in Syria. He stated, “While countries are making regional power calculations, humanity is dying in Syria. A global system that cannot stop this massacre cannot be fair and humanist.”⁵²⁵

EGYPTIAN COUP (JULY 2013)

On July 3, 2013, a cadre of Egyptian military officers overthrew President Mohamed Morsi and installed an interim military government. President Morsi had risen to power in the aftermath of the 2011 Egyptian Arab Spring revolution as the country's first democratically elected president. As the military coup was under way, President Morsi was taken into military custody along with approximately 38 of his political party's senior leadership.

The coup came as a particular shock to the Turkish government, which had developed strong ties with Morsi and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. Prime Minister Erdogan swiftly and strongly condemned the coup, insisting that President Morsi be reinstated as the democratically elected leader of the country. The Turkish public also reacted strongly to the overthrow of a democratically elected ally, taking to the streets in protest.⁵²⁶

Turkey was just as shocked by the international community's response to the overthrow of a democratically elected leader as it was by the coup itself. In a statement, Prime Minister Erdogan stated,

It is clear that the international community, by supporting the military coup and remaining silent over previous massacres instead of protecting democracy and constitutional legitimacy in Egypt, has encouraged the current administration to carry out today's intervention.⁵²⁷

In President Obama's initial response to the coup, he refrained from condemning the undertaking, "Since the current unrest in Egypt began, we have called on all parties to work together to address the legitimate grievances of the Egyptian people, in accordance with the democratic process, and without recourse to violence or the use of force."⁵²⁸ The question of the administration's acceptance that President Morsi's removal constituted a coup would have implications for the future of US aid to Egypt. Under US law, the administration is required to cut off aid to any country that has recently

undergone a military coup. In 2013, Cairo was slated to receive \$1.5 billion in financial assistance from Washington. The influx of US assistance to Egypt paved the way not only for the country to continue to function, but was also a way for the US to buy Cairo's commitment to its longstanding peace with Israel. As stated by former US Congressman and former chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Howard Berman, at the time, "The law by its terms dictates one thing, and sensible policy dictates that we don't do that. That's why the executive branch gets to decide whether it's a coup or not. Under the plain meaning rule, there was a coup."⁵²⁹

In contrast to Washington's tepid response, Turkey deemed the ouster of President Morsi as an "unacceptable coup" and pushed



the UN Security Council to respond accordingly. "It is unacceptable for a government that has come to power through democratic elections to be toppled through illicit means and, even more, a military coup," Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu told reporters.⁵³⁰ Ankara was also distressed over the lack of US response to the massacre that occurred on August 14, 2013 when Egyptian security forces opened fire on over 1,000 pro-Morsi protesters who had gathered in Cairo's Raba'a Square. "In Rab'a Square, Egyptian security forces carried out one of the world's largest killings of demonstrators in a single day in recent history," Human Rights Watch Executive Director Kenneth Roth reported, "This wasn't merely a case of excessive force or poor training. It was a violent crackdown planned at the highest levels of the Egyptian government. Many of the same officials are still in power in Egypt, and have a lot to answer for."⁵³¹ While President Obama did condemn the violence that unfolded that night, which left over 500 dead, and canceled the US' biannual joint military exercise with Egypt the following month, he also stressed, "We [US] don't take sides with any particular party or political figure."⁵³²

While Turkey's close relations with the Morsi government certainly hardened its stance against the new Sisi regime, Turkey's history of military coups also informed and influenced its perspective on what was unfolding in Egypt. It made Turkey nervous about how its allies, particularly the US, would react should the Turkish military again rise against Turkish democracy. It lessened Turkish faith that its partners would stand up for the country's democracy. Secretary of State John Kerry shocked the Turkish public one more time when he stated that the military in Egypt was "restoring democracy" in the country.⁵³³ "Those who extol democracy when they meet with us, saying 'one must not compromise on democracy,' we want to see their backbone," Prime Minister Erdogan remarked in criticism of the failure of the US to stand up for Egypt's democratically elected leader.⁵³⁴

CHEMICAL WEAPON ATTACK IN SYRIA (AUGUST 2013)

On August 21, 2013, two opposition-held areas in Ghouta, a suburb of Damascus, were hit by rockets containing Sarin nerve gas. The use of Sarin in the attack was confirmed by a team of UN inspectors who had been in the country investigating another alleged chemical weapons attack. In a report filed on September 13, the inspectors concluded that chemical weapons had been used “on a relatively large scale” in the Syrian conflict not only between warring parties, but against civilians as well.⁵³⁵ The US and French governments published unclassified summaries of their assessments on August 30 and September 3 respectively.⁵³⁶

The August attacks in Ghouta were not the first alleged chemical attacks to be carried out in Syria. Since US President Barack Obama had first warned in August 2012 that the use of chemical weapons in Syria would be a “red line”, there had been several reported incidents. Speaking after the attack on the 20th, President Obama stated, “Once we establish the facts, I have made clear that the use of chemical weapons is a game changer,” warning that if it was determined that the Assad regime was responsible, there would be a shift in US policy.⁵³⁷ In a letter sent to Senator John McCain on April 25, the Obama administration stated that US intelligence agencies assessed “with varying degrees of confidence” that the Assad regime had used chemical weapons on a small scale in Syria, though it did not list specific instances.⁵³⁸

On May 16, President Obama met with Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan for a lengthy meeting on the events in Syria. Ahead of the meeting, Prime Minister Erdogan said that Turkey had evidence that he would share with President Obama during the upcoming visit proving that the Assad regime had used chemical weapons. He called on the US to “take further steps” to address the issue.⁵³⁹ Speaking after the meeting on the

16th, President Obama noted the role Prime Minister Erdogan was playing “at the forefront of the international effort to push for a transition to a democratic Syria without Bashar Assad,” and asserted that the US and Turkey would “keep increasing the pressure on the Assad regime and working with the Syrian opposition.”⁵⁴⁰ Discussing the issue of chemical weapons, Prime Minister Erdogan suggested that whatever evidence Turkey had would continue to be shared with both the US and its other allies as well as other organizations like the UN.⁵⁴¹

Despite the evidence provided by Turkey in the May bilateral meeting and the assessment by the US intelligence community that gas attacks had occurred, the Obama White House chose not to take further action at the time. Speaking at an event following his meeting with President Obama, Prime Minister Erdogan called on the UN Security Council to decide whether or not to impose a no-fly zone over Syria.⁵⁴² It was not until mid-June that the White House decided to expand “military support” it was providing to Syrian opposition groups.

Following the chemical attacks in Ghouta in August 2013, actors within the US began to move towards condoning intervention and expectations grew rapidly. Like many other nations, Turkey spoke out against the chemical attacks and suggested that military action by the international community was a possible response. On August 22, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said that a “red line was crossed” by the Assad regime’s actions in Ghouta on August 21, alluding to President Obama’s comments from 2012. Davutoglu declared that addressing the attack was “a responsibility for the sides who still set these red lines, and for all of us.”⁵⁴³ A week after the Ghouta attacks, Turkish officials declared that if the UN failed to take action, Turkey would be willing to join an international coalition even without UN blessing, a marked shift from Turkey’s previous position.⁵⁴⁴ Foreign Minister Davutoglu said on

August 26 that Turkey hoped for international cooperation under the blessing of the UN but, “If such a decision doesn’t emerge from the UN Security Council, other alternatives...would come onto the agenda.”⁵⁴⁵ US Secretary of State Kerry reportedly told his Turkish counterpart that the US had decided to take “appropriate action” in response to the attacks, and the two of them reportedly discussed what action would be appropriate if UN approval could not be attained due to Russian or Chinese obstruction.⁵⁴⁶



On August 28, in an interview with PBS News Hour, President Obama stated that while the US had concluded that the Syrian regime was responsible for the recent chemical attacks, he had not decided whether or not to take military action.⁵⁴⁷ In a surprising move, the president announced several days later that he would carry out military action against the Assad regime only

if such an action received approval from the US Congress.⁵⁴⁸ Possible US strikes were eventually averted by a deal struck on September 14 between the US and Russia to destroy Syria's chemical weapons arsenal.⁵⁴⁹

While both the US and Turkey recognized the need to respond to the chemical attacks, they disagreed over what response should be taken. US officials repeatedly spoke of their desire and intent to limit any US engagement in Syria. Secretary Kerry asserted that any action "will not involve any boots on the ground. It will not be open ended and it will not assume responsibility for a civil war that is already well underway."⁵⁵⁰ In Turkey, however, officials spoke of aiming to actively resolve the conflict. President Abdullah Gul warned that because of its proximity to Syria, Turkey could not remain "indifferent" to the growing "chaos and uncertainty." Prime Minister Erdogan pushed back against comments made by Secretary Kerry and President Obama calling for limited interventions. He insisted that "a limited military action will not satisfy us [Turkey]. It [the intervention] should be like in Kosovo," referring to the 1999 intervention by NATO.⁵⁵¹

After any possible US intervention was stopped by the deal reached in September between the US and Russia, Prime Minister Erdogan criticized the agreement, expressing doubt that the regime would follow through on its promises. In a speech on September 12, Prime Minister Erdogan stated, "The Assad regime has not lived up to any of its pledges, it has won time for new massacres and continues to do so."⁵⁵²

Since late 2012, the US and Turkey increasingly diverged in their approaches to the conflict in Syria. While both nations maintained opposition to the Assad regime and were involved in efforts to provide non-lethal aid to opposition groups, Turkey repeatedly called for outside intervention in the conflict while also ruling out intervening in Syria unilaterally.⁵⁵³ The Obama administration,

on the other hand, chose to take a more removed approach to the conflict. After the initial reports of chemical attacks, the Obama administration maintained that it needed more substantiated evidence before it would act.

CYPRUS REUNIFICATION TALKS RESUME (MAY 2014)

On May 21, 2014 Vice President Biden arrived in Cyprus to stump for reunification talks. His visit was the first by a senior US official in over 50 years. He also utilized the visit to emphasize the US's "growing cooperation" with Cyprus, especially in finding alternative energy routes to Europe.⁵⁵⁴ The American Vice President held separate talks with both Greek and Turkish Cypriot officials as well as civil society representatives and religious leaders. The Biden-Eroglu meeting was very important for Turkish Cypriots, who interpreted Vice President Biden's visit as a sign that the US approaches the Cyprus issue from a different perspective.⁵⁵⁵



Also present for Vice President Biden's visit was Turkish Deputy Prime Minister (DPM) Besir Atalay, Ankara's envoy at the time for relations with the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. DPM Atalay remarked on the timing of the visit and on the prospect of progress toward finding a settlement to the frozen conflict that divides the island, "This time, negotiations have been working out productively. Frankly, we consider efforts by both the EU and the US useful on that issue."⁵⁵⁶ Turkish Foreign Minister

Davutoglu prior to Vice President Biden's arrival in Cyprus also noted that the Vice President's visit was an important step for creating momentum in the peace process.⁵⁵⁷

Following his visit to Cyprus, Vice President Biden traveled to Istanbul to meet with President Erdogan and Prime Minister Davutoglu. After his meeting with President Erdogan, he asserted that negotiations should be restored in Cyprus,

There is a potential for a solution that will be appropriate for the interests of all the people both in the region and in the island. For this to happen, it is necessary to focus on reducing the tension and returning to the negotiating table. Considering the serious energy potential in the Eastern Mediterranean, the awards of forming a future in cooperation is very high for both communities⁵⁵⁸

Prime Minister Davutoglu also commented on the Cyprus issue during Vice President Biden's visit to Istanbul. He said, "Energy is the tool of cooperation, not conflict. If everyone agrees that the natural resources around Cyprus belong to all Cyprus and everyone uses these energy resources with a common vision and action plan to achieve peace then everyone wins."⁵⁵⁹

US efforts to encourage reunification talks continued through 2014 and 2015. Secretary Kerry addressed the issue again following meetings on the frozen conflict in Washington on May 13, 2014, "We had been talking and working on the issue of trying to find a peace for Cyprus, a reunification of the island on a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation policy." Secretary Kerry next met with both Turkish Cypriot leader Akinci and Greek Cypriot President Anastasiades in New York in September 2014 before traveling to Cyprus to "support the ongoing UN-facilitated process of talks" in December 2015.⁵⁶⁰

TURKISH PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION (AUGUST 2014)

On August 10, 2014, Turkey held its first ever direct popular vote in a presidential election. The results transitioned Recep Tayyip Erdogan from his prior post as Prime Minister of the country into the Turkish presidency. In the election, where the participation rate was 74 percent, Prime Minister Erdogan was elected by 51.7 percent of the vote, the Republican People's Party (CHP) and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) joint candidate Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu took 38.5 percent of the vote and the People's Democratic Party (HDP) candidate Selahattin Demirtas garnered 9.7 percent of the vote.⁵⁶¹



The US responded to Prime Minister Erdogan's victory the next day. "President Obama looks forward to working with Prime Minister Erdogan in his new role and with whomever succeeds him as the next Prime Minister," a White House spokesperson responded when asked about the President's reaction to the Turkish election.⁵⁶² Two days after the election, Prime Minister Erdogan and President Obama spoke via phone. According to the

official White House read out the call, “The President praised the Prime Minister’s speech on Sunday and noted that as Turkey’s first directly elected President, the Prime Minister has an historic opportunity to further move Turkey forward.”⁵⁶³ The congratulatory call was the first phone call between the two leaders in six months, a stark departure from the earlier days of the Obama administration when the American president and the Turkish leader routinely spoke to each other.

