

# Turkey 2020

## *Scenario One:*

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### **Illiberal Islamism**

The Justice and Development Party (AKP) consolidates its power by capitalizing on the weakness of the secularist opposition, responding to the demands of the conservative urban lower-middle class, and building an alliance with the Islamist Felicity Party (SP). By 2020, Sunni Islam is the most powerful force in domestic and foreign policy, to the exclusion of minority views.

## *Scenario Two:*

### **Illiberal Secularism**

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The AKP faces socio-economic challenges, increasing resistance to its Islamist tendencies, and a deteriorating security situation. This creates an opportunity for the Republican People's Party (CHP) to come to power, with the support of the military and the National Movement Party (MHP). The new coalition espouses a strong, secure, and secular Turkey. In pursuing these goals, however, it tends toward authoritarianism.

## *Scenario Three:*

### **Political Pluralism**

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The AKP loses support when it fails to mitigate Turkey's socio-economic problems. Dissatisfaction prompts civil society and political parties to begin coalescing around new approaches to the economy, corruption, regional development, and governance. Politics becomes more competitive, forcing parties to compromise in order to build governing coalitions, and the polarization between secularist and Islamist forces gives way to pragmatism.

## PROJECT OVERVIEW

The CGA Turkey Scenarios workshop, conducted on May 21, 2010, was the fifth in a series of events at CGA designed to reduce surprise and expand U.S. foreign policy options. Previous events focused on Iraq, Iran, China, and Russia. Subsequent workshops on Ukraine and Pakistan will be released later in 2011. The workshops on China, Russia, Turkey, Ukraine, and Pakistan are funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

In both official and academic policy debates, the future is often expected to parallel the recent past. Potential discontinuities are dismissed as implausible, information that conflicts with prevailing mindsets or policy preferences is unseen or viewed as anomalous, pressure for consensus drives out distinctive insights, and a fear of being “wrong” discourages risk-taking and innovative analysis. This conservatism can reduce foreign policy options. Our experience, through several workshops, is that experts tend to underestimate the degree of future variability in the domestic politics of seemingly stable states. This is the case with Iran and with the Soviet Union. Globalization, financial volatility, physical insecurity, economic stresses, and ethnic and religious conflicts challenge governments as never before and require that we think seriously about American policies in such uncertain circumstances.

The CGA Scenarios Initiative aims to apply imagination to debates about pivotal countries that affect U.S. interests. The project assembles the combination of knowledge, detachment, and future perspective essential to informing decisions taken in the presence of uncertainty. The project comprises long-term research on forces for change in the international system and workshops attended by experts and policymakers from diverse fields and viewpoints. The workshops examine the results of current research, produce alternative scenarios, identify potential surprises, and test current and alternative policies against these futures.

Michael Oppenheimer, the founder of the project, has organized over thirty such projects for the Departments of State and Defense, the National Intelligence Council, the Central Intelligence Agency, the U.S. Institute of Peace, the Brookings Institution, the Council on Foreign Relations, and the President’s Science Advisor. He is a professor at the Center for Global Affairs at New York University.

## FOREWORD

A key ally of the United States, long-standing member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and a candidate for membership in the European Union (EU), Turkey has strong ties to the West and to the East in a volatile, yet strategic region of the world. Turkey sits geographically at the crossroads of civilizations, but has only in the last decade of the post-Cold War environment assumed the confidence and trappings of a geopolitically pivotal player. As a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council from 2008–2010, a G-20 founding member since 2008, and holder of the post of Secretary General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) since 2005, Turkey’s global rise is unprecedented. Turkey’s newly discovered role in global politics has its benefits, but also its challenges that need to be assessed.

Turkey’s new role has been brought about by the emergence of the self-confident Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his Justice and Development Party (AKP). Elected in 2002, reelected in 2007, and projected to win again in 2011, they have become a formidable force to be reckoned with in Turkish politics. Their critics accuse them of authoritarianism and Islamism, while their proponents laud their democratic reforms and liberal attempts at opening Turkey up domestically and internationally. The fact that the AKP as a civilian party has unrivalled control of Turkey in a way unprecedented in its post-Ataturk history means the stakes for the country’s future have never been higher.

The recent activism and independence of Turkish foreign policy has drawn the most recent attention throughout Europe, the United States, and in Turkey’s immediate neighborhood. In the West, there are fears that Turkey is being “lost,” that it is becoming more oriented toward the East, and that it is drifting away from secularism and toward Islamism. Turkey is seen as a more autonomous actor pursuing greater regional and global influence, and making it a less reliable partner of the West. Ideationally, the Cold War metaphor of Turkey as a “bridge” between East and West has been abandoned to demonstrate the agency of Ankara in its evolving neighborhood. Indeed, Ankara, particularly under the influence of current Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davuto lu, now conceptualizes Turkey as a “central country” in the midst of “Afro-Eurasia,” one that attempts to pursue “strategic depth” and “zero problems” with its neighbors. It does so by fostering bilateral and multilateral ties, by using the country’s

Ottoman heritage as a foreign policy asset, and by exerting “soft power” and economic independence in its region. Actions in support of these policy goals include Turkey’s headline grabbing engagement of states and movements shunned by the West, such as Iran, Syria, and Hamas. However, perhaps more significantly but less glamorous, Turkey’s efforts to establish free-trade and visa-free zones throughout its neighborhood as it seek to integrate these areas into the global environment by projecting itself as a regional leader and hub.

Balancing Ankara’s historically close relationships with the West both in its “strategic alliance” in Washington and its ongoing process with Brussels amidst the realities of its neighborhood is no simple task. Key to this is managing the interdependency between a democratizing and stable domestic political scene and ambitious foreign policy vision in Ankara. The changes in Turkish foreign policy cannot be attributed to a single factor; rather, a number of domestic and international considerations have propelled this phenomenon as this report seeks to outline. Turkey has the economic and political potential to be a trans-regional actor that promotes peace, prosperity, and stability or an inward-focused state, whose domestic turbulence inflames problems abroad. Therefore understanding Turkey on its own terms and assessing its potential impact globally and regionally is of critical importance to practitioners and scholars alike working on Turkish foreign policy today.

This report is a valuable contribution towards these assessments of future scenarios for Turkey. As idealized and highly stylized extremes, no single scenario of the three can be seen as fully predictive, but simply plausible potential outcomes. The distinguished practitioners and scholars gathered together represent the best thinkers of our day on Turkey and their perspectives offer us important insights. Not a single participant or reader will agree with every part of this report, but given the nature of the exercise it offers a unique perspective on a valuable and increasingly important strategic player on the global scene. This report could not be more timely given upcoming elections and the winds of change sweeping Turkey’s neighborhood. It is an important contribution to our understanding of one of the most dynamic players on the international stage today.

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April 1, 2011

## INTRODUCTORY NOTES

The Turkey Scenarios workshop was held on May 21, 2010. A group of Turkey experts were convened for a free-flowing discussion on plausible scenarios for the future of Turkey to the year 2020. It was not a formal simulation with assigned roles, but an open dialogue. The objective of the session was to identify and develop three plausible, distinct, and consequential scenarios that merit the attention of U.S. foreign policy-makers.

The launching point for the discussion was a paper prepared by the CGA Scenarios Initiative team (see Appendix) that identified six “drivers of change” in Turkey: secularism and political Islam, the military, the economy, the Kurdish question, and the country’s foreign policy orientation. In preparation for the event, participants were asked to consider how each of these “drivers of change” has varied in the past, how they could *plausibly* vary in the future, and how such variations could interact with other “drivers of change”.

Scenarios, as conceived in this project, arise as the “drivers of change” evolve and interact over time, to the extent that a country would be described substantially differently in the year 2020 than at present. We have consciously chosen to deemphasize—without ignoring—the role of external forces in shaping change based on an impression we have gained from previous workshops that country experts tend to underestimate the degree of variability of factors internal to countries. Seemingly stable states surprise observers when they suddenly unravel—the USSR being the classic example. Expectations of stability often turn out, in retrospect, to have reflected limited information, embedded mindsets, political biases, and/or excessive caution. This observation does not amount to a general prediction of imminent instability, but recognizes that states are today subject to an extraordinary combination of internal, as well as external, demands.

The workshop in May began with a presentation of fragmentary scenario ideas by the CGA Scenarios Initiative team based on considerations of Turkey’s “drivers of change”, as well as current literature on the subject. Panelists were asked to consider how Turkey in 2020 could *plausibly* differ from today. They discussed the ideas presented, adding to the list and making suggestions for eliminating redundancies. A recurrent theme

in the workshop's early conversations was the apparent tension between Turkey's Kemalist secular tradition and political Islam: how would these two seemingly dichotomous political traditions drive change?

Some panelists noted that they most obviously gave rise to four scenarios: a liberal secular state, an illiberal secular state, a liberal Islamist state, and an illiberal Islamist state. Others questioned the validity of using the secularist-Islamist and liberal-Islamist dichotomies built into this model, arguing that the reality in Turkey is significantly more complex and nuanced. Still others emphasized the need to integrate other dimensions, such as economic realities and nationalism. The challenge remained that only three scenarios could be addressed within the time constraints of the workshop.

Nearly all panelists agreed that a scenario would have to be built for a Turkey that is decidedly more Islamist in 2020 than it is at present, since this prospect had become prevalent in the literature following the rise to power of the Justice and Development Party (AKP). Since this scenario involved the predominance of only one of many ideologies and viewpoints in Turkey, it was decided that it would be beneficial for U.S. policymakers to consider the prospect of its coming to dominate Turkey at the expense of alternate views; that is, in an illiberal fashion.

It was then highlighted that the obvious alternative should be considered as well: that the government's commitment to secularism—and all the related ideas this term encompasses in Turkey—could strengthen once again. Panelists agreed that this scenario appeared unlikely at the present, given the weak position of both the military (the traditional “guardian” of secularism) and the Republican People's Party (CHP). However, this scenario would be highly consequential should it occur. As the discussions progressed, it was decided that this scenario would also trend away from liberalism, since its realization would also depend on the restriction of alternative, apparently competing, views.

There was also support for building a scenario in which the apparent tension between secularism and political Islam was not resolved. It was proposed that, given the right confluence of circumstances, Turkey's diversity could precipitate conflict, center-periphery divisions, or even threats the country's territorial integrity. Some panelists countered that the surfacing of diverse views and competing interests would not

necessarily lead to conflict. The emergence of a multiplicity of influential actors with a multiplicity of views—in a situation in which no one set of actors could monopolize institutions—would, by definition, give rise to a more pluralistic Turkey. It was considered plausible that such a scenario could produce a relatively liberal outcome.

By the time the scenarios were selected, it was clear that many more scenarios were conceivable for Turkey in the next decade. The possibilities for the future of such a dynamic, complex country could certainly not be fully addressed through three scenarios. However, it was clear that the objective of the exercise—to select three plausible, distinctive, and relevant scenarios for detailed treatment—has been met.

It should be noted that the selected scenarios were not intended to represent the most likely or probable scenarios for Turkey's future; rather, they were intended to consider developments that would be highly impactful were they to occur and that challenge both our assumptions and our preferences. None of the scenarios assumed that Turkey will have arrived at an idealized end-state in 2020.

The remainder of the workshop was committed to building the most persuasive case possible for each of the scenarios. Panelists were asked to suspend disbelief, set aside probabilities, and use imagination. For each scenario, the following questions were addressed: What would Turkey look like in 2020? What factors and events would precipitate and drive the emergence of the scenario? How would potential hindrances to the emergence of the scenario be rendered unimportant?

It should be noted that, while the conversations during the workshop were rich and detailed, they also included many debates, disagreements, and contradictions. Consequently, by the end of the workshop, the CGA Scenarios Initiative team was left with an impressionistic image of each scenario and faced the task of synthesizing the discussion and crafting from it three coherent narratives. The narratives that follow, then, represent the ideas presented at the workshop, as well as supplementary research.

Each scenario was constructed around a particular conception of Turkey in 2020 and includes a plausible, though not necessarily probable, narrative toward that outcome. Since the narratives all begin in the present, their early years are structured around similar events, such as the AKP-

sponsored constitutional amendment package passed by referendum in September 2010. As actors respond differently to emerging realities, the narratives diverge and take on unique characteristics that by 2020 definitively distinguish them from the other scenarios. Thus, the scenarios are not mutually exclusive, but each represents a dominant tendency with distinctive implications for Turkey and for U.S. foreign policy. Each scenario concludes with a discussion of implications for U.S. foreign policy.

To reiterate, it is not the goal of this project to predict or speculate on the likeliness of any particular event or scenario. Rather, the goal is to stimulate imaginative thinking about a country whose future course is by no means confined to the current trajectory. We hope that each scenario is plausible and thought-provoking, revealing challenges and opportunities for U.S. policy not apparent in extrapolations or in policy-driven debates about the future of Turkey.

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The scenarios presented in this document were prepared by faculty and students at the Center for Global Affairs, based on discussions at a full-day workshop and additional research. The group of experts who participated in the workshop was assembled by *Michael F. Oppenheimer*, Clinical Professor at the Center for Global Affairs.

