

Determinants of Turkish-American Relations and Prospects for the Future

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ABSTRACT *This article analyzes the fluctuating course of the Turkey-U.S. relationship with a special focus on Barack Hussein Obama's presidency. When Obama held office, he aimed at reinventing U.S.' image and shifting center of gravity from the Middle East to Asia-Pacific. These led U.S. to develop its relations with its allies in the region to provide the course of politics go along with the American geostrategic goals. Obama suggested a "model partnership" concept to draw a line between his Administration's and that of his predecessor George W. Bush. Differences of opinion, however, meant the concept did not go beyond being a surface change. Ultimately, two problems remained unsolved; the FETÖ leader's ongoing residence in U.S. and American support for YPG/PYD in Syria.*

Introduction

Turkey's relations with the U.S. have occupied a special significance in its foreign policy agenda since the end of the Second World War. This priority stems from three essential roots: the comprehensive security and military relationship developed since the Truman Doctrine (1947), the intensive economic and financial relationship that emerged as a result of the Marshall Plan (1948), and the joint strategic initiatives, which emerged after the Cold War in the vast Eurasian region.¹

Throughout the 1990s, Turkish and American statesmen have characterized bilateral relations as strategic alliance or strategic partnership. Having been critically damaged during the Iraqi War of 2003, the strategic dimension of the relationship was restructured by a series of trust building measures during George W. Bush's second term.² However, the AK Party government's efforts to rehabilitate the relations with a new common strategic vision did not yield the expected positive results. Barack Hussein Obama developed another term and

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called the for a *model partnership*³ in 2009.⁴ This new approach was welcomed in Ankara and then Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan supported developing a relationship built on a new understanding – a perception of mutual benefits and common interest. Nevertheless this win-win concept only effectively worked for two years until the Arab Spring erupted. After Obama's two

terms of presidency, the current situation of Turkish-American relations can more readily be described as well apart from a strategic or model partnership.

Considering the deterioration in 2003 crisis, the U.S. military assistance to YPG/PYD terrorist organization in Syria and Iraq, made relations even worse. On the other hand, the relations are shadowed by public suspicions about U.S. involvement in FETÖ's coup attempt, and U.S.' resistance to extradite the FETÖ leader – displaying lack of solidarity in Turkey's fight against ISIS. Therefore Turkish-American relations necessitate an urgent renewal and upgrade. Donald Trump's presidency may create an opportunity to open a new page in Ankara-Washington relations, which face the most dramatic divergence in its bicentennial history.

This article attempts to assess eight years of Turkish-American relations during the Obama administration and analyzes future prospects for the upcoming Trump presidency. Bearing in mind that ignoring the long history of bilateral relations, which present a number of indicators for the elements of continuity and change would endanger the accuracy of the conclusions, this study will first highlight key turning points in Turkey's relations with the U.S.

The overwhelming share of academic literature about the relations between Turkey and the United States assert that the two countries started to interact with each other following the Second World War. Although it is true that the volume and scope of Turkish-American relations dramatically intensified after 1945, no one can ignore the historical roots going back to late eighteenth century. Moreover, early dynamics of the nations' bilateral relations paved the way for the pre- and post-Second World War encounters.⁵

Ottoman Past

The legacy of Ottoman-American relations was disagreement rather than cooperation, with three essential problems emerging during the nineteenth

century. The first problem stemmed from the unbalanced nature of economic and social interactions. Except a short period in 1870s, the amount of exports from the Ottoman Empire to the United States was more than the imports and the trade was overwhelmingly done by American vessels. By the time of the Ottoman-American Trade and Navigation Agreement of 1830, a capitulatory regime, which included lower tariffs as well as legal exemption, was established in favor of American merchants. In the following years, the U.S. government intensified political pressure on the Ottoman government to enlarge the scope of extra-territorial legal privileges of American citizens visiting or living in the Ottoman lands. Naturally, this attitude created repeated cycles of tensions between the two governments. Interestingly, almost a century later the issue of judicial privileges granted to American military personnel created problems in both the 1960s and early 2000s.

Another problem of the Ottoman era was the involvement of Americans into revolutionary and nationalist movements of non-Muslim minorities. Starting from the Morea Revolt in 1821, some American charitable organizations, volunteers, former army members, diplomats and, most actively, Protestant missionaries enthusiastically supported the independence tendencies of a wide range of Christians including Greeks, Bulgarians and Armenians. On one hand, the personal contribution of Americans to the rebellions against the Ottoman Government have incited quite a number of diplomatic crises and created anti-Turkish sentiments among the American citizens in the U.S. on the other. Stereotypes including 'Terrible Turk' or 'Unspeakable Turk' are original contributions of Philhellene and Armenophil American missionaries to the English lexicon whose missionary schools and facilities in Ottoman lands reached significant numbers by the end of the nineteenth century. Additionally, some American diplomats played an active role in the immigration of Eastern European Jews to Palestine. Travel and settlement restrictions imposed by the Sublime Porte were occasionally criticized by American diplomats.⁶ In addition, there are examples of American individual or institutional involvement into Turkish domestic affairs in the upcoming decades. For instance, particular activities of the Peace Corps in 1960s and 1970s resulted in a wave of political discontent. Finally, public perception of American support for the FETÖ has shaken the U.S. image in Turkey.

The third essential problem emerged as a result of U.S. demands to have maritime access to the Black Sea. Passage through the Dardanelles and Bosphorus straits were limited through a series of international conventions beginning with the London Convention of 1841.⁷ Being a non-riparian state, the U.S. was not granted right of free passage to and from the Black Sea during peace and war times. Washington's enthusiasm for the straits and Black Sea passage would continue. As the U.S. is not party to the Montreux Convention of the Straits (1936), its naval presence in the Black Sea is restricted. However, legal

In 1990, then Turkish President, Turgut Özal met with his American counterpart George Bush in Washington D.C.

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restrictions did not prevent the American Navy asking for an entrance permit during the Russo-Georgian war of 2008.