NATO SUMMIT IN WALES (SEPTEMBER 2014)

On September 5, 2014, President Obama and President Erdogan held a meeting in Wales before the 2014 NATO summit of heads of state. President Erdogan laid out his goals not only for the summit but for his meeting with President Obama,

The most important framework of our [US-Turkey] cooperation in the military area is NATO. We enjoy cooperation in the political, economic and cultural areas as well. We have attended a NATO summit during which such issues as Iraq, Palestine, Egypt, Libya and Ukraine have been discussed. I will discuss all these issues with President Obama and we will seize this opportunity in the best way.⁵⁶⁴

During joint remarks delivered before their meeting, President Obama outlined his hopes for the meeting and his appreciation for Turkey's role in the crises in the Middle East,

I look forward to a very productive discussion around issues that we're both equally concerned about, principally the instability in Iraq and Syria, and the emergence of ISIL as a threat to all our nations. And I want to express my appreciation for the cooperation between U.S. and Turkish both military and intelligence services in dealing with the issue of foreign fighters, an area where we still have more work to do.⁵⁶⁵

During the bilateral meeting, the two leaders shared similar concerns about developments in Iraq and Syria, particularly the spread of ISIS as a threat to all countries.



For President Erdogan, an issue of importance for the bilateral relations was to push for the extradition of US based cleric Fethullah Gulen. In this regard, Prime Minister Erdogan stated,

I will tell the US...Since we are strategic partners with you and we have a model partnership between us. Similar to you, sometimes you want us to deport some terrorists from Turkey and we do it, we also want you deport this terrorist. Either deport him or give him to us. He [Gulen] says he's not guilty. Then he can come and live here.⁵⁶⁶

US-TURKEY DIVERGENCE OVER SYRIA (2014)

In 2014, the split between Turkey and the US over issues in Syria became increasingly transparent. The two allies continued to cooperate on shared concerns, such as maintaining support for the Syrian opposition via the Friends of Syria group and at the UN Geneva Peace talks, but, as ISIS became a larger and more pressing threat, the US increasingly turned its focus in Syria towards specifically defeating the terrorist group and away from removing the Assad regime. While Turkey similarly saw ISIS as a threat, it continued to push for a broader, more holistic approach to the Syrian conflict that would include addressing the continued rule of Bashar al-Assad.

GENEVA II

At the beginning of 2014, despite the differences between the US and Turkey over the 2013 chemical weapons deal, the two governments continued to coordinate and support efforts to help reach a political resolution in Syria. At the October 2013 London meeting of the Friends of Syria Core Group, which included both the US and Turkey, the group announced that it would place its “united and collective weight” behind the UN-led Geneva II peace process for Syria.⁵⁶⁷ Ahead of the Geneva II talks scheduled for January 2014, both the US and Turkey sent representatives to a meeting between the Friends of Syria Core Group and a representative of the Syrian opposition in Paris on January 12. Turkey was represented by Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu while Secretary of State John Kerry attended as the representative of the US government. In a declaration issued at the end of the meeting and during discussions, the members of the group urged the Syrian National Coalition, the largest recognized group of the Syrian opposition, to take advantage of the Geneva talks and to form a delegation to send to the summit.⁵⁶⁸ In remarks follow-

ing their sideline meeting in Paris, Secretary Kerry and Foreign Minister Davutoglu hailed their “common approach to the issue of Syria.”⁵⁶⁹ Several days later, the US Secretary and Turkish Foreign Minister again spoke via phone to discuss developments in Syria and the upcoming Geneva II talks.⁵⁷⁰

COALITION BUILDING

On September 10, 2014, President Obama announced that the US would “lead a broad coalition to roll back” the threat of ISIS.⁵⁷¹ He concurrently announced that the US would continue to conduct airstrikes against the terror group and announced that he would ask Congress to expand funding for US efforts to train and equip the Syrian opposition. In June, the president had asked Congress for \$500 million to fund a program to train and equip “properly vetted” Syrian opposition members.⁵⁷² In an interview on September 7, President Obama called on Turkey, among other US allies in the region, to step up to help counter the spread of ISIS.⁵⁷³ An unnamed US defense official was quoted as suggesting that Turkey was an essential partner for the coalition, “it won’t work without Turkey.” While Turkish officials said that they would work with their allies on the issues, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu noted that Turkey had also been open with the US about “what we will do and what we will not do.”⁵⁷⁴

The day after the president’s announcement, US Secretary Kerry traveled to Jeddah to meet with leaders of Arab allies such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Qatar, and Turkey to discuss counterterror efforts. While the other ten countries at the meeting agreed to support anti-ISIS efforts, signing the “Jeddah Communiqué,” Turkey declined to sign. Secretary Kerry downplayed Turkey’s lack of participation, suggesting that they were dealing with “sensitive issues,” presumably alluding to the 49 Turkish citizens being held hostage by ISIS in Mosul.⁵⁷⁵ Similarly,

in a Department of Defense briefing on the 12th, Press Secretary Rear Admiral John Kirby told reporters that Turkey would contribute to anti-ISIS efforts, “in their own way and in accordance with their own mandates from the Turkish people.”⁵⁷⁶ Speaking in Ankara several days later, Secretary Kerry suggested that it was “entirely premature and frankly inappropriate at this point in time to start laying out one country by one country what individual nations are going to do” in response to a question about Turkey’s contributions to the fight against ISIS. A week later in an interview with Charlie Rose, President Erdogan commented on the Turkish decision at Jeddah,

In Jeddah a meeting...and after those meetings, Mr. Kerry came to visit me that we would be part of a humanitarian effort. But because we had the 49 hostages, we would not be in a position to take other steps. And we have actually taken significant steps in terms of humanitarian support.⁵⁷⁷

While US officials publicly portrayed it as a non-issue, an anonymous US official was quoted as saying that the US government had been pushing Turkey to shut down its border to stem the flow of foreign fighters to and from Syria.⁵⁷⁸

At the beginning of October 2014, shortly after obtaining the release of Turkish hostages from Mosul, the Turkish Parliament voted to authorize its military to conduct operations against ISIS and also granted permission to foreign militaries to operate out of Turkish bases.⁵⁷⁹ US officials from both the State Department and Department of Defense welcomed the outcome of the vote.⁵⁸⁰ US officials visited Turkey in the same month to discuss the role Turkey would play in the anti-ISIS coalition. After a visit by Special Presidential Envoy John Allen and Deputy Special Presidential Envoy Brett McGurk on October 9, the US State Department spokesperson told reporters that “Turkey has agreed to support train and equip efforts for the moderate Syrian

opposition” as part of the program run by the Department of Defense.⁵⁸¹ Turkish officials were reported as saying that at least 2,000 fighters would be trained by US and Turkish special forces on Turkish soil.⁵⁸²

Despite the tentative agreement, US officials noted that many details remained to be discussed and it was apparent that there were areas of concern between the two countries. Speaking during a visit to South America in early October, US Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel said that a safe zone in northern Syria along the Turkish border, a long standing Turkish request, was not on the table in discussions.⁵⁸³ Similarly, different priorities were apparent in comments from Turkey. Speaking in Trabzon, President Erdogan called for the coalition to take action against the Assad regime, and not ISIS alone. He declared, “We should also take decisive steps against the regime in Syria... Otherwise we cannot take a role.”⁵⁸⁴

In November, after Vice President Joe Biden visited Turkey to meet President Erdogan for discussions on the role of Turkey in the anti-ISIS coalition, Turkish officials announced that the two countries had agreed to run a train and equip program based out of Turkey.⁵⁸⁵ However, the remaining differences over the establishment of no-fly zones and safe zones in Syria threatened to scuttle the deal.

President Obama’s announcement on September 10 that the US would establish a military coalition to combat ISIS in Iraq and Syria came around the time that ISIS forces began to threaten the Syrian town of Kobani, a predominantly Kurdish city situated on the border with Turkey. While both the US and Turkey urged each other to take more decisive action to defend the city, the two nations came to an impasse of how to do so and what to do about the Assad regime. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan warned that airstrikes would not be enough to contain

ISIS and continued to call for the removal of Assad, an aim that the coalition did not share.⁵⁸⁶ In a speech on October 6, President Erdogan warned, “unless there is cooperation for a ground operation,” Kobani would fall to ISIS.⁵⁸⁷ Other Turkish officials similarly called on the US and other members of the anti-ISIS coalition to expand their efforts in Kobani.⁵⁸⁸

Turkey and the US eventually came to an agreement. Speaking in October, US officials announced that Turkey had agreed to open its bases for the US and other coalition forces’ operations against ISIS as well as agreeing to train Syrian rebel forces.⁵⁸⁹ Days after the US-led coalition began dropping supplies into Kobani, Turkey announced on October 20 that it would allow Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga fighters to cross the border into Syria to support the fight in Kobani, a decision seen as a success for US efforts.⁵⁹⁰ The two governments, however, remained apart on the question of Assad.

When ISIS began assaulting the border town Kobani in September 2014, the YPG members reportedly provided US planes with coordinates of ISIS forces in order to help support the defense of the city and improve US targeting capabilities.⁵⁹¹ This initial cooperation quickly began to develop into deeper coordination and cooperation, as the US became more involved in the fight against ISIS, dropping pallets of supplies to the fighters in the city in October 2014. The decision came shortly after Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan had spoken out against any possible transfer of arms from the US to YPG forces.⁵⁹² As noted, Turkey was and remains highly concerned about the YPG in Syria, given its ties and connections to the PKK, a terror organization. Despite Turkish concerns, the US continued to expand its relations with YPG fighters in Syria. The beginning of US support to YPG resulted in a serious crisis in mutual trust and confidence between Turkey and the US.