Please note that the NYU Scenarios Initiative assumes responsibility for the contents of this report. Workshop participants discussed the core themes and underlying factors on which the scenarios are based, but the details of the narrative were provided by the NYU Scenarios Initiative. The contents of this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

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## Scenario One:

# ILLIBERAL ISLAMISM

## INTRODUCTION

In this scenario, Turkey becomes an illiberal Islamic state. By 2020, Islam functions as justification and motivation for restrictive government policies, a basis of identity for large segments of society, and an exclusionary code of conduct in everyday life. Institutions remain nominally democratic, but political opposition groups and parties are either repressed or ineffective. Turkey is governed by the religious-conservative Justice and Development Party (AKP) in coalition with the Islamist Felicity Party (SP). Though the AKP gains substantial voter support and manages to keep the country stable and reasonably prosperous for a number of years, by the end of the decade the country is on the verge of a political and economic crisis.

Turkey's relations with the EU and the U.S. have deteriorated, and Turkey has stepped back from all EU-accession negotiations. While its relationships with states in the Middle East, Central Asia, and Russia deepen over the decade, by 2020 a number of countries from these regions are skeptical of Turkey's starkly anti-Western course, since they had benefited—economically and diplomatically—from Turkey's former role as a “bridge” between the East and the West. Turkey's trade relations with both Eastern and Western partners gradually deteriorate throughout the decade, compounding the problems already threatening the country's economy, especially unemployment.

By 2020, Sunni Islam (the branch of Islam to which over 80 percent of Turkish Muslims belong) dominates Turkey's public sphere, education system, and state apparatus. However, the relationship between Islam and democracy in Turkey is complex. On one hand, measures to facilitate an Islamic lifestyle and allow Islam to influence political decisions have been promoted under the banner of freedom and justice and implemented by a democratically elected government. On the other, minorities, including non-Sunni Muslims, atheists, secularists, and homosexuals, face discrimination and have become alienated from politics and the state. Furthermore, the government heavily influences the media and attempts to repress all opposition groups and actors. Hence, Sunni Islam has

become the rationale for social, economic, and political exclusion—the means by which the masses impose their will on the minority.

## DRIVERS OF THIS SCENARIO

- **Internal Migration:** By 2020, more than 90 percent of Turkey's population lives in an urban environment. Throughout the decade, large-scale migration from rural to urban areas floods cities with people holding conservative and religious worldviews. Religiosity emerges as the defining feature of the growing urban lower-middle class. These segments of Turkey's society provide Islamic conservative parties and groups with the necessary mass support.
- **Islamism:** The AKP capitalizes on the growing political influence of the urban lower middle class. In order to appeal to the conservative masses, the AKP relies increasingly heavily on religious symbolism and attempts to introduce laws supporting Islamic ways of life. Over time, staunch Islamists gain influence in the government, especially when the AKP enters a coalition with the SP.
- **Foreign Policy:** Turkey deepens its relations with Middle Eastern and Central Asian countries, as well as Russia, while the country's traditionally solid ties with the U.S. slowly deteriorate. The country increasingly views itself as a part of the Muslim world, rather than the West. Disappointed by the stagnating EU-accession process and the harsh anti-Turkish stance of many EU politicians, Turkey steps back from accession negotiations. Turkey's prime minister and other state officials exploit and fuel anti-Western and pro-Islamic sentiments domestically by employing stridently Islamist rhetoric toward foreign policy issues, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
- **The Economy:** As the AKP asserts its power, its Islamic supporters increasingly monopolize emerging economic opportunities. Cronyism becomes a defining feature of the economy. Meanwhile, unemployment—especially among women and youth—continues to grow. Concerns over Turkey's economic prospects are heightened when the government's break with the EU (Turkey's biggest export market) begins to dampen trade and investment with the bloc, as well as with countries in the Middle East and Central Asia looking to utilize Turkey as a transfer point into Western markets.

- **The Military:** The military, traditionally functioning as the guardian of Turkey's secularist state and the authoritarian antithesis to Islamist movements, has lost most of its political influence. Its interference in civilian issues is increasingly opposed by large segments of the population, and its former power is weakened by ongoing investigations launched against military personnel by the AKP.
- **Civil Society:** Many civil society groups and members of the intelligentsia promote Islam as the distinguishing feature of Turkish national identity and social order and support the government's tendency to turn away from the West. Those civil society actors opposed to the country's pro-religious course face repression, threats, and discrimination—from the state and from non-state actors.

## THE PATH TO 2020

### 2010-2011: The Consolidation of the AKP's Power

In 2010, the governing Justice and Development Party (AKP) responded to the long-standing demands of liberal Turks and EU politicians for a more democratic constitution with a package of 26 constitutional amendments. In the September constitutional referendum, a great majority of the Turkish people supported the proposed reform package (58 percent of votes cast in favor, with a turnout of 74 percent).

While several of the amendments seemed to genuinely further Turkey's democratization, such as improvements in women's and children's rights and the strengthening of additional civil liberties, it became evident over time that others were aimed at solidifying the AKP's political power. Reforms of the latter kind included limitations on the Constitutional Court's ability to ban political parties and to veto future constitutional changes. Hence, under the altered constitution the Court would likely be unable to challenge future controversial legislation by the AKP government. This change was particularly significant because previously, in the absence of an effective opposition party or an intervening military, the Constitutional Court had been the sole institution able to block controversial moves by the AKP, such as its attempt in 2008 to invalidate the headscarf ban at public universities. Moreover, as part of the amendment package, the number of constitutional judges and personnel of the Supreme Board of

Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK) was increased, thus hampering decision-making processes within the judiciary.

Overall, the constitutional amendments significantly increased the power of the president and parliament, institutions dominated by the AKP. The AKP also used the constitutional amendments to weaken the position of the military. In addition to the ongoing Ergenekon trials, the AKP began to strive for civil prosecution of military generals involved in the coup of 1980, a judicial undertaking that had not been possible under the previous constitution. Most importantly, the approval of the amendments by a public referendum confirmed the people's trust in and support for the party, which increased its legitimacy.

Despite criticism from the secularist establishment, represented by parts of the judiciary, the military, and the Republican People's Party (CHP), the majority of Turks supported the AKP. In the 2011 national elections, the AKP won a majority in the Turkish Grand National Assembly for a third consecutive term. Apart from the AKP, only the CHP, the National Movement Party (MHP), and a handful of independent candidates were able to claim seats. Thus by late 2011 the AKP had increased and consolidated its power, while the influence of the military, the Constitutional Court, and the secularist parliamentary opposition had significantly diminished.

**The AKP was able to capitalize on the growing political influence of the urban lower middle class.**

The AKP owed its electoral success to a number of factors. Most notably, the party was able to capitalize on the growing political influence of the urban lower middle class, winning, as it had in 2002, the support of conservative, religious Turks who had migrated from the countryside to the cities over the course of the previous 30 years. In order to appeal to the conservative masses, the AKP relied heavily on religious symbolism (such as Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's avoidance of alcoholic beverages at official receptions)<sup>1</sup> and attempts to introduce laws supporting Islamic ways of life (such as allowing headscarves at universities). Competing secularist parties, such as the CHP, remained unable to mobilize mass support, in part because of their organizational weakness and in part because of the unipolarity of their staunch Kemalist views. At the same time, the AKP established itself as the party of economic success and market liberalization. It gained the support of entrepreneurs

and small businesses that were rooted in traditional culture and suspicious of the secularist parties' close ties with big industries.

### 2011–2015: Deepening Conservatism and Fallout with the West

Having won the 2011 elections and successfully implemented several constitutional amendments in its favor, the AKP enjoyed more power than ever before. President Abdullah Gül enjoyed broad support within the AKP and won a second term in 2012. Riding on its success, the party exercised its power by further changing the constitution, this time without intervention from the weakened Constitutional Court. In the name of religious freedom and equal educational opportunities, the party lifted the ban on headscarves at universities—a triumph for religious conservatives. This decision was perceived by many conservative Turks as the beginning of a new era, in which the state would be open to greater influence from Islam. Islamic civil society groups became more vocal, demanding the implementation of further religiously motivated legislation. More women began to wear headscarves, more men began to grow beards, bars and restaurants that served alcoholic beverages were occasionally vandalized, and journalists and others who criticized these developments were often anonymously threatened by Islamists or sued by politicians for publicly “insulting” them—all without serious response from the AKP government. Social and political issues, such as unemployment, social welfare, economic growth, security, and foreign relations, were debated in

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relation to religious values and principles. Islamic movements, such as the Gülen movement and the “Islamic Community Millî Görüş,” openly articulated their visions of a Turkey improved by the application of religious doctrines.

These developments provoked several demonstrations by secularist and liberal opposition groups against the AKP and the “Iranization of the country.” However, these segments of Turkish society were small compared to the AKP’s nationwide support base, and their actual impact on political decisions was limited.

The nation’s new course also affected its foreign relations. Anti-Islamic and anti-Turkish opinions grew among many EU citizens and politicians—a

shift that became particularly significant during the 2014 EU parliamentary elections. Many right-wing EU politicians and parties drew heavily on anti-Turkish sentiments in their campaigns, advocating “No” to Turkey’s EU potential accession. The AKP, as well as other Islamic parties, responded to such opinions and campaigns with pro-Islamic campaigns of their own. The central vision expressed in their campaign messages in Turkey’s 2014 local elections and 2015 national elections was of a strong, self-confident Turkey, united by an Islamic identity. Concurrently, Turkey’s foreign policy began to center on deepening ties to Islamic countries, especially Iran and Iraq, which served to reinforce its growing distance from the EU.

An additional development prior to the 2015 national elections was the emergence of cronyism within the ranks of the AKP. Members of the Islamic business community took advantage of their connections to politicians, facilitated by memberships in Tarikats and Sufi Orders, and profited from energy deals with Iran, Iraq, and Russia. These newly rich entrepreneurs had formerly argued that Islam would foster industriousness, modesty, and thrift and ultimately lead to social justice and national prosperity. Now, however, they indulged in ostentatious displays of wealth while remaining easily identifiable as Islamic through their renunciation of alcohol and their wives’ use of the headscarf.

In the eyes of the relatively poor masses, such behavior was inappropriate for true followers of Islam. Ultra-conservative religious media seized on this discontent and vocally raised criticism. Other Islamist parties began to sense an opportunity to displace the AKP as “real” Islamic parties. The Felicity Party (SP), which had recovered from its split in 2010, became particularly prominent as it claimed to support justice and prosperity for ordinary, hard-working Muslims and labeled the AKP as an “Islamic jet set.”

### 2015: National Elections and the SP’s Entry Into Parliament

Even though evidence of cronyism within the ranks of the party hurt the AKP’s image, it still emerged from the 2015 national elections as the strongest force in parliament. However, the most significant result from the election was that the Islamist SP entered parliament for the first time, barely surpassing the 10 percent threshold with about 11 percent of votes cast. As it turned out, the AKP’s corruption scandals had helped the SP to win over some votes from AKP’s support base. The CHP and



the MHP entered parliament as well, but were unable to increase their representation.

To the surprise of many political observers, the AKP built a coalition government with the SP in order to form a dominant two-thirds majority in the Grand National Assembly (GNA). It was decided—at the insistence of the SP—that the two parties would take turns filling the post of prime minister, first with the AKP's Erdoğan until 2017 and with the SP's leader thereafter. This agreement enabled Erdoğan to run for president in 2017 when Gül would be barred from seeking an additional consecutive term. The combination of the majority of the population's nationalism, religious conservatism, and concern with their own economic security favored the coalition: the AKP campaigned for a strong, self-confident, assertive Turkey and the SP successfully drew on concerns about issues of social justice and unemployment.

Secularist parties, on the other hand, remained unable to gather enough supporters to seriously challenge the AKP's power or the strengthening of the SP. In fact, the main secularist opposition party, the CHP, had not been able to win more than 21 percent of votes cast since the 2002 elections. Although some demonstrations against the AKP's pro-religious policies had occasionally taken place in Turkey's bigger cities, the great majority of Turks never felt represented by the secularist CHP, precisely because it lacked sympathy for the religious sentiments of the population. The CHP was unable to effectively engage pre-election debates or reframe those debates in secular terms.

Moreover, the opposition to the AKP and the SP was highly fragmented. The CHP's traditional emphasis on Turkey's territorial integrity—and, hence, ingrained prejudice against Turkey's Kurdish population—prevented the party from cooperating with Kurdish parties. Liberal and leftist critics of the country's course toward religious conservatism and authoritarianism predominantly voted for independent candidates, since in their view the CHP was not progressive or liberal enough. The ultra-nationalist MHP entered the parliament, but was unable to collaborate with others. Thus, liberals, secularist elites, Kurds, Alevi, and other actors opposing the AKP could not establish a unified opposition.

## 2015–2020: Crisis and Isolation from the West

The trend towards Islamization of the state and distance from the West now accelerated. The first political decision made by the new government was to step back from EU-accession negotiations—a decision supported by many Turks, given the decline in relations with the EU during the previous two years and the apparent opportunity of exerting influence independently in the Middle East and Asia.

Evidence of this reorientation was an emerging coalition among Turkey, Iran, Syria, and Iraq. While stressing their common religion, these countries deepened trade relations with Turkey, defined the Kurdish question as a common security problem, and became increasingly hostile in rhetoric and diplomacy towards Israel, the U.S., and the West in general. Ideologically united under the banner of Islam, these states began reaching out to other countries in the region, trying to leverage their influence on Kurdish issues, Israeli-Palestinian relations, and nuclear non-proliferation.