In fact, the problematic nature of Ottoman-American relations has prevailed until the early years of the Turkish republic. Specifically, abolition of capitulations of American citizens that were given at the Ottoman time and restrictions on the U.S.' Near East Relief organization's activities aimed at Armenians delayed re-establishment of diplomatic relations until 1927, after they were officially withdrawn in 1917. During the 1930s, however, the two countries pursued distant but amicable relations.⁸

Diversification after 1945

The Second World War marked a turning point in Turkish-American relations. In 1943, Turkey became a recipient of Lend and Lease military assistance from the U.S. and Turkey's declaration of war on Germany and Japan paved its way to become a founding member of the United Nations in 1945. After the war, the emergence of strategic and ideological disagreements between the U.S. and the then USSR helped develop closer political and military ties between Ankara and Washington. At the beginning of the Cold War, Turkey was under Soviet pressure, and the U.S. was preparing its policies of containment. The Turkish-American rapprochement gained impetus in 1947, when President Truman declared his decision to send military assistance to

Turkey and Greece, both of which were under ‘communist threat.’ American assistance to Turkey after the Truman Doctrine did not only affect the military dimension, it had rather a political influence on the future of Turkish-American relations.⁹

According to the Article 2 of the Military Assistance Agreement dated July 12, 1947, the usage of the military equipment provided by the American government was limited by the essential goals of the agreement, namely to defend Turkey against foreign invasion.¹⁰ All American military assistance to Turkey in the following years was given under the same condition and, as a matter of fact, it created military and political dependence on the U.S. For instance, when Turkey intended to intervene to Cyprus in order to put an end to Greek EOKA organization’s atrocities on the Turkish Cypriots, in 1964, Washington did remind Ankara that it could not use American arms in its military actions.¹¹ Moreover, when Turkey did finally intervene in Cyprus in 1974, the U.S. imposed an arms embargo, which lasted for 3 years and weakened the fighting capacity of Turkish military.¹²

Following the Truman Doctrine, the U.S. economic aid given to Turkey through the Marshall Plan in 1948 and Turkey’s accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1952 strengthened Turkey’s position in the Western Bloc on one hand, while also intensifying Turkey’s economic, political and military dependence to the U.S. Ankara started to face difficulties in pursuing any foreign policy initiative which was not overlapping with U.S.’ Cold War strategies. Additionally, Ankara was directed by Washington to take action in line with so-called Western priorities. From formation of the Bled and Baghdad pacts to Turkey’s reluctance towards the non-alignment movement, from deployment of Jupiter missiles on its territory to the lack of support to Algeria’s independence, quite a number of Turkey’s foreign policy decisions emerged as repercussions of U.S. policies. One natural result of Turkey’s ‘Americanized’ foreign policy was its alienation from the non-Western world. Described as the ‘last patrol on the southern flank’ by NATO, Turkey structured its defense capabilities completely in line with Western needs.¹³

Since the level and scope of political, economic and military cooperation was highly favored by the Turkish military, the nature of Turkish-American relations did not change after the *coup d’état*, on May 27, 1960, which toppled Prime Minister Adnan Menderes and his government. On the contrary, the perpetrators emphasized in a radio announcement that they “were loyal to the NATO.” U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower did not attempt to save the demo-



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military aligned with FETÖ to topple the democratically elected Turkish government. The language and contents of early remarks of the U.S. officials after the July 15 incident caused a wave of dissatisfaction amongst Turkish public as well as political leaders.

cratically elected Menderes government, but instead he assessed how pro-American the coup leaders were. Satisfied with the intentions of the new military leadership, just a few days later Washington recognized the new government. The 'loyalty to NATO' phrase was subsequently used by both coup plotters – on September 12, 1980 and July 15, 2016.¹⁴ The latter was a failed attempt by a group of Turkish

Divergences and Convergences

As a result of a number of international and bilateral developments the trouble-free atmosphere of Turkish-American relations gradually changed after 1962. The course and results of the Cuban missile crises between the U.S. and the USSR caused a loss of confidence in Ankara. When the Turkish government learnt that President Kennedy had made a bargain with his Soviet counterpart Nikita Khrushchev over missiles in Turkey and did not inform NATO capitals, including Ankara, a debate on "reliability of the U.S." ensued, for the first time since the Truman Doctrine.¹⁵ Two years later, when President Lyndon Johnson sent a letter to Prime Minister İsmet İnönü designed to stop a likely military intervention to Cyprus, the bilateral ties were once more shaken. The tough language of the letter and Johnson's indication of NATO's possible reluctance to defend Turkey against a Soviet attack created huge disappointment in Ankara. Until 1980 although a number of crises continued to shadow Turkish-American relations, the two countries have also initiated to reshape their military and economic cooperation. The ups and downs primarily stemmed from three factors.

The first was a direct result of the new era of détente between Washington and Moscow. While the U.S. was changing its military strategies and asking its allies –including Turkey – to fit into this new paradigm, Turkey was at a different point. For the first time since the end of the Second World War, it was developing multi-faceted diplomacy and the transition from massive retaliation to elastic response, in NATO military terms resulted in a new definition of Turkey's role in collective defense. On the other hand, the easing of tensions

between the bloc leaders encouraged Turkey to improve its ties, at least in economic and technical areas, with Eastern Bloc countries, particularly the USSR. Moreover, Ankara has started to develop its relations with the Muslim world, the non-aligned countries and the newly independent countries of Africa.

The second factor was a result of political dynamics in Turkey. Following the 1965 parliamentary elections, anti-American and anti-western terminology in political rhetoric started to increase. The newly established Turkish Workers' Party (TIP) became the political center of such debates. Along with the TIP, some student organizations and trade unions, located on the left of political spectrum intensified their stance against the U.S. military in Turkey and NATO strategies. This political and public behavior naturally had negative repercussions on Turkish-American relations.¹⁶

Finally, there was a shift in domestic political dynamics in the U.S. The increasing influence of the Greek and Armenian ethnic lobbies over the Presidency and the Congress negatively impacted the relations. President Richard Nixon's narcotics strategy, which unfairly highlighted Turkish opium as a threat gave rise to both anti-Turkish sentiments in the U.S. and definitely fostered a political and public reaction to Washington in Turkey. However, the major break in relations occurred in 1975, when the U.S. imposed an arms embargo on Turkey after the latter's military intervention in Cyprus in July 1974. The arms embargo, which lasted for three years gave impetus to anti-American feelings in Turkey and resulted in the collapse of the Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA) of 1969. A new legal basis for bilateral relations, the Defense and Economic Cooperation Agreement (DECA) could only be signed in 1980 and was put into force after the military coup in Turkey in September 1980.