TURKEY ANNOUNCES CHINESE MISSILE DEAL (SEPTEMBER 2013)

Since 2007, the Turkish government began soliciting bids for a contract to develop a “long-range air and missile defense system,” called T-LORAMIDS. Missile defense has been a long-standing concern for Turkey, which had only been heightened following the advent and escalation of the Syrian conflict on its southern border. A partial response to this occurred with deployment of NATO Patriot Missile batteries to three locations in Turkey to help defend against possible threats from Syria. At the end of September 2013, Turkey announced that it would begin talks with China Precision Machinery Export-Import Corp (CPMEIC) to develop the HQ-9 missile system for T-LORAMIDS. The CPMEIC offer beat out offerings for similar systems from Raytheon and Lockheed Martin for the Patriot missile system, the Russian S-300, and Eurosam, an Italian-French consortium, for the SAMP/T Aster 30.⁵⁹³

According to statements from Turkish officials, there were two key reasons why Turkey selected the CPMEIC bid. Valued at \$3.44 billion, CPMEIC’s offer was much lower than the price tag of any of the other bids.⁵⁹⁴ The next closest was Eurosam’s bid at \$4.44 billion and the other two offers were even higher.⁵⁹⁵ The second reason that Turkey chose to go with CPMEIC was the promise of technology transfer that would allow Turkey to develop its domestic capabilities. The Turkish Undersecretary of Defense Industries described the Chinese bid as being “perfectly in compliance with [Ankara’s] terms and conditions,” providing the most favorable terms on “price, technology, local work share, technology transfer and credit financing.”⁵⁹⁶

The decision to go with the Chinese contract from CPMEIC was controversial in the US for a number of reasons. First and foremost were political concerns over the decision by Turkey to pursue the purchase of a system produced by an entity under US

sanctions. CPMIEC had been sanctioned by the US since at least 2003, when Washington said it was extending sanctions on the company for arms sales to Iran. The US had also announced further sanctions on CPMIEC in February 2013 for violating the Iran, North Korea and Syria Nonproliferation Act.⁵⁹⁷ At a State Department press briefing on September 30, Spokesperson Jen Psaki told reporters that the US had “conveyed our serious concerns about the Turkish Government’s contract discussions with a U.S. sanctioned company for a missile defense system that will not be interoperable with NATO systems or collective defense capabilities” at a “high level.”⁵⁹⁸ Turkish officials asserted that while they understood US concerns, they would not allow those concerns to force their decision.⁵⁹⁹

In addition to the sanctions placed on CPMIEC, US officials and members of Congress expressed concern that the possible integration of the missile system could give China access to critical and classified NATO information.⁶⁰⁰ A group of Republican Senators drafted and sent a letter to Obama administration in October, again warning against allowing the deal to go through. The letter read, “We strongly urge you to exert all available diplomatic pressure to prevent Turkish procurement of a [China Precision Military Import and Export Corp.] missile defense system and ensure NATO will never allow such a system to be integrated into NATO’s security architecture.” Further, the letter warned that “Since Turkey is fully integrated into NATO’s missile defense network, such as the NATO Air Defense Ground Environment, we are concerned about the risk of third-country access to NATO and U.S. classified data and technology.”⁶⁰¹ Congressman Mike Rogers, the House Armed Services Strategic Forces Subcommittee Chairman, told *Defense One* in October 2013 that news about the deal sent “a chill through the spine of members of Congress who care about NATO and Turkey’s alignment with the West.”⁶⁰²

The Turkish decision elicited such a critical response from the US that the 2014 Defense Authorization Act that passed in December 2013 specifically included a clause barring the use of US funds “to integrate missile defense systems of the People’s Republic of China into missile defense systems of the United States.” The act also noted, “It is the sense of Congress that missile defense systems of the People’s Republic of China should not be integrated into the missile defense systems of the United States or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.”⁶⁰³

A secondary concern for the US and NATO were questions about interoperability of the Chinese system with other NATO missile defense systems. In 2012, NATO member states had agreed to the Connect Forces Initiative, which aimed to ensure that the military equipment of member states “can share common facilities, and is able to interact, connect and communicate, exchange data and services with other equipment.”⁶⁰⁴ The Turkish government maintained that the HQ-9 system would be interoperable with other NATO systems. Under Secretary for Defense Industry Murad Bayar asserted in a press conference on October 1, “As part of this program, a Turkish defense company will be tasked with integrating the air defense system into a network operated by the Turkish Air Force. That integration will mean integration with NATO assets too since the Turkish system is fully integrated with the NATO system.” Additionally, Prime Minister Erdogan maintained, “There is no stipulation that you cannot buy weapons or that you cannot enter into co-production outside of NATO” and pointed to other NATO countries using Russian systems.⁶⁰⁵

Despite Turkish reassurances of interoperability, both US and NATO officials expressed concerns about integrating a possible Chinese weapons system into the larger NATO infrastructure. Many suggested that the issue was not only because of technical compatibility, but because other NATO members would not be

willing to allow a Chinese system to access their systems for fear of infiltration.⁶⁰⁶ On October 7, NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen stressed that while the decision of which system to purchase was a national decision, any missile system in a NATO member state should be interoperable with other systems in order to ensure functionality of the ballistic-missile shield.⁶⁰⁷ Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan pushed back on Secretary-General Rasmussen's comments, "Nobody has the right to overshadow our understanding of independence" and that the question of interoperability had already been taken into consideration.⁶⁰⁸

Despite the announcement in September 2013 and suggestions that the deal would be signed in early 2014, Turkey extended the deadline numerous times until the end of 2014, allowing Raytheon & Lockheed Martin and Eurosam several opportunities to revise their offers in attempt to win the contract away from CPMIEC.⁶⁰⁹ Rosoboronexport's bid had been turned down after September 2013. However, the aforementioned companies refused to show any degree of flexibility during this period. Especially in terms of technology transfer, they rejected Turkey's demands of co-production or sharing technology. This ultraconservative position despite the higher prices irked the security establishment in Turkey. Prior to a state visit to China in July 2015, President Erdogan suggested that the deal might be renegotiated, noting that while CPMIEC's bid was originally the most attractive, "There have been developments afterwards ... some snags."⁶¹⁰

On November 18, 2015, two years after the initial announcement of the deal between Turkey and CPMIEC, Turkey cancelled the contract. A statement from the Turkish Defense Ministry said that Turkey would instead focus on developing an indigenous missile-defense system.⁶¹¹ In July, an official from the Defense Industry Undersecretariat, which oversaw the negotiations with China, said that a major stumbling block in negotiations had been

China's unwillingness to transfer technology that would have allowed Turkey to develop the knowledge to operate and eventually replicate the missile system.⁶¹² Technology transfer and the eventual development of a domestic system had been a long-stated goal of Turkey and had been credited as one of the key reasons CPMIEC won the contract in the first place.

THE G20 ANTALYA SUMMIT (NOVEMBER 2015)

The G-20 leaders met in Antalya, Turkey in November 2015 under the shadow of the Paris attacks that killed at least 129 people on November 15, with an agenda focusing on the Syrian crisis, climate change, and financial and economic developments taking place in the world. During his speech at the summit, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan warned countries against tightening their refugee policies following the terrorist attack in Paris claimed by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).⁶¹³ President Barack Obama also highlighted the same issue, “many of these refugees are the victims of terrorism themselves -- that’s what they’re fleeing. Slamming the door in their faces would be a betrayal of our values. Our nations can welcome refugees who are desperately seeking safety and ensure our own security. We can and must do both.”⁶¹⁴



On November 16, President Erdogan and President Obama held a bilateral meeting on the sidelines of the G20 summit. After their meeting, President Erdogan and President Obama held a joint press conference. President Erdogan declared that he dis-

cussed with President Obama Turkey's actions against ISIS in Syria and the next steps Turkey and the US would take as coalition partners. He said that, as model and strategic partners, they would continue their resolute solidarity to contribute to world peace.⁶¹⁵ President Obama started his statement by condemning attacks in Paris, underlining that "the killing of innocent people in Ankara and Paris was not only directed at France or Turkey, they were directed at the whole of humanity." He asserted that Turkey had been a crucial partner in the struggle against terror and going after Daesh both in Syria and Iraq. Referring to his bilateral meeting with President Erdogan, he said, "The discussion we had today I think was very helpful in helping continue to coordinate work that we are doing together, to help to fortify the borders between Syria and Turkey that allow DAESH to operate."⁶¹⁶ President Erdogan reiterated his strong condemnation of the Paris attacks and said, "Terrorism does not recognize any religion, any race, any nation or any country. We are faced with collective terror in Paris just like in Ankara, Gaziantep, Suruc and Diyarbakır in Turkey" and he added, "we will put strong emphasis on having a firm stance on international terrorism."⁶¹⁷

COP21 UNITED NATIONS CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE IN PARIS (DECEMBER 2015)

On December 1, 2015, President Erdogan and President Obama held a bilateral meeting in Paris during the UN Climate Change Conference. The meeting occurred following the Turkish shoot down of the Russian fighter jet, and the two leaders discussed that incident, as well as different issues within Syria such as the joint struggle against the ISIS and operations against the Bayirbucak Turkmen.⁶¹⁸

During a joint press conference following the meeting, President Obama pointed out that Turkey and the US shared a common enemy in ISIS and that they should focus on that threat and the need to bring about a political resolution in Syria. President Obama said that a diplomatic solution was needed between Turkey and Russia so that the two countries could focus on solving the crisis in Syria. President Obama stated,

I want to be very clear: Turkey is a NATO Ally. Along with our allies, the United States supports Turkey's right to defend itself and its airspace and its territory. And we're very much committed to Turkey's security and its sovereignty. We discussed how Turkey and Russia can work together to de-escalate tensions and find a diplomatic path to resolve this issue.⁶¹⁹

President Obama praised Turkish support for Syrian refugees, "Turkey has been extraordinarily generous when it comes to its support of refugees." He also expressed his appreciation for the EU-Turkish agreements related to Syria, saying, "I was glad to hear that Turkey have had a productive meeting with the EU about how not only can border security be strengthened, but also additional resources for humanitarian support can be forthcoming."⁶²⁰

President Erdogan stated that Turkey was also looking for a diplomatic solution to its tension with Russia. He said, " diplomatic language will be sufficient in order to resolve the problems in the region -- because we don't want to invest in tensions."⁶²¹



On Syria, President Erdogan highlighted the issue of establishing a transitional government for the country, especially in the aftermath of the Vienna process. He said, “We are, so far, very happy to see the developments in that regard, and we hope and pray that the end result out of the Vienna process to be cultivated will provide a -sigh of relief for the entire region and for Syria.”⁶²² President Erdogan also raised the issue of Russian and Syrian regime’s operations against the Bayirbucak Turkmen. He stated,

There is no Daesh in the Bayirbucak region, where Turkmen live. Our kinsmen, our relatives live there. This area is constantly bombarded. Over 500 people, including civilians, have been killed here in the last 3 months. These are saddening developments for world peace. We wish we may rapidly overcome these problems” and sought for the US support for protecting Bayirbucak Turkmen.⁶²³

DEVELOPMENTS IN SYRIA (2015)

Throughout 2015, tensions between the US and Turkey over how to address the crisis in Syria continued to grow. Differences over which groups to partner with on the ground and whether to address the larger civil war or to focus only on ISIS became more apparent throughout the year.

In January 2015, the YPG partnered with US-led coalition forces and managed to retake large parts of Kobani, driving out the last ISIS forces on the 26th.⁶²⁴ Following the capture of Kobani, these forces with US air support embarked on a string of battles against ISIS, culminating in the capture of the border town Tel Abyad in June 2015.⁶²⁵ The capture of Tel Abyad by the YPG gave them effective control over 250 miles of the Syria-Turkey border.⁶²⁶ The YPG's policy of emptying the villages and towns in this part of northern Syria and its major human rights violations generated very harsh reaction from Turkey. Especially the YPG's attempts to demographically engineer the region by forcing local Arab and Turkmen populations to flee became a significant source of tension between Turkey and the US. Later, these activities of the YPG were documented by an Amnesty International report, in which the actions of the YPG were labeled "war crimes."

These developments were highly concerning to Turkey and the US role in support for the YPG continued to place a strain on the bilateral relationship. On June 11, Turkish President Erdogan criticized the US for supporting the terrorist groups and for "placing the PYD and the PKK in lieu" of Arab and Turkmen populations in the Syrian territory captured from ISIS.⁶²⁷ This tension was present since the beginning of the US support for the YPG in the Kobani crisis. However, in time, the artificial distinction that the US tried to draw between the PKK and the YPG and its increasing support for the YPG exacerbated the crisis in bilateral relations.

