



TURKEY UPDATE

Center for Strategic and International Studies ■ Washington, D.C.

“TURKEY IN EURASIA”

Speech by

Ambassador Unal Cevikoz

Acting Deputy Undersecretary,

Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs

June 20, 2007

CENTER FOR STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

Washington, DC

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today I intend to spend some time reviewing the post 9/11 developments that shape the dynamics in Eurasia. In this frame, I wish to offer some perspectives to discuss the current issues presiding over our agenda in this region.

By and large, I would argue that Eurasia today represents one main challenge to policy makers, scholars, and diplomats alike: *Instability*. Inherent instability in Eurasia thus provides a regional paradigm that is seemingly time immemorial with its beginnings and infinite with its end: *a continuous quest for security and stability*. This trait is now translated into the twenty-first century regional and global political framework. Foreign and security policy formulation overshadowed by factors of instability and unpredictability, then, is a challenging task. We often find ourselves engaged in an endeavor to strike a balance between the risks and the opportunities offered by this setting.

Appreciating the historical background is a prerequisite in any sound analysis of the current regional framework of Eurasia. Looking into the future is no less challenging than analyzing the present. However, I think clues for assumption could be found in the fine thread-work of the regional and global context.

Against this paradigm, I feel compelled to engage with some stock-taking on the region. The twenty-first century had started with a new political space after the dissolution of the Soviet Union that brought a new dynamism to Eurasia when the 9/11 tremor hit the world. Shock waves were not confined to the Western world and the United States; they engulfed Eurasia as well. The international military intervention in Afghanistan and the Greater Middle East perspective generated in response to 9/11 atrocities drew the ire of the region with complex reactions. This also led to emergence of new perceptions previously unfamiliar to the Eurasian countries.

The countries located in Central Asia and the South Caucasus had started the long process of nation and state building in the wake of the systemic change following the dissolution of the Soviet Union when they faced the post 9/11 challenges. With insufficient state capacity, scope of state functions fell short of optimum levels. Attaining sustainable development, as well as upholding pluralistic democracy and human rights were at best in their infancy.

Such was the state of affairs when they suddenly felt exposed to dramatically changing circumstances and external influences in the international scene. Integration with the rest of the world meant full participation of the external actors that were largely foreign to the region. These external actors imposed their own way of doing things which they believed was the only formula for accepting new members to the family of nations of the post 9/11 world order. In other words, if East were to meet West, it had be on the terms set out by the Western world. This, I would argue, noticeably scared some. As our presence in Afghanistan increased, our profile declined in Central Asia, however paradoxical it might seem at first sight. We managed to hold on to the South Caucasus though, albeit with visible difficulty.

While offering this perspective, I remain cautious for I am aware of the risks of dealing with cross-cutting issues in a time scale that spans over the last fifteen years. Yet it would be necessary to take stock in retrospect to make sound comparisons between our starting points fifteen years ago when these countries embraced their independence, and where we stand today.

At the outset, Western involvement in the region did not develop quickly for some time. The newly independent countries were to be regarded in the backyard of Russia. We in Turkey had difficulty to convince our major allies for the acceptance of Central Asian countries as CSCE/OSCE members. When membership to the Euro-Atlantic institutions came, we encountered another difficulty: these countries were not prepared to carry out the responsibilities bestowed upon them. Turkey viewed developing a Western vocation in these countries as an opportunity for their integration with the West, which in turn would reduce or balance Russian influence in the region.

Another problem emanated from the ethnic mix of the former Soviet States and the tradition inherited from Soviet 'Nationalities Policy'. This favored lesser ethnic groups against larger ones, and made nation building difficult by virtue of encouraging separatism. Discrepancies between ethnic and political boundaries represented a miscarriage for they entertained perils of conflict. Regional leaderships responded to these challenges in a fashion inherently familiar to them: they sought to uphold their influence by strengthening the repressive central authority. A readily available recipe was to seek security through regional organizations. However, new security threats obliged them to seek supplementary remedies, thus helping an incremental rapprochement with NATO and the EU.

