Middle East Policy, Vol. XXII, No. 4, Winter 2015

Business as Usual: The U.S.-Turkey Security Partnership

Mustafa Kibaroglu and Selim C. Sazak

Dr. Kibaroglu is the chair of the Department of Political Science and International Relations and director of the Center for International Security Studies and Strategic Research at MEF University in Istanbul. He has held positions at Harvard's Belfer Center and the Monterey Institute of International Studies. Mr. Sazak is a researcher in the Century Foundation's foreign-policy program and a non-resident affiliate of the Center for International Security Studies and Strategic Research at MEF University in Istanbul.

Philip Robins's famous question, "What on earth is happening in Turkey?" has been echoing around the capitals of the Atlantic community, uttered variously in exasperation, in admiration and in wonder.[1] The same refrain recently has been repeatedly raised around Turkey's careening towards an activist foreign policy in the Middle East, its increased willingness to break with its trans-atlantic allies on critical decisions and over its policies in Syria. A closer look at the structural dynamics of the U.S.-Turkey security partnership, however, reflects that the systemic factors underpinning the alliance are alive and well. The alarmist discourse is giving primacy to agency over structure and is hampered by "presentist" conceptions, leading to a distorted understanding of the half-century partnership between the United States and Turkey.

It is true that the U.S.-Turkey security partnership is going through a rough patch. The direction Turkey's domestic politics has taken in recent years, Turkey's aspirations for greater latitude in shaping regional politics, and the incongruity of Turkey's security interests with the policy objectives of its Western allies have all contributed to these troubles. Yet, the alarmists accusing Turkey of abandoning the West are embracing a one-sided and distorted narrative that further antagonizes Ankara and deepens the rift with its Western allies.

The path to a robust alliance that can address the myriad challenges in the Middle East and beyond is a constructive dialogue between Turkey and its allies aimed at identifying the fulcrum that balances Turkey's legitimate security interests with the broader objectives of its allies.

LOSING — AND REDISCOVERING — TURKEY

Turkey's opening of the Incirlik Air Base to coalition forces fighting Islamic

State (IS) militants was widely welcomed, reflecting worries about the allegedly moribund state of the U.S.-Turkey alliance. "The [Incirlik] agreement seems a watershed moment,"[2] the Washington Institute for Near East Policy's Andrew J. Tabler told *The New York Times*. Tweeting on the news, "Incirlik, at last!"[3] exclaimed Ambassador Martin Indyk, former U.S. peace mediator. James Stavridis praised the deal as a triumph for NATO: "[Its Syrian] border is not Turkey's alone: It is NATO's border as well."[4] The sentiment was similar on the Turkish side. TRT World, the English-language service of Turkey's state broadcaster, ran the news with the title "Turkey-U.S. realignment reaches top point."[5]

The jubilation was not untimely. Over the last years, the U.S. foreign-policy establishment had grown increasingly disillusioned with its allies in the Middle East over their inaction against (and alleged complicity in) the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS). A slew of establishment figures from Richard Haass[6] to Leslie Gelb[7] to Ryan Crocker[8] had publicly questioned why America should remain committed to allies that haven't been doing it much good against ISIS, whereas Assad is fighting the good fight, and Iran seems much nicer than it was.

These criticisms were explicitly aimed at Arabian Gulf monarchies like Saudi Arabia and Qatar, but they were also implicitly addressed to Turkey, NATO's only Muslim-majority member and an unruly partner that increasingly frustrated its trans-atlantic allies. These latent tensions in the U.S.-Turkey security partnership, which were by no means new, as discussed below, culminated over Syria. Turkey's continued support for opposition groups, and its intransigence on a solution that both ousted Assad and denied the Kurds an independent enclave in the north, proved a challenge to NATO's broader policy objectives.

In more sensationalistic accounts, Turkey's divergent interests were extrapolated into an alleged complicity with ISIS. According to this narrative, Turkey's frustration with U.S. hesitancy to push for Assad's ouster in full force had led it to secretly support ISIS and other Islamist groups as a means of containing the Kurds while further weakening the Assad regime. These were allegations of doubtful veracity. A study by the Carter Center had actually found that the Assad regime spared ISIS in 90 percent of its attacks,[9] and a separate study by the IHS Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Center (JTIC) found that the regime targeted ISIS in only 6 percent of its attacks.[10]

Yet, Turkey's alleged support for ISIS remained a persistent theme in the public discourse. A July 2014 report in *Newsweek* quoted a former ISIS member that "ISIS saw the Turkish army as its ally, especially when it came to fighting the Kurds."[11] There were also wilder allegations varying from weapons smuggling[12] to illicit oil trade[13] to turning a blind eye to Islamist recruitment in suburban neighborhoods.[14]

The watershed moment in U.S.-Turkey relations came with the siege of Kobani in October 2014. Despite Turkey's well-known concerns about the objectives and character of the Kurdish Democratic Party (PYD) and its embedded militia, the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) — a fighting force with ties to the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) that has been designated a "foreign terrorist organization" by the U.S. Department of State — the United States decided to provide military and humanitarian aid into Kobani to help

the Kurds push the ISIS offensive back.[15] A second concern was the accusation that the Kurds were conducting ethnic cleansing against Sunni Arabs and Turkmens with the intention of creating a de facto Kurdish enclave in northern Syria.[16] Although PYD has been adamantly denying these accusations, a recent report by Amnesty International alleged that the "Kurdish forces have carried out a wave of forced displacement and mass house demolitions, amounting to war crimes."[17]

At the time, Turkey's policies on Kobani were largely portrayed as refusing to help the besieged Kurds, a narrative that dovetailed with allegations of Turkish support for Islamist groups in Syria. This, however, was a factually erroneous characterization. More than 130,000 Kurds were allowed to cross into Turkey in the first days of the ISIS offensive,[18] and eventually the number exceeded 400,000.[19]

Nonetheless, Kobani emerged as a foil for those questioning whether Turkey really deserves to belong in NATO. On October 9, Jonathan Schanzer of the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies wrote for *Politico* a sharply worded criticism arguing, "Turkey under the AKP is a lost cause" and asking whether it was "time to kick Turkey out of NATO."[20] A few days later, the influential French intellectual Bernard Henri-Levy echoed the same sentiment in *The New Republic*: "If Kobane [sic] becomes the name of yet another Turkish default [on its NATO allies], this one inexcusable — its future in NATO is in doubt."[21] Historian Conrad Black wrote in even less uncertain terms: "Tell the Turks to stop supporting terrorism — or get out of NATO."[22]

