

# Resetting U.S.-Turkish Relations: Charting a New Way Forward

Aaron Stein

*Independent Foreign Policy Analyst, aaronstein1@gmail.com*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/jss>

 Part of the [Defense and Security Studies Commons](#), [National Security Law Commons](#), and the [Portfolio and Security Analysis Commons](#)  
pp. 1-18

---

## Recommended Citation

Stein, Aaron. "Resetting U.S.-Turkish Relations: Charting a New Way Forward." *Journal of Strategic Security* 4, no. 1 (2011) : 1-18.

DOI:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.5038/1944-0472.4.1.1>

Available at: <https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/jss/vol4/iss1/2>

---

# Resetting U.S.-Turkish Relations: Charting a New Way Forward

## **Author Biography**

Aaron Stein is an Istanbul-based freelance foreign policy analyst. He holds a bachelor's degree in political science from the University of San Francisco and a master's degree in international policy studies with a specialization in nuclear nonproliferation from the Monterey Institute of International Studies. Aaron's areas of interest include nonproliferation, weapons of mass destruction, and Iranian and Turkish politics. His work has appeared in Hurriyet Daily News, Today's Zaman, World Politics Review and the Nuclear Threat Initiative and the Center for Nonproliferation Studies website. Aaron will start a PhD in Middle Eastern and Mediterranean Studies at King's College next January.

## **Abstract**

After nearly nine decades of benign neglect, Turkey has set about reestablishing its influence in the Middle East. Although most observers agree that the United States and Turkey share a number of overlapping goals in the Middle East, Turkey's recent rapprochement with Iran has drawn the ire of the United States. In tandem, Turkey's relations with Israel, Washington's closest ally in the region, have deteriorated rapidly following Israel's war in Gaza and the events aboard the Mavi Marmara. These coinciding events have further complicated U.S.-Turkish relations and have led a number of pundits in Washington to openly question Turkey's ideological orientation. If Ankara and Washington want to mend relations they should acknowledge that their disagreements are not about their overall vision or intention for the region, but over how to implement and carry out foreign policy. Both Ankara and Washington should do a better job of enumerating their long-term regional policy goals and engage in a broader dialogue to clearly transmit these ideas to each other, while working together to achieve them.

# Resetting U.S.-Turkish Relations: Charting a New Way Forward

**Aaron Stein**

*Independent Foreign Policy Analyst*

---

---

## Abstract

After nearly nine decades of benign neglect, Turkey has set about reestablishing its influence in the Middle East. Although most observers agree that the United States and Turkey share a number of overlapping goals in the Middle East, Turkey's recent rapprochement with Iran has drawn the ire of the United States. In tandem, Turkey's relations with Israel, Washington's closest ally in the region, have deteriorated rapidly following Israel's war in Gaza and the events aboard the *Mavi Marmara*. These coinciding events have further complicated U.S.-Turkish relations and have led a number of pundits in Washington to openly question Turkey's ideological orientation. If Ankara and Washington want to mend relations they should acknowledge that their disagreements are not about their overall vision or intention for the region, but over how to implement and carry out foreign policy. Both Ankara and Washington should do a better job of enumerating their long-term regional policy goals and engage in a broader dialogue to clearly transmit these ideas to each other, while working together to achieve them.

---

---

## Introduction

Traditionally, the United States' policy in the Middle East has been based on ensuring Israeli security and maintaining access to Gulf oil. Following the division of the Middle East at the Yalta Conference, the United States

gradually replaced Great Britain and France as the dominant power in the Middle East. After the onset of the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union sought to control the region's vast oil reserves. The United States was principally concerned with the spread of Arab nationalist governments that allied themselves with the Soviet Union. For the United States, the festering Middle Eastern conflicts were viewed through a Cold War lens and were thought of as part of the global competition between the United States and the Soviet Union.

The Cold War backdrop was the impetus for the close relations with Iran and Turkey. The United States' Middle East strategy emphasized arming its allies in order to limit the likelihood of committing its troops abroad to help secure its vital interests. Iran and Turkey were both front-line states that the United States counted on to help repel any attack by the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact. In both cases, the United States poured in billions of dollars of advanced military equipment to bolster these two countries' military capabilities, and, at the same time, help ensure that they remained in the United States' sphere of influence.

The theoretical underpinning for the United States' strategy was the belief in containment, using military, economic, and diplomatic strategies to help prevent the spread of Communism. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the United States found itself in an unrivaled position of power in the Middle East. Former President Bill Clinton implemented "dual containment," a U.S. strategy to economically and militarily isolate Iran and Iraq. The United States' new policy emphasized coercion and military superiority, rather than American "soft power." These sentiments were strengthened under former President George W. Bush and the contemporaneous ascendance of an American neo-conservative foreign policy that advocated for—and eventually succeeded in—overthrowing Saddam Hussein.

Turkey's geostrategic position made it an indispensable U.S. ally during the Cold War and its aftermath. The U.S. Air Force base in Adana, Turkey was used to enforce the Iraqi no-fly zones, allowing the United States to maintain a strong military presence on Iran's northwestern border. However, in the years following the Cold War, Turkey set about mending its relations with Iran, as part of a larger effort to quell Kurdish separatism and diversify its suppliers of natural gas. In addition, the election of the *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (AK Party, or Justice and Development Party) in 2001 ushered in a new government interested in strengthening Turkey's ties to the Middle East. They brought with them a new foreign policy concept that emphasized "soft power" and "a zero problems with your neighbors" foreign policy.

