



THE TURKEY, RUSSIA, IRAN, U.S. NEXUS: POLITICAL AND SECURITY DIMENSIONS

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Highlights

This expert workshop explored the evolving political and security interests and concerns of Turkey, Russia, Iran, and the United States in the Eastern Mediterranean, Central Asia, and the Caucasus/Black Sea regions.

- The four countries have fundamental differences concerning political change in the Arab world. Turkey and the United States have embraced the transitions and support the development of political pluralism. Russia and Iran have been more circumspect due to fears about the political forces behind the Arab Awakening and that they could inspire domestic unrest. This caution, together with support for the Assad regime in Syria, have been damaging to their influence in the Eastern Mediterranean.
 - ✓ The United States and Russia should try to reach an informal understanding on desirable outcomes in the region and developments their two governments can work with others to avoid.
 - ✓ Assessing the causes and direction of the Arab Awakening could also be helpful to understanding the challenges of impending political transitions in Central Asia.
- The Iranian nuclear negotiations have reached a critical juncture. Military strikes against Iran could lead to a serious breach in U.S. relations with Russia and Turkey. While opposed to Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons because it would upset the regional balance of power, Turkish and Russian leaders see no alternative to diplomacy in resolving the crisis because military action against Iran would trigger a wide-ranging conflict with devastating consequences. Russian participants argued that there is still time for negotiations, as Iran will need at least 5–7 years to fabricate a nuclear weapon. U.S. and European confidence in the negotiation track is waning and President Obama has rejected containment as a policy option, affirming military action remains a last resort to prevent Tehran from acquiring a nuclear weapon.
 - ✓ Turkey and other neighbors that do not have a history of animosity toward Iran still hope to be able to convince Tehran that acquisition of nuclear weapons will lead to enduring isolation and insecurity.
 - ✓ Many Turkish and Russian interlocutors repeatedly insisted that U.S. engagement with Iran on non-nuclear issues where no fundamental difference of interests exists was a must to resolve most regional issues.
- Central Asia faces critical political transitions in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan and the potential for the emergence and spread of extremist groups supported by elements in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The Arab Awakening is unlikely to be replicated in Central Asia because civil societies in the region are more developed than those in the Middle East and the Soviet legacy has left a strong commitment to secular governments among political elites. However, there has been a revival of Islam in the region and the political environment is becoming more welcoming of Islamic groups. Secular regimes could be challenged by Islamic movements, including some radical ones, that are gaining influence.
- The four governments have largely diverging but some common interests in Central Asia. Russia seeks to maintain its dominant influence and preferential access to resources. The United States seeks to strengthen state sovereignty to limit Russian dominance and continues to balance support for democracy with the need to cooperate with authoritarian regimes on Afghanistan and combating terrorism. Russia and regional governments are increasingly watchful about rapidly growing Chinese

influence. Washington's level of engagement will diminish post-2014 given other priorities. Turkey aspires to support development and trade ties and to prevent Russia from retaining a controlling position over energy flows, but has limited capacity and commitment to the region. Competition between Tehran and Ankara is rather limited in Central Asia. Each has found their own niche and enjoy good bilateral relations with states in the region.

- ✓ Trilateral cooperation on Afghanistan and Pakistan would be desirable. The state of U.S.-Russian relations will have a major influence on the Afghan transition. Turkey has had some success in bringing the conflicting parties together and retains influence in Islamabad that could be better utilized.
 - ✓ It would be wise to find ways to engage Tehran in regional stabilization efforts. Iran shares interests with Russia, Turkey, and the United States in limiting the trafficking of drugs, weapons, and people, as well the growth of Sunni Salafi extremist groups, all of which threaten its security, particularly in Sistan-Baluchestan province.
 - ✓ The demand for regional security cooperation will likely increase and this could help overcome the current reluctance of Central Asian states to work with one another and with Russia. CSTO's role in regional security will likely remain limited but the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and ad hoc arrangements could prove useful in addressing various regional problems.
- The interests of Turkey, Russia, and Iran clash intensely in the Caucasus. The Soviet legacy still shapes the strategic landscape and Russia retains a dominant role. Ankara seeks to promote interdependence among the three South Caucasus states in order to strengthen their sovereignty and to expand commercial and energy links to Turkey. Iran's engagement in the region includes deepened ties to Armenia, efforts to intimidate Azerbaijan, but caution with respect to Nagorno-Karabakh. Iran does not want Russia heavily involved in the South Caucasus, but has avoided confronting Moscow, and has benefitted from a mistrust of Turkey in the region. Washington's interests are stability and enhancing the sovereignty of countries in the region by promoting democracy and diversification of commercial relations. U.S. efforts to limit Russian and Iranian influence are doomed to failure.
 - Enduring tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh threaten regional stability in the Caucasus. The current military balance prevents either side from making gains, but continued cross-border violence could trigger a conflict. Russian participants observed that maintaining the status-quo in Nagorno-Karabakh is the most feasible goal for Russia. Moscow is unable to resolve the conflict as both sides have refused to change their positions. It can only prevent the two antagonists from going to war.
 - ✓ Normalization of relations between Turkey and Armenia, including opening their borders, is out of the question for the near-term, but some lower profile initiatives underway, including cultural exchanges and opening transit in border provinces without formal negotiations, could increase connectivity and build positive momentum. There is potential for regional development projects and tourism that would also benefit both countries.

Background on the Workshop

The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington, in cooperation with The Institute of Oriental Studies (IVRAN) of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, and The Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey (TEPAV), Ankara, held an international workshop at IVRAN on June 18-19, 2012 that explored political and security issues in relations between Turkey, Russia, Iran, and the United States. This was the second of two workshops (the first of which was held at TEPAV on March 29, 2012 and focused on economic and energy dimensions) designed to deepen and give a more multinational character to initial CSIS analysis of the nexus of relations between Turkey, Russia, and Iran and to promote international dialogue. His Excellency Aydın Sezgin, Ambassador of the Republic of Turkey to the Russian Federation, graciously hosted an opening reception for workshop participants at his residence. During the workshop scholars and former officials from Russia, Turkey, and the United States examined the political and security interests and concerns of their countries in the Eastern Mediterranean, Central Asia, and the Caucasus and Black Sea regions, as well with respect to Iran's nuclear program. They also advanced some policy recommendations for addressing various regional challenges and resolving differing national interests. This report captures the key points of the workshop, which was conducted on a non-attribution basis to encourage candid dialogue.

