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SPECIAL REPORT

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ABOUT THE REPORT

On the eve of the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq, relations among Turkey, Iraq, and the Kurdistan Regional Government have been dramatically transformed for the better. While this report examines the change in relations and what led to the improvements, it also argues that grounds remain for continued concern, as sustained attention is needed on the eve of the U.S. military's departure to prevent events from undermining the progress achieved to date. In this respect, this report reflects on an earlier USIP report written by this author titled *Turkey and Iraq: The Perils (and Prospects) of Proximity* that called attention to the dangers of the then-deteriorating relations between Turkey and Iraqi Kurds to Turkey's future political stability, Iraq's unity, and U.S. interests.

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Henri J. Barkey

Turkey's New Engagement in Iraq

Embracing Iraqi Kurdistan

Summary

- In August 2009, the Turkish government announced that it would undertake a major initiative toward Turkey's Kurdish minority. In addition to being a major development in the long saga of Turkey's relations with its sizeable Kurdish minority, this initiative, known as the "democratic opening," is also a testament to the distance the Turkish government has traveled in its policy toward Iraq.
- Turkey, which had once spearheaded opposition to the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), is implementing a 180-degree turn in its policy toward the KRG. It is developing close economic and political ties with the KRG, and the two are collaborating on a gamut of issues, including efforts to pacify the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).
- At the heart of these changes lay a confluence of developments. They include the new geopolitics of the region, the new foreign policy conception of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), Turkey's domestic institutional context, changing perceptions within Turkey of the domestic Kurdish question, and efforts by key individual actors within Turkey.
- On the geopolitical level, the announced withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq has helped shift Turkey's approach to Iraq. Whether it is part and parcel of a conscious strategy by Ankara, Turkey's ability to influence events on the ground is greatest in northern Iraq. In Baghdad, Turkey has to contend with not just American competition but, far more significantly, the Iranian presence. Ironically, any increase in Turkish influence in the KRG translates into more in Baghdad because of the Kurds' critical role in Iraq's capital.
- On the foreign policy level, the AKP took advantage of the vacuum created by the war in Iraq and began to fashion itself as a regional power. In a policy that some have come to call "neo-Ottomanism," Turkey is expanding the contours of its influence in regions that were once part of the Ottoman Empire, including Iraq.

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- On the domestic institutional level, the Turkish military is still decisive on some matters, but the government has far more say than ever before in questions relating to national security. Indeed, the AKP wishes to resolve the Kurdish issue partly because doing so will curtail the military's vast prerogatives and in the process protect the party's own future from "meddlesome generals."
- On the societal level, there is a deep sense of war fatigue in Turkey, especially in the Kurdish southeast. There the pressure is for political activism rather than armed struggle.
- On an individual level, key actors within the Turkish military and intelligence community have come to realize that after twenty-five years of fighting, a strategy solely dependent on violence is unlikely to subdue the PKK or resolve Turkey's Kurdish question.
- For all of Turkey's newfound enthusiasm toward Iraq, the collapse of the Kurdish reform proposals in Turkey could have very serious ramifications for relations between Iraq and Turkey. It would both obviate the PKK's need to demilitarize itself and, more importantly, lead to increased violence in Turkey's Kurdish areas, which would complicate Ankara-Erbil relations.
- Both Washington and Ankara want to see a transition toward a stable and unified Iraqi political entity that is pluralistic and well on its way to improving the economic lot of its people.
- Among the recommendations presented herein, the United States should help keep the Turkish-KRG relationship on track; open a consulate in Erbil; build government capacity in the north; emphasize that it does not wish to leave a PKK presence in the KRG after its departure; be more inclusive of Turkish diplomats in Iraq in this period of transition; and help to improve and develop joint commercial ventures and hydrocarbon routes among Turkey, Iraq, and the KRG.

Introduction

In August 2009, the Turkish government announced that it would undertake a major opening toward Turkey's Kurdish minority. This momentous initiative by the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) could not have been conceived of without recent changes in Iraq, the transformation of the AKP's own policy toward northern Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), and the decision by the Obama administration to remove U.S. troops from Iraq. In addition to being a major development in the long saga of Turkey's relations with its sizeable Kurdish minority, this initiative, known as the "democratic opening," is also a testament to the distance the Turkish government has traveled in its policy toward Iraq.

Until recently, Turkey primarily viewed Iraq through the lens of its own Kurdish question. Kurdish autonomy in Iraq's north represented a particular—some said an existential—challenge to Turkey. Indeed, Turkish Kurds had increasingly begun to articulate nationalist demands and the Turkish-based Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) insurgents had ensconced themselves in northern Iraq's uncontrolled areas.¹ Ankara had been vociferously opposed to the Kurdish enclave in northern Iraq, an outcome of the 1991 Gulf War. In the aftermath of the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, Turkey found itself in the unenviable situation of contending with a transformed Iraq that legitimized the Kurds' claims in the north through the establishment of a federal Iraqi state. Short of the independence of northern Iraq, this outcome was long thought by Turks to be the worst possible outcome for Turkey.

Seven years after the invasion, Turkey, which had spearheaded opposition to the KRG, is implementing a 180-degree turn in its policy. It is developing close economic and political ties with the KRG, and the two are collaborating on a gamut of issues, including efforts to pacify the PKK. Ankara has done away with its alarming and highly charged discourse on

Iraqi Kurds. Remarkably, Ankara has even opened a consulate in Erbil, the KRG capital. In the process, Turkey has also emerged as a far more influential actor in Iraq. Although not as influential as Iran, Ankara is certainly giving Tehran a run for its money.

At the heart of these changes lay a confluence of developments, including the articulation by the AKP of a new regional strategic approach and the Turkish military's realization that after twenty-five years of fighting, a strategy solely dependent on violence is unlikely to subdue the PKK or resolve Turkey's Kurdish question. It is not surprising that Iraq's neighbors would adapt their approach to Iraq over time. Iraq and its problems pose very difficult challenges for neighboring countries, which have to develop policy options toward Iraq and the region under conditions of great uncertainty. Not only must Iraq's neighbors take Washington's intentions into account, but they must also worry about future developments in Iraq, a state that has yet to prove that it is stable and robust. Yet, no neighbor has so dramatically transformed its approach to Iraq as Turkey has. This transformation was the product of realpolitik and a hard look at what the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq will mean for Turkey in the long run.

What Explains Turkey's Change in Policy?

Turkey has long feared that Kurdish advances in Iraq would lead to a demonstration effect on its own Kurdish minority, estimated to be as much as 20 percent of its population. Starting in the 1960s, there was a great deal of cooperation between Baghdad and Ankara on efforts to curb Kurdish advances. After the Iran-Iraq War and the 1991 Gulf War, which resulted in untold damage and destruction by the Iraqi regime on its own Kurdish population, a safe zone was established in northern Iraq, ironically at the request of Turkey, which was anxious about the approximately 500,000 Iraqi Kurdish refugees camped on the other side of its border. Yet, Turkey shunned this Kurdish enclave, hoping for its eventual reincorporation into Iraq, albeit under more acceptable conditions.

By mid-2009, the Turkish government had signed agreements with the Iraqi Kurds on the importation of oil, begun an official dialogue with the KRG, and reduced its cooperation with the Iraqi Turkmen Front (ITC). Turkey had deemphasized its support for the Turkmen and begun to approach Iraq comprehensively, often in collaboration with the United States for purposes of influencing Iraq's transition. Whereas Ankara had been an irritant in Washington's conduct of Iraq policy, there is much greater harmony and cooperation between the two.

