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Ambassador Robert P. Finn

Senior Research Associate, Liechtenstein Institute on Self-Determination

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Ambassador Robert P. Finn, Ph.D.

Former United States Ambassador to Afghanistan

LISD Senior Research Associate

Ambassador Finn is currently Senior Research Associate at the Liechtenstein Institute on Self-Determination and Lecturer in the Department of Near Eastern Studies at Princeton University. Prior to this he was the Ertegun Visiting Professor of Turcology at Princeton University from 2003-2005. He served as the first U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan in more than 20 years, from March 2002 until August 2003. He served as U.S. Ambassador to Tajikistan from 1998-2001 and his other diplomatic postings include Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir, Turkey; Lahore, Pakistan; and Zagreb, Croatia. He opened the U.S. Embassy in Azerbaijan in 1992. Ambassador Finn is the author of the book *The Early Turkish Novel*, which has been published both in English and Turkish. His poems and translations have appeared in the United States, Turkey, France and Pakistan. He reads in more than ten languages. He holds a B.A. in American Literature and European History from St. John's University, an M.A. in Near Eastern Studies from New York University, and an M.A. and Ph.D in Near Eastern Studies from Princeton University. He was a Peace Corps volunteer in Turkey and a Fulbright scholar at Istanbul University.

Telephone 609.258.2011

Facsimile 609.258.5196

finn@princeton.edu

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The double helix of DNA winds and turns, sometimes narrowing and seemingly flipping, sometimes widening, but always connected by an interstice of sugar. The two strands of DNA are anti-parallel, in that they run in opposite directions. The current relations between Turkey and the U.S. seem to resemble that somewhat. The relationship is laden with question marks. Where is Turkey going? Who will be its friends? How do we get Turkey and Israel to repair their relations? What about Turkey and the PLO? Where is the “model partnership” that both governments speak about? There are many questions, and few clear answers.

Turkey’s Prime Minister Erdoğan recently returned from a triumphant tour of North Africa, where he was greeted in Egypt like a rock star. His reputation has grown steadily over the last few years as he has parlayed Islamist sympathies and anti-Israeli rhetoric into popular acclaim. In what many call a neo-Ottoman mode, evoking the glories of the past, Erdoğan said after his election victory last June, “Sarajevo won today as much as Istanbul; Beirut won as much as Izmir; Damascus won as much as Ankara; Ramallah, Nablus, Jenin, the West Bank, Jerusalem won as much as Diyarbakir.” If one recalls the dual nature of the Ottoman state, where the ruler was both temporal ruler of citizens from many different ethnic groups and religions and Caliph, spiritual head of the Islamic world community, the statement takes on new poignancy. But things constantly change, and Erdoğan, a pragmatic politician, surprised many both in Turkey and abroad by his call for secularism along with democracy while in Egypt. In another new development, his foreign minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu, gave a press interview in late September in which he forecast a new close union between Turkey and Egypt that will create an axis of democracy in the Middle East. Turkey, like the United States, was caught unawares by the Arab spring and initially supported the old regimes in both Libya and Syria. The Turks, however have successfully regrouped and maintained their popular lead in the region, while the U.S. still seems to playing catch up.

The Middle East is one area where these two close allies appear no longer to be working in the close cooperation that seemed to have existed since the end of the Second World War and the Marshall Plan and NATO made Turkey the forward castle of the west. In reality, there have been problems all along, many of them much more apparent to people in Turkey than to those in America. Long term irritants, some insensitive behavior on perhaps both sides and some historical realities have colored bilateral relations and continue to influence the relationship.

A quick walk down memory lane will help us to know these things. For most Americans who follow these things, the U.S.-Turkish relationship begins with the Marshall Plan. But for Turks, it goes back farther. Our first military actions were against the Barbary States of North Africa in the early nineteenth century, commemorated in the “shores of Tripoli” in the Marine Corps

hymn. Those states were nominally part of the Ottoman Empire. More importantly for Turks, American missionaries were very active in the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century. Their legacy includes the American universities in Beirut and Cairo and Robert College in Istanbul, still the leading secondary school in Turkey. A century ago, upwards of ten percent of the schoolchildren in what is now Turkey attended these schools, which attracted mostly students from the Christian minorities. The schools left a suspicion of missionary activities which still persists in Turkish public opinion.

