

**REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS,
REPORTS AND EVENTS
DECEMBER 2008-FEBRUARY 2009**



By Richard Giragosian

1. “CHRONOLOGICAL REVIEW”

25 February: Turkish state television cut off live broadcasting on Tuesday when Ahmet Türk, the head of the Democratic Society Party, the biggest pro-Kurdish party, began addressing his parliamentary group in Kurdish, breaking laws stipulating that all political speeches should be delivered in Turkish. In January, state-run broadcaster TRT launched a Kurdish language 24-hour television channel, which was welcomed as a major breakthrough that followed pressure from both the European Union and campaigners for minority rights. The Turkish Prime Minister spoke a few words in Kurdish at the channel’s launch on 1 January 2009, and at an election rally in mid-February, promised crowds in the south eastern city of Diyarbakır a “new Nevroz,” using the Kurdish word for spring. TRT also broadcasted a Kurdish translation of his speech.

24 February: Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan stated that Iran has asked Turkey to help resolve its 30-year dispute with the U.S. as a possible prelude to re-establishing ties, in an interview with the “Guardian” newspaper, later reported in the “Hürriyet Daily News Online.” Iranian officials made the request while George Bush was in office, Erdoğan said, adding that he had passed the message to the White House at the time. Erdoğan also renewed his criticism of Israel’s recent offensive in Gaza and challenged the Israeli Prime Minister-designate, Binyamin Netanyahu, to recognize Palestinians’ right to have their own state. Asked if Turkey could play a mediating role in overcoming mistrust between Washington and Tehran, Erdoğan replied that “Iran does want Turkey to play such a role. And if the United States also wants and asks us to play this role, we are ready to do this.”

13 February: During an official visit to Russia, Turkish President Abdullah Gül formally concluded a new strategic agreement with Russia. The new bilateral accord, officially known as the “Joint Declaration between the Republic of Turkey and the Russian Federation on Progress towards a New Stage in Relations and Further Deepening of Friendship and Multidimensional Partnership,” was signed by the Turkish and Russian presidents in Moscow on 13 February 2009. The accord asserts that “Turkish-Russian relations and cooperation serve the interests of both countries and also contribute to peace, security, stability and development of Eurasia,” and confirms each sides’ commitment to carrying out activities within the context of the “Action Plan for Cooperation in Eurasia between the Republic of Turkey and the Russian Federation.” The document further pledges to deepen cooperation in economic and trade, energy and transport, adding that the “Parties, with the understanding that security and stability in the

Eurasian geography is directly related with the stability in the South Caucasus region, agree on the necessity to take effective measures for resolving frozen conflicts that constitute potential destabilizing elements in the South Caucasus,” and noting that each side considers “the Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform” as a “constructive initiative” to that would “help overcome lack of confidence that they observe that exists among the countries that are parties to the frozen conflicts.”

11 February: In comments to a meeting of Turkey’s International Investors Association in Istanbul, former U.S. Ambassador to Turkey, Mark Parris, said “the bad news is that the Armenian lobby is fully mobilized, highly motivated and in possession of unprecedentedly clear and unqualified commitments from leading members of the new administration that the events of 1915 will be termed genocide.”

7 February: Turkish Foreign Minister Ali Babacan met with Armenian Foreign Minister Eduard Nalbandian and President Serzh Sarkisian on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference and reviewed the status of “secret” talks between both sides continuing under Swiss mediation, and discussed the unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

4 February: During the Moscow summit meeting of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), comprising seven post-Soviet states (Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan), a decision is announced to form new military Collective Rapid Reaction Forces (CRRF). Armenian officials hail the move as an essential step toward enhancing Armenian security, hinting at the threat from neighboring Azerbaijan and Turkey.

12 January 2009: Turkey created a new special section within its Interior Ministry designed to coordinate “strategic efforts” against terrorism. The new Security Under-Secretariat will not direct any operations, but will be responsible for “research, analysis and assessments” and will be tasked with handling terrorist organizations besides the PKK.

6 January 2009: Turkish military aircraft attacked several PKK bases in Northern Iraq (bases near Aquwan, which was also struck by artillery fire from Iran). Iranian artillery also shelled a PKK base near Maradu. The Turkish and Iranian governments have shared information on operations against PKK bases in northeastern Iraqi territory. Given its location, it is likely Aquwan serves as a logistical supply point for both the PKK and PJAK. The attack follows two similar operations, on 26-28 and 16-17 December that struck PKK bases in Khwakurk and Khnera (in Northern Iraq).