No single reason explains Turkey's policy change. It is a combination of developments within Turkey—some completely unrelated to Iraq and Iraqi Kurds—and the region at large. They include the new geopolitics of the region, such as the U.S. decision to withdraw from Iraq, the AKP's new foreign policy conception that at its core aims to make Turkey a global power of some prominence, the evolving civil-military relationship in Turkey, efforts by key individual actors within Turkey, and the changing perceptions within Turkey of the domestic Kurdish question, such as the Turkish military's reluctant conclusion that the insurrection will continue no matter what efforts it invests.

The geopolitical context

The Iraq War has irrevocably changed the region. However, far more important for the future of the region than the war itself has been the conduct of the United States and its inability to achieve the goals it had set for itself in Iraq. The unpopularity of the war in the region was matched by an equal degree of surprise when insurgents managed to bloody the U.S. military, causing it to suffer casualties and preventing it from establishing order and leaving.

With its failures, the Bush administration created a vacuum of influence and leadership in the region. In some ways, as will be further explored, this vacuum helped Ankara interject itself into the region's politics in general and Iraq's in particular.

The advent of the Obama administration confirmed and accelerated the Bush Administration's decision to withdraw from Iraq. This decision, taken without any assurance that the new regime in Baghdad will survive and not perish under the weight of sectarian, ethnic, and regional rivalries, is as transformative as the initial decision to invade. The regional powers, which had to anticipate the effects of an Iraq that conformed to the American imagination, now have to contend with an uncertain future in Iraq. This uncertainty is even greater because the United States may decide to pull out sooner than expected or be asked to leave earlier by the Iraqis themselves.² An unstable Iraq is likely to export its instability to the region. Whether such exports take the form of fundamentalist or jihadist organization and violence or nationalist stirrings, the repercussions will create opportunities for both regional cooperation and rivalries that may exacerbate conditions on the ground. Even if Iraq managed to emerge as a stable state—albeit one with limited influence in the medium term as it rebuilds from years of war and ravage—the fact of the matter is that the United States and the countries of the region would continue to pursue policies predicated on warding off the worst.

For Turkey, which has been consistent and insistent in defending the territorial integrity of Iraq, the prospect of an Iraq that becomes unglued would set in motion a series of intolerable repercussions. First, the probability of Kurdish independence and of the expansion of the Kurdish region to encompass Kirkuk, both the governorate and the city, would greatly increase. Turkey has long objected to Kirkuk's incorporation into the KRG. With Kirkuk's oil resources, its inclusion could embolden Iraqi Kurds to declare independence and set into motion irredentist claims throughout the region. Despite improvements in Ankara-Erbil relations, such developments would be seen as destabilizing to Turkey and would trigger violence between Kurds and other ethnic groups, primarily Arabs and Turkmen, that could spill over into Turkey. Second, an unglued Iraq could allow the heavily armed groups experienced at fighting a conventional army to export many of their fighters to neighboring countries, such as Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria, and even Turkey. The export of fighters would create further unrest that would undermine Turkish economic and diplomatic interests in the region. Third, greater unrest and instability on Turkey's borders would serve as a disincentive for EU members to accept Turkey as a full member of that organization.

Such dire prospects have helped shift Turkey's approach to Iraq. Ankara's ability to influence events on the ground is greatest in northern Iraq. In Baghdad, Turkey faces fierce competition from Iran which has long-lasting and well-established networks of influence as well as an American presence that will in the medium term continue to exercise a great deal of authority over decision making. Ironically, any increase in Turkish influence in the KRG translates into more, say, in Baghdad, because of the Kurds' critical role in Iraq's capital. In short, by helping shape events in northern Iraq, Ankara plays a role in determining the political contours of a future Iraq. The realization that the KRG, irrespective of the disputes that continue to swirl around the Iraqi Constitution and its federalism provisions, is here to stay has also affected Turkey's calculus. The KRG has succeeded in institutionalizing itself, not just by its very existence but also through the leadership of Iraqi president Jalal Talabani. Through his international contacts and personality, Talabani has simultaneously defended the interests of Iraq and the KRG, even when these interests have not always been in sync with each other.

The KRG, as the region's only autonomous Kurdish entity, has garnered support among Turkish Kurds. There is a new dynamic between Kurds on both sides of the border, where they each assume a protective stance vis-à-vis the other. Hence, Turkish Kurds do not take

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kindly to the AKP government when it engages in active hostility toward Erbil. Cooperation with the KRG has also achieved some of the Turkish goals that had been unattainable earlier, mainly the realization of Iraqi Kurdish pressure on the PKK. Finally, Turks are also beginning to appreciate that northern Iraq, which has been dominated by two large parties and ruled without much room for dissent against the Barzanis and Talabanis, has become a more differentiated society. The most recent provincial election in 2009 in the three KRG-controlled provinces witnessed an opposition party (Gorran) create a stir by riding an anticorruption wave and by making serious inroads into the dominance of these two families. Despite the conservative character of Kurdish society, especially in the Kirmanji-speaking areas of northern Iraq and Turkey, Iraqi Kurds resisted attempts, especially by Shia groups, to infuse the Iraqi constitution with religious influences. Kurds have also taken care to adopt a more secular approach with their regional institutions, potentially transforming the KRG into a buffer zone for Turkey against a potentially fundamentalist Iraq.

Turkish diplomacy, which played an active part in helping Washington resolve some of its differences with Baghdad on the relocation of U.S. troops and the schedule of U.S. troop withdrawals, also came to better understand the dynamics between the United States and Iraq. While the United States' decision to pull its troops out of Iraq has caused Ankara to rethink its strategy and priorities, Ankara has gained a better appreciation of the complexities of the U.S.-Iraq relationship and has come to understand that Iraq is very likely to strike a foreign policy course that is independent of the United States.

U.S. appreciation for a potentially constructive Turkish role also revealed itself late during the U.S. occupation of Iraq, and it took a real crisis in relations with the Turks for the Bush administration to change tactics. Upset at the safe havens the PKK enjoyed in northern Iraq, Turks had continuously upped their pressure on Washington to act. A devastating PKK attack on a Turkish border outpost in October 2007 that resulted in the death of thirteen Turkish soldiers is what finally triggered a new level of cooperation between Ankara and Washington. Domestic pressure on the Turkish government to intervene in Iraq had become so intense that Washington had little choice but to acquiesce to Turkish demands that more be done regarding the PKK encampments in northern Iraq. By helping to coordinate Turkish air strikes against PKK emplacements in northern Iraq, Washington dramatically increased its cooperation with Ankara and increased its pressure on the KRG to be more proactive in its support of Turkish actions.³ This change in U.S. policy was a watershed event. Turkish air strikes (and one ground operation) relieved the pressure. With the exception of one potential confrontation between *peshmerga* (Kurdish militia) forces and Turkish troops based in northern Iraq, tensions between the KRG and Ankara were managed thanks in part to precise bombing raids that caused minimal collateral damage in northern Iraq.