I. Political and Security Concerns in the Eastern Mediterranean

The first panel examined political changes and security issues in the Eastern Mediterranean following the Arab Awakening and unrest in Libya and Syria and the goals and interests of each country in that region.

U.S. Interests and Concerns

An American presenter described U.S. security interests in the region as indirect and linked to important bilateral relations with Israel, Egypt, and Turkey. These bilateral relations are in a triangular shape that has shifted as a result of the changes following the Arab Awakening. The overarching U.S. interest is to sustain these bilateral relationships and avoid conflict in the Eastern Mediterranean. This presenter argued that the United States has no design on the Eastern Mediterranean.

The United States has a special and long-term commitment to the security of Israel. Washington wants a confident Israel that is rooted in the region and has key allies in the region and outside. An insecure Israel would be detrimental to the region. Turkish-Israeli relations have been deteriorating, which is not reassuring to Israel. The Egyptian elections have also been unsettling to Israel and are likely to complicate relations with the United States. The military's efforts to reassert control and temper the growing power of the Muslim Brotherhood have been reassuring to Israel, but are probably not sustainable.

U.S. policy favors political change in Syria and is heavily influenced by humanitarian concerns and a sense of social responsibility. There are four tracks at this point in U.S. policy: 1. pursue the Annan plan and create a contact group with key European Union countries and Turkey; 2. bilateral engagement with Russia; 3. bolster unity among the Syrian opposition; 4. press the Assad government externally. Most American political leaders are reluctant to arm the opposition directly, but have allowed their Saudi and Qatari allies to do so. U.S. and Russian goals are broadly similar—avoid proxy wars and more slaughter. The Obama administration has talked about the need for an overall political transformation, but it has no specific outcome in mind and no leader to push forward. Thus far, it seems to know what it wants to avoid and things it could accept as positive outcomes. The longer the current conflict continues, the more likely it is going to lead to extremism and other undesirable outcomes. Israel and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries see the Syrian turmoil as a way to hurt the Iranian government. The Obama

administration does not see the Syrian crisis as a proxy war against Iran, although certain people in Washington do state that. Rather, they see the current turmoil as part of the Arab Awakening and believe that the upsides of political transformation outweigh the downsides. Turkey has been quite optimistic about the prospects for fundamental political change. While that optimism has faded a bit, Ankara recognizes that Syria has been transformed.

Russian Interests and Concerns

A Russian speaker noted that the Arab Awakening has changed the situation throughout the Middle East and has global implications. It is important to understand its causes and calculate how it will evolve because the Arab countries and the Middle East will not be the only ones that will embark on such political transitions away from authoritarian systems. People in Central and South Asia, in both Muslim and non-Muslim countries, are beginning to see the world differently and to speak out. The process in the Arab world started prematurely with inadequate institutional development. The roots of the Arab Awakening can be traced to the 2009 elections in Iran where masses of young people made effective use of the Internet and went into the streets to protest the results. Urban voters supported opposition figures, while the rural populations voted for Ahmadinejad. The Internet gave people from Iran and all parts of the region an opportunity to express their grievances.

The speaker argued that these changes in the Eastern Mediterranean are of even greater consequence for Russia than the United States, because Russian territory is close by and its trade routes and energy exports pass through the region. Current and future lines of trade and energy transit pass through Turkish territory and adjacent waters, making relations with Turkey even more important. Economic and political relations are on a positive course and with more than 3 million Russians traveling to Turkey annually the attitudes of Russians toward Turks and vice versa have improved dramatically.

The Russian speaker noted that cross-border ethnic and sectarian ties complicate Turkish policy options vis a vis Syria. Ankara is concerned that newly-active Kurdish opposition groups in Syria may embrace Kurdish separatism and support the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) that is waging a terrorist campaign in Turkey. In addition, there are 8-10 million Alevis and close to 500,000 Arab Alawites living in Turkey. A Turkish participant noted that Turkish Alevis and Arab Alawites are very different Islamic sects, but both have been persecuted minorities in their countries. Turkish Alevis, who generally support the opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), remain suspicious of the Sunni majority and are concerned that AKP efforts to support the Sunni majority in Syria in ousting Assad will leave their fellow Alawite minority vulnerable. Ankara is also increasingly concerned about the growth of a "Shia Front" extending from Tehran to Beirut.

The Russian speaker noted that Russia is also a Muslim country, with at least 15 million Muslims, including many Central Asian and Azeri guest workers. Russian Muslims in the Volga region differ from Middle Eastern Muslims as they experienced the reformation in the 19th century and have been living side-by-side with Christians (for example Cossaks and Tatars) for hundreds of years. Muslims and Christians fought in the same Army under Ivan the Great and one-third of Russian nobles were of Turkish origin. An American expert noted the situation in the North Caucasus is very different, where Muslim populations were conquered by Russia in the 19th century with great difficulty. The Bolshevik revolution ruined relations between Islam and Christianity in the Soviet Union. The rise of Salafi movements in the Middle East is dangerous for internal conflicts in the Caucasus. The Salafis in the Russian Caucasus are funded and receive arms from extremists in the Middle East.

Another Russian participant argued that Israel's security is also a key concern for Russia because a large number of Russian émigrés live in Israel. Russian leaders hoped that the Arab Awakening would bring a

positive, constructive search for openness in the region to alleviate Israel's isolation. An American participant noted that Americans tend to forget that Russia and Israel enjoy a strong relationship that is not at the expense of their relationships with the United States.