Although belatedly, the rich energy resources of Eurasia were recognized and the Western hemisphere as well as the Far East and South Asia found an interest in exploiting these resources, supplying them to world markets and providing the security of their transport. This eventually

underscored the inseparability of stability and economic welfare of Europe and Eurasia. Moreover, these countries by sustaining their independence proved their resilience as states, by attaining higher growth rates after an initial lull demonstrated their economic viability. Thus, Eurasia came up as a new cooperation area which attracted attention of the rest of the world, creating an environment where converging interests became often overlapped. One question, however, remains to be answered: now that Eurasia has become a focal point as for its energy resources, which direction will this newly found synergy take? This question still goes unanswered for the increasing clouts of Russian Federation, China, India and the Western world often find themselves in competition after the initial phase of independence in Eurasia.

This point takes me to one of the focal points of our debate today: is Western engagement in the Eurasian region, particularly in Central Asia, sufficiently intense and desirably comprehensive to avert competition with other power centers? I feel tempted to respond with a mixed picture. The European Union, unfortunately, still stands well behind Turkey and the US in this respect. It is true that the European Union has lately developed the 'European Neighborhood Policy' that foresees deeper and wider engagement with Eurasia. However, owing to its narrowly defined regional references, it leaves the Central Asian geography outside.

It is widely agreed that the track records of Eurasian countries in the fields of human rights and democracy fall short of desirable levels. Authoritarian regimes, lack of progress in democratization and poor human rights record are, therefore, criticized by the Western world. Eurasian states, on the other hand, raise a self-serving attitude by pointing out that democratization is a long term process and their domestic situation necessitate certain measures which may not be fully compatible with democracy. They insist, nevertheless, that they stay on track towards democracy, while unsparing a bullet of criticism towards the West for focusing solely on the problem of democracy gap.

I believe the regional democracy gap is not in abysmal proportions yet it is significant. It is indeed hard to argue that the Eurasian region, especially the Central Asian countries, display encouraging signs in terms of democratic maturity. This of course brings forward problems that influence our thinking on the region. In view of this, I think it would be timely to dwell on this issue: is a fifteen-year period sufficient for attaining an entirely desirable level of democratic maturity, or are we facing a surge of inherently structural problems?

Here, I feel compelled to draw attention to another related issue too: those left behind in globalization inadvertently create a certain pressure on global stability. I would rather argue that so long as we confine ourselves with criticism, and overlook the benefits of engagement that would deal with the root causes head on, it seems unlikely to eliminate the symptoms of instability and insecurity.

As I briefly mentioned earlier, the seventy-year long imperial hegemonic control over the Eurasian basin established the precursors for a quintessential problem: the nation-state construction remains virtually inexistent where qualified minorities of Russian and Slavic descent dominate the political, economic and social scene at the expense of the local population. This triggers a primordial problem of existence, if not survival, for the nascent nation-building effort of the local elites. When looked from the viewpoint of this factual dilemma, characteristic problems encountered by the ruling elites in the Eurasian countries could be better appreciated. Given the serious bureaucratic capacity problems, pledged delivery remains limited. By default, this falters state functions regardless of the expectations of local population for a better, secure and prosperous life. Under these circumstances, would it not be over optimistic to expect them display a glittering democratic maturity matching our standards?

I certainly do not attempt to indulge in justifying the democratic shortcomings that we often witness, and that frequently produce bewildering repercussions in these countries. As the second

Turkish President Ismet Inonu once noted, “*Whether a mistake is met with wide spread enthusiasm does not change the very fact that it remains a mistake. It simply becomes a widely celebrated mistake*”. I therefore simply intend to make a point that merits consideration should we wish to avoid grave mistakes while offering a sound judgment on these nascent members of the international community.

Yet, I do not wish to pronounce signs of despair. We should reveal, and never conceal, our discontent as and when we encounter seriously bothering issues. Simultaneously, we should not shy away from a constructive engagement that would produce positive end-results. Gazing into the crystal ball will not offer us any quick-fix solutions. We should therefore exercise patience and restraint, and display perseverance and dedication to make things better. This implies that our overarching objective remains saving these countries from a slide towards failure at all costs; and, ensuring stability and security that would support the gradual development of a political space with democratic credentials. In support of this argument, I think it is worth noting that most Central Asian countries narrowly negotiated a secure standing as Taliban rose to eminence in Afghanistan prior to 9/11 promising fearful repercussions of jihad beyond River Oxus.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Talking of Oxus makes me think of Afghanistan and of a celebrated saying; *most wars in history have been avoided simply by postponing them*. I think this would be a neat translation of the unfolding events that led to the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and the ensuing collective reaction in the world. The international community allowed this country to fail, knowingly ignoring the simmering extremism and organized crime that turned Afghanistan into a breeding ground under the very gaze of Taliban. We turned a blind eye over the atrocious human rights violations performed by the blindly indoctrinated Taliban regime in Kabul. Because we remained indifferent for a long time, the dark forces bred in Afghanistan came to visit us before we dared to go there.

