

Congressman Robert Wexler

Opening Statement

Subcommittee on Europe Hearing “The United States and Turkey: A Model Partnership”

May 14, 2009

The Europe Subcommittee will come to order.

I want to express my gratitude to our witnesses for testifying. Today’s hearing- “The United States and Turkey: A Model Partnership” - is being held a little over one month after President Obama’s historic visit to Turkey, where he addressed the Turkish people and parliament, and stated clearly that his Administration was prepared to “renew the alliance between our nations and the friendship between our people.”

President Obama’s trip to Turkey laid the foundation for enhanced American-Turkish cooperation and dramatically changed the playing field for increased US-Turkish collaboration in the economic, military and political spheres. This cooperation is essential to both nations as we face a global financial crisis and are grappling with serious security challenges in Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, the Balkans, Black Sea and Caucuses Region, and Middle East.

Turkey - as the world's 17th largest economy, a stalwart geo-strategic NATO ally, a member of the G20, and a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council - is strategically suited alongside the U.S. to meet the threats of the 21st century, including nuclear proliferation, countering terrorism, energy security and Middle East peace.

US-Turkish cooperation and coordination in both Afghanistan and Iraq continues to grow. Since 2002, Turkey has played a leading role in providing humanitarian, economic, military and security assistance in Afghanistan, has led the International Security Assistance Forces in Kabul on two occasions and recently hosted a trilateral summit meeting with the Presidents of Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Turkey has also played a positive role in efforts to stabilize Iraq through its role in the Trilateral Iraq-Turkey-US Commission. Turkey’s airbase at Incirlik and the Harbur Border Gate have been critical to American military operations and logistics in Iraq.

As the Obama Administration finalizes its withdrawal plans for Iraq, it is clear that Turkey can play a central role in the Administration’s plans to withdraw American troops safely, effectively and securely, and will continue to be a leading partner in Iraq’s future political, economic and security success.

There are few issues that weigh more heavily on the minds of the Turkish people than the unconscionable death and destruction caused over the past several decades by PKK terrorists. I applaud President Obama's effort to maintain security assistance to the Turkish government as it combats the PKK.

Today's hearing also comes on the heels of a much anticipated April 22nd announcement by the Turkish and Armenian governments that they have agreed on a comprehensive framework for the normalization of their bilateral relations. This diplomatic effort deserves the highest level of support from the United States and the international community; and I urge my colleagues in Congress to join me in supporting the Armenian and Turkish governments as they seek to establish diplomatic, political and economic relations. This effort is no small feat and both governments deserve our full support as they take politically charged decisions.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses who will provide insight into US-Turkish relations and offer their suggestions on how we can create and build a "Model US-Turkish Partnership" that will benefit both nations for generations to come.

I now would like to turn to the ranking member of the Subcommittee, Congressman Elton Gallegly, for his opening statement.