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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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“Allies Re-united, The Convergence of Turkish and American Foreign Policy”

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

LCDR A. Jason Tew, USN

**23 MAR 2012**

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## **Executive Summary**

**Title:** “Allies Re-United”

**Author:** LCDR A. Jason Tew, USN

**Thesis:** Since the 2011 Arab Spring, Turkey’s foreign policy has shifted to a more cooperative stance returning to a position that is convergent with U.S. policies.

**Discussion:** Prime Minister Erdogan’s rise and the rise of the Justice and Development Party is viewed as a model for a moderate Islamic State that can serve as an example for many Muslim countries, including those that emerged from the Arab Spring with a change in leadership after decades of authoritative rule. Considering factors such as economic globalization, possible European Union membership and Iran’s growing thirst for regional power, the United States will need to lean on Turkey more than ever to be a strong Muslim NATO leader and set the tone for the region. The “Turkish Model” is an example that Islamic leaning governments can learn from and hopefully unite to buffer totalitarian Islamic rhetoric and Iran’s influence.

**Conclusion:** The worldwide political environment shifted dramatically after the Arab Spring and now more than ever the United States must rely on Turkey in the region, to counter Iran and set the example as a moderate Islamic country that maintains its cultural identity while being a valuable partner and ally on the world stage.

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## **Introduction**

Turkey has been a major player in the theatre of world politics from the time of the Ottomans to the founding of the modern Turkish Republic. Its strategic location at the intersection between Europe and Asia has made it a powerful ally to some and a threatening presence to others. Its educated and expanding population along with its growing economic power necessitates the need for the world powers to not only cooperate, but also engage her leaders in an equal relationship. Turkey's emerging role and shift in regional politics as a result of the 2011 Arab Spring provides added stability for the region and will ultimately promote Turkish-US policies.

Turkey's status as a more "Western" and secular Muslim country make it an important piece in the puzzle of world politics. The US must recognize and respect the opportunity for Turkey to take the lead in the changing regimes throughout North Africa and the Middle East. In the most recent National and Defense security strategies the US outlines the need to rely on allies such as Turkey to take a more proactive role in international and regional politics and take advantage of the opportunities from the events of the Arab Spring and ongoing crises in Syria. Since the Arab spring, Turkey's foreign policy is shifting to a more cooperative position which will enable Turkey to influence regional politics while, at the same time, returning to a position that is convergent with U.S. policies in the region. This paper will discuss the United States and Turkey's converging policies in the Middle East and the impact of the Arab Spring on their closer relations since 2002.

Turkey's growing role and Prime Minister Erdogan's popularity within the region continues to garner attention from the beginnings of the Arab spring to the continued oppression

in Syria by the Assad regime. Prime Minister Erdogan was an outspoken critic of Mubarak and called for his resignation saying, “welcome the will of the nation for change without any hesitation.”<sup>1</sup> The United States and European Union will require Turkey’s influence and cooperation on the world stage on numerous issues including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Iran’s saber rattling. Turkey is governed by a conservative Muslim party based on moderation which is forefront in setting the example of a modern Muslim democratic republic. The western world cannot continue to “push” Turkey and expect her to blindly follow, as evidenced by Turkey’s decision to not cooperate in the U.S.’s invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the rift that was witnessed over the last decade.

Turkey has a stake in what is happening in the region and in what its neighbors are doing. Its geographical position makes it an important player in both Europe and Asia. Several factors have contributed to this change but some of the most significant factors are the Arab Spring, the continued unrest in Syria and Iran’s nuclear ambitions and saber rattling in the region. Turkey moreover, is a member of the G-20, maintains observer status in the African Union, has a strategic dialogue mechanism with the Gulf Cooperation Council, and actively participates in the Arab League. Turkey has also launched new diplomatic initiatives by opening 15 new embassies in Africa and two in Latin America, and is a signatory to the Kyoto Protocol. These developments display a new perspective of Turkey, one based on a new vision of the future, soft power, and implementation of consistent foreign policies in different parts of the world.<sup>2</sup> The ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) projects Turkey as a major regional power with

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<sup>1</sup> David Dayen, Turkey’s Erdogan Calls on Mubarak to “Welcome the Will of the Nation for Change.” [www.firedoglake.com](http://www.firedoglake.com), Feb 1, 2011, <http://news.firedoglake.com/2011/02/01/turkeys-erdogan-calls-on-mubarak-to-welcome-the-will-of-the-nation-for-change/>

