Section H

THE INFLUENCE OF DAVUTOĞLU ON US–TURKISH RELATIONS: CRISIS AND RAPPROCHEMENT?

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I. Introduction

The history of US–Turkish relations, since the end of World War II, has had many fluctuations, from the accession of Turkey into NATO, to its refusal to participate in the 2003 war in Iraq.

During the Cold War era, the relations of the two countries went from a period of smoothness and stability, to a long phase of doubt, commencing with the withdrawal of Jupiter missiles from Turkey’s NE frontier during the 1962 Cuba crisis, and continuing with the letter of President Johnson in 1964 and his indirect prohibition to Turkey to intervene in Cyprus, and with the imposition of an embargo in the sales of US weapons in 1974, after the Turkish invasion in Cyprus and the occupation of approximately 36 percent of the island. A period of relative stability would follow, which is of course related to the radical political changes in Turkey, during and after the military coup of September 12, 1980, as well as to the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran, the fall of the Reza Shah Pahlavi regime and the loss probably the most important ally of the US, in the oil-rich region of the Persian Gulf. The Carter doctrine, of January 23, 1980, came on the aftermath of the 1979 Soviet invasion in Afghanistan and the loss of Iran, and was mainly targeting the protection of US interests in the Gulf. Consequently, Turkey was upgraded in the geopolitical plans of the US.

In the decades following the end of WWII, it is accepted that probably the most important factor of formation of the relations between the two allies, was the US foreign policy in the Eastern Mediterranean and, more importantly, in the Middle East. The rise of anti-Americanism, following the turmoil resulting from the publication of the Johnson letter and the weapons embargo of 1974,
did not suffice to change the US dominant position in the US–Turkish relations, despite the fact that the governments in Turkey had realised that their ally was not willing to adapt the planning of its foreign policy in the region in order to face Turkey's challenges and concerns in the Cold War years. Turkish diplomacy has expanded its scope and interests since 1967, with some very cautious steps towards Moscow, such as the signing of an economic cooperation agreement during the same year, and the 1972 Declaration on the Principles of Good Neighbourhood and Cooperation. This partial rewarming of relations between the two countries continued until 1979, when it was halted following the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan.

The collapse of the Warsaw pact was a factor of radical change in the geopolitics of the Middle East, and beyond. Turkey did not share borders with the Soviet Union any more, because the breakup of the latter created new states in the region of Caucasus. On its southern border, the geopolitical balances had also changed: Syria, a traditional ally to the USSR in the Cold War period mainly because of its rivalry with Israel lost the support it had so long enjoyed by the former superpower. Iraq found itself amidst a swirl of events, that started many years before the collapse of the Soviet Union, with the 1979 Islamic revolution in neighbouring Iran, and subsequently with the 19801988 war and the wars that erupted in 1991 and in 2003.

Beyond all these geographical and political changes, an important element is that the US–Turkey relation during the Cold War was carved on their common concern for the danger emanating from the Soviet Union, which is now eliminated. The relation of the two countries was unidimensional, as it had focused on the aspect of security, and had left no margin for discord. Turkey had realised Stalin's intentions, already during the summer of 1945, to control the Straits and the cities of Kars and Ardahan. This was a move that substantially annulled the 1925 Non–Aggression Pact between Russia and Turkey. The eventuality of a Soviet descent into the Mediterranean and the Middle East was unacceptable for US interests, and the policy of Washington was earmarked with the Marshall Plan and the Truman Doctrine, i.e. the milestones of the commencement of the substantial relations between the US and Turkey.

During the Cold War period, the rapprochement between the US develops radically, initially in a positive context, with its most important elements being Turkey's involvement in the Korean war in 1950 and its accession to NATO in 1952, as well as its participation in the 1955 Baghdad Pact (Central Treaty Organisation/Middle East Treaty Organisation). In 1962 already, the first elements substantiating the reversal of the positive climate make their appearance, with a series of events that influenced the two countries' relations, directly or indirectly. The most important of these is the missile crisis in Cuba.

