

# THE ARAB WORLD GEOGRAPHER LE GÉOGRAPHE DU MONDE ARABE

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Vol. 11, Nos. 1-2

Spring / Printemps & Summer / Été 2008

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### The Arab World Geographer

ISSN 1480-6800

<http://users.fmg.uva.nl/vmamadouh/awg>

Editorial Office: Department of Geography and Planning  
Buchtel College of Arts and Sciences, The University of Akron  
Akron, OH 44325-5005 United States of America

Published four times a year, Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter

Printed by Coach House for AWG Publishing

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# Geopolitics from Above: A Review of U.S.–Turkey Bilateral Relations, 1947–2006

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*This paper analyzes geopolitical changes and continuity in bilateral relations between Turkey and the United States from the Truman Doctrine in 1947 to the present. While the relationship was referred to as an “alliance” during the Cold War, established with a common interest in containing the Soviet Union, the post–Cold War era posed important challenges and transformed the relationship into a “strategic partnership.” The post–September 11 era has put the viability of the strategic partnership under scrutiny: relations between the two countries have been going through a crisis, especially under the impact of the United States’ war on Iraq from March 2003 on. Bilateral U.S.–Turkish relations in this era have evolved from a “strategic partnership” to a “partnership for democracy and war on terrorism” in the greater Middle East.*

*Keywords: U.S.–Turkey relations, geopolitics, Iraq War, Middle East*

*Ce travail analyse les changements et les continuités géopolitiques affectant les relations unilatérales entre la Turquie et les États-Unis de la Doctrine Truman énoncée en 1947 jusqu’à l’heure actuelle. Alors que la relation entre ces deux pays avait été présentée comme une « alliance » durant la Guerre froide reposant sur l’intérêt commun de contenir l’Union soviétique, la période de l’après-guerre froide a posé une série de défis et a transformé la relation en un « partenariat stratégique ». La période de l’après-11 septembre a remis en question la viabilité*

*d’un tel partenariat stratégique : les relations entre les deux pays ont traversé une crise, notamment après mars 2003, à la suite de l’impact de la guerre américaine en Irak. Les relations bilatérales turco-américaines ont évolué pendant cette période d’un « partenariat stratégique » vers un « partenariat pour la démocratie et la guerre contre le terrorisme » dans le Grand Moyen-Orient.*

*Mots clés : Relations turco-américaines, géopolitique, Guerre d’Irak, Moyen-Orient*

## 1. Introduction

Located geopolitically and culturally where Europe and Asia—particularly the Middle East—interface, Turkey has both similarities and contrasts with its neighbouring states in the Middle East (see Figure 1). Indeed, common cultural and religious ties place Turkey *within* the Middle East. Yet historical ties with Europe and traditions such as democratic governance and state secularism place it in a non–Middle Eastern context. Because of Turkey’s status as a kind of East–West hybrid nation and polity, its geographical location is the most dominant factor in political discourse about its relationship to the world around it. For the United States, for example, the geopolitical importance of Turkey is precisely because of its



FIGURE 1

The location of Turkey straddling Europe and Asia.

geographical location (see Figure 1). Turkey's geographical and relative location is strategically important in several geopolitical contexts: (1) the Middle East and the Caspian Sea Basin, which together have important oil and energy reserves; (2) the Mediterranean Sea Basin, which is at the intersection of important sea lines of communication; (3) the Black Sea Basin and the Turkish Straits (Bosporus and Dardanelles chokepoints), historically important as routes of trade and communication; (4) the Balkans, which have undergone structural changes as a result of the break-up of both the former Soviet Union and the former Yugoslavia; and (5) the Caucasus region, which has abundant natural resources. Further, Turkey is adjacent to several contemporary geopolitical conflicts in West Asia, namely those involving Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, and Israel.

During the Cold War era, U.S.–Turkey bilateral relations primarily revolved around the containment of the Soviet Union. In the 1990s, Turkey's strategic importance to the United States in containing the U.S.S.R. evaporated as the U.S.S.R. broke apart. However, Turkey's strategic location proved increasingly important as conflicts emerged

near Turkey's borders: civil war and wars of secession in Yugoslavia in the west; wars in the Caucasus region to the north-east of Turkey (Chechnya, Nagorno-Karabakh, and the Abkhazia war in the newly independent state of Georgia); and, to the south-east, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, which led to the First Gulf War in 1991.

In recent years, particularly following the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, Turkey's geopolitical importance to the United States has increased further. At the same time, however, the strategic interests of the United States and Turkey have increasingly diverged, for two primary reasons. First, as a country straddling Europe and Asia, Turkey has enjoyed strong economic ties with both its European and its Middle Eastern neighbours. Its economic ties with industrialized Western Europe have been particularly important for Turkey's economic development; in addition, Turkey has maintained a democratic form of government and codified state secularism, thus further solidifying its ties with its secular and democratic European neighbours. Membership in the expanding European Union would further integrate Turkey with its European neighbours. Turkey officially

applied for EU membership in October 2005, but various policy reforms must be introduced in Turkey in order for its membership in the EU to be fully granted. In particular, Turkey's foreign policy must be more closely aligned with that of the EU, even where the EU's interests might diverge from those of the United States.