At the end of the First World War, many people in Turkey wanted to have an American mandate for Turkey. The U.S. had not declared war on the Ottoman Empire. The 1920 Treaty of Sevres divided up the defeated empire and envisioned an independent Kurdistan and Armenia in eastern Anatolia. That did not happen, because of the Turkish War of Independence, but many Turks suspect that Western powers, including the U.S., still want to divide up Turkey. Our relations with Turkey must bear this concern in mind.

The Cold War and Turkish participation in NATO and the UN's mission in Korea had many positive effects on the relationship, which are felt even to this day. Television programs and books recall Turkey's welcome involvement. In the war and the close ties with Korea. As the last Turkish veterans from the war of Independence passed away, Korean War veterans have taken their place in the national symbolism. .

But later there were more problems. Turks recall the 1964 Johnson letter that stopped them from moving into Cyprus and the later arms embargo from 1974 to 1980 after they did move into Cyprus. Perhaps the most damaging occurrence in recent years was the vote over sending coalition forces through Turkey into Iraq in 2003. Through mistakes made by both sides, the Turkish Parliament voted down a proposal to allow Coalition forces access through Turkey. Many in the U.S., particularly in the military, blame the decision for subsequent losses of Coalition lives. When the Turkish parliament later voted to send Turkish peacekeepers into Iraq, the offer was turned down. An incident in 2003 where U.S. forces took Turkish commandos who were in search of Kurdish terrorists into custody in northern Iraq and hooded them is still bitterly remembered in Turkey and constantly mentioned in the media. The depth of the insult to Turks, who use the same word "er" to mean both man and soldier, is one that we can hardly understand.

As anti-American propaganda became more widespread, a film in which the hooding event was portrayed "the Valley of Wolves" was the most widely ever seen film in Turkey, playing in virtually every single movie theater in the country for weeks and months on end. Another propaganda vehicle "Metal Storm" was a 2005 poorly written massive best-seller in which the United States invades Turkey and is only finally stopped by a coalition of Turkey, Russia and

European countries. In 1999, when President Clinton visited Turkey, the US was rated in the high nineties in popularity. Later it descended to only 9 percent, and today it is not much better. In my personal experience, I have gone from being “Ambassador Finn” to “Professor Finn” to “Robert who teaches Turkish literature” to finally “My friend Bob. His family’s Irish.” Notwithstanding that, I must say I have personally been treated only very nicely by Turks. American students studying at Turkish universities last year said that everything was fine until you get into politics, when some of the problems I have just mentioned start to get strident coverage.

Turkey and the United States today meet one another on a whole battery of issues. The United States has been an active supporter of Turkish membership in the European Union for years. In return, Turks appreciated the US’ support in what has become an increasingly protracted process. As the EU has continued to drag its feet on Turkish membership while always citing Turkish failures to accomplish a seemingly never-ending series of goals, Turks have become exasperated with the Europeans, particularly as a number of European states, such as France and Germany, have made it clear they do not want Turkish membership. The result, for our purposes today, has been that Turkish public opinion, which only a few years ago was over 70 percent in favor of EU membership, is now only about 37 percent in favor. US support on the issue, although still appreciated, has become less relevant as the issue itself moves further away from realization.

Critics within Turkey say that the Erdoğan government only wanted to use the possibility of EU membership as a tool to take away the power of Turkey’s military, in which it has been highly successful. For those in Washington who perceived the US-Turkish relationship in terms of NATO and military-to-military relations, this has been another downside. The vote against troop passage and the campaign to diminish military power have both served to mitigate support for Turkey in US security and military circles, which were among the most vocal supporters of Turkey for decades.

The nature of the Erdoğan government itself has become of concern to many in Washington. Highly organized and highly successful, Erdoğan Party of Justice and Progress (AKP) has won three elections, the last with 49 percent of the vote, very high for Turkey. Turkish voting laws give the AKP less than the two-thirds majority it would need to pass constitutional changes in the current parliament, but it clearly has a mandate to govern from half the nation, and it also has a voluble opposition from the other half. The key to AKP’s success has been in grass-roots organization, providing services, jobs and help to ordinary people in a manner reminiscent of old-fashioned American ward politics. The people respond by voting for the party. Ever sensitive to shifts in public opinion, Erdoğan eliminated a number of the more Islamic deputies from his party list last time around, replacing them with nationalists. In his rhetoric during his

African trip, he made calls for secularism and democracy, which resounded well with the crowds in the streets as well as with Washington. In return, Secretary Clinton congratulated the Turkish government for progress on religious freedom on the occasion of issuing the annual report on religious freedom. She said specifically that new rules allowing girls to wear head scarves at universities meant that girls would not have to choose between their religion and their education. It might also mean that some of Turkey's thirty percent very anti-head scarf secular voters might start to tear their own hair out.