During the post–Cold War period, the US–Turkish relations oscillate between the two extremes, i.e. from the full support in the 1991 Gulf War, to Turkey's refusal to take part in the 2003 war on Iraq. It is noteworthy that the two diametrically opposed policies were the result of different Turkish governments, with a different political orientation, yet their aim was substantially the same: to reinforce Turkey’s role in its greater region. The only difference is that, since 2003, Turkey's aim to be consolidated as a regional power is expanded. This remark is certainly a reasonable choice for any country that respects itself. It is, however, worthy to note the approach to this target during Alp’s administration, i.e. a stance largely attributed to the Advisor on foreign policy affairs, and since 2009 Foreign Minister, A. Davutoğlu.

II. Davutoğlu's approach to Turkey's foreign policy

The new approach introduced by A. Davutoğlu since 2002, as it is presented in his book “Strategic Depth” has been characterised as neo-Ottoman by many analysts and revises, to a significant extent, the axes of the country's foreign policy, that were previously dominated by the American factor. Based on Davutoğlu’s approach, Turkey's foreign policy since 2002 has been targeting the reasoning of “zero problems with its neighbours”.

He cultivates new friendships with the Arab countries and Iran, through trade, energy and financial aid, seeks solutions to the problem of the Armenian genocide and criticises Israel. He rejects the role of bridge between Islam and the Western world, which Turkey has played for decades, since he considers that substantially, it promotes interests and policies of other countries. Exercising influence in the Balkans and the Middle East is not a satisfactory option for the Turk scholar, because he considers that Turkey’s dynamism, that emanates from its historical background, its geographical location and its rapid economic development, cannot be consolidated in a central, not regional, role, by including Caucasus, Central Asia, the Gulf, the Caspian Sea, Eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea, in its zones of influence [1]. A. Davutoğlu holds that Turkey's policy in the geopolitical zones surrounding it had been erroneous during the Cold War. Moreover, he is convinced that the country’s new

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strategy, that is based on claiming its own interests, will make Turkey more, and not less, attractive, both in the region and in the West [2].

Turkey's foreign policy cannot be studied exclusively in terms of its American parameter, based on the inextricable link between the US–Turkish relations and the policy of the US in the geographical zones influenced by Turkey. The policies adopted on either sides of the Ankara–Washington axis, in the context of the above geopolitical space, affect also their bilateral relation. As long as there was a parallel or identical policy, exercised by the governments of Turkey and the US, such as e.g. during the Cold War period, when security was the main aspect of their relation, there was stability. The relations between the two countries begin to fluctuate, as soon as their approaches to the Middle East diverge.

A. Davutoğlu considers that the US–Turkey relation is a particular kind of state relation, and not a simple strategic relation. Turkey's geopolitical position is in the epicentre of a series of challenges that are of concern for the US strategy. The US needs allies in Africa and in Eurasia, while Turkey needs the cooperation of a world power [3]. Consequently, according to A. Davutoğlu's vision, Ankara can be placed as a mediating node between Washington and the countries of the Middle East, by fully upgrading its international geostrategic role and by obtaining the appropriate offsets from the US [4].

III. Factors affecting the US–Turkey bilateral relations

The bilateral relation between the US and Turkey is shaped by a series of factors, with political, economic, geographical and strategic traits. One of the most important factors, is fluidity in the Middle East, i.e. a region with particular strategic and economic significance for Washington, and with an intense activity on the part of Ankara, ever since 2002. The turn in Turkey's foreign policy is in many respects apparent in the rupture of the US–Turkish relations in 2003, and the American invasion in Iraq, when, based on Washington's plans, Turkey would assume a nodal role [5].

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5 After Turkey's refusal to allow the installation of 62,000 American soldiers on Turkish soil, on March 1, 2003, the comment of the US Deputy Secretary of State, Paul Wolfowitz, that the Turkish refusal was a “major mistake”, proves the significance attributed by the US State Department to the role of Turkey, as the starting point of the operations on the northern front against Iraq. Even when later Ankara decided
IV. Israel

During the Cold War, Ankara's relation with Tel Aviv was shaped as a function of the US policy in the Middle East, and of the equidistant policy of Turkey on the Palestinian issue. A change of course is observed in the post–Cold War period, initially with the conclusion of the Defence Cooperation Protocol, during S. Demirel's administration, in 1994 with the Security and Secrecy Agreement (SSA), at the time of T. Çiller, in 1996 with the Military Training and Cooperation Agreement (MTCA) and the agreement on cooperation in the military industry, and in 2000, with the Free Trade Agreement. The reference points of this alliance are to be found in Ankara, in Tel Aviv and in Washington. A basic aim of the former was to exercise influence on the latter, through Israel and its close ties with the US.

