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Geopolitics from Below: Student Perceptions of Contemporary U.S. – Turkey Relations

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This paper analyzes a survey involving 288 participants from three Turkish universities (Sabanci University, Gebze Institute of Technology, and Istanbul University) that was carried out to evaluate and analyze students' opinions on U.S.–Turkey bilateral relations. This survey was intended to ascertain the wider geopolitical perspectives of Turkish university students on the relationship between the two countries. It attempted to give a voice to those actually affected by policies emerging from this bilateral relationship, and thus open another empirical and “grounded” window on the students' perceptions of bilateral situations. The survey asks a range of questions about the nature of U.S.–Turkey relations, current constraints and obstacles in the relationship, and the future prospects and strengths of ties between the two countries. The survey results reveal an increased scrutiny of the viability of this strategic partnership, especially given the impact of the U.S. war in Iraq and its ramifications for Iraqi and Turkish Kurds.

Key words: U.S.–Turkey relations, geopolitics, student opinions, Iraq War, Middle East

Ce travail analyse le contenu d'une enquête menée auprès de 288 personnes dans trois universités turques (Université Sabanci, Institut de Technologie Gebze et l'Université d'Istanbul) pour évaluer le point de vue des étudiants sur les relations bilatérales entre les États-Unis et la Turquie. L'enquête visait à cerner les lectures

géopolitiques des étudiants turcs quant aux relations entre les deux pays. Elle a tenté de faire entendre ceux directement affectés par les politiques qui ont émergé de ces relations bilatérales afin d'obtenir un regard empirique différent, basé sur la perception des étudiants de ces situations bilatérales. L'enquête leur a posé une série de questions sur la nature des relations turco-américaines, les contraintes et les obstacles actuels affectant ces relations, ainsi que les perspectives futures et les forces des liens entre les deux pays. Les résultats dévoilent un regard critique sur la viabilité de ce partenariat stratégique, surtout au sujet de l'impact de la guerre américaine en Irak et de ses conséquences pour les Kurdes irakiens et turcs.

Mots clés : Relations américano-turques, géopolitique, opinions estudiantines, guerre d'Irak ; Moyen-Orient

Introduction

Geopolitics is the study of the distributions, concentrations, and divisions of power and their influence on the conduct of world politics (Agnew 2003). In its original usage, the term referred to the impacts of the spatial organization of continents and oceans, and of the distribution of natural and human resources, on interstate relations. Today, however, it also includes examinations of all the geographical implications that enter into

the making of world politics (as in critical geopolitics) and how these change in concert with material conditions (historical geopolitics; Agnew 2003). As Gearoid O'Tuathail and Simon Dalby emphasize,

geopolitics saturates the everyday life of states and nations. Its sites of production are multiple and pervasive, both “high” (like a national security memorandum) and “low” (like the headline of a tabloid newspaper), visual (like the images that move states to act) and discursive (like the speeches that justify military actions), traditional (like religious motifs in foreign policy discourse) and postmodern (like information management and cyberwar). (O'Tuathail and Dalby 1998, 5)

“Critical” geopolitics, as defined by O'Tuathail and Dalby, investigates geopolitics as social, cultural, and political practice rather than as a “manifest and legible” reality of world politics (1998, 2). Critical geopolitics thus attempts to “deconstruct” the structures and representations used by those in power to shape the way individuals understand international issues (Vujakovic 1999, 45) and to focus on geopolitics as practised “from below”—that is, by exploring the geopolitical perceptions and practices of broader segments of society, rather than those of state officials and elites alone. Indeed, broader perceptions of geopolitical issues are an important topic for geopolitical analysis, particularly in societies with democratic structures of governance where the general population can influence its country's bilateral relations with other states through voting and other democratic practices. This “from below” approach, however, is largely absent from contemporary discussions of geopolitics. The purpose of this study was thus to assess and analyze the perceptions of one particular segment of Turkish society—Turkish university students—regarding U.S.–Turkey relations and the possible factors behind these perceptions. University students were chosen for two primary reasons: first, because they represent a broad cross-section of society

whose social, cultural, and political practices may affect the U.S.–Turkey relationship; and, second, because students are arguably the future leaders and elites of Turkish society, whose practices have the potential to produce new geopolitical realities.

Methodology

The study is built upon a survey conducted at three Turkish universities—Istanbul University and Sabanci University in Istanbul and Gebze Institute of Technology in Kocaeli—in December 2005 and January 2006. The empirical data gathered by surveying 288 Turkish university students are the primary data source for the study. Turkish university students were chosen as the target population for the survey because they represent the future leaders of Turkey, as noted above, and because they arguably have the capability to evaluate U.S.–Turkey relations better than any other sector of Turkish society. That is, in developing countries such as Turkey, the public lacks a tradition of sharing their opinions with survey takers, and much of the public is not literate enough to comprehend and respond appropriately to questions. Turkish university students, however, are generally more responsive to surveys, and their opinions will reflect a more educated, upwardly mobile, and probably privileged segment of the Turkish population. This bias works in favour of the research by creating a population that is familiar with the issues at hand. Global geo-strategic theories such as Mackinder's Heartland theory, Spykman's Rimlands theory, and Cohen's Shatterbelt/Gateway theory (see Gokmen, de Socio, and Falah 2008) typically focus on geopolitics “from above,” and are preoccupied with the contest between superpowers, to such an extent that the geopolitical perspectives of the general populations of the regions are distorted or ignored altogether (Drysdale and Blake 1985, 28). Therefore, the present survey aimed to ascertain the wider

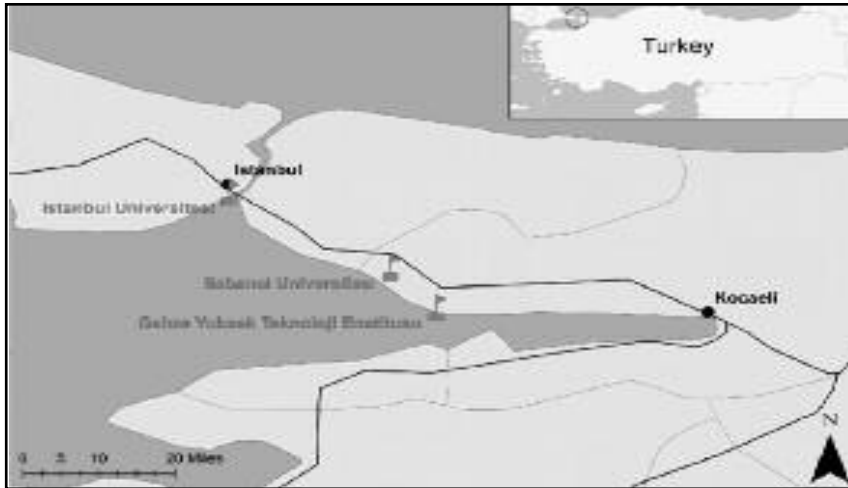


FIGURE 1
Locations of the three Turkish universities surveyed

TABLE 1
Distribution of respondents by university

Universities	n	%
Sabancı University	110	38.2
Gebze Institute of Technology	91	31.6
Istanbul University	87	31.6
Total	288	100.0

Source: M. Gokmen, fieldwork, January 2006

geopolitical perspectives of Turkish university students on the relationship between Turkey and the United States, and to give a voice to those actually affected by policies emerging from this bilateral relationship.

The survey asked a range of questions about the nature of U.S.–Turkey relations, current constraints and obstacles in the relationship, and the future prospects and strengths of ties between Turkey and the United States. The respondents were a convenience sample of students in their university's student union cafeteria. The students were notified of the survey by a sign set up in the area where the survey was conducted. The lead author (MG) conducted the survey at each university. At the time the survey started, participants received a letter explaining the survey, which ensured that all subjects understood that their participation was voluntary, that they could withdraw at

any time without penalty, and that their responses would remain confidential.

Selecting the Universities

Students at three universities participated in the survey (see Table 1 and Figure 1). In total, 288 questionnaires were distributed at three separate universities: Sabancı University, Gebze Institute of Technology, and Istanbul University. These three were chosen primarily for two reasons. First, they represent a cross-section of sentiments in Turkey with respect to politics and internal relations. Second, Istanbul and Kocaeli provinces are important cultural, historical, and industrial centres of Turkey and represent almost 20 % of Turkey's overall population. The inhabitants of these two provinces are mostly internal migrants from many cities throughout Turkey; the universities in these provinces therefore enrol a significant number of students from different regions of Turkey, and most of the students are temporary residents of these provinces. Arguably, the opinions of these students may represent a broad cross-section of Turkish public opinion on U.S.–Turkey bilateral relations.

Sabancı University (SU) represents the liberal, Western-leaning group that wants

Turkey to shift toward American and Western countries and favours full integration into the European Union and all that such a shift may entail. SU is a private research institution located in Istanbul; founded in 1994, it is the only university in Turkey that offers a liberal arts undergraduate curriculum. SU is a small and highly focused university with 2 734 undergraduates and 556 graduate students, maintaining a strong emphasis on the social and natural sciences. Undergraduate students enroll in SU after a rigorous screening in Turkey's annual nationwide Student Selection Examination (OSS), which comprises a verbal and a quantitative section. Based on SU student selection and placement success within the last four OSS examinations, 30 % of the university's students were among the top 1 000 candidates nationwide.

Gebze Institute of Technology (GIT) represents the rightist-centre group that sees Turkey on the crossroads between West and East. GIT was established to provide graduate programs; currently there are approximately 1 500 MA/MS and PhD students studying in the Departments of Environmental Engineering, Computer Engineering, Electronics Engineering, Materials Science and Engineering, Energy Systems, Geodesy and Photogrammetrics, Architecture, City and Regional Planning, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Mathematics, and Business Administration.