The troubles over Kobani were also partly anchored in Washington's simmering concerns about the Erdoğan administration. As Simon Tisdall astutely observed in his commentary on the Incirlik deal, "demands for Turkey's assistance [in Syria] were doubly unwelcome given Washington's criticism of Erdoğan's authoritarian, neo-Islamist leadership style, his attacks on human rights and press freedom, and his open hostility to a key U.S. ally, Israel."[23] "[NATO] is a coalition of countries with shared values," wrote Columbia University's David L. Philips; "If NATO were being established today, Turkey would not qualify as a member."[24] As Michael Werz and Max Hoffman observed, "The White House's frustration about Turkey's approach and President Erdoğan's constant public sniping and populist demagoguery provided some context for the military and strategic decision to save Kobani."[25]

While Syria was an important aspect of the mutual frustration between Turkey and the United States, it was by no means the only one. Another point of contention was Turkey's long-range missile-defense tender after Ankara rejected bids by its NATO allies in favor of a Chinese-built one.[26] "Turkey is recasting itself as a nonaligned country in its rhetoric, which is making NATO very uncomfortable," a Western official in Brussels was quoted as saying in a *Wall Street Journal* article discussing the Chinese deal; "Turkey's stance will be an issue for years to come, not only if the Chinese missile deal happens, but also because of its politics."[27]

Michael Merz and Max Hoffman perfectly summarized Washington's sentiment: "[Turkey's] role as a reliable NATO ally has been questioned [as it] signed accords with Russia and China that undermine NATO positions, routinely bargains with the U.S. over what should be basic transactions between allies in the fight against ISIS, [and] resorted to rhetorical at-

tacks [that] only increase latent anti-Americanism in Turkish society." The United States, wrote Merz and Hoffman, "should let the AKP enjoy the 'precious loneliness' [brought about] by its authoritarian and anti-Western shift."[28]

In perspective, however, these concerns were not endemic to recent years. In 2012, for instance, Turkey sparked a crisis after it blocked the participation of Israel and the European Union in NATO's Chicago Summit.[29] At the previous summit in Lisbon in 2010, Turkey had again become the Alliance's "enfant terrible" after its holdout on the missile-defense shield.[30]

Indeed, "losing Turkey" has been a perennial leitmotif in NATO-Turkey relations. In 1996, Thomas Friedman wrote an op-ed with the familiar title, "Who Lost Turkey?" bemoaning the Islamist ways, not of Tayyip Erdoğan, but of his mentor, Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan.[31] Similar refrains were raised only a few months into AKP's tenure, when the parliament stunned Washington with its refusal to authorize the use of Turkish facilities for Operation Iraqi Freedom on March 1, 2003. "If the Turkish parliament doesn't come around and vote to allow U.S. troops on its soil, look for diplomatic finger-pointing to begin in earnest over Who Lost Turkey?" wrote Al Kamen for *The Washington Post* four days after the vote.[32] A few months later, Soner Cagaptay presciently warned about "seismic events" affecting the U.S.-Turkish relationship: the rise of Islamist ideology, Turkey's realignment with Europe over the United States, and the ripple effect of the 2003 Iraq War. He wrote that, while "an obituary for the demise of a half-century partnership is premature," understanding these new dynamics will be key to determining where Turkey's relationship with the United States will go.[33]

In a 2006 article for the same journal, Jonathan Eric Davis was already lamenting "the loss of Ankara as a reliable ally" and urging "a more active and engaged U.S. approach to Ankara."[34] "Who lost Turkey? — a complacent West could be forced to confront this previously unthinkable question within the next few years," Philip Gordon and Omer Taspinar were writing the same year, arguing that the bigger risk is not Turkey's alleged Islamization but its growing nationalist frustration with the United States and Europe for their neglect of Turkish national-security interests[35] — an argument they later developed into a book.[36]

By late 2009, Cagaptay's tone, too, had shifted from caution to eulogy over the direction of Turkey's relationship with the United States: "Turkey's experience with the AKP proves that Islamism in the country's foreign policy may not be so compatible with the West, after all."[37] The "Who lost Turkey?" debate was revived in 2010 after a set-to between U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso. Gates blamed Brussels for discouraging Turkey in its negotiations over joining the EU, while Barroso blamed Washington for turning public opinion against the West with the invasion of Iraq.[38] Whatever the reasons, the implications were quite certain: a 2010 article in *The New York Times* was bemoaning Turkey's transition from a "pliable ally" to a "thorn for the U.S."[39]

The debate abroad was also reverberating at home. The leading foreign-policy figures of the opposition — especially three retired ambassadors: the secular CHP's Onur Oymen[40] and Faruk Logoglu[41] and the nationalist MHP's Deniz Bolukbasi[42] — voiced concerns about a fundamental transformation of Turkey's foreign policy under the AKP, coining what came

to be known as the "axis shift" debate in Turkish politics. Curiously, except for a few lone dissenters like Oguzlu,[43] Turkish scholars were quick to dismiss this line of reasoning: "The overwhelming majority of the Turkish experts studying Turkish foreign policy find the 'axis shift' argument an exaggeration and crude characterization," wrote Onis.[44] Instead, "the Davutoglu era" was praised as the high tide of Turkish foreign policy.[45] While some lauded Turkey's engagement with the Middle East as a "new geographic imagination,"[46] others trivialized it as being driven, not by security or identity, but by economics.[47]

Remarkably, the senior foreign-policy figures were signaling that Turkey sought to change the traditional algorithm of its relations with the United States. "The success of U.S.-Turkish relations will depend on the extent to which the American policymakers will be willing to accommodate Turkey as a new rising power centre in the most important corridor region of the world,"[48] wrote Ibrahim Kalin, Erdoğan's chief foreign-policy adviser. Kalin was forewarning that, if Turkey were not accommodated as a new rising power center, the United States would risk a default in its relations in Turkey.

