

“Turkey’s New Foreign Policy Direction: Implications for U.S.-Turkish Relations”

Testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee

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Chairman Berman, Ranking Member Ros-Lehtinen, Honorable Members. Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Prime Minister Erdoğan, and the Justice and Development Party (AKP) have changed Turkey fundamentally. They do not simply seek good relations with their Arab neighbors and Iran. Instead, they favor the most radical elements in regional struggles, hence their embrace of Syria over Lebanon and of Hamas over Fatah, and their endorsement Iran’s nuclear program.

Over the last 8 years, the AKP government has reoriented Turkey toward the Arab and Iranian Middle East, not to facilitate bridge-building to the West, but in an effort to play a leadership role not only in the Middle East but also among Islamic countries more broadly. Unfortunately, that leadership is increasingly oriented around the most extreme elements, including Iran, Syria and the terrorist Hamas leadership of Gaza.

In addition, Erdoğan has defended Sudan's Omar Hassan al-Bashir, who had been indicted on charges of genocide by the International Criminal Court, and personally vouched for Yasin al-Qadi, whom the U.S. Treasury department has labeled a “specially designated global terrorist” for his support of al-Qaeda.

For too long, American diplomats and officials in both the Barack Obama and George W. Bush administrations have been in denial: They have embraced Turkey as they wished it to be rather than calibrate policy to the reality of what Turkey has become. This is neither realism nor the basis of sound foreign policy.

Some see Erdoğan’s motive in Turkish reaction to European slights and anger at the Iraq war. However, Turkey’s radical turn is not reactive. Neither Iraq nor failure to gain acceptance to the European Union explain Erdoğan’s personal endorsement of al-Qaeda financiers, or his government’s support for crude anti-American and anti-Semitic propaganda, nor his own rejection of Western liberalism, all of which have led Turkey to become and, according to the 2010 Pew Global Attitudes survey, remain among the world’s most anti-American countries.

Evidence is insurmountable that Erdoğan has implemented a deliberate plan to send Turkey on a fundamentally different trajectory, both in foreign policy and in domestic order. He tells Western diplomats he is aggrieved by the European Union’s refusal to admit Turkey, but then chides

the European Court of Human Rights for its failure to consult Islamic scholars prior to ruling. Turkish journalists and economists say privately that the AKP has used control of the national banking board to channel foreign money to party coffers and has used the security services to harass and leak with impunity illegal tapes of private conversations.

Despite the fact that Turkey remains a nominal democracy, hope in a revitalized opposition is misplaced. While recent polls suggest that opposition leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu is running even with Erdoğan, the changes the AKP have made in Turkey over the past eight years cannot easily be undone: The AKP has undermined the secular nature of education at all levels, undercut the independence of the judiciary, used security forces to eavesdrop on domestic political opponents, and constrained the independence of the press. Indeed, Prime Minister Erdoğan's harassment of journalists and editors in Turkey is reminiscent of Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's treatment of the press.

Even if the opposition forces Erdoğan into a coalition, the AKP's behavior over the past eight years should raise long-term concerns about rapid shifts in Turkey's orientation. The alliance with Turkey, NATO's southern and only Muslim bulwark, has become an article of faith despite growing evidence Turkey is neither a consistently reliable ally nor a force of moderation among Muslims.

That does not mean that the United States should dispense with its partnership with Turkey. Turkey remains a

member of NATO and conducts more heavy lifting in Afghanistan than many of our European allies. Incirlik Air Base provides key logistic support for U.S. forces both in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Certainly, Turkey's residual military assistance is helpful, and the United States should not hasten its end. At the same time, U.S. policymakers should no longer assume Turkish goodwill.

Accordingly, the U.S. government should consider several issues relative to its relationship with Turkey:

- Precisely because the F-35 will be the fighter the U.S. Air Force will most depend on to maintain air superiority in the decades ahead, the decision to sell F-35s to Turkey, whose future foreign policy orientation is in question, should be reviewed by appropriate Defense Department elements to assess possible loss of critical technology to states of concern. Congress should mandate that review, specify that it be completed within the year, and then make it available to the appropriate committees of Congress.
- While Incirlik remains a key regional base, the Turkish government likes to make its use contingent upon the U.S. Congress not passing an Armenian Genocide Resolution. When the Pentagon renegotiates its lease, Ankara's enthusiasm to seek unrelated concessions and to micromanage the missions flown from Incirlik suggests a lack of

ideological affinity on security concerns. It is strategic malpractice not to advance contingency plans for the day when Turkey no longer allows the U.S. Air Force to use Incirlik or seeks to extract too high a price. The United States should develop contingency facilities in NATO member Romania and perhaps Georgia and Azerbaijan. At the very least, developing the U.S. presence at the Mihail Kogalniceanu Air Base near Constanza will enhance the U.S. position during the next round of lease renewal negotiations.

- While the United States welcomes Turkish involvement in the fight to stabilize Afghanistan, the current Turkish government has not done enough to stop Turkish jihadists from traveling to Afghanistan to fight for the wrong side. Taifetul Mansura, a Turkish Islamist group, has been increasingly active in its support for the Taliban, as have Chechen Jihadists who receive safe-haven in Turkey.
- The United States should continue to support Turkey's fight against Kurdish terrorism but, simultaneously, must pressure Ankara to acknowledge that its willingness to legitimize foreign terrorist groups based on the AKP's ideological affinity hampers Turkey's own fight against terrorism and could ultimately undercut Turkey's territorial integrity.
- The Armenian Genocide issue remains a hot-button issue in Turkey and among Armenian-Americans. Within the scholarly community, there is no

consensus: Most genocide studies scholars say that the Ottomans committed deliberate genocide against the Armenian community, but many Middle East scholars—Bernard Lewis, Andrew Mango—and military historians like Eric Erickson find the events a tragic outgrowth of fighting in World War I rather than genocide. Congress should not silence debate among historians; rather it should seek to facilitate it and demand that Turkey make its Ottoman archives open to all scholars, regardless of ethnicity, religion, or political perspective.

Thank you for your attention. I look forward to any questions you may have.