
THE AGENDA:
REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS,
REPORTS AND EVENTS
MAY 2011 - JULY 2011

By Richard Giragosian

1. “CHRONOLOGICAL REVIEW”

28 July 2011: In comments during a joint news conference with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan demanded that Armenian President Serzh Sarkisian “correct his blunder” and “apologize” for remarks he made at a 23 July meeting with school students from Armenia and its diaspora, which Erdoğan claimed were tantamount to pressing Armenian territorial claims on Turkey.

Asked about whether Armenia would regain control of historical Armenian lands in Eastern Turkey President Sarkisian had responded that it “will depend on you and your generation...each generation has its responsibilities and they should be discharged with honor.”

25 July 2011: A court in Istanbul court sentenced Ogün Samast, the chief suspect in the assassination of Hrant Dink – the editor of the bilingual Turkish-Armenian weekly Agos newspaper, to a 23-year prison term after finding him guilty of killing Dink outside his office in January 2007. Samast, who confessed to the murder, was initially sentenced to life imprisonment, but the court modified that decision and reduced the sentence because he was underage at the time of the murder.

24 July 2011: The PKK declared an end to its six-month-old cease-fire in February and has escalated armed attacks against the Turkish military throughout many areas of southeastern Turkey.

23 July 2011: Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan announced that it would be “unthinkable” for Turkey to “normalize” relations with Israel until it apologizes for the May 2010 raid on a Turkish ship heading for Gaza. In comments during the opening of a meeting of Palestinian ambassadors in Istanbul, Prime Minister Erdoğan added that “as long as Israel does not apologize to Turkey, pay compensation to the families of the victims and lift its blockade on the Gaza strip, a normalization of relations is unthinkable.” Nine Turkish activists were killed in the 2010 Israeli raid on the ship and the Israeli government has said it is ready to express its “regret” over the loss of life but has refused to apologize or pay direct compensation.

22 July 2011: Responding to a new call for Kurdish autonomy, Turkish Food, Agriculture and Livestock Minister Mehdi Eker announced that “the only place for Turkey’s main pro-Kurdish party to discuss its desire for “democratic autonomy” is in the parliament. He added that although “we are open to discuss all things

as long as it is legitimate, including diplomatic autonomy, we will never be open to anything that legalizes terrorist activities.” Members of the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) recently met in the southeastern province of Van to discuss a road map for the implementation of democratic autonomy. Their plan involves establishing 25 to 26 regions in the country where local governments would be given rights to rule themselves.

18 July 2011: Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu and several other senior Turkish foreign ministry officials met for several hours with a visiting delegation of Armenian civil society representatives in Ankara. The meeting focused on the current outlook for resuming the suspended normalization process between Turkey and Armenia, and also addressed regional issues, including the Nagorno Karabakh conflict, and the Armenian genocide issue. The five-member Armenian delegation also briefed the Turkish side of trends in Armenian public opinion, and warned that “Armenian patience for resuming the diplomatic engagement process was not without limit.”

15-16 July 2011: U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton arrived in Turkey for an official two-day visit to participate in a round of Turkish-hosted meetings in Istanbul of the Contact Group on Libya and to hold several bilateral meetings with Turkish officials. During the visit, Clinton also warned Turkey that it must act on concerns about backsliding on human rights and its secular traditions, stressing that the recent arrests of dozens of journalists and curbs placed on religious freedom were “inconsistent” with Turkey’s economic and political progress. She called on Turkey to “recommit itself” to the course of modernization and embrace the democratic institutions of statehood, in order for Turkey to serve as a model for Arab nations. Clinton further called on the Turkish people to use their constitutional reform process to “address concerns ... about recent restrictions on freedom of expression and religion” and enhance the tolerance and protection of the rights of minorities.

14 July 2011: Thirteen Turkish soldiers were killed in a clash with Kurdish fighters in the town of Silvan, near the southeastern province of Diyarbakır. Another seven soldiers were also wounded in the clash, prompting Diyarbakır Governor Mustafa Toprak to vow that follow-up security operations will continue in the region.

11 July 2011: Recently elected members of the new Turkish parliament, or Grand National Assembly, from Turkey’s main opposition party have taken their parliamentary oaths, ending a boycott of the parliament. Deputies from the opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP), along with a group of Kurdish deputies, launched a boycott of the parliament in June and refused to take the oath of office in a 28 June ceremony to protest court decisions keeping party members in

detention. The main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), which won 135 seats in the 550-seat legislature, said it would boycott the oath-taking ceremony to protest against a bar on two elected candidates who are on trial, accused of being part of a plot to bring down the government of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Thirty-six candidates who ran as independents from the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) also boycotted the ceremony after the High Election Board disqualified one of its candidates because of a past conviction for spreading "terrorist propaganda." Parliamentary proceedings remained stalled as the CHP and the BDP also refused to take part in debates. In a subsequent statement, the CHP and the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) called on all deputies who had refused to take the oath to be sworn in and participate in parliamentary work.

