

**Wednesday, July 28, 2010**

**Verbatim, as delivered**

## **Chairman Howard L. Berman's opening statement at hearing, "Turkey's New Foreign Policy Direction: Implications for U.S.-Turkish Relations"**

The purpose of this hearing is to gain insight into the changes in the foreign-policy direction of our long-time ally Turkey. Now the sixteenth-largest economy in the world, Turkey is a complex country, endowed by geography with circumstances that connect Turkey to developments in at least a half-dozen regions and sub-regions.

Turkey's foreign policy is also complex. It is an important ally to the United States in NATO and now particularly in Afghanistan, where it has 1,700 troops, heads the Kabul Regional Command, and makes other important contributions. Turkey is also a critical transit point for provisions for our troops in Iraq.

But it is Turkey's recent and worrisome policy turns regarding Iran, Israel, and the Palestinians – and the larger implications of those policies – that are likely to form the basis of much of today's discussion.

One State Department official recently put it this way: "There is a lot of questioning going on about Turkey's orientation and its ongoing commitment to strategic partnership with the United States."

I am among those who have such concerns. That is why we are holding the first full-committee hearing devoted exclusively to Turkey within my memory.

For some people, concerns about Turkey's direction first came to the fore almost immediately in November 2002, when the religiously-oriented AK Party won a powerful parliamentary majority. For others it was in March 2003, when the Turkish parliament voted down the US request to allow the US Fourth Infantry Division to cross Turkish territory as part of the Iraq war.

I was not in either of those groups. After the AK Party was elected, I was encouraged by their focus on internal reform and the European Union as well as by the hopeful prospect that AK would be a model for a moderate Islam that would inspire others throughout the Islamic world. I have also been encouraged by what has, at times, been a foreign policy less rigid and less nationalistic than traditional Turkish foreign policy.

But for me the evidence of a negative foreign-policy shift by the AK Party government has been clear at least since February 2006, when Turkey invited Hamas leader Khaled Meshal for a visit. Until then, Turkey has seemed as solidly anti-terrorist as any country in the world. At the time, the Turks indicated that they merely hoped to moderate Hamas, but now, with the passage of well over four years of regular contacts between Hamas and Turkey, it is clear that Hamas hasn't changed at all – but Turkey has. And the contacts continue, more intensively than ever.

The intensity of Prime Minister Erdogan's anger at Israel became clear for all to see at Davos in February 2009. Since that time Turkey's growing closeness with Iran has added, for many of us, a new dimension of outrage and concern.

Concerns about Turkey hit a new peak with the flotilla incident, the apparent ties between the AK Party and the Hamas-associated non-governmental organization IHH, and then the Turkish vote against UN Security Council resolution 1929, the historic sanctions resolution aimed at curbing Iran's nuclear program. Earlier this week Turkey's finance minister asserted that his nation would boost trade with Iran, while ignoring all non-UN sanctions. That's an upsetting position when Russia takes it, but it is appalling when it comes from an ally.

All of these developments raise many questions:

Is Turkey moving away from the West? Or is it merely taking independent positions regarding the Palestinians and Iran – however objectionable to us – while otherwise remaining committed to the Western alliance?

Is the AK Party government seeking greater leadership in the Middle East, and, if so, what does that mean?

What is the AK Party's vision for Turkey? Is it committed to democracy? To European Union membership?

And how crucial is Turkey to us as an ally? How important is the United States to Turkey's interests? How does Turkey view its alliance with the U.S.?

Certain points are beyond dispute:

–First, Turkey is indeed seeking to enhance its standing in the Middle East – some say, it is seeking to lead the Middle East – and it is using criticism of Israel and backing for Hamas to support that bid.

–Second, Turkish contacts with Hamas are deeply offensive. They undermine the pro-peace Palestinian Authority and ultimately, they undermine prospects for peace.

And, although we can't compel Turkey to view Hamas as a terrorist group – Prime Minister Erdogan has labeled it a "resistance" group – we should expect Ankara to respect the terrorism list of an important ally, namely, the United States.

This is particularly true when the U.S. is actively aiding Turkey in its fight against the Kurdish separatist terrorist group known as PKK. The US has been providing Turkey real-time, "actionable" intelligence against the PKK since December 2007 in response to a direct appeal from Prime Minister Erdogan.

–Third, it is critical that Turkey acknowledge the genocide committed by the Ottoman Empire against the Armenian people during World War I. That's why this Committee has repeatedly passed measures recognizing the Genocide and calling on the President to do likewise. I believe that Turks, once they come to terms with their past, will discover that they have relieved themselves and their children of an immense moral burden.

–Fourth, we also want to see more movement on the Cyprus issue. We want to make sure that the new Turkish Cypriot leader, who has always opposed a solution, negotiates in the spirit of the UN resolutions and inter-communal agreements that require a solution. It's time for Turkey to draw down its absurdly high troop level in northern Cyprus. And Turkey should cease settling Turkish citizens in northern Cyprus. Northern Cyprus is not sovereign Turkish territory.

–Fifth, we want to see true press freedom in Turkey. It is certainly not acceptable to manipulate the tax-system to force a newspaper publisher to temper his criticism of the government. And it is not acceptable for the prime minister to call for a boycott of newspapers he doesn't like. We think of Turkey as a democracy, and these practices of press intimidation have no place in democracies.

We also want full freedom for religious minorities in Turkey. It is time for Turkey to recognize the ecumenical nature of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate and it is certainly time for Turkey to allow its Greek Orthodox citizens to re-open Halki Seminary.

Not all of these problems began with AK Party control of government. In fact, Turkish positions regarding Cyprus, the Ecumenical patriarchate, and the Armenian Genocide reflect longstanding Turkish government positions. But the AK Party government has brought to the fore new issues of concern. I am eager to hear our witnesses' views as to just how concerned we should be, what course Turkey is likely to take in the future, and what, if anything, our government should be doing differently in its policy toward Turkey.