As a result, the United States and Turkey find themselves at odds over how to implement policy in the Middle East. This ideological disagreement has strained relations between the two allies. However, Turkey's foreign policy is not, as some right-wing pundits claim, a product of its prime minister's religious sympathies. Instead, it is part of an overall effort to improve Turkey's position in an economically and militarily important region. In fact, the United States and Turkey share many of the same goals for the Middle East. The fundamental difference between the United States and Turkey is how each intends to implement its current Middle East policy.

Unless both countries make an effort to better understand each other's intentions in the Middle East, the alliance will continue to be marred by misunderstandings and unfair accusations about overall intention. President Obama's renewed emphasis on diplomacy to help resolve the Iran nuclear issue has certainly helped clarify the United States' position vis-à-vis Iran. However, uncertainties over each other's overall intentions remain, as evidenced by Turkey's recent decision to vote "no" on the latest round of UN Security council sanctions against Iran. To better understand how Iran influences U.S.-Turkey relations, we need to analyze the theoretical underpinnings of Turkey's new foreign policy and chart the history of Turkish-Iranian relations.

## Turkey's New Middle East Policy: Re-Engaging with Its Ottoman Past

Turkey has set about mending relations with its Arab and non-Arab neighbors, and is seeking to re-establish its ties with the Middle East. After years of benign neglect, Turkey's current government, the AK Party, has re-engaged with the former provinces in the Ottoman Empire. Turkey's new policy is based on what its current foreign minister, Ahmet Davutoglu, calls "strategic depth"—a foreign policy seeking to balance Turkey's relations with the West and its former Ottoman provinces in the South and East.<sup>1</sup> The policy includes a conscious effort to establish strong security and economic ties with the Islamic Republic of Iran, along with other countries in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East.

At the outset, the West encouraged Turkey's new assertive foreign policy, believing that Turkey could serve as a vital diplomatic actor in the Middle East. The European Union believed that Turkey's unique position in the region could facilitate diplomacy and help solve some of the intractable conflicts that have been festering in the Middle East. President Obama chose Turkey as the first Muslim country to visit after being elected presi-

dent and called Turkey a "strategic partner."<sup>2</sup> Turkey was an active participant in the Middle East peace process and facilitated talks between Israel and Syria.<sup>3</sup> These new diplomatic initiatives reflect the AK Party's belief that dialogue and diplomacy are the best tools to resolve international disputes. Turkey has chosen to use its "soft power" to implement its "zero problems" foreign policy instead of relying on coercion. Despite the diplomatic accolades, Turkey's new outlook has drawn the ire of the United States and some European countries because of their long-standing commitment to a coercive foreign policy in the Middle East and their determination to isolate Iran.

Turkey's recent rapprochement with Iran has drawn the ire of the United States because of: Turkey's swift recognition of President Ahmedinejad after the controversial 2009 election, Prime Minister Erdogan's unabashed support of Iran's nuclear enrichment program, Turkey's (and Brazil's) separate fuel-swap agreements with Iran, and its "no" vote on the recent UN Security Council sanctions against Iran. These developments coincided with the recent collapse of Turkish-Israeli relations following Israel's bombing of Gaza and the tragic incident on the *Mavi Marmara*. In tandem, Turkish-Iranian economic relations have flourished during a time when the United States and its Western allies have implemented a number of unilateral sanctions designed to limit Iran's banks and prevent Iran's import of refined petroleum. The Turkish Government has said that it will only comply with the UN Security Council sanctions, and does not feel that it is legally obligated to comply with the United States' and European Union's unilateral sanctions.<sup>4</sup>

The current Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has consistently stated his opposition to an Iranian nuclear weapon, but has fervently iterated his belief that Iran has the right to nuclear enrichment and the pursuit of a peaceful nuclear-energy program.<sup>5</sup> By refusing to take a more proactive stance against Iran's nuclear program, some Western Security officials argue that Turkey's current government is blunting international efforts to curtail Iran's enrichment program. Some suggest that Turkey is "turning east," in reference to the current government's alleged "Islamist sympathies."<sup>6</sup> Erdogan's comments and Turkey's activist foreign policy have cast a shadow over U.S.-Turkish relations. Perhaps, most importantly, these developments have overshadowed the fact that both countries share many of the same strategic goals in the Middle East. Both seek to limit the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East, have a vested interest in supporting Iraq's dysfunctional government, are committed to combating terrorism, and seek a just solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The problem is that both countries are at loggerheads over how to go about implementing their strategic objectives. The United States, in keeping with its policy of "containment," has imposed strict financial sanctions and continues to arm Tehran's traditional enemies.<sup>7</sup> With regards to the United States' Iran policy, Ankara views sanctions suspiciously, believing that their implementation may eventually lead to war or limited military action.<sup>8</sup> Instead, Ankara believes that robust diplomacy, combined with deep economic and cultural ties, will help Ankara shape Iranian behavior. They believe that an isolated Iran is more likely to lash out to bolster domestic legitimacy, and the results of any armed conflict will seriously threaten Turkey's economy. Furthermore, Ankara does not actually believe that sanctions will work, arguing that the gradual ratcheting up of sanctions only helps the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) solidify its control over Iran's black-market economy. Thus, at the end of the day, the current sanctions policy will do little to limit Iran's nuclear program and will make the likelihood of military action more plausible. Drawing on its experience during the Gulf War, Turkey is adamantly opposed to any military action because the resulting chaos, they believe, will undermine Turkish economic growth and will exacerbate problems faced by its Kurdish minority.