What we have achieved in Afghanistan by virtue of the US led collective endeavor is certainly praiseworthy. We did not yield to severe challenges, as our service men and women engaged with life risking missions constantly, some making the ultimate sacrifice. Yet, this is a noble effort to bring peace, security and stability in Afghanistan, and to its larger region in Eurasia.

Insofar as our engagement in Afghanistan is concerned, a lot is already achieved, yet more needs to be done. Afghanistan has risen from fragility to self confidence with significant support from the international community. There is no obvious quick fix to the insurgency and wide spread poverty. We have to display courage and determination to overcome the difficulties. In so doing, we should also apply a lessons learned exercise for attaining our objectives. Broadly speaking, we need more coordination among respective security sector reforms, central authority needs to be supported in its reach to the provinces, and alternative livelihoods be developed without further delay next to eradication and interdiction efforts in tackling with the drug cultivation and trafficking. In this respect, I take pride for Turkey’s contributions ranging in a wide spectrum, from its military footprint on the ground to the humanitarian relief endeavors and civilian reconstruction assistance projects in remote parts of the country.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As I turn to another sub-region of Eurasia, the South Caucasus, I find another striking picture somewhat different yet similar to the Central Asian canvas. Here it is particularly noteworthy to observe certain characteristics of the post-Soviet theatre, visible elsewhere but more painful. With the end of the Cold War the Soviet veil was lifted in this region, and with it the ‘order’ disappeared. The deep running scars pre-dating the Soviet era were exposed to the naked eye with no immediate healing.

The disingenuous stability, coherence and welfare long presented as trademarks of the Soviet Union dissolved rapidly. In short, micro-nationalism did not bode well for these newly independent countries. As it brewed, secessionist conflicts emerged adding to severity of the existing problems. Immediate concerns for survival swept reconstruction and democratization under the carpet, as they remained irrelevant for a long time. The countries in the South Caucasus succumbed to centrifugal forces in the face of resurgent ethnic demands, or developed persistent symptoms of weakness by nature of their inherent fragility. In far more radical fashion than their Central Asian counterparts, the countries in this sub-region fell victim to systemic change in international relations. These infant states were quickly consumed by internal conflict while their governments desperately sought credibility as their authority, security and territorial integrity became challenged.

Born into severe strife and conflict, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia are still in transition, or in transformation, after fifteen years. Despite their efforts for reform, and claim for an impressive record of accomplishment, they still have to cover ground until peace, stability and viable democratic structures are irreversibly in place. Yet, the question remains as to whether these countries have developed the strategic vision, courage and commitment to carry out the necessary reforms to attain this cardinal objective.

The answer to this question is not an easy one. It takes a comprehensive analysis in view of the social, political and economic climate in the region. The answer also discloses features underscoring the region's inherent significance.

- * First, the region is located at the confluence of energy and transport routes,
- * Second, it is critically important in terms of hydrocarbon reserves,
- * Third, it serves as a gateway between East and West as well as between the Russian

Federation and the Middle East,

The Caspian Basin has been an exporter of oil and natural gas in the past, but recent developments have made it a more significant region for global energy markets. Azerbaijan is the main producer in the Southern Caucasus region, but Georgia also stands to gain considerably from the pipelines constructed across its territory.

The main conduit for oil is the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline project. The Southern Caucasus pipeline for natural gas is being constructed alongside the oil pipeline. It is expected to carry a considerable volume of natural gas for consumption in Turkey and Europe.

But I feel compelled to draw your attention to yet another important project; that is the Trans-Caspian Pipelines Project, or securing a diversified outlet for the hydrocarbon resources of Central Asia. As you are well aware, this scheme bears great importance for energy security in the new century. It also complements the Southern Caucasus oil and gas pipelines. The Trans-Caspian perspective offers a stable income for the upstream countries, and reduces risks of volatile price shocks. Yet, arguably the most important aspect of the Trans-Caspian frame would be to ensure a two-way relationship between the Western hemisphere and the Central Asian basin countries by virtue of our deeper and broader engagement that could create an alternative to the existing profile of the Russian Federation.