Although it has been ruled by a motivated republican board and a group of professors, Istanbul University (IU) represents the conservative-religious group who see Turkey as more of a Muslim and Middle Eastern country with its own heritage and interests that are national and regional. IU currently has 17 faculties on five campuses and a teaching staff of 2 000 professors and associates and 4 000 assistants. More than 60 000 undergraduate and 8 000 graduate students take the courses offered by the university every year. IU graduates have frequently been the main source of academic

staff for the Turkish university system; the university has also produced a very large number of Turkish bureaucrats, professionals, and business people.

Demographic Characteristics of Survey Respondents

Table 1 indicates the distribution of questionnaires among the three universities. There is fairly equal distribution among the universities; Sabanci University has a slightly larger sample, while the other two are almost equal. The aim of the study was to survey at least 110 students at each university and thus obtain 330 students' opinions on U.S.–Turkey bilateral relations. The lead author spent one week at each university and surveyed these numbers of students. Because of time constraints, he could not spend more time at GIT or IU to reach the target of 110 respondents. In fact, the distribution of respondents among universities (see Table 1) may give some indication of students' level of willingness to give their opinions on U.S.–Turkey bilateral relations, even though the same amount of time and effort was expended to obtain these opinions. Perhaps these differences reflect the political cultures of the various universities.

The participants were 49.3 % male and 50.7 % female (see Table 2). The numbers of male and female participants are almost equal across the three universities, as Table 2 indicates, with four more women than men. This is an interesting result, in terms of female students' willingness to express their opinions, and contrasts with most contemporary gender studies of Turkish society and with the general Western perception of Muslim women in predominantly Muslim countries such as Turkey. Women who are earning university degrees may be different from those who are the subject of such studies. In terms of the strength of the survey analysis, having almost equal numbers of male and female participants encouraged us to investigate the influence of gender on the

TABLE 2

Gender profile of survey respondents

Gender	n	%
Male	142	49.3
Female	146	50.7
Total	288	100.0

Source: M. Gokmen, fieldwork, January 2006

outcomes of specific questions.

Four different age groups can be observed among respondents: 54.1 % of participants were 18–20 years old; 26.4 % were between 21 and 23; 16.7 % were between 24 and 27; and 2.6 % were between 28 and 35 years old. As this age distribution indicates, the survey sample was composed of very young people who are university students and, quite possibly, the future leaders of Turkey. Their opinions on U.S.–Turkey bilateral relations are important for future predictions on the long-standing alliance of the American and Turkish governments.

Most students in Turkey are supported by their parents, and this often determines which university a student attends. Parent income profiles of the participants were obtained via the following questionnaire item: “Which of the following best describes the level of your parents’ income?” Participants indicated their responses on a scale from “much higher” to “much lower” than the average Turkish household’s (Table 3). The results must be approached with caution, since they are based on students’ perceptions and not on actual knowledge of their parents’ income. Table 3 shows that most of the students (71.2 %) come from families whose incomes are “equal to” or “slightly higher” than the average; the “much higher” and “slightly lower” income categories are almost equal. This distribution is expected and ensures a reliable cross-section of classes. In addition, only a very small number of students (3.5 %) did not want to reveal their parents’ income level.

Table 4 provides information about respondents’ self-perceived political inclinations. Overall, 26.4 % of respondents

TABLE 3

Parent income profiles of participants in relation to the average income of Turkish households

Parents’ Income Profile	n	%
Much lower	4	1.4
Slightly lower	32	11.1
Equal	90	31.3
Slightly higher	115	39.9
Much higher	37	12.8
No answer	10	3.5
Total	288	100.0

Source: M. Gokmen, fieldwork, January 2006

described their political ideology as “liberal,” and a further 26.4 % as “a mixture of liberal and conservative”; 14.9 % reported “other beliefs,” including “nationalist,” “leftist,” “Islamist,” “anti-Americanist,” and “Marxist.” Some 13.5 % of respondents described their political ideology as “conservative,” 3.5 % as “very liberal,” and 3.1 % as “very conservative”; 12.2 % did not give an opinion (see Table 4). As Table 4 demonstrates, the frequency of answers to this question produce interesting results. Three categories of answers can easily be identified. In the first category, “liberal” and “a mixture of liberal and conservative” have the highest number of answers; the frequencies of these two answers are perfectly equal. In the second category, “conservative” and “other ideologies” groups have the second-highest number of answers; the frequencies of these two answers are almost equal. In the third category, “very liberal” and “very conservative” groups have the lowest number of answers, and again the frequencies are almost equal. It is also noteworthy that for this question, relative to the question addressing parents’ income level, a very high number of students did not want disclose their “political ideology” (12.2 % vs. 3.5 %). The number of students who opted to identify their “political ideology” as “other” seems relatively high as well, at 14.9 %.

Table 5 reports students’ self-perceived religious inclinations. A total of 29.9 %

TABLE 4

Self-described political ideology profile of participants

Political Ideology	n	%
Very liberal	10	3.5
Liberal	76	26.4
Mix of liberal and conservative	76	26.4
Conservative	39	13.5
Very conservative	9	3.1
Other	43	14.9
No answer	35	12.2
Total	288	100.0

Source: M. Gokmen, fieldwork, January 2006

described themselves as “secular,” and 29.5 % described their beliefs as “a mixture of secular and religious.” A further 13.9 % described themselves as “very secular,” 12.8 % as “religious,” and 4.2 % as “very religious”; 4.2 % of respondents reported “other beliefs” (such as “atheist,” “deist,” and “non-religious”), and 5.6 % did not give an answer (see Table 5). Of special interest is that the answers break down into three main categories: “secular” and “a mixture of secular and religious” received the highest number of answers, and their frequencies are almost equal; the category combining “religious and “very secular” has the second-highest number of answers, and the frequency of the two is almost equal, but about half that of the first category. The third category consists of the smallest groups, “very religious” and “other beliefs,” which received perfectly equal numbers of answers. Very few students did not answer this question, compared to the “political ideology” question (5.6 % vs. 12.2 %), suggesting that they were more comfortable revealing their “religious beliefs” than their “political ideology.” This result may be attributed to the fact that in Turkey, a religious identification may be more acceptable than a political identification. Interestingly, the number of students who reported “other beliefs” is low (4.2 %) in comparison to the equivalent number for the “political ideology” question (14.9 %). This may be

Table 5

Self-described religious belief profile of participants

Religious Beliefs	n	%
Very secular	40	13.9
Secular	86	29.9
Mix of secular and religious	85	29.5
Religious	37	12.8
Very religious	12	4.2
Other beliefs	12	4.2
No answer	16	5.6
Total	288	100.0

Source: M. Gokmen, fieldwork, January 2006

evidence of Turkey’s politically diverse and cosmopolitan character; the country has 21 political parties.

In summary, the study sample consists of people with diverse backgrounds in terms of family income, political ideology, and religious belief. Arguably, this fact increases the validity of the survey results in terms of capturing the different voices and sentiments of the Turkish population. It is important that people from all social strata be represented in this study in order to capture the geopolitical perspectives. The sample is also almost equally distributed in terms of gender; it is important to obtain the opinions of women, in order not to run analyses based solely on male opinions. The survey sample exhibits a notable concentration on a younger age group (18–23), which accounts for 80.5 % of participants. Indeed, ensuring a younger participant group for the survey by targeting university students was one of the aims of the study, because of the fact that, arguably, this demographic group’s opinions reflect those of an educated, upwardly mobile, and probably privileged segment of the Turkish population.

Student Survey: The Nature of U.S.–Turkey Bilateral Relations

Public opinion is a crucial component in the bilateral relationships between states. In the Turkish tradition of foreign policy, public

TABLE 6

Turkish university students' perceptions of U.S.–Turkey relations

Relationship	n	%
Allies	53	18.4
Partners	39	13.5
Friends	23	8.0
Enemies	31	10.8
Other definitions	121	42.0
No answer	21	7.3
Total	288	100.0

Source: M. Gokmen, fieldwork, January 2006

opinion has always been accepted as an important element of the country's international relations. Turkish policy makers and diplomats have always underlined the importance of the role played by Turkish public opinion and have used it as a bargaining tool in negotiations (Erdogan 2005, 1). Similarly, as a democratic country, the United States has always been concerned about Turkish public opinion and about its policies toward Turkey and the surrounding region. Especially during the Cold War period, U.S. and pro-American elements in Turkey were concerned with the political and social tendencies of Turkish people and conducted highly effective campaigns aimed at strengthening anti-Soviet sentiments.

Our study sample of Turkish university students was asked to describe the relationship between the United States and Turkey, in an effort to understand how they perceive the nature of the bilateral relations between the Turkish and American governments. This population's perception of the United States is an important factor in the future of Turkish–American relations. I argue that the existence of a relatively small percentage of negative characterization of the relations because of the recent developments in the Middle East caused by the military actions of the United States, the Turkish Grand National Assembly's rejection of U.S. demands before and during the Iraq war, and the American response to this.

