

# Turkey, the United States and the Delusion of Geopolitics

Ian O. Lesser

Turkey and Turkish–US relations have been prisoners of a narrow concept of geopolitics. The key questions are not geographic – whether Turkey is a bridge or a barrier, a flank or a front – but how Turkey will act, and whether Turkish and American policies are convergent or divergent. For decades, the relationship between Ankara and Washington has been described as ‘strategic’ – sustained and supportive of the most important international objectives of both sides. Today, the strategic quality of the relationship can no longer be taken for granted, as a result of divergent perceptions of the Iraq War and, more significantly, new international priorities on both sides. As a result, a bilateral relationship of great geopolitical significance, but one that has operated without fundamental reassessment since the early years of the Cold War, is now in question. A reinvigorated strategic relationship is possible, and will be in the interest of both countries. But it is likely to have quite different contours, with new forms of engagement – and more realistic expectations.

## The myth of a golden age

Differences over Iraq, and the recent rise of anti-Americanism in Turkey, lead many Turks to look back with nostalgia to a lost golden age in relations with Washington. Current frictions have also led some Americans to ask ‘who lost Turkey?’ Both ideas are misleading. Serious disagreements in the bilateral relationship between Turkey and the United States are nothing new. The ‘Johnson Letter’ of 1964 and the arms embargo following the 1974 Cyprus crisis were only the most striking examples of periodic friction between successive Turkish and American administrations, even against a backdrop of shared strategic purpose.

**Ian O. Lesser** is Public Policy Scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington DC, and President, Mediterranean Advisors, LLC. He is a former member of the Policy Planning Staff in the US Department of State.

For decades, the need to contain Soviet power shaped the relationship, and set expectations about what Washington and Ankara could offer in security terms. The potential demands on the relationship were substantial, including the use of Turkish territory for nuclear strikes against targets in the Soviet Union. At the same time, the United States might have been required to risk nuclear retaliation against its own territory in defence of Turkey. In retrospect, these contingencies seem highly improbable, but they were not seen as remote or inconceivable even as late as the 1980s.

During the Cold War, the strategic relationship appeared solid because it was never really tested in terms of mutual defence. It was only later, with the 1990–91 Gulf War, that Turkey was called upon to provide extensive support for coalition operations (Turkey's own requests for air-defence reinforcements from NATO were met only after substantial delay – an experience that still rankles in Turkish policy circles). Turkey's forward-leaning stance in the Gulf War left important and somewhat divergent lessons for both sides. In the United States, the experience of 1990–91 reinforced the image of Turkey as a strategic ally, at the forefront of new security challenges emanating from the Middle East. Turkish policymakers sought to reinforce this impression with American policy audiences, although the notion of Turkey as a key Middle Eastern ally was always an uncomfortable fit with Ankara's European aspirations.

In Turkey, by contrast, the first Iraq conflict, or more precisely its aftermath, is widely seen as the place where the trouble started – with trouble defined as the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) insurgency, more complicated relations with Syria and Iran, and more contentious relations with Washington. It is worth recalling that the years following the first war with Iraq were characterised by frequent bilateral disagreements, over the rules of engagement for operations *Provide Comfort* and *Northern Watch* (which provided humanitarian relief and enforced the no-fly zone in northern Iraq), the conduct of counter-PKK operations in southeastern Anatolia, human rights, arms transfers and policy in the Aegean and Cyprus. By the mid-1990s, many Turks saw the United States as a less-than-reliable ally, and some American strategists came to see Turkey as part ally, part rogue state. In this climate of mistrust, which was also part of the equation in Turkey–EU relations, it is not surprising that Ankara pursued a policy of strategic diversification, including a deeper security and defence-industrial relationship with Israel.

Even in the post-Cold War period, when the containment of Soviet power was no longer a driver of security policy, both Ankara and Washington persisted in seeing Turkey's geographic position as the basis for Turkey's strategic importance and, ultimately, as the centre of gravity for bilateral cooperation. Turkey's prox-

imity to areas of interest and crisis in the Balkans, the Black Sea and the Middle East has made questions of access for the projection of military power, or the transportation of energy, the focus of strategic cooperation with Ankara. This real estate agent's view of strategy – 'location, location, location' – has not served either side well in a post-containment era of diffuse regional problems, less-than-existential threats, and new debates about national power and purpose on both sides of the Atlantic. In the 1990s, Turkish and Western observers debated the question of whether Turkey would serve as a bridge or a barrier between Europe and its periphery, and between the Muslim world and the West.<sup>1</sup> The reality is more prosaic. Turkey's role will continue to be shaped, above all, by its own calculus of national interest rather than abstract geopolitical formulas.