On the domestic level, the new government tried to implement many laws in favor of an Islamic lifestyle and Islamic principles. The ban on the headscarf in public spaces, including government buildings was lifted in 2016. Concurrently, positions in the administration were now opened to graduates from Imam-Hatip High Schools. In 2017, the AKP supported a group of ultra-conservative MPs in pitching a reform package to significantly alter the curricula of public high schools and universities in an attempt to take advantage of a fast-growing youth population. All subjects concerning natural sciences and history were to be revised in accordance with the Koran, and law schools were to integrate Sharia law into their curricula, while making Roman law an elective subject. However, after some debate, the government decided to postpone these proposed reforms because it feared opposition to them would be too great and that implementation would require better planning and, hence, more time.

Other laws promoted Islamization more indirectly. They included, for example, increasing financial support for the building of mosques and the staffing of the Directorate for Religious Affairs, a further increase in tax on alcohol, and official permission for workers to take breaks for daily prayers. Furthermore, various AKP policies strengthened Islamic banking in Turkey in order to foster opportunities for businesses and individuals.

Measures to support Islam went hand in hand with increasing authoritarianism. Holding the majority in the parliament, the AKP and SP not only controlled executive organs and the police, but also had the political, financial, legal, and administrative means to sue their political opponents, ban demonstrations, influence and control labor unions and civil society associations, and, most significantly, censor the media. The demands of non-Sunni Muslims and other minority groups for equal rights and liberties were largely ignored—including those of Kurdish citizens for more freedom to use their language and promote their political interests publicly.

Although the AKP and SP's ideologically driven policies were popular in the short run, both internal and external resistance grew in the latter part of the decade. Their educational reforms met stiffer resistance than expected in the parliament. The breakdown of EU-accession negotiations in early 2016 gradually undermined trade and investment relations with the EU and negatively affected the Turkish stock market and the value of the Lira. Efforts to coordinate diplomacy with Iran, Iraq and Syria generated few concrete benefits, while harming relations with the West. Moreover, by breaking with the West, Turkey had all but forfeited its former role as the "bridge" between the East (including the Caucasus and Central Asia) and the West in international diplomatic and trade relations. The negative effects of this shift became clear when negotiations over natural gas and oil deals—such as the expansion of the Nabucco pipeline project—lost

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momentum, upsetting countries in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Middle East, which had hoped to continue profiting from Turkey's diplomatic and economic ties to the West.

Consequently, Turkey found itself increasingly isolated from the West, while facing complications in dealings with its eastern neighbors. Turkey's economy suffered under strained trade relations. Downward revisions of growth forecasts—and indications that high unemployment, the country's most pressing economic problem, would linger for the foreseeable future—were blamed on the government.

In this context, it became clear that the AKP's pro-market liberalization policies and desire to craft an advanced industrialized society were increasingly at odds with its education policies. Since the majority of

Turkish citizens had only limited access to higher education and training, the labor market was saturated with unskilled workers. Low-skilled workers, migrating from the countryside to Turkey's bigger cities in search for employment, found themselves in a competitive environment. Simultaneously, the demand for skilled workers could not be met by Turkey's small number of graduates from high-quality universities. This trend was compounded by the neglect of education for women and in Kurdish regions, as well as continuing population growth and the corresponding growth in the youth population.

In addition, PKK-sponsored terrorism escalated, with increasing support from the Kurdish civilian population. While the AKP-SP government sporadically announced the continuation and deepening of what had been termed "the Kurdish opening" early in the decade, promises for increased language rights, language education, better access to education, and the development of southeastern regions were never fully implemented. Closely related issues, such as the demands of Kurdish politicians, human rights groups, and the EU for better prosecution of extra-judicial violence against Kurdish demonstrators by police and security personnel, were neglected more often than not. The AKP-SP increasingly alienated Kurds, many of whom had begun to view the PKK's attacks against Turkey's security forces as legitimate.

These concerns fueled a more effective opposition. In 2017, as agreed, Erdoğan left his post as prime minister to the SP's leader.<sup>2</sup> Even though it had been arranged in advance, the ascent of the new SP leader, an ultra-conservative Islamist, to the position of prime minister galvanized various opposition groups and parties. Demonstrations took place in many of Turkey's bigger cities. While opposition groups were actually small in number and not powerful enough to seriously challenge the government or upset the power balance immediately, their criticism turned national attention to the country's growing challenges. Problems such as Turkey's democratic deficit, cronyism, high unemployment, and isolation in the international realm were obvious, and the popularity of AKP and SP began to wane.

In the 2019 elections, the AKP-SP government managed to gain only a slim majority in government, while the CHP profited from the AKP and SP's losses. The most critical outcome of the election was the sharp drop in voter participation. Many people were increasingly disappointed by

Turkey's political and social situation. As the decade ended, Turkey was trending toward polarization, fragmentation, and isolation. Religious-conservative forces had failed to lead Turkey to social peace, greater security, or increased prosperity, but opposition parties, including the CHP, remained unable to develop a convincing alternative path to a more prosperous and politically liberal and stable Turkey.

### 2020: What Next?

By 2020, Turkey had evolved into an illiberal Islamist state, though it was unclear whether this was a transformation really led by the population or whether it could actually satisfy the population's needs. The country's relations with neighboring countries had deteriorated, economic growth around the country was uneven, and conflict between social groups was intensifying. Citizens had grown detached from politics, and opposition parties appeared weak and irrelevant. In the absence of a viable alternative to the AKP-SP government that could remedy these issues, the country appeared to be bordering on national crisis.

The erosion of checks on the AKP government early in the decade had created an environment ripe for authoritarian tendencies, a trend facilitated by the weakness of the opposition and civil society. Thus, while AKP-SP government's "Islamic" legislation largely centered on *allowing* the individual to express an Islamic creed which could have been compatible with democracy, the government's break with the West and poor management of minority issues created perceptions that Islam was, in fact, being imposed on the populace by an illiberal government. Unfortunately, while opposition to this government grew significantly throughout the decade, politically viable alternative visions for the country's future had not materialized by the decade's end, leaving Turkey in a precarious state.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. POLICY

None of the scenarios are without challenge for U.S. policymakers. Turkey as an effective partner or, more likely, as a positive influence in independently confronting problems shared by both states, presupposes a strong and self-confident Turkey with which we will not regularly see eye-to-eye. Turkey as a dependable ally reinforcing American policy presupposes a Turkey without the capacity (political or economic) to pursue its own interests in a regional and global environment full of both

threat and opportunity. A pliable Turkey is by definition weak, unable to exert influence in a rapidly changing Middle East, less useful to U.S. policy as a bridge to the Muslim world, and unable to offer material or effective diplomatic support in areas of U.S. engagement. This seeming paradox is something the U.S. confronts in multiple venues, with several rising (or risen) powers, but Turkey is perhaps the best test of our ability to succeed in post-hegemony, given the country's size, imperial past, and location at the intersection of East and West, Muslim and secular worlds.

As we consider these scenarios, it is important to understand the contribution of strategic considerations in Turkey's "zero problems with neighbors" policy and insistence on playing a more active, independent role in the region. These policies should not be attributed entirely to the internal contest between secular and Islamist forces. Yet the three scenarios do present varying levels of challenge to U.S. interests—depending on who governs, and how successfully Turkey builds its international influence.

The Illiberal Islamist scenario is surely the most daunting. The combination of an illiberal politics and strengthening Islamic identity will poison the climate for collaboration between the U.S. and Turkey, and complicate the management of a range of bilateral issues from trade policy to human rights. Turkey's value as a link to the Muslim world will diminish as its distance from the EU widens and its policies tilt towards Iraq, Iran and Syria. The indirect value of Turkey as a reconciliation of Islam, pluralism and democracy will be lost, just when—given the revolutionary changes in the region—it is needed the most. On issues of central importance to U.S. interests where Turkey has some leverage, such as controlling the spread of nuclear weapons, extending/reforming liberal institutions of global governance, managing U.S. troop withdrawals from Iraq and Afghanistan, mitigating the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and promoting secular responses to political change in the Arab world, the two countries will frequently find themselves on different pages.

**The obvious question is how to influence political change in a moderate, pluralist direction.**

Two challenges will be especially important. First, new opportunities presented to Iran in a reconfigured Arab world, and the weaponization of its nuclear program (a reasonable prospect by 2020), will raise issues of prevention, then containment and deterrence if prevention fails, that will

place the U.S. and an Islamic Turkey at direct odds. Second, shaping the direction of political change in the Middle East will be a priority for both countries, and a natural competition between the two for influence in transitional states will be aggravated by diametrically opposed visions for the future of regional politics. Although an emboldened Iran and violent, unpredictable change in the Middle East pose common threats for both states, their capacity to act collectively against these threats will be badly compromised in this scenario.

With these negative consequences for U.S. interests, the obvious question is how to influence political change in a moderate, pluralist direction. Under the conditions described however, it is difficult to imagine the U.S. wielding either the power or the legitimacy to have much positive impact on internal Turkish developments, and the best approach—the EU accession process—breaks down in this scenario. The U.S. has little influence over the EU accession process, however, and while it has so far been associated with advances in Turkish democracy, this scenario paints a breakdown in the accession process. That said, as security worsens in Turkey's region, there may come a point when 'zero problems with neighbors' loses its value, threats common to the U.S. and Turkey trump competing interests and ideologies, and ad hoc cooperation becomes possible. Until then, the U.S. will have to pursue its interests in the Middle East without much help from Turkey, and sometimes with its active opposition.

## Scenario Two:

# ILLIBERAL SECULARISM

## INTRODUCTION

In this scenario, secularist forces again come to dominate Turkish life. The traditional maxims of territorial integrity and modernization gain new persuasiveness for many citizens, for whom fears of insecurity and a sense of nationalism grow throughout the decade.

This scenario is driven by diminishing returns to the AKP's economic and foreign policies and by deteriorating regional security. Violence in Kirkuk after the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq and increasing PKK violence in southeastern Turkey fuel fears that the country's stability is being threatened. The CHP rises to power by contrasting with the failed policies of the AKP its own vision for Turkey—as strong, secure, and unified—and by promising to restore security. It presents secularism as embodying a range of principles valued by Turks, such as progress, democratization, social justice, and national unity, while arguing that Islamism undermines these principles.

Once in power, the CHP addresses religious issues from a secular standpoint. Secularism, as conceived by the party, is more than the neutral principle of separation of religion and politics, but rather involves state control over the expression of religion in public life. This includes debates over religion in education, the wearing of the Islamic headscarf in public spaces, the employment of Islamic prayer leaders, and the building of mosques, among other issues.

As the CHP strengthens its alliances with the MHP and the military, the authoritarian-secularist tendencies of Turkey's past reappear. Demands for religious freedoms and freedom of expression in the media, including the use of the Kurdish language, are repressed in the name of security. Criticism from abroad is rejected as undue interference in domestic affairs. By the end of the decade, many of Turkey's international relationships are strained and membership negotiations with the EU have been suspended indefinitely.

## DRIVERS OF THIS SCENARIO

- **The Economy:** In the early years of the decade, Turkey's annual GDP growth has returned to around 5 percent. Fundamental economic challenges remain, however, including persistent unemployment, difficulty attracting foreign investment, and corruption at all levels. These issues undercut prosperity later in the decade and become central to criticisms of the AKP's leadership.
- **The Kurdish Question:** The AKP's promises of an enhanced human rights situation in Kurdish regions and greater attention to Kurds' demands go largely unfulfilled. Instead, policies toward Turkey's Kurdish population become more repressive. The issue continues to be addressed as a security threat to the state, rather than as a question of human rights or civil liberties. Kurdish demonstrations against the lack of political rights often turn violent and are harshly suppressed. PKK terrorism escalates throughout the decade. The CHP comes to power on promises to restore order and national unity. Its approach simply reinforces the security-orientation of past policies, however, and thus flounders. Meanwhile, threats to Turkey's security and territorial integrity begin to be used as justification for curtailing civil liberties in the country as a whole.
- **The Military:** The military's influence over Turkish politics increases under the CHP, which views strong security forces as the key to containing PKK terrorism and violence in Kurdish regions. The government and military collaborate frequently, and in partnering with the CHP leadership, the military reassumes much of its former role as a bastion of Turkish secularism.
- **Foreign Policy:** Turkey's neighborhood becomes increasingly unstable due to the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq, popular revolts in some Middle Eastern countries, the lingering potential for an independent Kurdistan, and ever-greater prospect of a nuclear Iran. Turkey makes no real progress in resolving disputes with Cyprus and Armenia. Throughout the decade, Turkey's foreign policy becomes more and more symbiotic with domestic political sentiments, especially nationalism. Dispute over the Turkish government's increasingly illiberal tendencies leads to the formal suspension of EU accession negotiations late in the decade.

## THE PATH TO 2020

### 2010-2011: "Trial and Error" for the CHP

After winning the constitutional referendum in September 2010, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) was able to reestablish its image as a bastion of democracy, sensitive not only to the demands of its Islamic-conservative constituency, but also as a reformer of human rights and civil liberties in the country.

Nonetheless, the AKP's policies came under increasing fire. Its management of the economy drew particular criticism. After contracting in 2009, Turkey's economy had improved, with exports trending upward due to demand in Africa and the Middle East.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, high unemployment, a large current account deficit, and noticeable wealth disparities persisted. The AKP's failure to substantially reduce unemployment after two terms in power left the Turkish electorate with questions about the AKP's ability to achieve this in the future.