The rise of AKP to power has brought about changes to the approach of the bilateral relation, as a result of Davutoğlu's policy, which was based on the minimum postulates of the Turkish–Israeli alliance of the previous decade in Turkish society, so as to support the toppling of the policies of previous governments in the interior political scene. The shift of the 1990s was relied on the armed forces and on the common concerns for security, not on public feeling [6]. The election of a strong government, with a different political agenda in 2002, and the gradual weakening of the military establishment, created the conditions for the cancellation of the close Turkish–Israeli cooperation.

The approach of Turk Foreign Minister, revolving around the axis of the reinforcement of Turkey's role in the Middle East, aims to achieve Turkey's active involvement in the efforts to resolve the Palestinian issue. This is apparent also in Turkey's mediation between Syria and Israel, in 2008. Israel's concern for the rising influence of Tehran in Damascus, Syria's wish to return the Golan Heights, that have been occupied by Israel since 1967, and its effort to rewarm its relations with Washington something that could be achieved through Tel Aviv has led Turkey to try to bring the two countries to the discussions table, as part of its effort to emerge as a key country in the issues of the region.

The Israeli attack on Gaza in 2008, amidst Turkish efforts to mediate between Syria and Israel, exasperated Turkey's PM, R.T. Erdoğan. This fact, combined with his reaction against the Israeli President Shimon Peres, during

the discussions on Gaza, in the margin of the meetings of the World Economic Forum in January, 2009 [7], and following the new Israeli operations in Gaza against Hamas, has brought new tension to the relations of the two countries. Furthermore, the Turk Foreign Minister A. Davutoğlu has stated that Turkey does not wish to be assumed as cooperating with Israel in military matters, as long as the latter bombs the Gaza Strip [8]. Israel's reaction to the outburst of the Turk PM was restrained, based on the assumption that the strategic cooperation between the two countries exceeds the policy of Erdoğan. Despite the above, Ankara did not invite Tel Aviv to the international military exercise "Anatolian Eagle" of October, 2009, even though Israel had taken part in the event during the previous years. This resulted in Italy and the US cancelling their participation, and thus obliging Ankara to execute the exercise on a national level.

A further escalation of tensions in the two countries' relations is observed also since 2010, with the intervention of the Israeli special forces in the "flotilla" heading to Gaza, and the concomitant death of ten Turkish activists aboard the "Mavi Marmara", as well as the recent natural gas explorations, between Cyprus and Israel, following the demarcation of the Exclusive Economic Zone of each country, at the end of the year.

The recent events virtually fuelled the already turbulent relation between Turkey and Israel, without however being the main axis of the problem. Turkey's opening to the Arab, and more widely to the Muslim world, has somehow imposed the degradation of the Turkish–Israeli relation, which in the 1990s was characterised by close ties of cooperation, mainly in the military and economic domains. Ahmet Davutoğlu, based on his perception that Turkey influences a wider geopolitical space round its borders, and on the basis of AKP's ideological background, has proceeded to political openings to the Arab countries. This change of policy requires Turkey's balancing, between its new political allies and Israel, a country with which it had important economic and military agreements, until the beginning of the previous decade, either indirectly, because of its long-term pro-Western attitude, or directly, mainly since the 1990s. It would be difficult to maintain this balance, since Turkey's new foreign policy targets an active involvement in the issues of the Middle East, particularly in the Palestinian issue, where the Muslim countries of the Middle East, and Israel, support diametrically opposite views. It might be assumed that the degradation of the Turkish–Israeli relations is a political preference of Ankara,

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rather than the consequence of events during the last three years. The substantial aim of the Turk Foreign Minister is to substantially release his country from Israel, so that Turkey can convince the Arab and Muslim countries on the content of its rapprochement towards them, on the one hand, and so that it can emerge as a leading power in the region, capable of representing the countries' rights, on the other. Since 2000, this is Mr. Davutoğlu's preferable policy, in his book *The Strategic Depth*. 