American acquiescence and help on air strikes went a long way in reassuring the Turkish government and military that the United States was unwilling to forsake its relations with Ankara. It erased some of the hard feelings that had developed within the Turkish military since the events of July 4, 2003.⁴ Ironically, it may have also helped the Turks engage the Iraqi Kurds. Without the political cover that the American help provided, the government would have faced even fiercer domestic opposition to extending any olive branch to Iraqi Kurds. For their part, Iraqi Kurds toned down their criticisms of Turkey, especially of the air strikes. In fact, Turkish Kurds were the ones to complain the most loudly, but influenced by the KRG, they too ultimately kept their powder dry.

There was one initiative that also helped the change in Turkish policy: the secret engagement of Iraqi Kurds by the head of the Turkish National Intelligence Organization (TNIO), Emre Taner. At a time when Turkish officials shunned the KRG, Taner's missions were critical in keeping tensions from overheating and in preparing the groundwork for future talks. Taner and his colleagues at the TNIO had long been convinced that the hard-line tactics of the

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Turkish military against Iraqi Kurds were counterproductive. Whereas numerous Turkish officials, civilian and military, had previously often asserted a variety of “redlines” that would trigger a Turkish military operation into northern Iraq, invariably infuriating KRG officials, such talk slowly disappeared from Ankara’s discourse. This was in part due to increased communication between the two sides. Accompanying this shift was Turkey’s de-emphasis of the Turkmen issue in northern Iraq. Turks discovered that the Turkmen were not just waiting to be “saved” by Ankara. In fact, 50 percent or more of the Iraqi Turkmen are Shia who have aligned themselves with traditional Iraqi Shia groupings. In the 2005 elections, the ITC did extremely poorly, managing to win less than 1 percent of the vote nationwide. Additionally, for those Turks who imagined that the army could intervene in Kirkuk, a general reminded the public in 2007 that Kirkuk is more than 452 kilometers from the Turkish border.⁵

Turkish government officials privately express their worries regarding expanding Iranian influence in Iraq. Moreover, they would like to see Iraq once again become a counterweight to Iran. Perhaps far better than any other of Iraq’s neighbors, Iran has successfully wooed and nurtured many of Iraq’s multiple ethnic and sectarian groups. Iran had a head start because many of the Iraqi opposition politicians made Tehran their home during Saddam Hussein’s rule. Even in Iraqi Kurdistan, the Iranians, unlike the Turks, were quite adept at cultivating both Kurdish parties. Despite their private misgivings, Turkish officials have displayed a very cordial if not friendly attitude toward Tehran. The creation of the Free Life Party of Kurdistan (PJAK), a PKK affiliate operating in Iran that shares bases and infrastructure with the PKK in the remote Qandil mountain range in northern Iraq, provided the Iranians with an opening into Turkey. Though much weaker than the PKK, PJAK succeeded in bloodying the Iranian military in Iran’s Kurdish regions. Tehran made a point of shelling PKK/PJAK hideouts in coordination with Turkish military actions. At the time, General İlker Başbuğ, then chief of Turkish land forces, acknowledged that there were a variety of exchanges between Turks and Iranians on these matters, including intelligence ones.⁶

Even so, the Turks have one decisive advantage over Tehran in Iraq: Iraqi Kurds. Although Turks had been resistant to hearing it, the KRG made it clear early on that Ankara, which offers a direct connection to Europe and an indirect one to the United States, is its natural partner. For Iraqi Kurds, the West represents their primary source of legitimacy and, perhaps, existential support. As a NATO member and an EU aspirant, Turkey offers the Kurds a more desirable strategic and economic option than Iran. With its Islamic regime at odds with the West and a less sophisticated economic base, Iran cannot compete with Turkey in northern Iraq. Although Iran’s ability to play a complicated game of chess in northern Iraq and Iraq proper should not be underestimated, its attributes do not match those of a confident Turkey at peace with itself. In effect, a KRG with strong linkages to Turkey would end up becoming an effective and natural counterbalance to the prospect of growing Iranian influence in Iraq.

Finally, the prospect of access to northern Iraq’s market in general, and, more importantly, to its oil and gas potential, has come to loom larger in the Turkish imagination in recent years. This development has even caused a substantive change in Ankara’s policy toward Iraq’s hydrocarbon law. Whereas Ankara sided with Baghdad against the KRG in the Kurds’ dispute over a new law, Ankara became frustrated with the sluggishness of the process in Baghdad. In 2009, Turks began to directly import oil from northern Iraq, and the prospect of a gas pipeline feeding into the newly announced Nabucco pipeline assumed greater import for them. Turkey, in its quest to become an oil- and gas-transit hub, wants to assure itself of alternative gas sources because it faces direct competition from Russia. Azerbaijan, its prime supplier, has insufficient gas resources. The northern Iraqi market may not account for a significant share of Turkish exports, but the prospect of intensive economic relations with

the KRG has the added benefit of improving the lot of one of Turkey's most economically depressed regions, the Kurdish-inhabited southeast.

In the final analysis, the Turkish government's change of policy is a calculated geopolitical risk. The most dramatic move that expresses the depth of change is the decision to open a consulate in Erbil, a move that only a year or two ago would have been seen as treacherous in Turkey. As such, the consulate can also be interpreted as an open admission by Ankara that it recognizes the federal structure of Iraq, with the KRG as a constituent element—an admission it had long abhorred to make. Critics charge that Ankara may even be strengthening the KRG's hand by facilitating its irredentist aspirations over Kirkuk and other parts of Iraq, to say nothing of Iranian, Syrian, and Turkish parts of the Kurdish-speaking region. Even so, the KRG is landlocked, and its ability to emerge as a viable state with all of its neighbors assuming a hostile stance toward it is quite minute. Further, past Turkish policies have not worked, especially those related to the domestic Kurdish problem, and Turkey certainly could not militarily handle its own Kurdish problem and simultaneously circumscribe Iraqi Kurdish actions. In the end, the KRG will likely prove to be a greater value than risk to Turkey.

The foreign policy contexts

The AKP's new foreign policy vision also underlies the shift in Turkish attitudes toward Iraq. The AKP came to power with the intention of revitalizing Turkey's inward-looking foreign policy. Taking advantage of the vacuum created by the Bush administration's war in Iraq, the AKP began to fashion itself as a regional power, acting as mediator in a number of conflicts. In a policy that some have come to call "neo-Ottomanism," Turkey has been expanding the contours of its influence in regions that were once part of the Ottoman Empire.⁷ The architect of this new foreign policy, current foreign minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, has a far more ambitious agenda—making Turkey a global power. Leveraging Turkey's cultural and historical ties, NATO membership, EU candidacy, and rapid economic growth, the AKP has demonstrated a willingness to don a leadership mantle and has been furiously trying to increase Turkey's role in international organizations, winning for example a seat on the United Nations Security Council after an almost fifty-year hiatus. In the process, Davutoğlu and Turkish prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan have set forth an ambitious policy of "zero problems with neighbors," including a high level of engagement with the leaders and populations of neighboring states and an emphasis on the importance of the internal linkage between security and democracy.