### **A changing Turkey in a changing neighbourhood**

In Turkey, domestic and regional factors have driven policymakers and the public toward a more wary and ambivalent approach to relations with the United States. Some of these elements may be transitory, but others are likely to prove durable.

First, public opinion now counts in Turkish foreign policymaking, and as polling results suggest, this opinion has turned distinctly anti-American in recent years. Recent surveys indicate that Turkish public attitudes toward the United States are now the most negative in Europe.<sup>2</sup> This marked deterioration in perceptions of the United States has special significance for relations between Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) government and the George W. Bush administration. An avowedly populist government with Islamist roots must deal with a more active and interventionist leadership in Washington, one that confronts Turkey with multiple policy dilemmas in its neighbourhood. It is a challenging mixture, and one that is not, of course, unique to Turkish–American relations. Indeed, Turkish public opinion, sensitive to both European and Muslim concerns (e.g. Palestinian aspirations), has multiple sources of pressure when it comes to attitudes toward the United States. To this must be added the tendency of some American foreign- and security-policy elites to ignore the changes that have taken place on the Turkish scene over the last decade, in particular the greatly increased role of public opinion and the emergence of new actors in the Turkish policy debate. In this as in other key areas, relations suffer from 'deferred maintenance', with only limited attempts to engage new constituencies beyond traditional bilateral partners on the Turkish side. Indeed, even the traditional partners, such as the Turkish military and security establishment, appear ambivalent regarding strategic cooperation with the United States (this was also the case in the early 1990s).

The trend toward strongly negative attitudes about the United States might be reversed, or at least offset, by new policy initiatives seen as favourable to Turkish interests, most notably on the issue of the PKK presence in northern Iraq, or on Cyprus. So too, an overall improvement in transatlantic relations and perceptions of the United States would probably have an effect on public attitudes in Turkey. Yet, without change in these areas, the state of Turkish public opinion will continue to limit the scope for bilateral cooperation, especially visible cooperation at the regional level. When unreservedly positive Turkish

*Turkish opinion is attuned to the abundant evidence of turmoil and indecision within the EU*

public attitudes toward the United States are confined to single digits, bilateral relations face a serious challenge – a challenge given further meaning by the heightened international debate about American power and purpose.

Second, the accelerated pace of Turkish–EU relations has changed the foreign policy debate in ways that inevitably affect relations with the United States. Regardless of the actual outlook for Turkish membership, a path fraught with pitfalls but also many opportunities over the next decade, the process of overall Turkish convergence with European practices and institutions is likely to continue. This process

of convergence is, ultimately, what counts for Europe and the United States, and quite possibly for Turks, many of whom are confused or troubled by the European project, and uncomfortable with its implications for national sovereignty. In this respect, Turkish opinion is attuned to the abundant evidence of turmoil and indecision within the EU.

The United States has been a consistent champion of Turkey in Europe, even if Washington's ability to push Turkey's case – and the need to do so – has declined steadily since the 1999 Helsinki Summit. Now that Turkey is launched on the path of accession, however uncertain, policymakers on all sides will need to ask more serious questions about the implications for US–Turkish relations over the next decade. Some Europeans may persist in their fear that Turkey within the EU will serve as a 'Trojan Horse' for American foreign-policy preferences. In reality, closer Turkey–EU relations will almost certainly pose a greater challenge of adjustment for Washington. Turkish policy is already within the European mainstream, and far closer to European than American approaches on a range of questions, not least Iran, Iraq and the Middle East peace process. This essentially European orientation extends to contentious global issues, including the International Criminal Court and the Kyoto agreement on climate change.