Yet, the American discourse remained fairly optimistic about Turkey's shift. "Turkey's recent focus on the Middle East does not mean that Turkey is about to turn its back on the West," wrote F. Stephen Larrabee, "If managed properly, it could be an opportunity for Washington and its Western allies to use Turkey as a bridge to the Middle East."[49] Veteran journalist Hugh Pope similarly argued that Turkey was "at most, only partly to blame for the setbacks suffered by its zero-problem foreign policy."[50]

WHAT THE ALARMISTS GET WRONG

These discourses on Turkey's loss (and rediscovery) by the West were anchored in a flawed "presentism." As Hugh Pope elegantly describes, the vacillations of the West's discourse on Turkey followed a cyclical pattern, trailing the West's own perceptions of Turkish policy:

> There were times when Turkey was seen as the good country, when Turkey was the model, and Turkey showed the Middle East how it could develop and how progress could be made — a multiplier of Western values and market economics in the region. And then, almost inexplicably, there would be moments when Turkey was the bad country, Turkey had gone rogue. You'd see headlines — and I really have forgotten how many times I've seen that headline — "Who lost Turkey?" Eventually, I decided it actually much more reflected what people in Washington, D.C., and European capitals were actually thinking about themselves and how they were dealing with Turkey.[51]

The problem with these presentist arguments was that they conflated what Kenneth Waltz famously called the three levels of analysis — the individual, the domestic and the systemic contexts.[52] From this perspective, most of the arguments against Turkey's place in NATO are either at the individual level (Erdoğan's careening towards authoritarianism) or the domestic levels (Islamization, Gaullism, or rising anti-Americanism) but rarely at the systemic level, which mattered the most for the longevity of Turkey's security partnership with the United States.

On the individual level, it is apparent that President Erdoğan stands in stark con-

trast to his predecessors, including his Islamist patron Necmettin Erbakan. Stephen Kinzer described Erbakan as "a grandfatherly figure [who] moves delicately, gestures calmly and speaks softly,"[53] whereas Erdoğan is described as "angry and paranoid"[54] with a "mercurial temperament and propensity for rhetorical threats."[55] Yet, on the one issue that mattered, Erbakan's portrayal then bears an uncanny resemblance to Erdoğan's portrayal now — Erbakan, too, was considered intent on "moving Turkey away from its identification with Europe and the West."[56] This is not to say that personalities do not matter — they certainly do[57] — but not to the extent that the fate of a half-century partnership would be upended on their sole basis.

Similarly, the domestic transformations in Turkey that are argued as rationales for excluding it from NATO's "value-based community" are by no means new. Consider the issue of anti-Americanism. The 2003 Iraq War surely contributed to anti-American sentiment in Turkey,[58] but this followed a global trend also observed in other NATO allies.[59] Moreover, anti-Americanism actually had a long history in Turkey;[60] Turkey's relations with NATO were never smooth sailing.[61] While it is true that the disappearance of a common existential threat (the Soviet Union) complicated Turkey's relations with NATO,[62] similar woes were also faced by NATO's European allies.[63] Indeed, even Cold War-era accounts of Turkey's security policies framed Turkish priorities in invariably pragmatic terms based on three contexts: the Soviet threat, the Aegean/Cyprus problem and the Middle East subsystem.[64]

The same is true of Turkey's careening towards authoritarianism. Turkey was never a bulwark of liberal-democratic values, but by and large, Turkey's Atlantic allies were rarely bothered by it. Turkey's much-maligned constitution, for example, was a legacy of the 1980 junta, which the United States had fully backed.[65] "For the U.S.," as Tanel Demirel wrote, "preserving the integrity of the Turkish state as an ally of the West was much more important than preserving the democratic regime."[66] Turkey's authoritarianism was not short-lived; it preceded the 1980 junta and survived it.[67]

Indeed, the secular establishment's authoritarian excesses through the 1980s and 1990s[68] were one reason the AKP victory was so widely celebrated. Ahmet Insel, for example, wrote, "[AKP's victory] created an unexpected possibility of exit from the authoritarian regime established after the military coup of September 12, 1980."[69] Soli Ozel elegantly described the promise seen in AKP's rise:

> If the communitarian-liberal synthesis works and Turkey's decent secular principles can be rescued from their essentially extrinsic yet historically stubborn entanglement with authoritarianism; if Turkey's Islamic movement reconciles itself to a secularism grounded not only in worry about the dangers of politicized religion but also in an honest desire to protect religion's own integrity and dignity; if the military can at last be brought to see that it is time to let its inordinate political involvements "go gentle into that good night," then the Turkish political system will have managed to remodel itself along democratic lines.[70]

Yet, despite some ominous signs, even the more astute observers of the political class remained tone-deaf. A tragic example is Hugh Pope. In 2009, even as Gareth Jenkins[71] and Dani Rodrik[72] had been raising doubts about due process and factual inconsistencies in the now-discredited

Ergenekon and Sledgehammer coup-plot trials, Pope was convinced that the judges "would certainly not have taken so many high-profile people into custody unless they had an absolute certainty that this is a real case."[73] Now, even AKP leaders are deflecting the blame on "a conspiracy of the Gulenist 'parallel state.'"[74]

Similarly, on the Kurdish problem, human rights and democratization took a backseat to security cooperation and alliance politics, in both the past and the present, as argued by a slew of commentators, from Eric Edelman[75] to Patrick Cockburn[76] to Dov Friedman[77] to Leela Jacinto.[78]

Turkey's democratic deficit, its authoritarian tendencies, and the strong undercurrents of anti-Americanism mentioned in the works of these commentators were always there. These concerns are by no means trivial. Yet, it is also true that they never sufficed to turn Turkey away from NATO or NATO away from Turkey. Why should it be different now?

For the U.S.-Turkey security partnership to undergo such a dramatic change, there needs to be a paradigmatic shift on the systemic level. Hence, the question is whether conceptions of national interest, arrangements of power, or dynamics of dependency transformed in a way that would translate into a meaningful change in Turkey's security partnership with the United States and NATO. The answer is no, but the dominant discourse on Turkey is imbued with the comfort of a flawed presentism, which disguises the resilience of these overlapping interests at the systemic level.