V. Iraq

Turkey's policy vis-a-vis Iraq has gone through many different stages during the last 30 years: three wars have erupted, changes to the political leadership of Iraq have taken place, there have been important political developments in Turkey's interior and in bilateral issues, e.g. the Kurdish issue, the issue of water and energy.

The policy of neutrality in the eight-year war between Iran and Iraq has turned out to be an appropriate option for Turkey, given its significant financial profit from its relations with the two countries. The governments, both in Baghdad and in Tehran, aimed at enhancing their economic relations with Ankara, so as to ensure its neutrality and safeguard the export routes for their oil and the import routes for weapons. Against this backdrop, Turkey increased its strategic importance in the region [9].

During the 1991 Gulf War, Turkey concurred with the alliance of the UN against the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait, cooperated with the American administration by ceding the base of Incirlik and took part in “Operation Provide Comfort”. The change of stance, in 2003, and its refusal to participate in the War on Iraq, is attributed to the new strategy of the Turkish foreign policy, as it is expressed by A. Davutoğlu.

Ankara’s refusal to take part in the military operations, in any way whatsoever, exasperated the Republican administration in Washington, as it considered that the Turkish government had misled it, by implying that it would actively support the US operations in Iraq. This position is rejected by the Turkish side, given that during the meeting of the two countries’ Foreign Ministers, Colin Powell and Abdullah Gül, which took place in Davos, approximately two months prior to the negative vote of the Turkish National Assembly of March 1, 2003 with regard to the country's participation in the war on Iraq, the then advisor of PM R.T. Erdoğan is said to have warned the American Sec-

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retary of State on the eventuality of the relevant resolution being rejected by the parliament [10].

For Turkey, the US expedition in Iraq was a double challenge, given that, on the one hand, it would be difficult for Ankara to manage, politically, a war on its southern borders between an Arab country and the US (a country not quite being accepted in the region), on the level of the new Turkish policy in the Middle East, as coined by A. Davutoğlu. Moreover, such a war would create new negative perspectives for Turkey’s interests in the Kurdish issue. Ankara was not sympathetic to S. Hussein; on the contrary, according to St. Larrabee, political circles in Ankara considered him to be a brutal dictator. Despite all this, Turkey wished Iraq’s unity, which had been ensured by the Iraqi leader for decades, and closed its eyes to his methods of imposing his interior policy [11]. The American invasion, aimed at overthrowing Saddam’s regime, created the conditions for a sharp increase of religious divisive violence in the country, and of Kurdish nationalism, resulting in the future division of Iraq, while a Kurdish state on the northern part of the country, seems very probable [12]. Such a perspective has alarmed Ankara, because of the serious and long-lasting problems it faces from Kurdish nationalism, which are due also to its chronic harsh policy towards its Kurdish population. It is therefore characteristic that the unilateral truce, on the part of the Kurdish separatists of Turkey, that followed the arrest of the organisation’s ideological and operational leader in 1999, was raised in 2004 and the PKK, now named Kongra–Gel, relaunched its attacks on Turkish territory, being based on territories of Iraqi Kurdistan. Part of the responsibility for this development is with the Turkish governments that failed to use this five-year period of truce to proceed to initiate a serious dialogue, along with substantial changes, to address the problem. Turkey has repeatedly requested, either the US intervention to cease the activity of the PKK, or the permission to proceed alone to cleansing operations in Northern Iraq, against the bases of the Kurdish organisation. Washington was negative in taking some operational initiative against the PKK, on the one hand because it was unable to deploy troops, and on the other, mainly because it did not want to destabilise Northern Iraq, i.e. a region that was more stable compared


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to other parts of the country. Moreover, the Kurds were the most loyal allies of the US in its mission against Iraq, and an eventual loss of the Kurdish support would derail the effort for the emergence of a unified and stable Iraqi state [13]. The American stance did not help in mitigating the increasing suspicion of the Turkish society vis-a-vis the intentions of the US for Northern Iraq, even though successive governments in Washington have stressed that they do not wish its breakup [14]. Even when the Turkish troops penetrated Northern Iraq in February, 2008, the public opinion in Turkey did not seem to relieve some of its anti-Americanism, which had been intensified in 2003, when polls showed that the opposition to the US invasion in Iraq had reached almost 90 percent.