24 December 2008: The Turkish and Iraqi governments agreed to increase bilateral “cooperation” aimed at halting the PKK from using bases in Northern Iraq. Iraq has promised Turkey that it will act to curb PKK operations, including intelligence cooperation and permitting Turkey to maintain surveillance bases in northern Iraq. The Iraqi government says that it will “continue to fight against terrorism” but Turkey insists that Iraq provides more help in eliminating PKK base areas completely. Members of the Turkish Kurdish political party, the Democratic Society Party (DTP) launched their own initiative with Iraqi Kurds to explore political solutions to the PKK insurgency.

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

New Report: “*Eurasian Energy Security*.” The U.S. Council on Foreign Relations released a 66-page report in February. The report, authored by Jeffrey Mankoff, assessed energy security in Eurasia, and included a focus on Turkey’s role in regional energy transit and security. Most notably, the report identified Turkey as a “problem” for the proposed Nabucco pipeline project, stating that:

“Although Turkey does not produce its own gas, it is a crucial part of the transit corridor for both the Nabucco project and BTC/BTE, and is a stakeholder in Nabucco through its state-run energy company Botas, which holds 16.7 percent share in the consortium. But Turkey continues to block progress on negotiations for a common legal framework that would allow the pipeline to move forward. Meanwhile, many southeastern European states are wary of Ankara’s pivotal role. In essence, their complaints about Turkey echo those of Ukraine and Belarus about Russia: their larger neighbor has been willing to cut energy supplies to extract political concessions. Countries like Greece, Bulgaria, and Hungary fear increasing their reliance on Turkey and see South Stream, which would run beneath the Black Sea before coming ashore at Varna, Bulgaria, as a way of diversifying their gas supplies by reducing dependence on Ankara.”

The complete report is available online at the Council on Foreign Relations’ website, at: www.cfr.org.

Special Analysis: Pending Al-Qaeda Attack in Turkey? In the 6 February 2009 issue of the Jamestown Foundation's Eurasia Daily Monitor, Visiting Fellow Emrullah Uslu provided his unique insight into a surge in Al-Qaeda-related thefts and robberies in Turkey, as part of a broader trend regarding the growing threat of an Al-Qaeda-linked attack in Turkey.

The analysis is available at: www.jamestown.org.

New Report on Turkish Military's Presence in Cyberspace. The "Open Source Center" released a 16-page report on 2 February 2009, assessing the Turkish military's presence in cyberspace. According to the report's findings:

"The military uses (the website of the General Staff of the Turkish Armed Forces) to inform the public of its counterterrorism activities, to expound its views as the upholder of Atatürk's legacy and the foundations of the Turkish Republic, and to offer what it considers the official viewpoint of the Turkish state on the Armenian issue. Targeting the public as well as army personnel, the site showcases the (Turkish Armed Forces), its military prowess, its activities, and its projects, and offers a comprehensive archive and access to its publications."

The full report, "Turkey: General Staff Website Serves as Main Media Outlet for Military," is available in Adobe Acrobat (pdf) format and can be requested from TPQ editorial staff.

New Report: "Preventing Conflict over Kurdistan." The U.S.-based Carnegie Endowment for International Peace released a comprehensive report in January 2009, written by Henri Barkey. The report examined the post-war security situation over Kurdistan, with a focus on Turkey as well. According to the report, "rising tensions in Turkey between the state and its Kurdish minority" represented a serious potential threat, adding that the Kurdish issue may also emerge as an even more serious problem for U.S.-Turkish relations.

The report is available online at the Carnegie Endowment's website, at: www.CarnegieEndowment.org.

3. “ACADEMIC NEWS”

Washington, DC, 4 February 2009: The Washington-based Jamestown Foundation hosted a seminar entitled, “From Cyprus to Iraq: Turkey’s Near Abroad,” with a presentation by Hugh Pope, the Turkey Representative for the International Crisis Group, the independent conflict resolution and prevention organization.

Resident for more than two decades in Istanbul, Pope mainly writes reports on Turkey, Cyprus and the European Union (freely available at www.crisisgroup.org). Previously he was a staff correspondent for The Wall Street Journal, covering the broader Middle East for the decade until 2005. Hugh Pope’s books include *Sons of the Conquerors: the Rise of the Turkic World* and *Turkey Unveiled: A History of Modern Turkey*.

The video record of the seminar is available at: www.jamestown.org/fileadmin/JamestownContent/HughPope.wmv