In the 1980 coup, the military leadership issued almost the same kind of declarations as their 1960 predecessors, emphasizing their strong support for improving relations with the U.S. Bearing in mind that Turkey's loyalty to NATO was important for the Alliance's military capability, particularly after the dramatic incidents in the region such as the Islamic Revolution in Iran and Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in 1979, subsequent U.S. presidents supported Turkey's generals in political and economic terms. During this period, President Jimmy Carter's National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski's plan to utilize pro-Western Muslim countries as a "shield" to halt the spread of Soviet communism and the Iranian Islamic Revolution in the Middle East, necessitated closer cooperation with Turkey, which was certainly playing a key role in realization of the so-called Green Belt.

During the last decade of the Cold War, while military assistance from the U.S. had a balanced, linear course, there was a sharp decline in the economic aid to Turkey. This indicator individually shows that Turkey, located at the edge of

the volatile Middle East held a more strategic meaning for Washington, rather than an economic one. As a matter of fact, in spite of persistent efforts by Prime Minister Turgut Özal, who came to power in 1983, to increase the volume of bilateral trade and to remove trade quotas imposed on Turkish export goods entering the U.S., no noteworthy advance was achieved in the economic arena. Meanwhile a Turkish-American F-16 fighter jets project – developed under the terms of DECA – was initiated, conducted and concluded. Moreover, Ankara enthusiastically supported President Ronald Reagan’s strategic initiatives to deploy a rapid reaction force in some NATO countries, including Turkey. In spite of developing dimensions of military and defense industry cooperation problems arising from the Cyprus issue, false Armenian allegations and human rights issues have continued to strain relations.

Emergence of a ‘Strategic Partnership’

When the Cold War came to an end in early 1990s, one of the important factors behind strong Turkish-American military cooperation disappeared. According to a number of analysts, Turkish-American relations could be downgraded to a lesser extent compared to the Cold War years. However, the new dynamics, concerns and perils of the post-Cold War era inspired a renewed spirit of partnership. Taking into consideration their interests in the Middle East, the Balkans, the Caucasus and the Central Asia, Washington and Ankara mutually took steps to enrich the scope of their cooperation in the new period.¹⁷

The developments during and after the Gulf Crisis of 1990-1991, ethnic and religious clashes in Yugoslavia, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia as well as the war in Chechnya forced Turkey to radically reevaluate its perception of threats and to describe a new “role” for itself in a difficult region surrounded by ongoing confrontations and where Asia and Europe, *North* and the *South* and Islam and Christianity meet. In accordance with the dynamics of the new environment, Turkey gradually retired from being a “flank country” or “the last patrol of the Western world,” and has tried to become a “safe haven” in the middle of a “sea of instabilities.”¹⁸

Emergence of a new situation also forced NATO, an inherent Cold War organization, to redefine its duties, responsibilities and geography of action. A Strategic Concept, adopted in 1991, outlined three new responsibilities for the Alliance: development of democratic institutions and establishment of stability and security environment in Europe, in a way that no European country would threaten another; establishment of a trans-Atlantic forum for synchronization of different organizations’ efforts towards threats; and preservation of new balances in the region. Turkey actively supported NATO’s new initiatives, which were actually set forth by the U.S.¹⁹

Almost eight years after the first one, another “new” NATO Strategic Concept was adopted during the Washington Summit of 1999, enlarging the area of NATO actions and legalizing the so called “non-Article 5” operations. Coinciding with the NATO’s Kosovo Operation, the new concept defined new threats facing the Alliance as, “... uncertainty and instability in and around the Euro-Atlantic area and the possibility of regional crises at the periphery of the Alliance, which could evolve rapidly; economic, social and political difficulties of some countries in the region; ethnic and religious rivalries, territorial disputes, inadequate or failed efforts at reform, the abuse of human rights, and the dissolution of states, which can lead to local and even regional instability;” and empowered NATO to take necessary steps to stop the threats to spill over the NATO countries.²⁰

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In addition to concerns from newly emerging threats, Turkey’s continued desire to maintain a strong relationship with the U.S. can be explained through a concept called ‘military dependence.’ Although Turkey tried to diversify its defense capabilities by importing arms from Germany, Israel, Russia and even China, the U.S. remained as the main supplier to Turkish army. Total arms purchased from the U.S. between 1994-2000 reached almost \$11 billion. While the total of amount Turkey paid to the U.S. between 1950 and 1983 was \$1,196 billion.²¹

Finally, Turkey was interested in close cooperation with the U.S. to facilitate its economic transformation initiative, a program mainly launched by Özal in the mid-1980s and followed by other governments, it was designed to revitalize market economy parameters in Turkey. This program could only be achieved by the accumulation of an adequate amount of foreign capital in the country, which was enabled by with creation of new investment possibilities. New loans and credits from the U.S. and/or the IMF and the World Bank helped realization of this transformation.

One concrete example of Turkey’s close cooperation in economic fields with the U.S. was seen in early 2000s. Turkey received a \$19 billion loan from the IMF to overcome the effects of the deep economic crises it faced between November 2000 and February 2001. Keeping in mind that Washington’s support for economic recovery in Turkey was crucial, during his visit to the U.S. in January 2002, Turkish Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit expressed his gratitude saying that Turkish-American relations has reached a level of ‘strategic part-



The photo shows the İncirlik Base in Turkey, which has become one of the hot topics in the Turkish-American relationship.

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nership.’ American authorities qualified bilateral relations as a ‘strategic partnership’ for specific reasons. Ian O. Lesser summarizes the American approach to the term “strategic” as follows:

The U.S. approach to Turkey is often characterized as “strategic,” in contrast to Europe’s more political –and often more critical- approach to relations with Ankara. Indeed, the relationship continues to be strategic in several senses: strategic in terms of the primacy of security matters; strategic in terms of enduring and broad-based cooperation; and strategic in terms of Turkey’s role in the broader geopolitical equation. [...] The United States views Turkey, and measures Turkish cooperation, through the lens of a global power, and in this context, Turkey’s trans-regional position is significant. The trans-regional quality goes beyond the country’s geographic position adjacent to areas of interest –the Balkans, the Eastern Mediterranean, the Caucasus, and the Gulf. Analysts and officials, both Turkish and American, often make this point –‘location, location, location’– in reference to Turkey’s strategic significance.²²