Turkish Interests and Concerns

A Turkish presenter noted there is both continuity and change in Turkey's foreign policy toward the Eastern Mediterranean. Continuity is reflected in the close relationship with the United States. Turkey joined NATO in the face of the threat of Soviet expansion into the region. The Eastern Mediterranean became a major element of Turkish foreign policy as it worked with the United States and the United Kingdom to create a defense system for the region. In the post-Cold War era, Iraq became the most important issue in Turkey-U.S. relations and led to some serious strains during the administration of George W. Bush. Since then, the AKP government has been closely aligned with most Obama administration's policies in the Middle East. It shifted its stance on the Libyan civil war and, in response to U.S. appeals, endorsed all NATO efforts to stop Ghaddafi from slaughtering his own citizens. Despite a decade-long effort to build a rapprochement with Syria, Assad's brutality has led to a very hostile posture towards that regime. Turkey won't take more forceful actions against Assad without leadership and security assurances from Washington.

The most important change in Turkey has come in domestic politics. The AKP claims to be secular, but its roots are in Islamist parties and it is advancing Islamic values in society. In foreign affairs, AKP is actively working to forge closer relations with Islamic states.

The other key change is the diminished role of the Turkish General Staff in politics and the emergence of Prime Minister Erdoğan's firm control of the military. The Turkish military previously determined the country's security interests in the Eastern Mediterranean and coordinated closely with the Pentagon. This dynamic is no longer dominant.

President Obama called the U.S-Turkey relationship a "model partnership" early in his tenure. The two country's mutual embrace of the Arab Awakening epitomized this partnership. Many in the Obama administration believed AKP's "moderate" Islam could be a model for the Arab world. Islamists who had previously been shut out of political life could return to government through the ballot box, establish a cooperative relationship with the West, and integrate into the global financial system. Syria exposed limits of Turkish influence in the Middle East. AKP's hostility toward Israelis has also caused problems with Washington. This is a key component of Erdoğan's appeal and he's not going to move away from it anytime soon; nevertheless, Turkish-Israeli economic and cultural ties remain strong.

Discussion and Recommendations

An American participant observed that while Russia and the United States share an interest in stability in the Eastern Mediterranean, the differences on Syria have been fundamental. Washington favors Assad's removal. Kremlin leaders have said they are not wedded to Assad staying in power, and have even been exploring what they call the "Yemen variant" where he steps down but the Ba'athist regime remains intact. Washington is promoting unity among the opposition, while Russia is skeptical of their standing. In American politics, Russia is cast as isolated in their position of supporting Assad. However, China is standing behind Russia in the UN Security Council in opposing intervention in the domestic affairs of sovereign states. The Russian position on Syria is influenced by domestic concerns about the growth of radical Islam in the North Caucasus.

Russian participants said that Moscow's diplomatic stance on Syria was based on rivalry with Washington and skepticism about the Western push for democracy in the Arab world, because the Russian experience with democratic transformation has failed. They also argued that both U.S. and Russian policies were driven by domestic politics. American politics compel the U.S. to oppose authoritarianism and the strong anti-American tone of the presidential election in Russia makes it essential for the Kremlin to be firm on non-intervention in Syria to avoid loss of face.

A Russian participant noted that the Syrian armed forces had shown remarkable unity at that point with not a single unit defecting. Currently, the minorities in Syria are behind Assad, whether vocally or not, because they are afraid of the alternative. The Syrian opposition has sent representatives to Russia since the start of the uprising. Russia is willing to support a peaceful reconciliation process in Syria. Overall, the Russian government is afraid of sectarian revolutions in the region and opposes external intervention to achieve regime change.

An American participant argued Russia has never been enthusiastic about the Arab Awakening and politicization of Islam because it fears contagion. Russian participants agreed the Kremlin did see the Arab Awakening as an extension of the color revolutions with equally disruptive consequences for Russian interests. Another American participant observed that a key difference in the U.S. and Russian approaches toward the Arab Awakening relates to differing assessments of the political transformations underway. Russia sees multi-directional transformations unfolding that could lead to radicalization. American and Turkish officials seem more relaxed about this uncertainty on the ultimate direction of the change. Russia is also focused on preserving sovereignty and avoiding external intervention. A Turkish speaker contended that if Turkey and the United States were serious about democratization of the Middle East, they should start with Saudi Arabia. A Russian participant agreed there is a double standard at work since Washington and Ankara are not encouraging liberalization among the Gulf states.

An American speaker reiterated that each country's desired outcome is not diametrically opposed to the other. It would be helpful for the United States and Russia to develop a general agreement on desirable outcomes and what developments the two governments can work with others to avoid.

An American speaker noted that U.S. and Turkish perspectives on political change are much more closely aligned. Foreign Minister Davutoğlu regularly notes in his speeches that Turkey welcomed the Arab Awakening and embraced it. The fundamental divide between the four countries is over political change, with Turkey and the United States welcoming it and Russia and Iran fearing its consequences. He also noted that there is a sense in the United States that Russia is benefiting from regional instability in the near term because it has helped keep oil prices high, but over the long-term, this turmoil may be detrimental to Moscow's regional influence and domestic stability.

A Turkish participant noted his government's zero-problem policy is based on sustaining positive relations with capitals in the Eastern Mediterranean. However, since the regimes are changing, it is difficult to retain this policy. Turkey would like to be the most important trade hub of the region. The AKP's rise to power followed two decades of industrial and market transformation. Those in the United States who hope the Arab Awakening could follow this path quickly are naïve. In many Arab countries, political transformation came before economic transformation which may be problematic. Turkey has lost the opportunity to play a conciliatory role in the Syria conflict. Turkey hasn't done their "homework" on the key issues with Syria—Alawite and Kurdish minorities. If Turkey were able to solve their own Alevi and Kurdish issues, they would be in a stronger position vis-à-vis Syria. Another Turkish presenter noted that Syria is placing strains on Turkey's relations with Russia and Iran. The killings of Sunni by Syrian Alawites and others are a very emotional issue in Turkey that Ankara can't pretend is not a problem.

A Russian speaker said that Iran is pursuing realpolitik, not an Islamist foreign policy. Tehran is seeking to maintain its extended influence in the Eastern Mediterranean through Syria. Iran is also cooperating with Russia and Armenia to limit the influence of their Shia brethren, the Azeris.