As Table 6 indicates, our questionnaire

TABLE 7

Gender differences in perceptions of U.S.–Turkey relations

Relationship	n		%	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Allies	21	32	14.8	21.9
Partners	22	17	15.5	11.6
Friends	9	14	6.3	9.6
Enemies	19	12	13.4	8.2
Other definitions	64	57	45.1	39.0
No answer	7	14	4.9	9.6
Total	142	146	100.0	100.0

Source: M. Gokmen, fieldwork, January 2006

clearly suffered from limitations with respect to the response categories for the question, "Which of the following terms best defines United States–Turkey relations?" The answers participants could choose from were "allies," "partners," "friends," "enemies," and "other definitions—please define." In all, 42.0 % of respondents chose "other," indicating that their views of the relationship are not limited by the choices given. Most who chose "other" further defined the relationship as "hegemonic relationship," "pragmatic relationship," "proxy state (Turkey)–global power (U.S.) relationship," "economically and politically dependent relationship," "unequal power relations," and so on. A further 18.4 % of the students identified the United States and Turkey as "allies," 13.5 % as "partners," 10.8 % as "enemies," and 8 % as "friends"; 7.3 % did not respond (see Table 6). On the one hand, it appears that despite the negative consequences of the recent strained relationship between the United States and Turkey, the 39.9 % of respondents who identified the two countries as "allies," "partners," and "friends" still hold positive attitudes toward U.S.–Turkey relations. On the other hand, the above-mentioned negative consequences may explain the 10.8 % of respondents who characterized the two countries as "enemies." This figure reflects the minor negative perception of the United States on

TABLE 8
Effect of political ideology on perceptions of the relationship between Turkey and the United States

Relationship	Political Ideology							Total
	Very Liberal	Liberal	Mix of Liberal and Conservative	Conservative	Very Conservative	Other Ideology	No Answer	
Allies	n 3 % 30	14 18.4	15 19.7	9 23.1	0 0	6 14	6 17.1	53 18.4
Partners	n 1 % 10	13 17.1	12 15.8	8 20.5	2 22.2	2 4.7	1 2.9	39 13.5
Friends	n 0 % 0	11 4.5	3 3.9	3 7.7	1 11.1	2 4.7	3 8.6	23 8
Enemies	n 0 % 0	7 9.2	7 9.2	6 15.4	6 66.7	1 2.3	4 11.4	31 10.8
Other definitions	n 6 % 60	27 35.5	32 42.1	12 30.8	0 0	30 69.8	14 40	121 42
No answer	n 0 % 0	4 5.3	7 9.2	1 2.6	0 0	2 4.7	7 20	21 7.3
Total	n 10 % 100	76 100	76 100	39 100	9 100	43 100	35 100	288 100

Source: M. Gokmen, fieldwork, January 2006

TABLE 9

Effect of religious belief on perceptions of the relationship between Turkey and the United States

Relationship		Religious Belief							Total
		Very Secular	Secular	Mix of Secular and Religious	Religious	Very Religious	Other Religion	No Answer	
Allies	n	9	12	17	9	2	1	3	53
	%	22.5	14.0	20.0	24.3	16.7	8.3	18.8	18.4
Partners	n	4	16	9	5	4	1	0	39
	%	10	18.6	10.6	13.5	33.3	8.3	0	13.5
Friends	n	2	10	4	4	0	2	1	23
	%	5	11.6	4.7	10.8	0	16.7	6.3	8
Enemies	n	4	7	7	6	6	0	1	31
	%	10	8.1	8.2	16.2	50	0	6.3	10.8
Other definitions	n	20	36	37	12	0	7	9	121
	%	50	41.9	43.5	32.4	0	58.3	56.3	42
No answer	n	1	5	11	1	0	1	2	21
	%	2.5	5.8	12.9	2.7	0	8.3	12.5	7.3
Total	n	40	86	85	37	12	12	16	288
	%	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: M. Gokmen, fieldwork, January 2006

the part of Turkish university students in particular and the Turkish population in general.

A closer analysis of the results reveals that gender and political orientation play a significant role in overall perceptions of U.S.–Turkey relations (see Table 7). Female students have a more positive attitude than male students toward the United States: they were more likely to characterize the two countries as “allies” (21.9 % versus 14.8 %) or “friends” (9.6 % versus 6.3 %), and less likely to characterize them as “enemies” (8.2 % versus 13.4 %). Male students, meanwhile, were more likely to see Turkey and the United States as “partners” (15% versus 11.6%). In addition, female students were almost twice as likely as their male counterparts not to answer this question (9.6 % versus 4.9 %), suggesting that they are less politicized on this issue than their male counterparts.

Of special interest in Table 8 is the comparison between those who identified themselves as “very liberal” and those who identified themselves as “very conservative”:

66.7 % of the former but none of the latter characterized the United States and Turkey as “enemies.” It is clear that “very conservative” respondents see no possibility for “alliance” with the United States: again, none of these respondents characterized the relationship in these terms, by comparison with the “very liberal” respondents, 30 % of whom did so. This is probably the most interesting finding of the survey. “Very conservative” and “conservative” students appear to see Turkey’s relationship with the United States in terms of “partnership” (see Table 8).

The combined total of “very conservative” and “conservative” respondents who characterized the two countries as “partners” (42.7 %) is much higher than the combined total of “very liberal” and “liberal” respondents who did so (27.1 %). Interestingly, those students who reported “other political ideologies” mostly defined the relationship with “other definitions” (69.8 %), demonstrating that the descriptions of the relationship provided in the survey question do not represent the way these students see U.S.–Turkey bilateral relations.

TABLE 10

Student perceptions of the relationship by university

Relationship		Sebançi University	Gebze Institute of Technology	Istanbul University	Total
Allies	n	23	12	18	53
	%	20.9	13.2	20.7	18.4
Partners	n	22	6	11	39
	%	20.0	6.6	12.6	13.5
Friends	n	7	11	5	23
	%	6.4	12.1	5.7	8.0
Enemies	n	8	7	16	31
	%	7.3	7.7	18.4	10.8
Other definitions	n	46	48	27	121
	%	41.8	52.7	31.0	42.0
No answer	n	4	7	10	21
	%	3.6	7.7	11.5	7.3
Total	n	110	91	87	288
	%	100	100	100	100

Source: M. Gokmen, fieldwork, January 2006

Table 9 reveals a similar pattern with respect to the limitations of the questionnaire. As noted above, 42.0 % of respondents indicated that they would define the relationship between Turkey and the United States with “other definitions.” Table 9 provides an interesting comparison between the answers of the “very secular” and those of the “very religious.” None of the “very religious” students selected “other definitions,” which indicates that they are very clear in their answers with respect to the categories stated in the questionnaire. Of the “very religious” students, 50 % identified the two countries as “enemies” (versus 10 % of “very secular” students who did so) and 33.3 % identified the two countries as “partners” (versus 10 % of “very secular” students). This is an interesting gap among the “very religious”, indicating that they are not nearly unanimous in their perceptions of U.S.-Turkey relations.

Table 10 shows the results of a cross-tabulation of the U.S.–Turkey relationship by the three universities selected for the study. It is clear that this specific question has certain limitations, since 49.3 % of the respondents either chose “other definitions” or did not

answer. The remaining 50.7 % of respondents account for 39.9 %, compared to 31 students (10.8 % of the entire sample) who see the United States as an “enemy” country. Similarly, 23 of 288 participants see the United States as a “friend” country. The United States and Turkey are seen as “allies” by 53 respondents (18.4 %). In this category, Sabancı University takes the lead, followed by Istanbul University and Gebze Institute of Technology. We see the same pattern in “partners” category, which comes second after “allies.” Yet for the “friends” category, GIT comes first: the number of GIT students who chose this response is almost equal to the total number at IU and SU combined. Here IU is in third place. IU ranks first, however, in defining the United States and Turkey as “enemies”: half of the 31 students who chose this response come from IU, while the remainder are divided almost equally between the other two universities.

The differences among the universities can be accounted for by two main factors. First, students at Sabancı University are primarily from wealthy families (see Table 11), and their parents’ employers often have

TABLE 11

Parent income profiles by university

Parents' Income*		Sebanci University	Gebze Institute of Technology	Istanbul University	Total
Much lower	n	0	1	3	4
	%	0	1.1	3.4	1.4
Slightly lower	n	2	10	20	32
	%	1.8	11.0	23.0	11.1
Equal	n	11	44	35	90
	%	10.0	48.4	40.2	31.3
Slightly higher	n	63	30	22	115
	%	57.3	33.0	25.3	39.9
Much higher	n	32	3	2	37
	%	29.1	3.3	2.3	12.8
No answer	n	2	3	5	10
	%	1.8	3.3	5.7	3.5
Total	n	110	91	87	288
	%	100	100	100	100

* By comparison to average Turkish household income

Source: M. Gokmen, fieldwork, January 2006

strong relationships with U.S. companies through selling American products in Turkey, owning American-franchised companies in Turkey, or exporting raw materials to the United States and importing U.S. goods to Turkey. This type of economic relationship affects students' attitudes towards the United States, and may explain why 47.3 % percent of students at SU see the United States as an "ally," "friend," or "partner" country (see Table 10). Second, students at Istanbul University tend to come from families whose income level is slightly lower than or equal to the average income of Turkish households (see Table 11). These groups often see Turkey as primarily a Muslim and Middle Eastern country with its own heritage and interests that are both national and regional. U.S. military actions in the Middle East may have had an impact on the 18.4 % (16/87 IU students) of IU respondents who identified the United States and Turkey as "enemies."

On 1 March 2003, the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA) made a decision to reject the United States' demand for the

use of Turkish soil in its military operation to topple Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq. The students were asked whether they "agree" or "disagree" with the TGNA's decision in order to find out their opinion on the rejection of U.S. demands. The great majority of respondents (89.2 %) agreed with the decision made by the TGNA (see Table 12). As Table 12 shows, the students strongly support the TGNA's decision: 58.7 % said they "strongly agree"—almost twice as many as the combination of "agree" and "moderately agree" (30.5 %)—which shows that they are firm in their answers. This result also suggests that Turkish students believe Turkey should oppose the war and should not help the United States. The negative ramifications of the first Gulf War for the Turkish economy may have had an impact on students' agreement with the TGNA'S decision. Turkey gave military support to the United States and was a loyal ally to the American government during the first Gulf War, and as a result Turkey experienced an economic crisis and continuing high inflation until the late 1990s.