<sup>2</sup> Ahmet Davutoglu, “Turkey’s Zero Problems Foreign Policy,” [www.foreignpolicy.com](http://www.foreignpolicy.com), May 20, 2010, [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/05/20/turkeys\\_zero\\_problems\\_foreign\\_policy?page=0,1](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/05/20/turkeys_zero_problems_foreign_policy?page=0,1)

ambitions to be a global actor and power player. Since the AKP was first elected in 2002, Turkey has assumed the post of secretary-general of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), taken observer status at the Arab League, joined the G-20 group of the largest world economies, held a nonpermanent seat on the U.N. Security Council, appointed an Assistant Secretary-General of NATO, and a Secretary-General of the Organization for Security Cooperation and Development (OECD), and sought seats on the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank executive boards. Since the 2011 Arab Spring, Turkey's foreign policy has shifted to a more cooperative stance returning to a position that is convergent with U.S. policies.

### **Turkey's Foreign Policies**

From the Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs web site, a synopsis outlines Turkey's goals regionally and internationally. Drawing heavily from Ataturk's policy of "peace at home, peace abroad," Turkey has sought to adhere to policies that focus on security and stability to encourage its democratic and secular system. Terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, transnational crime, illegal immigration, climate change, peacekeeping operations, and humanitarian missions are just a few items specifically outlined in her synopsis. The Turkish government clearly understands and states that the need to reconcile with her neighbors, and more importantly her place in the middle of Eurasia. Turkey clearly understands the importance of regional stability in the Middle East and with her neighbors in the Caucasus.<sup>3</sup> Her

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/synopsis-of-the-turkish-foreign-policy.en.mfa>

ability to interact globally and regionally while maintaining an open economy and retaining her cultural identity is and should be a model for other Muslim countries.

“In a world where international developments become increasingly complex and difficult to manage, Turkey will resolutely continue to pursue a responsible and constructive foreign policy, inspiring confidence in its region, by way of mobilizing its political, economic and cultural experience in the service of the common ideals of humanity and its national interests.”<sup>4</sup>

This however, is not without its controversies, such as the argument that Turkey is shedding its secularism and transitioning towards Islamism. Turkey is a member of numerous global organizations and has served as a non-permanent member to the UN Security Council. Her experiences on these broad and diverse groups has given her the experience she will require to understand and deal with the new problems the world faces since the start of the Arab Spring and Iran’s continued Nuclear Ambition. Turkey recently hosted a Joint Strategic Dialogue meeting in Istanbul with Foreign Ministers of the Cooperation Council of Gulf Arab States of the Gulf (GCC) where a joint statement was issued that outlined a Joint-Action plan, that is in line with much of Turkey and US foreign policy goals in the region:

“On a multilateral basis, we seek to advance shared security interests, such as through NATO’s Istanbul Cooperation Initiative with the GCC, and common interests in promoting governance and institutional reform through participating in the Forum for the Future and other regional dialogues. The U.S. also will continue to develop our key security relationships in the region with such Arab states as with Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia and other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries—partnerships that enable our militaries and defense systems to work together more effectively.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/synopsis-of-the-turkish-foreign-policy.en.mfa>

<sup>5</sup> 2012, National Security Strategy, pg. 45

The plan reiterated support for the two-state solution in the Israel-Palestine resolution, bringing an immediate end to the bloodshed in Syria, affirming commitment to the sovereignty and support for Iraq, strengthening the transition of security and unity in Yemen, support of a Non-Proliferation treaty and need for continued negotiations with Iran, commented on Turkey's EU negotiations, the Cyprus problem, and numerous other issues were outlined concluding for another meeting to be held in Bahrain. The support of the GCC and their recognition of the role of Turkey is clearly a sign that Turkey is held in such regard that they are important to the region and will have impacts on decisions that are made.<sup>6</sup>

## **The Development and Impact of Arab Spring**

William J. Burns, Under Secretary for Political Affairs at the Department of State, gave testimony before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations outlining an agenda of four main elements concerning the Middle East and "Arab Spring."<sup>7</sup> These four main elements are: peaceful democratic change, economic modernization, a comprehensive Israeli-Arab peace, and lastly is regional security. These four elements are crucial to both US/Turkish relations and have international implications.

The first element of US Policy is support for peaceful democratic change. Turkey's support for peaceful democratic change, as was witnessed with moderate violence in the regime changes in Tunisia, Egypt and a full on revolution in Libya is the first of several areas

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<sup>6</sup> Joint Statement Turkey-GCC High Level Strategic Dialogue 4th Joint Ministerial Meeting Istanbul – Turkey (28 January 2012) Issued in Istanbul, the Republic of Turkey, on Saturday, 28 January 2012, corresponding to 5 Raby` al-Awal 1433 A.H.