TURKEY AND NATO

Despite the breadth of the literature on NATO-Turkey relations, the essential question of what it means to be allies is never explicitly discussed. Recalling David Phillips's argument that "[NATO] is a coalition of countries with shared values," is this really the case? If NATO is indeed a value-based community, what are these values? And what happens when security interests clash with the shared values?

In official discourse, the "shared values" Philips is alluding to are defined in minimal terms; in practice, they are paid even less attention. President Obama publicly outlined the template U.S.-Turkish relations would follow under his administration in his 2009 Ankara speech, where he identified three pillars of the partnership: Turkey's status as a "strong, vibrant, secular democracy" and its commitment to the rule of law; its potential to serve as an interlocutor and a model for the Middle East and the broader Muslim world as part of President Obama's efforts to patch up America's image in the Muslim world; and its important role in the NATO alliance and its push for membership in the European Union (which together implied the preservation of Turkey's organic ties with the Western world).[79]

The three pillars were never really compromised. On the issue of Turkey's "strong, vibrant, secular democracy," as shown in the case of the Ergenekon and Sledgehammer coup trials, Erdoğan's democratic credentials remained widely accepted at home and abroad, even with many reasons for skepticism. Aydinli, for example, was celebrating these trials as the advent of "a new Turkey in which the state does not own the society, but society, with all its competing elements and actors, may very well own the state."[80] Even at Obama's Ankara speech, Turkey's democratic problems were not unknown. Obama should "develop a joint U.S.-Turkish approach to key regional issues," wrote

Joshua W. Walker and Elliot Hen-Tov[81] following Obama's Ankara speech, but he should also "speak truth to power in the AKP government" about "minority protection, religious freedom and stemming xenophobia." Yet, as has been the case since the 1980s, Washington was not bothered. Human rights were in U.S.-Turkey relations never the *sine qua non* that security cooperation was, and they did not become one now.

On the issue of Turkey's engagement with the Middle East, as pointed out in the Larrabee quote cited above, Turkey's pivot to the Middle East was actually encouraged by the United States in the hope that it would help to restore the damage the Iraq War had dealt to America's credibility in the region. Indeed, despite the occasional crises, Turkey remained a reliable partner in addressing the "critical challenges" President Obama identified in his 2009 speech, such as stabilizing Iraq, pressuring Iran to negotiate on its nuclear ambitions and combating terrorism. Moreover, Turkey also leveraged the space afforded by its activist foreign policy to facilitate a diplomatic agenda endorsed by Washington: working as a backchannel to Iran, facilitating talks between Fatah and Hamas, and serving as a go-between in Israel's diplomacy with Syria and Palestine. At times, the ways Turkey went about these efforts frustrated its Western allies, but "even when it has erred, the Turkish government has not forsaken the goals of many of its Western partners, including relieving suffering in Gaza and finding a way to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons."[82]

IRAN AND ISRAEL

Turkey's rapprochement with Iran had been a popular cause for Turkey skeptics, citing a slew of "contrarian" positions, from Turkey's opposition to the naming of Iran as a threat to be countered by the NATO missile-defense shield,[83] to Erdoğan's close relations with Iran's inflammatory and obstinate Mahmoud Ahmedinejad,[84] to its intransigence over expanding sanctions against Iran,[85] to the alleged sharing of NATO intelligence with Tehran.[86] This narrative, however, conveniently overlooks how Turkey eventually turned around to support the alliance's policies on all the issues it opposed (e.g., the missile-defense shield[87]), or how it played a critical (and thankless) role in early nuclear diplomacy with Tehran.

In this regard, the failure of the tripartite nuclear-fuel-swap deal is a particularly important case. In 2010, Ankara, along with Brazil, managed to broker an agreement that would have drastically reduced Iran's stockpiles of enriched uranium.[88] This maneuver, which would have been an important confidence-building step in stalemated negotiations, had been previously proposed by former IAEA secretary-general Mohammad ElBaradei, but Iran had not agreed.[89]

In all likelihood, the United States had encouraged the deal. Only a few months before the Tehran Declaration, President Obama had sent a letter to the governments of Turkey and Brazil setting out the conditions under which Washington might accept a nuclear fuel swap with Iran,[90] and just a few weeks before the Turkish-Brazilian initiative, U.S. officials were publicly describing the proposed deal as an option "still on the table."[91]

Yet, when the initiative succeeded in getting Iran on board, the United States balked, killing the deal by linking it to Iran's immediate, permanent suspension of its enrichment activities. This was a manifestly unrealistic bar. Indeed, the widely

celebrated Vienna Agreement allowed Iran to keep 5,060 centrifuges active at Natanz and to enrich uranium to 3.67 percent, while providing for gradual increases in Iran's enrichment capacity culminating in the full removal of limitations after 15 years.[92]

The even worse affront, however, was the tone of U.S. officials who went on record to dismiss the deal, whereas the Turkish foreign minister adamantly insisted that Secretary Clinton had been briefed on his initiative all along.[93] From this angle, it was the United States that hung Turkey out to dry, not vice versa.

Those criticizing Turkey for not taking a tougher stance against Iran are failing to appreciate the longstanding strategic balance between the two countries.[94] Their common frontier has remained roughly unchanged since the 1639 Kasr-i Shirin Treaty. Turkey has no zero-sum strategic competition with Iran comparable to the Saudis' stakes in Bahrain and Yemen or Iran's territorial disputes with the United Arab Emirates. Indeed, most flash points of Iran's grand strategy (like Lebanon, Yemen and Bahrain) are not priorities for Turkey. In contrast, Turkey and Iran have many converging interests, from thwarting the rise of the Kurds to carrying Iranian gas to European markets to balancing Russian power in the Caucasus. As in the case of the 2010 tripartite nuclear-fuel-swap deal, Turkey has sought to leverage these attributes to the benefit of its allies and has never truly departed from its broader commitments to the Atlantic alliance. Yet, somehow it is still getting the blame for not cheerleading for a war against an enemy it did not have.