In fact, Ecevit’s perception of the strategic partnership went beyond cooperation in security affairs; he, as Özal did previously, tried to add a “strengthened economic dimension” to the Turkish-American bilateral agenda, which was truly enriched in late 1990s by Washington’s support for the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline project, and for Turkey’s EU membership. Nevertheless, Ecevit’s demands for removal of trade barriers imposed on Turkish export goods and

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support for the development of new sorts of economic cooperation areas, such as creation of "Qualified Industrial Zones" (QIZ) in Turkey, did not generate too much enthusiasm in Washington.²³

A Period of Quakes

A new period began with the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington on September 11, 2001, an era which has witnessed both a rise and a fall in Turkish-American relations. The rise came when Turkey supported the U.S. war on the Taliban in 2000 and the fall was triggered by Turkish Parliament's rejection to take part in the Iraqi War in 2003.²⁴

Turkey, as a country fighting with terrorism almost for two decades, provided support to the initiatives and policies of U.S. President George W. Bush after 9/11. Expecting that Washington's war on terrorism would strengthen its policies towards the PKK terrorist organization, Ankara first extended its political support to the American military operation in Afghanistan and later sent troops in 2002 to be part of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF).

However, when the Bush Administration started to give clear signs as to its intention to invade Iraq, the Turkish public did not behave with the same enthusiasm. Although the leader of the AK Party, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, clearly gave support to Bush's Iraqi Operation to stop production of weapons of mass destruction during his visit to Washington in December 2002, only 15 days after his party's landslide election victory in Turkey, neither the majority of the Turkish people, nor most of the MPs in his party shared the same views. While 91 percent of the Turkish people were against al-Qaeda terrorist network and supported fighting with terror, only 10 percent supported an American invasion of Iraq.²⁵

There were two main reasons behind the Turks' reluctance. First, unlimited support to the U.S. during the Gulf Crisis (1990-1991) did not result in benefits to Turkey; the trade embargo on Iraq cost the Turkish economy more than 80 billion dollars, and a 'safe haven' created by the U.N. in the Northern

Starting with the Turkish government's decision to give support to the U.S. patented BMENA initiative in 2004, the cool atmosphere in bilateral relations was replaced with a warmer climate

Iraq became an untouchable base for PKK militants, which increased terrorist attacks in Turkey and led to the deaths of more than 20 thousand people. The PKK presence in Northern Iraq, under control of the U.S.-led 'Provide Comfort' and 'Northern Watch' operations, gradually created anger towards the U.S. in the Turkish public. Secondly, the lack of a UN Security Council Res-

olution approving military action against Iraq created a legal debate in Turkey; those who were against Turkish support for a U.S. operation properly claimed that the Turkish Constitution prohibited such an action. Mainly with those motivations, the Turkish Parliament rejected to pass a government proposal for giving access to the American troops to Turkey.²⁶ Although, the Parliament later on March 20 decided to open Turkish air space to U.S. bombers and missiles, it was not enough to demonstrate the Turkish government's support to the U.S. and did not decrease the level of disappointment in Washington, caused by the rejection of March 1 motion.²⁷

During the American military operation, some attempts to repair damaged bilateral relationship were made. In April 2003, Secretary of State Colin Powell visited Ankara declaring that "Turkey is an important member of the coalition against the Saddam regime."²⁸ Turkey had been relegated to the position of an 'important coalition member' rather than a 'strategic partner.'²⁹ In addition, following the Iraq war, American authorities begun to harden their expressions. U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, during an interview with a Turkish television on May 6, 2003 said the following:

I think we had a big disappointment [...] I think for whatever reason they [Turkish military] did not play the strong leadership role on that issue that we would have expected. But I think the bigger disappointment has to do with the general failure of the Turkish public reflected also in the government, about what the stakes were in Iraq and that here you have a neighbor with an overwhelmingly Muslim population where the people were suffering under the worst dictators in the world. And one would have thought that Muslim solidarity would have led people to say let's help the Americans liberate these people and that isn't what happened.³⁰

Wolfowitz was blaming, not the Turkish government but the Turkish military who did not 'play a strong leadership role' in pressing for Parliament's approval of the motion. Just two months after Wolfowitz' interview, on July 4, 2003, over 100 American soldiers attacked the Turkish Information Bureau in Su-

laymaniyah, Northern Iraq, arresting 11 Turkish soldiers and accusing them of planning an assassination of the Kurdish governor of Kirkuk. The incident created a huge public reaction in Turkey with demonstrations condemning the American action and demanding the release of the soldiers. Although the soldiers were released after 60 hours of diplomatic correspondence, no apology was forthcoming from Washington.³¹ The July 4 Incident or the Hood event as it was named by Turkish media, increased the opposition to U.S. actions amongst the Turkish public with the number of people who said they “like the United States” scoring an all-time low in surveys.

On the other hand, the Turkish government tried to take steps to repair the damage in bilateral relations and authorized the utilization of İncirlik base in Adana, as a transfer point for rotation of the U.S. forces in Iraq, in September 2003. Furthermore, in November, the Turkish government agreed to send troops to Iraq to assist the so called Coalition Forces, but suspended its decision due to reaction from the Kurdish parties in the Northern Iraq. Finally, it gave energetic support to the American led-Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative (BMENA, known the “Greater Middle East Project” as well) in June 2004. Eight months after his previous remarks Paul Wolfowitz asserted in January 2004 that many things in bilateral relations has changed in a positive way. He said:

Eight months ago, actually. What I was saying is, and I think it has happened, that it's important for Turkey to step up to its responsibilities and to its own interests in the region. I think Turkey has done that in a magnificent way. I think the eight months since we met last, a lot has happened [...] I think the purpose of the terrorists, both here and in Turkey, is to try to divide Turks from Americans and Turks from Turks and I'm pleased to say that it seems to me it's had the opposite effect. [...] So I think we're, our Turkish-American relations are demonstrating their influence and their importance to this critical region at a critical time.³²

The Turkish government worked hard to repair its relations with the Bush administration after the Iraq War. Although the first year following the war was passed with negative repercussions as a result of the crisis, starting with the Turkish government's decision to give support to the U.S. patented BMENA initiative in 2004, the cool atmosphere in bilateral relations was replaced with a warmer climate. Attending to the NATO Summit in İstanbul, President Bush visited Prime Minister Erdoğan and declaring “the U.S. supports Turkey's accession to the EU, which is a secular country with a mainly Muslim population.” Bush further said the following in İstanbul:

For decades, my country has supported greater unity in Europe – to secure liberty, build prosperity, and remove sources of conflict on this continent.