Second, the geopolitical importance of Turkey for the EU is arguably increasing. Turkey's accession to the EU will have a major impact on two significant aspects of the geopolitical status of Turkey *vis-à-vis* the EU. First, Turkey will become increasingly important because of its function as a crossroads for energy supplies: Turkey is adjacent to oil and natural gas reserves in the Middle East and in the Caspian Sea Basin, and Turkey's membership in the EU could help secure Europe's access to these resources and guarantee their safe transportation into European countries. Second, Turkey's accession would extend the EU's borders to Central Asia and the Middle East, thus elevating the significance of conflicts in the region for EU foreign-policy concerns. This elevation of the strategic importance of Turkey for the EU, in combination with Turkey's moves to strengthen its ties with Europe, means that the EU is perhaps replacing the United States as Turkey's most significant ally. Indeed, this "courting" of Turkey follows previous and contemporary models of geopolitics in which Turkey's geographic location is noteworthy for its strategic coastal location along the southern periphery of the Eurasian landmass.

The purpose of this paper is to review these geopolitical changes and continuity in bilateral relations between Turkey and the United States from the Truman Doctrine in 1947 to the present in light of historical and contemporary models of geopolitics. Bilateral relations between Turkey and the United States are reviewed and analyzed within the contexts of global change, regional crisis, and Turkish internal politics in three structurally different historical eras within the contemporary world geopolitical order: the

Cold War era (1947–91), the post–Cold War era (1990–2001), and the post–September 11 era (2001–present). Analyses of these eras are based primarily on reviewing and assessing the historical events that shaped relations between the United States and Turkey within the context of geopolitics. Section 2 below reviews historical and contemporary models of geopolitics and Turkey's place within them; sections 3–6 review the contexts of global change, regional crisis, and Turkish internal politics in the three historical eras identified above, and section 7 offers some concluding remarks.

## 2. Models of Geopolitics and the Role of Turkey

Students of political geography and international relations have made several attempts to devise global geopolitical models of the relationships between states. These include the Heartland Theory (Mackinder 1904), the Rimland Theory (Spykman 1942), and the Shatterbelt/Gateway Theory (Cohen 1973, 2005). Almost all discussions of global geopolitical perspectives begin with Sir Halford Mackinder (1919), who described the "heartland" as a vast territory of Eurasia stretching from the northern Arctic coast of Russia, south to the Himalayas, and then westward to Baluchistan and the Persian Gulf. The Heartland concept, Mackinder explained, was equivalent to the territory of the Soviet Union. In 1919, Mackinder revised his theory to include Eastern Europe, and the theory became known as Mackinder's Heartland Theory. Turkey is situated immediately south of the pivot region. Based on this geographical view, Mackinder formulated his famous hypothesis:

*Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland  
Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island  
Who rules the World-Island commands the World*  
(1919, 106)

Despite criticism of Mackinder's geopolitical idea, American foreign policy makers treated his theory as valid and capable of materialization. This belief persisted through most of the Cold War period. According to Mackinder's last revision of the Heartland map, Turkey is more or less at the border of the pivotal area and within the Inner and Marginal Crescent. Peter Taylor (1993) points out that Mackinder's Heartland Theory regarding the significance of the world-island and what Mackinder deemed the inevitability of an era of sea power versus land power conflict became the new world order. Mackinder's two worlds finally came into being as the Cold War geopolitical world order. Turkey and Greece were in the buffer zone for superpowers at that time; when the United States supported Turkey and Greece, the Cold War was firmly in place (Taylor 1993). Gearoid Ó Tuathail (1996, 28), one of the advocates of critical geopolitical theory, calls Mackinder's Heartland Theory "a triumphalism blind to its own precariousness." Ó Tuathail writes that in interpreting the "end of geography" as a diversion from the struggle for territorial expansion to the struggle for relative efficiency among imperial states, Mackinder was oblivious to those who came to define it as the struggle for cultural and territorial independence.

Nicholas Spykman argued that the critical geopolitical area of the globe was Mackinder's inner crescent, which he renamed the "Rimland." Spykman wrote that the Mackinder dictum is false. If there is to be a slogan for the power politics of the Old World, it must be:

*Who controls the Rimland rules Eurasia  
Who rules Eurasia controls the destinies of the world* (1944, 43)

During World War II, Spykman asserted that the United States must adopt policies that would promote American

influence in the marginal crescent. In this case, Western Europe and Turkey were buffer states for the United States in order to contain the U.S.S.R. Another American geographer, D.W. Meinig, argued that some rimland states were inward-looking toward the heartland, and others outward-looking toward the oceans. Therefore, the preference of allies in the rimland could be a complicated matter, and the orientation of individual states might change through time (Drysdale and Blake 1985, 27).

Saul Cohen used the term "shatterbelt" as roughly equivalent to the concept of the Rimland. Cohen defines a shatterbelt as "a large, strategically located region that is occupied by a number of conflicting states and is caught between the conflicting interests of adjoining Great Powers" (1973, 251). Cohen saw the Middle East and Southeast Asia as the primary shatterbelt regions; he modified his idea of which regions constituted the world's shatterbelts several times.

Whether as part of Mackinder's World Island or of Spykman's Rimland, the Middle East—connecting Eurasia and Africa—has always been seen as a region of strategic importance. In Cohen's model, the Middle East is a shatterbelt where the maritime realm meets the continental realm. Where once it was a powerful region of great empires and an important trade region, in more recent times the Middle East has found itself susceptible to foreign influence, in the form of colonial domination, and a pawn in an international chess match between the Soviet Union and the United States. The position of the region will always be important geographically; however, it is unclear whether the Middle East will be able to overcome its economic and social difficulties to re-establish itself as an important region of trade and culture or whether it will continue to be a shatterbelt, caught between colliding external cultural and political forces.