One Turkish participant asserted that American policymakers don't really understand Islam. He contended there is fundamental Islam and radical Islam. Sunni Islam in Turkey and elsewhere is being "wahhabized" due to heavy influence from Saudi Arabia. The only truly moderate strand of Islam is to be found in Shia traditions, which have been overlooked because of Iran's current theocracy and expansionist policies. He argued that the United States missed an opportunity when it was unable to reach a modus vivendi with Ayatollah Sistani in Iraq, because his conservative teachings, embraced by most Iraqi Shia, favors a separation of religion and politics.

II. Iran's Nuclear Program and Regional Security

The workshop then turned to considering the implications of Iran's nuclear program, as another round of P5+1 discussions with Iran began in Moscow with muted expectations.

Turkish Interests and Concerns

A Turkish presenter noted that Turkish President Gül underlines the fact that the Iran-Turkey border has stayed the same since the 17th century not because of friendship, but because of the military balance between the two countries. Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons is upsetting that balance and policymakers in Ankara remain strongly opposed to such an outcome. Turkish political leaders continue a dialogue with the Iranians. They accept Iran's right to a full nuclear fuel cycle, and have candidly expressed their concerns to Tehran at the highest political levels. No one in Ankara wants to see a nuclear-armed Iran.

Many Turks feel Iran is so intent on its nuclear program due to fear and is linked to their national survival. Turkey's policy of engagement and non-confrontation with Iran has been designed to mitigate that fear, but cooperation with Iran can only work when there is no nuclear bomb. In the long-term, Turkey favors a Middle East nuclear weapons free zone. Turkish officials have tried to get Israeli counterparts to accept that Iran is a major part of the Middle East. Turkey, Israel, and Iran will persist, but their leaders need to eliminate the fear that overshadows their relations. This speaker argued that deepening trade and private sector development in the region is the best long-term solution.

U.S. Interests and Concerns

A U.S. presenter noted that since Iran resumed activities related to uranium enrichment in 2005, it has steadily amassed the wherewithal to build nuclear weapons. Iran has mastered the technology to enrich uranium and continues production despite the absence of any civil requirement. It has moved vigorously to increase enrichment from 4 percent to 20 percent, one step closer to weapons grade. Iran is estimated to have produced almost 6.2 tons of uranium enriched to a level of 3.5 percent since it began the work in 2007—some of which has subsequently been further processed into higher-grade material. Based on the IAEA reports, independent experts estimate that Iran's existing stockpile of low-enriched uranium, if further enriched, could produce over five nuclear weapons.

IAEA inspectors also have information indicating that Iran conducted studies and detailed engineering work on how to fashion highly enriched uranium into an advanced nuclear implosion device and its engineers have studied how a nuclear device could be mounted on the Shahab 3 missile, which can reach Russia, Turkey, other European countries, and many Mediterranean and Gulf states. In 2007 the U.S.

Intelligence Community assessed that this work on weaponization halted in 2003. But this is work that could easily be restarted.

After skepticism about the diplomatic track with Iran, the Bush administration decided to give indirect support to the E3/EU efforts and joined the effort more fully by 2006. Since then, the P5+1 have offered a variety of incentives: advanced nuclear technology, legally-guaranteed assurances of nuclear fuel, and participation in an international fuel enrichment center. The Obama administration and its P5+1 partners offered to provide Iran with fuel for a research reactor in exchange for much of the low-enriched uranium that Iran illicitly produced at Natanz. Offer after offer has been refused by Tehran. Iran's authorities have shown more interest in posturing domestically and buying time for nuclear pursuits. This speaker noted that the United States remains committed to multilateral diplomacy, backed by crippling sanctions and the threat of a military option, as the best course of action to Iran's nuclear program.

U.S. officials and experts generally assess that Iranian leaders see a nuclear weapon as a way to assure regime survival in the face of growing domestic unrest and to avoid nuclear blackmail by the United States or threats from others. Iran might not test a device or even announce that they have the capability—they could keep it keep ambiguous or “under the veil.” The nuclear weapons program is tightly controlled by the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) and transfer of nuclear weapons to terrorist groups is seen as unlikely. There is strong concern that Iran, with an explicit or implicit nuclear deterrent, might be more emboldened in extending its influence and intimidating neighbors through the use of surrogates (Hezbollah), unconventional means, and perhaps even conventional force to threaten and attack nearby countries.

The biggest concern among U.S. officials and analysts is the destabilizing consequences of further proliferation. A nuclear-armed Iran may lead other countries—Saudi Arabia, Gulf states, Egypt, or even Turkey—to consider acquisition of their own nuclear weapons capability. Such a nuclear arms race is not inevitable, nor would it necessarily be fast. But it expands the risk of accidents, miscalculations, or even nuclear weapons falling into the hands of terrorists.

A recent CSIS report, “Gulf Kaleidoscope: Reflections on the Iranian Challenge,” looks at the options: engagement, containment, and deterrence as well as compellence—preventive military action to stop the development of nuclear weapons. The risks of a military strike are well understood, which is why it has been so unpalatable even to the Israelis—who see a nuclear-armed Iran as an existential threat. Military action would unleash broad Iranian retaliation in the region and against U.S. and Israeli interests around the world, leading to disruption of energy flows and further global economic instability. It could trigger a wider war in the Middle East with potential refugee flows into neighboring regions. It might only set back the program but not end it. In fact, it could drive it underground and to more robust goals. President Obama said in March, before a meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, that he rejected containment as a policy option. He declared explicitly that his administration would use force—a “military component,” as he put it—only as a last resort to prevent Tehran from acquiring a bomb.

Russian Interests and Concerns

A Russian presenter noted that if there are no clear results from the P5+1 negotiations, Iran will risk a military confrontation with either the United States or Israel, or both, which would have disastrous consequences. He argued that prolongation of the talks benefits all the parties. Iran can't develop a weapon for some time and its leaders need time to reach a compromise.