<sup>7</sup> Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *American Strategy in a New Middle East*, March 2011, <http://www.state.gov/p/us/rm/2011/158516.htm>

that Turkey can lead. The world has witnessed continued unrest in Bahrain, Jordan, Morocco, and the continued violent oppression in Syria by the Assad regime. Protests and demonstrations have continued in less violent manners such as in Bahrain, a strategic location and home to the US Navy's Fifth Fleet and a major logistical distribution center in the Persian Gulf, which many view as ground zero in a proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia.<sup>8</sup> Turkey's ongoing transformation away from secularism towards a more moderate Islamic State has many concerned that Turkey has dismissed their previous Kemalists view and that the military, which has been the keeper of secularism, has lost its power. There are many reasons for this change. Prime Minister Erdogan and his political party came to power in 2002 and made reforms through moderation and time. They moved from radical rhetoric, have quietly made changes through democratic means, and have highlighted the corruption by senior military leaders. Many critics are concerned that Turkey will become an Islamic state following Islamic law and rolling back many freedoms enjoyed by its citizens. Speaking with a few Turkish nationals, they feel that they are enjoying greater freedoms than they did twenty years ago, many of their parents compare the past to a more authoritarian type of government and welcome change. With any change, there are critics, but Turkey has made an effort to assure those critics that they do not wish to become a strict Islamic country, but merely a model for a Democratic Islamic conservative leaning party. State Minister Faruk Çelik said, "Turkey is a democratic, secular country and its position, as it continues to work towards EU membership, is very clear and not open to any controversies."<sup>9</sup> After the Arab Spring and several regime changes, Prime Minister Erdogan toured Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya as a sign of support for the fledging new governments.

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<sup>8</sup> Margaret Coker and Farnaz Fassii "Iran, Saudi Arabia Tensions Spur Fears of a Proxy War," *online.wsj.com*, October, 17, 2011, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970203658804576635150261606730.html>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/default.aspx?pageid=438&n=turkey-not-becoming-an-islamic-country-state-minister-says-2011-01-14>

Turkey's strong, democratic and mildly Islamic regime makes it a model for new governments in all three countries and gives Turkey credibility throughout the region as they position themselves to become the leader in North Africa and the Middle East.<sup>10</sup> It is important to note that Turkey is facing sharp criticism from Iran, and is competing for power and influence throughout the region. The military adviser to Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khomeini, Maj.-Gen. Yahya Rahim-Safavi, recently said, "The Turks have so far committed a few strategic wrongs, one was Erdogan's trip to Egypt and his presentation of the secular model there. This fact was unexpected and unimaginable since the Egyptian people are Muslims."<sup>11</sup> Iran is striving to be the leader of the Middle East and sees itself as a model of an Islamic State for Muslim countries to emulate. Rahim-Safavi went on further saying "If Turkish political leaders fail to make their foreign policy and ties with Iran clear, they will run into problems. If, as they claim, they intend to raise the volume of contracts with Iran to the \$20 billion mark, they will ultimately have to accommodate Iran."<sup>12</sup> These remarks were directed towards Turkey's decision to host a NATO Ballistic Missiles Defense shield, which is viewed in Iran as a threat to its military power and an attempt to defend Israel against any possible missile strikes. It would serve US interest to support Turkey and rely on her to curtail Iran's influence and growing power in the region. There are numerous proxy wars in the Middle East and Iran supports terrorists groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah. Turkey is the right ally and partner to deter Iran from escalating tensions in the region. The Turkish Model as a secular Islamic Government is an example for other Muslim States thereby offering an alternative to totalitarian Islamism.

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<sup>10</sup> Patrick, Cockburn, "Turkish PM Sets out to Become Leader of the Arab World," [www.independent.co.uk](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/turkish-pm-sets-out-on-mission-to-become-leader-of-arab-world-2353684.html), September, 13, 2011 <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/turkish-pm-sets-out-on-mission-to-become-leader-of-arab-world-2353684.html>

<sup>11</sup> Cana Ya'ar, "Iran Warns Turkey: Trade Ties are I Jeopardy," [www.israelnationalnews.com](http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/148599) , October, 9, 2011, <http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/148599>