Even if Turkey's candidacy stalls, or proves hollow over the coming years, the result is unlikely to be closer ties with Washington. Under conditions of

estrangement from Europe, Turkish opinion could shift even further in the direction of a more sovereignty-conscious, nationalistic posture, a development that would complicate relations with Washington as much as Brussels. Only against a background of vastly heightened regional risk, against which American deterrence and reassurance would be essential, would a return to closer strategic cooperation with the United States be the natural outcome. Scenarios that could trigger this response include renewed competition with a more assertive Russia, or friction with a nuclear-armed or nuclear-ready Iran.

If Turkey's candidacy proceeds apace and the process of Europeanisation continues, this could encourage a useful diversification and deepening of Turkish-US ties, especially on the economic front.<sup>3</sup> In this scenario, movement toward Europe can have a multiplier effect on trade and investment links with the United States. American investors may be impressed by Turkey's current growth rate of around 9%, and the performance of the Istanbul stock market, which made real returns of 50% or more in 2005. But over the longer term, the American business community is more likely to be impressed by improvements in the soft infrastructure for direct investment – effective rule of law, transparency and a predictable regulatory climate – that would come with steady adherence to European practices. Continued integration with Europe could contribute to an aura of attractiveness and familiarity, with transatlantic consequences.

This effect could also be felt in the political and security realm, but only if transatlantic relations as a whole develop positively. From a Turkish perspective, a troubling scenario is one of transatlantic friction and drift, in which Ankara is compelled to choose between American and European policies in key regions, and on key issues – or worse still, is estranged from both Washington and Brussels. More likely, deeper economic ties with Europe and the United States will facilitate, but not assure, closer ties at the strategic level.

New regional dynamics also complicate cooperation. America's intervention on Turkey's Middle Eastern borders has given the question of bilateral relations a much sharper edge. The Iraq War touches on the most sensitive problems affecting Turkish society and politics, above all the issue of Kurdish identity within Turkey and across the region.<sup>4</sup> The AKP government has encouraged a more open and active debate on the Kurdish issue – with some success – but it remains a flashpoint across the political spectrum. Experience since 1990 has reinforced the impression that developments in Iraq (as well as Syria and Iran) are intimately linked to Turkey's own internal security. The recent revival of PKK violence has only underscored the significance of developments in this area, and revived fears of Western – and especially American – encouragement for Kurdish nationalism in northern Iraq.<sup>5</sup> Ankara very nearly came to blows

with Syria over its support for the PKK in 1998, and Turkey has intervened in northern Iraq as part of its cross-border counter-insurgency strategy. In short, the Kurdish–Iraqi equation is the most troubled dimension of the country’s external policy, and one subject to historic sensitivities at the public and elite levels. In the wake of the Iraq War, it has also become the focal point for bilateral engagement and friction with Washington.

To be sure, many Turks misjudge American strategy and intentions with regard to Kurdish separatism and Iraq. Successive American administrations have made clear that the United States does not favour a break-up of Iraq, or an independent Kurdish state, and certainly not one that might threaten the integrity and security of a NATO ally. Repeated assurances on this score have done little to reduce the now widespread Turkish suspicion regarding American policy in northern Iraq. The most tangible demonstration of American commitment to the policy of a united Iraq and a secure Turkey would be concerted action against PKK bases and leaders in the region. Many American strategists would favour this. But with immense demands on American attention and resources elsewhere in a still highly unstable Iraq, few policymakers will be enthusiastic about opening new fronts inside the country, especially in a region that appears *relatively* secure from the vantage point of Washington. As a result, American policymakers have been constrained in their ability to act in the one area that might reassure Turks about the direction of US policy (although visits by high-level American intelligence officials to Ankara in December 2005, presumably to discuss this issue, were welcomed by most Turkish observers).<sup>6</sup>

Regardless of American and Turkish preferences, both countries must reckon with the possibility that an independent Kurdish state could emerge out of continued chaos in Iraq. This scenario is no longer a taboo subject in the Turkish strategic debate, and some analysts now quietly argue that a stable Kurdish state could be managed and accommodated within the regional order, and might even become a strategic asset for Turkey. That said, this line of thinking remains outside the mainstream discourse in Turkey. Even under benign conditions, Ankara would find it hard to confront the emergence of a Kurdish state unilaterally, without the cooperation and resources of Western partners. Turkish military intervention in northern Iraq, to forestall or to shape the emergence of a new state, or to take more direct action against the PKK, would imply substantial political costs in Ankara’s relations with the United States and Europe. All of which underscores the centrality of northern Iraq and the Kurdish issue as an issue for US engagement with Turkey.