THE JULY 2015 BASING AGREEMENT

After months of negotiations, Turkey and the US announced that they had reached an agreement to base US troops and manned as well as unmanned warplanes to be based out of Turkey in the fight against ISIS. One US official was quoted as calling the agreement a “game changer.”⁶²⁸ An anonymous Turkish official from the Prime Minister’s office noted that Turkey was concerned by the threat ISIS posed in Syria, but that it had not changed its position on Assad.⁶²⁹ While the deal allowed the US and other coalition planes to conduct operations against ISIS, according to the Turkish Foreign Ministry, the agreement did not include the US missions being flown in support of Kurdish forces.⁶³⁰

Shortly after the deal was announced, an unnamed US official was quoted as saying that the US and Turkey were in discussions aiming to “establish an ISIL-free zone and ensure greater security and stability along Turkey’s border with Syria.”⁶³¹ The reveal of this effort came days before an emergency NATO meeting held to discuss the threat posed by ISIS and Turkey’s response to it on July 28.⁶³² The area discussed under the reported deal included much of the territory that was eventually recaptured from ISIS by Turkish and FSA forces under Operation Euphrates Shield in 2016, but the US and Turkish reports did not seem to develop into concrete action in 2015.

WITHDRAWAL OF PATRIOT MISSILES (AUGUST 2015)

In August 2015, the US announced that the Patriot missiles batteries which had been deployed to Turkey since 2013 would return to the US at the end of their mandate in October. A statement released jointly by Turkey and the US said that the batteries would be “redeployed to the US for critical modernization upgrades.”⁶³³ The announcement came a little under a month after the US and Turkey struck a deal to base US service members and aircraft at Turkish bases to conduct airstrikes against ISIS in Syria.⁶³⁴

While the official statement suggested that the decision had been mutual, unnamed US officials later said that the decision came in the middle of tense negotiations regarding Syria. According to the reports, the US did not inform Turkey that it had decided not to redeploy the Patriot missiles in Turkey until after President Obama and President Erdogan had reached an agreement on the use of Turkish bases for anti-ISIS operations.⁶³⁵ Four US officials were anonymously quoted by the *New York Times* as saying that the Turkish officials were “livid” when they were informed of the decision.⁶³⁶

Russian jets violated Turkish airspace on October 4 and October 5, just one month after the decision not to renew the Patriot missile deployments in Turkey. Jens Stoltenberg, the new NATO Secretary-General, issued a statement condemning the incursions, calling on “the Russian Federation to cease and desist, and immediately explain these violations” and later met with Turkish Foreign Minister Feridun Sinirlioglu to discuss the event.⁶³⁷ At the NATO Defense Minister level meeting several days later on October 8, Turkey reportedly urged the alliance to maintain the deployment of the Patriot missile batteries in light of the Russian encroachment on its airspace.⁶³⁸ In statements at the meeting, however, both the US and German officials maintained their position that it was time for their batteries to return. US Secretary of Defense Ash Carter contended that the decision had been taken “many months ago” for the specific purpose of modernizing the unit.⁶³⁹

THE END OF TRAIN AND EQUIP PROGRAM

In October 2015, the US Department of Defense announced that it would end the train and equip program for Syrian opposition forces that had been running for less than a year. The US said that it would instead focus on groups already active in Syria that the US could partner with and support.⁶⁴⁰ Around the same time that the US announced it would end its train and equip program,

the YPG and other Syrian Arab groups announced that they had formed a new umbrella group called the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). The Arab forces were grouped under the moniker, “The Syrian Arab Coalition” (SAC).⁶⁴¹ However, many observers called this attempt an endeavor to appease Turkey, since the backbone and major fighting force in the region was composed of US-backed YPG groups.

VICE PRESIDENT BIDEN VISITS TURKEY (JANUARY 2016)

On January 21, 2016 Vice President Biden arrived in Istanbul for a two-day visit. The visit came amidst ongoing divergence in US and Turkish priorities in Syria. The US was continuing to back the YPG forces against ISIS.

While in Turkey, Vice President Biden engaged in several actions which angered his Turkish counterparts. Prior to meeting with President Erdogan and Prime Minister Davutoglu, the vice president met with several journalists and civil society organizations known for being in opposition to the AK Party government. His choice of attendants for the meeting was criticized in the Turkish media for failing to involve a representative group of diverse ideas and opinions in Turkey.

According to Turkish Prime Ministry sources, during his meeting with Vice President Biden, Prime Minister Davutoglu commented on Biden's meeting with journalists, "You (Biden) can talk to whoever you want, but we expected you to meet with a group that include a wide range of views to understand the whole picture."⁶⁴² Following his meeting with Prime Minister Davutoglu on January 23, Vice President Biden addressed the issue of ongoing anti-ISIS coalition operations in Syria,

We spent a great deal of time in our discussion -- we ran over -- because we were talking about our shared mission on the extermination of ISIL. And we've gotten very precise -- very precise. We do believe that our plans together have matured. They've gotten more coordinated. And we're increasingly making progress. And I am confident that we will -- that that progress will be sped up as a consequence of our meeting today and our continued collaboration.⁶⁴³

Prime Minister Davutoglu also pointed out this issue and expressed Turkey's stand on Syria,

For Turkey, we do not see any difference between PKK, DHKPC, DAESH and Nusra, no matter what ethnic and cultural base they

are in. We have the sensitivity to act the same against all these terrorist organizations. There is no state authority beyond our borders (in Syria). We see 3 threats: regime, DAESH and YPG. Because all of these did ethnic cleansing to the Arabs, the Turkmen and the Kurds who did not think like them. We do not hesitate to take any necessary steps against these threats for sustaining our national security.⁶⁴⁴

Vice President Biden and President Erdogan did not deliver public remarks following their meeting on the same day, however, an official readout of the meeting issued by the White House stated that the two leaders discussed cooperation against ISIS, mutual respect for Iraqi territorial integrity, and ongoing efforts toward a negotiated settlement in Cyprus.

PRESIDENT ERDOGAN VISITS WASHINGTON (MARCH 2016)

During his visit to Washington, DC for the 2016 Nuclear Security Summit, President Erdogan met with President Obama at the White House. The bilateral meeting took place after a dinner hosted by President Obama in honor of the heads of state and governments participating in the Nuclear Security Summit. During the meeting, the two leaders discussed the cooperation between Turkey and the US on refugees, regional security, and the fight against terrorism.⁶⁴⁵ President Obama said that the US support



for Turkey's security and the Turkish-American mutual struggle against terrorism would continue. He also extended condolences to President Erdogan for those killed and injured in the latest terrorist attack in Diyarbakir, Turkey.⁶⁴⁶

During a press conference following the Nuclear Security Summit, President Obama answered a question on whether or not he believed President Erdogan acted in an authoritarian manner, "There is no doubt that President Erdogan has been repeatedly elected through a democratic process, but I think the approach that they've been taking towards the press is one that could lead Turkey down a path that would be very troubling."⁶⁴⁷ Although Obama continued his words by praising Turkey as a NATO ally, calling the country a vital partner in the fight against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, his comments were criticized by President Erdogan. The Turkish leader expressed his displeasure with President Obama's comments, saying, "I was saddened to hear that statement made behind my back. During my talk with Obama, those issues did not come up."⁶⁴⁸

In Washington DC, President Erdogan also attended bilateral meetings with the US Vice President Biden and Secretary of State Kerry. Besides these meetings with the US government officials, President Erdogan met with leaders of Jewish organizations and gave speeches at a dinner with high level businessmen in the US, which was organized by Foreign Economic Relations Board of Turkey (DEIK) and Prime Ministry Investment Support and Promotion Agency of Turkey (ISPAT) and The Brookings Institution.⁶⁴⁹ During his speech at the Brookings Institution, he evaluated the Turkish-American partnership as a partnership that could produce very positive results. He said that there may be differences of opinion in certain topics between two countries but this is very normal. He noted that "Turkey-US relations, however, have proved many times that they are deep and strong enough to resolve these disagreements through dialogue."⁶⁵⁰

CAMPAIGN TO RETAKE MOSUL

One of the greatest shocks of ISIS' rapid advance across Iraq in the spring of 2014 was the fall of Mosul, one of Iraq's largest and most oil rich cities in June of that year. As the militants stormed the city, they took control of the Turkish consulate and took hostage 49 employees and family member of employees.⁶⁵¹ The fall of the city and the deteriorating security situation in Mosul put the nail in the coffin of the Obama administration's hope to leave Iraq behind.⁶⁵²

In March of 2015, Turkey launched an operation in Bashiqa, Iraq to train Iraqi fighters preparing for the battle to retake Mosul from ISIS control. During a visit to Baghdad that month, Turkish Defense Minister Ismet Yilmaz announced that Ankara was "ready to help the Iraqi army and the Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga forces with equipment and training" and that Turkey would "stand with Iraq if there is any operation to retake Mosul."⁶⁵³ In December 2015, Turkey deployed several hundred troops to a base in Bashiqa to enhance its training operation, which had already succeeded in training over 2,000 fighters.⁶⁵⁴ According to Turkish sources, the plans for the deployment had been "discussed in detail" with Special Presidential Envoy for the counter-ISIL Coalition Brett McGurk during his visit to Ankara in November 2015.⁶⁵⁵ Two US officials confirmed that the Obama administration was aware of Turkey's deployment, but stressed that its decision to do so was taken outside of the anti-ISIL coalition.⁶⁵⁶

During a phone call on December 10, Prime Minister Davutoglu reportedly walked Vice President Biden through Ankara's reasoning for the deployment, emphasizing Turkey's commitment both to Iraq's territorial integrity and also its desire to see ISIS eradicated from the country.⁶⁵⁷ In the readout of a call between Vice President Biden and Iraq's Prime Minister Haider Al-Abadi just 6 days later, Vice President Biden, "noted the recent deploy-

ment of Turkish forces into northern Iraq had occurred without prior consent of the Iraqi government,” and called on Turkey to withdraw “any military forces from Iraqi territory that have not been authorized by the Iraqi government.”⁶⁵⁸ In response to Baghdad’s rebuke of the Turkish troop deployment and the Obama administration’s decision to call on Turkey to withdraw from Iraq, Ankara made the decision on December 14 to reduce the number of troops it had sent to Bashiqa. In a call with Prime Minister Davutoglu on that same day, Vice President Biden welcomed the move as “an important step to de-escalate recent tensions.”⁶⁵⁹

As the anti-ISIL coalition continued to strategize and prepare to retake the city, tensions crept in over which groups should participate in the offensive. With this in mind, Turkey vowed that it would maintain what forces remained at its position in Bashiqa until after the city was liberated. “We are determined to deflate the balloon of sectarian conflict aimed at drowning the region in blood and fire,” President Erdogan stated.⁶⁶⁰ Turkey openly lobbied for its inclusion in the operation to retake the city, prompted by its fears that Shi’ite militia groups would override the operation into a vehicle for stoking sectarian unrest. Iraqi Prime Minister al-Abadi, however, remained adamant that Turkey not play a role in the offensive.⁶⁶¹ Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter spent much of the year between the Turkish move into Iraq and the launch of the Mosul offensive trying to balance “our [US] respect for the sovereignty of Iraq” and “our respect also for Turkey’s historic role in the region.”⁶⁶² The final push to liberate Mosul was launched on October 16, 2016. In the end, Turkey did play a limited role in the offensive at the request of the Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga. “The Peshmerga have mobilized to cleanse the Bashiqa region from Daesh. They asked for help from our soldiers at the Bashiqa base. So we are helping the tanks with our artillery there,” Prime Minister Yildirim announced on October 24.⁶⁶³

In January 2017, an agreement was reached between Iraq and Turkey regarding the Turkish base in Bashiqa. “Turkish soldiers in the Bashiqa camps have been providing tremendous service in the fight against Daesh. More than 700 militants have already been killed and more than 6,000 local forces have been trained by our soldiers in Bashiqa,” Turkish Defense Minister Fikri Isik stated during remarks on January 11. “The Turkish and Iraqi sides will reassess the Bashiqa issue after that point,” he maintained. The agreement eased the Bashiqa related tensions in the Iraqi-Turkish relationship.⁶⁶⁴

THE COUP ATTEMPT (JULY 2016)

On the night of July 15, 2016 a faction of the Turkish military, acting under the leadership of personnel affiliated with the Gulen movement, attempted a coup against the democratically elected Turkish government. Soldiers and tanks took to the streets and a number of explosions rang out in Ankara and Istanbul. Turkish fighter jets under the control of the putschists dropped bombs on the parliament and presidency buildings. The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Hulusi Akar, was kidnapped by his own security detail. In response to a call from President Erdogan to take to the street and defend Turkey's democracy, thousands of unarmed ordinary citizens gathered in streets around the country to oppose the coup. These people resisted tank fire and air bombardments and defeated the coup attempt in a matter of hours with the help of loyalist soldiers and police forces.⁶⁶⁵ By the time the Turkish government regained full control of the country, at least 265 people had been killed, 161 of whom were civilians and police officers defending their country and 2,194 others were injured.⁶⁶⁶ In the aftermath of July 15, the response of the US and other major Turkish allies on the night of the coup became a source of tension in Turkey's foreign relations.