27 June 2011: Russian President Dmitry Medvedev expressed his personal frustration with the failure of his Armenian and Azerbaijani counterparts to reach a framework agreement on Nagorno-Karabakh and warned that he may no longer serve as the mediator or host of future talks between them. The Russian president's warning followed a failed round of trilateral negotiations with Presidents Serzh Sarkisian and Ilham Aliyev that were held in the Russian city of Kazan on 24 June. Despite strong international pressure, the two leaders failed to agree on the basic principles of ending the Karabakh conflict put forward by Russia, the United States, and France. The Kazan meeting was the ninth Armenian-Azerbaijani summit hosted by Medvedev in the last three years, a fact highlighting the Russian president's central role in the Karabakh peace process.

21 June 2011: Turkish State Minister and chief negotiator for EU talks Egemen Bağış announced that "the border between Turkey and Armenia could be opened after Armenia and Azerbaijan shook hands," adding that "Turkey and Armenia have the chance to work together in order to prevent people, nations and countries from suffering more in the future." He explained that while Turkey wanted "zero problems" with its neighbors, Turkey also wanted its neighbors to have "zero problems" with their own neighbors, too.

15 June 2011: Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan held talks in Ankara with Hassan Turkmani, a personal envoy of Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad, in an attempt to mediate an end to the Syrian government violent and, at times, bloody crackdown on opposition protesters. Officials declined to release any statement after the nearly three-hour talks, but Prime Minister Erdoğan has previously called on the Assad government to end the violence and draw up a timetable of reform. Over 8,500 Syrian refugees have already sought refuge in Turkey from the internal conflict in Syria and more refugees were reported to have crossed into Turkey in the wake of an offensive by Syrian troops and tanks seeking to crush the uprising

against the Assad regime. Human rights groups report that some 1,300 civilians are believed to have been killed since the start of the Syrian uprising in mid-March, and more than 300 soldiers and police are also reported to have been killed.

12 June 2011: In a third consecutive parliamentary election win, the ruling AKP secured nearly 50 percent of the vote. More specifically, the AKP increased its vote share from its last win in 2007 by more than three points, to 49.9 percent, but still leaving the party short of the two-thirds parliamentary majority needed to unilaterally amend the Turkish constitution, which was written after a military coup in 1980. Winning 326 of 550 seats, actually representing four fewer seats than it held going in to the election, the results also let the AKP five seats short of what it would need to call a referendum for a new constitution. The country's main opposition party, the secular Republican People's Party (CHP), secured 26 percent of the vote, marking its best result in 30 years, notably under a new leader, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu. The right-wing Nationalist Action Party (MHP) also appeared to be largely unaffected by scandals that had forced 10 of its senior parliamentarians to resign during the campaign, but its vote was only one point less than the last election, as it secured 13 percent. The pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) –fielding its candidates as independents and overcoming Turkey's parliamentary-threshold rule that prevents any party with less than 10 percent of the national vote gaining seats in the national assembly- succeeded in winning 36 seats..

2 June 2011: A Turkish court sentenced a group of paramilitary policemen to jail for negligence over the January 2007 murder of Hrant Dink, a prominent ethnic Armenian journalist, in Istanbul. The sentences, ranging from imprisonment terms of between six months and four years, followed the conviction of a police colonel and five subordinates who held key posts in the city of Trabzon, where a group of local youths conspired to murder Dink. Prosecutors admitted that the local police received prior intelligence of a plot to kill Dink which had been organized in Trabzon, home to the self-confessed gunman, aged 17 at the time of the murder. In September 2010, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that the Turkish authorities had failed to take adequate measures to protect Dink in the face of known threats.

3 May 2011: Armenian President Serzh Sarkisian urged more countries of the world to recognize the World War I-era mass killings of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire as genocide, saying that would not damage their relations with Turkey. Making an official visit to Switzerland, Sarkisian cited a relevant resolution that was adopted by the Swiss parliament in 2003, arguing that its passage, strongly condemned by Ankara, did not prevent the Swiss from mediating the Turkish-Armenian normalization process. The Armenian president further stressed that, “by recognizing the genocide, Switzerland condemned that despicable crime against

humanity and thereby...prevailed over all geopolitical and military-economic considerations.”

2. REPORTS OF INTEREST & NEWS FROM ACADEMIA AND THE “THINK THANK” WORLD

New Report: “On Europe’s Fringes: Russia, Turkey and the European Union.”

In July 2011, the London-based “Chatham House” think tank, released a new Briefing Paper by Philip Hanson, Associate Fellow at the Russia and Eurasia Program at Chatham House.

The following is a brief summary of the report:

This new Briefing Paper compares the economies of Russia and Turkey and considers the major constraint on growth in each case. In light of these findings, it examines the implications for relations with the European Union in the context of a decline in the EU’s relative economic power, internal coherence and reputation for economic governance.