### 3. Turkey and the Practice of Geopolitics, 1947–present

John Agnew (2003) identifies three discourses in the evolution of geopolitical thought from the early 19th century until the end of the Cold War: civilizational geopolitics; naturalized geopolitics; and the “ideological geopolitics” of the Cold War years, when the world was divided in line with the ideological leanings of the United States as capitalist and the former U.S.S.R. as communist.

In a divided world, the dominant goal of U.S. foreign policy from the late 1940s to the end of the Cold War was to contain Soviet power within the geographical boundaries established at the end of World War II. Containing Soviet power was the subject of George F. Kennan’s famous 1947 article in *Foreign Affairs*, “The Sources of Soviet Conduct.” Kennan argued that, for historical and ideological reasons, the Soviet Union would seek to expand its political control beyond the immediate postwar geographical boundaries. He urged the United States to respond with a policy of “long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment,” and called for “the adroit and vigilant application of counter-force at a series of constantly shifting geographical and political points, corresponding to the shifts and maneuvers of Soviet policy” (Kennan 1947, 575–576).

Under the inspiration of the Containment Theory, U.S. presidential administrations began to form political and military alliances around Soviet territory and the Soviet sphere of influence. In this Cold War context, as Edward Erickson (2004) states, Turkey was a vital ally in the implementation of “containment” and deterrence against the Soviet Union during peacetime. Turkey and Greece became crucially important to the strategy of containment. It was this support that came to be known as the Truman Doctrine: on 12 March 1947, U.S. president Harry Truman said that the United States must help “free peoples who

are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures” and pledged military and economic aid to Greece and Turkey (Truman 1947). The Truman Doctrine laid the groundwork for the U.S. Cold War with the Soviet Union (Agnew 1993).

John O’Loughlin (1989) examines similar bilateral relations between the superpowers (the United States and the Soviet Union) and two African countries (Somalia and Ethiopia). He notes that the Third World includes some of the most unstable regimes, anxious to acquire protection and aid from regional and global allies. The Soviet Union’s attention to Third World politics was mainly focused on “the Arc of Crisis” (Lenczowski 1979) for the most basic of reasons: its long border with one of the world’s most unstable regions, from Turkey to Afghanistan.

As emphasized in many studies, the strategy of containment of the Soviet Union was one dimension of U.S.–Turkey bilateral relations during the Cold War years. Because of Turkey’s geographic location, its population size, and its capabilities—including the size of its military forces and its economic strength—U.S.–Turkey bilateral relations have been multidimensional from their inception. As Cohen notes, American strategists tend to see Turkey as either “a passive bridge or forward point for NATO and the West to the Middle East, the Transcaucasus, and Central Asia” (2004, 577). Turkey is a potential regional hegemon, influencing the Middle East, the Caucasus, and the Balkans. This uniqueness of Turkey’s geopolitics forged a solid relationship between the Turkish and U.S. militaries (Erickson 2004).

Agnew argues that the post–Cold War geopolitical order is still organized geographically. The Cold War geographical structure of United States, Soviet Union, and Third World no longer exists (Agnew 2003); the collapse of the Soviet Union has introduced some modifications within Cohen’s

Shatterbelt and Gateway regions (1999). As Ghazi Falah (1993) predicted, when the collapse of the Soviet Union and the breakup of Yugoslavia were underway, Turkey was key to the Middle East geographically, but Turkey has become more Europe-oriented within the post-Cold War geopolitical order. Turkey's integration into Europe will be consolidated by future developments (Falah 1993). In the post-Cold War geopolitical order, Turkey became a key country in the future geopolitical formation of the new Caucasus and Central Asian states (Cohen 1999). This is largely because the unexploited oil fields of Central Asia have become a major geo-strategic concern in post-Cold War geopolitics (Dodds 2003). Despite the end of the Cold War and the collapse of communism, there was a strong basis for strategic cooperation between the United States and Turkey. Turkey's geographical location and pro-Western identity support strategic cooperation (Kirisçi 2001); in addition, the post-Cold War geopolitics forced Turkey to initiate a new activism in the Balkans, the Middle East, the Caucasus, and Central Asia that was congruent with American interests (Yavuz 1998).

#### **4. U.S.–Turkey “Alliance” in the Cold War Period**

U.S.–Turkey bilateral relations mirror, in part, changes in the distribution of global power and global geopolitical structures. From this vantage point, Turkey acquired great importance for the United States during the Cold War (from 1947 through the early 1990s) as long as the Soviet Union and its power were intact. The origins of the U.S.–Turkey alliance appear to contradict the prominent political scientist Kalevi Holsti's argument that “geographic conditions do not appear to play a significant role in alliance making” (1967, 111). As explained above, Turkey's strategic position was its main asset and the major reason for its alliance with the United States during the

Cold War period and beyond. The U.S. alliance with Turkey was of particular significance and complexity because of geography. As Spykman observed, “geography is the most fundamental factor in foreign policy because it is the most permanent” (1944, 41).