TABLE 12

Students' level of agreement with the Turkish Grand National Assembly's decision not to allow U.S. troops on Turkish soil

	n	%
Strongly agree	169	58.7
Agree	56	19.4
Moderately agree	32	11.1
Moderately disagree	9	3.1
Disagree	7	2.4
Strongly disagree	9	3.1
No answer	6	2.1
Total	288	100.0

Source: M. Gokmen, fieldwork, January 2006

University students, well versed in international affairs, are well aware that if Turkey went to war with American troops again, the Turkish economy could be adversely affected.

As for the impact of gender on this question, Table 13 indicates that the differences between male and female respondents' answers are confined to the various levels of of "agree." Female students are firmer than male students in their agreement with the TGNA's decision (61 % versus 56.3 % "strongly agree"); male students were more likely to choose "agree" (22.5 % versus 16.4 %), and the largest gap between men's and women's answers is among those who said they "moderately agree" (8.5 % versus 13.7 %) with the TGNA's decision. There is no significant gender difference in the "disagree" categories.

Although there is no significant difference among income levels in terms of agreement or disagreement with the TGNA's decision, Table 14 reveals a slight but observable tendency: as parental income level increases, the likelihood of opposing the TGNA's decision increases. This is especially apparent among those who said they "disagree" (0 % "much lower," 0 % "slightly lower," 1.1 % "equal," 2.6 % "slightly higher," and 8.1 % "much higher") and "strongly disagree" (0 %, 0 %, 2.2 %, 4.3 %, and 5.4 %). When we look at the individual

TABLE 13

Effect of gender on students' opinions of the TGNA's decision

	n		%	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Strongly agree	80	89	56.3	61.0
Agree	32	24	22.5	16.4
Moderately agree	12	20	8.5	13.7
Moderately disagree	6	3	4.2	2.1
Disagree	4	3	2.8	2.1
Strongly disagree	4	5	2.8	3.4
No answer	4	2	2.8	1.4
Total	142	146	100.0	100.0

Source: M. Gokmen, fieldwork, January 2006

categories separately, we find significant differences in each level of agreement and disagreement between the answers of students who identified their parents' income as "slightly lower" than the average (24 students) and those who identified their parents' income as "much higher" than the average (20 students). The students whose parents' income is "slightly lower" show stronger agreement (75 % versus 54.1 % "strongly agree") with their parliament's decision than those whose parents' income is "much higher" than average. Students whose parents' income is "much higher" are not firm in their agreement with the Turkish parliament: 16.2 % of them chose "moderately agree," compared to those whose parents' income is "slightly lower," only 6.3 % of whom answered "moderately agree." Similarly, none of the students whose family income is "slightly lower" than average expressed any level of disagreement; by contrast, of the students whose family income is "much higher," 2.7 % answered "moderately disagree," 8.1 % "disagree," and 5.4 % "strongly disagree." In light of this statistical information, it appears that students from poorer families have slightly more trust in their government than those from richer families.

Table 15 reveals an interesting result: 71.4 % of students who did not want to

Table 14

Effect of parents' income level on students' agreement with the TGNA's decision

Level of Agreement		Parents' Income*					No Answer	Total
		Much Lower	Slightly Lower	Equal	Slightly Higher	Much Higher		
Strongly agree	n	4	24	48	65	20	8	169
	%	100.0	75.0	53.3	56.5	54.1	80.0	58.7
Agree	n	0	5	24	21	5	1	56
	%	0	15.6	26.7	18.3	13.5	10.0	19.4
Moderately agree	n	0	2	11	13	6	0	32
	%	0	6.3	12.2	11.3	16.2	0	11.1
Moderately disagree	n	0	0	2	6	1	0	9
	%	0	0	2.2	5.2	2.7	0	3.1
disagree	n	0	0	1	3	3	0	7
	%	0	0	1.1	2.6	8.1	0	2.4
Strongly disagree	n	0	0	2	5	2	0	9
	%	0	0	2.2	4.3	5.4	0	3.1
No answer	n	0	1	2	2	0	1	6
	%	0	3.1	2.2	1.7	0	10.0	2.1
Total	n	4	32	90	115	37	10	288
	%	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

*By comparison to average Turkish household income

Source: M. Gokmen, fieldwork, January 2006

reveal their "political ideology" strongly support the TGNA's decision. This indicates that even though they are not comfortable disclosing their "political ideology," they have no problem with answering this question and strongly support their government on this specific issue. "Very conservative" students are the firmest in supporting the Turkish parliament: they either "strongly agree" (66.7 %) or "agree" (33.3 %) with the TGNA's decision. In general, no matter what their "political ideology," participants give strong support to their government: in each category of political ideology, at least 50 % of respondents "strongly agree." Those students who reported "other ideologies" also firmly support the TGNA's decision (62.8 % "strongly agree"; see Table 15).

The first notable result in Table 16 is that the percentages of "very religious" students who said they "strongly agree" (66.7 %) and "agree" (33.3 %) are exactly same as the those of the "very conservative" students (see Table 15). Based on this information, it appears that "very conservative" and "very

religious" students have exactly same attitude of strong agreement with the Turkish parliament on this specific issue. Those students who did not identify their religious belief are the firmest in supporting the Turkish parliament (75 % "strongly agree"). Those whose reported religious beliefs are "very secular" (65 %), "religious" (67.6 %), "very religious" (66.7 %), and "other religions" (66.7 %) were almost equal in giving strong support to their parliament, indicating that no matter what religious beliefs they hold, they have similar ideas on the rejection of U.S. efforts to open a second front in Northern Iraq from Turkish soil.

An individual examination of the universities (see Table 17) reveals that students at Istanbul University are the firmest in supporting their parliament (78.2 % "strongly agree"); Gebze Institute of Technology comes second (57.1 % "strongly agree"), while Sabanci University students gave the lowest percentage of "strongly agree" answers (44.5 %). Among respondents who chose "agree," the ranking of the universities is

TABLE 15

Effect of political ideology on students' level of agreement with the TGNA's decision

Level of Agreement		Political Ideology						No Answer	Total
		Very Liberal	Liberal	Mix of Liberal and Conservative	Conservative	Very Conservative	Other Ideology		
Strongly agree	n	5	40	44	22	6	27	25	169
	%	50.0	52.6	57.9	56.4	66.7	62.8	71.4	58.7
Agree	n	3	17	10	12	3	7	4	56
	%	30.0	22.4	13.2	30.8	33.3	16.3	11.4	19.4
Moderately agree	n	0	10	11	4	0	5	2	32
	%	0	13.2	14.5	10.3	0	11.6	5.7	11.1
Moderately disagree	n	1	3	4	0	0	0	1	9
	%	10.0	3.9	5.3	0	0	0	2.9	3.1
Disagree	n	1	1	3	0	0	2	0	7
	%	10.0	1.3	3.9	0	0	4.7	0	2.4
Strongly disagree	n	0	4	3	0	0	1	1	9
	%	0	5.3	3.9	0	0	2.3	2.9	3.1
No answer	n	0	1	1	1	0	1	2	6
	%	0	1.3	1.3	2.6	0	2.3	5.7	2.1
Total	n	10	76	76	39	9	43	35	288
	%	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: M. Gokmen, fieldwork, January 2006

TABLE 16

Effect of religious beliefs on students' agreement with the TGNA's decision

Level of Agreement		Religious Belief						No Answer	Total
		Very Secular	Secular	Mix of Secular and Religious	Religious	Very Religious	Other Beliefs		
Strongly agree	n	26	41	49	25	8	8	12	169
	%	65.0	47.7	57.6	67.6	66.7	66.7	75.0	58.7
Agree	n	6	22	15	7	4	1	1	56
	%	15.0	25.6	17.6	18.9	33.3	8.3	6.3	19.4
Moderately agree	n	4	11	13	2	0	2	0	32
	%	10.0	12.8	15.3	5.4	0	16.7	0	11.1
Moderately disagree	n	1	4	3	1	0	0	0	9
	%	2.5	4.7	3.5	2.7	0	0	0	3.1
Disagree	n	2	2	2	1	0	0	0	7
	%	5.0	2.3	2.4	2.7	0	0	0	2.4
Strongly disagree	n	1	4	2	1	0	0	1	9
	%	2.5	4.7	2.4	2.7	0	0	6.3	3.1
No answer	n	0	2	1	0	0	1	2	6
	%	0	2.3	1.2	0	0	8.3	12.5	2.1
Total	n	40	86	85	37	12	12	16	288
	%	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: M. Gokmen, fieldwork, January 2006

TABLE 17

Students' level of agreement with the TGNA's decision by university

Level of Agreement		Sabancı University	Gebze Institute of Technology	Istanbul University	Total
Strongly agree	n	49	52	68	169
	%	44.5	57.1	78.2	58.7
Agree	n	26	18	12	56
	%	23.6	19.8	13.8	19.4
Moderately agree	n	19	9	4	32
	%	17.3	9.9	4.6	11.1
Moderately disagree	n	3	5	1	9
	%	2.7	5.5	1.1	3.1
Disagree	n	7	0	0	7
	%	6.4	0	0	2.4
Strongly disagree	n	4	4	1	9
	%	3.6	4.4	1.1	3.1
No answer	n	2	3	1	6
	%	1.8	3.3	1.1	2.1
Total	n	110	91	87	288
	%	100	100	100	100

Source: M. Gokmen, fieldwork, January 2006

reversed: 23.6 % at SU, 19.8 % at GIT, and 13.8 % at IU. Responses of “moderately agree” show the same ranking: 17.3 % at SU, 9.9 % at GIT, and 4.6 % at IU.

Although there were no significant differences among universities in terms of agreement or disagreement with the TGNA's decision, as described above, significant differences do exist in terms of the level of students' agreement. This difference might be explained by the fact that each university represents different sentiments concerning politics and internal relations in Turkey.