In the run-up to the 2011 parliamentary elections, the CHP tried to attract voters by pointing out the deficiencies of the AKP's policies. It highlighted economic problems, promising that if elected, it would prioritize increasing welfare provisions and reducing unemployment. In addition, the CHP continued to claim that the AKP's constitutional reform package had betrayed Turkey's secular principles and served only to help the AKP consolidate power (according to many CHP supporters, the referendum only furthered the AKP's agenda to transform Turkey into an Islamic theocracy). These criticisms played out in a heated public debate about the AKP's "hidden Islamic agenda" and its implications for the country's future.

Commentators had initially predicted the CHP could win above 30 percent of the 2011 parliamentary votes<sup>4</sup>—enough to elevate it to power. This prediction, however, proved premature. Many voters still felt a sense of loyalty to the AKP and remained unconvinced by the CHP's critical stance on the AKP's policies. It appeared that the CHP's stance on Islam and its indifferent position towards the Kurds were preventing it from mobilizing voters beyond its traditional support base. The AKP repeated the success it had enjoyed in the constitutional referendum in the 2011 parliamentary elections, once again securing its position as the strongest political force in Turkey.

## 2011–2015: The Downfall of the AKP

Free from significant opposition in parliament, the military and the judiciary, the AKP turned its attention to pro-Islamic legislation in an attempt to solidify its popularity among conservative Islamic voters, a critical element of its support base. The party overturned the headscarf ban in universities and introduced legislation to restrict the consumption of alcohol. However, intense backlash to these policies surprised the party, which believed following its electoral success that public support would be relatively high. As expected, secularists were at the core of this resistance, and they succeeded in galvanizing much greater support for their views than expected. Many AKP supporters, for example, expressed concerns that the party was undertaking these policies at the expense of following through on its more critical promises to voters, such as improving living standards and deepening democratization.

Concerns with the AKP's political agenda were heightened by its foreign policy. The “zero problems with neighbors” approach began showing obvious signs of strain. As the leadership deepened connections with leaders of Muslim-majority countries, such as Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Pakistan, secularists raised concerns that the country's foreign policy was turning pro-Islamic. Other detractors criticized these relations from a nationalistic point of view. When foreign minister Ahmet Davutoğlu proved unable to extract an apology from Israel following the Gaza flotilla incident of June 2010, opposition parties accused the AKP of allowing Israel to get away with murder. Turkish nationalists, notably the anti-western *ulusalcılar* (neo-nationalist groups), claimed the AKP was making Turkey appear weak in its neighborhood and leaving it vulnerable to exploitation. In 2011, a delay by Erdoğan in decisively speaking out in support of democratic protests in the Middle East in 2011 opened him to criticisms by the CHP that he had double standards for the region.<sup>5</sup>

Nationalistic concerns with the AKP's foreign policies grew further when the government reopened negotiations with Armenia in an effort to normalize diplomatic relations and open the border between the two countries (much to the frustration of Azerbaijan, which insisted that Armenia withdraw from the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh territory first). While this move had been a response to mounting pressure from the U.S. and EU, most citizens did not see it as improving their reputation abroad. Rather, the outrage of nationalist groups at what they saw as an implicit concession regarding the “Armenian question” gained currency.

In the end, nationalistic resistance to these measures was so strong that the effort was ultimately abandoned.

Concurrently, the AKP's relations with the military deteriorated. Investigations and court proceedings against military personnel connected with the Ergenekon and “Sledgehammer” cases continued. Furthermore, the party extended measures against the military's political power by prosecuting army generals who were involved in the 1980 coup d'état, a legal move made possible by the constitutional amendments in 2010. To many Turks, however, concentration on this issue appeared disproportionate, given that many more pressing issues remained unaddressed.

The AKP's attempts to weaken the military became particularly controversial when violence escalated in Kurdish regions. Many Turks surmised that the government was encouraging extensive media coverage of the military investigations in order to distract the public from the Kurdish issue, while secularists pointed out the ill timing of such measures, given that the fragile security situation demanded a strong military response.

The Kurdish issue had begun to flare following the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq, which brought expectations of insecurity across Northern Iraq. Indeed, there were some episodes of pro-Kurdish violence that spilled over into the Kurdish regions of southeastern Turkey. However, the Kurdish population's discontent had been longer in the making, stemming primarily from the AKP's failure to follow through on its promises of improving the human rights situation there and expanding political rights for Kurds. In urban areas, Kurds displaced years earlier by violence in their home regions, were disappointed that the AKP had not addressed discrimination against them. Young Kurds in particular felt alienated and betrayed by the AKP.<sup>6</sup> Their dwindling support for the Party—reflected in their boycott of the constitutional referendum in 2010—dipped further when, in its third term, the AKP continued to overlook demands for Kurdish language rights and reacted harshly to Kurdish demonstrations, notably in the trials of the “stone throwing kids.”<sup>7</sup>

Violent protests broke out in February 2014 on the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the capture of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan, provoking a harsh crackdown by Turkish security forces in which hundreds of young Kurdish protestors were imprisoned. Kurdish protests spread across Turkey and reached

Istanbul. These developments were accompanied mounting violence between PKK guerilla fighters and the military in the region between Turkey and Iraq, as well as an increasing number of PKK terrorist attacks in major cities. In the wake of a series of attacks against the army in the Turkish-Iraqi border region and a bomb attack on Istanbul's central Taksim Square (which killed one police officer), the AKP lost much of its credibility on the Kurdish issue. Voters became deeply skeptical of the party's ability to guarantee national security.

The AKP simultaneously faced persistent criticism for its economic policies, particularly as unemployment still consistently hovered above 13 percent. It became clear that the Ministry of Labor's regulation requiring businesses to provide jobs for five Turkish citizens for every foreign worker they employed, for example, had done little to solve this problem.<sup>8</sup> The education system was not producing workers with the skills to work in higher-end manufacturing or services industries, and vocational training schemes were neglected. Calls to increase compulsory education from eight to ten years had not been answered; close to 40 percent of

Turkish youth was not attending school. Frustration with the lack of economic opportunity led many youth to feel excluded from society.<sup>9</sup>

**By 2015, the AKP's policy failures had brought about a sharp decline in its popularity.**

By 2015, the AKP's policy failures had brought about a sharp decline in its popularity. The primary beneficiary was

the CHP, which had gradually honed its ability to capitalize on the public's growing dissatisfaction with the AKP's religious policies, foreign relations, treatment of the Kurdish issue, and economic management. Learning from its loss in 2011, the CHP reorganized. Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu was forced to resign from his post as party chairman as his poor electoral results were viewed as evidence of the ineffectiveness of his conciliatory approach. Kılıçdaroğlu was replaced by a staunchly secular leader who immediately began to assess how the party could best expand its support base. Under new leadership, the party worked to consolidate formerly dissociated and disorganized sentiments of opposition to the AKP into a single, unifying message.

The CHP's reinvented message catered to the public's rising fears of insecurity and stressed their commitment to protecting security, national

unity, and prosperity. In speeches peppered with nationalistic references, the new CHP leader repeatedly cited the AKP's failure to stop PKK-sponsored attacks and violence in the Kurdish regions, or to protect Turkey from the spillover effects of instability in Iraq's Kurdish regions. He blamed high employment and widening income disparities on the AKP as well, accusing its leaders of favoring demands of their patronage networks over those of the country as a whole. By demonstrating concern with the security situation and with issues of social justice, the CHP attracted new supporters, including from the far right and the social democratic camps.

### 2015–2019: Secularist Leadership

Unsurprisingly, the AKP suffered significant losses in the 2015 parliamentary elections, and the CHP gained almost as many seats in the parliament. The MHP, too, entered parliament, as did a number of pro-Kurdish independent candidates, and the AKP only barely managed to form a governing coalition. In fact, the opposition was so strong that analysts predicted Erdoğan's ability to make decisions in the future would be highly constrained by opposition from the CHP and MHP.

**The CHP's reinvented message catered to the public's rising fears of insecurity.**

Under the pressures of the cumulative criticism of his last term, the current power struggle in parliament, and the prospect of legislative gridlock, Erdoğan abruptly resigned as prime minister after 13 years in power. With the loss of its prime mover, the AKP was facing a seemingly inevitable decline as a significant political force. Given the parliamentary gridlock, early elections were held late in the same year. The CHP won a clear victory, the AKP was reduced to the second strongest party in parliament, the MHP gained seats, and even the Kurdish BDP entered parliament. Overall, the new Turkish Grand National Assembly (GNA) was dominated by the CHP, which began to operate with the support of the ultra-nationalistic MHP.

Following the elections, the new government increased the state's education budget by 10 percent and proposed increasing benefits to the unemployed. The government also announced a review of Turkey's taxation system to eliminate corruption and ensure equal treatment for all Turks. More women were appointed to senior government positions,

including as senior bureaucrats in the justice ministry. Government officials' speeches promised modernization through economic reform, improved social welfare, and new educational prospects. This approach appeared popular with the Turkish electorate.

On religious issues, such as allowing the headscarf, the CHP, whose politicians had previously demurred with statements like “the need for social consensus,” began to pursue a more traditionally secularist line. The new government announced its intent to reverse the rule allowing women to wear the headscarf in public universities. The review of the taxation system singled out Islamic banking for special scrutiny. Some commentators went as far as arguing that the tax review was a plot to undermine the rising Islamist class that had prospered under the AKP. The CHP countered that these measures were essential to Turkey's modernization. Such ideas were not just for a secularist elite but for all Turks. The government also stopped all prosecutions of military generals, trying to develop an amicable relationship between the army and the

government—a move that the CHP considered necessary for containing incessant PKK terrorism and attacks by guerilla fighters.

**The CHP-led government's illiberal approach to the Kurdish question was mirrored in its general style of governance.**

The CHP's strategy of pacifying the Kurdish regions through heavy reliance on federal police and military forces

was unsuccessful. The simmering conflict with the PKK and frequent skirmishes between Kurdish demonstrators and the police in the streets kept the country constantly on the verge of open, large-scale conflict. The CHP also suspended the previous government's approach of engaging neighboring countries affected by the Kurdish issue, namely Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Armenia, instead prioritizing the desire to protect Turkey's territorial integrity.

The CHP-led government's illiberal approach to the Kurdish question was mirrored in its general style of governance. The party's opponents found themselves increasingly antagonized, and observers began to raise questions about the future of Turkey's democracy. The government rebuked media editorials critical of its policies—a practice commonly used by the AKP and criticized by the CHP while it was in the opposition. The numbers of prosecuted journalists and publishers continued to grow,

and the government kept pressure on the Supreme Council of Radio and Television to block broadcasts it perceived as negative. Humanitarian NGOs became subject to new, cumbersome restrictions, which in many cases limited access to areas where the government and military were undertaking “national security” operations.

The government's actions elicited condemnation from abroad. The EU parliament called for increased political freedom for all Turkish citizens and an end to media censorship and restrictions on speech. Such concerns about the rule of law and individual and collective human rights had long been a sticking point in EU-Turkish relations. However, with nationalist sentiment at a high following the military actions against the PKK, the government saw no incentive for yielding to outside pressure. Instead, it rejected the EU's criticisms as interference in internal matters. The government further hinted that the U.S. should be at least partially blamed for the instability plaguing Turkey because of its failures in Iraq, not to mention its continued meddling in the Armenia issue and over Cyprus.

The CHP's and MHP's stance against the EU and the U.S. was popular among Turks and polls showed waning support for EU membership. The regime capitalized on public sentiment by announcing that the EU must get its own budgetary house in order before making further demands on Turks. This diplomatic estrangement was reinforced by increasing commercial disengagement. Europe was suffering a half-decade of slow growth and, although a double-dip recession had never materialized, Turkey's trade continued to drift away from Europe. Turkey was on good terms with both Russia and China, and had signed a series of bilateral trade and investment deals. Lulled into a sense of security regarding its popularity, the CHP government continued to claim that its policies were strengthening Turkey and returning it to the greatness once imagined by Ataturk.

## 2020: Illiberalism

Shortly before the 2019 parliamentary elections, two car bombs exploded simultaneously in Istanbul and Ankara, killing 28 civilians and injuring 40, including several Western tourists. A fringe Islamist group, affiliated with the al-Qaeda network, seeking to destabilize the country in advance of the elections, had perpetrated the attack. The government responded by launching an investigation into Islamist parties more broadly, strengthening the image of secularists as the necessary guarantors of national security.



Concerns about the politicization of national security, however, cast a shadow over the government's response.

One manifestation of this was that EU leaders openly threatened suspension of Turkey's EU accession process on the grounds of ongoing restrictions on civil liberties. An emboldened Turkish government countered that this was another sign that the EU never intended to let Turkey join the Union and that it was imperative for Turkey to create a future independent of the EU. Thus both the EU and Turkey agreed to halt the accession negotiation process indefinitely. With little to be gained from supporting EU accession at this juncture, Turkish opposition parties did not protest. It seemed that the long-standing ideal of a formal union between Turkey and Europe had been buried, though no grander vision had emerged to replace it.