The end of World War II marked a watershed in Turkish–Soviet relations as well as in U.S.–Soviet relations. Towards the end of the war, on 19 March 1945, the Soviet Union gave notice to Turkey of its intention to abrogate their 1925 Treaty of Friendship and Non-aggression, and on 7 June 1945 it claimed rights to some eastern provinces of Turkey (Kars, Ardahan, and Batum) as well as to controlling passage through the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles by establishing a base there. Turkey's objective to contain the imminent Soviet threat was coupled with a similar concern on the part of the United States, which feared Soviet expansion into the Middle East and the Mediterranean, where oil was the most important U.S. strategic concern. Turkey's geopolitical location was crucial for the containment of such ideological and territorial expansion. As a result, U.S. military analysts reached the conclusion that Turkey was “the most important military factor in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East” and that “the Soviet expansion would have a serious impact on the vital interests of the US” (Campany 1986, 80).

With the end of World War II, a new era in the contemporary geopolitical order emerged. In the emergent bipolar structure of the Cold War, the United States and the U.S.S.R. occupied opposing poles of the ideologically separated international system; relations between countries were determined mostly in the shadow of this bipolarity. The smaller countries in the geopolitical order, in particular, had to side either with the United States or with the U.S.S.R., and had various reasons for their choices (Kirisçi 2001). For Turkey, there were three reasons to set up close relations



with the United States. First, Turkey felt insecure in the face of the emerging expansion of the U.S.S.R.: Soviet political leaders had unilaterally annulled the 1925 Treaty of Friendship, claimed a revision in the Montreal Agreement for the sake of the states bordering the Black Sea, and demanded some territory in East Anatolia (Uslu 2000, 204). This Soviet threat led Turkish political leaders to call for American military and diplomatic support. Second, Turkey needed economic and military aid from the United States. It is generally known that developing countries feel the need to improve their military and defence capabilities by setting up close relations with a developed country. Turkey was in need of both economic and military aid: its economy was particularly sensitive to fluctuations, and its critical geographical position meant that it needed money to develop and buy weapons for defence in Cold War conditions. Turkey therefore began to move closer to the United States to gain that aid, sending nearly 4 000 soldiers to the Korean War between 1950 and 1953 in support of American forces and showing an ardent desire to participate in NATO and thus obtain the aid provided by the Truman Doctrine and Marshall Plan (Sander 2000, 231–34). Third, Turkey's quest to participate in the Western bloc was related not only to its security concerns but also to its domestic ideological considerations. Turkey's coalition with a democratic and secular power would promote the Westernization of Turkey, such that Turkey's identification with the Western world could be ratified by its relations with the United States. In this context, Turkey's relations with the United States during this period were hierarchical and uneven; Turkey, as the weaker partner, generally took positions in accordance with U.S. national interests. Sometimes, however, Turkey deviated from the American path, and immediately faced the threat of being left alone in the geopolitical system to deal with the Soviet threat. In light of this fact, the Cold War

period in U.S.–Turkey relations can be divided into three periods: (i) 1950–64, (ii) 1964–80s, and (iii) 1980s–91.

Between 1950 and 1964, U.S.–Turkey relations enjoyed their heyday, thanks to Turkey's enthusiasm for American policies, considering its immediate security situation in the face of the Soviet threat, and the Turkish Democratic Party's plan to obtain economic aid for projects to be implemented in reforming the domestic structure of the country. Thus, for example, Turkey opted to support the United States, rather than Britain, in the Suez Canal crisis of 1956 and gave unconditional support to the Eisenhower Doctrine, which envisioned protecting Middle Eastern countries against Communist truculence and destructiveness (Folliot 1954, 65). Despite the its resulting isolation within the region, Turkey continued to follow the path of the United States by adapting its defence plans and its army to the American model proposed by the American experts, even though this could jeopardize the sovereignty of the country (Uslu 2000, 214–15). Nasuh Uslu asserts that U.S. reluctance to donate stability funds to redress the Turkish balance of payments was the most serious problem in U.S.–Turkey relations during the 1950s (215).

The 27 May 1960 coup in Turkey and the Cuban Missile crisis could not paralyse these relations (Kirisçi 2000; Uslu 2000; Yavuz 1998). Between 1964 and 1980, however, U.S.–Turkey relations were shaken for a number of reasons. In the early years of this period, the Turkish side posed a number of criticisms. First, the dismantling of U.S. Jupiter missiles in Turkey was seen as indicating a decline in Turkey's strategic importance to the West and was expected to create a security vacuum in Turkish defences (Kirisçi 2000, 73). Second, the insufficiency of American military aid led to a deterioration in bilateral relations (Uslu 2000, 218). Third, the United States remained silent about the events in Cyprus and blocked Turkish intervention in the island (218).

Furthermore, U.S. president Lyndon Johnson sent a letter to the Turkish government implying that the United States would not provide support in the event of a Soviet attack on Turkey (Yavuz 1998, 28–30). This, in particular, paved the way for a wave of anti-American movements in Turkey, which was also supported by the greater freedom of expression ushered in by the 1961 constitution (32–35).

Turkey tried to calm the rise of internal criticism by withdrawing from the Multilateral Forces, forbidding the flight of American U2s in Turkish airspace, restricting use of the Incirlik airbase to NATO, and reconsidering bilateral agreements signed with the United States (Uslu 2000, 216). Moreover, Turkish leaders paid extensive visits to Eastern Bloc countries and signed economic agreements with them (Kirisçi 2000, 82). Turkey also began to differ on some issues with the United States at the United Nations and to support Third World and Arab countries in order to gain their support, especially on the issue of Cyprus.