The same is true with Israel. While the rise of political Islam in Turkey and the nature of party politics in Israel have surely contributed to the worsening of bilateral relations, it was structural factors that drove a wedge between Israel and Turkey.[95] Indeed, four years before the much-maligned altercation in Davos between Erdoğan and Israeli premier Shimon Peres, Mustafa Kibaroglu had forewarned that a clash of interests over northern Iraq was driving the Turkish-Israeli alliance to a crossroads.[96]

Had the United States preserved its traditional relations with Israel, it is likely that Washington would have mediated these crises, compelling its two close allies to play nicely. Yet, in the year of the Davos crisis, the "special relationship between Israel and the United States [was] about to enter perhaps its rockiest patch ever [with Israel] growing exasperated with the Obama administration's effort to use diplomacy to roll back Iran's growing uranium-enrichment program."[97] As the United States careened towards an eventual deal with Iran, its relations with Israel progressively worsened, hitting rock bottom on March 3, 2015, when Israeli premier Benjamin Netanyahu joined the Republicans in their grudge match against President Obama and accepted an invitation from Republicans to argue against the administration's nuclear deal with Iran in an address to the Congress.

Netanyahu's address was the straw that broke the camel's back. "Nearly everyone (apart from Congressional Republicans) seems to believe that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is making a mistake in refusing to cancel his March 3 address to the U.S. Congress,"[98] wrote Lisa Goldman at the time of Netanyahu's speech. A day later, John B. Judis wrote that the rift created by Netanyahu ended up "threatening the 'special relationship' between the United States and Israel, a hallmark [of

which had] been its bipartisan nature.[99]

It is misleading to assess Turkey's changing relations with Israel without reference to the dramatic transformations in U.S.-Israeli relations under the Obama administration. Turkey's increased engagement with the Middle East (the so-called "neo-Ottoman" foreign policy) was surely frustrating to Israel,[100] but just as frustrating was the Obama administration's denial of a carte blanche to Israel in its dealings with the Palestinians and Iran. In this regard, it is a common mistake to project Turkey's deteriorating relations with Israel onto Turkey's relations with the United States; on Israel, Washington and Ankara had shared sentiments. Indeed, in an address at the Brookings Institution on September 9, 2015, former secretary of state and current presidential contender Hillary Clinton confirmed this argument, discussing how she "spent literally years trying to get the Israelis to apologize to the Turks for the flotilla."[101]

WHERE CAN TURKEY GO?

The analysis so far presents a fairly compelling picture of (a) the ill-founded alarmism of the "losing Turkey" narrative, (b) the conflation of agency and structure in describing the landscape of the security partnership between Turkey and the United States, (c) the intact nature of the pillars of the U.S.-Turkey security partnership, and (d) the failure of the dominant narrative to properly contextualize the causes and implications of Turkey's "outlier" interactions with Iran and Israel. Before concluding, however, let it be assumed that the entire analysis in this paper is wrong, and that Turkey is indeed careening away from its Atlantic allies. Where can Turkey go?

Ostensibly, the expectation is for Turkey to emerge as a challenger to the United States in its perceived sphere of influence and to join, with Russia and China, an "axis of the excluded."[102] Along these lines, Turkey's long-range-missile defense deal with China has been widely cited as the smoking gun for such a paradigm shift. This critique, however, reflects a distorted understanding of Ankara's rationale. Turkey has ambitious plans to expand its defense exports. Considering that Turkey lacks the defense-industrial base to indigenously design and develop its own air defense system, it is only reasonable to leverage acquisition power for optimal conditions in joint production, technology transfer and export prospects. Turkey's concerns are not exclusive. When CPMIEC (Chinese Precision Machinery Import-Export Corporation) balked at Turkey's technology-transfer conditions, Turkey reopened talks with the second-best bidder, Eurosam — indicating Turkey's eagerness to give the U.S. or European bidders the latitude to revise their bids to meet its demands.

Ankara knew that its deal with China was less than optimal, as there are strong concerns about the Chinese platform. The Atlantic Council's James Hasik described what Turkey was acquiring as "the air defense equivalent 'of a 1991 Hyundai,' which would not be a good deal even at a Volkswagen price."[103] What drove Turkey and its Western allies apart was neither price nor performance, but the double standards Ankara perceived in how its aspirations for long-range missile defense are handled by its Western allies, who are hesitating to offer Turkey the favorable technology-transfer conditions they have offered other allies in much less critical theaters — Australia, New Zealand, Portugal and Sweden. In other words, Ankara was moving forward with China because

it was hearing in the Western objections to its missile-defense plans echoed of David Cameron's 2010 remarks: that it is guarding the camp but not allowed to sit in the tent. Turkey's alliance with China was one of necessity, not preference. Indeed, just as this article was going into print, Turkey announced that it is canceling not only its contract talks with the Chinese but the entire missile-defense tender and instead moving forward with an indigenous program. This is another instance of Turkey's forcing its hand but eventually turning around to support the Alliance's policies.

Further evidence that Turkey remains firmly entrenched in the Western camp is found in the Turkish reaction to increased Russian involvement in Syria. "Russia doesn't have a border with Syria," charged Erdoğan in an interview with Al-Jazeera right after Russia launched airstrikes in Syria, "I want to understand why Russia is so interested in Syria."[104] The United States has no border with Syria either, but Erdoğan never directed the question at Washington. Instead, he bemoaned, "Turkey is bearing the brunt of the crisis in Syria whereas the U.S. is standing on the sidelines."

Erdoğan's press briefing on October 10 was even more direct. He called Russian involvement in Syria a "grave mistake... that would only further isolate Russia" and warned — in a thinly veiled threat to downscale relations — "the depth of Russia's bilateral relations with Turkey can't compare with its relations with Syria."[105] Even in the worst of times with the United States, Ankara's parlance towards Washington never escalated to such levels of antagonism.

While Russia's entrance into the Syrian game will inevitably push Turkey closer to the United States, this should not be expected to bring Turkey into lockstep with Washington. Erdoğan, for example, remains adamantly opposed to supporting the Kurdish militia PYD in northern Syria. As echoed in a recent assessment by the pro-government think-tank SETA (Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Studies), "If a new Kurdish autonomous entity becomes permanently established in northern Syria, Turkey may eventually work with it, as it has done with KRG. But in a scenario where Turkey is threatened by such an entity or by the PKK's efforts to use it as its backyard, cooperation would be impossible and Turkey could come into conflict with a U.S.-enabled entity in northern Syria."[106]

A CHANGING WORLD

As Hugh Pope astutely observed, the narrative moves in cycles. Every now and then, someone asks, "Who lost Turkey?" and another responds, arguing that Turkey is not lost and that its alliance with the West is alive and well. But this time, there is a difference: "losing Turkey" can become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Turkey is seeking to upgrade itself from a "junior partner" to a "regional power." Where this agenda is running into resistance from the West, Turkey is taking bold and unconventional steps—as it did with the long-range missile deal with China—to show that it's not without options. In reality, both Washington and Ankara are beholden to each other. As the saying goes, better the devil you know; after half a century, one comes to know one's devil pretty well.