Turkey criticized the US for its slow and shallow response to the events that occurred on the night of the coup attempt. US officials have admitted that the American government's response was lacking, "The truth is I don't think that many of us fully understood — or maybe we didn't communicate that we understood — the depth of feeling and emotion in Turkey for the events of July," Deputy Secretary of State Antony Blinken admitted four months after the attempted coup.⁶⁶⁷ The first formal US statement on the violence unfolding in Turkey came from Secretary Kerry after the launch of the coup attempt. It called for "stability and peace and continuity within Turkey." The statement followed a phone call between the Secretary and his Turkish counterpart Foreign Minister Cavusoglu. It stated that Secretary Kerry, "emphasized The United States' absolute support for Turkey's democratically-elected, civilian government and democratic institutions."⁶⁶⁸ Later in the day, the White House stated that, during a meeting on the situation in Turkey, "the President and his team lamented the loss of life and registered the vital need for all parties in Turkey to act within the rule of law and to avoid actions that would lead to further violence or instability."⁶⁶⁹ These statements were perceived as not going far enough to condemn the coup attempt and as evidence that the US was withholding a stronger response in case the coup attempt had succeeded in Turkey. For once, the statements avoided using the word "coup" which was interpreted in Turkey as a part of the wait and see policy from the US side. Turkish ambassador to US criticized the US statements saying, "All parties? One of them is the Turkish state and Turkish people who tried to defend their democracy, and the other is a terrorist organization...How can you expect the Turkish public not to be disappointed with this?"⁶⁷⁰ Two days after the failed coup, Secretary Kerry warned the Turkish government not to overreach in its response against coup plotters, claiming that NATO "has a re-

quirement with respect to democracy” and that it would “measure very carefully what is happening.”⁶⁷¹ At the height of the trauma of Turkish people, such a warning was considered the lack of appreciation for the trauma and shock that Turkish people and the Turkish government were going through.

It wasn’t until four days after the coup attempt that President Obama spoke directly to President Erdogan. According to the White House’s readout of that call, the President at the time “strongly condemned” the coup attempt, and “lauded the Turkish people’s resolve against this violent intervention and their commitment to democracy.” However, the lack of an immediate and strong response by the US disappointed most of the Turkish officials and people. The US response was also judged as somewhat confused and not conscious enough of the seriousness of the failed coup.⁶⁷²

For some in Turkey, the slow US response was cause to consider that Washington may have had more sinister feelings and involvement in the coup attempt.⁶⁷³ Faced with persistent speculation, President Obama felt it necessary to formally deny the rumors, “Any reports that we had any previous knowledge of a coup attempt, that there was any U.S. involvement in it, that we were anything other than entirely supportive of Turkish democracy are completely false, unequivocally false.”⁶⁷⁴ When asked whether the US had foreseen or had prior knowledge about the coup attempt, CIA Director John Brennan stated, “The first thing you do when you have a situation like that is you try to ascertain the facts, and a lot of time...it’s very very difficult because a lot of information is coming in and it is hard to distinguish between rumors.” He continued, “We [the CIA] made sure that our policy makers were kept informed,” he said. “That’s where our intelligence assessments go.”⁶⁷⁵

While the US sought to qualify its slow response, the Turkish government was rapidly moving to corral the ongoing threat to its national security posed by the coup-plotters. According to

both the Turkish government and the Turkish people, the coup's mastermind was the US-based cleric Fethullah Gulen who has lived in self-imposed exile in the US since 1999. The Turkish government in the aftermath of the coup started to ask the U.S. to expedite the extradition of Gulen to Turkey to face trial. "I hereby call on US President Obama to extradite that person living on a 400-acre compound in Pennsylvania," President Erdogan stated on July 16.⁶⁷⁶ At the end of July, President Erdogan's statements grew harsher against US reaction towards the failed coup in Turkey. He said, "Instead of thanking this government for thwarting this coup attempt, and for [maintaining] democracy, you [the US] are standing by the [plotters]. The putschists [Fethullah Gulen] is already in your country, you are looking after him."⁶⁷⁷ The White House denied Erdogan's claim; Deputy Press Secretary Eric Schultz asserted that the US was one of the first countries to condemn the failed coup. He argued that a successful coup would have put American troops serving in Turkey at risk.⁶⁷⁸

Turkey's push for the extradition of Fethullah Gulen had been an ongoing issue since 2014, when Prime Minister Erdogan personally expressed his concerns to President Obama about the Gulenist organization's movements to undermine Turkish security.⁶⁷⁹ The Turkish government issued an arrest warrant for Fethullah Gulen in December of 2014 on charges of "infiltrating state institutions to gain control of state mechanisms, illegal wiretapping, forgery of official documents and spying."⁶⁸⁰ After the coup attempt that Turkey formally demanded Gulen's extradition. Statements from US officials, such as that of Secretary Kerry, responded to Turkey's quest for extradition by urging Turkey to present the US with evidence of Gulen's involvement in the coup attempt.⁶⁸¹ In order to assist Turkey in preparing an extradition case that was mindful of US laws and regulations, a delegation from the US Department of Justice was dispatched to Ankara. The group held

technical meetings with the Turkish Ministry of Justice and to clarify evidence Turkey planned to present in the case.⁶⁸²

By August 24, 2016 the US Department of State confirmed that it had received a formal extradition request.⁶⁸³ Justice Minister Bekir Bozdag and Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu both held meetings in Washington to discuss the issue, and the request of extradition was frequently brought up during these high-level sit downs between US and Turkish officials.⁶⁸⁴ In October 2016, Turkish Justice Minister Bekir Bozdag traveled to Washington for meetings with US Attorney General Lynch. Speaking to journalists at the Turkish Embassy in Washington, Justice Minister Bozdag stated,

Whatever Osama bin Laden means for the United States and for the American people, Fethullah Gulen means the same for Turkey and Turkish people...Just imagine that there was an assassination attempt on President Obama and his family, or the White House and civilians were bombed, tanks were marching in the streets, people were shot, and US civilians were killed and thousands were injured. And after all this, just imagine that the manager and the perpetrator of all these activities was residing in Turkey. What would the American people think about that?⁶⁸⁵

He also warned the US not to prolong the decision on extraditing Gulen back to Turkey, saying, “If the process is prolonged...it will be a huge blow to the relationship” between Turkey and the US.⁶⁸⁶ On the same day, Speaking at an event hosted by the SETA Foundation at Washington DC, he said that Turkey would continue to work on the process with the next US president regardless of who won the upcoming 2016 US presidential election.⁶⁸⁷ Justice Minister Bozdag also discussed that it is a requirement for the US to arrest Gulen under Article 9 of a 1979 extradition treaty between the U.S. and Turkey.⁶⁸⁸ While US officials reminded their Turkish counterparts that the judicial review takes time and must be carried out according to due process, Turkish public and officials expressed concern that the US has not sufficiently prioritized the case.⁶⁸⁹

BIDEN VISITS TURKEY (AUGUST 2016)

On August 24, 2016, Vice President Joe Biden visited Turkey in an effort to ease tensions between Washington and Ankara over the Obama administration's response to the July 15 coup attempt and Turkey's ongoing demands for the extradition of Fethullah Gulen.⁶⁹⁰ The visit was meant to underscore the US commitment to its partnership with Ankara. The day before Vice President's visit, a delegation of officials from the US Department of Justice arrived in the Turkish capital to assist with the technical aspects of constructing an extradition case against Gulen.⁶⁹¹ During his visit, Vice President Biden met with Ismail Kahraman, the Speaker of the Turkish Grand National Assembly, Prime Minister Yildirim, and President Erdogan. He visited the attacked areas of the Turkish Parliament during the July 15 coup attempt with Ismail Kahraman. After this visit, he expressed his regrets about the coup attempt and said, "I wish I would be here the next day of the coup attempt."⁶⁹²

During remarks with President Erdogan at the Presidential Palace in Ankara, Vice President Biden addressed the issue of Gulen's extradition,



Mr. President [Erdogan], this case, like all others, is going to have to be assessed by an independent federal court along with evidence backing it up. That's what we're working on together now. And it takes time to work an extradition request, but there should be no doubt that we'll continue to work closely with the Turkish government as this process unfolds.⁶⁹³

Meanwhile, President Erdogan continued to push not only for haste in the Gulen's extradition case, but also called on the US to detain him while Turkey continued to prepare the necessary documents,

And in light of [the US-Turkey] extradition treaty, those individuals should be taken into pretrial detention, they should be arrested, and throughout the trial they need to remain in custody. This person, however, is currently managing and directing the terrorist organization where he lives.⁶⁹⁴

Vice President Biden also sought to assure the Turkish people and government that the US did not play a role in the events of July 15, "We did not have prior knowledge, we did not support, we immediately condemned, and we continue as we did before the coup to stand shoulder to shoulder not only with the government of Turkey but with the people of Turkey. The people of Turkey have no greater friend ... than the United States of America."⁶⁹⁵

The extradition of Fethullah Gulen was not the only issue discussed by President Erdogan and Vice President Biden. During his visit, Biden announced the Obama administration's intention to cut support for the YPG should the Kurdish militia fail to move east of the Euphrates River, as demanded by Turkey.⁶⁹⁶ Prime Minister Yildirim also emphasized the importance of the US approach towards the PYD for Turkey,

We saw the US commitment to this issue, the PYD / YPG components will not be able to exist in the west of the Euphrates. We know that PYD is working with the PKK. Even if they seem like they are helping the fight with DAESH, if you fight against a terrorist organization with another terrorist organization, you will face a terrorist organization at the end of the day.⁶⁹⁷

Hours before the Vice President's arrival in Ankara, Turkish military forces launched a push into Syria to oust ISIS militants from the territory along its border. The operation, which was dubbed the Operation Euphrates Shield, underscored Turkey's security concerns in Syria stemmed from multiple sources - both the YPG/PYD and also from ISIS.⁶⁹⁸

DEVELOPMENTS IN SYRIA IN 2016

Tensions over the role of the YPG in the SDF and the US relationship with the organization continued to simmer into 2016. At the end of January 2016, US Presidential Special Envoy for the fight against ISIS Special Envoy Brett McGurk visited northern Syria, the first visit to the region by a serving Obama administration official in several years. During his visit, he toured Kobani and met with what a US official described as “a very diverse array of committed fighters in the anti-ISIL campaign.”⁶⁹⁹ The visit caused an uproar in Turkey. Speaking with reporters, President Erdogan described how the visit hindered US and Turkish efforts to coordinate and heightened mistrust between the two allies.⁷⁰⁰ The week after McGurk’s visit, when asked about the different policies between the US and Turkey vis-a-vis the PYD, State Department Spokesman John Kirby noted that while Turkey did consider the PYD to be a terror organization, “we [the US] we don’t, as you know, recognize the PYD as a terrorist organization.” In response, Turkey summoned John Bass, the US Ambassador, over these comments the next day.⁷⁰¹

In May 2016, the issue of US ties with the SDF and its YPG component came to a head after photos were published showing US special forces in Syria wearing YPG patches.⁷⁰² After the publication of the photos, US Colonel Steve Warren, the spokesman for the anti-ISIS coalition, told reporters that the patches were “unauthorized and inappropriate” and that the US had made it clear to Turkey that action had been taken to address the situation.⁷⁰³ The Turkish government criticized the images, calling them “unacceptable” and suggested that the US was “applying double standards” by denying that the YPG was a terrorist group despite its ties to the PKK.⁷⁰⁴ While the publication of the photos did not result in any changes in policy in Syria from either the US or Turkey, it was seen as a major disturbance at the time.