Beyond Iraq, Turkey under the AKP government has pursued a policy of more active engagement in the Middle East, even as relations with Europe have taken



centre stage. This is not to say that Turkey has completely overcome its traditional ambivalence regarding relations with Middle Eastern neighbours. Few Turks would seriously argue that ties to the south and east represent a real economic and foreign policy alternative to relations with the West. But the two can certainly coexist as areas for Turkish external engagement, and the AKP government seems inclined to test this proposition to a far greater extent than its predecessors. High-level discussions with Syrian and Iranian policymakers, and some high-profile visits and cooperation agreements, point in this direction, at a time when Western policy toward both Damascus and Tehran is becoming more assertive.

If Turkey continues to balance and diversify its foreign policy through more active engagement in the Middle East, this could spur further concern among American observers that Ankara is turning away from its historic Western orientation.<sup>7</sup> In all likelihood, these fears will only materialise in the event of a prolonged estrangement from Europe, and a marked rise in nationalism in Turkey, and perhaps elsewhere. The more useful question for American policymakers, at this point, is whether Ankara's new regional activism can *support* Western objectives. The Erdogan government has acquired useful standing in Damascus and Tehran. Turkey has already been a visible interlocutor in the attempt to compel Syrian cooperation with the UN-led investigation in Lebanon.

Given its own stake in the issue, and expanded economic and political relations with Tehran, it is possible that Turkey could play a helpful role in dialogue with Iran over its nuclear ambitions. Although Turkey has lived with a nuclear arsenal on its northern borders for decades, Turkish strategists are increasingly concerned about the country's exposure to regional proliferation trends.<sup>8</sup> Iran already deploys ballistic missiles capable of reaching Turkish population centres, and the prospect of a new nuclear-armed neighbour in the Middle East would be deeply worrying for Ankara. The emergence of multiple nuclear powers in the region – one possible consequence of a nuclear-armed Iran – would change the strategic environment dramatically. It could spur the re-nuclearisation of Russian strategy, already a concern for Turkey, and could affect military balances and strategies from the Aegean to Central Asia and beyond. Turkey is unlikely to respond by pursuing a nuclear programme of its own. But it would make the continued credibility and effectiveness of the NATO security guarantee a central question, and could drive Ankara to renew and reinforce the security relationship with Washington as a nuclear guarantor.<sup>9</sup>

Outside of the Middle East, Turkey has mixed stakes in American engagement. Interest in the Black Sea is increasingly fashionable on both sides of the

*The Erdogan government has acquired useful standing in Damascus and Tehran*

Atlantic. Turkey sees a range of hard and soft security challenges in this region, and is playing a leading role in new multilateral cooperation initiatives. But the prevailing mood of suspicion regarding American policy has encouraged a wary attitude toward greater American diplomatic and military presence, especially outside a NATO frame. A degree of caution regarding Russian interests is also part of this equation – caution encouraged by the complex web of economic and energy ties that have emerged between Turkey and Russia since the mid-1990s. A more assertive Russian posture might change the Turkish outlook, and revive traditional Turkish concerns about Russia as a long-term competitor. For the moment, however, Ankara is inclined to treat Moscow with caution, and even as a useful hedge in relations with Europe and the United States.<sup>10</sup>

America's stance in Bosnia and Kosovo was applauded by Turks, and Turkish and US policies toward the Balkans are largely in accord. Here, the challenge from the Turkish perspective may be to keep Washington engaged in an area increasingly seen as a European area of responsibility. Similarly, in the Aegean, the prevailing detente between Greece and Turkey – a very positive development from an American perspective – has also meant a degree of American disengagement in the face of more pressing diplomatic and security priorities elsewhere.<sup>11</sup> Ankara may look to the United States as a key actor in the reintegration of the Turkish north of Cyprus, but the future of the island is now intimately bound up with European policy and Turkey's EU candidacy. Washington is no longer the centre of gravity for progress on Cyprus.

### **A different kind of American partner**

There is an understandable tendency among America's international partners to particularise their relations with Washington, to focus on the unique and historically distinctive in their bilateral relations. But viewed from the United States, these relationships, even the most important, are part of a global perspective, with interests that cut across regions. Over the last decade, and most dramatically since 11 September 2001, American foreign and security policy has been transformed in ways that have changed the nature of the United States as a partner for Turkey.