Now the European Union is considering the admission of Turkey, and you are moving rapidly to meet the criteria for membership. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk had a vision of Turkey as a strong nation among other European nations. That dream can be realized by this generation of Turks. America believes that as a European power, Turkey belongs in the European Union. Your membership would also be a crucial advance in relations between the Muslim world and the West, because you are part of both. Including Turkey in the EU would prove that Europe is not the exclusive club of a single religion, and it would expose the “clash of civilizations” as a passing myth of history. Fifteen years ago, an artificial line that divided Europe – drawn at Yalta – was erased. Now this continent has the opportunity to erase another artificial division – by fully including Turkey in it.³³

Almost one year after the İstanbul remarks, President Bush underlined the importance of the strategic relationship Turkey and the U.S., during a visit of Prime Minister Erdoğan to Washington in June 2005. Bush said as follows:

We’ve had an extensive visit about a lot of issues. And the reason why is because Turkey and the United States has an important strategic relationship. I told the Prime Minister how grateful I was that he was a -- is a strong supporter of the broader Middle Eastern initiative. Turkey’s democracy is an important example for the people in the broader Middle East, and I want to thank you for your leadership.³⁴

Following mutual high-level statements to rehabilitate Turkish-American relations, then Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Gül and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice announced a ‘shared vision’ during Gül’s visit to Washington in June 2006.

According to this document, Turkey and the U.S. underlined their determination to cooperate against PKK and other terrorist groups; to seek a fair and lasting solution to the Cyprus problem; to encourage democracy and stability in Iraq, the Black Sea, Caucasus, Central Asia and Afghanistan; to support international efforts aimed at resolving the Middle East conflict; to boost peace and stability through democracy in the Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative; to ensure energy security; to strengthen transatlantic relations; and to enhance understanding among religions and cultures. The document also created a mechanism for undersecretaries of both countries to meet annually to discuss this shared agenda.³⁵

Nevertheless, neither Turkey’s enthusiasm to play an active role in the BME-NA initiative, nor joint statements designed to overcome the difficulties have solved the bilateral problems completely. In fact, following the Israel-Lebanon War in July 2006, the BMENA initiative gradually lost its effectiveness.

The last two years of the Bush presidency did not yield any concrete results affecting the status of bilateral relations. Moreover the Russo-Georgia War of 2008 found Turkey and United States disagreeing about the status of the straits and the Black Sea. Ankara's restriction on U.S. naval ships entering the Black Sea as agreed on Montreux Convention of 1936 created some reaction in Washington.

The Rise and Fall of a 'Model Partnership'

Barack Hussein Obama's election as the U.S. president in November 2008 was welcomed in Ankara and gave boost to the expectations for opening of a new page in Turkish-American relations. The concept of a 'model partnership' was rather designed to point a hope towards a substantial improvement in bilateral relations – a relationship which was relatively harmed in President George W. Bush's terms.³⁶

It may be argued that the Iraqi War in 2003 sowed the seeds for a transition in the discourse to define the relationship between U.S. and Turkey from the American perspective. The Turkish Parliament's voting against U.S. war plans can be regarded as a signal flare that paved the way for 'strategic partnership' concept to lose its meaning which was already far from being clear cut. It was President Bill Clinton who pronounced the term "strategic partners" at an official dinner speech to define Turkish-American relations in 1999.³⁷ However, he did not use the same concept in his speech to the Turkish Grand National Assembly.³⁸ Thereby, strategic partnership was not given a tangible meaning and did not go beyond a goodwill gesture just after an earthquake where thousands of Turkish people died.

Obama's model partnership concept was designed to distinguish his Administration's policies from the Bush Administration and help make a fresh start with its NATO ally. During his election campaign, Obama explicitly criticized the foreign policy of the Bush administration, including his Middle East policies and he came to office by making a commitment to reinventing the image of U.S. in the world and particularly in the Middle East.³⁹ His need to reformulate the Turkey-U.S. relationship on the surface may be attributed to this motivation. When the foreign policy of Obama is analyzed it is seen that he was more prone to apply an isolationist policy towards the Middle East. As a consequence of that, he made an effort to maintain a greater distance to the geopolitics of the Middle East than his predecessor did.⁴⁰ As China emerged as a powerful regional actor, Obama's inclination to withdraw from the Mid-



As China emerged as a powerful regional actor, Obama's inclination to withdraw from the Middle East and focus his attention on Asia-Pacific brought particular requirements

Though Obama held himself at a distance from Israel compared to previous presidents, Turkey's expectations were far from fulfilled as regards Israel's attacks on Gaza and *Mavi Marmara*

dle East and focus his attention on Asia-Pacific brought particular requirements. Above all, the allies of U.S. in the Middle East came into the prominence ever more for American foreign policy makers. While U.S. intended to give weight to Asia-Pacific, it was aimed that the responsibility "of providing the course of Middle East politics perpetuate in compliance with Amer-

ican geostrategic goals," was conferred to the U.S. allies in the Middle East region. For this reason, it may be argued that from U.S. perspective the motivation to develop its relationship with Turkey manifested itself with a change in the definition of the relations. That pointed a shift from a strategic to model partnership.

Obama defined the relationship as a model partnership that stresses a partial shift previously defined as a strategic alliance and strategic partnership respectively. In his visit to Ankara, he argued that Turkey and the United States may "build a model partnership in which a majority Christian and a majority Muslim nation, a Western nation [...] can create a modern international community that is respectful, secure and prosperous."⁴¹ Similar to the previous conceptualizations of strategic alliance and strategic partnership, Obama's conceptualization of model partnership was also far from concrete and clear cut. Although the model partnership concept was used by leaders in both countries, the full meaning of it was never well-defined.⁴²

While Turkey's former Minister of Foreign Affairs argued the model partnership of would last forever, there was no mention of what model partnership actually was and how it distinguished from its predecessors. Turkey envisioned a relationship based on more equal terms⁴³ compared to previous course of relations since the end of the Second World War. During his visit to Ankara, President Obama addressed Parliament and committed to increase cooperation between the two countries in regional affairs and trade among themselves.⁴⁴ While Obama pointed to the worsening of bilateral relations in the former years, he stressed his hope and optimism for the following years as follows:

I know there have been difficulties these last few years. I know that the trust that binds us has been strained, and I know that strain is shared in many places where the Muslim faith is practiced. Let me say this as clearly as I can: the United States is not at war with Islam and will never be. In fact, our partnership with the Muslim world is critical in rolling back a fringe ideology that people of all faiths reject.⁴⁵



Turkish Justice Minister Bekir Bozdağ meets his American counterpart Loretta Lynch in Washington D.C. to discuss the extradition of Fetullah Gülen to Turkey, on November 27, 2016.