Even though the United States and Turkey share many of the same goals in the region, they have set about implementing policy differently. Turkey's Iran policy will help determine how the international community deals with the perceived problems posed by Iran's progressing nuclear program. Turkey's longstanding alliance with the West and its renewed commitment to strengthen relations with its Middle Eastern neighbors will continue to impact the global response to Iran's nuclear program and shape the ongoing debate about the most appropriate response to Iran's refusal to comply with the United Nations Security Council. Turkey's Iran policy will also continue to impact its relations with the United States, the world's lone superpower and the guarantor of Turkish security. Furthermore, Turkey's recent desire to position itself as a mediator in the Middle East may offer the West another diplomatic tool to help facilitate dialogue between itself and Iran. However, in order for both sides to fully take advantage of Turkey's diplomatic enthusiasm, they must first understand the underpinning of each other's Iran policy. Thus, each side can identify the areas where their policies converge, which in turn will help the West and Turkey better coordinate their diplomatic efforts in the future.

To do so, the United States should make an effort to better understand Iran's and Turkey's long history of relations. By doing so, the United States will better understand the historical elements that continue to shape the two countries' relationship. This will allow the United States to

better understand Turkish intentions in Iran. The history of the two countries' relations reveals a complex nexus of competing religious ideology and mistrust, but also the absence of armed conflict since the current border was delineated nearly five centuries ago. In order for the United States and Turkey to move forward and coordinate their Middle East policies, it is necessary for the West to understand the history of Turkish-Iranian relations.

## Historical Background: Iranian-Turkish Relations

The foundation of Turkish-Iranian relations is a shared sense of national identity that stems from a common history of powerful empires that were usurped by imperialism. Both countries are home to historic Middle Eastern empires that controlled large swaths of territory in the Middle East and Central Asia. The two former empires shared a number of cultural and religious similarities. Iran's Safavid Empire was a source of great inspiration for the Anatolian Turkmens who were dissatisfied with the bureaucratic centralism of the Ottoman Empire during the fifteenth century.<sup>9</sup> During the Ottoman-Safavid war of 1514, the Ottoman Empire conquered Eastern and Western Anatolia and present day Azerbaijan. Subsequently, the Ottomans successfully conquered the territory of modern-day Iraq from the Safavids in 1534. The two Empires relentlessly fought over the two territories encompassing Baghdad and Mosul before eventually signing the *Kasr-ı Şirin* Treaty in 1639, which delineated Iran's and Turkey's current border and granted control of the Iraqi territories to the Ottomans.<sup>10</sup>

Modern-day leaders in Iran and Turkey often point to the 1639 Peace Treaty as a symbol for the two country's long history of amicable and peaceful relations. Despite the lofty diplomatic rhetoric, tensions surrounding Safavid Shi'ism and "the Ottoman version of Islamic Orthodoxy" continued to influence and undermine relations between the two countries for hundreds of years after the signing of the *Kasr-ı Şirin* Treaty. The simmering tensions were finally resolved in 1847 after Qajar Persia and Ottoman Turkey signed the Treaty of Erzurum.<sup>11</sup> Relations remained stable up until the turn of the century and turned for the worse at the onset of the First World War.

Following the First World War, Turkey's Mustafa Kemal [Ataturk] and Iran's Reza Khan implemented a number of top-down secular nationalist reforms. The imposition of these reforms led to domestic turmoil and separatist activity. The chaos that ensued continues to influence Iran's and Turkey's social and national security policies and underpins the two coun-

tries' relationship to this day. Both leaders adopted platforms emphasizing independence, universal secular education, equality, and the centralization of Turkish and Farsi, respectively, as the official language of the state.<sup>12</sup> In both cases the country leaders tapped into the population's nascent nationalism to muster political legitimacy to gain power for their nationalist movements. The advocacy of a staunch secular nationalist ideology, combined with the two countries' heterogeneous demographic, led to civil strife and unrest among large segments of the population.<sup>13</sup> To quell the violence, leaders in both countries set about creating a new sense of national identity. In Turkey, Ataturk propagated the notion of a uni-ethnic Turkish society, while in Iran the Shah propagated Persian nationalism. In both cases, religion was seen as the source of the country's fragility and the root cause of society's social problems.<sup>14</sup>

Early Iranian and Turkish policies also reflect the geo-strategic reality of the post-World War I world. Both Turkey and Iran are non-Arab-majority Muslim states that are located in geographically unstable areas. As such their early security policies were geographically centered, and focused on maintaining friendly relations with neighboring states and on respecting state sovereignty. Thus, during this time period, Iran and Turkey did not adopt a foreign policy based on the subversion of national sovereignty, as did other states in the Middle East.<sup>15</sup> Instead, the two states worked to quell domestic unrest and consolidate the power of the new nationalist governments.