In 1969, the United States blamed Turkey for producing opium that was consumed by American youth and pressed Turkish political leaders to cease the planting of poppies (Kirisçi 2000, 78). This was the beginning of a difficult era in relations between the two countries. The inception of leftist terrorist activities targeting Americans and the Turkish ban on the use of the Incirlik airbase worsened relations, and the onset of the Cyprus crisis in 1974 brought bilateral relations to a new low point (Yavuz 1998, 32). The United States imposed an embargo on Turkey, which remained in force until the Soviet intervention into Afghanistan made clear the importance of Turkey as the most important U.S. ally against the Soviet Union in the face of the end of *détente*. Turkey's importance in the eyes of the United States grew still more with the Islamic Revolution of 1979 in Iran. These developments culminated at last in the normalization of the bilateral relations in the 1980s.

In the 1980s, relations followed the same path on which they were built and were moulded by the Defense and Economic Cooperation Agreement (DECA) of 29 March 1980 (Kirisçi 2001). The ratification of this agreement by the diverse political groups in Turkey, and Turkey's abrogation of its opposition to NATO membership for Greece, indicated Turkey's new enthusiasm for developing relations with the United States. Although Turkey had a number of reasons to be dissatisfied with its relations with the United States, it still insisted on carrying on those relations. The problems were mainly related to the application of DECA, the Armenian problem, the issues between Turkey and Greece with respect to Cyprus, and the insufficiency of U.S. support in redressing Turkey's economic problems.

From the American standpoint, good relations with Turkey stemmed from Turkey's *rapprochement* with Israel; Turgut Özal's desire to reform the Turkish economy on the neo-liberal American economic model of the time and the opening of the Turkish economy to American firms were the basis of U.S.–Turkey relations in the 1980s. Turkey's geopolitical importance to the United States in the Middle East, blocking Soviet expansionism in the neighbouring region and locking Soviet sea power in the Black Sea, which tipped the Eastern Mediterranean balance to the West, encouraged U.S. enthusiasm for improving relations with Turkey. Moreover, the Islamic Revolution in Iran, the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, and uncertainties in the Middle East made it essential for the United States to develop its relationship with Turkey (Uslu 2000, 219).

### **5. The End of the Cold War: From “Alliance” to “Strategic Partnership”**

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the significance of Turkey's geopolitical location diminished, and, in order to regain its

importance in the eyes of the United States, Turkey shifted its foreign policy toward playing a larger role in regional politics. This shift ultimately coincided with U.S. interests in the region and with the broader U.S. global “war on terror” and its fallout in West Asia. This explains why Turkey forged good relations with Israel in the 1990s (Kirisçi 2000, 73), and has deepened them over the past decade. U.S.–Turkey bilateral relations are a function of Turkish engagement in the politics of its region: in effect, how can Turkey pursue its own interests while serving those of Washington? Questions of petro-politics in West Asia and the political economy of petroleum access and control in Central Asia play a major role in this connection. Direct Israeli involvement in Iraqi Kurdistan and the establishment of Kurdish autonomy in Northern Iraq since 2003 are other sources of potential friction between Ankara, on one side, and Tel Aviv and Washington, on the other.

During the post–Cold War era, the relationship between the United States and Turkey evolved under new geopolitical conditions. The end of the Cold War, marked by the disintegration of the Soviet Union, opened another phase in U.S.–Turkey relations. The basic nature of this new relationship can be defined as extended cooperation in the political field, an increase in diplomatic consultation, and an emphasis on enhanced economic partnership, in compensation for the decreasing emphasis on security and defence-related matters. In the post–Cold War era, as Kemal Kirisçi (2000, 73) points out, both the United States and Turkey were in agreement to advance democratic, secular, and pro-Western regimes in the Middle East and to prevent the rejuvenation of the Russian/Soviet empire.

The first Iraqi crisis was perhaps the earliest indication of the close relations between Turkey and the United States in this new post–Cold War era. Turkey gave significant support to the United States in the Iraqi crisis. Although Turkish troops did not

engage the Iraqi military, Turkey nonetheless served the coalition in two important ways: first by massing an estimated 100 000 troops along the 240-km border with Iraq, forcing Iraq to commit an equivalent force and raising concerns that coalition forces would initiate a second front in the north; and, second, by allowing the United States to use bases (principally the Incirlik airbase in southeastern Turkey) to bomb targets in northern Iraq during the Gulf War (Bahçeli 1994, 435).

Turkey acted in accord with the United States in the Middle East peace process. President Turgut Ozal also actively sought to participate in the Madrid peace process, and had already advocated the idea of building water pipelines from Turkey across the Middle East as a project to promote peace in the area (Kirisçi 1998, 65). Although Turkey was not invited to the Madrid talks, it later, with U.S. support and urging, took an active part in the resultant working groups. Turkey began to develop relations with Israel, especially following the September 1993 agreement between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (Altunışık 2000, 172–91). Since then this relationship has expanded considerably and has clearly received active U.S. support, including U.S. participation in the first joint naval exercise between Israel and Turkey in January 1998. The United States did object, however, to certain aspects of Israeli–Turkish military cooperation, particularly in the area of anti-missile technology (Kirisçi 2000, 68).