Turnout was low in the 2019 elections. Turks were disengaged from politics, since none of the main parties represented a dynamic future for the country. The CHP again eked out a victory, but it was clear that the changes to which it aspired were not the type that voters were hoping for. As 2020 dawned, Turkey appeared a more illiberal country than in the prior two decades. Turkish leaders continued to play on fears for Turkey's territorial integrity, once again elevating the idea of Turkishness as intrinsically vulnerable and fragile. Turkey's historic system of governance, wherein those new to power eventually become co-opted by the country's institutions, showed no signs of changing. The end of the EU accession process had hurt Turkey's economy, reducing its ability to attract foreign investment, while its import-dependent manufacturing sectors remained unreformed. In 2020, unending confrontation haunted Turkey's society and politics, with no sign of abating.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. INTERESTS

The consequences for the U.S. in this scenario bear some resemblance to those associated with the Illiberal Islamist scenario. Turkey has lost its EU anchor, veers strongly towards (secular) authoritarianism, and as such falls out of step with the liberal orientation of U.S. foreign policy. Beyond these similarities, its crackdown on the Kurds, particularly as this extends into northern Iraq, and its worsening relationship with Greece, are especially damaging to Turkey's ties with both the EU and the U.S. The renewed power of the military undoes years of democratic reform. Turkey's influence as a link between the West and Islam, compromised

in the first scenario by a tilt towards its Islamic neighbors, now succumbs both to fear of Iran and radical Islam in the Arab world, and the West's rejection of its illiberal politics.

Turkey is, in these circumstances, more dependent on its traditional security relationships with the U.S. and with NATO, and potentially more subject to U.S. leverage on limiting Iran's nuclear development, resisting pressure on Israel, and containing radical political trends among the Arab states. But its high level of insecurity and extreme nationalism make it an unreliable partner at best, a source of escalating regional conflict at worst. Its internal governance produces friction with a U.S. foreign policy increasingly subject to domestic pressures. And its economic weakness and deteriorating relations with neighbors make it at best useless, at worst a liability for any U.S. effort to reach out to the Arab world, improve regional security, or more generally to protect its interests in a multi-polar system.

**With these consistently negative implications for U.S. interests, our focus should be on prevention, not mitigation.**

With these consistently negative implications for U.S. interests, our focus should be on prevention, not mitigation. As with the first scenario, maintaining the external pressures and incentives for democratic reforms would be helpful, a process that is most effectively pursued by the EU. Yet no one should be optimistic about the EU's interest or capacity to play this role, at least over the short term. More to the point is that regional security drives this scenario. Turkey's "zero problems with neighbors" foreign policy depends on a relatively benign regional environment that is now deteriorating, which Turkey acting on its own cannot reshape. Turkish 'strategic depth', its ability to take full advantage of its power and position in a pivotal region, depends on an external environment that is impossible to imagine without an effective U.S. presence and at least implicit U.S.-Turkey collaboration. A rising and nuclear Iran, chaos in the Gulf and North Africa, U.S. troops withdrawing from Iraq and, soon, from Afghanistan, place the AKP's current strategy at risk and create a deep sense of insecurity that undermine its credibility and precipitate Illiberal Secularism. These potential outcomes, negative for both countries, should permit a meaningful strategic dialogue between them in the medium term.

## Scenario Three:

# POLITICAL PLURALISM

### INTRODUCTION

In this scenario, the AKP gains control over all branches of government through constitutional amendments, and has a seemingly unobstructed path to implementing its agenda. While this continues for several years, the gap between public expectations and the AKP's performance grows when it begins to pursue policies easily identifiable as “Islamist” and neglects crucial socio-economic problems (income inequality, regional disparities, corruption, Kurdish resentments) and EU negotiations. Rising opposition in the form of reorganized minority parties (the CHP and BDP) and an invigorated civil society strengthen political competition and the constraints on AKP authority.

When no party wins a parliamentary majority in 2015, the political system faces gridlock from which it emerges in 2017 after a split within the AKP and early parliamentary elections. In the new parliament, the AKP competes with a reinvented CHP for the support of smaller parties needed to push through its preferred policies. Both parties, in an effort to win over the electorate, attempt to distance themselves from ideologically charged policies—which proved detrimental to the former AKP government's popularity—and now identify themselves as capable of pragmatically remedying pressing socio-economic problems. With reinvigorated EU membership negotiations providing the guiding vision for reforms and with civil society actively articulating public concerns, policy priorities become increasingly clear. In 2020, public demands and external pressures have created the conditions for political pluralism to produce constructive results: more effective governance, expanded civil liberties and human rights guarantees, and more equitably distributed economic growth.

### DRIVERS OF THIS SCENARIO

■ **Political Competition:** Controversial AKP policies generate increased political resistance. Simultaneously, opposition parties manage to reinvent themselves after years of attrition and begin to expand their

support base. By the end of the decade, the CHP competes directly with the AKP for both public support and alliances with the minority parties whose backing they need to implement policies. Since citizens of all ethnicities and religions grow more concerned with socio-economic problems throughout the decade, political parties' platforms begin to converge, and political competition revolves around bringing about tangible improvements.

- **Civil Society:** Civil society plays a central role in this scenario. The AKP-led government's attempts to suppress dissent early in the decade energize civil society organizations. While such organizations represent, as always, a diverse range of views, many find common ground in their opposition to the AKP and as they ally with other groups, they grow in strength. Their ideas reflect the growing concerns among the populace that their well-being and rights are being neglected.
- **The Kurdish Question:** Among those most disappointed by the AKP's policies early in the decade are the country's Kurds, who feel the party's promises remain unfulfilled. The pro-Kurdish BDP party garners Kurdish votes formerly committed to the AKP and becomes a vehicle for advocating the rights of the country's minorities in general. The political success of the BDP provides a newly effective outlet for Kurds' concerns and prevents their discontent from fueling violent movements. When the BDP eventually secures a substantial number of seats in parliament, it becomes a prize ally for both the AKP and the CHP, who each offer significant concessions to Kurdish regions. The human rights, economic, and security situations of these regions improves.
- **The EU Accession Process:** With the EU initially distracted by its own internal issues and with Turkey concentrating on other foreign policy objectives, Turkey's EU membership negotiations stall, causing many to give up on Turkey's membership. However, by mid-decade, the EU has stabilized internally and refocuses on Turkey's accession, conditional on resumption of reform. To revive progress in EU negotiations, many politicians firmly reassert their support for membership in an attempt to distance themselves from the increasingly unpopular AKP leadership. By the end of the decade, EU membership appears a real prospect for Turkey and a powerful driver of national reforms.

- **The Economy:** GDP growth remains fairly strong through the decade. However, without effective policies to improve the regulatory environment, stimulate new investment, and build workforce skills, growth fails to meet public expectations for rising living standards and employment opportunities (a particularly pressing problem, given the swelling ranks of unemployed youth). In addition, the AKP government neglects its commitment to expanding commercial relations with a broad range of countries, alienating the business community. Opposition parties consequently demand improved economic management and invigoration of the reform process. As politicians reap political rewards from meeting such demands, governance of the economy improves.
- **Foreign Policy:** Growing dissatisfaction with an AKP strategy viewed as ideologically motivated peaks in the latter half of the decade when the stagnation of negotiations with the EU becomes a central concern, and a central point of resistance to Erdoğan's leadership. Following the 2017 election, coalition governments lead Turkey back into EU accession negotiations, but retain AKP's multi-directional strategic orientation.

## THE PATH TO 2020

### 2010–2011: AKP's Influence Peaks

On September 12, 2010—the 30th anniversary of the country's last full-scale military coup—Turkish voters approved an AKP-sponsored constitutional amendment package by a wide margin.<sup>10</sup> The AKP and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan interpreted this outcome as an endorsement of their leadership and claimed it as confirmation that citizens wished to leave behind the military interventionism of the past.<sup>11</sup>

The approved constitutional amendments were implemented over the course of the following year. Many of these, such as laws protecting the rights of women and children, personal data, and collective bargaining rights for civil servants, were relatively easily adopted and measurably improved human rights and civil liberties in the country. Other amendments, such as the restructuring of the judiciary, changes to the constitutional reform process, revisions to procedures for banning political parties, and the institution of civil liability for military generals, were viewed with alarm as an effort to lock in the AKP's political ascendancy.

Erdoğan maintained that these amendments were essential for making the 1982 constitution suitable for a democracy, but he faced criticism from several fronts. The CHP and its supporters criticized the amendments as an attempt by the AKP to gain power and realize its Islamist agenda. The Kurdish BDP, which had led a surprisingly successful boycott of the referendum, argued the changes neglected Kurdish interests<sup>12</sup> by failing to extend guarantees of rights and liberties, such as language rights and freedom of speech, to the minority. Various civil society groups, including those that supported the amendments, such as the “Not Enough, but Yes” Platform (*Yetmez ama Evet*), argued that the AKP's reform package should have included greater guarantees of pluralism and freedom and removed racist and extreme nationalist language from the constitution.<sup>13</sup> Overall, the opposition suspected that the party's primary objective in reforming the constitution was extending its own influence over the levers of power and silencing critics.

As the AKP spearheaded implementation of the approved reforms, its opponents' dissatisfaction grew. Increasing the number of constitutional judges from 11 to 17 proved especially controversial. The parliament and president heavily influenced the appointment of the 6 new judges who were, unsurprisingly, overtly pro-AKP. Political opposition decried the erosion of judicial independence although observers noted that the judiciary had not been convincingly independent to begin with and that, in fact, their real concern was the threat to the Court's traditional role as protector of Kemalist principles of secularism and national unity<sup>14</sup>.

Changes to the judicial system exacerbated disagreements on another controversial subject: the role of the military in civilian affairs. By the time of the constitutional reforms, the military had already been weakened considerably, convincing many observers that its tendency to intervene in politics was a relic of the past.<sup>15</sup> However, military-civilian relations—and the secularist-Islamist divisions they ostensibly embodied—remained in the public eye due to ongoing trials of retired and active military officers accused of plotting coup attempts in the “Ergenekon” and “Sledgehammer” cases.<sup>16</sup> These trials had divided public opinion since their inception but they became even more divisive when judicial reforms were implemented in 2011. The 2010 amendments included provisions to making military personnel liable in civilian courts in cases concerning “crimes against the security of the State, constitutional order and its functioning”<sup>17</sup> and in preventing civilians from being tried in military courts, except in times

of war. While the AKP argued that subordination of the armed forces to civilian authorities was essential for democratization—an argument supported by the EU<sup>18</sup>—detractors maintained that these reforms were an ill-disguised effort by the AKP to silence its critics in the military so it could pursue its own agenda unchallenged.

By the end of 2011, it was clear that by succeeding in amending the constitution, the AKP had emasculated its most formidable institutional opponents—the historically secularist-dominated Constitutional Court and the military—and secured a dominant position in all three branches of government. Its popularity still appeared remarkably resilient, and in the 2011 national elections, it extended its unbroken record of electoral success since 2002, once again winning a solid majority in parliament. Although the elections did not drastically change the balance of power in the Grand National Assembly (GNA), they were significant in that the pro-Kurdish party, BDP managed to secure 30 seats. AKP leaders dismissed these results as a temporary aberration resulting from Kurdish voters' dissatisfaction with the constitutional reforms and predicted that they would soon return their support to the AKP.

### 2012–2015: Disappointing Performance, Growing Opposition

As the AKP approached its tenth year as dominant player in Turkish politics, challenges to its hegemonic position were growing, in part as a consequence of its own failures to meet the expectations of the electorate, in part due to its constitutional overreaching and a resurgence in the opposition.

Having gained power in the wake of a financial crisis and then positioned itself as an economic reformer, the AKP depended heavily on strong economic performance to maintain its legitimacy and popularity. Robust GDP growth prior to the 2009 global financial crisis—averaging 6 percent between 2002 and 2008—had created ongoing expectations of rising living standards and expanding business opportunities. In addition to effective macroeconomic management, meeting these expectations would require a wide array of reforms to improve the business climate, curb corruption, reduce income inequality, upgrade the education and health systems, and boost the technology sectors that would facilitate a much-needed move “up the value chain.”

Although the AKP's platform had long centered on delivering such reforms, by 2012 it was clearly falling short of what it had promised. The constitutional reforms and general elections had assumed higher priority,<sup>19</sup> and foreign investors expressed increasing reservations about entering the market, despite forecasts of robust growth. More seriously, although annual GDP growth averaged 5 percent, unemployment remained above 12 percent—and substantially higher for women, youth, unskilled workers, and residents of eastern regions. Voters' patience was growing thin with the government's (much-touted) job-creation programs underperforming and employment opportunities remaining insufficient to accommodate the country's burgeoning working-age population.

The negative effects of stalled economic reforms were compounded by several AKP missteps that fanned its critics' worst fears—that Erdoğan and the AKP had authoritarian and radically Islamist designs. In 2012, following through on Erdoğan's promises, the government attempted a complete overhaul of the constitution in an effort to bring it in line with prevailing models—namely, those of Europe and the United States.<sup>20</sup> When Erdoğan announced his intention to push for the replacement of the parliamentary system with a presidential system—a radical change, understood by many as playing into Erdoğan's personal plans to eventually become president—a fire storm of criticism erupted. Restrictions on the media were tightened in an attempt to contain the debate, but this only served to further radicalize and harden the positions of those who felt their views were being suppressed.

Resistance to the rewriting of the constitution surprised the AKP, which had expected that, as with the referendum of 2010, it would be able to override criticism and win support for its proposals. Most surprising for the leadership was that its own ranks only expressed weak support. This signaled that a shift was underway within the party. Disillusioned by the leadership's neglect of economic reforms and increasingly heavy-handed tendencies, many moderate voters and politicians (whose support for the AKP rested on its image as the country's best hope for democratization and prosperity) had begun to distance themselves from the party, either joining the opposition or simply withdrawing from political debates.