At the outset of the Cold War, Turkey and Iran adopted a pro-Western foreign policy. Driven by a nascent fear of Soviet expansion, Turkey and Iran actively sought an alliance with the Western powers to help bolster their defenses in the event of a Soviet attack. This is evidenced by the two countries' participation in the short-lived, and ultimately unsuccessful, Baghdad Pact (and the follow-on organization CENTO) and the informal "alliance of the periphery" with Israel.<sup>16</sup> During the early days of the Cold War, Iran's and Turkey's strategic locations were of great importance to the new security paradigm taking shape in the Middle East. Both countries came to be front-line Cold War states and were expected to resist any military encroachments by the Soviet Union. The United States, in an effort to exert its influence and control in the Middle East, provided both countries with billions of dollars worth of advanced military equipment and training.

The geo-strategic significance of the Bosphorus Straits, deft Turkish diplomacy, and Turkey's proximity to the Soviet Union's oil fields in present-day Azerbaijan ultimately led the United States to invite Turkey to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1952.<sup>17</sup> Turkey's inclusion

in the Alliance increased its access to American-supplied military equipment and led to the establishment of the region's most powerful military. According to John Calebrese in his article *Turkey and Iran: Limits of a Stable Relationship*, "Turkey's privileged status in the Western alliance aroused the Shah's envy, but did not damage Turco-Iranian relations."<sup>18</sup> "Instead, both countries were more concerned about the rise of rival powers in the region—Greece in the case of Turkey, and the spread of Arab nationalism in Iraq and Egypt in the case of Iran."<sup>19</sup> The two countries' views on security reflected their attitudes and beliefs about their regional security situation, and the two countries' similar ideology and outlook decreased tensions and fostered cooperation. As such, the two countries did not feel threatened by one another and sought out ways to deepen relations.<sup>20</sup>

Close relations continued during the 1960s, and the two countries deepened security and diplomatic relations in the wake of the new policy of détente in the United States and Soviet Union. Spurred on by a large influx of petro-dollars during the oil crises in the 1970s, the Shah of Iran embarked upon a massive military modernization program. The Shah was seeking to replace the British as the guarantor of security for the small Gulf oil kingdoms. Gains made by the Soviet Union in the region, namely the conclusion of Friendship Treaties with India and Iraq, added to the Shah's sense of insecurity and hastened his resolve to build up the country's armed forces. Iran was seeking to control the Strait of Hormuz and the vital shipping lanes in the Indian Ocean. The Shah's ambitious military program certainly piqued the interest of the Turkish armed forces, but the Shah's preoccupation with the Gulf States and the Persian/Arabian Gulf did not immediately threaten Turkish interests in the region. Thus, Iran and Turkey maintained their close relations, despite the Shah's massive military modernization program.

## The Islamic Revolution

Up until the Islamic Revolution, Turkey and Iran regarded each other as status quo powers in the Middle East that shared a common world outlook and faced similar security threats. However, the Islamic Revolution changed the complexion of Iran's governing ideology and altered Iran's security policies. Ayatollah Khomeini's fiery rhetoric and desire to overthrow the Gulf Oil sheikdoms ran counter to Turkey's non-interventionist foreign policy. Overnight, the new Islamic Republic adopted policies that were antithetical to Turkish interests in the Middle East, such as promoting the eradication of the state of Israel and supporting proxy groups to export Iran's unique interpretation of Shi'ite Islam.

In the aftermath of the Revolution, a number of Iranians fled to Turkey, raising suspicions that these groups of immigrants were sympathetic to the Islamic Revolution and could foment religious unrest in Turkey. During the 1980s, Turkey was experiencing a period of extreme domestic unrest. The domestic turmoil prompted the military to intervene and take over Turkey's elected government in 1980. This military takeover was compounded by the outbreak of violence in Eastern Turkey by members of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Khomeini's emphasis on exporting the Revolution naturally raised suspicions in secular Turkey. Ankara was wary of Khomeini's rhetoric and believed that Iran was allied with insurgent groups that would eventually target Turkey's secular Republic.<sup>21</sup> Tensions were exacerbated after Ankara alleged Tehran's clandestine support for the PKK.<sup>22</sup> These accusations are notable because these two issues have dominated Turkey's national security policies since the founding of the Republic. Despite Ankara's allegations, Turkey maintained its "hands-off" policy in the Middle East and adopted a policy of neutrality during the Iran-Iraq war.<sup>23</sup>

Turkey maintained its policy of strict neutrality throughout the Iran-Iraq war. As a result, it was able to benefit economically because it was one of the few countries that did not join the global effort to economically isolate Iran. During the war, Iran emerged as Turkey's second largest supplier of natural gas, after Iraq. During the 1990s, trade between the two countries gradually increased. By 2000, it totaled nearly \$1 billion. By 2005, it had increased to nearly \$5 billion; and by 2008, it topped \$10 billion annually.<sup>24</sup> In 2010, trade dropped to \$5.5 billion because of the global recession and the drop in oil and natural gas prices.<sup>25</sup>

The warming of relations was punctuated in August 2010, when the Turkish Daily *Milliyet* reported that Turkey was expected to remove Iran from a watch list of countries that it considered to be a "specific threat."<sup>26</sup> The updated security outlook was drafted by the country's powerful and influential National Security Council and was adopted in October 2010. The new review mentioned Iran's nuclear program, but did so as a part of Turkey's oft-repeated desire for a region free of nuclear weapons. The statement was interpreted as a reference to Israel, which is believed to be the region's only nuclear-weapons state.<sup>27</sup> The timing of the report coincided with a number of high-level talks between American and Turkish officials over Turkish-Iranian trade relations. Officials from the United States treasury had reportedly grown impatient with Ankara's robust trade with Turkey, despite U.S. and European Union sanctions meant to limit investment in Iran's oil and gas sector and their efforts to bar the export of refined petroleum to Iran.

