In the last decade Turkey has emerged as a more active and important actor on the international stage. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Turkey rediscovered a world of interests and affinities stretching “from the Balkans to Western China”—areas that had been largely absent from the mainstream Turkish foreign policy debate, not just since the start of the Cold War but since the foundation of the Republic. More recently, analysts have focused on the increasing activism in Turkish external policy. With few exceptions, this activism has been evident largely in traditional areas of interest such as Europe, as well as areas of perceived risk, above all the Middle East.

Turkey is, at base, a conservative society with a conservative approach to public policy in most spheres. Almost 80 years after the founding of the Turkish Republic this remains true. However, Turkey today is in the midst of a period of important political change that could have a profound effect on its foreign policy evolution. Looking ahead, several significant, open questions will shape the Turkish foreign and security policy debate. They will also shape to a considerable extent the character of Turkish relations with the West. These key questions concern the future shape of Turkey as a society, Turkey’s international identity, its regional behavior, and its place in a globalized world.

WHITHER TURKEY?

Turkey’s current economic travails only serve to underscore the importance of the country’s internal evolution in determining what is possible and what is likely in Turkish external policy. Turkey is truly
at a crossroads. After more than a decade of substantial modernization, Turkey faces a crisis of leadership and reform. Few Turks, outside of the most traditional government circles in Ankara, would disagree with the notion that the process of change in Turkey has reached an impasse that requires some dramatic changes in the way the country is governed, and by whom. Visions of what should come next differ at the level of orientation but not scale. Incrementalism and “muddling through”—approaches that have characterized Turkish policy in the past—are unlikely to be sufficient in the future. The threshold for social unrest in Turkey remains high, but a continuing economic crisis, with social and political cleavages left unresolved, could push Turkey toward instability, making more extreme or chaotic outcomes a possibility. The foreign policy consequences would be substantial. In particular, a Turkey in turmoil would likely find Europe even more resistant to the idea of Turkish membership in the EU.

The argument about Turkey as a pivotal state turns on the potential for the country to affect a wider area through its foreign policy behavior but also through internal developments. The notion of Turkey as a regional model reflects the positive side of this potential. But an impoverished and unstable Turkey would have very different and very negative consequences for Europe, Eurasia, and the Middle East. An unstable hinterland might impede reconstruction and integration in Southeastern Europe. It might reinforce an existing tendency toward instability in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Security perceptions in Athens and Moscow would be affected. An unstable and unpredictable Turkey would contribute to a deteriorating security environment in the Middle East and would limit Western options in the Gulf and elsewhere. From a NATO and an EU perspective, a troubled Turkey makes it more likely that Ankara will be a “consumer” rather than a “producer” of security on the European periphery.

The scenario of a troubled, inward-looking, and more nationalistic Turkey, with a more limited but also less predictable foreign policy, is not the most likely case. But it is a possibility. More plausibly, Turkey’s resources and resilience—and the climate of incipient change—will eventually lead to significant reforms on the political as well as the economic scenes. The result in this case is likely to be a more modern and stable Turkey, better integrated in European insti-
tutions, more comfortable with the challenges of globalization, and more moderate and multilateral in its foreign policy outlook. This is a scenario that would benefit Turks, Turkey’s neighbors, and Turkey’s allies.

As a former imperial power, Turks are used to thinking strategically, and the modern strategist finds no shortage of plausible and implausible theories in the Turkish policy debate. The economic crisis and the natural focus on domestic politics have, however, reduced strategic thinking to a minimum. For the moment, the country’s intellectual and political energies are focused elsewhere, with an emphasis on immediate domestic challenges. But the resolution of these internal challenges will have a critical effect on Turkey’s future geopolitical role. If Turkey proves unable to overcome its domestic difficulties, its ability to play an active and constructive role in international affairs will be sharply reduced.

WHERE DOES TURKEY FIT?

It is arguable that modern Turkey has functioned as part of several systems—European, Middle Eastern, and Eurasian—while remaining on the cultural and political periphery of each. At an important level, the Turkish foreign policy debate is a constantly renewed argument about identity. There is a tendency among many highly Westernized Turks to regard discussions about Turkish identity with distaste. Surely Turkey’s EU candidacy means that the question of identity has been resolved? But this question of identity has not been resolved and will in all likelihood remain open for the foreseeable future. There is nothing pejorative or unnatural about this. Europe itself is witnessing an extended debate about its own identity as it contemplates enlargement, monetary union, and a more common approach to foreign policy and defense. Turks rightly sense that the EU’s approach to the question of Turkey’s (and other nonmembers’) role in ESDP is not simply institutional in nature. It includes an identity dimension: Who is “European” and who is not? Where do Europe’s frontiers end? Who and what are we defending?