The speaker noted that Mark Fitzpatrick of the IISS in London has estimated that given its stocks of enriched uranium and other factors Iran needs about a year and a half to build nuclear weapon. He argued

that this calculation was unrealistic and doesn't take into account internal and external political and economic factors. Iran will need at least 5–7 years to be near realization of a nuclear weapon. Iran will develop the infrastructure to be ready to fashion a nuclear weapon when the ruling elite determines it will be necessary. So there is still time for Iran and the international community to reach a compromise.

Iran will be motivated to continue the talks because sanctions are really constraining the country's economic development. Because of internal political divisions, it will take time to reach consensus within the ruling elite on an acceptable resolution of the nuclear weapon issue. President Ahmadinejad and Majlis Speaker Larijani may want to reach a compromise, but they can't move now because of presidential elections in 2013. At this point there is little common ground between the P5+1 and the Iranian positions.

Discussion and Recommendations

A Russian speaker commented that the IAEA reports on Iranian work on nuclear devices are inconclusive. They cited alleged studies on weapons components, but have not provided hard evidence that Iran is developing a nuclear weapon. He said the experts at Rosatom, the Russian state nuclear energy corporation, assess Iranian technical skills and education levels with respect to nuclear materials to be very low and that they lack sufficient numbers of trained technicians to operate a nuclear weapons program successfully. Another Russian speaker said Russian technicians working at the Bushehr nuclear plant have respect for the professionalism and capabilities of the Iranian technicians, many of whom were trained in Western universities. Another Russian speaker noted that the Iranians are very confident and think of themselves as a nation of great power with the capacity to overcome all technical hurdles.

This participant also argued that Iran is unwilling to rely on a guaranteed fuel supply from the international community. Governments must accept that Iran will continue nuclear enrichment. Iran is willing to suspend enrichment beyond 5 percent at just one facility, which is a good start and allows Tehran to save face. The international community needs to think seriously about what benefits Iran should receive for this concession. A Turkish speaker suggested a limited opening of the European market to Iran natural gas supplies would provide a powerful incentive. He also argued that the P5+1 and the IAEA discussions focus too much on technical issues and do not address Iranian security adequately.

A Turkish presenter noted that there is great concern in Ankara as to who controls the nuclear program and likely delivery systems in Iran in light of the current political wrangling in Tehran. These concerns are akin to the concerns many have expressed about the effectiveness of controls on the Pakistani nuclear program.

An American participant asked whether the Pakistani or the Iranian nuclear programs are more dangerous. U.S. and other experts have been greatly concerned about the security of Pakistan's nuclear weapons. Looking at the history of nuclear weapons programs, there have always been concerns that ruthless leaders like Stalin, Mao, or others could not be trusted to be prudent in the development of nuclear weapons. But deterrence has proven remarkably potent in keeping any aggressive intent in check. Iran's drive for nuclear weapons is principally driven by security concerns. Iraq had been Iran's biggest threat; now they are concerned about Israel and the United States, but also Saudi Arabia and Turkey. Is it really likely that Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons will trigger a domino effect with wider proliferation in the region?

Another American agreed that Iranian leaders have a yearning for great power status that they feel they can't achieve without nuclear weapons. They also see their country surrounded by hostile neighbors and believe possession of nuclear weapons provides the only absolute guarantee of their security. They see

that states that gave up nuclear programs, Iraq and Libya, were attacked by the West. However, nuclear capabilities will isolate Iran which will bring them back on the track of feeling insecure. Perhaps neighbors that do not have a history of animosity toward Iran can help work it out of its cycle of paranoia. He also noted that there is real fear among neighboring states that a nuclear-armed Iran might be hard to deter and could even become more aggressive.

A Turkish presenter noted that the Ankara government's position is that Israel's nuclear program also needs to be monitored and be taken into consideration as the talks with Iran go forward. A Russian speaker commented that Iran will remain reluctant to reach an agreement as long as the Israeli nuclear program remains outside the scope of the IAEA inspections regime. He urged the United States to encourage Israel to be more transparent about its nuclear program and to not exaggerate the state of the Iranian nuclear weapons program.

A Turkish speaker asked why the United States has not engaged more with Iran on Afghanistan and Pakistan, which many Russian and Turkish participants repeatedly insisted was a prerequisite to resolving a host of regional issues where no fundamental difference in interests exists. It was noted that the United States cooperated very well with Iran in supporting the Northern Alliance. Washington's priority on the nuclear issue restricts pursuit of cooperation in other areas and the current Iranian government is more suspicious of and unwilling to work with Washington.

An American participant noted that U.S. strategy is to maintain its military capabilities in the Persian Gulf to reassure partners in the region. Enhanced security cooperation with partners in the Middle East could increase confidence in the effectiveness of these commitments. These steps can enhance extended deterrence and also slow the impulse of these countries to strike Iran or develop nuclear weapons. These measures can support both dissuasion and deterrence if the strategy fails. Prudent pursuit of missile defenses to protect U.S. and NATO territory and populations as well as partners in the Middle East, along with offers of cooperation with Russia in this area, can both bolster diplomatic efforts, dissuade Iranian leaders that their efforts to use the threat of nuclear weapons could be blunted by missile defenses, and also develop real capability to diminish the threat and support deterrence if a threat does materialize.

III. Political and Security Concerns in Central Asia

The third panel explored domestic challenges confronting Central Asian countries and the geopolitical and security concerns of Turkey, Russia, and the United States in the region. The moderator noted that while not part of the agenda for this workshop, developments in the energy sector, including Kazakh oil and Turkmen gas, are sources of tension and could be part of the solution to some security concerns.

Russian Interests and Concerns

The Russian opening speaker noted that Moscow's main concern is destabilization of Central Asia. While each country faces a different set of challenges, domestic developments are more likely to trigger instability than external factors. The region is marred by authoritarian regimes unwilling to pursue substantial reforms for fear of upending a fragile equilibrium. Kyrgyzstan will remain volatile for the foreseeable future due to north-south rivalries and enduring tensions between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks. Tajikistan is more stable, but is challenged by Islamization, a weak parliamentary system, and, most importantly, whether President Rahmon will be able to maintain his regime. Kazakhstan's enlightened authoritarianism has proven quite successful and inter-ethnic conflicts have been avoided, but social inequality persists as evidenced by the demonstrations in Zhanaozen. Other states in the region are unlikely to see national eruptions in the near term.