Journal of Strategic Security

This expected move came only two months after Turkey, along with Brazil, refused to support a fourth round of UN Security Council Sanctions against Iran for its refusal to freeze enrichment and answer a number of questions about suspected weaponization research. While Turkey is not a veto-holding member of the UNSC, meaning that its "no" vote could not derail the sanctions package, the United States and the European powers were seeking to pass the sanctions unanimously. The unanimous passage, they argued, increased Iran's isolation and was an important show of international consensus against Iran's enrichment program. Turkey's "no" vote set off a chorus of anti-Turkey rhetoric in the United States. The dominant story line, among Republican politicians and right-wing media pundits, was that Turkey was shunning its traditional Western allies because it was embracing an "Islamist ideology."

These recent events have given rise to a difficult time in U.S.-Turkish relations. During the Cold War, the alliance was cemented by Cold War politics, fears over the Soviet Union, and a general loathing of Communism. However, after the fall of Communism, the two allies have struggled to re-define their relationship. The difficulties were punctuated during the run-up to the second Gulf War. Despite massive political pressure and a \$15 billion dollar aid package, Turkey's Parliament failed to pass a bill that would have allowed American troops to invade Northern Iraq from Turkish territory. Washington was stunned by the vote, and Former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld went as far as to blame Turkey for the post-war insurgency.

Tensions eased after the United States began supplying intelligence to Turkey that allowed its air force to bomb targets in Northern Iraq. The United States' commitment to repairing relations was underscored in April 2009 when newly-elected President Obama traveled to Turkey to reaffirm the Turkish-U.S. alliance and implore closer cooperation.<sup>28</sup> However, the euphoria surrounding Obama's visit was short-lived, and tension continued over Iran. These tensions have continued, and neither government appears to have a solution. The United States remains committed to its policy of coercion, while Turkey does not seem to be prepared to "toe the policy line" espoused by the Western powers. As a result, tension over how to deal with Iran now dominates the relationship. This issue has clouded the fact that both countries have a mutual interest in maintaining friendly ties.

If the United States and Turkey were to better understand each other's intentions in the Middle East, both could work together to maximize their political self-interest. However, before this can happen, both countries have to reassess their immediate policy interests in the region. This

includes working together to solve the Iranian nuclear crisis, along with many of the other festering conflicts throughout the Middle East. If the United States can capitalize on Turkey's new diplomatic enthusiasm, it will benefit U.S. interests in the region. This will entail the United States recognizing and acknowledging Turkish interests and working to ensure that Turkey's immediate interests are enhanced by cooperating with the United States. This will not be an easy task and will entail both countries working more closely together.

## Charting a New Path Forward: Redefining the U.S.-Turkish Partnership

The first steps towards reconciliation should include a clear enumeration of each country's foreign policy objectives. The tenets of each other's foreign policy are well known and widely available, should one choose to look; however the United States and Turkey should restate their immediate and long-term goals, the first of which should be the reconciliation of policy about Iran. This should take the form of an official communiqué from both governments and be reaffirmed through a series of official meetings designed to clarify questions about intent.

As of now, both countries share a common interest in ensuring that Iran does not acquire nuclear weapons. Turkey's President Abdullah Gul, despite supporting Iran's right to civilian nuclear technology, has indicated his support for a Middle East nuclear weapons-free zone in numerous interviews and during his speech to the United Nations.<sup>29</sup> Unfortunately, his recent calls come at a time when Turkey's relations with Israel have deteriorated. This has led to the widespread belief that Turkey is making a concerted effort to equate Iran's nuclear program with Israel's. In the United States, policymakers are growing increasingly frustrated with this stance because they do not want to equate Iran's nuclear program with Israel's. Instead, they wish to decouple the two issues and rally a coalition to continue its policy of "containment." This is reflective of the United States' long-held strategic objectives in the region. Turkey's recent foray into Israeli-Palestinian issues has upset Washington and, more importantly, goes against one of the major pillars in American foreign policy, namely the maintenance of Israel's military superiority vis-à-vis its Arab neighbors.

The diplomatic rhetoric has resulted in the Iranian and Israeli issues being connected. Thus, both sides expect some sort of concession on one issue before being prepared to make concessions on the other. This tit-for-tat thinking is counterproductive and limits the effectiveness of U.S.-

Turkish policy in the Middle East. In the interests of maximizing their policy interests, the United States and Turkey should make an effort to decouple Israel from their immediate policy issues in the Middle East. First, the United States should reiterate its support for the full implementation of the 1995 NPT Review Conference Resolution that "calls upon all States in the Middle East to take practical steps towards the establishment of an effectively verifiable Middle East zone free of weapons of mass destruction."<sup>30</sup> The United States did as much when it supported a UN Security Council Resolution reaffirming support for the 1995 Resolution in May 2010.<sup>31</sup> This statement echoes those of Gul and should serve as the basis for a complementary nonproliferation policy in the Middle East. These goals should be expanded upon and reiterated in a series of track one and track two diplomatic meetings that focus on the future of the Middle East, and on how the U.S. and Turkey can cooperate to achieve their objectives.