Many in Turkey still claim that Erdoğan and his party have a not very well hidden religious agenda reflected, for example, in sumptuary taxes on alcohol and tobacco. Consumption of raki, the Turkish national drink, was down nearly seven percent last year. Shortly after the AKP election successes last spring, municipal workers showed up in trendy sections of Istanbul to remove tables and chairs from large numbers of open air restaurants where people were having dinner. The government says the problem is about space utilization in public areas but critics alleged that the AKP didn't want people to be seen drinking openly during the Islamic month of Ramadan and business in the area is now down 80 percent. Similar stories in the media about gender issues, fasting during Ramadan and religious influence in schools reflect widespread concern...

Another serious problem in Turkey is press freedom and public expression in general. Turkey has some 70 journalists – and many more senior military officers – in prison, some of them held for years with no charges brought against them. Criticism of this by others, including the Council of Europe, often falls on deaf ears. When the US ambassador in Ankara said he didn't understand why the reporters were being held, Prime Minister Erdoğan responded with a broadside about how his daughter how to submit a photo with her face exposed to get a US visa. Criticism of the government in the press becomes more and more muted, as tax laws, corporate acquisitions and day to day pressure cut down on Turks ability to speak freely. With a few exceptions, the press has become fairly anodyne.

In addition, the government acknowledges it listens to 100,000 phones, and most Turks imagine their phone is one of those. (I imagine that my phone in Turkey is one of those.) The arrests of the journalists and over ten percent of general officers, most in connection with a broad-ranging conspiracy called Ergenekon that reminds observers of Soviet-system intimidation, has changed the character of public debate in Turkey, especially since Erdoğan's rough and tumble personal style doesn't leave much room for dialogue. The world got a taste of that in 2009 at Davos when an exasperated Erdoğan told off Israeli Shimon Peres on the stage and then stalked off to receive a hero's welcome when he returned to Turkey. Turkey's strategic partnership with the US, itself changing in the light of regional developments, cannot help but be affected by a perceived decline in personal freedoms in Turkey. Turks on all sides

of the political spectrum agree that a new constitution is necessary to ensure a better level of personal freedom in Turkey, and preliminary talks are underway on this topic. But the writers, the generals and six members of parliament remain in prison

The US-Turkish relationship was strongest under NATO, as Turkey provided the second largest army in NATO and stood on the border with the Soviet Union. Now the situation has changed and Russia is the largest single trading partner with Turkey, while Turkey's is Russia's fifth largest trading partner, with trade at \$40 billion a year. In comparison, Turkey is only the US' 35th trading partner with \$14.8 billion last year. 2.5 million Russians visited Turkey last year, second only to Germans, and visa-free entry will make that number only increase. Turkey and Russia now have what is called a "strategic partnership" with Turkey getting 35 percent of its gas needs from Russia and Russia contracted to build Turkey's first nuclear power plant. When discussing the missile warning radar that Turkey has agreed to place on its soil Foreign Minister Davutoğlu made certain to point out last year at NATO that the radar should not be thought of in conventional NATO terms, but as part of regional security. In the event, the Russians were calmed to some extent, the Iranians not happy and presumably, Israel a little more secure, as the U.S. stated that information gleaned by the radar would be shared with Israel as well as others. U.S. military experts consider the agreement to place the radar the most important agreement since 2003, and one senior administration official was quoted in the New York Times as stating it was the most important agreement in the last 15 to 20 years.

The radar system is designed to guard against Iranian attack. Turkey's relations with Iran, which seemed to be improving rapidly in recent years, with Foreign Minister Davutoğlu's refusal to observe an embargo against Turkey's neighbor. Prime Minister Erdoğan was photographed with Iranian President Ahmadinejad and the Brazilian President in Teheran after they signed an agreement on Ukrainian nuclear issues that sidestepped the United Nations and irritated even Russian President Medvedev by permitting Iran to continue making nuclear fuel. Turkey's close energy and trade relations with Teheran, the visa-free presence of more than a million Iranians in Turkey and numerous other issues have made that relationship problematic for the U.S. and others. Iran seemed pleased when Turkey held its first ever joint military exercises with China this past year. The Turkey-Iran relationship seemed to be a prime problem area between Turkey and the United States.