Several months after the publication of the photos, the SDF announced the beginning of operations to retake Manbij, a Syrian city west of the Euphrates River, from ISIS.⁷⁰⁵ The involvement of YPG forces in the SDF assault on Manbij raised some concerns, given Turkey's repeated warnings that the YPG forces not cross west of the Euphrates River. During the Nuclear Security Summit in Washington, DC on March 31 and April 1, President Erdogan and President Obama discussed possible Turkish support for the operation. Reportedly, President Erdogan pressed for the Syrian Arab forces participating in the operation to withdraw from the SDF and for the US to expand its air support for the Syrian groups supported by Turkey.⁷⁰⁶ However, the two countries were unable to reach an agreement to ensure Turkish support.⁷⁰⁷ As operations began on June 1, 2016, US officials maintained that the YPG fighters would withdraw from Manbij back across the Euphrates after combat ended, largely seen as a concession to Turkish concerns over the PYD.⁷⁰⁸ Reportedly, ahead of the operation, Turkish and SDF officials met in a series of gatherings brokered by the US in order to assuage Turkish concerns and win its support for the operation.⁷⁰⁹ Despite this effort, President Erdogan said that Turkey would be closely watching the operation, "monitoring what is being done in this process through our own intelligence network and command chain."⁷¹⁰

Following the capture of Manbij by the SDF in August, Turkey called on the YPG fighters to hold to their agreement with the US and withdraw east of the Euphrates.⁷¹¹ On August 22, Turkey began shelling SDF forces in Manbij and Jarablus, and on August 24 it announced, "Operation Euphrates Shield," an incursion into Syrian territory to capture the Syrian town of Jarablus from ISIS with Free Syrian Army (FSA) forces. President Erdogan asserted that the operation would target both ISIS and the Kurdish PYD forces it encountered.⁷¹² Shortly after Operation Euphrates Shield

began, Special Envoy McGurk visited Turkey as well as northern Syria yet again where he met with members of the SDF. According to State Department Spokesperson Mark Toner, Special Envoy McGurk “ensured ongoing U.S. support for the SDF in their fight against ISIL and he also emphasized the need for strict adherence to prior commitments made by the SDF,” during his meetings in the region.⁷¹³ Toner also reiterated that, in the opinion of the US, the Kurdish forces in the SDF had “moved back to the east of the Euphrates River” in accordance with their prior agreements.⁷¹⁴

The Operation Euphrates Shield began the same day that Vice President Joe Biden was on a visit to Turkey, the first visit by a high ranking US official since the July 15 coup attempt. Speaking in Ankara, Vice President Biden expressed US support for the operation and warned that Kurdish forces in Syria “cannot, will not, and under no circumstances will get American support if they do not keep” their promise to withdraw east of the Euphrates.⁷¹⁵ While the US initially offered strong support for the operation, officials quickly began to call for Turkey and the SDF to come to a resolution and to focus on ISIS, even as Turkish officials asserted that operations would continue. In Turkey, President Erdogan asserted that the operation would continue “until Daesh, PKK and its Syrian affiliate PYD are eliminated as threats against our citizens.”⁷¹⁶

From the US, however, Special Envoy McGurk, tweeted on August 29 that “we want to make it clear that we find these clashes -- in areas where #ISIL is not located -- unacceptable and a source of deep concern.”⁷¹⁷ In the White House daily briefing on the 29th, Deputy National Security Advisor Ben Rhodes stated that the US would “be actively working with our partners on in the coming days is, again, support for the objectives laid out by Turkey to secure and clear Jarablus of ISIL fighters, provide that space and security on its border, but at the same time to not have members of our coalition engage with one another.”⁷¹⁸

Towards the end of 2016, as part of the Operation Euphrates Shield, Turkish and FSA forces began to capture and clear areas in Syria opening a path towards the Syrian town of Al Bab. As the Euphrates Shield forces moved towards Al Bab, there were repeated clashes between them and forces aligned with SDF forces. After Turkish airstrikes against several groups in October, US Secretary of Defense Ash Carter maintained that the US-Turkey “partnership is very strong in the counter-ISIL campaign,” and that the US was “working with the Turks now very successfully to help them secure their border area.”⁷¹⁹ The US’ and Turkey’s differing views on the PYD and the YPG proved to be a continuing irritant in their relationship in Syria despite their shared aim of defeating ISIS. Despite US efforts to downplay and mitigate the tensions, repeated incidents such as Special Envoy McGurk’s visits and comments by US officials heightened Turkish concerns about Syrian developments.

2016 US PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS (NOVEMBER 2016)

The 2016 US Presidential elections pitted Democratic Party stalwart and former First Lady and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton against reality TV star and real estate mogul Donald Trump, who won the Republican Party nomination. The outcome of the election was seen as being important for Turkey, as the new US president would take over Washington's fledgling Syria policy.

Hillary Clinton, throughout the campaign, championed a continued policy of arming the Syrian Kurds, calling them "our best partners in Syria, as well as Iraq."⁷²⁰ This policy won her no favor with Turkey, who had long sought to limit the role of the PYD/YPG forces on northern Syria. Another issue where Turkey clashed with the possibility of a Clinton presidency came from campaign contributions made to the Clinton campaign by the Gulen movement. Persons and organizations linked to self-exiled cleric, and Turkish persona-non-grata, participated both on a pro-Clinton political action committee and also donated generously to the Clinton Foundation.⁷²¹

Donald Trump, who would go on to win the election in a surprise victory, seemed to take stances more favorable to the future of the US-Turkey partnerships. He was quick to laud President Erdogan for his handling of the July 15 coup attempt, "I give credit to Erdogan for turning it [the coup] around," before continuing, "You know, the first hour, it seemed like it was over. Then all of a sudden, and the amazing thing is the one that won that was the people."⁷²² He also seemed to look to Turkey as a partner and ally in the fight against ISIS in Iraq and Syria, "I think Turkey can do a lot against ISIS, and I would hope that if I'm dealing with them, they will do much more about ISIS." However, he also didn't rule out the possibility of continuing the US policy of working with the YPG while also having a strong relationship with Turkey, "But

I'm a big fan of the Kurdish forces. At the same time, I think we have a potentially — we could have a potentially very successful relationship with Turkey. And it would be really wonderful if we could put them somehow both together.”⁷²³



President Erdogan and Prime Minister Yildirim both congratulated President Trump the day after his electoral victory. “I wish a future full of success [to Trump],” President Erdogan said, “With this choice, a new era has begun in America. I hope this choice of the American public will contribute to beneficial steps toward basic rights and freedoms, democracy and developments in our region.”⁷²⁴

TRUMP ADMINISTRATION TRANSITION (JANUARY 2017)

January 1, 2017, ushered in the transition of the US presidency from the Obama administration to the Trump administration. The period was full of indications from both the Turkish and American sides about what the incoming Trump administration would mean for the US-Turkish relationship. The key issues in focus included whether or not President Trump would continue the Obama era policy of providing support for the PYD as part of the US anti-ISIS campaign and how the new administration would handle Turkey's request for the extradition of Fethullah Gulen. President Erdogan appeared hopeful that the Trump administration would bring a positive transition in Ankara's relationship with Washington. In a speech to a gathering of Turkish ambassadors on January 9, President Erdogan stated, "I believe we will reach a unity of understanding with Mr. Trump, particularly in regional issues, and make progress [in the relationship]."⁷²⁵

On the US side, expectations for the future of the relationship also seemed to be running high. During his confirmation hearing, Exxon-Mobil CEO and Secretary of State in waiting Rex Tillerson commented on the future of the relationship as well as the future of US support for the PYD. He advocated a policy of "re-engagement" with Turkey in Syria. However, he also described YPG members in Syria as "our greatest allies" and called on the US to "recommit to the Syrian Kurds that we intend to continue to support you with the capability to continue the advance on Raqqa and then build coalition forces that can contain ISIS if it attempts to move into other parts of the country."⁷²⁶

As a signal of the hopeful atmosphere surrounding the future of the Ankara-Washington partnership, Foreign Minister Cavusoglu traveled to Washington to attend president-elect Trump's inauguration. In the days prior to the event, he met with the des-

ignated successor to the post of National Security Advisor Mike Flynn as part of a larger group for a working breakfast; he was the only foreign official in attendance.⁷²⁷

In the days following the inauguration, President Erdogan again outlined his desire for renewed US-Turkey ties under President Trump,

As things stand, can our strategic relations be considered healthy? No. We need to address that. One other issue of importance is the Middle East. We need to rejuvenate our ties in the context of developments in the Middle East. We are two NATO member countries but it cannot be claimed that we are cooperating in the region as two allies.⁷²⁸

Eleven days later, on February 7, President Erdogan and President Trump held their first official phone call. The conversation lasted 45 minutes. According to the official White House readout of the call, President Trump “reiterated US support to Turkey as a strategic partner and a NATO ally, and welcomed Turkey’s contributions to the counter-ISIS campaign.”⁷²⁹ According to sources from the Turkish presidency, President Erdogan utilized the conversation to highlight Turkish concerns over US support for the PYD/YPG as well as to stress the importance of US assistance in the fight against the PKK. During the phone call, President Trump also highlighted the upcoming visit to Turkey of CIA Director Mike Pompeo to consult with Ankara on both the US support for the PYD and the Gulen extradition case.⁷³⁰

OPERATION EUPHRATES SHIELD (AUGUST 2017)

On February 17, 2017, the Turkish Armed Forces released a statement declaring that they, in cooperation with FSA forces, had successfully taken the Syrian town of Al Bab from ISIS.⁷³¹ Turkish and FSA operations to retake the city as part of Operation Euphrates Shield had been ongoing since late 2016. At the beginning of the operation in November 2016, US Colonel John Dorrian, spokesman for the anti-ISIS coalition told reporters that the operation would not be supported by coalition airstrikes and that the US had withdrawn some special forces soldiers who had been deployed with Turkey to support Operation Euphrates Shield as a result. Col. Dorrian also reiterated the US' continued concern about possibility of conflicts between Turkey and other US partners in the fight against ISIS, "What we would like to do is to continue to work with them [Turkey] to develop a plan where everyone remains focused."⁷³²

The lack of coalition support for Turkey's operation in Al Bab became an issue as the operation progressed. On December 26, Turkish Presidency Spokesman Ibrahim Kalin told reporters, "the international coalition must carry out its duties regarding aerial support to the battle we are fighting in al-Bab. Not giving the necessary support is unacceptable."⁷³³ On December 27, President Erdogan similarly criticized the US and the coalition, "the U.S.-led coalition has failed to keep its promises [pledging air support] in our operation to liberate al-Bab."⁷³⁴

On January 3, US Department of Defense spokesman Peter Cook told reporters, "there were flights conducted by the coalition" in support of Turkish forces around Al Bab the week prior as "a visible show of force." He also said that the US and Turkey were maintaining high levels of coordination over their efforts in Syria.⁷³⁵ The coalition began conducting airstrikes in support of the operation in January 2017, striking ISIS forces around the town,

after beginning reconnaissance and intelligence flights in support of the operation in December, according to Col. Dorrian.⁷³⁶ An unnamed Turkish official, speaking on January 13, suggested that the two countries had worked out most of their disagreements over the operation, “Over the last couple of days, there have been contacts at various military levels and I believe they cleared up most of the procedural and trust issues.”⁷³⁷

After another month of intense fighting, and nearly a month after the inauguration of President Donald Trump in the US, Turkish and FSA forces declared victory over ISIS in Al Bab. The capture of Al Bab came as the new Trump administration was evaluating the Syria policy it had inherited from its predecessor and determining if it would change tack. Following the capture of Al Bab, Turkey began to signal that it would continue Operation Euphrates Shield further into Syria. In an interview with *Al Arabiya*, Turkish President Erdogan stated that, after having captured Al Bab, Turkey and its FSA partners would target Manbij, in order to remove the PYD forces that Turkey maintained were still in the area.⁷³⁸ Since 2016, the US had maintained that, while the SDF controlled Manbij, all PYD components of that force had left the area. While Turkey and the US had resolved their dispute over coalition support for Turkey’s operations in Al Bab, it was clear that the two countries had remaining disagreements over Syria, particularly over the role of the PYD.