Secondly, the United States should take advantage of the recent fuel-swap arrangement that Turkey and Brazil negotiated with Iran in order to help resolve the Iranian nuclear crisis. The tepid response to Brazil's and Turkey's agreement with Iran cannot be taken back, but the United States could use Turkey's diplomatic credibility to further talks with Iran. For example, Iran has recently stated its willingness to return to talks over its nuclear program.<sup>32</sup> Thus far the United States has reaffirmed their commitment to renewed negotiations with Iran, did not mention imposing specific sanctions should these upcoming talks fail, and have indicated that a revised and updated agreement to deliver uranium fuel rods could be part of a confidence-building measure before many of the core issues are addressed.<sup>33</sup> As a first step, the United States and its Western allies could honor Iran's willingness to ship 1,200 kg of low-enriched uranium (LEU) to Turkey, in exchange for fuel rods for the Tehran Research Reactor.<sup>34</sup>

Critics of the deal are correct when they claim that the deal has little non-proliferation value because it does little to slow Iran's controversial nuclear program. Experts estimate that a country like Iran would need 1,200 kg of LEU to produce enough fissile material for one nuclear weapon, should Iran decide to enrich its LEU to 90 percent. When the Declaration was concluded, the IAEA had reported that Iran had accumulated 2,300 kg of LEU. The removal of 1,200 kg of LEU would allow Iran to replenish its LEU stockpile quickly, thus negating the nonproliferation benefits of the fuel-swap arrangement.<sup>35</sup>

The deal's intended purpose, when the permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany (P5+1) first proposed it in October 2009,

was a confidence-building mechanism meant to temporarily remove the possibility that Iran could further enrich its stockpiled LEU for a nuclear weapon. The United States and other members of the P5+1, including Russia, were quick to point out the Declaration's deficiencies. However, these probing criticisms disregarded Turkey's official policy on the subject. Ahmet Davutoglu, in an official statement released on the Turkish Foreign Ministry's website, pointed out that "critics of the Tehran declaration refer to the fact that it does not treat all problems surrounding Iran's nuclear program. This was never the purpose of the original agreement. But we [Turkey] believe that the declaration helps to address the entire issue by providing essential confidence-building, the key missing component thus far."<sup>36</sup>

Turkey argues that the P5+1 had been pursuing this deal, but had been unable to convince Iran to agree. Despite the likelihood that Iran was trying to derail the forthcoming UN sanctions, the fact remains that Turkey was able to convince Iran to ship out 1,200 kg of LEU in one shipment to a neutral third party. Up until this point, the P5+1 were unable to convince Iran to ship out its LEU to a neutral third site in one batch. Turkey argues that this agreement should be thought of as a first step towards achieving an overall diplomatic settlement. Davutoglu's website article, entitled "Giving Diplomacy a Chance," reflects the theoretical underpinning of the AK Party's foreign policy. In the interim, the United States should take advantage of Turkey's willingness and ability to engage Iran on sensitive issues. The P5+1 should invite Turkey and Brazil to the latest round of talks about Iran's nuclear program. As a starting point for new negotiations, the P5+1 should use the text of the Iran-Turkey-Brazil Declaration. The P5+1 should be prepared to accept an initial delivery of 1,200 kg of LEU, in exchange for a promise that Iran will accede to the IAEA's Additional Protocols and abide by the internationally accepted definition of Article 3.1 of its nuclear safeguards agreement with the IAEA.<sup>37</sup> If Iran were to accept these terms, it would be an important first step and help build confidence. It would also serve the United States and Turkey's overall strategic objectives. Turkey would have helped register a "diplomatic win" without the use of force, and the United States would have severely limited Iran's ability to quickly produce a nuclear weapon, and at the same time preserved Israeli security.

By including Turkey in the negotiations, the P5+1 gain a negotiating partner that has proven itself to be committed to strengthening its relations with Iran, while still pursuing a negotiated settlement to the nuclear crisis. Turkey's previous success could help break the cycle of negative reciprocity, and may lead to each side's making concessions. In short, any effort to break the persistence of zero-sum thinking can help move diplo-

Journal of Strategic Security

matic processes forward and help contribute to an eventual agreement. If Turkey were to be included in the talks, the United States and other members of the P5+1 could help shape the trajectory and positions of all of the negotiating parties. This would help unify the negotiating position of all parties involved and help create more transparency among all parties about their ultimate intentions.

## Conclusion: Identifying Common Interests

The divergence in opinion over the United States' and Turkey's Middle East policies stems from an ideological difference over how to implement foreign policy. The United States has long favored a policy of coercion, while Turkey has turned its back on this policy and is now convinced that "soft power" is best suited to achieving its objectives. Despite this, the two countries share an overwhelming interest in maintaining friendly ties and working together in the Middle East. In order to maintain these relations, both countries have to work together to clearly enumerate each other's immediate interests, identify areas of convergence, and respect areas of disagreement.