On Current Constraints and Obstacles in U.S.–Turkey Relations

Strategic military and economic alliances are based on the principle that unity brings strength, which necessarily entails perceived common interests and the political goodwill of the countries involved. Such pacts usually provide for mutual assistance in the case of aggression. In this context, the origins of the alliance between the United States and Turkey are the product of perceived common interest

and political goodwill, specifically the containment of the former Soviet Union during the Cold War era. Turkey played a critical role in the containment of Soviet power. The end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union eroded Turkey's geopolitical importance as a strategic military ally from an American perspective.

As the nature of global geopolitical systems and political realities changes, so do the purpose and content of strategic military alliances. An alliance comes to an end if the member countries do not agree on the same “geopolitical codes” to maintain the strategic relationship in the newly transformed geopolitical world order. The U.S.–Turkey alliance coped with this transition of political realities during the post–Cold War era and continued its common interest in a multidimensional platform that includes strategic energy cooperation, security ties, regional stability, and the global “war on terror.”

What must be kept in mind is that today's geopolitical circumstances are very different from those in which the U.S.–Turkey alliance was forged (Cohen 2004, 578). Unfortunately, the strategic military

alliance between the United States and Turkey has been greatly damaged in the post–September 11 era, as demonstrated by events surrounding the Iraq war. This fact was pointed out by Paul Wolfowitz, former deputy secretary of defence, at the beginning of 2004, as summarized in the *Turkish Daily News* on 31 January 2004:

Our strategic partnership has changed. It is no longer as it was before. In the past, this relationship was based on a military basis. Only military relations used to be discussed. This era is now closed. Military relations, of course, do exist but the new strategic partnership is not based on a military field but rather on democracy and politics. (Birand 2004)

A watershed event in the history of the U.S.–Turkey relations took place on 1 March 2003 when the TGNA rejected the government’s motion to allow U.S. troops to open a second front against Iraq from Turkish soil. This development initiated the current constraints and obstacles in U.S.–Turkey bilateral relations by angering the Pentagon and causing a rift in U.S.–Turkey relations. The strain was immediately clear, as we can see in reports from several prominent American newspapers on 2 March 2003:

The Turkish Parliament dealt a heavy blow to the Bush administration’s plans for a northern front against Iraq, narrowly rejecting a measure that would have allowed thousands of American combat troops to use the country as a base for an attack. (*New York Times*)

Turkey’s cooperation was important to the Pentagon’s plan to divide the forces of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein by simultaneously attacking from the south, through Kuwait, and from the north, across the Turkish border. (*Washington Post*)

The Bush administration finds itself in a jam following the refusal of Turkey’s parliament Saturday to let 62,000 U.S. forces use the country as a base to launch an invasion of Iraq from the north. With the White House saying that war is just weeks away, Turkey’s unexpected rebuff

TABLE 18

Turkish university students’ level of agreement with the statement that the 2003 U.S. military intervention in Iraq has been a significant turning point for U.S.–Turkey relations

	n	%
Strongly agree	58	20.1
Agree	101	35.1
Moderately agree	70	24.3
Moderately disagree	18	6.3
Disagree	28	9.7
Strongly disagree	5	1.7
No answer	8	2.8
Total	288	100.0

Source: M. Gokmen, fieldwork, January 2006

forces the Pentagon to reshuffle its war plans. (*USA Today*)

In a stunning rejection that appeared to kill U.S. plans for a “northern front” in any war against Iraq, Turkey’s parliament refused Saturday to authorize the deployment of 62,000 US troops on Turkish soil. (*Los Angeles Times*)

Beginning with the war on Iraq, the national interests of the United States and Turkey diverged, and they lost their perceived common interests and political goodwill, which exacerbated declining positive perceptions of the United States. The failure of both countries to recognize and resolve their divergent strategic interest in Iraq is to blame for much of the worsening relations (Kapsis 2006). In order to explore opinions on the impact of the United States’ 2003 military intervention in Iraq on U.S.–Turkey relations, Turkish university students were asked to rate their agreement with the statement, “The United States’ 2003 military intervention in Iraq has been a significant turning point for U.S.–Turkey relations.” Answers ranged from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” The majority of students (79.5 %) agreed that United States’ 2003 military intervention in Iraq was a significant turning point for U.S.–Turkey relations (see Table 18), indicating

TABLE 19

Students' level of agreement with the statement on 2003 U.S. military intervention in Iraq by university

Level of Agreement		Sabancı University	Gebze Institute of Technology	Istanbul University	Total
Strongly agree	n	21	16	21	58
	%	19.1	17.6	24.1	20.1
Agree	n	45	27	29	101
	%	40.9	29.7	33.3	35.1
Moderately agree	n	25	22	23	70
	%	22.7	24.2	26.4	24.3
Moderately disagree	n	6	8	4	18
	%	5.5	8.8	4.6	6.3
Disagree	n	10	13	5	28
	%	9.1	14.3	5.7	9.7
Strongly disagree	n	2	2	1	5
	%	1.8	2.2	1.1	1.7
No answer	n	1	3	4	8
	%	0.9	3.3	4.5	2.8
Total	n	110	91	87	288
	%	100	100	100	100

Source: M. Gokmen, fieldwork, January 2006

that the Iraq war and developments before and after the invasion affected people's current attitudes toward this relationship. We must keep in mind that, in fact, the Turkish government's reluctance to support the U.S. policy in Iraq has strained the U.S.–Turkey alliance. The survey results, however, reveal that students are not firmly in agreement with this hypothesis. As Table 18 shows, the students' answers rank as follows: "agree" (35 %), "moderately agree" (24.3 %), "strongly agree" (20.1 %), "disagree" (9.7 %), "moderately disagree" (6.3 %), "no answer" (2.8 %), and "strongly disagree" (1.7 %). This ranking indicates that although the majority of students see the United States' 2003 military intervention as a significant turning point for U.S.–Turkey relations, they do not firmly believe that this fact was important. Their agreement with this hypothesis is scattered over three agreement levels (strongly agree, agree, and moderately agree). One of the most important indicators in Table 18 is that the majority of the students (97.2 %) answered this question and only a very small percent-

age (2.8 %) did not; this suggests that students have very clear opinions on this question.

Looking at the universities individually, we see that Istanbul University students are more likely to "strongly agree" (24.1 %) compared to students at Sabancı University (19.1 %) and Gebze Institute of Technology (17.6 %). The implication is that IU students are slightly firmer in their agreement than those at the other two universities. Among students who said they "agree," the highest proportion are from SU (40.9 %), compared with 33.3 % at IU and 29.7 % at GIT. Interestingly, almost equal percentages at all three universities said they "moderately agree" (see Table 19).

As Table 19 indicates, GIT has a very interesting distribution of answers compared to other two universities, with higher percentages at each level of disagreement with the statement. Moreover, while the percentages answering "strongly agree" (17.6 %) and "disagree" (14.3 %) are almost equal at GIT, the percentage answering "strongly agree" (24.1 %) at IU is much

TABLE 20
Student ranking of current constraints and obstacles in U.S.–Turkey relations

Items	Rankings (1 = most important, 8 = least important)										Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	No Answer		
U.S. Kurdish Policy	n 62 % 21.5	96 33.3	43 14.9	30 10.4	18 6.3	2 0.7	10 3.5	0 0	27 9.4	288 100	
Presence of PKK in northern Iraq	n 68 % 23.6	42 14.6	54 18.8	34 11.8	14 4.9	27 9.4	15 5.2	6 2.1	28 9.7	288 100	
U.S. Middle East policy	n 72 % 25	33 11.5	38 13.2	40 13.9	31 10.8	29 10.1	18 6.3	4 1.4	23 8	288 100	
U.S. invasion of Iraq	n 18 % 6.3	27 9.4	39 13.5	50 17.4	32 11.1	47 16.3	43 14.9	3 1	29 10.1	288 100	
Armenian problem	n 16 % 5.6	28 9.7	35 12.2	30 10.4	59 20.5	57 19.8	28 9.7	4 1.4	31 10.8	288 100	
U.S. Cyprus policy	n 11 % 3.8	24 8.3	32 11.1	41 14.2	51 17.7	47 16.3	47 16.3	6 2.1	29 10.1	288 100	
U.S. "War on Terror"	n 13 % 4.5	11 3.8	19 6.6	29 10.1	47 16.3	44 15.3	82 28.5	10 1.5	33 11.5	288 100	
Other U.S. policies	n 11 % 3.8	3 1	3 1	4 1.4	3 1	2 0.7	8 2.8	214 74.3	40 13.9	288 100	

Source: M. Gokmen, fieldwork, January 2006

Source: M. Gokmen, fieldwork, January 2006

higher than the percentage answering “disagree” (5.7 %).
As indicated in Gokmen and de Socio (2009), and according to the outcomes of the survey documented here, the U.S. decision to intervene militarily in Iraq and the subsequent demand for Turkish assistance created a new turning point in U.S.–Turkey relations.

Turkey’s full support for Washington’s 1991 war with Iraq did not further Turkish interests, as was expected. In fact, as a result of the economic embargo on Iraq, Turkey lost considerable revenue through lost trade and investment opportunities. Turkish university students saw the new conflict with Iraq as a significant turning point in U.S.–Turkey rela-

tions because of the Turkish Grand National Assembly's refusal to allow U.S. forces to use Turkish territory for the war and U.S. officials' angry response to this decision.

On the basis of the issues discussed in Gokmen, de Socio and Falah (2008) and of landmarks in the history of U.S.–Turkey bilateral relations, eight different current constraints and obstacles in U.S.–Turkey relations were identified; respondents were asked to rank these obstacles in terms of their importance, from 1 (most important) to 8 (least important). The eight constraints identified were (1) presence of PKK in northern Iraq, (2) U.S. Kurdish policy, (3) U.S. Middle East policy, (4) invasion of Iraq, (5) U.S. Cyprus policy, (6) Armenian problem, (7) U.S. “War on Terror,” and (8) other U.S. policies.