Two interlinked problems had interfered with this vision: first, Ankara has had serious problems with northern Iraq, specifically the KRG; second, as İbrahim Kalın has argued, "the current state of the [domestic] Kurdish issue alone cripples Turkey's ambitions to speak with confidence about democracy, transparency, and human rights in the Middle East."⁸ Improvement in relations with the KRG would have a positive impact on the domestic Kurdish question, and progress on both accounts would remove some of the stigma carried by Ankara, thereby providing it with more international clout. Ironically, AKP's early successes in foreign policy have increased the saliency of foreign policy considerations in domestic politics; the AKP has been able to campaign on its foreign policy successes. Erdoğan has derived a certain degree of popularity from his high-level international intercessions, blurring to some extent the boundaries between domestic and foreign policy.⁹

Both openings toward the KRG and the domestic Kurdish issue serve Ankara's foreign and domestic policy purposes. They also strengthen Turkey's hand in Iraqi politics. Its increased sway can also better serve the interests of the Iraqi Turkmen down the road. Finally, both openings lift an important burden in Turkish-American relations from Ankara's shoulders and

transform Turkey into a more valued and ultimately reliable interlocutor in Iraq. However, one danger that lurks in Turkey's new initiatives is the possibility of overconfidence on the part of Ankara. In its zeal to become the go-to interlocutor, Ankara risks alienating some of the friends that it ultimately needs the most.

The AKP by and large has played a constructive role in Iraq, establishing relations with groups other than the Turkmen and Kurds. It has had a special relationship with Iraqi vice president Tariq al-Hashemi. According to senior Turkish officials, Ankara has developed close relations with Hashemi, providing him with much needed support. Ankara's Sunni outreach occasionally angered Iraqi Shia, especially when some of the hardcore anti-Shia Sunnis were gathered for a conference in Istanbul. To perhaps even the score, both Erdoğan and Abdullah Gül received Moqtada al-Sadr in Ankara in May 2009 and facilitated his meeting with his followers in Istanbul.¹⁰ The pace of visits to Ankara by leading Iraqis increased after the Iraqi Parliament settled on an election date. In all of these visits, the Turkish message has been the same—to avoid political actions and coalitions that can increase tensions on the eve of these elections.¹¹

The domestic institutional context

The dramatic changes in Turkey's Iraq policy would not have been possible without significant developments in the domestic institutional context. The AKP's emergence and success as a somewhat anti-establishment party has set the stage for a showdown between it and the state. The civil-military establishment is fearful of Turkish society's Islamicization, and the AKP's performance on hot-button national security issues has served as a means to put pressure on the party.

In fact, the AKP did very little in the first years of its rule on the Kurdish question (as broadly defined) and essentially followed a traditional course of action which emphasized the terroristic nature of the domestic problem and the illegitimacy of the KRG in Turkish eyes. The only two exceptions were the forays of Taner into northern Iraq and a 2005 speech by Erdoğan in Diyarbakir, the heart of the southeast, where he recognized that Kurds had not been well treated during the republic's history. However, there was no follow-up to the speech, and expectations raised by it soon evaporated. Erdoğan would later even assume a hostile stance against Turkey's pro-Kurdish Democracy and Society Party (DTP), which is seen as representing the most nationalistic elements of Kurdish society and being close to the PKK.

The AKP, which won an overwhelming majority of parliamentary seats in the 2002 elections with only 34 percent of the electorate's support,¹² succeeded in winning almost all of the seats from Kurdish-majority areas. This meant that the AKP parliamentary delegation contained a significant number of Kurdish deputies who were eager to see the AKP improve conditions in the southeast. The increasing hostility between the establishment and the AKP reached a boiling point in 2007 and 2008. In what turned out to be a major miscalculation, the military leadership intervened in an attempt to prevent the AKP from electing Abdullah Gül, then foreign minister, as president. Gül's main handicap was the fact that his wife wore a headscarf; for senior officers this constituted a major transgression of secularism for someone who would be occupying the office held by the nation's founder, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. The resulting political crisis forced AKP to call for early elections, in which they rode a wave of resentment. The AKP substantially increased its share of the vote, from 34 to 47 percent—the first time an incumbent party had increased its share of the vote in Turkey since 1954. In effect, the military had received its comeuppance from the Turkish voters, triggering a crisis of confidence in its ability to offer unchallenged views of all things political.

The civil-military establishment is fearful of Turkish society's Islamicization, and AKP's performance on hot-button national security issues has served as a means to put pressure on the party.

The 2007 elections had changed the political landscape in a decisive way. Although the establishment made one more attempt at ridding the country of the AKP by instituting a court case aimed at banning the party, it failed. The AKP emerged stronger from these bruising battles with the military and its allies. Its parliamentary opposition was also more varied: instead of two parties, three had crossed the 10 percent threshold, and some twenty Kurds who had been elected independently formed their own group under the DTP banner once in Parliament.¹³

Hidden from the daily agenda, the reform of civil-military relations had always been at the top of the AKP's priorities. Its push for EU membership had been motivated by its need to curtail the military's vast prerogatives and protect the party's future from "meddlesome generals." Resolving the Kurdish issue is also part of this agenda, because the insurgency has enabled the military to maintain a very visible and critical role in society. Political mistakes committed by officers over the years have helped to somewhat redress the lopsided nature of civil-military relations. Although the Turkish military is still decisive on many matters, the government has far more say than before in matters relating to national security.

Corresponding to the changes in civil-military relations has been the weakening of the traditional statist parties. While the Republican People's Party (CHP) and the arch-nationalist Nationalist Action Party (MHP) are represented in Parliament, the CHP in particular has wallowed in Deniz Baykal's poor leadership and is incapable of offering constructive alternatives, thus rendering it quite irrelevant to the discussion of the Kurdish question at home and in Iraq.

The societal context

The societal context in Turkey has changed substantially as well. First, there is a deep sense of war fatigue. In the Kurdish southeast this is felt very keenly and has manifested itself in many ways. For example, the PKK has been indirectly pressured to seek peaceful means, as citizens increasingly turn to political action to express their opinions. The first and to date only return of PKK fighters from northern Iraq was greeted with jubilation and heightened expectations of further such developments by Turkish Kurdish citizens. Second, and perhaps most troubling to both state authorities and the DTP and its successor party, the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), is the reemergence of the Kurdish Hezbollah organization. This extremely fundamentalist organization is opposed to both the Turkish state and the secular Kurds who support the PKK and DTP. As a fundamentalist Sunni organization, it has benefited from the Kurds' traditional conservatism.¹⁴ In the 1990s, Hezbollah waged a ferocious war against both PKK and DTP militants and sympathizers that left large numbers of unresolved murders. The resulting damage to the local population was extensive. However, when Hezbollah turned its guns on the security forces, the Turkish state that had watched its activities with benign neglect sought to annihilate its fighting cadres. The organization had, at least on a political level, been making a comeback and benefiting from the lack of progress in the region.

In the rest of the country, continuing casualties among soldiers, though at a smaller scale than in the peak days of the insurgency, have, in addition to overt anti-Kurdish acts, given rise to calls for an end to the conflict. The KRG's mere existence has helped the search for solutions; Turkish Kurds see the Iraqi Kurdish federal state as both a potential refuge and a serious experiment that deserves their support. The continued PKK-led insurrection is a continuous threat to Ankara-Erbil relations. Turkish Kurds have opposed Turkey's cross-border anti-PKK operations into northern Iraq in part because, in their mistrust of Ankara, they perceive them as being as much against the PKK as against the KRG.

Turkish Kurds see the Iraqi Kurdish federal state as both a potential refuge and a serious experiment that deserves their support.

The growth of Turkish civil society, the subtle impact of Turkey's EU accession efforts, and ultimately the successive crises of confidence in state institutions caused by embarrassing revelations of official misconduct and miscalculations have enabled some in Turkey to publicly begin challenging sacred societal myths. Among the most damaging revelation is the Ergenekon investigation—an enormous and also nebulous undertaking by prosecutors that potentially exposes the workings of a number of cabals, many of which seemed to work independently and which includes members of the armed forces, academia, and the press, as well as many others intent on overthrowing the AKP government.