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

A second element of Turkey's change is its continued strong support for economic modernization. In the short run, that means helping Libya, Egypt and Tunisia to navigate past significant difficulties created by political turmoil and the temporary collapse of tourism. The U.S. pullout of Iraq left a void that Turkey could fill and could use its influence to encourage democracy. Erdogan and Maliki signed a strategic partnership agreement committing Turkey and Iraq to cooperation in the fields of politics, economy, energy, water, culture and security. The formation of the High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council outlined during Erdogan's July 2008 visit was a model for warming relations with Syria, which have since degraded. Iraq's former deputy prime minister Barham Salih, called the agreement "the starting point of the Middle East common market" and likened improving relations between Iraq and Turkey to the relationship of France and Germany in the 1950s.<sup>13</sup> In March 2009, President Gul became the first Turkish president to visit Iraq in thirty-three years and met with President Talaban. In August 2009, Foreign Minister Davutoglu stated that Iraq was a strategic partner and friendly country for Turkey, adding that every development in Iraq would affect Turkey. The neighbors have strengthened relations with a memorandum of understanding and other agreements. Turkey is Iraq's largest trading partner and they ambitiously hope to increase trade volume to \$20 billion by 2015 up from \$7 billion in 2009.<sup>14</sup> It is also crucially important for Turkey to consider trade liberalization initiatives for key Arab states in transition, ideally in cooperation with the EU. Turkey can be a bridge and facilitator in this process as an example of a secular Islamic country with a GDP ranked 16 in the world.<sup>15</sup> Her economy grew by 6.5% between 2002 and 2010 and should be a model for emerging Islamic governments such as Egypt, Tunisia,

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<sup>13</sup> "Iraq-Turkey Want to Integrate Economies and Transform Mideast," [www.todayszaman.com](http://www.todayszaman.com/news-187456-100-iraq-turkey-want-to-integrate-economies-transform-mideast.html), September 18, 2009 <http://www.todayszaman.com/news-187456-100-iraq-turkey-want-to-integrate-economies-transform-mideast.html>

<sup>14</sup> Bayram Kaya, "Trade Volume with Northern Iraq to Reach \$20 Billion," [www.todayszaman.com](http://www.todayszaman.com/news-214750-trade-volume-with-northern-iraq-to-reach-20-billion.html), July 1, 2010, <http://www.todayszaman.com/news-214750-trade-volume-with-northern-iraq-to-reach-20-billion.html>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tu.html>

Libya and other oppressive regimes as a way forward. According to projections by Goldman Sachs (2008), Turkey has the potential to become a USD 6 trillion economy by 2050, making it the third largest in Europe. Turkey could also rapidly narrow the income gap with the EU and achieve a per capita GDP level of USD 60,000 or 75% of the projected EU average by 2050.<sup>16</sup> Turkey was one of the few European economies whose output in 2010 surpassed its pre-crisis levels and the fact that Turkey experienced her own financial crisis in 2001 due to macroeconomic problems placed her in a better position to weather the global crisis that still plagues the EU with much speculation as to the future of the euro and EU. Turkey's economic performance, coupled with its political stability, has fueled an unprecedented sense of self-confidence and pride in Turkey.<sup>17</sup> Positive economic growth is an example of utilizing soft power and influence to combat Islamic extremism and encourage continued democratic transitions after regime change.

A third element of a positive American agenda for Turkey and the Middle East is a renewed pursuit of comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace. Turkey had at one time been Israel's only Muslim ally participating in military drills and maintained formal political relations. Turkey was the first country to recognize Israel in 1948 and would be the only country to do so until Egypt followed in 1973. This cordial relationship was severely degraded since the Gaza Flotilla raid in 2010 and the September 2011 release of a negative report condemning Israel's actions by the United Nations. Turkey subsequently expelled the Israeli Ambassador due to his refusal to offer an apology, which Israel has said will not happen. It is important to note that an Israeli official said Friday that the report showed Israel's actions were in keeping with international law. The

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<sup>16</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/economy\\_finance/publications/publication16004\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/publications/publication16004_en.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> Soner, Cagaptay, "Turkish Foreign Policy: Rift with Washington," The Washington Institute of Near East Policy, Policy Notes, No 3, January 2011, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/pubPDFs/PolicyNote03.pdf>