This is not to say that the future of the U.S.-Turkey security partnership will be smooth sailing. In 2010, Pope wrote that a "reason to be more sanguine about Turkey's foreign policy is that, despite recent

strains, the fundamentals of Turkey's alliances with the West have not changed."[107] Today, those fundamentals are slowly but steadily changing. The idea of "the West" does not have the moral, political and economic weight it used to carry. It is not as powerful as it used to be, morally or economically. Turkey has its face turned towards the West, but its feet are standing in the East. A future where the West's allure fades holds the specter of an illiberal resurgence. It is this angst that the persistent fears of "losing Turkey" are anchored in.

The remedy to these fears, however, is to pull Turkey towards the West, not push it further away by failing to heed its legitimate political, economic and security interests, and throwing tantrums when Turkey seeks to assert those interests on its own.

A robust alliance between the United States and Turkey cannot be premised on turning Ankara around to Washington's policies kicking and screaming. It can only endure through a constructive dialogue between Turkey and its allies towards identifying the fulcrum that keeps a delicate balance between Turkey's legitimate security interests and the broader objectives of its allies. A partnership that covers Turkey's legitimate security interests would also have a centripetal effect, pulling Turkey closer to the West. Entrenching Turkey's perception of exclusion and double standards would have a centrifugal effect, pushing Turkey away from the moral and political axis of the Atlantic Alliance.

[1] Philip Robins. "Confusion at Home, Confusion Abroad: Turkey between Copenhagen and Iraq." *International Affairs* 79, no. 3 (2003): 547–66.
[2] Ceylan Yeginsu and Helene Cooper. "U.S. Jets to Use Turkish Bases in War on ISIS." *New York Times*. July 24, 2015.
[3] Martin Indyk, Twitter post, July 24, 2015, 2:17 p.m., http://twitter.com/martin_indyk.
[4] James Stavridis, "It's All About The Base," *Foreign Policy*, July 29, 2015.
[5] TRT World, "Turkey-US Realignment Reaches Top Point for Northern Syria," July 25, 2015.
[6] Richard N. Haass, "Look to Syria to Halt the Deadly March of ISIS," *Financial Times*, August 26, 2014
[7] Leslie H. Gelb, "Face It, Obama. Without Assad, You've Got No Strategy in Syria," *Daily Beast*, January 22, 2015.
[8] Ryan C. Crocker, "Assad Is the Least Worst Option in Syria," *New York Times*, December 21, 2013.
[9] Carter Center, *Syria: Countrywide Conflict Report #4*, September 11, 2014, 25.
[10] Cassandra Vinograd and Ammar Cheikh Omar, "Syria, ISIS Have Been 'Ignoring' Each Other, Data Suggests," *NBC*, December 11, 2014.
[11] Barney Guiton, "'ISIS Sees Turkey as Its Ally': Former Islamic State Member Reveals Turkish Army Cooperation," *Newsweek*, November 7, 2014.
[12] Humeyra Pamuk and Nick Tattersall, "Turkish Intelligence Helped Ship Arms to Syrian Islamist Rebel Areas," Reuters, May 21, 2015.
[13] Mike Giglio, "This Is How ISIS Smuggles Oil," *Buzzfeed*, November 3, 2015.
[14] Alev Scott and Alexander Christie-Miller, "ISIS Starts Recruiting in Istanbul's Vulnerable Suburbs," *Newsweek*, September 12, 2014.
[15] Tim Arango and Eric Schmitt, "Turkey Uneasy as U.S. Support of Syrian Kurds Grows," *New York Times*, June 29, 2015; and Semih Idiz, "U.S. Support of Syrian Kurds Ruffles Turkey's Feathers," *Al-Monitor*, August 4, 2015.
[16] Mary Alice Salinas, "U.S. Probes Reports of Kurd YPG Purging Arabs," Voice of America, June 13, 2015.
[17] "Syria Kurds 'Razing Villages Seized from IS'—Amnesty," BBC, October 10, 2015.
[18] Reuters, "More than 130,000 Syrian Kurds Fleeing Islamic State Crossed into Turkey: Deputy PM," September 22, 2014.