Survey respondents ranked “U.S. Kurdish policy” as the most important obstacle, followed by “presence of PKK in northern Iraq,” “U.S. Middle East policy,” and “invasion of Iraq”; as Table 20 indicates, these are considered the top four most important and challenging obstacles in U.S.–Turkey bilateral relations. These obstacles and constraints have roots in the history of U.S.–Turkey bilateral relations and may stem from the different national interests of the allies on certain issues.

The primary importance of Turkey (as regional power) and of the “Kurdish inhabited area” (as a contested area) for the United States (as global power) revolves around their geographical location. The geopolitics of the “Kurdish issue” have their roots in the division of the Ottoman Empire but have also been greatly affected by more recent American geopolitical interests in the Middle East, such as Cold War containment policies, anti-Khomeini policies after the 1979 Iranian Revolution and the hostage crisis, support for Iraq during the Iraq–Iran War, and the 1991 Gulf War and 2003 Iraq invasion in which U.S. policy was reversed and Iraq became the enemy. As mentioned above, the United States has had a close rela-

tionship with both sides during the conflict between Turks and Kurds. However, the United States has never tried to be a mediator in this conflict; rather, it has used the geopolitical situation of Turkey and the “Kurdish inhabited area” in its geopolitical imaginings, visions, codes, and political agendas in the Middle East since the collapse of the former Soviet Union. Whenever Turkey opposed U.S. military actions or interventions in the Middle East, the United States officially and unofficially blackmailed Turkey to support possible emergence of “Kurdistan” on the eastern and south-eastern flank of Turkey, which would propagate a mobilization among Turkey's Kurdish population and threaten Turkey's territorial integrity. The United States used the same strategy after Turkey's refusal to allow the United States to launch an attack from their soil to topple Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq: after this event, the United States treated Kurds as a potential ally in their invasion of Iraq. Official U.S. recognition of the Kurds' ethnic, cultural, and linguistic identity, and the U.S. policy toward the Kurds in northern Iraq have created problems for U.S.–Turkey bilateral relations.

On the one hand, the Kurdish issue in general and the United States' Kurdish policy in particular are attracting keen attention from Turkish media, scholars, and the public. Participants in the survey live with it in every aspect of their lives, which may be why they identified this particular obstacle as the most important constraint in U.S.–Turkey bilateral relations. On the other hand, the Turkish government and people perceive the U.S. Kurdish policy as one of the most important obstacles and expect the United States as a global power to be the adjudicator in the resolution of this conflict.

At the beginning of 1980s, Kurds who lived in Turkish territory began to seek independence for the south-eastern part of Turkey, where the majority of the Kurdish population in Turkey resides. Turkish policies that suppress any expression of Kurdish

identity eventually created the conditions for the formation of Kurdish separatist groups seeking independence. In 1984 Abdullah Ocalan formed the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party), a Kurdish separatist group that gained a reputation as ruthless revolutionaries (McDowall 2000, 421). Turkey retaliated against the PKK, which was listed as a terrorist organization by a number of states and organizations around the world, and warfare ensued in south-eastern Turkey in the late 1980s. The battle between Turkish soldiers and Kurdish insurgents continued through the 1990s: according to the Turkish government, more than 30,000 people have been killed in this conflict since 1984. Political scientist Michael Gunter believes that the Kurdish issue will "become the single most important issue in the volatile, geo-strategically important Middle East if and when the Arab–Israel dispute is finally settled" (Gunter 1999, 133).

Since the emergence of the PKK, Turkey's primary interest in Iraq has consistently been to protect the integrity of its border and to eliminate PKK separatists. These separatists have used the mountains of northern Iraq as a base for attacking Turkish targets. The United States' unwillingness to address Turkey's security concerns by eliminating the PKK forces in northern Iraq, as well as its ambivalent position regarding the future of northern Iraq and the role of the Iraqi Kurds, have caused Turkish society to support a negative shift in attitudes toward the United States. This shows that even though the allies have common interests on a regional and global level, national interests and the primary problems of the countries involved are always the first priority. Interestingly, participants ranked the presence of the PKK in North Iraq as the second most important obstacle, while the U.S. Kurdish policy was ranked first. This suggests that participants believe that U.S. adjudication of this conflict would very likely resolve, or at least mitigate, the Kurdish issue. Most importantly, partici-

pants believe that these two obstacles are interrelated and that both significantly hinder U.S.–Turkey bilateral relations.

As students revealed in their comments in the open question of the survey, students believe that U.S. Middle East policy in general and the invasion of Iraq in particular have entangled the U.S.–Turkey alliance. As discussed above, the majority of participants (79.5 %) considered the United States' 2003 military intervention in Iraq a significant turning point for U.S.–Turkey relationship (see Table 18). Students ranked the U.S. Middle East policy as the third most important obstacle. We must keep in mind that this obstacle includes the Kurdish issue as well. The three obstacles respondents considered most important are interconnected; all they are associated with the Kurdish issue, although the third most important obstacle also embraces other topics.

According to the survey, Turkish university students generally hold more positive opinions of Turkey's regional neighbours than of the United States. Some respondents made positive mention of visits by Abdullah Gül, the former Turkish prime minister, to other countries in the region. The purpose of these visits was to find a solution to the Iraqi question. Thus, in the eyes of Turkish students, the United States has not justified the war on Iraq, and the students are uncomfortable with the ongoing U.S. military actions in Iraq. Moreover, they do not want war on their country's immediate borders, and believe that Turkey needs to have good relationships with its neighbours. Survey results reveal that Turkish university students believe that the "war on terror," U.S. policy on Cyprus, and the United States' Armenian policy are less important than the four most important obstacles mentioned above. These impediments were ranked very low relative to the top four; nevertheless, they are also significant and affect U.S.–Turkey bilateral relations.

Future Prospects and Strength of Ties between the United States and Turkey

TABLE 21

Turkish university students' level of agreement with the statement that the presence of U.S. military installations in Turkey helps to promote a better future for Turkey

	n	%
Strongly agree	5	1.7
Agree	9	3.1
Moderately agree	17	5.9
Moderately disagree	23	8.0
Disagree	86	29.9
Strongly disagree	146	50.7
No answer	2	0.7
Total	288	100.0

Source: M. Gokmen, fieldwork, January 2006

The aim of this study was to highlight the fact that Turkey's geographical location attracts the United States and that the interests of the United States in the region entail engagement in bilateral relations with Turkey. The nature of U.S.–Turkey bilateral relations is a function of current and future U.S. objectives in Turkey's neighbouring regions and of Turkey's need for U.S. economic and political support. In other words, the United States needs Turkey, and Turkey needs the United States, in many ways. Thus the current strained relationship between the United States and Turkey has a real impact on both countries' strategic interests; and there are always future prospects, new directions, and strength in a variety of areas and hope for U.S.–Turkey bilateral relations. The United States and Turkey should, and must, take real steps to improve their relations in the immediate future. The future transformation of the U.S.–Turkey alliance will depend to a great extent on the compatibility of mutual interests in the partnership as part of the search for a new order in the regions around Turkey.

From a Western perspective, Turkey is often associated with a secular form of Islam, its geopolitical location, and its alliance with the United States. Turkey's exceptional place in U.S. hegemonic inter-

ests stems from its geographical location. Despite recent strained relations, Turkey will remain an important ally in U.S. strategic planning as long as the United States continues to pursue its interests in the neighbouring regions, especially the Middle East (Dahlman 2004, 570; Murphy 2004). If the U.S.–Turkey alliance is maintained, Turkey will not be alone in dealing with the process of accession to the European Union, the PKK's terrorist activism, issues with Greece around Cyprus, the Armenian issues in the international community, and its economic and cultural initiatives in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Balkans. What also makes Turkey valuable to U.S. geopolitical interests in the region is that most of Turkey's neighbouring states have historical, ethnic, and cultural ties with Turkey—the legacy of the Ottoman Empire.

Turkey's economy, combined with its access to the European Union, Central Asia, and the Middle East, is making Turkey increasingly important to the U.S. government and to American businesses. Moreover, "a half-century of strategic cooperation especially through NATO provides important experience of working together, as manifested by U.S. enthusiasm for Turkish military units in UN and NATO peacekeeping operations" (Kirisici 1998, 26). These are clearly important forces that will push both countries toward continued cooperation at the bilateral as well as the regional level. Furthermore, the United States strongly supports Turkey's accession to the EU. One reason for this support is that by accepting Muslim Turkey into the European Union, the West can demonstrate that it is not set against Islam (Debnar and Smith 2006, 20).

Regarding the question of whether the presence of U.S. military installations in Turkey helps to promote a better future for Turkey, 99.3 % of survey respondents answered this question (only two students did not answer), and 88.6 % disagreed with this statement, including 50.7 % who said they "strongly disagree." (By comparison,

TABLE 22

Students' level of agreement with the statement on the presence of U.S. military installations by university

Level of Agreement		Sabancı University	Gebze Institute of Technology	Istanbul University	Total
Strongly agree	n	5	0	0	5
	%	4.5	0	0	1.7
Agree	n	4	5	0	9
	%	3.6	5.5	0	3.1
Moderately agree	n	11	3	3	17
	%	10.0	3.3	3.4	5.9
Moderately disagree	n	16	5	2	23
	%	14.5	5.5	2.3	8.0
Disagree	n	31	30	25	86
	%	28.2	33.0	28.7	29.9
Strongly disagree	n	42	47	57	146
	%	38.2	51.6	65.5	50.7
No answer	n	1	1	0	2
	%	0.9	1.1	0	0.7
Total	n	110	91	87	288
	%	100	100	100	100

Source: M. Gokmen, fieldwork, January 2006

8 % said they “moderately disagree” and 29.9 % said they “disagree” with the statement.) This shows that students are firm in their answers. The percentage of respondents who chose each answers increases exponentially from “strongly agree” through to “strongly disagree” (see Table 21). This result indicates that students do not want a U.S. military presence within Turkish territorial boundaries and do not think that the presence of U.S. military installations helps promote a better future for Turkey.