Key agents of change

There is no question that the most important drivers of the change in Turkish policy toward the Kurds are Erdoğan, Gül, and Davutoğlu. None of these individuals are new to these issues. Gül had been very active in foreign policy in previous incarnations of the AKP, when he served as a state minister in the government of Necmettin Erbakan (1996–97) and advised the then-prime minister on foreign policy. Indeed, beginning in the 1990s, he was the principal foreign policy thinker and spokesperson for the Islamist parties, while Erdoğan had one of the most progressive reports on the Kurdish situation to date prepared for then-party leader Erbakan in 1991.¹⁵ In 2005, Erdoğan made his first formal foray into the Kurdish issue with a well-received speech on the Kurdish question, in which he admitted that the issue was more than one of economic deprivation and that the Turkish state had committed many errors vis-à-vis its Kurdish inhabitants. However, Erdoğan could not maintain the momentum created by his remarks because he was facing a much tougher climate in Ankara then, not to mention a renewal of PKK violence.

The AKP and its much more Islamic predecessor parties have downplayed nationalist discourse when dealing with the populations of the heavily Kurdish regions, preferring instead to emphasize the religious unity of Kurds and Turks. For conservatively inclined Kurds, this has been a winning message historically. The AKP has received an important share of the Kurdish vote and includes numerous—perhaps as many as seventy—parliamentary members of Kurdish origin. Whereas these MPs are a source of pressure on their political leadership, they are also constrained from articulating their grievances in public by rigid party rules and Erdoğan's total dominance of the party. Still, many are within Erdoğan's close circle, with a chance to provide him with a current account of how his policies are being received among Kurds. Erdoğan, however, is prone to extemporization and verbal mistakes. For example, his self-confident rhetoric in advance of the municipal elections in 2009, when he promised to “conquer” the DTP fortress of Diyarbakir, caused a backlash, resulting in a resounding defeat of his party by the DTP.

The AKP remains a fiercely nationalistic party that subsumes some of its nationalist rhetoric under a more general rubric of tolerance and values. As noted, its foreign policy is ambitious and designed to transform Turkey and the Kurdish question, on both sides of Turkey's border. Although the AKP's foreign policy faces formidable obstacles, Syria and Iraq are two places of consequence where the AKP thinks that Turkey can play a substantial role. Hence, the AKP leadership should be expected to continue to invest time and resources in both of these countries.

Even so, much of the change in Turkey's Iraq policy—more specifically, its northern Iraq policy, which has constituted the core of Turkish concerns—would not have come about without the acquiescence of the military, the initiatives undertaken by Ministry of Foreign Affairs personnel, or the efforts by the Turkish National Intelligence Organization. To be sure, new conditions on the ground and opportunities unquestionably set the stage for changes in policy. That said, however, in Turkey, where ideology matters and the discourse

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on Kurds and Kurdish rights has been taboo, individuals within critical institutions played decisive roles. Specifically, without the consent of Başbuğ, the chief of the Turkish General Staff (TGS) who assumed his position in August 2008 for a two-year nonrenewable term, the new Kurdish initiative would not have gotten off the ground. The Turkish military views itself as the guardian of not just the security of the Turkish state but also of its character and the ideological legacy of Atatürk. Much of this legacy was constructed on a denial of the existence of Kurds in Turkey. Turkey was imagined to be a country only inhabited by Turks, and those who were not Turks had little choice but to accept this designation. The military was at the forefront of numerous attempts at the social engineering of Kurdish areas.

The military also took a hard-line against any attempts at or even suggestion of a domestic opening toward the Kurds, insisting that the problem in the Kurdish areas was one of terrorism—that is, the struggle against the PKK—and poor economic conditions, which were driving people to rebel. Although General Başbuğ has had the reputation of being a hard-line general, he has, unlike his predecessors (with the possible exception of Hilmi Özkök), sought diverse opinions on the Kurdish issue. In a wide-ranging speech in April 2009, Başbuğ articulated a clear message on Kurdish identity. Emphasizing that “those who formed the Turkish republic are the people of Turkey,” he affirmed that it was perfectly fine for an individual to have a sub- or a secondary identity, though he maintained that these identities ought to not be constitutionally recognized. Still, in an indirect recognition that nonviolent means ought to be considered in Turkey’s fight against the PKK, Başbuğ suggested that legal changes enabling some PKK fighters to return to society ought to be envisioned.¹⁶ Başbuğ’s speech was critical because he referred to Kurdish citizens of Turkey in a nonconfrontational manner and distinguished between them and the PKK, which Turkey blames for the southeast region’s ills. Başbuğ has also come to the realization that after twenty-five years of struggle, the Turkish military is not any closer to eradicating the insurgency, as the pipeline of recruits for the PKK has continued almost unabated.¹⁷ Most importantly, during the August 20, 2009, meeting of the National Security Council, Turkey’s main civil-military coordinating body, it was decided that the government’s program on the Kurdish issue would be continued. Başbuğ told those who were anxious about the Kurdish opening not to worry because “the Turkish military, with the power it derives from the people, is hard at work.”¹⁸ Such statements represent the clearest possible endorsement of the policy that civilians could get from the Turkish military.

Başbuğ’s tacit support for the domestic Kurdish initiative and change in Iraq policy has also come with some fine-tuning. As the discussion of the initiative has gathered steam, he has intervened to define the contours of the changes;¹⁹ in some ways, he has acted as a bulwark for the nationalist elements who look to the military as the guarantor of the regime and the status quo. He has been careful to draw redlines on the use of Kurdish in education and on changes to the constitution and, thus, has alleviated some of their concerns. By quelling such anxieties, these redlines enable the process to go forward without the opposition resorting to street demonstrations and even violence. The subtle role played by Başbuğ, though very constructive at this stage, is also the product of the unnatural evolution of civil-military relations in Turkey. This relationship is on track for further significant changes of which Başbuğ is acutely aware. He often reiterates his institution’s role in Turkey’s democratic system, yet the Turkish military is not a civilianized institution. Ever since the 1960 military coup, when lower-ranking officers overthrew not just the government but also their own hierarchy, officers have been careful to maintain the military chain of command and defend the institution’s prerogatives. Just as Başbuğ undid years of military practice on the Kurds, his successor, Işık Koşaner, the current chief of the land forces who takes over in August 2010, is in no way compelled to follow through on the opening or reforms, and may even try to reverse them.²⁰

In the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, meanwhile, two diplomats played an important role in convincing the military that a change in policy in Iraq was in Turkey's best interests. Murat Özçelik, the special Iraq coordinator and current ambassador to Baghdad, and Feridun Sinirlioğlu, former deputy undersecretary for Middle East affairs and current undersecretary, have regional credentials and, perhaps more importantly, were perceived by all to be independent thinkers and actors. In short, they were very dependable because they were not seen as being pro-AKP. Both had to work the system and the mutual suspicions that the AKP and the military had for each other.