Helsinki summit decisions notwithstanding, the issue of where Turkey fits in a changing Europe remains unresolved on both sides. Turkey’s own internal evolution and convergence with European norms is a fundamental, enabling condition for the promise of Euro-
pean membership to be fulfilled. An evolving Europe, possibly with multiple circles and “variable geometry,” could become more comfortable with the challenges of scale and identity associated with Turkish membership. On the other hand, the elements contributing to mutual ambivalence about membership are unlikely to be resolved easily. Europe may continue to hold Turkey at arm’s length even against a background of growing Turkish integration and convergence with Europe in a political, economic, and social context. Or, the failure to meet key aspects of the EU’s Copenhagen criteria, or lack of progress on Cyprus and the Aegean, could relegate Turkey to a hollow candidacy. In foreign policy terms, the question of Turkey’s European integration is full of gray areas. It is perfectly plausible that Turkey can remain, as it always has, a functioning part of the European system short of full EU membership. Absent Cold War conditions, however, it may be increasingly difficult for Turkey to play an effective role in the Euro-Atlantic system without progress on the domestic reform agenda.

To what extent might alternative Middle Eastern, Muslim, or Turkic identities augment or replace a European identity that remains unconsolidated? The short answer is that this is most unlikely. Over the next decade, Turkey might well find itself with more active economic and political ties to Eurasia and the Middle East. This could be the product of a more dynamic Russia or the full reintegration of Iraq and Iran in the international system. Turkey is a potential beneficiary of both possibilities. Or it could be the product of political developments inside Turkey, including the emergence of a reformist-religious or a religious-nationalist synthesis, with fewer reservations about ties to the Muslim and Turkic worlds. It is nonetheless difficult to imagine the practical basis for such reinforced ties replacing the strategic (in the sense of comprehensive political, economic, and defense interests) relationship with the West. Europe is likely to remain the overwhelmingly important economic partner for Turkey, and short of a U.S. retreat from engagement in Europe and the Middle East, Washington will remain Ankara’s key security partner. As a matter of identity, one possibility for the future is greater acceptance of a more balanced orientation between East and West, as the Kemalist tradition becomes more diffuse.
**HOW WILL TURKEY ACT?**

The heightened activism and assertiveness in Turkish external policy in recent years should prove durable. Immediate economic challenges may well leave Turkey with less energy and fewer resources to devote to foreign policy in the short term. But the bases of a more active approach, from the rediscovery of regional interests to the expansion of the public debate on foreign policy questions, are likely to endure and make themselves felt in the future. Indeed, one of the consequences of Turkey’s recent travails may be a heightened sense of national interest, especially as it relates to trade and economic development. And ultimately, a more prosperous and integrated Turkey may see new reasons for active engagement in adjacent regions, alongside the country’s international partners.

Turks continue to stress the insecurity of their neighborhood as a rationale for cautious engagement, and sometimes intervention. At the opening of the 21st century, Turkey’s neighborhood remains extraordinarily troubled. The resulting regional challenges will be difficult, perhaps impossible, for Ankara to ignore. In Southeastern Europe, the process of political and economic reconstruction is likely to be prolonged, with the potential for further destructive conflict, especially in the Southern Balkans. Short of a serious break in Ankara’s relations with the West, Turkey will remain a conservative, multilateral, and significant actor in the Balkans. But Ankara’s policy is likely to remain in step with Western policy, not run counter to it.

With Athens, Ankara shares a strategic stake in the resolution of Aegean disputes. Greece and Turkey have shown an ability to act in concert in the Balkans and have recently moved toward a more flexible and less risk-prone stance in their bilateral relations. However, Ankara’s future willingness to consolidate Turkish-Greek détente and, in particular, to help resolve the Cyprus problem will turn critically on the overall character of relations between Turkey and Europe. A Turkey disillusioned or bitter in its relations with the EU will have fewer incentives to compromise on the Aegean or Cyprus. The result could be a return to brinkmanship in Greek-Turkish relations and an additional burden on European and American diplomacy in the Eastern Mediterranean.
Turkey’s rediscovery of a larger Turkic world in the Caucasus and Central Asia has had a significant effect on Turkey’s perception of its national interests. It has also been a vehicle for more active involvement, officially and by the Turkish private sector. Initial expectations about the scope of Turkey’s role have proven to be inflated. But the opening of former Soviet areas that had been off-limits, intellectually, politically, and in practical terms, has had enduring consequences for Turkish foreign policy. Opportunities in Eurasia have not replaced more pressing interests in the West, but they have placed these and other interests in a different perspective.