AA PHOTO

During his visit, Obama further claimed the importance of Turkey and argued that by cooperating, a strategy may be built that would see the Muslim and Western world unified. In this way, while the relationship had been considerably harmed since the 2003 Iraq occupation, Obama demonstrated a strong commitment towards the improvement of relations between the two. His determination caused satisfaction amongst Turkish political elites at the time. However, with passing of time, despite of mutually good intentions from both sides, the model partnership and supportive words was not adequate to sustain stable relations.

There were various reasons why Obama administration could not accomplish its goals as declared at the beginning of 2009. Iran's nuclear activities had been a bone of contention between U.S. and Turkey. Obama insistently declared his concerns about nuclear activities in the Islamic Republic and argued that it presented a serious threat for Israel and the Middle East region. He proposed new sanctions towards Iran whereas Turkey, together with Brazil resisted the proposal of new sanctions and signed Tehran Declaration in May 17, 2010. The Tehran declaration, signed by foreign ministers of Brazil, Turkey and Iran shaped the framework of a nuclear fuel exchange agreement where Iran would keep its nuclear research and development activities but would deposit its weapon-oriented uranium (1,200 kg, low enriched) in Turkey and would get fuel-oriented uranium for its nuclear research reactor (120 kg, high enriched) from Turkey.⁴⁶ As a consequence of counteracting the American proposal of applying new sanctions, Turkey's common initiative with Brazil towards Iran

From the U.S. perspective, Turkey was a strong candidate to be a model for Arab countries due to its secular character and democratic experience from 1946

caused dissatisfaction in U.S. administration, which insisted that Iran's ultimate aim was producing a nuclear bomb. It is known that President Obama and then Prime Minister Erdogan negotiated on the Tehran declaration at great length. Turkey, however, defined the agreement as an important step to the non-proliferation weapons of mass destruction.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, despite of Turkey and Brazil's negative votes in United Nations Security Council, the U.S. secured approval of the sanctions in June 2010.

Another factor that led to drive a wedge between the two countries was the *Mavi Marmara* incident that took place on May 2010, when Israeli Special Forces killed 9 Turkish citizens in international waters. The

raid took place in one of six civilian ships carrying humanitarian assistance materials to Gaza under Israel's blockade. The incident caused a deep rift between Israel and Turkey, and Turkish officials were further dissatisfied with the lack of U.S. reaction towards the Israeli governments who was responsible for killing of Turkish citizens. Though Obama held himself at a distance from Israel compared to previous presidents, Turkey's expectations were far from fulfilled as regards Israel's attacks on Gaza and *Mavi Marmara*. After Israel's killing of 9 Turkish citizens, then Turkey's foreign minister Ahmet Davutoğlu explicitly expressed the anticipation of solidarity from U.S., while he pushed for a strong condemnation of Israel in United Nations Security Council. U.S. officials appeased Davutoğlu instead of following his advice.⁴⁸

Despite tensions between the two, Turkey continued to fulfill its function as a NATO ally, continuing to side with U.S. in both Afghanistan and Iraq. In the face of worsening relations, Turkey was still an important ally in the Middle East due to the U.S. partial withdrawing policy from the region and shifting its center of gravity to Asia-Pacific.⁴⁹ To accomplish such a goal, the U.S. needed allies ever more, making Turkey's importance essential. Within this scope, Obama's policy of 'lead from behind' was an important motive for the Administration. Therefore, despite Israel's and Jewish lobby's strong opposition against collaboration with Turkey, Obama acted carefully to keep a relationship on course with Turkey. In 2013, Obama's diplomatic efforts resulted in an apology from the Israeli Prime Minister for the losses and \$20 million in compensation to the families of victims in return for withdrawing all international judicial cases.⁵⁰

To the contrary of worsening factors, some developments played for the better in Turkey–U.S. relations. At a NATO Summit in November 2010, a Missile Defense System issue was debated at the summit, which projected a radar system

to be deployed in a city of Turkey, Malatya.⁵¹ Meanwhile, France's insistence that the Missile project be aimed at Syria and Iran was not welcomed and Turkey's growing relationships with the two neighboring countries were preserved despite of Iran's evident dissatisfaction with the project.

Another factor that warmed up relations between the two was the protests and political turmoil that took place in Arab countries starting in 2010. The protests also known as the Arab Spring, first gained importance to Turkey for American policy makers, however, it later caused disputes in various issues. From the U.S. perspective, Turkey was a strong candidate to be a model for Arab countries due to its secular character and democratic experience from 1946. Meanwhile, Turkey's foreign policy towards the Arab governments showed an alteration as the Arab Spring processed.⁵² For example, such a change can be seen in Turkish support for the Egyptian people, rather than Mubarak's administration. Following Mubarak's resignation, Turkey shifted its support towards popularly elected Muslim Brotherhood leader, Mohamed Morsi. However, Morsi was toppled by a military coup led by General Sisi almost a year after the presidential elections. While Turkey strongly condemned the coup, the U.S. did not, and diplomatically recognized Sisi's administration. Furthermore, the U.S. has continued to convey military and economic assistance to Cairo.

However in Libya, Turkey's policy was relatively moderate due to considerable private investments. With this understanding, Turkey objected to a NATO operation to Libya early on, as the time passed it took part in the operation and supported calls for Gaddafi's resignation.

Syria, PKK, FETÖ and Beyond

The most significant issue between the U.S. and Turkey has been Syria – where a civil war began in 2011. Due to the personal relationship of Erdoğan and Assad, from the very start, Turkey called Syrian regime to make democratic reforms but achieved no result. Turkey's second move supported the Syrian political opposition, which sought a regime change. Meanwhile, Obama was getting prepared for the 2012 Presidential elections and refrained from developing a concrete attitude towards Assad's regime. He confined himself to condemning the regime. While Turkey and the U.S. arrived at a consensus on the surface, the methods of Assad's overthrow were never agreed.