First, the overwhelming focus on counter-terrorism has led to the subordination of many traditional foreign-policy priorities, and has spurred greater activism in areas seen as directly related to national security in the narrow sense. In the Middle East and Eurasia, American strategy is now essentially one of extended homeland defence. Given the primacy of internal security concerns in Turkey's own strategy in recent decades, this approach is not necessarily unfamiliar to Turks. But the growing attention to challenges such as terrorism and the spread of weapons of mass destruction also means that longstanding regional ties and



policies will be measured much more closely in terms of their ability to contribute to specific functional requirements. If Turkey (or other NATO allies) can offer active assistance, the way is clear to closer cooperation. If not – as with Turkey in Iraq – the perceived ‘strategic’ utility of the relationship will decline. The current environment is one of sharper requirements and sharper judgements in terms of bilateral relations, at least in security terms. The traditional ‘fly wheel’ of Alliance commitments and cohesion has lost a good deal of its momentum, and will be less effective in sustaining the relationship in times of disagreement.

Secondly, to the extent that the United States pursues a more active policy aimed at transforming societies and compelling changes in behaviour in regions adjacent to Turkey, Ankara will be presented with continuing and difficult choices. Iraq is only the most pressing, ongoing example. The desire to ‘shake things up’ in Syria, or to forestall Iran’s nuclear ambitions through the use of force, would pose new dilemmas for Turkish policy. For decades, the US–Turkish strategic relationship was based largely on the defence of the regional status quo, territorial and political – an approach well suited to Turkey’s essentially conservative foreign-policy outlook. Today, Turkey faces an American partner with more dynamic, even revolutionary objectives in areas of shared interest.

Whether the product of misperception, mismanagement, unrealistic expectations – or all three – disagreement over Iraq has been at the core of a troubled bilateral relationship since 2003. The lack of an agreed bilateral approach to power-projection issues, including the use of Incirlik airbase for non-NATO contingencies, will be an even greater liability for the relationship under these conditions. Elements within the American strategic community tend to regard the breakdown of bilateral cooperation in advance of the Iraq War as a watershed event, casting grave doubt on the predictability of US–Turkish defence cooperation in regional crises. In reality, successive Turkish governments have been unwilling to allow the use of Incirlik for anything other than the most limited, non-strategic operations in Iraq since the end of the first Iraq War in 1991. Ankara’s reticence regarding the use of Turkish territory and airspace for American power projection should come as no surprise to American policymakers (Turkey does support on-going coalition operations in Iraq in logistical and other ways short of direct assistance with offensive operations). Cooperation along these lines, absent a NATO or UN mandate, or pressing Turkish defence needs that cannot be met in other ways, has been, and will remain, exceptional.

Third, Turks will continue to be uncomfortable with prevailing American thinking about Turkey’s role in the broader Middle East and North Africa. Few Turks, even those keen to expand Turkey’s relations to the south and east, welcome the notion of Turkey as a ‘model’ for the Middle East, either because

they prefer to see Turkey's role described in Euro-Atlantic terms, because they are sceptical about the exportability of democracy to the Arab world, or both. In somewhat different terms, and with somewhat different language, the EU is also attempting to promote democratic transformation in the Mediterranean and the wider European neighbourhood. Turkey has a stake in this transformation, but will naturally prefer the less intrusive approach emanating from Brussels, especially against a background of widespread anti-Americanism in Turkish public opinion. American and possible European pressure for new political and economic sanctions aimed at Syria or Iran will be particularly difficult to reconcile with Ankara's recent policy of greater engagement with these neighbours.