If Turkey is more central in European, American, and Russian calculations today, this is so in large part because the field for Turkish external policy is now much broader—and many of the new possibilities lie in Eurasia. Continued economic growth in Turkey will require access to new sources of oil and gas, from Russia and the Caspian. A more complex web of oil and gas pipelines will make these energy links a “permanently operating factor” in Turkey’s foreign policy. With the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline plan, Turkey is a leading competitor in Caspian geopolitics. But perhaps more significantly, Turkey is now part of a complex and highly interdependent system of energy supply, and shared economic interests, spanning Eurasia. Even without Baku-Ceyhan, Turkey is emerging as a key entrepôt and transit state for energy supplies headed to Europe from Eurasia and the Southeastern Mediterranean.

Turkey’s ability to play a more active role in the energy field, however, will be significantly affected by political developments in the Caucasus. Since the mid-1990s, Turkey has succeeded in enhancing its role as an important regional actor in the Caucasus, strengthening ties to both Azerbaijan and Georgia. But the political situation in the Caucasus is extremely fluid. Both Azerbaijan and Georgia will face succession issues in the near future. How these are resolved could have a significant effect on Turkey’s interests in the Caucasus, especially the prospects for completion of the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline.

These new factors in the Turkish foreign policy calculus will have the effect of reinforcing a very traditional Turkish foreign and security policy concern about Russia. For centuries, Turkey was at the center of Russian-Western interaction in security terms. In the post–Cold War climate, the consequences of alternative paths in Russian-
Western relations are once again likely to be felt most directly on the European periphery, with direct implications for Turkey. Ankara will continue to have a strong stake in cooperative relations with a stable and satisfied Russia. A more chaotic Russian state, with turmoil on its borders, would create political and security vacuums around the Black Sea and the Caucasus, increasing the likelihood of refugee movements and violent spillovers affecting Turkey. Moreover, turmoil along Russia’s south could stimulate nationalist sentiment inside Turkey and might lead to pressure for a more interventionist policy in Ankara. A resurgent and assertive Russia would similarly find more room for maneuver in peripheral areas, adjacent to Turkey, from the Balkans to the Caucasus. In short, the risks in Turkish-Russian relations are high over the longer term, and the need for deterrence and reassurance vis-à-vis Moscow will continue to drive a cautious and Western-oriented approach in Ankara.

Turks will continue to see the Middle East as an area of risk requiring an active, security-driven set of policies. The core of this activism is likely to remain the close connection between internal security issues—Kurdish separatism and Islamism—and the situation to Turkey’s south and east. Developments inside Turkey, such as a gradual resolution of the Kurdish problem or the emergence of a less provocative relationship between religion and secularism in Turkish politics, could reduce the prominence of this connection, but it is likely to remain a factor of some weight in the Turkish foreign policy calculus. Thus, Ankara will prefer a cohesive and reintegrated Iraq that can be held at arm’s length in security terms. Roughly the same approach will apply in relations with Iran—a policy orientation closer to that of Europe than that of the United States. If Turkey has a containment strategy in the Middle East, it will continue to apply, above all, to Syria, where the sources of bilateral friction are multiple and pronounced.

The Middle East has been the principal theater of Turkish regional activism in recent years. It is also the area where Ankara is willing and able to pursue a more assertive and unilateral set of policies. The task of balancing the defense of Turkish interests in the Middle East, sometimes with the use of force, without becoming embroiled in costly, strategic confrontations may be more difficult in the future for several reasons. Economic stringency is unlikely to derail the longer-term evolution of Turkey as a modern and highly capable
power, capable of the projection of military force at some distance from its own Middle Eastern borders. In future Middle Eastern crises, Turkey will have the potential for significant intervention in its own right, in addition to facilitating Western power projection. At the same time, the spread of weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles across the Middle East will lead to far more credible threats of retaliation against Turkish territory. With the deterioration in Israeli-Palestinian relations again posing the possibility of a regional conflict, and with the question of Iraqi and Iranian futures unresolved, the ingredients for a much more challenging environment are in place as seen from Ankara. Here, as in other regional settings, the risks to Turkey of an activist stance would probably be far greater in the absence of a predictable Turkish security relationship with the West.

The new emphasis on combating terrorism in the wake of the September 11, 2001, attack on the United States is likely to complicate Turkish foreign policy, especially in the Middle East and Central Asia. As a Muslim country, Turkey will want to ensure that the war on terrorism does not become a “civilizational” struggle between Islam and the West. Ankara will also have to weigh its interest in supporting U.S.-led actions against terrorism with its own national interests in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf.