official said that Israel hoped the two countries could now “return to the cooperation that was a cornerstone of regional stability.”<sup>18</sup> While this may be the sentiment of Israel and much of the Western World, Prime Minister Erdogan has given several confrontational speeches concerning Israel, most notably at a United Nations General assembly meeting in September 2011, extolling that “If you want to send a box of tomatoes to Palestine, this is subject to approval from Israel, and I don’t think that is humanitarian,”. Mr. Erdogan suggested that the new spirit of change in the Middle East meant Israel could no longer continue with her status quo and the continuation of settlements in the “occupied lands.”<sup>19</sup> This is a dramatic change in relations between two countries that once participated in military training exercises and had significant economic ties to include sales of military equipment from Israel to Turkey. Prime Minister Erdogan described Israel as “the principal threat to peace” in the Middle East and in December 2009 declared that if Israel attempted to use Turkish airspace to launch an attack on Iran that Israel would “receive a response equal to that of an earthquake”. If Turkey is serious about the “new” role throughout the region, they should be the mature one and be prepared to step up and be the bigger of the two in thawing relations and look towards building what once existed. Turkey could use her advantage as a member of NATO and as a secular Muslim country to be in a position to facilitate negotiations. Instead of the harsh rhetoric that Mr. Erdogan continues to espouse, he should find a way to normalize relations and to mediate for a true and lasting peace that all sides could agree to and most importantly stay committed to a lasting peace.

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<sup>18</sup> Doug, Mataconis, “Turkey Expels Ambassador as Dispute over Flotilla Worsens,” September 2, 2011, [www.outsidethebeltway.com](http://www.outsidethebeltway.com/turkey-expels-israeli-ambassador-as-dispute-over-flotilla-worsens/), <http://www.outsidethebeltway.com/turkey-expels-israeli-ambassador-as-dispute-over-flotilla-worsens/>

<sup>19</sup> Neal MacFarquhar, “Harsh Words from Turkey about Israel, and from Iran about US,” September 22, 2011, [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/23/world/middleeast/irans-president-mahmoud-ahmadinejad-rails-against-the-west-in-united-nations-speech.html), <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/23/world/middleeast/irans-president-mahmoud-ahmadinejad-rails-against-the-west-in-united-nations-speech.html>

The fourth and last element is the United States' stake and commitment for regional security – in strengthening ties to the Gulf Cooperation Council states; in fighting terrorism; in preventing Iran from developing nuclear weapons and setting off a catastrophic regional arms race; in not losing sight of Iraq's own crucial democratic transition and reintegration into the Arab world.<sup>20</sup> Turkey's shift in policy is most notable in their relations with their neighbors and their attitudes towards these neighbors is placing them in a more vocal and leading role. The Turkish model of transitioning from a secular government that was controlled by the military and imposed authoritative rule is the example for previously oppressed regimes to transition to. Even those countries governed by royal and powerful families can look towards Turkey as a way to move towards possible change, or at least as a way to transition to a more moderate form of governance. Several institutions and media centers describe Turkey as a stealth superpower and recognize that she will be a superpower by 2050.<sup>21</sup> Population growth and urbanization in the Middle East and Africa will contribute to increased water scarcity and may present governance challenges and the strong possibility for future conflicts in the region over scarce resources. The uncertain impact of global climate change combined with increased population centers in or near coastal environments may challenge the ability of weak or developing states to respond to natural disasters.<sup>22</sup> Turkey is clearly in a position to take the lead in these possible conflicts through both possible humanitarian situations, military actions and as the role of mediator.

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<sup>20</sup>Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *American Strategy in a New Middle East*, March 2011, <http://www.state.gov/p/us/rm/2011/158516.htm>

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2010/06/14/opinion/main6579448.shtml>

<sup>22</sup> 2011 National Military Strategy

## **Stalemate of Accession European Union**

The German Marshall Fund's 2010 Transatlantic Trends report found that only 38% of Turks still favored joining the EU, down from 73% in 2004, while European support for Turkey's membership fell from 29% to 23%.<sup>23</sup> Main impediments to Turkey's accession are Cyprus, the Kurdish question, and a weak rule of law at home. The recent acquittal of defendants in the murder trial of Hrant Dink, an Armenian, is one such example of a perceived unjust legal system that does not protect the rights of minorities. Europe's Human Rights commissioner has stated that the government is protecting itself rather than the people and criticized lengthy pre-trial incarcerations, some lasting 10 years.<sup>24</sup> AKP critics argue that the European Union is not to blame for stalling the accession process but the AKP themselves which they maintain does not "share the dream of a liberal, Western Turkey" and is only using the ascension process to gain legitimacy and further curb the power of the secular military.<sup>25</sup> Since Erdogan and the AKP's rise to power, they were in favor of EU membership and pushed for talks as a means to allay fears of their Islamic roots. Talks were also a way for the AKP to assert greater control over the military and institute reforms that would allow them greater influence in the political process and set the stage for a power grab domestically. Ascension talks began in earnest in 2005, but did not guarantee full membership. Much criticism has swept through Europe over accepting a Muslim country into the EU, no matter how moderate. There is just as much criticism in Turkey over joining the EU and a rise in nationalists' pride. The most outspoken critics of Turkey's accession are the two most important governments of Germany and France. German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Nicolas Sarkozy have