Turkey, on the other hand, took solid steps including arming the opposition, forming a no-fly zone and/or a "safe haven" and were reciprocated by a true apathy and wait-see approach from U.S. side. With ISIS' coming into focus and consolidating power in particular parts of Iraq and Syria, the U.S. resorted to

supporting Kurdish forces, the YPG. Despite Ankara's insistence on YPG's terrorist nature and the organization's undeniable links with the terrorist group PKK, the Obama administration supported the former group until he left office.⁵³ Meanwhile, the U.S. tenaciously refrained from supporting Turkey's proposal to form a safe haven to settle Syrian refugees. Despite Turkey's dissatisfaction with Obama's policies – particularly regarding Middle East – the state of affairs during the term of Donald Trump are almost unforeseen.

Another factor of influence was the failed coup attempt by FETÖ on July 15, 2016. Relations between Ankara and Washington have been aggravated since the coup attempt, as the leader of the FETÖ, Fetullah Gülen, has been a long term resident of Pennsylvania. Terrorist Gülen has resided in the U.S. since 1999 and his fingerprints are explicit on all over the failed coup attempt.⁵⁴ While the Turkish government's passing of state of emergency to conduct a purge in all government offices and business sector is still in progress, Turkey's demand to extradite the mastermind of the failed coup remains unfulfilled.

Obama did not take a step at the cost of damaging bilateral relations and the potential attitude of Trump administration is still unclear. Despite the fact that U.S. officials have claimed their inclination to accept any application from Turkish authorities under the terms of mutual assistance treaty on criminal matters,⁵⁵ such statements are considered by the Turkish side as nothing but running out the clock. Meanwhile the discourse that Turkish political elites have been using regarding the U.S. and terrorist Gülen case, mobilized the Turkish public opinion and Turkish media towards forming considerable negative sentiments towards Washington in Turkey. A public survey conducted in the aftermath of July 15 shows the fact that most of the people in Turkey have a perception that the U.S. backed the failed coup attempt.⁵⁶

Burdens of the Past, Hopes for the Future

The Trump administration is expected to lead a sea change in the U.S. foreign policy. Obama's distinct policies including refraining from deploying troops in any point of conflict, shifting its position of center of gravity from Middle East to Asia-Pacific via multilateral trade agreements, providing a nuclear deal framework with Iran, reconciliation with China that led to the Paris Accord to reduce global warming, reinstallation of American presence in Latin America are likely not to be in demand by the new administration.⁵⁷ Considering the course of Turkish-American relations under Obama, it is apparent Donald Trump did not take over an easy task.

The new president inherited basically two main agenda topics as an object at issue. The first one is ongoing support of the U.S. for YPG/PYD in its fight

against ISIS. It is apparent that Turkey would not take a step back from its demand regarding U.S.' withdraw such support due to explicit bonds between YPG/PYD and PKK.⁵⁸ The second issue is the failed coup attempt, its aftermath and the American response. The Obama administration failed to take concrete action regarding the extradition of the suspected leader of the coup attempt. Turkey's demand for Gülen's extradition from U.S. has been in place since December 17-25, 2013, a fully fabricated plot with the aim of toppling the legitimate Turkish government. It was implemented by FETÖ members in police and judiciary where U.S. responded with insistently refraining from returning Gülen. On the other hand, while Western media considerably underestimated the effect of coup attempt, they focused on the purge of the FETÖ members from government offices, the private sector, media, and academia and presented such measures as a so called witch hunt. The apathy of Western world despite the Turkish people's noteworthy resistance to the coup attempt for the first time in Republican history, one of the few successful examples among all democratic countries, caused serious dissatisfaction both at Turkey's public and political elites.⁵⁹

Although President Trump's possible contribution towards Turkish–American relations remains ambiguous, his expressions and actions so far are adequate to comment on perils and powers of the relations in the new term. Trump's possible continuation to support YPG/PYD forces in Syria would inevitably prevent the development of the relations while the opposite would have a reverse situation and warm up the diplomatic ties.

Tracking Donald Trump's speeches during his election campaign could be useful to gain insight of Turkish-American relations. In various regions, Trump addressed to the American voter 71 times between the dates of June 16, 2015 and November 7, 2016. When the text of his speeches is subjected to a simple discourse analysis, it became apparent that the politics of Middle East is a foremost agenda topic for the Trump administration.

The series of talks during his election campaign that started in New York City and ended in North Carolina involved both positive and negative elements for the course of Turkish–American relations. Trump used at least one of the terms –radical Islam, Islamic terrorists, radical Islamic terrorists, radical Islamist terrorists, Islamic terror– in 47 speeches out of 71 while he pronounced “ISIS” in 42 of his speeches. Meanwhile, the word “Middle East” was used in



Trump's preference of juxtaposing radical terrorism and Islam may result in tensions between U.S. and Turkey due to fact that President Erdogan's sensitivity of distinguishing ISIS from Islam is so apparent

39 talks during this same period. When the texts are considered, it is obvious that during his campaign Trump consciously correlated terror with Islam. While using the terms “radical Islamist terrorism,” he also blamed Obama by refraining to make a definition as such⁶⁰: “[...] And we’re in a war against radical Islam, but President Obama won’t even name the enemy [...]”

Trump’s preference of juxtaposing radical terrorism and Islam may result in tensions between U.S. and Turkey due to fact that President Erdogan’s sensitivity of distinguishing ISIS from Islam is so apparent. Underlying that Islam is a religion of peace, President Erdogan rebuked German chancellor Angela Merkel for using phrase “Islamic terrorism.”⁶¹ It would not be a surprise that Trump’s continuation of using Islam and terror together would cause displeasure on the Turkish side.

When compared to Obama’s term, Trump used a language where he signaled a relatively active foreign policy in Middle East while claiming that he will strengthen U.S. army and increase the defense budget. Meanwhile he reveals that he looks positively to the allies that would cooperate against ISIS as he indicated his support to Turkey’s struggle against ISIS since his election campaign.⁶² Consequently, his promise for a more active⁶³ struggle against ISIS and his commitment to “knock the hell out of ISIS” or to “defeat ISIS overseas” would answer Turkey’s expectations from U.S. who has been criticizing Americans for remaining unresponsive to the developments in Syria. Meanwhile, Trump also gives positive messages to the YPG/PYD, allegedly fighting against ISIS.