The most practical method moving forward is to decouple the Israeli issue from broader Middle East issues, quickly followed by working together to resolve the dispute over Iran's nuclear program. By doing so, the allies can redefine their alliance to meet the challenges each country faces in the 21st century. In the absence of the Communist threat, the two allies can chart a new path forward that favors regional diplomacy and the pursuit of each other's interests. This will necessitate a more open dialogue on each side that downplays Turkey's religion and the United States' coercive policy, in favor of each other's complementary interests. The fact of the matter remains that the two countries share more interests than differences over the threats and opportunities they face.

## About the Author

Aaron Stein is a research fellow at the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation in Istanbul, where he works on Turkey's security policy and how Turkey perceives the Iranian nuclear program. He holds a B.A. in Political Science from the University of San Francisco and an M.A. in International Policy Studies with a specialization in Nuclear Nonproliferation from the Monterey Institute of International Studies. Aaron's areas of interest include nonproliferation, weapons of mass destruction, and

Iranian and Turkish politics. His work has appeared in *Today's Zaman*, *World Politics Review*, the *Nuclear Threat Initiative* and the Center for Nonproliferation Studies websites.

## References

- 1 Ömer Taspinar, "Turkey's Middle East Policies: Between Neo-Ottomanism and Kemalism," *Carnegie Papers*, No. 10 (September 2008): 14, available at: [http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/emec10\\_taspinar\\_final.pdf](http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/emec10_taspinar_final.pdf).
- 2 "Turkey's Crises over Iran and Israel," *The International Crisis Group Europe Report* (September 2010).
- 3 Ethan Bronner, "Israel Holds Peace Talks with Syria," *New York Times*, May 22, 2008, available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/22/world/middleeast/22mideast.html>.
- 4 Mahir Zeynalov, "Turkey Not Bound to Bilateral EU, U.S. Sanctions on Iran," *Today's Zaman*, September 26, 2010, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/66v9vkh> ([www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/news-222690-100-turkey-not-bound-to-bilateral-eu-us-sanctions-on-iran.html](http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/news-222690-100-turkey-not-bound-to-bilateral-eu-us-sanctions-on-iran.html)).
- 5 Robert Tait, "'Iran Is a Friend:' Turkish PM Exposes Nuclear Rift in NATO," *The Guardian*, October 26, 2009.
- 6 F. Stephen Larrabee, "Turkey Rediscovered the Middle East," *Foreign Affairs* 86:4 (July/August 2007): 103; Roula Khalaf and Delphine Strauss, "Turkey Throws Sanctions Lifeline to Iran," *The Financial Times* July 25, 2010, available at: <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/611b301e-97d5-11df-b218-00144feab49a.html>.
- 7 Stephen M. Walt, "The New Saudi Arms Deal," *Foreign Policy*, September 21, 2010, available at: [http://walt.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/09/21/the\\_new\\_saudi\\_arms\\_deal](http://walt.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/09/21/the_new_saudi_arms_deal).
- 8 Ömer Taşpinar, "The Anatomy of Turkey's Iran Policy (I)," *Today's Zaman*, August 2, 2010, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/6b2lk2q> ([www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/columnists-217860-the-anatomy-of-turkeys-iran-policy-ii.html](http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/columnists-217860-the-anatomy-of-turkeys-iran-policy-ii.html)).
- 9 Somel, Selçuk Akşin, *Historical Dictionary of the Ottoman Empire* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press Inc., 2003), 134.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 John Calabrese, "Turkey and Iran: Limits of a Stable Relationship," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 25:1 (May 1998).
- 12 Keddie, Nikkie R., *Modern Iran: Roots and Result of Revolution* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 83.
- 13 Pope, Hugh and Nicole Pope, *Turkey Unveiled: A History of Modern Turkey* (New York: The Overlook Press, 2004), 59; Keddie, 83.