Next to hydrocarbon prospects, skilled labor and the existence of the basic infrastructure are other positive elements of the region that altogether create a favorable environment for development and prosperity. Against this backdrop, potential for regional cooperation can be utilized to bolster peace, security and prosperity by increasing inter-dependence in the Southern Caucasus.

However, reverse of the coin is disheartening. South Caucasus is also home to struggling, nascent democracies, unresolved ethnic conflicts that have uprooted hundreds of thousands, high unemployment and high levels of corruption. The governments in the region did not perform well in utilizing their efforts so as to create a favorable environment for the democratic institutions to flourish; and, they fell short of creating an effective mechanism that would ensure basic freedoms and human rights.

Ambitions to create territorially homogeneous states have marked the South Caucasus in departure from the past. During much of its history, the region witnessed an extraordinary movement of peoples and invasions owing to its location at the crossroads of migration routes. This resulted in creation of a uniquely cosmopolitan, multi-ethnic, diverse yet distinctive Caucasian culture, shared by all the peoples of the region. However, reconstruction of the region along exclusively homogeneous and national lines also offered a recipe for conflict in the post-Soviet political space.

Today, the Southern Caucasus is fragmented; largely due to existing frozen conflicts that prevent Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia from pooling their efforts to collectively address current challenges the region faces. Lack of cohesion among these countries and failure to progress in frozen conflicts remind us how serious the crisis in the Southern Caucasus is.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As we are gathered here today, proliferation of weapons, terrorist networks, drug trafficking and all sorts of organized crime represent a new cluster of challenges that promise to further complicate the inherent fragility of Eurasia. Limited reach of the central governments when coupled with weakness and corruption of the law enforcement agencies, thus, undermine state structures and the public order. The outcome is not surprising: Faltering state capacity undermines delivery of essential services that lead to state weakness. Lack of political space providing for constructive engagement of the political actors and civil society hints the reasons for stalled democracies.

Russian Federation's relations with the South Caucasus and Central Asia add another source of tension owing not least for the Soviet legacy but also for the post-Soviet complexities that blend Russia's complicated ties with the region. To complete the picture, one has to note the influence cast by the turmoil in the Middle East and Afghanistan, as well as the Iranian overtures geared toward these regions.

The post 9/11 'Greater Middle East' perspective echoes deeply in Eurasia against this backdrop. Although its Middle Eastern aspect has stronger tones, it promises repercussions for the South Caucasus, Central Asia and Afghanistan as well. At this point I wish to reflect on another focus of my discussion today. We must employ the 'Greater Middle East' initiative as an instrument of engagement and dialogue, and not as a tool for coercion, bearing in mind the potentially wide spread reaction and backlash it could generate should we choose to do the latter. The initiative, therefore, should be carefully crafted and revised as and when necessary to assume the standing of a communication channel, and a powerful instrument for the good of all. Turkey's well deserved credentials provide an example to this end as we conjointly lead the process of 'dialogue of civilizations' with Spain. Yet, one particular point merits attention: we should thread forward with caution, and should seek to establish two-way channels of empathy.

This takes me to two separate yet closely related countries that loom high on the agenda: Iraq and Iran. Iraq represents an enormous post 9/11 traumatic case study. The newly-found self rule of the Iraqis free from dictatorial oppression and persecution did not bode well as full fledged insurgency continues. The security challenge should not, however, discourage us from helping the Iraqis to attain the desired end result: a democratic, stable, secure and unified Iraq that by virtue of upholding

democracy and human rights sets a precious example for its neighborhood. To this end, we should remain prepared to support, bolster and standby Iraq, displaying an understanding, an empathy which would make them realize that we share their aspirations as for their destiny.

As for Iran, I think it is most pertinent to make a case for our future dealings with this country. Iran should be part of the solution, not the problem in the larger picture we encounter in Eurasia. Establishing two-way channels would be instrumental in this regard. I think the recent engagement of the US with Iran over exploring how to further security in Iraq emphatically made a point when viewed from this perspective.