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<sup>23</sup> German Marshal Fund, "Transatlantic Trends, 2011" pg 19

<sup>24</sup> "Justice for Some, Not in Turkey," The Economist, January, 21st-27th, 2012, 58

<sup>25</sup> Soner Cagaptay, "Turkey Lost Turkey," online.wsj.com, July 13, 2010, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704911704575326712932649550.html>

suggested offering Turkey a “special relationship” or “privileged partnership” with the EU in lieu of membership.<sup>26</sup> Supporters on both sides remain and would like for further negotiations and talks to move forward. Several contributing factors that have set up roadblocks to the ascension process, such as Turkey’s decision not to support sanctions against Iran in 2010, Cyprus, the question of Armenian genocide, and Turkey’s lack of domestic reforms, most notably the Kurdish issue. There is a sentiment that the US needs to do more to push the ascension process and facilitate talks however, there is considerable uncertainty in the continuing process. Turkey will freeze talks with the EU when Greek Cypriots take over the EU presidency for six months on Jan 1, 2013. Turkey’s membership in the EU and the ongoing ascension process is more uncertain given the current financial crisis in the EU and the austerity measures several European countries have made. The US has publicly supported Turkey’s membership as a means of encouraging democratization in Turkey and as a foothold in the Middle East to spread democracy. Possible European Union membership will bridge the western world and Islamic countries fostering greater cooperation and economic endeavors will provide stability for the future. Bridging these two worlds and the continued globalization of world economies and markets will be a catalyst to curtail future conflicts around the world.

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<sup>26</sup> Eurobarometer found 45% of Turks surveyed supported EU membership in December 2009, “Support for EU Membership Drops in Turkey,” *Anatolia*, December 14, 2009. That figure is within the margin of error of a domestic Turkish poll which reported 49.% support in January 2010, “Davutoglu Most Successful Turkish Minister, Says Poll,” *Hurriyet Daily News.com*, January 14, 2010. However, the annual GMFUS Transatlantic Trends survey, released on September 15, 2010, found that only 38% of Turks agreed that “Turkey Joining the EU Would be a Good Thing.” Survey accessible via <http://www.gmfus.org>.

## **Arab Spring Impact on Turkey's Foreign Policies**

It is important to understand the impact of the Arab Spring's role in closing a rift between Turkey, the US and the Western world that began with the rise of the AKP, Mr. Erdogan, and Islam's role in Turkish identity. The rift in relations with the US began with Turkey's financial crises in 2001 and the AKP were able to capitalize on a perfect storm of high inflation and unemployment to resonate with the populace. The AKP and its close ties to the Muslim religion were able to use these changing times in Turkey to achieve a more mainstream acceptance. They used this acceptance as an opportunity to lay the blame for these difficult domestic issues on the military and elites that had taken an active role in controlling Turkish politics and policies.

The Arab spring began when Mohamed Bouaziza, a Tunisian zealot, set himself on fire in Tunisia to protest the ruling regime. His actions are credited with starting the revolutions that began in Tunisia and spread throughout North Africa and the Middle East.<sup>27</sup> These grassroots uprisings have been the impetus in the last year for the toppling of many of the authoritative regimes and dictators. These revolutionary movements in Northern Africa and the Middle East are partially motivated by crippling economic conditions that have plagued their citizens for years. The economic troubles of high unemployment of the younger generations, lack of social services, skyrocketing food prices and stagnate economies have motivated the citizens to demand changes to the governments that are controlled by the perceived elite. These economic stressors set the stage for full-scale revolt and the examples set by the Tunisians motivated movements in the rest of the Muslim and Arab world. The long-standing dictators and authoritative regimes

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<sup>27</sup> Amara, Tarek, Lowe, Christian, "Huge Turnout in Tunisia's Arab Spring Election," [www.reuters.com](http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/10/23/us-tunisia-election-idUSTRE79L28820111023), 23 October, 2011, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/10/23/us-tunisia-election-idUSTRE79L28820111023>

have found it difficult to keep a strong grip on the growing younger populations that are organized and angry at the tough economic situations facing them and their families. “It’s the Economy Stupid” is a phrase that is used whenever there is unrest or political change and that sentiment rings true to those fighting for change in the Arab world. Many contribute this statement to President Bill Clinton’s Presidential Campaign in 1992 when the US was in a recession and understood that if voters are not happy and experiencing a healthy economy, then they will look forward to a change in government. This concentration on a failing economy is how AKP came to power and is what motivated many who were involved in the Arab Spring revolts. The AKP in Turkey was able to represent an opposing view and a change from the status quo of the military ruling regime.