The Arab Awakening is unlikely to be replicated in Central Asia because civil societies in the region are more developed than those in the Middle East and the Soviet legacy has left a strong commitment to secular governments among political elites. However, there has been a revival of Islam in everyday lives and the political environment is becoming more welcoming of Islamic groups. Secular regimes could be challenged by Islamic movements, including some radical ones, that are gaining influence.

The speaker concluded that the U.S. presence in Afghanistan is very important to Russian security interests and the withdrawal of U.S. and ISAF forces will have a significant negative impact on regional political dynamics and could create a security vacuum. Afghanistan and other states in the region are ill-equipped to counter the trafficking of drugs, weapons, and people that pose a significant risk to Russian and regional security. Another Russian participant lamented Moscow's decision to withdraw border guards from Tajikistan as shortsighted in this regard.

Turkish Interests and Concerns

The Turkish presenter outlined Ankara's historical lack of engagement in Central Asia—apart from its comprehensive relationship with Afghanistan from 1921-1991—which left Turkey unprepared to deal with the emergence of a new order in the region after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Ankara was among the first to recognize these countries after independence and received support from the West as a role model and sent military trainers, doctors, and teachers to assist transitions. However, the Turks—and their supporters—did not fully understand the internal political dynamics in play and lacked a coherent strategy for the region. After six failed summits in the immediate aftermath of independence and the re-emergence of Russian domination as a stabilizing power, the new governments of the region rejected pan-Turkism. While Ankara provided a welcome commercial alternative to Moscow, the authoritarian regimes were able to curb cultural and religious influences emanating from Turkey that they found problematic.

Ankara wants to remain a player in Central Asia. Prime Minister Erdoğan said that Turkey was “thinking of leaving Afghanistan after all other countries have left,” and it is likely to continue to try to play a role in facilitating dialogue with the Taliban. The Turkish government is willing to assist counterparts in the region to address mutual security concerns such as trafficking in human, arms, and drugs. Turkey is also a dialogue partner of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which may be a useful vehicle for Russian and Chinese cooperation with other governments in the stabilization of Afghanistan and dealing with other security issues. Turkey has a vested interest in the stabilization of these countries in order to maintain unimpeded energy flows and prevent Russia from gaining a controlling position where it could restrict western flows—access to Turkmen gas is particularly important to Turkey's aspirations to be a major energy transit corridor. Several non-governmental Turkish groups, including the Fethullah Gülen movement, run schools and development projects in Central Asia.

U.S. Interests and Concerns

The American presenter outlined U.S. security concerns in Central Asia as bifurcated with one school of thought arguing that the main threats are state-based and external, including geopolitical and energy competition in which Russia and China figure prominently, and another believing the greater threats are indigenous and non-state based including authoritarianism, weak political institutions, and the threat of transnational terrorism. U.S. security policy has emphasized cooperation of the Central Asian states with institutions like NATO and the OSCE, and promotion of energy pipeline routes that don't go through Russia or Iran. Washington has also supported democratic and economic reforms, as well as regional cooperation. However, the democracy promotion agenda has often clashed with the need for the U.S. to cooperate with authoritarian regimes on Afghanistan and combating terrorism and managing that balance has often been problematic.

With the 2014 ISAF withdrawal approaching, it remains to be seen which strand of U.S. policy toward the region will be dominant. The state of U.S.-Russian relations will have a major influence on the Afghan transition. The U.S. effort to “reset” relations with Russia was mainly driven by the need to enlist Moscow’s support on Afghanistan and Iran. In recent years, Moscow had tolerated the continuing U.S. military presence in Kyrgyzstan, and gave access to its territory for land and air resupply routes for ISAF forces. How will this dynamic change when Afghanistan is not such a focus of U.S. leaders? Political developments in the region including power transitions in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan as well as the potential for the spread of radicalism in parts of Central Asia will also shape the geopolitical situation. While regional institutions such as the SCO, Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), and the Customs Union have been established in Central Asia, the U.S. has been skeptical of their utility. Washington sees them as ineffectual, and anti-democratic instruments designed to expand Russian and/or Chinese influence and U.S. attempts to engage them has come to naught. Ultimately, U.S. policy toward Central Asia will be shaped through the prism of Afghanistan and Washington’s level of engagement will likely diminish as U.S. priorities shift post-2014.

Discussion and Recommendations

Participants agreed that the demand for regional security cooperation will increase and this could help to overcome the current reluctance of Central Asian states to work with one another and with Russia. While CSTO has established a rapid reaction force, members have yet to agree to use the organization for peacekeeping missions. CSTO’s role in regional security will likely remain limited. They agreed it is in Russia’s interest to help shoulder the burden of border protection with national authorities in the region, and Chinese resources could also be helpful, but the complicated relationships among Central Asian states makes this a difficult task. Another constraint is that Central Asians are wary of Russian intrusion into their domestic affairs. Moscow has shifted its engagement strategy toward economic integration to accommodate Central Asian sensibilities.

Participants agreed that competition between Tehran and Ankara is rather limited in Central Asia compared to their more pronounced rivalry in the Middle East and even in the Caucasus. They have each found their own niche in Central Asia and governments in the region are happy to reap the benefits of good bilateral relations with each of them. The teachings of Fethullah Gülen and the National Vision Movement, who cast themselves as a unifying force for a new Islam, are not popular with regimes in the region. Several Gülenist schools have even been closed down.

Many participants agreed that relations with Pakistan would be a key factor in stabilizing Afghanistan and that the protracted deterioration in relations between Washington and Islamabad, particularly the military-to-military relationship, were quite concerning. It was also noted that Russia and Pakistan are pursuing a rapprochement.