Turkey and the United States were also in agreement about pipelines to distribute Caspian oil and gas to the world market. The United States has advocated multiple routes for pipelines including one from Baku across Turkey to its oil terminal at Ceyhan on the Mediterranean. The Turkish government has supported this route with much greater singlemindedness, irrespective of commercial or economic factors, and has felt that the United States did not put sufficient pressure on oil companies to do the same (Kirisçi

1998, 75). Nevertheless, American decision makers have repeatedly expressed public support for the Baku–Ceyhan route, and clearly see this project as enhancing Turkey’s ties with the West, boosting its economy, and improving its stability.

### **6. The Post–September 11 Period: The War on Iraq and U.S.–Turkey Relations**

After 11 September 2001, bilateral relations between Turkey and the United States were shaped and reshaped by the internal politics of Turkey, where conflicting views were held by various political parties and elites, and among differing social strata within the Turkish public—those who want Turkey to shift toward American and Western countries, with full integration into the EU and all that may entail or portend, and others who see Turkey as more of a Muslim and Middle Eastern country, with its own heritage and interests that are national and regional. This domestic political complex is affected by foreign-policy factors, such as the question of Kurdistan and the Kurdish minority in Turkey (a regional majority in some provinces in eastern Turkey), as they arise from the continuing occupation of Iraq, and further compounded by the rejection of the American presence in Iraq by a large segment of the Turkish population and by some Turkish political elites. Proponents in Turkey of a kind of pan-Turkic unity of peoples, stretching far into Central Asia and led by Turkey, represent another voice calling for greater Turkish autonomy in a kind of “Turkic,” rather than Turkish, nationalism. Nationalist discourses may call for greater Turkish opposition to Israeli policies in the name of Muslim unity, greater criticism of U.S. policy in the region in the name of Turkish–Arab solidarity, or greater Turkish influence in Central Asia in the name of pan-Turkic geopolitical aims. Religious fundamentalism in Turkey calls for a preservation of, and return to, more Islamic values. Intellectual discourses call for a struggle

against a new “Orientalism” and demonizing of Islamic belief and practice by various elites in Europe and North America. And all these discourses stand in conflict with the United States’ primary strategic and economic interests, as perceived by the governing American political and corporate elites.

The transition of the American government from Democratic to Republican control is a vital point in understanding U.S.–Turkey relations in the post–September 11 world. The Bill Clinton administration was an interregnum among presidencies whose leaders shared the same ideals: during the presidencies of Ronald Reagan, George H. Bush, and George W. Bush, the same politics were pursued. The so-called Project for the New American Century (PNAC 2000), established in 1997 and pursued by the “inner group” within the government, is the current guide to foreign affairs for the United States. The core of this project is U.S. leadership in world affairs, and its emphasis is on security matters and military power:

As the 20th century draws to a close, the United States stands as the world’s most preeminent power. Having led the West to victory in the Cold War, America faces an opportunity and a challenge: Does the United States have the vision to build upon the achievement of past decades? Does the United States have the resolve to shape a new century favorable to American principles and interests?

[What we require is] a military that is strong and ready to meet both present and future challenges; a foreign policy that boldly and purposefully promotes American principles abroad; and national leadership that accepts the United States’ global responsibilities.

Of course, the United States must be prudent in how it exercises its power. But we cannot safely avoid the responsibilities of global leadership of the costs that are associated with its exercise. America has a vital role in maintaining peace and security in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. If we shirk our responsibilities, we invite challenges to our fundamental interests. The

history of the 20th century should have taught us that it is important to shape circumstances before crises emerge, and to meet threats before they become dire. The history of the past century should have taught us to embrace the cause of American leadership (PNAC 2000, frontispiece).

This project was claimed by a powerful group in the George W. Bush administration to be in the interest of U.S. citizens. This group was hegemonic in attitude; it tended to disrespect international law in the face of an insecure world for the United States, and the interests and choices of other countries and the voice of the international community were bypassed. In this context, Turkey's relations with the United States became strained by the latter's desire to act unilaterally and disregard Turkish interests and priorities. Although Turkey watched developments in northern Iraq with concern, U.S. policy makers tended to disregard the trepidations of the Turkish government. The unilateral foreign policy of the Bush administration and the on-going Palestinian problem have widened the gap between two the countries.

The ascent to power of the Islamist Justice and Development Party (JDP) following the 3 November 2002 elections is also important in understanding U.S.–Turkey relations in the post–September 11 world. The impact of the JDP's vision on relations with the United States is generally evaluated as negative; many have criticized the JDP for failing to support the Iraq war. However, the opposition party—the Republican People's Party (RPP)—and the army, which have an enormous impact on the formation of foreign-policy options, also rejected the idea of supporting the United States in Iraq, thus moderating the reaction against the JDP's policies. Nevertheless, U.S.–Turkey relations have been damaged by the JDP's position in Turkish politics; as a peripheral party, JDP has only weak ties with foreign interest groups and lobbies and is closer to society's margins than to Turkey's

political core, which has been occupied by bureaucrats and the military with strong ties to international pressure groups (Pipes 2003). This core, which has long dominated Turkish politics, has played an important role in developing close relations with Western countries, especially the United States. In contrast to the centre's close relations with the United States, JDP is more concerned about the Islamic world and about EU membership; in other words, the JDP did not want to reduce Turkey's prestige in the eyes of other Muslim countries—as a result of pressure from a party base composed of Islamists—by supporting the United States in the Iraq war. Because much of the Islamic world viewed the American action in Iraq as a direct assault on Islamic civilization, the JDP could not accept the war as legitimate. If Turkey had supported the United States, it would probably have been excluded from the Islamic world and would have lost its ties with the Middle East.