- 14 In Turkey, this new sense of national identity was codified in the Turkish Constitution and is referred to as the Six Arrows Concept. For more information please refer to: Sevgi Drorian, "Turkey: Security, State and Society in Troubled Times," *European Security* 14:2 (2005): 255–275.
- 15 Gregory Gause argues that the post-War history in the Middle East demonstrates "a recurrent theme in international politics in the "rejection by powerful local actors of the state system bequeathed to the region by European Colonialism." For more information about the rejection of state sovereignty by actors in the Middle East, please refer to: F. Gregory Gause, "Sovereignty, Statecraft, and Stability in the Middle East," *Journal of International Affairs* 45:2 (Winter 2002): 441–469.
- 16 Alastair Crooke, "The Strange Tale of Iran and Israel," *Le Monde Diplomatique* (February 2009), available at: <http://mondediplo.com/2009/02/05iran>.
- 17 Melvyn P. Leffler, "Diplomacy, and the Cold War: The United States, Turkey, and NATO, 1945–1952," *The Journal of American History* 71:4 (March 1985): 807–825.
- 18 Calabrese, 77.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Taspinar, "Turkey's Middle East Policies: Between Neo-Ottomanism and Kemalism," 21–22.
- 22 F. Stephen Larrabee, "Turkey Rediscovered the Middle East," *Foreign Affairs* 86:4 (July/August 2007).
- 23 Farah Naaz, "Turkey and the Middle East in the 1990s," *Strategic Analysis* 23:9 (December 1999).
- 24 David Pupkin, "Iran-Turkey Economic Relations: What Their Rapid Growth Means for Iran's Nuclear Program," *American Enterprise Institute*, June 24, 2010, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/5vyvuly> ([www.irantracker.org/analysis/iran-turkey-economic-relations-what-their-rapid-growth-means-iran-s-nuclear-program](http://www.irantracker.org/analysis/iran-turkey-economic-relations-what-their-rapid-growth-means-iran-s-nuclear-program)).
- 25 "Gas Transfer to Europe Key in Turkey-Iran Relations," *Today's Zaman*, February 4, 2010, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/6dp55ao> ([www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/news-200505-gas-transfer-to-europe-key-in-turkey-iran-relations.html](http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/news-200505-gas-transfer-to-europe-key-in-turkey-iran-relations.html)).
- 26 Russia, Iraq, and Greece were also removed from the list. For more information, please refer to: "Russia, Iran, Iraq, Greece no longer 'National Threat' to Turkey," *Hürriyet Daily News* (23 August 2010), available at: <http://tinyurl.com/6jjsrnl> ([www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=turkey-to-remove-iran-from-enemies-watchlist-2010-08-23](http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=turkey-to-remove-iran-from-enemies-watchlist-2010-08-23)); Aslı Aydıntaşbaş, "Kırmızı kitapta köklü değişim," *Milîyet*, August 23, 2010, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/63va6jd> ([www.mil-liyet.com.tr/kirmizi-kitapta-koklu-degisim/asli-aydintasbas/siyaset/yazardetay/23.08.2010/1279655/default.htm](http://www.mil-liyet.com.tr/kirmizi-kitapta-koklu-degisim/asli-aydintasbas/siyaset/yazardetay/23.08.2010/1279655/default.htm)).
- 27 "Turkey to Remove Iran from Enemies Watchlist," *Agence France Presse*, August 24, 2010; see also: "Kırmızı Kitap'tan Cemaatler Çıkıyor!," *CNN Türk*, August 23, 2010, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/4ktyus8> ([www.cnntrk.com/2010/turkiye/06/28/kirmizi.kitaptan.cemaatler.cikiyor/581441.0/index.html](http://www.cnntrk.com/2010/turkiye/06/28/kirmizi.kitaptan.cemaatler.cikiyor/581441.0/index.html)).

Resetting U.S.-Turkish Relations: Charting a New Way Forward

- 28 Remarks of President Barack Obama—As Prepared for Delivery, Address to Turkish Parliament, *BBC News*, April 9, 2009, available at: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/06\\_04\\_09\\_obamaspeech.pdf](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/06_04_09_obamaspeech.pdf).
- 29 "Turkish President to Urge Mideast Nuclear-Free Zone at UN Summit," *Hurriyet Daily News*, September 21, 2010, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/47kpmx> ([www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=ap-interview-gul-backs-mideast-nuclear-free-zone-2010-09-21](http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=ap-interview-gul-backs-mideast-nuclear-free-zone-2010-09-21)).
- 30 1995 Review and Extension Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, *United Nations*, April 17–May 12, 1995, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/6aufqs5> ([www.un.org/disarmament/WMD/Nuclear/1995-NPT/pdf/Resolution\\_MiddleEast.pdf](http://www.un.org/disarmament/WMD/Nuclear/1995-NPT/pdf/Resolution_MiddleEast.pdf)).
- 31 "UN Backs 'Nuclear-Free' Middle East," *Al Jazeera English*, May 6, 2010 available at: <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/americas/2010/05/2010561726294993.html>.
- 32 Glenn Kessler, "Iran Signals Interest in Talks on Nuclear Program, Diplomats Say," *Washington Post*, September 23, 2010, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/6hd25fu> ([www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/09/22/AR2010092205917.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/09/22/AR2010092205917.html)).
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Joint Declaration by Iran, Turkey, and Brazil, *The Guardian*, May 17, 2010, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/382dp7e> ([www.guardian.co.uk/world/julian-borger-global-security-blog/2010/may/17/iran-brazil-turkey-nuclear](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/julian-borger-global-security-blog/2010/may/17/iran-brazil-turkey-nuclear)).
- 35 "Iran's Proposed LEU Deal: Skeptical But Awaiting Clarification," *The Institute for Science and International Security*, May 17, 2010, available at: [http://www.isisnucleariran.org/assets/pdf/Iran\\_LEU\\_deal\\_17May2010.pdf](http://www.isisnucleariran.org/assets/pdf/Iran_LEU_deal_17May2010.pdf).
- 36 Ahmet Davutoglu, "Giving Diplomacy a Chance," *Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, May 26, 2010, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/6gorean> ([www.mfa.gov.tr/article-by-foreign-minister-of-turkey-h\\_e-ahmet-davutoglu-and-celso-amorim-published-in-new-york-times-newspaper-on-26-may-2010.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/article-by-foreign-minister-of-turkey-h_e-ahmet-davutoglu-and-celso-amorim-published-in-new-york-times-newspaper-on-26-may-2010.en.mfa)).
- 37 Report by the Director General, "Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement and relevant provisions of Security Council resolutions 1737 (2006), 1747 (2007), 1803 (2008), and 1835 (2008) in the Islamic Republic of Iran," *International Atomic Energy Agency*, May 31, 2010, available at: <http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Board/2010/gov2010-28.pdf>; James M. Acton, "Iran Violated International Obligations on Qom Facility," *Proliferation Analysis, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, September 25, 2009, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/653hso5> ([www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=23884](http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=23884)).

Journal of Strategic Security