Key Summary Points include:

- Russia and Turkey, significant powers on the fringes of the European Union, both have awkward relations with Brussels.
- As Russia’s and Turkey’s strength becomes greater and the EU’s declines, the relationships between them will increasingly involve political as well as economic factors.
- Turkey is economically and politically closer to Europe than Russia is, while Russia’s relationship with Europe mainly consists of a mutual energy dependency.
- Russia’s unpredictable business environment remains a key constraint on its deeper integration with the EU. The Turkish economy faces challenges, but Turkey has a much better business environment than Russia.
- The EU’s own economic deficiencies suggest that it needs to remain circumspect in dealing with both countries. But Turkey, in particular, should be considered more of a foreign policy partner.

A full copy of the new Briefing Paper is freely available for download at: www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/0711bp_hanson.pdf

New Article: “Fading Hopes, Rising Demands: Kurdish Problem Moves Closer to the Point Of No Return.”

In a new article published in the 27 June 2011 issue of the “Turkey Analyst” (Vol. 4 No. 13), entitled “Fading Hopes, Rising Demands: Kurdish Problem Moves Closer to the Point Of No Return,” Gareth H. Jenkins assessed the Kurdish question in Turkey in the wake of the country’s recent parliamentary election. The “Turkey Analyst” (www.turkeyanalyst.org) is a biweekly publication of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program Joint Center.

The following is a brief summary of the article:

In the general election of 12 June 2011, candidates backed by the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) won 36 seats in Turkey’s 550-member unicameral parliament. On June 21, 2011, the Supreme Electoral Board (YSK) stripped Hatip Dicle, one of the successful BDP candidates, of his seat on procedural grounds. On June 23, the BDP announced that it would boycott parliament unless Dicle was reinstated. Over the days that followed, courts in the city of Diyarbakır blocked the release of another five successful BDP candidates. The decisions infuriated the BDP and further antagonized Turkey’s already deeply alienated Kurdish population. Unless the Turkish government acts quickly, both the BDP’s civil disobedience campaign and the violent insurgency of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) appear likely to escalate; with potentially devastating repercussions for Turkey’s social and political stability.

The author, Gareth Jenkins, is a Senior Associate Fellow with the CACI & SRSP Joint Center, is an Istanbul-based writer and specialist of Turkish Affairs. The full article is available at: www.silkroadstudies.org/new/inside/turkey/2011/110627A.html

New Article: “Turkey Faces Difficult Challenges in a Volatile Foreign Policy Environment.”

In the same 27 June 2011 issue of the “Turkey Analyst” (Vol. 4 No. 13), Richard Weitz offered an analysis of Turkish foreign policy entitled “Turkey Faces Difficult Challenges in a Volatile Foreign Policy Environment.”

The following is a brief summary of the article:

Foreign and defense policies did not figure prominently in the recent general election in Turkey. Most Turks seem satisfied with the more assertive role that their government has assumed in recent years, while Turkey’s weak opposition parties have yet to offer a coherent foreign policy alternative to the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP). Still, Turkish leaders will not be

able to escape foreign and defense issues given Turkey's dependence on its foreign economic ties and its location as a "front-line" state bordering the Middle East, Central Asia, and the Balkans. The situation in Syria is the most sensitive one for Turkey, and it could notably disrupt Turkey's otherwise harmonious relations with Iran. Another crucial question is how much pull NATO will exercise over Ankara's foreign and defense policies.

The author, Richard Weitz, Ph.D., is Senior Fellow and Director of the Center for Political-Military Analysis, Hudson Institute. The full article is available at: www.silkroadstudies.org/new/inside/turkey/2011/110711A.html

New Article: "A Different Path: Assessing Turkey's Foreign Policy in Latin America."

In a third article in the same 27 June 2011 issue of the "Turkey Analyst" (Vol. 4 No. 13), Ariel S. Gonzalez Levaggi focused on a specific aspect of Turkish foreign policy in an analytical article entitled, "A Different Path: Assessing Turkey's Foreign Policy In Latin America."

The following is a brief summary of the article:

Never before have Turkey and Latin America been closer than they are at present. Latin America has become an indicator of the extension of Turkey's capacity for global influence. The regular exchange of high level political visits, the increase of commerce and the slow but sustained advance of cultural relations lays the foundations of a political convergence. From a geopolitical standpoint, the most important emerging association is the one between Turkey and Brazil. The relation of the two rising powers is of significant relevance as they promote a multi-polar international order, and it will bestow accrued legitimacy on them at an international level. The re-elected government of the AKP has a great opportunity to further deepen Turkey's relations with Latin America, generating opportunities for dialogue and participation on the international stage.

The author, Ariel S. Gonzalez Levaggi is coordinator of the Middle East Program at the Argentine Center of International Studies (CAEI) and South America Representative of Encompassing Crescent. The full article is available at: www.silkroadstudies.org/new/inside/turkey/2011/110711B.html