Resolution 688 of the UN Security Council, and the launch of the “Operation Provide Comfort” in 1991, led to the retreat, not only of the military forces of S. Hussein, but also to the breakdown of the entire mechanism of the state, triggered in Northern Iraq, and to the creation of a political and administrative void, in an effort of the regime to exercise pressure on the Kurdish population [15]. The area was detached from the remaining state, even though it remained in Iraq's sovereignty, Baghdad imposed an economic embargo, trade was suspended and all the banks closed down [16].

The de facto autonomisation of Northern Iraq, after the withdrawal of the state's mechanism from the region in October, 1991, the double embargo in the region (on the one hand of the UN on Iraq, and on the other of Hussein's government on Northern Iraq) and the elections of June 1992 that failed to designate a self-reliant government scheme, were followed by the conflict between the two dominant Kurdish political parties, PUK and KDP, which was terminated with the active intervention of the US and the 1998 Washington Agreement.

The area of Northern Iraq is particularly interesting with regard to the shaping of the US–Turkish relations during the last decade. The negative vote of the Turkish parliament in March, 2003, apart from exasperating the US, raised the status of the role of Iraqi Kurds in the policy of Washington in Iraq. During the 1990s, Turkey had been deploying military operations against the PKK on Iraqi

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soil, without being negatively criticised by the US [17]. This tactic of Washington would not be pursued after upgrading the role of Iraqi Kurds and, what is more, the Kurdish issue was brought once again to the foreground, leaving behind its degrading resulting from the arrest of A. Öcalan in February, 1999 [18]. The intense anti–Americanism of the Turkish society was reinforced with the reinforcement of Iraqi Kurds and the rewarming of the Kurdish issue. To this contributed also the incident of July 4, 2003, when US forces arrested in Sulaymaniyah the members of a special missions party of the Turkish army, on the accusation of conspiracy. Their treatment by the US forces was considered humiliating by the Turkish public opinion, while for some politicians, Washington had deliberately showed its favour to the Kurds of Iraq, and not to its NATO ally.

It is noteworthy also that the AKP’s political stance has substantially boosted the relations between the US and the Kurds in Iraq, because the refusal of the Turkish parliament (where the AKP had the vast majority of votes) to open a northern front in the war in Iraq, has obliged the US to depend on Kurdish groups of combatants [19].

Since the mid2000s, there is an intense entrepreneurial activity, between Ankara and Erbil, the seat of the regional government of Kurdistan (KRG [20]), of the semi-autonomous region of Northern Iraq, particularly after the radical overhaul of the city’s international airport [21]. “Iraq is one of the most important exporting destinations of Turkey’s economy, with an export volume of $7.5 bn., 70 percent of which is directed to Iraqi Kurdistan”, according to the General Consul of Turkey in Erbil, Aydin Selcen [22]. In 2011, it was estimated that a total of 935 Turkish companies were active in Iraqi Kurdistan, mainly in the domains of oil, of natural gas and of constructions. Furthermore, on March 29, R.T. Erdoğan became the first Turkish PM to officially visit the semi-autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan. During his visit, he promoted the increasing bilateral business activities [23].

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17 H.J. Barkey. 2000. Hemmed in by circumstances: Turkey and Iraq since the Gulf war. Middle East Policy. VII.4, 118.
20 Kurdistan Regional Government.
22 See: Kurd.net, "TurkeyKurdistan economic ties strong despite conflict". <www.ekurd.net/mismas/articles/misc2011/10/turkey3491.htm 24.10.2010>
Despite Turkey's business activity in Iraqi Kurdistan, the action of the PKK remains Turkey's most important problem, and it is linked directly to the newly-born state, given that the PKK is active on its territory. In the part, Turkey's foreign policy faced with suspicion the new state, due to the presence of the PKK, fearing that an independent Kurdish state on its SE border might intensify the secession tendencies represented by the PKK in Turkey's interior. The leaders of Iraqi Kurdistan were largely criticised in the past by Turkey's political and military leaders, for inadequately confronting the PKK on the country's territory. This criticism has settled down during the last years, particularly after the creation of the trilateral security committee, with the participation of Turkey, Iraq, and the US, aimed to confront the cessation tendencies in Iraq. Possibly, the Turkish business activity and the diplomatic rapprochement of the two countries may become the basis for resolving the issue of PKK's activity from the soils of Iraqi Kurdistan. Turkish officials who had rejected the leaders of Iraqi Kurds as responsible for “interracial violence”, unofficially accept that part of the solution of the Kurdish issue may lie in the cooperation with Iraqi Kurds. Even the recently jailed, former leader of Turkey's armed forces, İlker Başbuğ, has admitted that Turkey's military power alone, would not resolve the country's Kurdish issue [24]. Moreover, the policy of seclusion of the Kurds of Iraq is both ineffective and contrary to the principles of a new Turkish foreign policy advocated by A. Davutoğlu.