There is also some uncertainty regarding the effect of these developments on Europe. European attitudes toward Turkish membership in the European Union remain ambivalent despite the Helsinki decision. The war on terrorism may reinforce this ambivalence as Europeans become even more reluctant to see a Muslim country enter the EU, fearing the import of “Middle Eastern” conflicts. This could further complicate Turkey’s prospects for EU membership, leaving Turkey increasingly frustrated and disappointed.

In short, Turkey’s ability to play a strong regional role is likely to face increasing challenges in the coming decade. Turkey may well be a more confident and capable foreign and security policy actor in the 21st century, but it will face many new risks if this activism is played out in a unilateral context. The need to avoid acting as a “lone wolf” gives Turkey an interest in maintaining a diverse set of security relationships—transatlantic, European, Israeli, possibly even Russian
under favorable conditions. The effectiveness of these ties will be a key variable in Turkey's regional influence.

WHAT PLACE IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD?

The diversity of challenges and opportunities on Turkey’s borders encourages Turks and others to see Turkish policy through a regional lens or, more accurately, a set of regional lenses. But as the unresolved question of Turkish identity suggests, Turkish policy has always had a wider systemic context. As our discussion of domestic developments suggests, a more liberal, outward-looking Turkey is one quite likely path, but it is not the only one. Turkey could well experience a period of retrenchment in which the country turns inward and acts with a more nationalistic flavor internationally.

The costs and consequences of a retreat from integration and globalization are probably increasing. By many measures, from tourism and foreign remittances to telecommunications and Internet usage, Turkey is already a highly globalized country. Turkey’s urbanized elites are relatively comfortable with the phenomenon of globalization, and many of Turkey’s most successful businesses have far-flung international interests. The prosperity of the last 20 years has been closely tied to the opening of the economy and the progressive globalization of Turkish society at many levels.

Nonetheless, Turks are keenly aware of the competitive pressures and vulnerabilities that integration and globalization imply. The current economic crisis has only served to reinforce a long-standing sensitivity about globalization in light of Turkey’s long tradition of state involvement in virtually all aspects of life and a very highly developed notion of national sovereignty. It is increasingly clear that Turkey cannot preserve the traditional prerogatives of the Kemalist state if it wishes to integrate more closely with Europe and participate more effectively in a globalized system. More precisely, Turkey could hold to traditional ideas of state sovereignty—and many Turks may favor this—but it will pay a high price to do so. Moreover, with political and economic questions becoming more central to Euro-Atlantic relations, it is likely that a more sovereignty-conscious and inward-looking Turkey would find its security relationships troubled as well. If economic and political reform fails in Turkey, many Turks may find it convenient to blame international financial institutions
and the phenomenon of globalization more generally. A climate of resentment would inevitably affect the quality of Turkey’s foreign and defense policy cooperation with the West.

As Turkish leaders have discovered in previous periods of political and economic turmoil, internal problems can have an isolating effect, chilling the climate for foreign investment and diplomatic cooperation with allies. In the absence of Cold War strategic imperatives, the link between internal stability and international engagement in and with Turkey may be even closer. Turkish default on its international debt, unlikely but not impossible, would have a devastating effect on the country’s international standing and would reinforce an existing tendency in some quarters, especially in Europe, to see Turkey as “part of the problem.” Further large-scale financial assistance to forestall a Turkish default would probably imply further draconian conditions and an insistence on fundamental political as well as economic change. Ultimately, Turkish policymakers may count on the idea that their country is simply too important in geopolitical terms for Europe and the United States to ignore—that the systemic implications of a Turkish collapse will always compel international intervention. They may be right. But Turkish-Western relations will not benefit from too many such test cases of the country’s pivotal status.

Some aspects of globalization may imply an end of geography. For Turkey, the rise of political, economic, and military issues that cut across traditional regional lines and span Europe, Eurasia, and the Middle East will be central to perceptions of the country’s geopolitical importance. Geography makes Turkey a key partner in addressing transregional risks, from drug smuggling and refugee flows to terrorism and the proliferation of destructive, longer-range weaponry. It will also make Turkey an essential partner in capturing new diplomatic and commercial opportunities, whether through new lines of communication for energy or in new approaches to the Middle East peace process.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR TURKEY’S WESTERN PARTNERS**

These conclusions suggest a number of implications for the United States and Europe in their relations with Ankara over the next decade. First, Turkey’s internal evolution is likely to be the leading
determinant of the country’s foreign policy potential and direction. The key choices in this regard will be made by Turkey, and the conditions for successful change will emanate largely from Ankara. Turkey must choose the pace and extent of reform in key areas, including the economy, the rules governing political parties, and human rights. The outcome will be critical to Turkey’s relations with Europe and the United States. However, although the longer-term direction for Turkish society will be determined largely by domestic realities, Western assistance, both political and economic, can help to reduce near-term risks and enable Turkey to manage its internal problems more successfully. However, this support should be conditioned on Turkey’s willingness to proceed with a coherent and sustainable reform program.