Conservative, Islamist voices were also growing stronger within the AKP. Policies began to be framed in ideological terms and included various

explicitly religiously motivated measures, such as the lifting of the headscarf ban at universities and increasing the taxation of alcoholic beverages. Unfortunately for the AKP, this strategy did not necessarily guarantee broader popularity, as even pious Turks were primarily concerned with lingering unemployment and the poor quality of public services, especially health. Consequently, the government relied ever more heavily on patronage as a political tool, causing the level of corruption and cronyism to escalate further.

A priority shift was also evident in the government's foreign policies. Ahmet Davutoğlu, who remained foreign minister, continued to espouse the government's commitment to a "zero problems with neighbors" outlook. However, skeptics (who had long accused the AKP of Islamizing the country's foreign policy) could point to the concentration of the foreign ministry's efforts on deepening relations with Iran, Syria, and Iraq. When combined with the prime minister's habit of playing the "Islamic card,"<sup>21</sup> this trend led many to believe that the country's foreign policy was becoming distinctly "Islamic." Among the most disappointed were Turkey's business leaders, who, while welcoming deeper trade relations in Iran, Syria, and Iraq, felt the government was neglecting crucial negotiations with other regional powers, such as the EU, and corresponding projects, such as the construction of the Nabucco pipeline. A slow response by the AKP to the revolt in Libya in 2011 only compounded criticism towards its foreign policy.

As dissatisfaction with AKP policies grew, opposition parties found the means to reestablish themselves in Turkish politics. By 2013, the revival of the CHP under the new leadership Kemal Kılıçdaro lu was well underway. Disappointed by its poor performance in the 2011 elections, the party had undergone a much-needed process of introspection and reorganization. Recognizing widespread disappointment with the AKP's economic policies, the CHP had developed an economic platform which emphasized social democracy. While few believed the CHP could become the next "reformist" party, its prioritization of socio-economic issues and seemingly less corrupt management played to its advantage. In addition, under Kılıçdaroğlu's leadership, the party's support for EU membership strengthened.

The most significantly transformed party was the BDP, whose popularity had increased immensely. Its new role in Turkish politics stemmed

from the spectacular failure of the AKP's management of the "Kurdish question." Enthusiasm for the AKP's "Kurdish opening" launched in 2009 had waned as early as the 2011 elections.<sup>22</sup> The PKK's unilateral ceasefire announced in late 2010 was broken soon after the elections, and military and federal police presence in the Kurdish-majority regions of the country grew dramatically. At the same time, Kurdish demands for increased freedom of speech and assembly remained unmet and the socio-economic consequences of the escalating violence—such as widespread displacement of Kurdish families—remained unaddressed. When the AKP's proposals for the new constitution did not remove the language of Article 166 (which stipulated that all inhabitants of Turkey were Turks), Kurdish voters became convinced that the party would neglect their concerns indefinitely. As a result, their withdrawal of support from the AKP, evident in the 2011 elections, became permanent. Some—especially the children of internally displaced families who had grown up in Ankara, Istanbul, and other bigger cities—took up arms against the Turkish state,<sup>23</sup> guaranteeing that the situation would remain explosive for the foreseeable future. Most, however, committed themselves to increasing their political voice through the BDP's representation in parliament. Thus the BDP saw its ranks swell while it attracted support from non-Kurdish center-left voters and other disappointed former AKP constituents.

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Growing political opposition to the AKP was magnified by new activism within civil society. Individuals with strong opinions on Turkey's socio-economic problems and the role of religion in politics were organizing into civic groups, many of which had links to political parties. While media censorship remained a well-practiced AKP tactic, cracks in the party's support gave dissenters a feeling that change was possible and that the rewards from challenging the AKP were increasingly worth the risks.

This growing opposition found common ground in their determination to address problems of swelling youth unemployment, deteriorating quality of health and education, the poor condition of low-income urban neighborhoods, the frequency of prison abuses, and skilled labor shortages. As civil society organizations developed their ideas and improved organizationally, they gained supporters. The youth and

student movement “Genc Civiler” (Young Civilians),<sup>24</sup> for example, grew in number and strength by advocating the idea of a non-authoritarian, pluralist society. Having achieved visibility during the constitutional reform referendum, the “Yes, but it’s not enough” campaign turned its attention to broader advocacy of democratic reform, gaining public support from intellectuals like Orhan Pamuk. But by far the most active civil society organizations were those working to secure the rights and freedoms of Turkey’s minorities, including Kurds, Alevi, Armenians, Christians, and Jews, who managed to gain national attention for their causes (although certainly not consensus around their views), in part due to well-known (if under-reported) attempts by federal authorities to shut them down.

In the lead up to the 2015 elections, it was clear that political competition was intensifying, and that the AKP lacked the means to stem it. Election campaigns were intense and the journalists covering them ever more defiant of the government’s threats to punish those who criticized the ruling party.

External change was also underway: the EU, having recovered from the internal struggles evident early in the decade, began showing renewed interest in Turkish accession. It reiterated the concerns of earlier in the decade—that the reform process had slowed compared to the 2002–2005 period and that democracy was eroding.<sup>25</sup> Perhaps inspired more by worries that a destabilized Turkey could endanger Europe than by an overwhelming desire to see Turkey as part of the EU, European officials urged Turkey to refocus on democratization and economic reform in return for renewed prioritization of membership negotiations.

### 2015–2017: Political Stalemate Ends in Pragmatic Compromise

The 2015 elections took place in the context of intense political competition and external pressure to tackle the country’s mounting challenges. The campaign period was rife with speculation that the AKP would not secure the majority—or even the plurality—of seats.

In the end, the AKP lost a substantial number of seats, but remained as the strongest party in the parliament. The CHP and BDP both gained seats, as did independent candidates of other parties. Only the MHP’s representation remained more or less unchanged. Without an outright majority for the first time since 2002, the AKP was not able to act without

the support of at least one additional party. Because its relations with opposition parties had deteriorated so sharply in recent years, it was not clear with whom it could partner. With no grand coalition, Turkey fell into acrimonious political stalemate.

A multiplicity of views and agendas gained currency in the new parliament. The BDP pushed for public investment in Kurdish regions and guarantees for human and civil rights; the CHP advocated retrenchment of the AKP’s “Islamist” policies and greater attention to socio-economic problems; the MHP focused on wooing nationalists in the AKP and the CHP. The AKP was on the defensive. Parliamentary debates were long and tough, often ending without consensus. Although debates were often dominated by radical voices, the incentives for each party to appear more competent and relevant were strong enough to help moderate, pragmatic politicians to begin to gain prominence.

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Political stalemate finally ended in 2017 with a split in the AKP and early elections, both of which were triggered primarily by renewed argument over the Cyprus conflict. The AKP split was precipitated by Ali Babacan, Deputy Prime Minister Responsible for the Economy and chief negotiator in Turkey’s EU accession talks, who openly turned against Erdoğan and accused him of stalling the EU-accession process by neglecting the Cyprus question. AKP politicians who had been looking for an opportunity to distance themselves from Erdoğan seized this opportunity to break with him on this politically sensitive issue. They declared that Erdoğan and his supporters had willfully undermined Turkey’s EU membership prospects by focusing on their personal ambitions instead of resolving the Cyprus issue and implementing the political and economic reforms needed for membership. Babacan also found support among many politicians in the BDP and the CHP, since both parties had made EU accession a central component of their platforms in the 2015 elections. As AKP MPs shifted their support to Babacan, Erdoğan’s support base came to rest on staunchly conservative Islamist MPs.

The disagreements emerging within the AKP received significant media attention and censorship wilted. The public had begun to take an eager interest in the dynamics of this new competitive environment, wondering

how it would affect daily life. The details of parliamentary debates were widely disseminated, increasing pressure on politicians to make cogent arguments. Babacan's criticisms paved the way for a flood of discussion about the relative merits of the AKP's policies in recent years. The "Islamization" of public and foreign policy came under heavy fire, both for being a distraction from pressing socio-economic matters and for undermining religious freedom.

Parliamentary debate on the opening of Turkish ports to Cypriot vessels grew extremely heated. When they reached an obvious impasse, Erdoğan called for a vote of confidence, which he lost, leading to early elections. Election results revealed that the AKP's support base had shrunk substantially and that its losses had benefited a wide range of parties, from small radical Islamic parties that attracted voters dissatisfied with the shift of policy debates away from Islamic policies to larger opposition parties, especially the BDP and the CHP, who seemed to offer voters more convincing approaches to tackling Turkey's problems.

### 2017–2020: Pluralism Drives Democratic Deepening

Undoubtedly the most significant outcome of the 2017 general elections was that the CHP found itself roughly on par with the AKP in terms of parliamentary seats for the first time in more than a decade. Both parties held more than 180 seats. While observers expected the deadlock of the previous parliamentary session to be repeated, they were pleasantly surprised that the relatively equal positions of AKP and CHP had positively changed the dynamics of competition in parliament.

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The AKP and CHP challenged each other to win minority MP support (especially from the BDP, the largest minority party) in order to push through their preferred policies. Consequently, ideologically charged rhetoric gave way to more moderate policy-oriented discussions.

The AKP's internal divisions had enabled reform-oriented politicians to assert a dominant position in the party, and, under the leadership of Babacan, it decisively returned to its former program of pro-EU policies and market liberalization. Meanwhile, a new generation of politicians had asserted itself within the CHP, solidifying the party's new image as a social

democratic party that emphasized the democratic aspects of Kemalism over its polarizing ideological aspects.

At the heart of this change was a realization on the part of each party that—given the severity of Turkey's socio-economic challenges, the renewed lure of the EU, and the high expectations of the public—their relative performance in the coming years would determine their fate. The rapid shifting of supporters between parties in recent years had convinced politicians that no sector of the Turkish public was beyond their reach: issues such as employment, health, education, security, and EU membership resonated with voters from all religions and ethnicities. While parties' overlapping goals frequently caused bitter disputes among rival MPs over credit for successful policies, the net effect was to improve governance because no party could afford to be seen as opposing the publically popular reforms being undertaken. The relentless involvement of civil society in national political debates helped maintain pressure on political parties to perform.

Babacan, as the AKP's new leader, presented himself as chief advocate of Turkey's EU accession. In 2018, the first Cypriot freighter docked in a Turkish port, signaling not only that resolution of the Cyprus conflict was possible, but that Turkey was ready to reopen the frozen chapters of its EU accession negotiations. Significant obstacles remained of course, but EU membership appeared an achievable rather than aspirational goal for Turkey.

EU pressure helped to shape politics. Anti-corruption measures eventually improved the quality of public services and the business environment generally, which leveled the playing field for the country's entrepreneurs while raising foreign investment. When GDP growth reached 7 percent in 2019, it seemed the government's new reform-orientation was paying off. In addition, the EU's insistence on guaranteeing human, civil, and minority rights—combined with the pivotal role of the BDP in parliament—fostered a marked improvement of the government's approach to the Kurdish question. Public investment in infrastructure and services in Kurd-dominated regions increased rapidly, creating hopes of a more prosperous future. Language rights for Kurds expanded as well, with many official forms and documents available in Kurdish. Other minorities also benefited from this new approach, particularly as a result of several measures to increase religious freedom.

While reengaging with the EU, successive Turkish governments maintained the AKP's earlier emphasis on improved relations with all its neighbors, and with powerful states outside the region. The economic and strategic opportunities for large, rapidly growing countries such as Turkey, had expanded in a more multipolar world, and Turkey's competitive democratic politics and improved EU prospects had positioned Turkey to seize these opportunities. It could now credibly position itself as a gateway between East and West, between the Muslim Middle East and

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the secular states of Europe and North America. Attractive to the East for its economic and political access westward, and to the West as a successful, moderate Muslim democracy, Turkey could now reap benefits in both directions.

By 2020, Turkey's political landscape was dramatically different than in 2010. The polarizing tensions that defined the political system earlier in the decade—between secularism and Islamism, between elites and the masses, between the majority and minorities—had given way to a greater diversity of debates on a wide variety of issues. As incentives for cooperating with opposition parties increased, politicians found common ground in advocating pragmatic policies. A robust, diverse civil society played a crucial role of communicating voters' policy preferences to politicians. Ideological differences and radical, polarizing views did not disappear but were marginalized. As the decade drew to a close, Turkey faced a bright future.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. POLICY

This represents the most favorable scenario, both for Turkey and for the U.S. It describes a moderate politics and a pragmatic/realist foreign policy devoted to maximizing Turkey's influence in its region and beyond, but aware of its own limitations and vulnerabilities, and prepared to partner with the U.S. on at least an ad hoc basis to address threats and create conditions favorable to its interests. A moderate, pluralist domestic politics arise not from an implausible self restraint of a dominant AKP, but from a competitive political process ignited by diminishing returns to AKP policies, both domestic and foreign, the revival of other parties and increasing civil society dynamism, all of which promote a competition that rewards compromise and pragmatic problem solving.