The Arab Spring proved that change has come to the Middle East and Turkey is embracing its role as a big brother in the region such that, emerging governments may look to her for inspiration and as a model of a powerful moderate Muslim nation. This emergence of power is not a simplistic jump with only economic motivations, but is a more complicated convergence of power and a changing population. These power struggles are continuing in many of the Arab countries of the region, most notably in Egypt where, Essam el-Erian, a deputy leader of the Brotherhood’s Freedom and Justice party recently said that “we welcome Turkey and we welcome Erdogan as a prominent leader, but we do not think he or his country alone should be leading the region or drawing up its future.”<sup>28</sup> Emerging governments’ and fledgling countries’ only option for support might be Iran which is supporting Shiite causes and powers in the region, while Turkey has given support to the Sunni’s in their proxy war in the region. The

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<sup>28</sup> Reuters, “Egypt’s Islamists Warn Turkish PM Over Regional Role,” [www.dawn.com](http://www.dawn.com), September, 15, 2011 <http://www.dawn.com/2011/09/15/egypts-islamists-warn-turkish-pm-over-regional-role.html>

battle for control of these pivotal lands has existed between Iran and Turkey for centuries and goes back to the time of the Ottoman and Persian Empire. The struggles for power were as meaningful then as they are now and continue to affect the stability of the region as a whole. Many believe that the ongoing crises and oppressions exerted by President Assad's regime in Syria are the front lines of the battle to be the top dog between Iran and Turkey, there can be only one Shah or Sultan, but not both.<sup>29</sup> It is important to understand that one of Iran's reasons to continue their support of Syria is that Iran views Syria as a province and consider their strategic location to be a key to their continued quest to gain more power in the region. Iran views Syria as their main access point to both Lebanon and the Mediterranean Sea and view Syria as an important location to provide a base for operations against Israel whom Iran has called for her destruction and to be wiped of the map. If the Assad regime fails and there is a change of power in Syria, then that development may be viewed as a "win" for Turkey and an embarrassment for Iran.

Turkey has vast economic trade interests with Iran, which were further fostered when the AKP came to power, and the two countries have a stated desire to increase trade between them to more than \$30 billion a year. In keeping with their policy of no problems with their neighbors, Turkey has worked to establish bilateral relations with Iran as a means to discourage any future conflict between the two regional powers. The growing economic interests would be sure to dissuade the nations from direct conflict due to the economic losses that both sides would be victim of if any real dispute or conflict were to arise. Iran's press blamed those in power in Ankara for the unrest in Syria and the Iranian Governments' continued support of President

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<sup>29</sup> Soner Cagaptay, "Turkish-Iranian rivalry Redux," [www.hurriyetdailynews.com](http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com), October 17, 2011  
<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-iranian-rivalry-redux.aspx?pageID=449&nID=7422&NewsCatID=424>

Assad and its support for the Kurdish separatists in Iraq in opposition to the Turkish agenda have further damaged the two countries previously stable relationship. Washington-based Turkish analyst, Tulin Daloglu, believes that the AKP has focused too narrowly on the short term benefits of closer economic ties with Iran, but with Iran accounting for 30% of Turkey's oil imports, Turkey could utilize this position to influence Iran in negotiations with the West. This possible influence would prove that when economic interests converge, divergent countries might be willing to work to a peaceful win-win solution. Economic solutions often offer strong resolutions for complex political problems.

## **US Foreign Policy and Strategic Policy**

“We will continue to engage with Turkey on a broad range of mutual goals, especially with regard to pursuit of stability in its region.”<sup>30</sup> Turkey's decision to host the US/NATO Ballistic Missile Defense Shield provides security throughout the Middle East, Europe and counters Iranian threats and fears.<sup>31</sup> This will provide a cohesive front that will promote stability and encourage Iran to give up their nuclear weapons ambitions. Iran has continued uranium enrichment activities and its saber rattling in the region are contributing factors to the reversal of Turkey's previous position to allow a US/NATO Ballistic Missile Defense AN/TPY-2 radar system to be deployed in Turkey. Their decision to agree at the NATO Summit in 2010 to host a complex military radar system is a sign that they are concerned about maintaining a strong regional influence and to counter Iran's growing hostilities. The

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<sup>30</sup> US National Security Strategy, 2012, pg 45

<sup>31</sup> Tilford, Robert, “We will Target NATO's Missile Shield inside Turkey if Attacked, vows Iranian General,” [www.examiner.com](http://www.examiner.com/city-buzz-in-charlotte/we-will-target-nato-s-missile-shield-turkey-if-attacked-vows-iranian-general), November, 28 2011, <http://www.examiner.com/city-buzz-in-charlotte/we-will-target-nato-s-missile-shield-turkey-if-attacked-vows-iranian-general>