On March 1, after repeated clashes between SDF forces and Turkish-backed Free Syrian Army forces, the Manbij Military Council announced that it had come to an agreement with Russia to hand over villages held by the SDF west of Manbij to the Assad regime. The deal would create a regime-held zone between SDF and FSA forces to the west.⁷³⁹

Only days after these reports, the US deployed forces west of Manbij. On March 4, the spokesman for Operation Inher-

ent Resolve, the US-led anti-ISIS coalition, tweeted out that the move was a “deliberate action to reassure Coalition mbrs [Coalition members] & partner forces, deter aggression and keep focus on defeating ISIS”*[sic]*.⁷⁴⁰ On March 6, 2017, the Department of Defense spokesman said that a small number of US forces had been deployed west of the city as a “visible sign of deterrence and reassurance.”⁷⁴¹ On March 7, US Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Joseph Dunford held meetings with his Turkish and Russian counterparts to address the clashes and work to deconflict the area around Manbij.⁷⁴² Following the deployment of US forces and the deal between the SDF and Russia, there were fewer reports of clashes between the FSA and SDF.

On March 29, Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim announced that Operation Euphrates Shield would come to an end, having achieved its goals.⁷⁴³ Turkish troops remained deployed in Syria, but the PM suggested that any future actions would be under a new operation. Turkey and its FSA partners had successfully captured Jarablus, Al Bab, and Dabiq during the operation from ISIS and managed to place a wedge between the Kurdish-controlled territories in northeastern and northwestern Syria.⁷⁴⁴ There were questions, however, about the decision to end the operation, as Turkish officials had previously contended that it would continue until it captured Manbij as well.⁷⁴⁵ While the operation had achieved some Turkish aims, it also highlighted continued tensions between the US and Turkey over the conflict in Syria, despite their shared aim of defeating ISIS.

TURKEY STRIKES SINJAR AND NORTHERN SYRIA (APRIL 2017)

On April 24, 2017 Turkish warplanes conducted raids targeting PKK positions in Iraq's Sinjar region along the Turkish-Iraqi border and in northern Syria. Since the breakdown of a peace process between the Turkish government and the PKK in July of 2015, it had become routine practice for the Turkish air force to target PKK outposts in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. What distinguished this attack, however, was that the airstrikes indirectly killed 5 Iraqi Kurdistan Peshmerga soldiers who were stationed at a nearby base. The US also claimed that the strikes endangered US military personnel operating in the region, and offered a strong rebuke of the Turkish strikes.⁷⁴⁶ US State Department spokesman Mark Toner stated, "We are very concerned, deeply concerned that Turkey conducted air strikes earlier today in northern Syria as well as northern Iraq without proper co-ordination either with the United States or the broader global coalition to defeat IS."⁷⁴⁷ Pentagon spokesman Major Adrian Rankine-Galloway said, "We [the US] recognize the threat the PKK poses to Turkey, but Turkey cannot pursue that fight at the expense of our common fight against terrorists that threaten us all."⁷⁴⁸

The Turkish General Staff issued a statement following the strikes arguing that the strikes were conducted "within the scope of international law," and "with the aim of destroying the hotbeds of terrorism which target the unity, integrity, and safety of our country and nation."⁷⁴⁹ Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan similarly defended the strikes, "We are obliged to take measures. We must take steps."⁷⁵⁰ However, the US criticized Turkey for failing to give adequate notice before the strikes, claiming that they received the information only one hour before the strikes. "That's not enough time. And this was notification, certainly not coordination as you would expect from a partner and an ally in the fight

against ISIS,” Col. John Dorrian, the U.S. military spokesperson said, “We didn’t have exact fidelity on where the strikes would occur and not an enormous amount of time to have our forces react,” adding that the U.S. forces in Syria were less than 10 kilometers (six miles) from the target zone.”⁷⁵¹

Following the strikes, US forces in Syria visited the area where the Turkish strikes had occurred and a US officer was photographed with an alleged PKK commander, causing yet more consternation in Turkey.⁷⁵² The US maintained that they were merely there to “check on the partner forces who were harmed by the strikes.”⁷⁵³ Following the strikes, US forces in armored vehicles adorned with US flags began patrolling the Turkey-Syria border. While the deployment of those troops was widely seen as a deterrent against further attacks, US officials initially would not confirm the exact role of the forces on the border.⁷⁵⁴ The coalition later said, “The patrols’ purpose is to discourage escalation and violence between two of our most trusted partners in the fight to defeat [Daesh] and reinforce the Coalition’s commitment to both Turkey and the SDF.”⁷⁵⁵

President Erdogan expressed disappointment over the reports and images of US vehicles operating along the border, “the presence of an American flag along with the [insignia] of a terror organization called YPG in a convoy has seriously saddened us.”⁷⁵⁶ The continued US support for the SDF and Turkey’s continued concerns over its ties to the YPG, and therefore, the PKK, remained a serious obstacle to US-Turkish coordination in Syria.

FIRST WHITE HOUSE MEETING BETWEEN PRESIDENT TRUMP AND PRESIDENT ERDOGAN (MAY 2017)

In May 2017, President Erdogan traveled to Washington for his first official meeting with President Trump. In a speech before leaving Turkey for a multi-country tour including his upcoming US visit, President Erdogan remarked, “America is going through a transitional period currently. Due to this transitional period, we [Turkey] must be more careful and sensitive here at home.” He also outlined his agenda for the meeting,

Our expectations from the U.S. include previous unresolved matters, including the armed supported given to the YPG. This heavy weaponry is not ordinary weaponry ... This is obviously a matter that is against the strategic cooperation we have with the U.S., and the developments are against our strategic agreements. We obviously do not want them to happen, thus we will address and discuss these issues.⁷⁵⁷

Prior to President Erdogan’s arrival in Washington, he dispatched a delegation of high level officials, including Chief of General Staff Hulusi Akar, MIT Chief Hakan Fidan, and Presidential Spokesman Ibrahim Kalin to the US for meetings with US officials. Most important of these meetings was a May 9 meeting between the delegation National Security Advisor H.R.



McMaster at the White House. This meeting was followed by a quick greeting and exchanging of pleasantries between the delegation and President Trump.⁷⁵⁸

During President Trump's meeting with President Erdogan on May 16, the pair of leaders focused on the fight against terrorism, trade and commercial ties, as well as broader security in the Middle East. During joint remarks after the meeting, President Trump stated,

I look forward to working together with President Erdogan on achieving peace and security in the Middle East, on confronting the shared threats, and on working toward a future of dignity and safety for all of our people.⁷⁵⁹

President Trump added,

We are determined to expand our relations, and I believe my current official visit to the United States will mark a historical turn of tide. Whether it be throughout our bilateral discussions, whether it be the discussions that we shall have between the delegations, I think we are going to enjoy some further gains in terms of the future of our relations. We seem to agree on expanding our relations in the field of economy, trade, reciprocal investments, energy, and defense industry.⁷⁶⁰

Despite the positive tone of the meeting between President Erdogan and President Trump, the discussions were largely overshadowed by other events of the day. The Trump administration, during the days of President Erdogan's visit, was in the throes of a domestic controversy over the new President's firing of FBI Director James Comey over his handling of an investigation into former White House National Security Advisor Mike Flynn.⁷⁶¹

IRAN SANCTIONS EVASION CASE

On March 28, 2017, Mehmet Hakan Atilla, a deputy chief executive officer at *Türkiye Halk Bankası AS*, a Turkish state bank, was arrested at JFK international airport in New York City on charges of conspiring to evade trade sanctions imposed by the US on Iran. His arrest was the second such arrest made in the case, with Turkish-Iranian national Reza Zarrab having been arrested on similar charges in March 2016.⁷⁶² In an official release by the United States Department of Justice, Acting US Attorney Joon H. Kim outlined,

As alleged, Mehmet Hakan Atilla, a Turkish banker, participated in a years-long scheme to violate American sanctions laws by helping Reza Zarrab, a major gold trader, use U.S. financial institutions to engage in prohibited financial transactions that illegally funneled millions of dollars to Iran.⁷⁶³

Turkey was swift to respond to the arrest of Mr. Atilla. Justice Minister Bekir Bozdag criticized the detention, “There is nothing legally sound there and Turkey is facing a completely political plot.”⁷⁶⁴ Deputy Prime Minister Mehmet Simsek defended the Halkbank transactions in question,

This is an effort to expand a case left over from a previous term. When we discussed those issues with Halkbank thoroughly long time ago, we saw it was very clear that the bank had conducted brokerage with a neighboring country in a scope allowed by the UN Security Council.⁷⁶⁵

On April 13, Mr. Atilla entered a plea of not guilty in response to the charges.⁷⁶⁶ The Turkish government, through DPM Simsek, made it clear that it would stand behind Mr. Atilla’s innocence in the case, “Halkbank is a state-run bank and as the Turkish state, we back our lender. We will do whatever is necessary to maintain the lender’s capabilities to support the real sector and tradespeople.”⁷⁶⁷

The US implication of Halkbank in Iran sanctions case was broadened in September 2017 when US prosecutors charged Zafer

Caglayan, a former Turkish Minister of Economy under the AK Party and an ex-head of Halkbank of engaging in the same conspiracy to violate Iran sanctions. The allegations stated that Mr. Caglayan was involved in conspiring to illegally move hundreds of millions of dollars through the US financial system and into Tehran's hands.⁷⁶⁸ The statement on his arrest echoed that made by the Department of Justice following the arrest of Mr. Atilla.

Turkey was quick to criticize the arrest warrant. President Erdogan himself personally urged the US to review the charges, pointing out that Ankara had never agreed to comply with the US sanctions against Iran and that the prosecution was politically motivated. "There are very peculiar smells coming from this issue," he stated, "The United States needs to revise this decision."⁷⁶⁹ Justice Minister Bozdag also stated, "If you ask what is trying to be done in the US regarding Reza Zarrab and now the issue that our honorable minister's name is involved, the essence of the matter is this: The American judicial system is being used to repeat what the Fethullahist Terrorist Organization tried to do during the coup attempt of Dec. 17-25 [2013] and failed."⁷⁷⁰

Amid continued tension over the arrests, President Erdogan and President Trump held a phone call on September 9. Following the call, President Erdogan remarked, "For the moment, it is impossible to evaluate this within legal logic. I see this step against our former economy minister as a step against the Turkish Republic." The two leaders were due to meet just days later in New York for the United Nations General Assembly, proving another possibility for the Turkish government to press for the release of its citizens.

TRUMP ADMINISTRATION'S SYRIA STRATEGY REVIEW

On January 28, 2017, newly-elected President Donald Trump issued an executive order calling for the US government to review its strategy to defeat ISIS in Iraq and Syria.⁷⁷¹ For Turkey, the new administration's decision to review US strategy in Syria was an opportunity to convince the US to move away from its partnership with the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which Turkey sees as a front for the YPG, and therefore the PKK.

Turkish officials expressed hopes that the US under President Trump would adopt a strategy to retake Raqqa that addressed Turkish concerns. After a phone call between President Trump and President Erdogan, sources from the Turkish presidency told reporters that the two leaders had discussed and agreed on joint action against ISIS in Raqqa.⁷⁷² The US did not give similar details, saying only in a readout of the call that President Trump had "reiterated U.S. support to Turkey as a strategic partner and NATO ally, and welcomed Turkey's contributions to the counter-ISIS campaign."⁷⁷³ Turkey had long pushed for the US to move away from its partnership with the YPG-heavy SDF and instead to work with Turkish and Turkish-backed Free Syrian Army Arab forces to retake Raqqa.