This more competitive politics has seemingly contradictory effects on Turkish foreign policy, and on its U.S. relationship. Foreign policy becomes more a product of domestic politics – among parties, and between parties and civil society – and less the expression of a dominant AKP grand strategy. This implies incoherence. Yet a strengthened liberal politics positions Turkey for renewed EU accession negotiations (during the latter part of the decade), reduces friction with the U.S., contributes to a successful “Kurdish opening” and permits an effective execution of “zero problems with neighbors” approach, which is indeed the most rational posture for a country with Turkey's size and location. As the door to EU membership reopens, Turkey's economic opportunities grow, and its appeal to Arab states as an avenue of diplomatic and economic access to the West is enhanced. With its Muslim population, pluralist politics, growing economy and positive relationships with most regional and global powers, it is able to fully realize its potential influence.

This is most certainly a positive outcome for the U.S., as it positions Turkey to reinforce regional stability, help in managing specific conflicts in the region, provide an example and material support for more effective governance in the Muslim world, respond to common threats (rising Iran, spreading terrorism, chaos in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya) through ad hoc cooperation or through NATO, and generate commercial opportunities for U.S. business. These common interests become more compelling should accelerating change in the Arab world produce potentially damaging consequences for both countries.

But these opportunities could be easily squandered by unrealistic U.S. expectations for a “liberal” Turkish foreign policy. Turkey, as it emerges towards the later part of the decade, is successful, stable, self confident, with a pivotal position in a critical and transforming region. The substance of its strategy will remain the maximization of its power regionally and globally in circumstances that offer great opportunity. While its threat environment will sometimes create common interests with the West, and with the U.S. in particular, it will not operate as a surrogate. How much it serves as a link to the Muslim world will vary with the messages we're trying to deliver. Cooperation in confronting threats will depend on the circumstances, and on both states' willingness to compromise on issues they will often view differently. One should expect potentially conflicting responses to containment/deterrence of Iran, questions of outside intervention in the evolving revolutions in the Middle East, managing



potential turbulence in Northern Iraq as the U.S. presence recedes, and the substance and process of any Israeli-Palestinian settlement. These issues also complicate U.S.-Turkey relations in other scenarios. Here, Turkey is not a precipitator of conflict and insecurity, and has important leverage to bring to regional stabilization, but acting in a cooperative, or at least mutually reinforcing way, will require a long term view of our common interests, a degree of patience, and adept diplomacy on both sides.

One area of likely conflict in this scenario arises from the increasingly mercantilist character of Turkey's foreign economic policies. This is a product of the democratic nature of Turkey's foreign policy decision making, its robust growth and its globalizing commercial and financial interests. Competition for markets, capital, and resources will frequently threaten to overwhelm cooperation with the U.S., and with other liberal trading states. Turkey will find common purpose with other rising powers

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that question the legitimacy of the liberal trading system. EU conditionality may curb the worst excesses in commercial practice, but the EU is just as likely to accommodate these practices in the interests of membership.

Getting the most out of a relationship with a strong, independent regional power with a Muslim population and competing economic interests will be

difficult, often producing unsatisfying compromises and agreements to disagree. U.S. contribution to Turkey's development will be modest, but not trivial: supporting the EU accession process; working to build regional security by encouraging Turkey's mediation efforts in Middle East conflicts, and in stabilizing Iraq and Afghanistan; leveraging Turkey's synthesis of Islam and pluralism in shaping political change in the Arab world; and, when necessary, pursuing our interests vigorously and independently, counting on multiple common interests and effective diplomacy to contain the damage.

## Appendix

### DRIVERS OF CHANGE IN TURKEY

Turkey has long been seen as a pivotal state for U.S. foreign policy due to its geo-strategic location between Europe and Asia and its proximity to trouble spots in the Balkans, the Caucasus, and the Middle East.<sup>26</sup> As a neighbor to Iran, Iraq, and Syria, Turkey's regional profile is garnering international attention.

The Turkish Republic is unique in a number of ways. It is the only predominantly Muslim country in the Middle East that is a secular democracy. As a member of NATO and a European Union candidate, Turkey has often been described as a model for other countries in the Middle East that could confute the "Clash of Civilizations" theory, proving that Islam can be compatible with Western values of liberalism and democracy.

While its predecessor state, the Ottoman Empire, was long ill-reputed as "the sick man of Europe," today's Turkey is confident, playing an influential role in regional and international politics. With growing economic success, Turkey has evolved from being a recipient of economic aid to a donor country. As an energy transit country, Turkey is pivotal for Europe's resource security. Domestically, however, it suffers from intense divisions between secularists, Islamists, and nationalists and between Kurds and Turks, which have the potential to jeopardize Turkey's newfound influence.

Turkey's future is thus subject to a high degree of variability. How will it evolve? Toward Western-oriented liberal democracy? Toward Islamist authoritarianism?

### DRIVERS OF CHANGE

Many scenarios are possible for Turkey in the year 2020 depending on how political, economic, and social forces evolve over the next decade.

This paper identifies five key factors that could act as “drivers of change” in Turkey, each characterized by a range of variability. What could enable or prevent these drivers from trending in a particular direction? How could these drivers interact with one another to shape the course of Turkey’s future?

## Secularism and Political Islam

The rise of political Islam is one of the most closely watched developments by scholars and observers of Turkey. Will the country remain a strictly secular Republic; can a moderate influence of political Islam make Turkey a model for the Muslim world; or is there potential for Turkey to undergo a fundamental transformation towards an Islamic Republic following the example of Iran? While opinions about the current influence of religion in Turkish politics diverge, it is clear that future dynamics between secularism and political Islam are a decisive factor in Turkey’s future.

In Turkey’s short history as a secular Republic since 1923, Islamist parties have continued to emerge despite regularly being shut down by the judiciary or pushed out by the military. The Justice and Development Party (AKP) has governed Turkey since 2002. The AKP describes itself as conservative democratic party, whereas outsiders generally characterize it as a “moderate Islamist” party. With support from the growing, largely provincial, pious middle class and liberal businesspeople, the AKP prevails as the most influential political movement in the country.<sup>27</sup>

The Constitutional Court and the Turkish military, two institutions considered bastions of the secularist establishment, have viewed the AKP critically since the party assumed power in 2002. They are suspicious of the AKP’s Islamic roots, as well as the political pasts of some of its leaders, including those of Prime Minister Erdoğan and President Gül. A number of the AKP’s actions while in government have further fueled mistrust. For example, in 2008, the AKP pushed through legislation lifting the ban of Islamic headscarves in Turkish universities, a controversial move that led to large-scale protests before the ban was re-instituted four months later. Nevertheless, a 2008 Constitutional Court indictment of the AKP failed to prove that the party had become a center of anti-secular activities in Turkey, and its dominant position in the political system endures.<sup>28</sup>

While the AKP undoubtedly has Islamic roots, the party differs significantly from previous religious-right parties in Turkey. The Welfare Party (RP) and

the Virtue Party (FP), predecessors of the AKP, pursued explicit religious agendas before being banned in 1998 and 2001, respectively. These parties were overtly anti-Western, strongly opposing Turkish membership in the EU and considering Islam incompatible with Western values. By contrast, the AKP has promoted seemingly Western ideas, such as liberal market policies, democracy, respect for human rights, and the rule of law and has made significant progress towards EU membership by implementing a number of Brussels-demanded reforms.<sup>29</sup> However, there is no doubt that certain elements of the party would prefer that the AKP deepen its religious orientation.

Current debates about political Islam in Turkey primarily focus on the AKP, but it is not the only expression of political Islam in Turkey. Constitutional bans have not eliminated more radical Islamist movements. In fact, the “real” Islamist movements appear to be the Milli Görüş movement, led by former Islamist Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan, and the Felicity Party (SP), the ideological heir of the Welfare and Virtue parties. Nonetheless, the future of political Islam in Turkey is linked to the AKP.<sup>30</sup>

The future of both the AKP and political Islam in Turkey are uncertain and subject to wide variability. Could more radical members of the AKP get the upper hand to promote an Islamic political agenda? How could further “Islamization” of the Turkish Republic evolve, and what would it mean for democracy in Turkey? What conditions are required for the AKP to continue its democratic reform agenda in line with EU demands? What could catalyze greater support for opposition parties? Under which conditions could other Islamist movements gain greater support in Turkey?

## The Military

The Turkish military, the second largest in NATO, has traditionally been a stronghold of Turkey’s secular elite. With a watchful eye over government policies, the military has long been a central and active institution in the Turkish political system. Considering itself the guardian of secularism in Turkey, it has regularly intervened against governments seen as threatening the founding principles of the Turkish Republic, including through coup d’états in 1960, 1971, and 1980, a so-called post-modern coup in 1997, and an “e-coup” in 2007. Democratic reforms have led to a gradual decline in the political influence of the Generals; however, it is

not yet clear whether this trend has solidified or whether the military will reclaim its interventionist role in civilian affairs.

Over the past decade, the military has undergone fundamental changes. In accordance with demands made by the European Union, the AKP enacted a number of reforms to limit the powers of the military in domestic and foreign policies. Among the most drastic reforms were the changes to Turkey's National Security Council (MGK) in 2004, which reduced the number of military members from five to one. In addition, legislation was introduced requiring that the position of the Secretary-General, traditionally reserved for a military officer, be held by a civilian member of the Council.<sup>31</sup> The frequency of MGK meetings was reduced and its budget put under the direct control of the Prime Minister. Taken together, such reforms have significantly altered the political landscape in Turkey, downgrading one of the most important Turkish executive institutions to a purely advisory body and limiting the influence of military officials in civilian affairs. Importantly, they occurred in accordance with EU-membership criteria, which garnered public support for the changes and minimized resistance from the military itself.<sup>32</sup>

In addition to significant legal reforms, the power of the Turkish military since 2007 has also been strained by accusations and litigations against a large number of officers. In the ongoing Ergenekon investigation, the Prosecutor seeks to uncover alleged military plans for a coup d'état against the AKP in 2003. To date, investigators have made more than 200 arrests, searched several hundreds of houses, and wiretapped several thousand people. Initially, the investigation was perceived as a positive move towards democratic consolidation, but concerns are growing that Ergenekon is a really political tool of the AKP to silence its opposition. In addition to military generals, the investigation has targeted journalists and members of the judiciary critical of the AKP.<sup>33</sup> Several conspiracy theories revolve around the Ergenekon case. Many military experts consider the 5,000-page document published by the investigators in early 2010—allegedly the detailed plan for the coup d'état drafted by the military—staged.<sup>34</sup>

As an institution that enjoys the respect and trust of the public despite recent changes, the military could significantly influence Turkey's future. Will the Generals quietly accept further suppression of their political influence, or might the military seek to reclaim its position in civilian affairs? Under which conditions would the military abandon its

commitment to protecting secularism? Given recent developments, does a coup d'état remain a realistic possibility for the overthrow of an Islamist government? What will be lasting effects of the Ergenekon investigation? Would further weakening of the military endanger national security and Turkey's reliability in NATO?

## The Economy

Although often marred by boom and bust cycles and vulnerability to external shocks, the Turkish economy has grown rapidly for much of the last decade. Turkey is a middle-income country with an economy smaller than the BRICs' but larger than second-tier markets such as Poland, Indonesia, and Vietnam; GDP grew to US\$730bn in 2008. Although Turkey trades predominantly with Europe, it has signed a number of trade agreements with other countries in recent years. It benefits from a large, young labor pool, but remains beset with inequality, uneven educational opportunities, and other structural economic weaknesses.

Turkey began liberalizing its economy in the 1980s when it shifted from an import-substitution to an export-intensive growth model. Entry into a customs union with the EU improved Turkey's production structure and made it more resilient to global volatility. Increased competition from EU imports forced greater efficiency in the manufacturing sector and raised productivity. The original "Anatolian tigers", labor-intensive manufacturers that benefited from Turkey's initial liberalization, have grown into some of the country's largest companies. Their success has underpinned the growth of Turkey's burgeoning middle class, which is largely "provincial and pious" and supports the AKP.<sup>35</sup>

After back-to-back economic crises in 2000–01, IMF-led reforms helped Turkey reduce public sector deficits and debt. Structural reform of the banking sector increased competition and enabled banks to benefit from strong global liquidity conditions. The AKP has presided over a considerable reduction in the government's interest burden and raised over US\$26bn from privatization initiatives between 2005 and 2008.<sup>36</sup> Turkey did not completely collapse during the global financial crisis (though GDP growth plummeted by 6 percent in 2009), and, to date, none of its banks have collapsed. The AKP government eschewed a new IMF rescue plan, which leaves less room for policy error in the next few years.

Despite signs of improving economic health, structural weaknesses in the economy remain formidable. With half of its population under the age of twenty-nine, Turkey urgently needs to spur new job creation. Doing so will require “moving up the value chain” into technology- and skill-intensive sectors and increasing the output potential of all sectors. However, this process is hampered by relatively low levels of long-term investment, the product of an increasing current account deficit since 1995 (6 percent of GDP in 2007)<sup>37</sup> that has driven up real interest rates to an average of 13 percent (2002–2007).