AN/TPY-2 radar will allow greater range of detecting any missiles fired from threatening countries towards Europe or the Middle East. Ballistic Missile Defense is a core tenet to US security as stated recently in National Defense Strategy “We will continue to lead in advancing Ballistic Missile Defense capabilities against limited attacks and we seek opportunities for cooperation with allies and partners in this area.” Turkey’s decision to support our strategic interests is paramount to our goal of maintaining regional security and protecting allies. Turkey has a growing fear of Iran’s nuclear ambitions and continued threatening rhetoric in the region, which may set off an arms race that will threaten stability.<sup>32</sup> These combined moves may ratchet up tensions and could perceivably spark a Middle Eastern Cold War with countries such as Saudi Arabia desiring the acquisitions of nuclear weapons to counter threats from Iran. Turkey’s stated policies concerning stability in the region and Joint Statement with the GCC, clearly aligns with US policies and goals as evident in the 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance.

“Our defense efforts in the Middle East will be aimed at countering violent extremists and destabilizing threats, as well as upholding our commitment to allies and partner states. Of particular concern are the proliferation of ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction (WMD). U.S. policy will emphasize Gulf security, in collaboration with Gulf Cooperation Council countries when appropriate, to prevent Iran’s development of a nuclear weapon capability and counter its destabilizing policies.”

It is important to note that their decision has strained relations with Russia and Russian Media made claims that their decision to host the shield is over Russia’s gas policies. Turkey currently imports approximately 60% of their gas from Russia.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> 2012, National Military Strategy, pg 5

<sup>33</sup> Stephen Blank, “Turkey Falls Out With Russia,” [www.silkroadstudies.org](http://www.silkroadstudies.org), November 21, 2011, <http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/inside/turkey/2011/111121B.html>

## Conclusion

Several very complex issues have been discussed and while many of the problems in the region are highly complicated, it is important to understand the history behind Turkey's changing policies, her relations with Iran, her role in the Arab Spring and how the United States and the Western World will ultimately benefit from Turkey's growing role as a major voice for stability and peace in the region. In December 2009, after a meeting between President Obama and Prime Minister Erdogan, President Obama suggested that Turkey could be "an important player in trying to move Iran" in the direction of pursuing peaceful nuclear energy, while providing "assurances that it will abide by international rules and norms."<sup>34</sup> Prime Minister Erdogan followed, indicating that he was willing to do whatever it took to see to a peaceful diplomatic solution. It appears that the current administration has a clear understanding of Turkey's role in the region and the importance in achieving US goals of stability, curtailing Iran's nuclear ambition and the threat a nuclear Iran poses.

Both the Western and Arab worlds have hoped that Turkey will be a model for aspiring Arab democracies, the Turkish Model. With its secular democracy, booming economy and growing international influence, Turkey has become an inspiration for Muslims around the world. Washington will have to balance between treating Turkey as a full partner in its political and military actions in the region and marginalizing the country as Turkey attempts to gain a more individualized power. Its role in the region fosters a belief in world politics that Ankara is an indispensable ally. Turkey is a major player in its region, but will be unable to fully deliver

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<sup>34</sup> Reuters, "Obama Sees Role for Turkey in Iran Dispute," [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com), December 7, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/08/world/europe/08erdogan.html>

on all that it promises, and many fear that Turkey overestimates its ability to control the Arab political process. This disconnect is where the US will be able to fill a void of power and strategy in the Middle East and further prove to Turkey that the US “Partnership” is just as important to them as it is to the US. There will be obvious differences between the two nations and the countries’ policies will most certainly diverge on several issues. The most notable divergence in political policies will likely be over Israel and the future of a possible Palestinian state. Turkey’s role as a key ally of the United States has made her an important asset on the world stage and as highlighted in the National Security Strategy, “We will continue to engage with Turkey on a broad range of mutual goals, especially with pursuit of stability in the region.”<sup>35</sup> The political environment shifted dramatically since the Arab Spring and now more than ever the United States must rely on Turkey to set the example in the region, to counter Iran and set the example a moderate Islamic country that maintains its cultural identity while being a valuable partner and ally on the world stage. The United States must realize and work with Turkey and the many issues in the region and Turkey must embrace her position as a modern developed Islamic country that is at the crossroads of the Western world and the Middle East.

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<sup>35</sup> US 2012 National Security Strategy, pg 42

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