Turkey's attitude toward the Iraq war was appreciated by the EU, although the EU itself was divided on the issue of giving support to the United States. Despite the fact that Turkey's application for membership in the European Union faces considerable obstacles, Turkey's opportunity for EU membership may have been lost if Turkey had insisted on siding with the United States in the war. Current developments in Turkey–EU relations show that Turkey's importance has increased in the eyes of the EU with respect to strategy; its commitment to the European values of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law; and its attitudes toward the Iraq war. Nevertheless, the Turkish government has acted ambiguously, as a result of its political legitimacy problem and of insistent pressure from the United States. For instance, President Tayyip Erdogan, who blamed Israel for pursuing state terrorism after Israeli forces murdered Sheikh Ahmed Yasin, visited Israel on 2–4 May 2005; this visit was aimed partly at placating the U.S. government.

Turkey has its own neo-Ottoman project in the region, which is autonomous from U.S. and Israeli priorities and has had the highest potential to damage U.S.–Turkey relations. This project simply envisions reviving relations with ex-Ottoman communities and creating a sphere of influence in the region. It was first articulated by the late prime minister Turgut Özal in the post–Cold War era, in an environment that was pushing Turkey to develop relations with its co-religionists in the Balkans, the Caucasus, North Africa, and the Middle East and with Turkic communities in Central Asia. Özal failed to implement the neo-Ottoman project, however, and it was abandoned by subsequent governments—which had a different perception of Turkey’s identity (as a secular, Western country) and its role (seeking to join with the United States and Israel, regardless of the reactions of the public and of other neighbouring states).

The neo-Ottoman foreign policy strategy was abandoned as a result of a number of changes in Turkish domestic politics: the election of Motherland Party (MP) leader Mesut Yilmaz – successor to Özal – as president of the Turkish Republic; the so-called postmodern coup by the army and anti-Islamist organizations, which toppled the Islamist Welfare Party and put pressure on Islamist groups; and the subsequent establishment of a governing coalition of the Democratic Leftist Party (Third World nationalist), the liberal-right MP under Yilmaz, and the extreme nationalist Nationalist Movement Party. The project has been revived, however, since the election of the JDP. This pendulum swing in foreign-policy behaviour reflects an ideological struggle in domestic politics. The crisis of Kemalism—the state ideology of the Turkish state—and the rise of Islamist groups since the 1960s that tend to pursue politics on the basis of Muslim identity and an Ottoman past, has transformed the social norms and state identity. Today, therefore, the JDP’s foreign policy moves in a zigzag pattern as a

result of its Islamist/Ottomanist identity and of pressure from Westernist-secular elites, the United States through its embassy in Ankara, and the U.S. media.

In this new muddled environment, U.S.–Turkey relations were first tested in Afghanistan. First, the United States expected Turkey to be involved in the Afghanistan operation and that, as part of its commitment to NATO, Turkey would provide access to airspace and bases and would share the intelligence it had gathered in Afghanistan over many years as a sponsor of the Northern Alliance. Second, the United States envisioned that Turkey would share what it had learned while fighting Kurdish groups in southeastern Turkey in the 1980s and 1990s: the terrain there is similar to that of Afghanistan, and the tactics and weaponry of the Kurds are similar to those of the Taliban (Kinzer 2001). Third, it was expected that Turkey could be involved if a peacekeeping force were needed in post-Taliban Afghanistan; with its historical and cultural ties with Afghanistan, and since Turkey is also a Muslim country, its participation could give legitimacy to the war in the eyes of neighbouring Islamic countries.

Iran opposed Turkey’s involvement in Afghanistan, however, being always concerned about Turkey’s influence in the region. Turkey, especially since the 3 November 2002 election, has begun to pursue a foreign policy that gives priority to engagement with Central Asia in keeping with its neo-Ottomanist objectives, and also strengthening its ties to Europe and the U.S. by acting as a mediator between the E.U. and U.S. on the one hand, and Central Asian republics on the other. Turkey, for example, hosted the NATO–Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) summits held in 2004. Moreover, by opening its bases to international powers in support of operations in Afghanistan, Turkey has shown that it is prepared to more fully cooperate with the U.S. in the region. This may also play a positive role in U.S.–Turkey relations in the

context of Iraq and the war there.

In terms of U.S.–Turkey relations, the second important phase in the post–September 11 era was the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq. The U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq differs from the Afghanistan war in many respects. First, from the Turkish point of view, there was no legitimate reason for the United States to attack Iraq; for this reason, the United States could not secure Turkish support for its invasion. Second, for the United States, the invasion of Iraq had a deeper reason than the intervention in Afghanistan: promoted as the second step in the Bush administration's global project, it embodied the U.S. government's real intention of establishing a unilaterally hegemonic order. Many states were sceptical toward the United States, however, and the global civil society aired its views on the illegitimacy of the Iraqi invasion through massive protests and demonstrations. Third, the invasion of Iraq has been viewed with scepticism by Turkish officials, in light of Turkey's Kurdish problem and the spread of Islamist politics in Turkey. Fourth, the invasion of Iraq has obstructed Turkey's neo-Ottomanist foreign policy. With the huge U.S. presence in Iraq and Afghanistan, Turkey found itself in direct competition with the U.S. in terms of exercising regional influence.