Finally, the critical transatlantic context for the bilateral relationship is in flux – to say the least. When Europe was the centre of gravity of American strategic concerns, Turkey had a specific and predictable place in terms of European defence. Absent a return to more competitive relations with Russia, American strategy will continue to be cast largely in terms of functional challenges of an essentially global nature. Over time, there will be real potential for a structural shift of American attention to China and the Asia-Pacific region. European observers have periodically expressed concern about this possibility. With the perception of China as a growing strategic competitor in many sectors, and the ongoing risk of a crisis over Taiwan, the next decade may actually see a marked shift of attention eastward, with implications for American engagement in Eurasia and the Middle East. From the Turkish perspective, this could mean a world in which the American presence as a regional actor is less predictable, and the need for an enhanced European role on the periphery of the continent may be increased. In some areas, such as the Gulf, there may be too much American influence for Turkish taste. In other areas of Turkish interest, such as the Balkans or Cyprus, there may well be *too little* American engagement.<sup>12</sup>

### **New directions for engagement**

Changes in the foreign-policy debate on both sides, against the backdrop of developments in the geopolitical environment, make clear that the bilateral relationship can no longer be guided by traditional patterns. Failure to explore a new approach, especially under conditions of troubled alliance relations, could spell further deterioration in the outlook for cooperation. This analysis points to some substantial challenges. It also suggests some areas of opportunity – steps that could bolster damaged perceptions on both sides and help to restore the strategic character of the relationship.

It is essential to acknowledge that a strategic relationship conceived essentially in bilateral terms is unsustainable. The most important external element

in the future of the relationship is undoubtedly the evolving nature of transatlantic cooperation as a whole. Both sides have an interest in assuring that Euro-Atlantic relations are set on a new and positive course. A dysfunctional transatlantic relationship, including a diminished role for NATO, would place even greater pressure on Turkish-US relations, and would force Ankara into a succession of uncomfortable policy choices in the coming years. For this reason, among others, Washington will benefit from continued Turkish convergence with Europe – as long as transatlantic relations are stable.

After a decade of awareness, Turkish and American policymakers still need to address the challenge of developing a more diverse, broad-based relationship. There is an intriguing comparison to be made here between America's relations with Turkey and India. With India, the United States enjoys a deep and diverse relationship, spanning economic, scientific and cultural ties, spurred by a large and active Indian-American community. Yet the development of a 'strategic' relationship between Washington and Delhi has proved difficult. With Turkey, the strategic relationship is longstanding, but the economic and cultural dimension remains underdeveloped. The quality of the bilateral relationship continues to be measured, overwhelmingly, by the quality of interaction at the high political level, with too little in the way of an underlying society-to-society relationship. To a degree, this is the inevitable product of a geopolitical approach to relations, and the existence of multiple crises on or near Turkey's borders. If, in a few years' time, there is less attention to the use of Incirlik air base and more attention to economic and cultural engagement, the relationship will benefit.

*The security-heavy framework is a problematic legacy of the Cold War*

The prevailing security-heavy framework is a leading and problematic legacy of the Cold War years. For structural reasons, Europe will remain the natural focus of economic cooperation for Turkey. But much more can be done to encourage American trade and investment in the country, including participation in less traditional areas such as financial services. The most important factor in this regard may well be Turkey's own movement toward EU membership, a development that is likely to spur much greater private sector interest in Turkey across the board. Here, as in other areas, the European and transatlantic 'vocations' are complementary and reinforcing, rather than competitive.

American policy toward the Kurds and northern Iraq is an unavoidable part of the bilateral equation, especially in the context of Turkish public opinion. Over the last decade, Washington has been remarkably unsuccessful in reassuring Turkish policymakers and opinion shapers about America's commitment

to Turkish national integrity and security in this setting. To the extent that the large-scale American presence in Iraq can be reduced and replaced by a multinational arrangement, perhaps under NATO leadership, and possibly with substantial Turkish involvement, the bilateral relationship will benefit. But this is a longer-term objective. For the moment, the United States remains absorbed with the task of bringing a reasonable level of stability to Iraq, and is reluctant to extend the counter-insurgency campaign to address PKK violence emanating from northern Iraq. That said, the United States can do and say much more than it has about threats to Turkey from this quarter, not just to court Turkish opinion, but to bolster the security of a NATO ally.

If there is to be an enhanced NATO role in Iraq, countering PKK infiltration along Turkey's border with Iraq might be a logical place to begin. It is also possible to imagine a new and more cooperative bilateral approach to Iraq as a whole, in which Washington assists in a visible way with Turkish concerns regarding the PKK, and Ankara helps to pressure Damascus regarding the infiltration of insurgents across the Syrian-Iraqi border. It is possible to revive an overt, cooperative approach to Iraq, but the prospects for this will be greatly improved with a package approach that reflects Turkish as well as American priorities.