VI. Syria

Syria's relations with Turkey have been dominated, during the last 25 years approximately, by the Kurdish issue, and by the issue of the distribution of the waters of rivers Tigris and Euphrates, by Turkey's relation with the North Atlantic Alliance, with the US and its policy in the Middle East, as well as with Israel. The close ties between Turkey and Israel, during the 1990s, have rooted alliances against Turkey, which have comprised Iran, Syria, Greece and Armenia [25].

The loss of Hatay has been a point of friction between the two countries, without however creating particular tensions. Since 2000, the current President, Bashar al-Assad, son of Syria's leader, Hafiz al-Assad, has gradually reduced this Hatay-related tension, on the part of Syria. In early 2005, the Turk President Ahmet Necdet Sezer and prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan have paid

official visits to Syria and obtained a statement from the Syrian authorities, that they have no more claims on Turkey's sovereignty in Hatay.

During the wars of 1991 and 2003, the courses of Turkey and Syria run parallel: both countries participated in the alliance of UN countries against the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait in 1991 [26], while during the war of 2003, to which Turkey was negative, Syria had declared its support to Iraq, even before the start of the war, and had shown its opposition to the policy of the US and its allies. The exchange for this stance was diplomatic isolation, and indirect threats from Washington for invasion, if it failed to effectively secure its borders with Iraq, so as to prevent the passage of combatants and to reduce arms smuggling. Moreover, in 2005, it was obliged to withdraw its troops from Lebanon, while before that, it had been accused of the murder of the country's prime minister, R. Hariri. Since October 20, 1998, Turkey and Syria have jointly signed the Adana Agreement, with which Damascus recognised PKK as a terrorist organisation, and committed to cease all provisions of aid to it and to expel its leader, A. Öçalan [27].

Syria's relation with the US and Turkey have in the past been ranging from unstable, to tense, culminating in the 2002 war, when J.R. Bolton, then high-ranked official of the State Department, included Syria among the countries of the so-called "Axis of evil", the governments of which foment terrorism and seek weapons of mass destruction. Since 2003, a gradual change is observed in the relations between Turkey and Syria, that is mainly due to Turkey's refusal to take part in the War on Iraq. Damascus held that Syria was not acting independently, following orders from Washington instead. Ankara's stance in 2003 led the Syrian leaders to revise this stance, and in 2004, the two countries signed a free trade agreement. In 2005, the issue of Hatay was resolved definitely, and in 2008 Ankara assumed the role of mediator in the conflict between Syria and Israel, on the issue of the Golan Heights. The dialogue process was abandoned, after only four rounds, due to the sharp deterioration of the Turkish–Israeli relations. The conflict between Turkey and Israel improved even further the bilateral relations between Ankara and Damascus, and until 2010, the two countries reinforced their diplomatic ties and commenced a military

26 Syria took part in the war with 17,000 soldiers and 300 T62 tanks. See: http://www.desertstorm.com. The reasons for which Damascus turned against Iraq in 1991, are mainly bilateral and are limited to the level of antagonism for exercising influence in the region of the Middle East. During the Iran–Iraq war, Syria allied with Iran and, after the end of the war, Baghdad supported General Michel Aoun, a main opponent of Syria in Lebanon. The Iraqi invasion in Kuwait was Syria's chance for countermeasures to Iraq's stance in Lebanon, while at the same time, Damascus would not allow Baghdad to achieve its aim, as it would drastically increase its influence in the region, to the detriment of Syria.