Limitations of the New Policy

Turkey's new Iraq policy contains defensive and expansionist elements. It is defensive insofar as it continues to be constructed on a platform of containment of Kurdish nationalism. This has always been Ankara's first concern, dating almost to 1926 when it consented to Mosul's integration into Iraq. It is also expansionist in that it seeks to maximize Turkish influence throughout the region and Iraq in particular, with an eye to earning a status commensurate with what Turks think they deserve. Because Iraq's future will have an inordinate amount of influence on how the region evolves, Turkey has an interest in shaping the future of Iraq. In addition to diplomatic and security considerations, Ankara is also attracted to the economic opportunities offered by Iraq and the region. Oil-rich Iraq is a source for hydrocarbons and a market for Turkish manufactured goods. During the Iran-Iraq War, both Iran and Iraq struggled with uncertain trade partners and relied heavily on Turkey as their source for various products and as a conduit to the rest of the world. Conditions have changed, but the fundamental importance of Iraq as a market for Turkey remains. Turkish trade with Iraq amounts to \$10 billion half of which is estimated to be with the KRG.²¹

For all of Turkey's newfound enthusiasm toward Iraq, the fact of the matter is that Iraq, in the end, is mostly an Arab country. With the obvious exception of Iraqi Kurdistan, Iraq perceives itself as being part of the Arab core. Turkish inroads into the Arab world have not been as significant as they have been touted to be. For all of Turkey's successes in the region, some states have been angered by Turkish forays into what they perceive to be their zone of influence. Despite the AKP's Islamist antecedents, in the eternal divide between East and West, it is not clear whether Arab states consider Turkey to be closer to them or the West. Iraqi Kurdistan has no choice but to expand its economic ties to Turkey. For the Kurds, the rest of Iraq, as a vestige of a rentier oil state, pales in comparison to Turkey in terms of commercial opportunities. Turkey also offers simple and durable consumer goods and even a hospitable environment for Iraqi Kurd tourists. Iran, in comparison, is far less competitive. Still, as Iraqi Kurdistan moves forward and expands its economic connections to Turkey—as it must—it will remain a part of Iraq in ways that are uniquely binding. First and foremost is the institutional structure of the Iraqi state, but more importantly in the medium term is the power of language. For Kurdish students in the north, Arabic will continue to be the most important language for their personal future advancement, influencing their future orientation.

The AKP's new foreign policy, which has Turkish diplomats reacting quickly to signs of trouble around its borders by offering their good offices, has raised Turkey's standing in the region. However, as demonstrated by Davutoğlu's August 2009 attempt to reconcile Syria and Iraq following devastating bombings in Baghdad's Green Zone—which the Iraqis blamed on Damascus—well-meaning efforts often do not amount to much. Iraqis were not keen to see the Turks interfere despite the honeymoon in Syrian-Turkish relations. There are issues in inter-Arab politics that, for a variety of reasons, are beyond the reach of outsiders.

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While Turkey may be earnest in its attempt to expand its influence in Iraq and elsewhere, the fact remains that sometimes issues will arise that are not the fault of any party but that can nonetheless cause major ruptures in the region. Of these issues, the most explosive is likely to be disputes over water, particularly as it relates to Iraq, the so-called Land of the Two Rivers.

The danger in Iraq not only to agriculture, but to a whole way of life, is quite severe. The two rivers—the Euphrates and the Tigris—both originate in Turkey. The Euphrates traverses Syria before entering Iraq. The Tigris delineates the border between Iraq and Syria for a short distance and then flows into Iraq. Upstream damming and irrigation projects, especially Turkey's Southeast Anatolia Project, have sharply reduced the quality and quantity of water flowing to Iraq and Syria. In the 1980s and 1990s, differences over water allocations were considered the grounds for Syrian leader Hafez al-Assad's support for the PKK and its leader Abdullah Öcalan. Turkey is not the sole cause of the problem. Iran's damming of tributaries feeding into the Tigris is also responsible for the current situation.

"Decades of war and mismanagement, compounded by two years of drought, are wreaking havoc on Iraq's ecosystem, drying up riverbeds and marshes, turning arable land into desert, killing trees and plants, and generally transforming what was once the region's most fertile area into a wasteland."²² The results are sandstorms and falling agricultural production. Between the ravages of climate change and declining water flows, Iraq is likely to become more urbanized and more dependent on food imports. It is likely that once Iraq stabilizes itself, it will try to more forcefully pressure Turkey (in conjunction with Syria, despite the current differences between them) to release more water. This is unlikely to produce results, because water scarcity is a regional problem where upstream countries—especially if they perceive themselves to be powerful—tend to latch on to their right to exploit such resources first. Depending on the severity of the water shortage, relations between Iraq and Turkey are likely to be affected. Already, Iraqi parliamentarians have expressed their concerns by preventing the ratification of a comprehensive trade and cooperation agreement with Turkey until provisions ensuring Iraq's share of the two rivers are included.²³

The collapse of the Kurdish reform proposals in Turkey could have very serious ramifications for relations between the two countries. There are already visible signs that the AKP has lost much of its enthusiasm for continuing its domestic Kurdish initiative, at the very least, until after the next elections scheduled for summer 2011. This would obviate the PKK's need to demilitarize itself and, more importantly, could lead to increased violence in Turkey's Kurdish areas. The violence would complicate KRG-Ankara relations and possibly contribute a return to Baghdad-centric policies. However, if such changes occurred, it would no longer be certain that Baghdad would unconditionally back Turkey against the Kurds, for fear of repercussions at home. The reverse is also true. If the Kurds chose not to keep their faith with Baghdad, any ensuing conflagration between Iraqi Kurds and Baghdad would not automatically enlist Ankara's support for Baghdad. The 2010 Iraqi elections have once again reinforced the centrality of the Kurdish representatives in the Iraqi parliament. Ankara will have to assess its options in light of its own domestic Kurdish situation, which is significantly different than before because of its own opening and because of the strong linkages that have developed between Turkish and Iraqi Kurds. The wild card here would be the pro-Turkish elements within the Turkmen population as their preferences and future prospects are likely to have an effect on Turkish policy, especially regarding Kirkuk. Conflict over Kirkuk, depending on its instigators and its outcome, would mark a major watershed in Turkish-Iraqi relations.

Disputes between Baghdad and Erbil over the exploration for and, more importantly, export of oil may put Ankara in a very untenable situation. For example, if Iraqi Kurds insisted on exporting their hydrocarbons through Turkey when Baghdad preferred non-Turkish options, then Turkey would be far more positively disposed to Erbil than to Baghdad. This

would pose an awkward predicament for Ankara, which is a proponent of a stronger Iraqi center. Generally speaking, instability in Iraq is likely to reflect poorly on Turkish-Iraqi relations, as Ankara would seek to shield itself from any violence, especially of the sectarian variety, emanating from its southern border.

Most analysts' assumptions about Iraq are pessimistic. It is seen as a country that will remain on the brink of civil war and mired in violence and instability for the foreseeable future. Although this is undoubtedly a safe assumption to make, it is important to consider what a resurgent Iraq could mean for the region. Oil will remain the commodity of choice for energy, and the demand for more oil is predicted to rise as China and India push the limits of prosperity. Iraq's oil potential may be far greater than what current reserve figures suggest. For most of the period since 1980, war and stiff international sanctions have stood in the way of oil exploration. Hence, some experts believe that Iraq's undiscovered recoverable oil reserves are quite large. An Iraq that can export four or possibly six million barrels of oil a day may once again formulate a foreign policy that is at odds with one or more of its neighbors. It might also decide to rearm. Alternatively, an Iraq with limited military capabilities may, at some point in the future, ask the United States to provide it with security, such as the establishment of military bases. All of these are hypothetical scenarios that would have an indelible impact on how Turkey, and the region as a whole, would relate to Iraq.