In considering the potential for trilateral cooperation between Turkey, Russia, and the U.S. on Afghanistan and Pakistan, participants agreed it would be desirable and might be politically conceivable on a practical level. One Russian contributor pointed out that Turkey has influence in Pakistan and has already made an effort to bring conflicting parties together. Islamabad’s ongoing internal power struggle among the governing and opposition parties as well as between military and civilian authorities has put it on the brink of a political crisis that could lead to fragmentation of the country that would also further destabilize Afghanistan. One participant noted, however, that Turkey’s domestic political dynamics were affecting relations with Pakistan, as the AKP has wrested a great deal of power from the Turkish General Staff and Islamabad’s traditional partner in Turkey has been the military.

A number of participants posited that Iran has to be inserted into the Afghanistan-Pakistan equation if the United States is serious about stabilizing the region. Tehran has considerable concerns about spillover effects on its security, particularly in its Sistan-Baluchestan province that borders both countries. Iran would likely be interested in cooperation. American participants noted that Washington would find this unacceptable as long as Iran maintains its current stance on the nuclear question. If the Iranians were to demonstrate a desire to negotiate in good faith on the nuclear issue, the Obama administration might consider opening the dialogue to other issues.

A Turkish speaker cautioned that sharing water among the Central Asian republics has also become more contentious given that quotas established during Soviet times are no longer in place, and water is an important component to both the energy and agriculture-based economies of these countries. So this may be another area for regional cooperation.

IV. Political and Security Concerns in the Caucasus and the Black Sea

The final session explored national perspectives on enduring tensions in the Caucasus and on security in the Black Sea region.

Russian Interests and Concerns

A Russian presenter noted that when the three states in the southern Caucasus achieved independence in 1991, the new borders did not immediately undo decades of integration with Russia and the USSR. Moscow remains concerned about stability and the rights of Russian-speaking populations in the region. The three countries confront similar political and economic challenges. Their political systems concentrate too much power in the presidency and have ineffective mechanisms for succession. Serious economic problems have led to stagnation and sizable migration, particularly of guest workers to Russia.

Enduring tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh threaten regional stability. The presenter contended that Azerbaijan has tried to use its economic success to pressure Armenia for concessions on Nagorno-Karabakh. Baku aspires to incorporate Nagorno-Karabakh and the five Azeri districts that surround it into Azerbaijan. The current military balance prevents either side from making gains, but continued cross-border incidents of violence could trigger a conflict. Azeri pressure and the Georgia war led Russia to reestablish military bases in the South Caucasus. Russians are also concerned that if Israel and/or the United States attacked Iran to debilitate its nuclear program, Iran would inflict damage from the Persian Gulf to the Caspian region, with the potential for a wider conflict and possible refugee flows into Russia.

In the Black Sea region, Russia sees an emerging imbalance. Romania and Bulgaria have joined Turkey as members of NATO. Romania and Turkey will host elements of the NATO missile defense system.

Turkish Interests and Concerns

A Turkish presenter noted that the Caucasus is a strategic crossroads for Turkey, Russia, and Iran. The region is a transit route for Turkey to Russia and Central Asia. For Russia it provides an important connection to Iran and the Middle East. For Iran, it is an alternative route to Europe and the Black Sea if things go wrong in Persian Gulf.

Turkey was the first country to recognize the independence of Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia. Ankara's goal was to promote energy and commercial interdependence among the three South Caucasus

states in order to strengthen their sovereignty and to open the door to commercial links and political cooperation with Turkey. There are strong lobbies for all three countries and various political factions within each country resident in Turkey, which complicate Ankara's policymaking. Normalization of relations with Armenia, beginning with ratification of the three protocols Turkey signed with Armenia in 2008, have been slowed by concerns of alienating Azerbaijan, which is a close ally and key energy partner. The driving force for normalization in Ankara was President Gül, who responded to encouragement from U.S. Secretary of State Clinton; however, Prime Minister Erdoğan stopped the process, in part because of strong pressure from Azerbaijan and the prospect of a new partnership between Baku and Moscow. While there are no formal diplomatic relations, Armenia has an official presence in Turkey through its delegation to the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation in Istanbul. There is some commerce, daily air flights between the two countries, and 57,000 Armenians living in Turkey, although many lack official work authorizations.

The speaker agreed that Azerbaijan's leadership is becoming very confident about its regional role as a result of revenues from their natural resource exports. Meanwhile, Armenia is losing many well-educated professionals via migration to Russia and the United States and could not re-populate Nagorno-Karabakh even if it tried. Tbilisi cannot make any concessions on Abkhazia, while they could negotiate on South Ossetia. Georgia must find a solution on the basis of interdependence that will integrate Abkhazia and South Ossetia into the country.

He argued that Iran's engagement in the region is multifaceted and has a strategic purpose. Iran has deepened its ties to Armenia and is completing a railroad line linking the two countries. While it has tried to intimidate Azerbaijan, Iran is extremely cautious with respect to Nagorno-Karabakh. Iran does not want Russia heavily involved in the South Caucasus because that might trigger further conflicts that could draw in the United States and Turkey. He also noted that Iran has benefitted from mistrust of Turkey among all the south Caucasus governments. Regional mechanisms for maintaining stability and cooperation in the Black Sea are useful, but could benefit from engagement by the United States.

U.S. Interests and Concerns

An American presenter commented that with so many dramatic developments in the Middle East and East Asia demanding attention from official Washington of late, the Caucasus now seems like a strategic sideshow. Four years ago, however, Washington's attention was riveted on the Georgia-Russia conflict, with a looming possibility of armed clash between the United States and Russia in the Black Sea. The Georgia-Russia conflict reflected shortcomings in U.S. policy toward both Russia and Georgia. Washington should not underestimate the risks that could still arise from turmoil in the Caucasus. The interests of Turkey, Russia, and Iran come together more intimately in the region than anywhere else, but the Soviet infrastructure still shapes the strategic landscape. Washington's interests are stability and enhancing the sovereignty of countries in the region by promoting democracy and diversification of commercial relations. U.S. efforts to limit Russian and Iranian influence are doomed to failure.