cooperation, by executing a 3-day military exercise, in April 2006. The culmination of this rapprochement has been the exchange of visits of the presidents of the two countries, in 2007 and 2009. Until 2010, their bilateral relations continue to improve. However, the start of riots in Syria, in the context of the “Arab spring”, in early 2011, resulted in the first frictions in the Turkish-Syrian relation. Before the summer, Ankara had toughened its stance towards Damascus, and by the end of the year, the political crisis in Syria resulted in a humanitarian crisis, given that 7,500 citizens had found refuge in Hatay and that, moreover, the UN estimate that at least 3,500 had been assassinated by the government forces. Ankara, aligning with the Arab League, has discontinued its relations with Damascus, intensifying the country’s international isolation, and demanded the resignation of president Assad, warning that if the death toll of protesters continued, it would adopt even harder measures [28].

VII. Iran

Turkey's relations with Iran had been calm, during most part of the 20th century, and until the 1979 Islamic Revolution. The main factors shaping their relations were, and still are, Turkey’s relation with the US, the Kurdish issue, and more recently, the differentiation of their approach to the uprising in Syria and Turkey’s resolution to install early warning radar systems on its territory, in the context of the NATO defence shield.

The fall of the regime of Reza Shah Pahlavi and the collapse of relations with Washington, the Iran-Iraq war and the wars on Iraq have substantially influenced the bilateral relations between Ankara and Tehran. Ankara's first steps towards Iran are observed during the rule of the Prosperity Party of N. Erbakan, with the agreement for the purchase of Iranian natural gas in 1996. In 2005, the volume of the bilateral trade reached $4 bn., and Turkey plans to invest $12 bn. for producing natural gas in Iranian deposits.

The two countries’ relations are not limited to trade, but are extended also on a political level. Turkey aims to assume an active mediating role in the dispute between Tehran and the West, in relation to the nuclear programme of the former. The persistent Kurdish issue is also on the agenda, with commitments for joint action against the PKK.

An important element that already causes cracks in their relations, is the regional role at which both countries aim in the Middle East. The so-called “Arab spring” has created the canvas for the projection of the different models

represented by the two neighbours, vis–a–vis the Arab countries that are experiencing dramatic political and social change. This, combined with Turkey's decision to install NATO's early warning radar systems, have caused serious problems in the bilateral relations of the two countries, particularly following the warnings of high–ranked Iranian officials towards Turkey, to abandon its policy towards the countries of the Arab Spring, which they consider to be dictated by the US, underlining Turkey's demand for the resignation of Syria's president Basher al–Assad and the projection of the Turkish model on the countries of Northern Africa, during the visits of Turkey's PM R.T. Erdoğan [29]. Moreover, Tehran reacted to the installation of the NATO radar system, condemned the Turkish decision, as witnesses the statement the country's leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and high–ranked military and political leaders warned Ankara that its stance would not be without consequences [30].

Based on the facts, Turkey seems to be re–adapting its policy and reducing its distance from the US, without being fully aligned with it, as it maintains important commercial agreements with Iran, an issue for which it is still being strongly criticised by Washington. In any case, it is apparent that after Israel, Ankara is rupturing its relations with Iran and this development is an oxy–moron in the Middle East.

VIII. Armenia

Turkish–Armenian relations date since 1991, and Armenia's independence. The dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan for the contended region of Nagorno–Karabakh has played a nodal role, and in 1993, Turkey closed its borders with Armenia, supporting Azerbaijan in the dispute, a country with which it maintains historic, cultural and linguistic ties. Particularly important in this context is the issue of the recognition of the Armenian genocide by the Ottoman empire in 1915, which Turkey denies.

The assassination of Hrant Dink, a journalist of Armenian descent, in Istanbul in 2007, by a 17year old Turkish nationalist has triggered the commencement of diplomatic efforts for stabilising the relations between the two countries. In September 2008, Abdullah Gül became the first Turkish president to pay an official visit to Armenia [31], and in 2009, under the pressure of the US

29 Hürriyet Daily News, "Iran tells Turkey to change tack or face trouble". <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/default.aspx?pageid=438&n=irantellstur-keychangetackorfacetrouble20111009 retrieved on 09.012012>
31 "Gül in landmark visit to Armenia" BBC News.