It would seem that Syria has significantly altered that. Erdoğan and Syria's Assad had become close friends in recent years. Countries which nearly went to war over Kurdish leader Öcalan a decade ago eliminated visas and took down the fences that physically separated them along their long border. Families that had been mostly divided for decades freely moved back and forth. Turkey tried very hard to mediate with Assad, and Erdoğan drew a lot of flak in the Turkish press when he pressed on with his efforts even after conversations with Secretary

Clinton and others. The Turks finally gave up on Assad after his promises for reform and a cessation to the violence fell through for the umpteenth time, Davutoğlu said

Iran was still seen as a supporter of the Assad regime and its bloody crackdown, so when Turkey called a meeting of neighbors to consider what to do about Syria, the Iranians were left out. Iranian-Syrian relations had led Hezbollah into the region via Lebanon and added to the danger to Israel. Turkish ships have been sent into the Eastern Mediterranean because of the question of energy exploration rights in the region, but also perhaps with an eye to the growing presence of Iranian military ships in the area. The Russians have also sent military vessels down to the Mediterranean. Troubles between Israel and Turkey are not limited to the Mavi Marmara problem. Energy explorations which have begun jointly between Cyprus and Israel have been claimed as illegal by Erdoğan. The strategic agreement signed with Egypt may bring another figure to the equation, as Egypt has to work its economic zone with its neighbors as well. A naval clash between Turkey and Israel cannot be ruled out.

Erdoğan's break with Syria, one that the U.S. approves of, may be one more indicator of a growing Sunni-Shia tension in the region. Bernard Haykel, who works on the region, said recently at Princeton that the Saudis have embarked on a strong anti-Iranian, anti-Shia propaganda campaign. You will remember that Saudi Arabia intervened to prevent trouble spreading in Sunni-ruled but Shia-majority Bahrain. The U.S. did not strenuously object, as Bahrain is the home of our Persian Gulf fleet. A regime change in Syria that removed the Alawi minority will create many questions and problems but it may bring in a Sunni regime that could cooperate with a Turkey that is becoming increasingly powerful.

The biggest issue in the region for U.S.-Turkish relations is the case of Israel. Alon Liel, who was Israel charge in Turkey and is now a professor in Israel, was quoted recently as pointing out that both Israel and Turkey have undergone essential governmental transformations that changed them from being ruled by European-oriented secular democratic elites to being ruled by ethno-religious parties. In addition, government policies are being made on the basis of emotions, rather than pragmatic needs. While Erdoğan has persistently engaged in colorful rhetoric on Israel, most recently calling it the "spoiled child of the west," Davutoğlu has been more measured, evoking time and again the long-standing relationship, mutual respect and basic shared values of the two countries, leaving the door open for a deal over the Mavi Marmara issue. In Israeli reporting I have seen claims that the deal was almost completed but was stopped by Foreign Minister Lieberman, a figure at least as inflammatory as Erdoğan.

For the United States, the specter of its two closest allies in the region at loggerheads with one another is distressing, to say the least. President Obama held meetings at the United Nations last week to try to resolve the problem, but could not get Erdoğan to budge on the issue, or on

support for the PLO's membership bid. Israel is becoming more isolated across the board in the Middle East, although its ambassador has returned to Jordan and diplomats have also gone back to Cairo. Nonetheless, there is no guarantee as to what will happen in any of the countries that have been affected by the Arab spring. Revolutions are acts of desperation, and often lead to desperate and unexpected ends. There is no guarantee that the new governments which will take power in the Middle East will be democratic and secular.

The U.S. and Turkey have much in common in the Middle East. Turkey claims better knowledge and presence in the region due to its businessmen and soft power, including glitzy Turkish television novellas that are the rage of the region and cause rage among the Islamic clergy. Its multidimensional relationship with the region has a heavy commercial component, but also pan-Islamist, NATO and Turkish strategic elements. Turkey is feeling itself as a strong regional power with global ambitions. In many areas it has parallel interests with the U.S. and, despite the acrimony, with Israel. It has also concerns about maintaining its popularity as well as its markets in the region. In the end, both the U.S. and Turkey want stability and democracy in the Middle East, but sometimes the double helix of their relations seems truly to be going in anti-parallel directions. The conversations between Turkey and the U.S., already intense, will need to continue and to be carefully structured in this rapidly changing environment.