[19] Scott Bobb, "Kobani Fighting Sends 400,000 Refugees to Turkey," Voice of America, October 19, 2014.
[20] Jonathan Schanzer, "Time to Kick Turkey Out of NATO?" *Politico*, October 9, 2014.
[21] Bernard-Henri Levy, "Shame on Turkey for Choosing the Islamic State over the Kurds," *New Republic*, October 12, 2014.
[22] Conrad Black, "Get Tough with Turkey," *National Review*, October 30, 2014.
[23] Simon Tisdall, "U.S. Deal With Turkey Over ISIS May Go Beyond Simple Use of An Airbase," *Guardian*, July 25, 2015.
[24] David L. Phillips, "Post-Erdoğan," *Huffington Post*, October 2, 2015.
[25] Michael Werz and Max Hoffman, *The U.S.-Turkey Partnership: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back* (Washington, DC: Center for American Progress, March 12, 2015).
[26] Mette Fraende, "NATO Head Expresses Concern about Turkey's Chinese Missile Deal," Reuters, October 7, 2013.
[27] Emre Peker, "Turkey Breaks From West on Defense," *Wall Street Journal*, April 21, 2015.
[28] Michael Werz and Max Hoffman, *The U.S.-Turkey Partnership: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back* (Center for American Progress, March 12, 2015).
[29] Lamiya Adilgizi, "Turkish Block on Israel, EU at NATO Summit Raises Eyebrows in West," *Today's Zaman*, May 6, 2012.
[30] Soner Cagaptay, "NATO's Turkey Problem," *Wall Street Journal*, November 18, 2010.
[31] Thomas L. Friedman, "Who Lost Turkey?," *New York Times*, August 21, 1996.
[32] Al Kamen, "How to Prepare Turkey," *Washington Post*, March 5, 2003.
[33] Soner Cagaptay, "Where Goes the U.S.-Turkish Relationship?" *Middle East Quarterly* 11, no. 4 (Fall, 2004): 43–52.
[34] Jonathan Eric Lewis, "Replace Turkey as a Strategic Partner?" *Middle East Quarterly* 13, no. 2 (Spring, 2006): 45–52.
[35] Philip H. Gordon and Omer Taspinar, "Turkey on the Brink," *Washington Quarterly* 29, no. 3 (Summer, 2006): 57-70.
[36] Philip H. Gordon and Omer Taspinar, *Winning Turkey: How America, Europe, and Turkey Can Revive a Fading Partnership* (Brookings Institution Press, 2008).
[37] Soner Cagaptay, "Is Turkey Leaving the West?" *Foreign Affairs*, October 26, 2009.
[38] "EU, U.S. Engage in Blame Game over 'Who Lost Turkey,'" *Today's Zaman*, June 24, 2010.
[39] Sabrina Tavernise and Michael Slackman, "Turkey Goes From Pliable Ally to Thorn for U.S.," *The New York Times*, June 8, 2010.
[40] "CHP'li Oymen: Turkiye Otoriter Rejime Kayiyor [CHP's Oymen: Turkey is Careening Towards Authoritarianism]," *Cumhuriyet*, June 11, 2010.
[41] Faruk Logoglu, "Turk Dis Politikasi: Derenin Dogrultusu? [Turkish Foreign Policy: Whither the River Flows?]," *Radikal*, January 29, 2010.
[42] "MHP'li Bolukbasi: Omurga Kaymasi Yasaniyor [MHP's Bolukbasi: Turkey is Undergoing an Axis Shift]," *Milliyet*, June 11, 2010.
[43] Tarik Oguzlu, "Middle Easternization of Turkey's Foreign Policy: Does Turkey Dissociate from the West?" *Turkish Studies* 9, no. 1 (2008): 3–20.
[44] Ziya Onis, "Multiple Faces of the 'New' Turkish Foreign Policy: Underlying Dynamics and a Critique," *Insight Turkey* 13, no. 1 (2011): 63.
[45] Bulent Aras, "The Davutoglu Era in Turkish Foreign Policy," *Insight Turkey* 11, no. 3 (2009): 127-42.
[46] Bulent Aras and Rabia Karakaya-Polat, "Turkey and the Middle East: Frontiers of the New Geographic Imagination," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 61, no. 4 (2007): 471–88.
[47] Mustafa Kutlay, "Economy as the 'Practical Hand' of 'New Turkish Foreign Policy,'" *Insight Turkey* 13, no. 1 (2011): 67-88.
[48] Ibrahim Kalin, "U.S.–Turkish Relations under Obama: Promise, Challenge and Opportunity in the 21st Century," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 12, no. 1 (2010): 93–108.
[49] Stephen F. Larrabee, "Turkey Rediscovers the Middle East," *Foreign Affairs* 86, no. 4 (July-August, 2007): 103–14.
[50] Hugh Pope, "Pax Ottomana? The Mixed Success of Turkey's New Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs* 89, no. 6 (November-December, 2007): 171.

[51] Hugh Pope, "The New Turkey and the Old Middle East: The Limits of Ambition," *Turkish Review*, May 1, 2015.
[52] Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (Columbia University Press, 1956).
[53] Stephen Kinzer, "The Islamist Who Runs Turkey, Delicately," *New York Times*, February 23, 1997.
[54] Mustafa Akyol, "Anger (and Paranoia) Management for Turkey's Tayyip Erdoğan," *New York Times*, June 9, 2015.
[55] Paul Richter, "Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan Poses Challenge for Obama," *Los Angeles Times*, October 10, 2011.
[56] Stephen Kinzer, "Besieged as Undemocratic, Islamist Turks Seek Democracies' Aid," *New York Times*, August 24, 1997.
[57] Daniel L. Byman and Kenneth M. Pollack, "Let Us Now Praise Great Men: Bringing the Statesman Back In," *International Security* 25, no. 4 (2001): 107–46.
[58] James E. Kapsis, "From Desert Storm to Metal Storm: How Iraq Has Spoiled U.S.-Turkish Relations," *Current History* (November, 2005): 380-9.
[59] Giacomo Chiozza, "A Crisis Like No Other? Anti-Americanism at the Time of the Iraq War," *European Journal of International Relations* 15, no. 2 (2009): 257–89.
[60] Aylin Güney, "Anti-Americanism in Turkey: Past and Present," *Middle Eastern Studies* 44, no. 3 (2008): 471–87.
[61] Mustafa Aydin, "Determinants of Turkish Foreign Policy: Changing Patterns and Conjunctures during the Cold War," *Middle Eastern Studies* 36, no. 1 (January 2000): 103–39.
[62] Sabri Sayarı, "Turkish –American relations in the Post-Cold War Era: Issues of Convergence and Divergence," in Mustafa Aydın and Cagri Erhan, eds., *Turkish–American Relations: Past, Present, and Future* (2004), 91–106.
[63] Robert B. McCalla, "NATO's Persistence after the Cold War," *International Organization* 50, no. 3 (Summer, 1996): 445–75.
[64] Ali L. Karaosmanoglu, "Turkey's Security and the Middle East," *Foreign Affairs* 62, no. 1 (1983): 157–75.
[65] "Journalist Birand Denies Henze's Accusations—with Evidence," *Today's Zaman*, June 14, 2003.
[66] Tanel Demirel, "The Turkish Military's Decision to Intervene, 1980," *Armed Forces & Society* 29, no. 2 (January 1, 2003): 257.
[67] Tim Jacoby, "Semi-Authoritarian Incorporation and Autocratic Militarism in Turkey," *Development and Change* 36, no. 4 (July 2005): 641–65.
[68] Michael M. Gunter, "Susurluk: The Connection between Turkey's Intelligence Community and Organized Crime," *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence* 11, no. 2 (1998): 119–41; Hamit Bozarslan, "Human Rights and the Kurdish Issue in Turkey: 1984–1999," *Human Rights Review* 3, no. 1 (2001): 45–54; Dicle Kogacioglu, "Dissolution of Political Parties by the Constitutional Court in Turkey: Judicial Delimitation of the Political Domain," *International Sociology* 18, no. 1 (March, 2003): 258–76; and Kim Shively, "Religious Bodies and the Secular State: The Merve Kavakci Affair," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 1, no. 3 (January 2005): 46–72.
[69] Ahmet Insel, "The AKP and Normalizing Democracy in Turkey," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 102, no. 2–3 (2003): 293–308.
[70] Soli Ozel, "After the Tsunami," *Journal of Democracy* 14, no. 2 (2003): 80–94.
[71] Gareth H. Jenkins, *Between Fact and Fantasy: Turkey's Ergenekon Investigation* (Washington, DC: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, August, 2009).
[72] Pinar Dogan and Dani Rodrik, "How Turkey Manufactured a Coup Plot," *Foreign Policy*, April 6, 2010.
[73] Agence France Presse, "Top Brass Grilled Over Turkey 'Coup Plot'," February 23, 2010.
[74] Emre Peker, "Turkey's Military Moves against Coup Cases as Judiciary Fights Government," *Wall Street Journal*, January 3, 2014.
[75] Eric S. Edelman, "America's Dangerous Bargain With Turkey," *New York Times*, August 27, 2015.
[76] Patrick Cockburn, "Obama's Deal with Turkey Is a Betrayal of Syrian Kurds and May Not Even Weaken ISIS," *Independent*, August 1, 2015.
[77] Dov Friedman, "The Unintended Consequences of the U.S.-Turkey Deal," *American Interest*, August 10, 2015.
[78] Leela Jacinto, "The Sultan of Swing's Dangerous Gamble," *Foreign Policy*, July 29, 2015.