Arguably, students may be aware of the fact that foreign military deployments, and especially military installations of powerful states, within the territorial boundaries of nation-states have negative effects on the sovereignty of weaker states in bilateral relations, especially with hegemonic states. One student also commented that the presence of U.S. military installations in Turkey erodes Turkish sovereignty rather than promoting a better future for Turkey. The conclusion one can draw from this result is that the United States and Turkey should work to justify U.S. military installations in Turkey and their

cooperation inside Turkish territory or its immediate neighbours (Fig. 4.3).

As shown in Table 22, the majority of students (88.6 %) believed that the presence of U.S. military installations in Turkey does not promote a better future for Turkey. An individual examination of the three universities reveals significant differences in students' answers to this question (see Table 22): 18.1 % of students at Sabancı University agree (4.5 % “strongly agree,” 3.6 % “agree,” 10 % “moderately agree”) with this statement and see the presence of the U.S. military installations in Turkey in a positive light. This is a very significant percentage compared to the overall agreement (10.7 %) and to the other universities' level of agreement with the statement (only 8.8 % of Gebze Institute of Technology students and 3.4 % of Istanbul University students expressed agreement). Thus, IU students are firmest in their opinions: 96.4 % disagreed with the statement, and 100% answered the question. Percentages respondents who said they “disagree” with the statement show noticeable convergence

TABLE 23

Turkish university students' level of agreement with the statement that aspects of the American way of life should be adopted in Turkey

	n	%
Strongly agree	4	1.4
Agree	9	3.1
Moderately agree	50	17.4
Moderately disagree	33	11.5
Disagree	90	31.3
Strongly disagree	99	34.4
No answer	3	1.0
Total	288	100.0

Source: M. Gokmen, fieldwork, January 2006

across universities: 33 % of students at GIT, 28.7 % of IU students, and 28.2 % of SU students chose this response. The most significant divergence is among those who said they "strongly disagree": 65.5 % at IU, 51.6 % at GIT, and only 38.2 % at SU (see Table 22). The most frequent responses to this statement were "moderately agree" (17.4 % overall), "moderately disagree" (11.4 %), "disagree" (31.4 %), and "strongly

disagree" (34.4 %). A very small number of students said they "strongly agree" (1.4 %) or "agree" (3.1 %) with the statement, and three students (1 %) did not answer.

Regarding the question of whether aspects of the American way of life (as perceived by each individual student) should be adopted in Turkey, the students did not totally reject what they perceive as the American way of life: a significant percentage (17.4 %) moderately agreed with this statement and considered the American lifestyle attractive (see Table 23). On the one hand 50.7 % of respondents strongly disagreed and 8 % moderately agreed that the presence of U.S. military installations in Turkey is in Turkey's best interest (see Table 21); on the other hand, 34.4 % of the students disagreed and 17.4 % agreed that aspects of the American way of life should be adopted in Turkey (see Table 23). Clearly, students are more open to the adoption of aspects of the American way of life than to the presence of U.S. military installations in Turkey.

As the responses indicate, 17.4 % of students overall said they "moderately agree"

TABLE 24

Students' level of agreement with the statement that aspects of the American way of life should be adopted in Turkey by university

Level of Agreement		Sabanci University	Gebze Institute of Technology	Istanbul University	Total
Strongly agree	n	3	1	0	4
	%	2.7	1.1	0	1.4
Agree	n	6	3	0	9
	%	5.5	3.3	0	3.1
Moderately agree	n	28	15	7	50
	%	25.5	16.5	8.0	17.4
Moderately disagree	n	15	9	9	33
	%	13.6	9.9	10.3	11.5
Disagree	n	30	31	29	90
	%	27.3	34.1	33.3	31.3
Strongly disagree	n	27	30	42	99
	%	24.5	33.0	48.3	34.4
No answer	n	1	2	0	3
	%	0.9	2.2	0	1.0
Total	n	110	91	87	288
	%	100	100	100	100

Source: M. Gokmen, fieldwork, January 2006

with the statement and find the American way of life attractive. Looking at the universities individually, we see that a significant percentage of students at Sabanci University (25.5 %) “moderately agree” with the statement that aspects of the American way of life should be adopted in Turkey. This result can be attributed to the liberal/Western profile of this institution, which is arguably congruent with the American lifestyle. At Gebze Institute of Technology, 16.5 % of students said they “moderately agree,” while only 8 % at Istanbul University did so. Of those who said they “strongly disagree,” the greatest proportion was at IU (48.3 %)—almost double the percentage at SU (24.5 %) and much higher than the overall percentage (34.4 %)—indicating that IU students firmly oppose the adoption of a more American lifestyle. This result can be attributed to the conservative-religious profile of Istanbul University, which is arguably incongruent with the American lifestyle. At GIT, 33 % of students said they “strongly disagree” (see Table 24).

Although a majority of students (73.3 %) believed that the American style of

TABLE 25

Turkish university students' level of agreement with the statement that the style of democracy practised in the United States would not be beneficial if adopted in Turkey

	n	%
Strongly agree	54	18.8
Agree	75	26.0
Moderately agree	82	28.5
Moderately disagree	32	11.1
Disagree	26	9.0
Strongly disagree	7	2.4
No answer	12	4.2
Total	288	100.0

Source: M. Gokmen, fieldwork, January 2006

democracy – again, as perceived by each individual student – would not be beneficial if adopted in Turkey, students are not firm in their answers. The most frequent response was “moderately agree,” at 28.5 % overall; next was “agree” (26 %), and only 18.8 % of respondents said they “strongly agree.” Moreover, 4.2 % of students did not answer this question. Taken together, these results suggest that students do not have clear opinions on this question. Furthermore, a signif-

TABLE 26

Students' level of agreement with the statement on U.S.-style democracy by university

Level of Agreement		Sabanci University	Gebze Institute of Technology	Istanbul University	Total
Strongly agree	n	13	15	26	54
	%	11.8	16.5	29.9	18.8
Agree	n	31	25	19	75
	%	28.2	27.5	21.8	26.0
Moderately agree	n	34	25	23	82
	%	30.9	27.5	26.4	28.5
Moderately disagree	n	15	9	8	32
	%	13.6	9.9	9.2	11.1
Disagree	n	11	12	3	26
	%	10.0	13.2	3.4	9.0
Strongly disagree	n	3	1	3	7
	%	2.7	1.1	3.4	2.4
No answer	n	3	4	5	12
	%	2.7	4.4	5.7	4.2
Total	n	110	91	87	288
	%	100	100	100	100

Source: M. Gokmen, fieldwork, January 2006

TABLE 27

University students' ranking of the areas most likely to be future strengths of U.S.–Turkey relations

	n	%
Cultural exchange	13	4.5
Trade and economic exchange	123	42.7
Military and security cooperation	121	42.0
Other areas	20	6.9
No answer	11	3.8
Total	288	100.0

Source: M. Gokmen, fieldwork, January 2006

icant percentage (22.5 %) did not agree with the statement, meaning that they believe the style of democracy practised in the U.S. would be beneficial if adopted in Turkey (see Table 25). Students' hesitation can be attributed to two facts: first, they may feel that American-style democracy would not be congruent with the Turkish societal context; second, the U.S. policy designed to spread democracy in the Middle East and its failure in Iraq may have had a negative impact on students' perception of American-style democracy. They do not oppose the nature of democracy; rather, they oppose the American way of exercising democracy, especially outside the United States.

Looking at the universities individually, we can observe a significant difference between Istanbul University and the two other in terms of strong agreement with the statement that the style of democracy practised in the United States would not be beneficial if adopted in Turkey. IU students were most likely to state that they "strongly agree" (29.9 %); 16.5 % of students at Gebze Institute of Technology chose this response, and students at Sabanci University were least likely to do so (only 11.8 % said they "strongly agree," well below the overall percentage of 18.8 %). These results are arguably congruent with the ideological profiles of SU (liberal, pro-Western), GIT (rightist, close to the mainstream), and IU (conservative, religious). There is no significant difference among the universities in

terms of the numbers of students who said they "agree" and "moderately agree" with the statement. Of those who said they "moderately agree," 13.6 % were at SU, 9.9 % at GIT, and 9.2 % at IU (see Table 26). Taken together, these results indicate that Sabanci University is more open than the two other universities to the American style of democracy.

When asked to rank the areas most likely to be future strengths of U.S.–Turkey relations, students ranked "trade and economic exchange" first area (42.7 %), followed by "military and security cooperation" (42 %), "other areas" (6.9 %), and "cultural exchange" (4.5 %); 3.8 % did not answer the question. "Trade and economic exchange" and "military and security cooperation" received almost equal support; these two areas together were considered future strengths of U.S.–Turkey bilateral relations by 84.7 % of the students. "Cultural exchange" received least support overall (4.5 %), indicating that students do not perceive this as a future strength for U.S.–Turkey relations (see Table 27).

As Table 27 indicates, the majority of respondents (84.7 %) anticipate a future in which "trade and economic exchange" and "military and security cooperation" will be areas of strength in U.S.–Turkey bilateral relations. This result can be attributed to four factors that might affect students' predictions. First, current developments in the Middle East increase Turkey's importance to the United States as a major regional ally. Second, U.S. economic and military interests in the Middle East require support from Turkey as one of the most powerful militarily and economically developing countries in the region. Third, Turkey's position as the sole democratic and secular Muslim society in the region is important for U.S. regime-changing interventions in the region. Lastly, and most importantly, the presence of the PKK in northern Iraq, which needs to be resolved through collaboration between the United States and Turkey, requires a strong

relationship between the American and Turkish governments in the area of military and security cooperation. The students anticipate that U.S.–Turkey bilateral relations will remain strong, thanks to a common interest in the areas of trade and economic exchange and of military and security cooperation.