Economic and political reforms could well bring previously marginal political forces into policymaking positions. As a result, Turkey’s partners will face the challenge of developing an effective dialogue with a wider range of forces, including the new breed of Islamists and Turkish nationalists, in addition to the traditional centrist and secular elites. The foreign policy inclinations of these elements are in flux, and early dialogue could help to ensure more moderate policies in future years.

Moreover, the Turkish political establishment faces a major generational turnover. Many of the dominant political figures of the last several decades—Ecevit, Demirel, Erbakan—are in their 70s and will soon depart from the political scene. They will be replaced by a new generation of Turkish leaders who may adopt quite different approaches to many problems than the older generation of leaders. As this transition unfolds—and this is likely to happen rather rapidly—Turkey may go through a difficult period of change. Thus, the West should begin now to establish close contacts with the new generation of leaders who will shape Turkey’s future.

Second, Turkey’s continued integration and convergence with Europe will be the leading external determinant of Turkish foreign policy behavior in the coming years. Helsinki established a path toward integration, but the outlook for Turkish membership remains highly uncertain. Turkish estrangement from Europe—a real risk—would have very negative consequences for Turkish regional policy in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Balkans and would render Turkey a
far less-predictable security partner in Eurasia and the Middle East. A difficult relationship with Europe could open the way for a more nationalistic and unilateral Turkish foreign policy. By contrast, a stable, positive evolution of Turkish-EU relations would encourage a more predictable and multilateral approach across the board. It would also simplify and strengthen U.S.-Turkish relations, provided transatlantic relations as a whole remain cooperative and Washington remains engaged in European and Middle Eastern affairs. A situation in which Turkey is forced to choose between Europe and the United States, in an unstable strategic environment, would pose nightmarish dilemmas for Turkish policymakers and could create serious tensions in U.S.-European relations.

It is important, therefore, that U.S. and European approaches toward Turkey be in harmony. EU policy will have a significant effect on Turkey’s future evolution. But given Ankara’s strong security ties to the United States and Washington’s security interests in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East, the United States will continue to be an important influence on Turkish policy. Thus, to avoid the emergence of new transatlantic differences over Turkey, U.S. and European policy needs to be closely coordinated.

This is particularly true regarding Cyprus. If mishandled, the accession of Cyprus into the EU could lead to a serious deterioration of Turkey’s relations with the EU—and even stimulate a nationalist backlash toward the West more broadly. The current détente between Greece and Turkey could also be jeopardized, possibly leading to a new period of confrontation between the two countries. Both the EU and the United States have a strong stake in preventing such a development. Thus, U.S. and European policymakers need to give higher priority to achieving a Cyprus settlement.

Third, even under the most favorable conditions and with a multilateral orientation in Ankara, Turkish cooperation in regional affairs, including Gulf security, cannot be taken for granted. The trend toward more careful measurement of Turkish interests, and the willingness to act forcefully in defense of security objectives, is unlikely to weaken. To the extent that Turkey recovers from its economic and political difficulties, the coming years are likely to see a new Turkish debate about foreign and security policy in which traditional assumptions about the rationale for cooperation will be reassessed.
Thus, the use of Turkish assets by the United States and NATO in the future cannot be automatically taken for granted.

Finally, expectations regarding Turkey’s international role should be tempered with a degree of realism. Turkey may well emerge as a more potent regional power in political, military, and commercial terms. But it faces strategic challenges in Eurasia and the Middle East that cannot be addressed with reference to national means alone. Effective Alliance relationships will be essential to an effective Turkish foreign policy, and these will impose their own constraints, particularly in an era of more dilute and conditional security ties. More broadly, Turkey’s long-standing dilemmas regarding identity and the country’s role in various international “systems” are unlikely ever to be fully resolved—nor is such resolution necessary. Key elements of the Kemalist tradition may fade—or be modified—but Atatürk’s legacy is likely to continue to exert an important influence on Turkey’s political evolution and differentiate it in important ways from that of other European states.