Although the government has been praised for reducing the public debt-to-GDP ratio, there are concerns that high interest payments have displaced spending on other projects critical to long-term development. For instance, although Turkey has the lowest share of university graduates in the working-age population of all OECD countries (15 percent), investment in education has not been prioritized.<sup>38</sup> Gender inequality is also a pressing concern, since the labor-force participation rate of urban women is estimated at around a strikingly low 21 percent. Corruption is prevalent and siphons off potential government tax revenues. Tax revenues are further dampened by the large proportion of grey-sector activity in the economy, estimated to comprise about one-third of official GDP. Lack of transparency and a patchwork of fragmented legislation and bureaucratic complexity make it difficult for small business to thrive or gain benefits of scale. In 2010, Turkey ranking in the World Bank’s *Doing Business* index dropped by ten places, to 73rd out of 183 countries.<sup>39</sup>

Given the range of structural challenges facing the Turkish economy, its future course is subject to variability. Is the EU-accession process vital to future economic reform? What must the government do to raise the living standards of its citizens? Can the Turkish economy remain resilient in an environment of prolonged infighting between a rising Islamic middle-class and the traditional secular elite? How resilient is the economy to political shocks, such as a Kurdish declaration of autonomy?

### The Kurdish Question

The Kurds are Turkey’s largest ethnic minority group, comprising approximately 20 percent of the country’s population, or about 14 million people. While the majority of Kurds reside in Turkey, large Kurdish communities also inhabit Iran, Iraq, and Syria. Since the establishment

of the Turkish Republic, Ankara has pursued an assimilationist policy toward the Kurds, neglecting minority rights in favor of a unified, culturally homogenous Turkish national identity. Kurds have actively resisted such policies, pursuing alternative goals ranging from greater cultural and political rights to separatism. The growing socio-economic disparity between Kurdish communities and the rest of the population has prompted concerns about potential radicalization, especially given the size of the unemployed Kurdish youth population.

The Iraq War brought about a resurgence of Kurdish nationalism. In 2004, the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), which had renounced violence after the capture of its leader Abdullah Öcalan in 1999, launched a new insurgency from the border region inside Northern Iraq. Violence escalated in 2006 and 2007, as did tensions between the Turkish government and the Northern Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), which was seen as protecting the PKK. The Turkish military has since carried out a cross-border operation in Northern Iraq, and in 2007, a U.S.-brokered agreement with the KRG began to calm Turkish fears and improve relations. Turkey has become the KRG’s most important economic partner: more than 1,200 Turkish companies are doing business in Northern Iraq. In October 2009 Turkey opened a consulate-general in Erbil.<sup>40</sup>

The AKP’s emergence has transformed the Kurdish question. Dealing with the PKK and the demands of the Kurdish community is no longer subject to the strategic considerations of the military alone, but also central to political debates. Under the leadership of the AKP, the “Kurdish question” has been increasingly viewed as requiring socio-economic solutions, not simply military suppression. The AKP initially appeared to be reorienting government policies toward the Kurds along these lines, and the situation of Turkey’s Kurdish community improved. In line with demands made by the EU, the AKP sponsored reforms that eased restrictions on publishing and broadcasting in the Kurdish language, a significant improvement in terms of human rights. Prime Minister Erdoğan’s acknowledgement in 2005 that “mistakes” had been made in dealing with the Kurds was seen as a major step towards reconciliation.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, human rights violations and impunity for Turkish security forces remain prevalent in Kurdish-populated areas. The latest EU Progress Report on Turkey states, “Allegations of torture and ill-treatment, and impunity for perpetrators are still a cause for great concern, and need to become a priority area for remedial action by the Turkish authorities.”<sup>42</sup>

Due to its democratic reform agenda, the AKP received strong support from the Kurdish population in the 2007 national elections. Kurdish support for the AKP has also been used as a means of accessing political power. Historically, Kurdish parties have been unable to surpass the minimum vote threshold (10 percent of total votes cast) for election to parliament. Furthermore, Kurdish parties have frequently been banned from politics due to alleged association with the PKK. Most recently, on December 11, 2009, the Turkish Constitutional Court banned the Democratic Society Party (DTP). The DTP has since reconstituted itself as the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), which is already under investigation.<sup>43</sup>

Especially in light of the banning of the DTP, optimism about the potential for reconciliation with the Kurdish community under the AKP has begun to wane. The AKP's policy of "Kurdish opening," which also includes reconciliation efforts between PKK activists and the Turkish state, has been complicated by opposition from Turkey's secular and nationalist movements, which denounce it as way of caving into "terrorist demands." These movements will not tolerate direct negotiation with the imprisoned PKK leader, Abdullah Öcalan, but his lingering influence makes it difficult to conceive a peace process excluding him. In addition, the conflict appears to be broadening from tension between the Turkish state and the PKK to polarization between Turks and Kurds themselves.<sup>44</sup> In late 2009, after a heavy PKK attack in the northern province of Tokat, the peace initiative became the foundation of ethnically motivated hostilities in several parts of the country, including in Istanbul. Clashes between pro-PKK Kurds and supporters of the Kurdish Hizbullah group, which opposes the PKK's socialist orientation and aims for an Islamist Kurdistan, have also fueled fears of a future resurgence of Hizbullah in Turkey.<sup>45</sup>

The evolution of the "Kurdish question" will play a decisive role in Turkey's future. Will the AKP manage to revive the Kurdish peace initiative? Will it maintain its orientation toward socio-economic solutions or return to security-oriented strategies? How will the cultural and political demands of the Kurds be treated? How will the government's management of polarization between Turks and Kurds affect polarization between secularists and Islamists? How can it simultaneously appease Abdullah Öcalan and refrain from "negotiating with terrorists"? How could an escalation of violence affect the support for the AKP and political stability? What effect would a move towards formal independence of Iraqi Kurdistan

have on Turkey's Kurdish problem? What effects would a strengthening of Hizbullah have on the situation of Kurds in Turkey and beyond?

## Foreign Policy Orientation

Turkey has significantly changed its foreign policy strategy during the last decade by diversifying its relations beyond its traditional allies, the U.S. and the EU. While many welcome Turkey's policy of "zero problems" with its neighbors (e.g., in the form of reconciliation with Armenia and Greece), greater engagement with players such as Iran, Syria, Hamas, and Sudan have raised concerns that the West might be *losing* Turkey.<sup>46</sup>

## The European Union

In 2010, prospects for Turkish EU membership are grim. Identity debates and economic overstretch are the main reasons for limited support for Turkey's accession among the European public. In view of current political and financial difficulties resulting from the global recession, it remains doubtful that the EU would be inclined to absorb a new member as large as Turkey. Were Turkey to obtain full membership, it would bypass Germany as the most populous European country by 2020, receive the greatest number of MEPs in the EU parliament, and, as such, gain significant influence in EU affairs.<sup>47</sup>

During the first years of the AKP administration, Turkey made significant progress in implementing EU-required reforms, leading to the official commencement of membership negotiations in 2005. However, to date only 12 out of 35 chapters of the EU Association Agreement have been opened, and reform progress has slowed. Nevertheless, many commentators continue to view the EU membership process as integral to Turkey's internal reform process, as well as underlying Turkey's appeal and stature in its region.

The Cyprus conflict is a progenitor of the reform stasis. After the Greek-Cypriot rejection of the Annan Plan to re-unify the island in 2004 and Cyprus' EU accession in 2005, Turkey faces additional obstacles in its EU-membership bid. Turkey continues to keep its ports closed to vessels from the Republic of Cyprus and has made no progress in normalizing relations with the Greek part of the island. The April 2010 election victory of Turkish-Cypriot hardliner Dervis Eroglu has lowered the odds a settlement will be reached in the near future.

## The United States

The U.S. decision to invade Iraq in 2003 caused a split in the U.S.-Turkey relationship. Turkey's refusal to allow American troops to access Iraq from a Northern Turkish front came as a surprise—with significant consequences for U.S.-Turkish cooperation. Additionally, the U.S. has faced increasing restrictions in accessing the strategically important military base, Incirlik, in South Eastern Turkey.<sup>48</sup> Under the administration of Barack Obama, who chose Turkey as the destination of his first official visit as president, the relationship has improved. However, disagreements about Cyprus, Iraq, Armenia, and Iran continue to reflect tension. On March 4, 2010, the U.S. House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee passed a non-binding resolution recognizing the killings of up to 1.5 million Armenians during World War I as genocide. Turkey's reaction was to withdraw its ambassador to the U.S., who eventually returned.<sup>49</sup> Should relations deteriorate further in the future, Turkey might deny the U.S. access to the Incirlik base altogether, reducing U.S. armed forces' maneuverability in the region.

## Russia

Turkey and Russia share a century-long history of rivalry. During the Cold War, Turkey was a crucial ally of the U.S., serving as a bulwark against the Soviet Union and communist influence in the Middle East. However, the dismantling of the Soviet Union meant that Turkey and Russia no longer share a common border. The dwindling threat of direct confrontation has ushered in a new era of economic cooperation between Turkey and Russia.

During the past decade, rapprochement between Turkey and Russia has advanced rapidly, not least due to the personal relationship between Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and Prime Minister Erdoğan.<sup>50</sup> In 2010, Russia surpassed Germany as Turkey's largest bi-lateral trade partner; Turkey now places seventh among Russia's trading partners.<sup>51</sup> Russia supplies 65 percent of Turkey's natural gas and 40 percent of its crude oil imports.<sup>52</sup> Simultaneously, Turkey has been cooperating with Moscow to diversify Russian energy transit routes to Europe, as well as welcoming Russian investment into its own energy sector. A Russian-Turkish consortium will build the country's first nuclear plant.<sup>53</sup>

Despite rapprochement, a degree of rivalry over geo-political influence in the Turkic Republics of Central Asia and the Caucasus remain. The Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008 revived Turkish mistrust against its former

rival.<sup>54</sup> Pipeline politics could also provide for future conflicts. Russia has opposed projects such as the Transcaspian and Nabucco pipelines, which would transport energy resources of Central Asia and the Caucasus via Turkey (and not Russia) to Europe.<sup>55</sup> With Russia a large supplier of oil and gas to Turkey and looking to expand its own regional influence, energy geopolitics could become more volatile in the next decade.

## The Middle East

Historically, Turkey's foreign relations have been closely aligned with the West. In the Muslim world, the secular Republic faced skepticism due to its role as former colonial power and its close ties with the U.S. In return, Turkey's Kemalist establishment perceived engagement in Middle Eastern affairs as danger to Turkey's secular, Western-oriented identity. While Turkey attempted to maintain a balanced and neutral role in the Arab-Israeli conflict for decades, it intensified cooperation with Israel, including through several military agreements, during the 1990s.

Since the AKP assumed power in 2002, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu's "zero problems" policy has catalyzed closer engagement with several Middle Eastern countries. Turkey has become Syria's most important economic partner, and its relations with Iran are flourishing. After Russia, Iran is Turkey's second largest supplier of crude oil and gas,<sup>56</sup> with bilateral trade growing rapidly, reaching an approximate US\$10bn in 2008. Prime Minister Erdoğan hopes to double this number by 2011 and plans to triple it to US\$30bn in the future.<sup>57</sup>

Politically controversial rhetoric from Turkey has heightened Western perceptions of a shift in Turkish foreign policy. Prime Minister Erdoğan was among the first to congratulate Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad for his disputed election victory in June 2009. He has repeatedly described the Iranian leader as his "friend," dismissed allegations of an Iranian nuclear program as "gossip," and refused to support sanctions against Iran in the UN Security Council. Additionally, Turkey has increasingly interacted with Hamas and entertains good relations with alleged genocidaire Omar al-Bashir of Sudan. Simultaneously, Turkey's relationship with Israel is deteriorating. Since the Israeli operation in Gaza in 2008–2009, Prime Minister Erdoğan's aggressive rhetoric, most prominently during the 2009 World Economic Forum in Davos, and the exclusion of Israel from the multinational military air-exercise Anatolian Eagle, have raised concerns about the future of the former alliance and prospects for Turkey's role in the region.

## Turkey as a Regional Power

Turkey has raised its profile in multilateral diplomacy in recent years. It increased its involvement in inter-governmental organizations, was elected to a non-permanent seat in the UN Security Council, and has hosted several international conferences and summits. Turkey also holds the post of Secretary General in the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) and has become an observer to the Arab League.<sup>58</sup>

Foreign Minister Davuto lu's policies have expanded Turkey's relations with the Middle East and attempted to position Turkey as a mediator in the conflict-ridden region. Turkey initially succeeded in mediating proximity talks between Israel and Syria in 2008, but contacts were broken off with the Israeli bombardment of Gaza in December 2008. Under the AKP, Turkey has also facilitated talks between Syria and Iraq, Syria and Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Morocco, Afghanistan and Pakistan, Croatia and Bosnia, and Serbia and Bosnia.<sup>59</sup> Having a closer relationship with Iran than any of the P5+1 members, Turkish officials have repeatedly offered their assistance in the Iranian nuclear crisis.<sup>60</sup>

The future will show whether regional ambitions in the Middle East can complement Turkey's traditional ties with the EU and U.S. or whether they will entail a shift away from the West. Entertaining good relations with the majority of regional actors, Turkey undoubtedly has great potential as a mediator (though it tends to over-amplify its role).<sup>61</sup> However, continuous fierce rhetoric against Israel could jeopardize its role as an "honest broker."

Moving forward, will Turkey continue on its path toward EU membership, and how would domestic development be altered if it did not? Could the Republic turn away from the West and replace its traditional relationships with even closer ties with the Arab world and Iran? How would greater cooperation with Russia and Central Asia alter Turkey's dependence on the EU? Could we imagine Turkey's involvement in regional conflicts or a fierce competition over regional dominance with Iran or Russia? How would shifts in Turkey's foreign policy orientation affect its internal socio-political divisions and economy?

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