Later in February, at the NATO Summit in Brussels, US Secretary of Defense James Mattis and Turkish Defense Minister Fikri Isik held a bilateral meeting on the sidelines of the summit. Secretary Mattis' Spokesperson, Commander Sarah Higgins, said that the US Secretary "assured Minister Isik of the support of the United States as a strategic partner in the counter-ISIS campaign," but did not provide further details.⁷⁷⁴ Speaking with reporters, Defense Minister Isik said that the new U.S. administration has a different approach to the issue. They are not insisting anymore that the operation should definitely be carried out with the YPG.⁷⁷⁵

Turkish sources also reported that Secretary Mattis promised his counterpart that the US would provide more support for the Operation Euphrates Shield.⁷⁷⁶

In spite of Turkish optimism, there were signs that, while the Trump administration was willing to discuss Turkish concerns, it was still planning to continue working with the SDF. On January 31, vehicles and weapons had been delivered to SDF in Syria, and in February, officials in Washington were reportedly uninterested in Turkish proposals to replace the SDF in any assault on Raqqa. An anonymous US official was quoted as claiming, “The Turks had no clear battle plan to offer and we are under pressure from the White House to come up with a plan to take Raqqa quickly.”⁷⁷⁷

In early March, after trilateral meetings between top military officials from the US, Russia, and Turkey, Prime Minister Binali Yildirim suggested that the operation for Raqqa “should be carried out jointly by the United States and Turkey,” and warned that if the US insisted on using the SDF, “the friendship between the United States and Turkey will be significantly damaged and undermined.”⁷⁷⁸ However, Prime Minister Yildirim also acknowledged, “It appears that the U.S. may carry out this operation with the YPG, not with Turkey.”⁷⁷⁹ US Lieutenant General Stephen Townsend, commander of Operation Inherent Resolve, said on March 1 that while the US was “engaged in discussions with the Turks on how they might participate in the liberation of Raqqa, there are going to be Kurds assaulting Raqqa for sure.”⁷⁸⁰ In those same remarks, Lt. General Townsend asserted that the Syrian Kurds the US was partnered with did not pose a threat to Turkey.⁷⁸¹

Despite early Turkish hopes, in the first week of May, President Trump approved a plan to retake Raqqa in partnership with the SDF. Going even farther than the Obama administration,

President Trump's plan included provisions to begin directly arming the YPG forces. Pentagon spokesperson Dana White stressed that while the US was "keenly aware of the security concerns of our coalition partner Turkey," it viewed arming the YPG "as necessary to ensure a clear victory" over ISIS in Raqqa.⁷⁸²

The decision by the Trump administration came shortly before a visit by President Erdogan to Washington, and was highly unpopular in Turkey. Speaking at a news conference the week before his visit, President Erdogan said that he would convey Turkey's concerns to Trump at the meeting and that "We [Turkey] want to believe that our allies will prefer to side with us, not with a terrorist organization."⁷⁸³ Prime Minister Yildirim warned that the decision "will surely have consequences and will yield a negative result for the U.S. as well."⁷⁸⁴ Despite the negative Turkish reactions, the US maintained a positive stance on relations. Secretary Mattis maintained, "We [the US and Turkey] will work out any of the concerns. We will work very closely with Turkey in support of their security on their southern border."⁷⁸⁵

Ahead of President Erdogan's visit, a Turkish delegation including the Commander of Turkish Armed Forces Gen. Hulusi Akar, Turkey's National Intelligence Agency (MIT) chief Hakan Fidan, and Presidential spokesman Ibrahim Kalin visited Washington. Among other meetings, the delegation met with US Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman General Joseph Dunford where they "discussed issues of mutual concern as well as the current security situation in the Middle East," including the fight against ISIS, according to General Dunford's spokesman.⁷⁸⁶

The week of President Erdogan's visit to Washington, a Turkish official was quoted by *Reuters* as calling the decision "tantamount to placing dynamite under Turkey-USA relations," while President Erdogan told reporters, "If the alliance is to be overshadowed we'll have to sort things out for ourselves."⁷⁸⁷ President Er-

dogan went into the meeting hoping to convince President Trump to change his mind and to not move forward with the plan to use the SDF to retake Raqqa.⁷⁸⁸ However, the US did not announce a change to its policy following the visit.

Around the same time that President Erdogan met with President Trump in Washington, Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter the Islamic State (ISIS) Brett McGurk and other State Department officials reportedly visited northern Syria on May 17. Following his visit, Turkey called for McGurk to be replaced. Foreign Minister Cavusoglu criticized him, “Brett McGurk is definitely giving clear support to the PKK and YPG.”⁷⁸⁹

In June, Turkish sources said that the US had promised to reclaim any weapons it provided to the YPG after the defeat of ISIS and to also provide a monthly inventory of all weapons provided to the group.⁷⁹⁰ Despite the US promises, widely seen as an effort to reassure its ally, President Erdogan declared, “The ones who think they are tricking Turkey by saying they are going to get back the weapons that are being given to this terrorist organization will realize that they are making a mistake eventually.”⁷⁹¹

On August 18, the US Department of Defense announced that Secretary Mattis would travel to Turkey as part of a trip where he would also visit Ukraine and Jordan.⁷⁹² The statement suggested that Turkey’s concerns about the PKK would play a prominent role in the meeting, noting that Secretary Mattis “will emphasize the steadfast commitment of the United States to Turkey as a NATO ally and strategic partner, seek to collaborate on efforts to advance regional stability, and look for ways to help Turkey address its legitimate security concerns - including the fight against the PKK.”⁷⁹³ Secretary Mattis reportedly met with his counterpart, Defense Minister Nurettin Canikli, and then with President Erdogan and the Turkish intelligence chief Hakan Fidan.⁷⁹⁴

While the visit was seen as an effort to again reassure Turkey of US support for its concerns, there was no joint statement or press conference held by Secretary Mattis and Turkish officials.

Despite Turkish hopes for better coordination with the US in Syria under the Trump administration, the new administration's focus on ISIS seemed to guide the decision to continue working with the SDF and the YPG. The US has since taken efforts to reassure Turkey, but it is unclear how it will affect possible future coordination in Syria and the broader fight against ISIS.

VISA CRISIS (OCTOBER 2017)

On October 8, 2017 the US announced that it was suspending non-immigrant visa services at its diplomatic facilities in Turkey. The move followed the arrest of Metin Topuz, a Turkish individual employed by the US Consulate in Istanbul. Topuz was detained on charges of espionage and of being a member of the outlawed FETO organization, which is accused of conducting the July 15, 2016 coup attempt. In response to the arrest, the US issued a statement saying that it was “deeply disturbed by the arrest” and that it believed the charges against Topuz to be “wholly without merit.”⁷⁹⁵ The outgoing US Ambassador to Ankara, John Bass, weighed in on the controversy, saying that Mr. Topuz’s arrest was motivated by “vengeance rather than justice,” and criticizing Turkish media outlets’ coverage of the arrest.⁷⁹⁶ According to the indictment that Turkish media outlets also revealed, Metin Topuz was in contact with a number of FETÖ suspects including police commissioners and some other coup plotters such as Oktay Akkaya, a former lieutenant colonel who was among the main actors in the 2016 coup attempt, and Zekeriya Öz, a fugitive accused of attempting to overthrow the government through the use of force.^{797, 798}

Washington’s decision to suspend visas for Turkish nationals was couched as an effort to “reassess the commitment of the government of Turkey to the security of U.S. Mission facilities and personnel.”⁷⁹⁹ Hours later, the Turkish Embassy in Washington issued a near verbatim statement, saying it would suspend visa services at its US missions and electronic visas and visas at the Turkish borders and “reassess the commitment of the Government of the United States to the security of Turkish mission facilities and personnel.”⁸⁰⁰ Meanwhile, the Turkish Foreign Ministry summoned the US Embassy’s Under Secretary, Philip Kosnett, to express their displeasure at the US’ decision.⁸⁰¹ Their decision to bypass Ambassador Bass was a direct result of his previously harsh comments on

the arrest of Mr. Topuz. Foreign Minister Cavusoglu stated that the visa crisis is unnecessary, the U.S.'s attitude over the course of the issue is "immature" and Turkey would not capitulate to "impositions" demanded by the US in order to resolve the feud if US's demands do not comply with Turkish Constitution. He asserted that "We (Turkey) will cooperate if their (US) demands comply with our (Turkish) Constitution, the rule of law, and sovereignty" and he added that Turkey and the US "can sort out these issues through bilateral understanding."⁸⁰² Presidential Spokesperson Ibrahim Kalin also indicated his belief that the crisis would soon be overcome as a result of ongoing talks between the US delegation in Turkey and the government.⁸⁰³ President Erdogan asserted that Ambassador Bass had "gone rogue" in announcing that the US would suspend visa services. He also said that Turkish officials, including ministers, have not accepted farewell visits from Ambassador Bass who is leaving Turkey for his new position, and added that "Bass is not considered the representative of the U.S. anymore."⁸⁰⁴ However, the State Department stood behind Ambassador Bass.⁸⁰⁵

In the days that followed, both the US and Turkey signaled that they were open to finding a solution to the crisis, however the visa suspensions remained in place. On October 11, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson spoke with Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu about the issue. According to the State Department readout of the meeting, Tillerson conveyed the administration's "profound concern" over Topuz's arrest, but also agreed to remain in "close contact" with his Turkish counterpart.⁸⁰⁶ According to Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Bozdag, talks between the US and Turkey on resolving the crisis were making progress. He framed the conversation between Tillerson and Cavusoglu as "very productive" and announced that "representatives from both sides decided to meet and work together."⁸⁰⁷ On October 16, a delegation of diplomats from the US, led by US Deputy Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs Jona-

than Cohen, traveled to Turkey for discussions on ways to resolve the dispute. The Turkish delegation was headed by the Foreign Ministry's Under Secretary, Ahmet Muhtar Gün who was accompanied by the Deputy Undersecretaries of the Foreign, Interior, and Justice ministries.⁸⁰⁸⁸⁰⁹ According to Turkish media reports, the US delegation came to Turkey with four conditions under which visa services could be reinstated. Chief among these was providing evidence to back up the detention of Mr. Topuz.⁸¹⁰

The crisis did not affect the military relations between two countries. On October 11, US Defense Secretary Jim Mattis asserted that U.S. and Turkish military forces continued to cooperate well together despite the ongoing diplomatic spat. He said, "We maintain a very close collaboration, very close communication. Military-to-military interaction and integration has not been affected by this."⁸¹¹ The Pentagon also released a statement saying that "developments have not impacted operational or personnel," at Turkish bases.⁸¹²

As the visa crisis unfolded, it had some impact on the Turkish markets. The Turkish lira declined dramatically following the visa suspension. However that process did not continue for long. This crisis also had a negative effect on the perception of the US in Turkey which had already deteriorated critically after the July 15, 2016 coup attempt. The arrest of Metin Topuz and the US response strengthened Turkish public belief that some US figures were involved in the July 15 attempted coup.⁸¹³ Both the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) and the opposition MHP and CHP parties have criticized the US response to the events. Chairman of the opposition Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), Devlet Bahçeli stated that the U.S. is causing a virtual crisis with the visa decision. Republican People's Party (CHP) Chairman Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu made a similar comment and said that what the U.S. did was wrong and that he does not support it.⁸¹⁴

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This almanac provides the synopsis of bilateral relations between the US and Turkey during the past fifteen years of AK Party rule in Turkey, starting with the March 1st crisis. During this period, AK Party governments have engaged with different US administrations headed by the presidents from different political parties (Bush, Obama and Trump) and different party majorities in the US Congress. The relationship has both undergone very serious crises and witnessed significant level of cooperation.

In this almanac, the major summits and main crises that impacted the relations between the two nations are covered. It is of course impossible to cover all of the events and developments in bilateral relations, thus we aimed to be selective while still including the most important moments of the relationship in our coverage in the limited space that we have. We hope this volume can help observers and scholars in the field of US-Turkey relations and contribute to their research.