You might be wondering why the Russian Federation does not find a take in this broad canvas. This is primarily because I focused on the post 9/11 traumatic case studies in Eurasia, Afghanistan and Iraq foremost of them. Although the South Caucasus does not represent a traumatic case *per se*, it is inherently prone to violent encounters due to the existing conflicts currently frozen thanks to the intervention of greater extra-regional powers.

On this note, I think it would be quintessentially important to realize that the Russian Federation does not represent an inherently problematic posture. On the contrary, it is a very important actor in the Eurasian context that has to be watched carefully. I think it is essential to provide a detailed analysis in this regard. The question we encounter from this perspective is how to take a beneficial stock of the present challenges and opportunities and transform this important actor into a partner.

I believe that we can, perhaps more importantly we should strive to do so. I further believe that this line of thinking is self-justified. Suffice to remember that Russia retains most of its capabilities together with a good part of its former imperial reach in Eurasia. Interestingly these are the areas where we observe the post 9/11 traumatic cases. Therefore, it does not take hard thinking to imagine the level of difficulty we would have to encounter without significant Russian help and cooperation as a benevolent partner while we tackle with the challenges in these areas. On the contrary, if we succeed in transforming Russia into voluntary co-operation, future generations will pay tribute to our efforts that pave the way for security and stability in Eurasia.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In this last part of my presentation, I would like to highlight Turkey's policy towards Eurasia. Turkey is located at the very core of Eurasia, and therefore is regarded as one of the pivotal players in the region projecting substantial diplomatic, economic and military prowess. As such, Turkey's policy in Eurasia is based on four pillars:

- * Contributing to the consolidation of the state building processes while helping to spread peace, stability and prosperity in the region,
- * Supporting political and economic reforms,
- * Promoting the integration of Eurasian countries with the international community,
- * Finally, developing and enhancing bilateral relations on the basis of equality, mutual interest and respect for sovereignty.

Turkey, in her endeavors to this end, draws from its geography and history as well as its modern and progressive thinking. Her strategic location is not simply a derivative of its geographical location. Her level of development, her alliances and the relations that encompass political, economic, military, cultural spheres she has cultivated in the area over the years are all components of her strategic value.

Turkey has substantial economic and commercial presence in Eurasia. The total volume of direct investments in the Eurasian countries, including Russia and Ukraine reached 10 billion dollars by the end of last year. Turkish contractors have undertaken projects worth close to 30 billion dollars. Our volume of trade with the region stands at another 30 billion dollars. Turkish companies are among the leading investors in Eurasia with well established relations in local administrations and peoples. This last point displays an underlying important fact: our trade with these countries far outweighs Turkey's overall place in the world trade largely owing to the fact that they have a force multiplier effect in terms of presence and influence entrenched in the hearts and minds of the ordinary people.

Since the South Caucasus and Central Asian countries embraced their independence, more than 15.000 students have studied in Turkey. There are around 100 Turkish educational institutions in the form of primary, secondary, university level, and language training centers established in these countries, some of which are sponsored by the Turkish government. These institutions are well respected. Besides, a significant number of the military cadres of these countries are educated in the Turkish military academies or trained by the Turkish officers in their own countries.

In light of these facts, it would not take hard guessing to assess the scope of positive soft power Turkey extends over this vast geographic entity with her membership and vocation in all Euro-Atlantic institutions. Turkey has closely worked with the United States towards realizing the policy objectives I briefly touched upon a moment ago. We believe this cooperation has proven its benefits and earned credit as observed in the multiple pipeline projects, among many other issues. Thus, we should intensify our joint endeavor in this direction with a view to enhance peace, stability and shared prosperity in this region.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to conclude by recalling a phrase from Sir Edward Gibbon that we should not take as a guideline, but must endeavor to change if we are to succeed in shaping the future of Eurasia. Sir Edward had argued that, *"history is, indeed, little more than the register of the crimes, follies, and misfortunes of mankind."* I think we should draw from the wisdom of this note, but stand up to challenge the fatalism it accommodates for we can make a real change together for our common objectives and for the benefit of all peoples in Eurasia, in the same way we stood united and succeeded in decades long Cold War. Twenty-first century calls for cooperation among all states and regions, not for confrontation. And, so long as we are united to this end, I have confidence that success will be ours.

Thank you.