[79] https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-obama-turkish-parliament.
[80] Ersel Aydinli, "Ergenekon, New Pacts, and the Decline of the Turkish 'Inner State,'" *Turkish Studies* 12, no. 2 (2011): 237.
[81] Joshua W. Walker and Elliot Hen-Tov, "Resisting Turkey's Lurch to Saudis," *Washington Times*, April 7, 2009.
[82] Hugh Pope, "Pax Ottomana? The Mixed Success of Turkey's New Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs* 89, no. 6 (November-December, 2007): 171.
[83] "Turkey Wary of Missile Shield," Al-Jazeera, November 19, 2010.
[84] Robert Tait, "'Iran Is Our Friend,' Says Turkish PM Recep Tayyip Erdoğan," *Guardian*, May 19, 2014.
[85] Daniel Dombey, "Turkey Defiant on Iran Sanctions," *Financial Times*, January 12, 2012.
[86] Adam Entous and Joe Parkinson, "Turkey's Spymaster Plots Own Course on Syria," *Wall Street Journal*, October 10, 2013.
[87] Thom Shanker, "Turkey Accepts Missile Radar for NATO Defense," *New York Times*, September 15, 2011.
[88] Mustafa Kibaroglu, "The Iranian quagmire: How to move forward; Position: Resuscitate the nuclear swap deal," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 66, no. 2 (November/December 2010): 102-108.
[89] Scott Peterson, "Mohamed ElBaradei Says Iran Nuclear Deal Still Possible," *Christian Science Monitor*, November 20, 2009.
[90] Jill Dougherty and Charley Keyes, "Obama Administration Tries to Dampen Dispute with Allies over Iran," CNN, May 29, 2010.
[91] Fredrik Dahl, "Iran Says Nuclear Fuel Deal 'Still On The Table,'" Reuters, February 10, 2010.
[92] Gary Samore, ed, *The Iran Nuclear Deal: A Definitive Guide* (Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, 2015), 6.
[93] Alastair Crooke, "Secretary Clinton's Cold Shoulder on the Iranian Fuel-Swap Deal," *Foreign Policy*, (May 26, 2010).
[94] Mustafa Kibaroglu and Selim C. Sazak, "Good News from Vienna is a Relief to Ankara," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, July 18, 2015.
[95] Tarik Oguzlu, "The Changing Dynamics of Turkey–Israel Relations: A Structural Realist Account," *Mediterranean Politics* 15, no. 2 (July 2010): 273–88.
[96] Mustafa Kibaroglu, "Clash of Interest over Northern Iraq Drives Turkish-Israeli Alliance to a Crossroads," *Middle East Journal* 59 (2005): 246–64.
[97] Ariel Ilan Roth, "The Root of All Fears: Why Is Israel So Afraid of Iranian Nukes?" *Foreign Affairs*, November 24, 2009.
[98] Lisa Goldman, "Bibi Bother: Netanyahu's Strategy in Washington," *Foreign Affairs*, March 1, 2015.
[99] John B. Judis, "The Breakup: The Slow Demise of U.S. Bipartisan Support for Israel," *Foreign Affairs*, March 2, 2015.
[100] Efraim Inbar, "Israeli-Turkish Tensions and Their International Ramifications," *Orbis* 55, no. 1 (January 2011): 132–46.
[101] Mahir Zeynalov, "Clinton Tried for Years to Get Israel To Apologize to Turkey," *Today's Zaman*, September 10, 2015.
[102] Fiona Hill and Omer Taspinar, "Turkey and Russia: Axis of the Excluded?" *Survival* 48, no. 1 (March 2006): 81–92.
[103] James Hasik, "Is the FD-2000 an Albatross or a Raptor-Killer?" Atlantic Council, March 12, 2014.
[104] http://www.afp.com/en/news/Erdoğan-urges-putin-change-mind-over-syria-bombing.
[105] Haberturk, "Cumhurbaskani Erdoğan'dan Fransa Seyahati Oncesi Aciklamalar [President Erdoğan's Press Briefing Before His Official Trip to France]," October 4, 2015.
[106] Kadir Ustun and Kilic Bugra Kanat, "Toward U.S.-Turkey Realignment on Syria," *Perspective*, SETA Foundation at Washington, DC (July, 2015), 6.
[107] Hugh Pope, "Pax Ottomana? The Mixed Success of Turkey's New Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs* 89, no. 6 (November-December, 2007): 170.