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President B. Obama, the foreign ministers A. Davutoğlu and Edward Nalbandian signed an agreement for establishing diplomatic relations, which however was not ratified by the corresponding parliaments the Turkish side had stated that it would ratify the agreement only if the Nagorno Karabakh were to be resolved, requesting the withdrawal of Armenian troops. The contacts froze and the Armenian side, on its part, also suspended the ratification process. The smoothing process was to be short–lived, and the oscillations of the issue of the Armenian genocide continued in 2007 and in 2010, when the foreign affairs committee of the US Congress voted for the recognition of the Armenian genocide, despite the opposition of president G.W. Bush and B. Obama. Ankara's reaction was intense, putting the blame on US governments. However, a significant role in the voting of the proposal was played by the influence exercised by NGOs and the national lobbies in the Congress, which Ankara is unable to understand.

IX. Conclusions

By the end of the 1990s, the US–Turkish relations had already experienced the end of the Cold War and the Gulf War. Given the Cold–war reasoning on which their relations were based, their cooperation had to be adjusted to a significant extent. Despite all this, by emphasising and focusing on different issues, and considering the strategic importance surrounding Turkey, the adjustment to the new variables has been a smooth process, despite differences in specific issues.

The rise to power of AKP in 2002, and the adoption of the new foreign policy, has marked a radical change in the approach of Turkey's bilateral relations with its neighbouring countries. The Cold War–minded, conventional reasoning that Turkey is surrounded by hostile countries [32] and must be therefore ready to confront them, has been substituted by the approach of “zero problems with [the country's] neighbours”, redefining the context of addressing its neighbouring countries by means of cooperation instead of conflict. However, Davutoğlu's approach, despite its initial success, particularly with regard to Syria, Armenia and Iran, has lost its dynamic, and the improvement of its relations with these countries has been decelerated, frozen and eventually suspended, in the final analysis.

The elimination of the Soviet factor, that prevailed in the Cold War relation between Ankara and Washington, has reversed the unidimensional Cold War–
minded US–Turkish relation. The transition to the post–Cold War period and Turkey's quest for a new role is impeded by a series of factors that gradually put the two countries on slightly diverging courses. The increase of influence of the human rights protection and arms control groups in the Congress and the Senate during the 1990s, has inflated the pressures on Turkey to modify its exclusively military solution of the Kurdish issue, implemented since the establishment of the state and, further, it has also hampered the possibility for its military reinforcement against the PKK. The establishment of the semi-autonomous Kurdish state in Northern Iraq has always been for Turkey a probable risk to its territorial sovereignty. Consequently, any support of this cause by the US, was considered by Ankara as an effort to weaken Turkey \[33\]. Moreover, its effort to converge with Iran and Syria, since 2002, when these countries constituted for the US the so–called “Axis of evil” and the collapse of the Turkish–Israeli relations, has inflated the differences existing already with regard to their confrontation. A further factor is the issue of the recognition of the Armenian genocide, which was voted twice by the Foreign Affairs Committee of the US Congress, in 2007 and in 2010, despite the opposition of the White House on both occasions, exasperating Ankara.

The influence of AKP's governments on the US–Turkish relations is obvious, owing to the implementation of A. Davutoğlu's rhetoric. The crisis in their bilateral relations should not be attributed exclusively to the post2002 period: its first indications appear already in the 1990s. However, the radical turn of Turkey's foreign policy, particularly in the geopolitical region to which it belongs, has been catalytic. Also, the divergence between Ankara and Washington, in a period that has been particularly important for the US policy in the Middle East, was recently expanded. There are, however, many reasons for which the strategic cooperation will be pursued. Turkey's role in the Middle East, its cooperation with the countries having energy resources in Central Asia, and its relation with the EU, make it attractive in Washington, particularly during a period of instability in the region, owing to the dissolution of the old regimes in countries that are pivotal in the region, e.g. Egypt, Libya and Syria.

The failure of the policy of “zero problems with the neighbours”, advocated by A. Davutoğlu, will lead Turkey towards different approaches to the respective countries, and to a reduction of the divergence in the policies of Ankara and Washington.


*Civitas Gentium* 3:1 (2013)