Finally, there are costs to both becoming a surrogate superpower in the region and making an inordinate effort to belong, and there is always the possibility of either Turkey or Iraq overplaying their respective hands. At this stage it is far more likely that Turkey would do so with its rather aggressive foreign policy initiatives. Could it inadvertently alienate Iraq or one of Iraq's Arab allies? As much as the new Turkey, which in Middle Eastern eyes is one that is at peace with its cultural heritage, is welcome in the region, it is still a Turkish- and not an Arabic-speaking society, one which for most of the twentieth century ignored the pull of the Muslim world.

Policy Options for the United States

U.S.-Iraqi relations are anything but predictable at this stage. "Since World War II, the United States and Iraq have never enjoyed close relations. There is no deep history of solidarity or deeply held shared values on which to build a new relationship. In fact, the U.S.-Iraq relationship has been fraught with mistrust, and successive generations of Iraqi leaders, while wanting the approval and economic attention of the West, have felt ambivalence if not hostility toward the United States and its global influence."²⁴ While the impact of the occupation and the American investment in blood and treasure will continue to figure in the bilateral relationship, Iraqi leaders have every incentive to demonstrate their independence from Washington.

Resentment against the United States among important Iraqi groups will endure for a long time to come. The Sunnis in particular will continue to blame their downfall as the masters of Iraq on the United States. Irrespective of American deeds, future entanglements the Sunnis may have with other Iraqi parties will also be blamed on Washington. Even the Shia, who gained power following the end of the Saddam regime, harbor deep bitterness for their abandonment in the 1990s and the poor execution of the war's aftermath; some may even see the Americans as the only obstacle to a complete takeover of Iraq. The likelihood of future antagonisms between the Shia and the United States cannot be discounted. Future Iraqi prime ministers will undoubtedly learn from Nouri al-Maliki's experience in 2008, when he initiated a major operation in Basra against the Mahdi Army without informing the U.S. military authorities. Despite being forced to call in American support to extract his forces from an embarrassing defeat, his perceived "independence" constituted an important

factor in his emergence as a powerful national figure. Therefore, the United States, despite its continuing imposing presence in Iraq, will have to tread carefully there.

In Turkey, Washington has a potential ally in Iraq with which it sees eye-to-eye on most medium-term issues. Although Turkish intentions and aspirations in the long run may not always coincide with those of the United States, in the interim, both countries will need each other in Iraq. All parties—Washington, Ankara, Baghdad, and even Erbil—want to see a transition toward a stable and unified Iraqi political entity that is pluralistic and improves the economic lot of its people. To this end, there are three principal areas in which the United States and Turkey can work together—the realms of politics, economics, and natural resources.

On the political front, with the impending drawdown of U.S. forces from Iraq, the United States can work with Turkey in a number of ways. First, it should help keep the Turkish-KRG relationship on track. Turkey made an important move in announcing its intent to build a consulate in Erbil, thereby ending suspicions and hearsay that Ankara would not accept the post-2003 federal character of Iraq. The United States should follow suit to dispel any lingering notions, especially among Kurds and Iraqi Sunnis, who for different reasons fear or believe that Iraqi federalism is reversible. In conjunction with this move, the Obama administration has an interest in improving the democratic character of the north. Only recently has the United States begun to focus on governance issues in the KRG, presumably because in contrast to other areas of Iraq, the Iraqi north has been an island of relative stability. The more Ankara and Erbil can work together, the more robust the KRG will be and the less influence Iran will have there. It is also imperative that the United States open a consulate in Erbil to show support to the KRG and to better implement some of the proposed reforms.

Second, the United States should emphasize that it does not wish to leave a PKK presence in the KRG after its departure. This is tricky as it requires the Turkish government to push ahead with its own domestic Kurdish opening, which would enable PKK fighters to return home or disperse. The U.S. position has to be crafted in a way to put pressure on all parties: on the KRG to further cut off PKK forces from resupply; on the PKK to make clear that as long as Americans are in Iraq, there can be a relatively orderly process of demilitarization; and finally on Turkey to use both the U.S. presence and withdrawal process as an opportunity to come to a resolution of its Kurdish problem. The United States ought to engage Turkey on its domestic Kurdish opening, something it has assiduously avoided; with signs that this is faltering, the collapse of this initiative would deal a potentially fatal blow to the burgeoning Turkish-KRG relations by reenergizing ethnic divisions on both sides of the border and in Kirkuk in particular, thereby undermining overall relations with Iraq.

Third, U.S. diplomats should be more inclusive of their Turkish counterparts in Iraq during this period of transition. The Turks have aggressively courted the different communities in Iraq and will likely have better relations with the Sunnis and Shia than will the United States. The Americans, unlike the neighboring Turks, will be leaving Iraq and the Turks are resolutely attempting to mold Iraq and the region in their own image. Therefore, the United States must achieve greater coordination with Turkey. In the end, a greater Turkish buy-in will also help balance the Iranians in Iraq and the region.

On the economic and natural resource fronts, Turkey is by far the most prosperous and industrialized of all of Iraq's neighbors. It offers transit routes to and from Western markets, as well as an exit to the Mediterranean for Iraqi hydrocarbons. Once an Iraqi government is formed now that the March 2010 elections have been concluded, the United States and Turkey can help the Iraqi government hasten the passing of a hydrocarbon law. The Turks are as anxious as the Americans to see this law passed and want the oil and gas fields in northern Iraq developed as soon as possible in order to find additional gas that will enable the realization of the Nabucco pipeline, which would carry gas to Europe. Turkey benefits

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from being the preferred export route for northern Iraqi hydrocarbons because such a route supports Ankara's claim to be a major hub for oil and gas pipelines. Syria, despite the current warming of relations between Ankara and Damascus, remains an important potential rival for the transportation of northern Iraqi hydrocarbons.²⁵

Helping to improve and develop joint commercial ventures and hydrocarbon routes among Turkey, Iraq, and the KRG is an immediate U.S. interest. In the past, the United States has used Qualified Industrial Zones (QIZs) to spur investment in cooperative manufacturing projects because their end products gain duty-free access into the United States. Experience to date in Jordan and Egypt has thus far demonstrated that these QIZs do create jobs, but in Turkey-Iraq-KRG, they would have a significant political impact in solidifying the existing federal structures in Iraq, stabilize Turkish-KRG relations for the long duration, and improve living standards in the KRG, thereby reducing secessionist impulses.

In addition, there remains the question of the disputed territories, areas that the Kurds would like to incorporate into the KRG because they are, the claim is, majority Kurdish in population, or at least had been until Saddam's massive efforts at altering the ethnic composition of the north through the redrawing of boundaries, forced population transfers, and sheer ethnic cleansing. The area that stretches from Sinjan on the Syrian border to Khanaqin on the Iranian side encompasses a very large territory, including the city and governorate of Kirkuk (renamed Tamim by Saddam). The United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI), which has been tasked to look into these disputes, produced one report that led to a series of recriminations and disagreement. UNAMI has since generated a larger and more detailed report that, unlike last time, has not been made public, although the parties concerned—the Iraqi, Kurdish, American, and Turkish governments, as well as representatives of the major communities—have each been given copies. Especially after the withdrawal of the U.S. military from Iraq, the chances that the question of disputed territories will become victim to short-term political calculations and ethnic entrepreneurs are quite significant. Any violence that may ensue could undermine the unity of Iraq and increase the likelihood that Iraq's neighbors will intervene in its domestic politics.