Turkey’s firm position that YPG/PYD is a terrorist organization due to its apparent bonds with outlawed PKK would lead Trump to make a choice by the end of the day.⁶⁴ On one side there is the only Muslim-majority sovereign state in the region which has a parliamentary democracy experience since 1946 and a NATO ally since 1952 and on the other there is a terrorist group whose militants point guns at the Turkish Armed Forces and civil citizens under the umbrella of PKK. It is obvious that Trump administration comes to the parting of the ways; however, it is hard to argue that that the decision to be given is tough.

When it comes to the other critical agenda topic, Trump’s possible extradition of terrorist Gülen would have a significantly positive impact while keeping the suspected terrorist in U.S. would presumably lead to a rupture point between the two. Appreciation of Turkish resistance against the coup, understanding and empathizing Turkey in the purge FETÖ members, would have a considerably positive impact on Turkey’s side. Within this scope a potential shift in the understanding of U.S. side towards the July coup attempt and aftermath may do a lot. Meanwhile, as one can see, it became apparent that Trump’s populist dis-

course was not only a facelift during his election campaign but rather forms the backbone of his Administration's policies. His prompt executive order, while suspends the entry of refugees into the U.S. for 120 days and orients U.S. officials to determine additional screening, also bans the admission of refugees from Syria indefinitely. Moreover, it bans entry into the U.S. for 90 days

to ordinary citizens from seven Muslim countries. Those countries are Iraq, Iran, Sudan, Libya, Somalia, Yemen and Syria.⁶⁵ A U.S. federal judge in Seattle stopped Trump's initiative on January 27, 2017, and a three-judge panel with the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit backed this halting. In response, Trump revised his executive order on March 6, 2017 where he temporarily suspends the U.S. refugee program, forming barriers on the issuance of new visas to the citizens of six of the previously mentioned seven Muslim majority countries excluding Iraq. Meanwhile he cuts down the refugee admissions to the U.S. from 110,000 to 50,000 in a fiscal year. The revised ban exempts current visa holders and the ones who held visas at the time original ban was implemented.⁶⁶ It's not so hard to guess that this step would not be welcomed by a Muslim majority country like Turkey and further, it might be argued that upcoming policies in the same direction would cause unease on Turkey's side.

Despite of its relatively lesser importance compared to urgent security issues, the economy has a considerable place in the relationship between the two countries. Trump's withdrawal from Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) would lead Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership's (TTIP) turn to come. Since negotiations began in 2013, Turkey's efforts to be part of TTIP obtained no result. If the negotiations would arrive at the conclusion as discussed under Obama administration, American goods would enter Turkey's market with zero customs tax while Turkey's goods are to be applied a customs tax which would lead \$3-5 billion to Turkey's disadvantage as a result of loss of commerce.⁶⁷ However, there are strong signals that Trump would position U.S. against TTIP.⁶⁸ Although it needs endorsement by the President to be implemented, Trump's Director of White House National Trade Council' comment on TTIP as a multilateral trade agreement and his remark that it is dead, means a lot.⁶⁹ Moreover for 2015, U.S.' sorting in Turkey's export list was 5th with \$6.4 billion whereas Turkey's imports from U.S. was worth \$11.13 billion account for 5.4 percent of its total imports. With a comparative perspective, Turkey's trade volume with 508 million inhabitants of EU is \$147.2 billion whereas its overall activities with U.S. of 325 million inhabitants constitute \$17.13 billion. These figures show that there are a lot to accomplish to develop the economic

Trump's decision to move the American embassy from its 68-year home Tel Aviv to Jerusalem would not only contribute to leaving the Arab-Israel problem unsettled but also contravene with Turkey's stance in the affair

relations between the two in the new term⁷⁰ Since the economic figures are inevitably depend on political developments, U.S. and Turkey should take a great care in forming their policies to promote the relations. Within this scope, Turkey's firm stance in the Palestinian Problem may conflict with U.S.' apparent backing of Israel at the cost of disregarding rights of Palestinians completely. Trump's decision to move the American embassy from its 68-year home Tel Aviv to Jerusalem would not only contribute to leaving the Arab-Israel problem unsettled but also contravene with Turkey's stance in the affair. In view of such limited information due to Donald Trump's taking office newly, it may be argued that the objects at issue in the Obama term are still on the table.

President Trump took office in a critical era where the long-term fluctuating course of Turkish-American relations remains delicate. However, the seeming subjects of disputes are surmountable. The Trump administration and Turkey have adequate instruments to comfortably promote the bilateral relations and make the Turkish-American relations relatively smooth if not 'great again.' ■

Endnotes

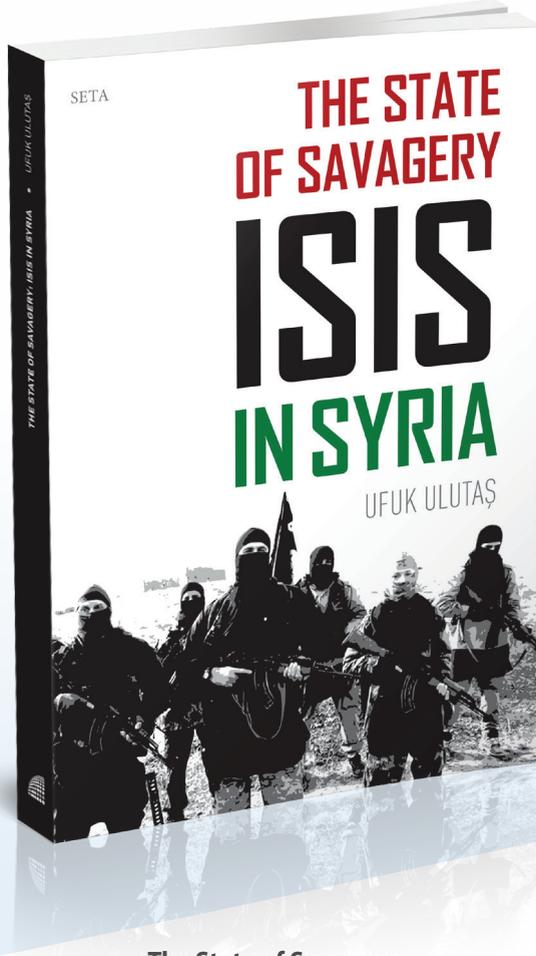
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