Through criticism and threats, both domestic and international groups tried to persuade the JDP government, but the Turkish parliament—constituted by the JDP and the RPP—declined the U.S. demand to use Turkish military bases to open a front from the north against Iraq. The Turkish army was also reluctant to open military bases to the United States. Lessons from the first Iraqi crisis and the hegemonic attitude of the United States, as well as the potential economic loss to Turkey, were also factors in this refusal. However, the situation shook U.S.–Turkey relations. Nevertheless, the Turkish government launched an initiative to search for a peaceful resolution of the Iraqi

crisis. This endeavour was praised in the majority of European capitals. Greece's foreign minister wanted to attend the Istanbul summit, dubbed the "Regional Initiative on Iraq," but was politely turned away; the German foreign minister, Joschka Fischer, visited Turkey during the summit and expressed his sympathies, and the French conveyed their congratulations. During Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's talks with Russian officials and his January 2003 visit to China, both states openly supported the JDP's attempts to avert war (Caliskan and Taksin 2003). In addition to hosting the Istanbul summit, the Turkish government paid visits to neighbouring countries, and former foreign minister Abdullah Gül—who would later become president of the republic—attended summits held in Riyadh and Tehran. Gül pressed for democratic reforms in the Islamic world that also respect human rights and aim to improve the living conditions of citizens.

After its initial invasion of Iraq – and despite the ongoing occupation there – the United States had begun to turn its attention to Iran during the second term of George W. Bush's administration. Designating Iran as the next target makes sense if the U.S. goal of "systemic transformation" in the post–September 11 world is taken into account (Baran 2003). On the one hand, Iran has been effectively excluded from the international system since the 1979 revolution. On the other hand, having stood for so long with no dependence on the international community and by engaging in policies of opposition and defiance to U.S. policies, Iran poses a direct challenge to U.S. hegemony in the region. In light of this, Iran's alleged pursuit of nuclear weapons raises the spectre of military conflict between the United States and Iran. Finally, the eruption of civil unrest in Iran following the disputed re-election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in June 2009 might pose further obstacles for U.S.–Iran relations.

### 7. Concluding Summary: Prospects for the Future

Nearly 50 years of U.S.–Turkey relations have evolved into a situation of strategic partnership in the post–Cold War era, both because the interests of two countries were in basic agreement over decades and because both tried to perpetuate these good relations by limiting themselves, to some extent, to certain core issues (centred on the Cold War and containment of the Soviet Union) for much of the period under examination. Since September 11, however, relations between United States and Turkey have been relatively troubled, perhaps even paralysed, because of developments in Iraq, the status of Iraqi Kurdistan, and the broader question of Israel. Moreover, the divergence between the United States and the EU, and the JDP government’s peripheral position in Turkish politics, has brought a different look to Turkey’s relations with its neighbours. The EU and the United States should attempt to better understand Turkey’s interest in achieving an equitable solution to the current stalemate in Cyprus, and perhaps recognition of Northern Cyprus as an autonomous area within a federation of what have become, in effect, two separate Cypriot states, with separate languages and religious majorities.

The EU and Washington should also better appreciate Turkey’s concern about the question of Kurdistan and its own Kurdish minority. The United States would do well to exert some influence in convincing the EU to extend membership to Turkey in the near future and to nurture realistic hopes among the Turkish elite and the working masses that this will indeed occur. Turkey needs to feel that it is on a clear path to EU membership; this is a geopolitical aim with considerable potential impact on a whole array of attitudes and issues.

The present situation seems to open what will become a new era in relations between Turkey and the United States.

However, the Turkish government appears somewhat erratic in its foreign policy making as a result of the complexities and pressures of the new era. Challenges arising from conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the increasing potential for conflict in Iran, has generated seemingly contradictory swings among potentially opposing policy choices, including siding with the United States in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Iran, siding with the European Union in its pursuit of energy resources in Central Asia, or pursuing its own neo-Ottomanist policy objectives. What will emerge in the near future will probably be determined by the JDP government’s performance in passing its reform packages, the EU’s response to these developments, and Turkey’s attitude toward a potential regional crisis between United States and Iran. Another potential factor is the possible emergence of an autonomous Kurdistan in northern Iraq, which could mobilize Turkey’s Kurdish population and threaten Turkey’s territorial integrity. Within these poles of idealism and realism, the JDP government is under pressure to choose the best policy options for the shorter and the long term.

These options open to the JDP and the current U.S. government will not only determine the health of bilateral relations but also, no doubt, affect regional security and the Islamic world’s relations with the Western world over the long term with respect to Turkey’s rising role in the Islamic world (e.g., for the first time the Organization of Muslim Countries has been led by a Turk, Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu). The success of the United States the “war on terror” and Turkey’s achievement of its regional aims may intersect. It is hard for Washington to succeed in the “war on terror” without the support of major Islamic countries; and as long as the United States pursues its current policies, it is unlikely to gain the genuine support of countries in the region. Therefore, both regional and international security would appear to rest on more



cooperative and equal relations between United States and countries in the region, especially Turkey, which has the potential to influence neighbouring states through its current Islamist government. Otherwise, the international environment will likely be less secure for all concerned.

### 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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