Although the Kurds know that they will not get all the territories they covet, the ultimate resolution of this problem is, as argued above, important to the United States. Moreover, the territories and the distribution of oil resources are clearly interlinked in the minds of all parties in the region. Therefore, Washington should work closely with UNAMI and seriously engage all relevant parties in the waning days of the U.S. presence in Iraq to fashion a compromise.

Notes

1. For more on the PKK please see Aliza Marcus, *Blood and Belief: The PKK and the Kurdish Fight for Independence* (New York: New York University Press, 2007).
2. Kenneth Pollack, "The Battle for Baghdad," *National Interest*, no. 103 (September–October 2009): 17.
3. In fact, close U.S.–Turkish cooperation on intelligence and counterterrorism efforts were confirmed by U.S. Ambassador to Ankara Ross Wilson and Turkish Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Burak Özügergin. See *Today's Zaman*, October 10, 2008.
4. On July 4, 2003, Turkish Special Forces operating in the Iraqi Kurdish city of Suleymaniya with American consent were caught red-handed with their Iraqi Turkmen Front clients preparing for the assassination of a leading figure in the Kirkuk (Tamim) governorate. In the ensuing encounter, the Turks were given the "al-Qaeda treatment"—they were cuffed and hooded and sent to Baghdad for interrogation. The Turks' treatment, especially in the absence of an official explanation by Ankara, created shock waves in Turkey and led to a wave of anti-Americanism that continues to affect Turkish perceptions of the United States. The irony was that within a year of the incident, the three generals in charge of the Special Forces ranging from a one- to a three-star officer were all retired or sidelined. Henri J. Barkey, "Kurdistanoff," *National Interest* (Summer 2007) and Murat Yetkin, "Süleymaniye'de gerçekte neler oldu?" *Radikal*, February 20, 2007.
5. Metehan Demir, "Niye Sınır Ötesi Operasyon Olmaz?" *Sabah*, January 22, 2007.
6. As reported by CNN-Turk on June 8, 2008.
7. Ömer Taşpınar, *Turkey's Middle East Policies: Between Neo-Ottomanism and Kemalism*, Carnegie Middle East Center Paper, no. 10 (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, September 2008), 11.
8. İbrahim Kalın, "Turkey and the Middle East: Ideology or Geo-politics?" *Private View* (Turkey) (Autumn 2008): 32.
9. Tank Oğuzlu, "Turkey's Northern Iraq Policy: Competing Perspectives," *Insight Turkey* 10, no. 3 (2008): 5.
10. Sadr has the added advantage of being an opponent of federalism and has emerged as an important foe of Iraqi Kurds. He has, however, been known to support both sides, such as when he offered Iraqi Kurds support against Turkey when the latter initiated a land incursion. Subsequently, during his May 2009 visit, his subordinates assured Turkish parliamentarians that they fully supported Turkey on Kirkuk. Private communication with a Turkish parliamentarian, Ankara, July 13, 2009.
11. Serhat Erkmen, "Dışişleri Bakanı Ahmet Davutoğlu'nun Bağdat Ziyareti Işığında Türkiye-İrak İlişkileri," *Orta Doğu Analiz* 1, no. 9 (September 2009): 21.
12. Turkey's electoral system has a 10-percent national minimum threshold requirement for parties to win seats in parliament. In 2002, only two parties managed to cross that threshold, hence they received far more seats than they should have, with the AKP winning the lion's share.
13. In December 2009, the DTP, despite its strong presence in Turkey's southeast, was banned and its two leading members of parliament barred from politics by Turkey's Constitutional Court. Since this was not the first time a Kurdish party was banned, the DTP had already created a replacement party, the Peace and Democracy Party.
14. Ruşen Çakır, *The Reemergence of Hizballah in Turkey* (Washington, D.C.: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2007). Emrullah Uslu, "From Local Hizballah to Global Terror: Militant Islam in Turkey," *Middle East Policy*, 14:1 (Spring 2007), pp. 124–41.
15. Belma Akçura, *Devletin Kürt Filmi* (Ankara: Ayraç Kitabevi Yayınları, 2008).
16. In his speech, Başbuğ quoted a variety of foreign and Turkish thinkers, including Samuel Huntington, Eliot Cohen, Morris Janowitz, Max Weber, and Chaim Kaufmann. See [www.tsk.mil.tr/10_ARSIV/10_1_Basin_Yayin_Faaliyetleri/10_1_7_Konusmalar/2009/org_ilkerBasbuğ_harpak_konusma_14042009.html](http://www.tsk.mil.tr/10_ARSIV/10_1_Basin_Yayin_Faaliyetleri/10_1_7_Konusmalar/2009/org_ilkerBasbu%C3%9C_harpak_konusma_14042009.html)
17. Private communications with a number of Turkish journalists and academics.
18. Fikret Bila, "Org. Başbuğ: Siyaset ve Terör Açılarından Kurtulmak Lazım," *Milliyet*, September 22, 2009. By contrast, Ahmet Altan, commenting on Başbuğ's intervention, laments his overly political role but also notes the same message regarding the Kurdish opening. See Ahmet Altan, "Belirsiz Duygu," *Taraf*, September 22, 2009.
19. Murat Yetkin, "Başbuğ'un Mesajı, Erdoğan'ın Yöntemi, Gül'ün Konumu," *Radikal*, August 26, 2009.
20. Başbuğ's predecessor Yaşar Büyükanıt had personally and publicly intervened in 2007 to prevent then Foreign Minister Gül from meeting the KRG Prime Minister Nechriwan Barzani. Yasemin Çongar, "Kuşatılmislik ve 'dinamik gülçer,'" *Milliyet*, February 19, 2007.
21. Amberin Zaman, "Neden, neden?" *Habertürk*, April 6, 2010. Zaman points out that while Iraq as a whole is Turkey's fourth largest trading partner, the KRG, were it an independent state, would have been among the top ten. Despite all the improvements and attention, including a 300-member trade delegation arriving at the end of April 2010, Zaman also points out that inattention to detail on the Turkish side means that border crossings between the KRG and Turkey are maddeningly slow.
22. Liz Sly, "Iraq in Throes of Environmental Catastrophe, Experts Say," *Los Angeles Times*, July 31, 2009.
23. Nimrod Raphaeli, "Water Crisis in Iraq: The Growing Danger of Desertification," *Middle East Media Research Institute, Inquiry and Analysis* no. 537, July 24, 2009.

24. Ellen Laipson, *America and the Emerging Iraqi Reality: New Goals, No Illusions* (Washington, D.C.: Century Foundation Report, 2008), 9.
25. Cüneyt Ülsever, "Enerji Barişı," *Hürriyet*, September 8, 2009. Ülsever argues that Washington favors Turkey over Syria as a hydrocarbon exit route because of Syria's close relationship with Iran.

Of Related Interest

- *Reluctant Neighbor: Turkey's Role in the Middle East* (1997) edited by Henri J. Barkey.
- *Turkey and Iraq: The Perils (and Prospects) of Proximity* by Henri J. Barkey (Special Report 141, July 2005).
- *The New Turkish Republic: Turkey as a Pivotal State in the Muslim World* (2007) by Graham E. Fuller.

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