On 6 February 2005, during a visit to Turkey as part of her first foreign visit as secretary of state in the administration of George W. Bush, Condoleezza Rice said,

I wanted to come here as a part of my first trip as Secretary of State to talk about the very important strategic relationship that the United States and Turkey enjoy a relationship that is based on interest, a relationship that is based on a common view of the future, but most importantly, a relationship that is based on common values. (U.S. Department of State 2005)

Since Rice's visit to Ankara, U.S.–Turkey relations have entered an era of revitalization. It is to be hoped that the future will bring a stronger relationship, similar to what existed before the Iraq war.

Assessment of the Survey Results

The results of the survey on the nature of U.S.–Turkey relations reveal that Turkish university students do not have a clear idea about the nature of the bilateral relationship (see Table 6) in its full depth and complexity. Despite the fact that the proportion of respondents who characterized the relationship in a negative way is small (10.8 %), the proportion describing the relationship outside the sphere of “alliance, friendship and partnership” is significantly high: 42 % percent defined the relationship in other terms such as “hegemonic relationship,” “pragmatic relationship,” “proxy state (Turkey)–global power (U.S.) relationship,” “economically and politically dependent relationship,” and “unequal power relations.” etc. These descriptions reflect a quite critical attitude. Moreover, 7.3 % of the

students surveyed have no idea how they perceive the relationship between the two countries. Their perceptions may have been distorted or negatively influenced by the incongruent attitudes of the two countries with respect to recent developments in the region, especially in Iraq.

This study yields two main areas for development to revitalize the relationship between the United States and Turkey. First, both sides should work diligently on constructing and giving a clearer picture of the relationship to the Turkish public by engaging in more public initiatives to underscore close and strong U.S.–Turkey relations. Moreover, in order to regain its prominent place in the eyes of the Turkish public, the United States should side with Turkey on the issues of Kurds, EU accession, Armenia, and Cyprus. The Turkish government needs the support of the United States, as a powerful ally in the international arena, on questions vital to Turkish interests. A separate question, of course, is the Kurdish lobby in the United States and its possible influence in Washington. That question, which impinges on geopolitical relations, has not been dealt with in the present study.

Second, the United States and Turkey should engage in better diplomatic efforts in cases of disagreement, rather than taking hostile and even punitive steps to pressure each other. As the survey results reveal, students had a negative view of the U.S. demand to use Turkish territory during the 2003 Iraq war. Both before and after the decision was made by TGNA to reject the U.S. demand, the American and Turkish government described it the most important decision in their long-standing alliance. The rejection of the U.S. demand increased the view among the Turkish public that the relationship between the two countries had deteriorated.

The survey results related to current constraints and obstacles in the relationship reveal a scrutiny of the viability of the U.S.–Turkey alliance, especially given the impact

of the U.S. war in Iraq and its ramifications for Iraqi and Turkish Kurds. As discussed above, students see the 2003 Iraq war as a turning point in the bilateral relationship (see Table 18). Students are not simply opponents of the 2003 Iraq war; rather, they are aware of the war's ramifications for Turkey. Students ranked U.S. Kurdish policy and the PKK presence in northern Iraq as the most important obstacles to positive U.S.–Turkey bilateral relations. Students' rankings of current constraints and obstacles to the relationship may help to explain why students see the Iraq war as a turning point in the relationship and why they strongly support the TGNA's decision to reject the U.S. demand for the use of Turkish territory in that war. The Iraq war has created a security vacuum in northern Iraq and on the south-eastern border of Turkey, where PKK separatists reside and claim sovereign territory for Kurdistan. Turkish students seem highly sensitive about U.S. attitudes toward Kurds, which they ranked as the most important obstacle. This is a nationalist perception, but it is part of their core identity and must be appreciated.

The year 2003 may, of course, prove to be one of the most fateful watersheds in modern American history; its repercussions are still hard to assess, and not only in terms of in bilateral relations between Ankara and Washington.

This study underscores the idea that U.S.–Turkey bilateral relations, in the past and the future, are fundamentally based on a range of concerns that serve the national interests of the two countries in the region. This bilateral relationship has faced many threats in the past, but, with time and effort, these were resolved, enabling the relationship to continue. The only real threat to the relationship currently is the Kurdish issue and the possible emergence of an independent Kurdistan in the region. If one day U.S.–Turkey relations come to an abrupt end or slip into a crisis phase, the reason will likely be the Kurdish issue. Another potential point

of friction is the question of the Armenian “genocide” in the early 20th century. There is a very powerful Armenian lobby in the United States that pursues this issue with great intensity, even though it is a distant historical question unrelated to the lives of almost anyone today. There are virtually no Armenians alive who actually lived through the convulsions of that period, nor are there any living Turks; but the question of the Armenian “historical narrative” and the need to resurrect a “historical memory of genocide” has come to play an important political role.

The survey results addressing the future prospects and strengths of ties between the United States and Turkey suggest that, despite recent entanglements in the relationship, U.S.–Turkey relations will regain momentum the areas of trade and economic exchange and of military and security cooperation. Although students see military and security cooperation as potentially the most solid prospect and positive strength of the relationship, they do not feel that U.S. military installations help to promote a better future for Turkey. This contrast may be due to the unilateral U.S. use of these military installations; if they could be used for bilateral and multilateral purposes, serving the national interests of both countries, as they were during the Cold War era, U.S. military installations might be seen in a positive light for the future of Turkey. If the United States is perceived as an aggressor in the region, and perhaps as fighting an “anti-Islamic” war, many students will reject this as a form of neo-hegemony.

The present military posture of Washington in the region is destructive to the U.S. image among all Muslims. In the case of Turkey, it is not so closely linked with the Palestine question. Turkey is the only large Muslim country that has had productive ties with Israel over many years. As the survey results reveal, trade and economic exchange is one of the bases on which U.S.–Turkey relations should proceed (see Table

27). This study suggests that the United States and Turkey can initiate trade and economic activism in Central Asia using Turkey's historical and cultural ties in the region, whose natural resources are already receiving enough attention from global investors. Turkey is a gateway to Central Asia, and the United States should recognize this, as many international investors do; this is the real space for future cooperation. And it is very much a geographical dimension of what Turkey is, and of its position in Western Asia, both physically and as a centre of Turkic culture, which spreads in a broad band into Central Asia.

Acknowledgements

This paper was extracted and modified from the M.A. thesis of Mahmut Gokmen, who passed away on 20 July 2008 at the age of 27. At the time of his passing, Mahmut was a PhD student in the Department of Geography, University of Oklahoma. Mahmut did his M.A. work in the Department of Geography and Planning, The University of Akron, Ohio. His M.A. thesis was supervised by Ghazi-Walid Falah (chief advisor) and Mark de Socio (member of the thesis committee). *The Arab World Geographer* thanks Dr. Mark de Socio, who has since moved on to join the Department of Geography and Geosciences at Salisbury University, Maryland, for preparing the text for publication.

Notes

- 1 *A biographical Note on Mahmut Gokmen by his closest friend, Necati Anaz, Department of Geography, University of Oklahoma, 100 East Boyd St., SEC Suite 684, Norman, OK 73010 U.S.A.*

Mahmut Gokmen was a promising, keen, productive, and young geographer at the University of Oklahoma. Mahmut was born in a very remote and rugged mountain village in the area of Havza City, Samsun, in Turkey. He went to a primary school in his village, where there was only one teacher for the whole school. Then he was sent to the high school in Havza, a two-hour drive from his village. This was Mahmut's first journey outside his village and also his childhood world.

The expectations of his family and village from him were very serious and big for a very small child. Mahmut had two sisters and two brothers to be role models in a very poor family. His mother was illiterate and his father had only completed the first grade in school. Mahmut was the only hope of the family.

Mahmut passed the nationwide university entrance exam to get a place in a college. He was one of the leading successful students of his time from out of a million and half test takers. This was the first time that he was introduced to geography at the University of Istanbul. In 1999, when one of the most devastating earthquakes of the century hit Turkey's western part, Mahmut was also one of those effected victims who had to sleep in the parks of Istanbul and study under the street lights. His love of reading and writing was just too great to be interrupted.

After college, Mahmut decided to come to the US to learn English and pursue a carrier in academic life, so that someday he would help in building a prosperous and peaceful community in his hometown and country. He came to Los Angeles to attend an English school and that is where he had a chance to meet with one the most prominent political geographers, John Agnew. Then Mahmut was accepted by Akron University to earn his master degree under the supervision of Dr. Ghazi-Walid Falah. In his master thesis, he analyzed "the geopolitical changes and continuity in bilateral relations between Turkey and the U.S. from the Truman Doctrine in 1947 to the present."

In the summer of 2006, he merged his life with a dedicated and beloved lady, Nalan Gokmen. The following fall, Mahmut was accepted to PhD. Program at the University of Oklahoma, Department of Geography as an advisee of Dr. Darren Purcell.

Mahmut worked on a variety of topics from popular geopolitics, Orientalism, territoriality, imaginary geographies to war on Iraq. He attended many international and national conferences and he published several articles in Turkish, Canadian, and an American geographic journals. His last ongoing, but not yet finished work was with Dr. Karen Culcasi about "*the Beard in the U.S. Media Representations of the Middle East*".

Mahmut passed away in the summer of 2008 when he was at the peak of academic life, at the age of 27. His remains were repatriated to his

village where he started his short and remarkable journey.

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