

Turkey and the United States: Looking Ahead

∴ Washington, 6 Temmuz 2006 **D**istinguished Guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

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It is my great pleasure to be here with you today. This institution has been at the forefront of ground breaking research and intelligent thinking on world affairs. I see it as a distinct privilege to address this gathering of members and guests.

I would like to use this opportunity to share with you my thinking on why I believe that the relationship between the United States and Turkey will continue to gather new strength and force in the years ahead.

Turkey and the United States have been strong allies since decades, and naturally, over the course of nearly sixty years their ties have flourished in many areas, always containing an important defense component. This being so, it is rather what has been taking place at home, in Turkey, that leads me to this conviction:

I am referring to the remarkable pace of reform that, during the last four years or so, brought Turkish democracy to European standards. In all respects, Turkish democracy has deepened thanks to wide-ranging legislative and administrative reforms that encompassed almost every aspect of Turkish citizens' daily life.

This reform movement has two main dimensions:

From the very start, we have recognized the need to couple political reform with economic reform. Indeed, in order to achieve overall success, these

two should go hand in hand. If one lags behind, the other fades away soon after. In our case, the two, namely economic and political reforms were successfully recoupled, each reinforcing the other.

More importantly, Turkey's success has ramifications beyond itself. After all, these reforms having been realized in a Muslim country, make a unique case so far. This is a gift to the World. Because the Turkish experience shows that Islam is compatible with democracy, and because it inspires other Muslim societies as well. Indeed, it attracts the attention of the Islamic countries, and societies, who desire reform and good governance.

Given the heightened expectations in the Muslim World, the many positive effects of these reforms cannot be seen as confined to Turkey alone.

As a matter of fact, I have been quite forthcoming and bold whenever I had the opportunity to address several Islamic platforms like the Organization of the Islamic Conference and other meetings. I was quite vocal about problems of representation; accountability; transparency; gender equality, and more fair distribution of wealth.

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Even before the "Broader Middle East" initiative, I had already been talking openly to the Islamic audiences about the need to put our houses in order and adjust to the realities of our day. Simply put, the requirements of the modern age should not be allowed to evade us any longer.

This is perceived as a sincere and credible message because we, in the first place, never shrank from living up to it.

We have been talking a lot about "common values" that bind us together. My Government did not treat them as mere words on paper, but implemented them in day-to-day politics.

I can understand that there may be quarters who are somewhat worried about the implications of the changes that are taking place in Turkey, and indeed, in the fabric of international relations. They seem to assume that as a result there will arise a rift between Turkey and the United States.

Yet, the case is rather the opposite: Turkey, with stronger democratic attributes, would only be opening up the way for a healthier relationship, ensuring a more substantial and durable partnership in the longer-term. It would also mean a more capable and self-confident partner. As Turkey transforms, it also develops better responses to the challenges of its neighborhood and the broader international community. These responses in turn help us build soft-power on the strength of Turkey's links expanding into regions that are vital to global security. Turkey's growing soft-power is a great asset for Turkey's friends and allies, foremost the United States.

Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

This is why Turkey's democracy is the best guarantee for the future of our relationship.

This is an age of profound change which compels everyone to reassess conventional wisdom and come up with new responses. In fact, we have all been trying to do that. Indeed, the difficulties that we had to undergo could well be seen as by-products of this adaptation process.

The challenge has been nothing less than this:

How to remain aware of and loyal to the fundamental principles and values that have shaped our historic relationship. This, at a time when world politics passes through a difficult transformation that tests almost every other relationship in the world.

Yet, the end-result is more important than how we got there...

The document entitled "Shared Vision and Structured Dialogue to Advance the Turkish-American Strategic Partnership," which I concluded with Secretary Rice yesterday, attests to the fact that we have succeeded in settling into a course toward a more robust and stronger relationship. As we start to substantiate in practice the many areas of cooperation listed in the said document, we will see our partnership grow.

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Our "Shared Vision" covers a wide spectrum of cooperation areas ranging from "promoting peace and stability in the Broader Middle East through democracy;" "settlement of the Arab-Israeli Conflict;" "combating terrorism" to Energy Security, and many other themes which are in fact the burning issues of our times.

One important feature of this document is the "Structured Dialogue" section which incorporates mechanisms that include consultations between respective civil society organizations.

I would therefore encourage that this esteemed institution also plays an active role in strengthening strategic cooperation between Turkey and the United States.

Thank you.