Finally, Turkish and American policy planners need to open a much more explicit discussion about future challenges and strategic cooperation, aimed at reducing the pervasive sense of unpredictability in the relationship. Scenarios to be taken up should include an assessment of the longer-term implications of nuclear proliferation in the Middle East – that is, how to deal with a nuclear or near-nuclear Iran should diplomacy fail. In the near term, it will be essential to enlist Turkish cooperation on the question of Iran's nuclear programme, a shared risk for Ankara, Europe, the United States and, ultimately, Russia.

A new and more predictable strategic relationship is possible. But it will require new approaches, a wider range of participants and issues for engagement and, not least, more modest expectations on all sides. It will also require an end to the idea of cooperation based largely on Turkey's location – the real estate perspective – and the development of an approach based on forward planning and concerted policies.

## Acknowledgements

A version of this article won the second of three Sakip Sabanci International Research Awards given by the Brookings Institution and Sabanci University in May 2006. The opinions expressed in this article are solely those of the author and in no way represent the views or opinions of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars or its research sponsors.

## Notes

- 1 For one contribution to the 1990s debate on Turkey's geopolitical role, see Graham E. Fuller and Ian O. Lesser, *Turkey's New Geopolitics: From the Balkans to Western China* (Boulder, CO: Westview/RAND, 1993). For a reassessment, see Ian O. Lesser, 'Beyond "Bridge or Barrier": Turkey's Evolving Security Relations with the West', in Alan Makovsky and Sabri Sayari (eds), *Turkey's New World: Changing Dynamics in Turkish Foreign Policy* (Washington DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2000).
- 2 See *Transatlantic Trends 2005* (German Marshall Fund, Compagnia di San Paolo, Fundacao Luso-Americana and Fundacion BBVA, 2005), as well as Pew surveys of recent years.
- 3 Key features of the economic relationship are surveyed in *Economic Partnership Between Turkey and the USA: Recent Dynamics* (Istanbul: Turkish-US Business Council, March 2006).
- 4 See Bill Park, *Turkey's Policy Toward Northern Iraq*, Adelphi Paper 374 (Milton Park: Routledge for the IISS, 2005).
- 5 Worry about American intentions is part of a larger tradition of Turkish suspicion regarding Western policy toward Turkey and the region – the 'Sevres syndrome' that has been analysed extensively by Kemal Kirisci and others.
- 6 Discussion continued – with little in the way of tangible, new commitments – at the meeting between US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Abdullah Gul in Ankara in late May 2006.
- 7 Concerns of this kind are reflected in a number of recent analyses, including Soner Cagaptay, *Turkey at a Crossroads: Preserving Ankara's Western Orientation* (Washington DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2005).
- 8 See Ozden Zeynep Oktav, 'Changing Security Perceptions in Turkish-Iranian Relations', *Perceptions*, vol. 9, no. 2, Summer 2004, pp. 103–17.
- 9 These dynamics are discussed in Ian O. Lesser, 'Turkey, Iran and Nuclear Risks', *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Summer 2004, pp. 81–98.
- 10 For a recent, comprehensive discussion of Turkish-Russian relations, see Fiona Hill and Omer Taspinar, 'Turkey and Russia: Axis of the Excluded?', *Survival*, vol. 48, no. 1, Spring 2006, pp. 81–92; and Suat Kiniklioglu, 'The Anatomy of Turkish-Russian Relations', Sakip Sabanci International Research Award Essay, May 2006, [http://www.brookings.edu/comm/events/20060523sabanci\\_3a.pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/comm/events/20060523sabanci_3a.pdf).
- 11 The loss of a Greek pilot after a collision between Greek and Turkish fighters over the Aegean on 23 May 2006 points to the continued risks for crisis management. A decade ago, the possibility of misinterpretation and escalation would have been far more serious. For a survey of current issues, see Mustafa Aydin and Kostas Ifantis (eds), *Turkish-Greek Relations: The Security Dilemma in the Aegean* (London: Routledge, 2004).
- 12 On the possible retreat from American activism in key areas, see Graham E. Fuller, 'Strategic Fatigue', *The National Interest*, no. 84, Summer 2006, pp. 38–43.