In 2010, senior U.S. officials identified the possibility of a renewed conflict between Russia and Georgia was the greatest threat to the "reset" in relations with Moscow. Moscow sees Georgia as inextricably linked to the North Caucasus. It realized most of the objectives in the 2008 conflict. The situation in South Ossetia and Abkhazia remain at a stalemate and President Obama is criticized for not doing enough to aid Georgia. There isn't much enthusiasm among NATO members to move on their commitment to Georgian membership in the Alliance, despite Tbilisi's substantial military contributions to ISAF operations in Afghanistan.

Nagorno-Karabakh is a frozen conflict that could become hot again as violent incidents have increased over the last few years. A new conflict would be more bloody and dangerous, as each side is much more heavily armed than they were during last conflict 20 years ago. Baku's rhetoric is more assertive, but seems mostly for domestic consumption. The Azeri leadership seems to appreciate these dangers as well as the challenges of conducting military operations in the difficult mountainous terrain. The risks of escalation and of drawing Russia, Turkey, and Iran into the fray are probably manageable. The Armenian Diaspora has strong views on the issue and domestic politics also play into Yerevan's stance. The Minsk Group's efforts are not progressing. While President Medvedev gave the issue considerable attention, President Putin is unlikely to push for a solution as the Kremlin is comfortable with the status quo. Any resolution will have to come through compromise among political factions in Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Israel has become a new actor in the region. Iran and Israel have been conducting a proxy war of assassinations in the Caucasus. In March, there was a story in the U.S. journal, *Foreign Policy*, that Baku and Tel Aviv struck a deal that would give Israelis access to Azeri airspace and military installations to support an attack on Iran. Despite quite a long history of security ties between the two countries, the presenter found this story implausible and very risky for Azerbaijan, as there are so many things Iran could do to make life difficult for Baku. Moreover, it seems unlikely that Baku would strike such a deal without checking with Moscow, and Moscow expressed clear concerns with the report. As discussed in the session on Iran's nuclear program, a military strike on Iran would also have disastrous consequences for the South Caucasus.

Discussion and Recommendations

Russian participants observed that maintaining the status-quo in Nagorno-Karabakh is the most feasible goal for Russia. Moscow is unable to resolve the conflict as both sides have refused to change their positions. It can at best only prevent the two antagonists from going to war, and there is growing concern in Moscow that the cycle of violence (with 60 people killed along the frontier in 2011) could spiral out of control. Azerbaijan has the upper hand in Nagorno-Karabakh. Currently there are 100,000 Azeris in Nagorno-Karabakh and Baku is improving its military. The mountainous geography limits military options, as it is impossible for either side to concentrate more than 25,000 troops. Yerevan and Moscow agreed in 2010 to extend Russia's access to the Gyumri military base in Armenia until 2044, and Russia stands by its bilateral and CSTO security commitments to Armenia. Moscow does not control Yerevan any more than the U.S. government controls the Armenian Diaspora—which has great influence over Yerevan. While Russia still has a number of problems with Azerbaijan, it is seeking to strengthen relations. Baku's official stance remains incorporation of Nagorno-Karabakh into Azerbaijan, which is unacceptable to Armenians there. Establishment of an autonomous region might be palatable. Russia would not realize economic gains from a solution in Nagorno-Karabakh. In the past, it was seen as a shorter route for energy pipelines, but the terrain makes this difficult.

An American participant argued that Russia's involvement in the Minsk Group is also designed to slow Azerbaijan's deepening partnership with NATO. The Kremlin sees Azerbaijan as a pivotal country in the region and it could gain leverage with Baku from brokering a resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. A Turkish participant said his country wants to be more active in resolving Nagorno-Karabakh to ensure regional stability and advance bilateral relations with Armenia and Georgia. There is a risk that if the domestic situation went sour in Baku, the government might seek to divert attention by restarting the conflict. Another Turkish participant observed that there is no consensus between Russia, the United States, and Turkey on a solution. The three governments pretend that a solution is very important to them, but they are not making it a real priority. It is an irritant that these powers have decided to tolerate.

A Turkish participant suggested one way to move forward on normalization of relations between Turkey and Armenia without alienating the Azeris would be to open transit and contacts in some border provinces without formal negotiations with Yerevan. The Turkish-Armenian Business Council has been active in considering such low-profile options to build momentum for wider contacts. Another Turkish participant argued that the protocols should not be regarded as linear. There were many other issues in the protocol aside from opening the borders. At this point, opening the border is out of the question. There are other steps that would increase the connectivity between Turkey and Armenia, including commercial, cultural, and student exchanges. Turkey has been pursuing small steps like these in recent months. For example, there were old administrative restrictions against Armenian trucks and goods entering Turkey. The Turkish Ministry of Transportation issued an executive order to remove these restrictions so that some Armenian trucks and mini buses can cross the border. Armenia is as important to Turkey as a transit country and there is potential for regional development projects and tourism that would benefit both countries.

A Turkish participant argued that the Azeris might have struck a deal with Israel on airspace access as a way to draw closer to Washington. An American participant also noted that this deal would give Israel proximity to Iran, and Azerbaijan could reduce its dependence on Russian military supplies. For Tel Aviv, another incentive may be that if Turkey falls out of the equation they will still have Azerbaijan as Israel badly needs partners.

A Russian participant noted that his country faces a number of unresolved issues in Abkhazia including property rights, work authorization, and a romanticized view that the populations would welcome Russian integration with open arms. The Abkhaz want independence and are asking the EU to help them reinstate their culture, economy, and politics. The key goal for the Abkhaz is to prevent Georgian refugees from coming back. There are also about 55,000 Armenians in Abkhazia and the relationship between the two groups is strained. Right now, there is a rough population balance among Armenians, Abkhazians, and Georgians. If Georgian refugees return it will be problematic. Russians are also concerned with Circassian question.

A Russian participant said Salafi influence is growing in the North Caucasus. Chechen leader Ramazan Kadyrov has sought to attract Arab investment in the region, including major companies based in Abu Dhabi. While Kadyrov has maintained stability, he has waged a violent crackdown on opponents and is enforcing his vision of Islam. In addition, various foreign jihadis are advising the Islamist militant Doku Umarov, who is believed to be responsible for a number of terrorists acts in Russia, including in the North Caucasus.