

*Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2009*

**The President's News Conference With President Abdullah Gul of Turkey in Ankara, Turkey**

*April 6, 2009*

*President Gul.* We are very pleased to host the President of the United States, Mr. Barack Obama, in Turkey. It would not be wrong to say that our discussions began in Strasbourg, and the discussions that we began in Strasbourg, we continued with them today, both during our meeting and then over lunch, and it was very beneficial.

At the outset of my remarks, I would like to say that we heard that there's been an earthquake in Italy. We just heard. And I would like to express my condolences to the people who lost their lives. We share the sorrow of the Italian people.

We are very appreciative of the fact that Mr. Obama, having been elected President, made Turkey one of his stops in his first overseas visit, and we have been very happy with that; the Turkish people have been very happy with that.

We have had opportunity to review the strategic dimension of our relations. Most of our relations seem to be on a military and political dimension, but we are also determined to move forward on the economic dimension of our relations. On the area of technology, we'll continue to support development of economic and technology cooperation. These are areas which we place importance on.

In—we look at Turkish-American issues, we see that the United States is very much interested, and must be interested, in important issues around the world as a superpower. And Turkey is an important country in her region, and Turkey is very much interested in many subjects. So if we were to make two separate lists of the issues that our countries are interested in, we would see that they are very much alike. And so I'm very pleased to say that Turkey and the United States have great understanding for each other and they work in cooperation with each other.

Of course, fighting against terrorism is one of the most important issues for both of the countries, and the cooperation that we've had so far will be further developed. And in many geographies, from Afghanistan to the Caucasus to the Balkans to the Middle East, we are working together, and we are determined to continue to work together. And the President has also shown great interest to Turkey's relations with the European Union. We appreciate that very much. We thank him very much for his words in that regard.

I think that this visit has been very beneficial. I'd like to welcome the President once again and wish him success.

Please.

*President Obama.* Well, thank you very much. And, President Gul, you could not be a better host, and we are grateful to you and your team as well as all the people of Turkey for the extraordinary hospitality that you've extended to us.

As you mentioned, we just heard the news of the earthquake in Italy, and we want to send out condolences to the families there and hope that we are able to get the rescue teams in and that we can minimize the damage as much as possible moving forward.

I have now spent a week traveling through Europe. And I've been asked, "Are you trying to make a statement by ending this weeklong trip in Turkey?" And the answer is, yes, I am trying to make a statement. I'm trying to make a statement about the importance of Turkey not just to the United States but to the world. This is a country that has been often said lies at the crossroads between East and West. It's a country that possesses an extraordinarily rich heritage, but also represents a blend of those ancient traditions with a modern nation state that respects democracy, respects rule of law, and is striving towards a modern economy.

It is a member of NATO, and it is also a majority Muslim nation, unique in that position, and so, as a consequence, has insights into a whole host of regional and strategic challenges that we may face. And I've been extraordinarily impressed with President Gul and the quality of his leadership, as well as Prime Minister Erdogan, and so as a consequence, I am excited about the prospects of us working together.

As the President noted, we had a wide-ranging conversation. We thanked Turkey for its outstanding work in Afghanistan, and we discussed our strategic review. We have a similar perspective in terms of how to move forward, and Turkey's contributions to ISAF and the overarching effort is going to be critical. We discussed the progress that's been made in Iraq and how we can continue to build on that progress as the U.S. begins to draw down its troops.

We talked about Middle East peace and how that can be achieved. And we discussed the need—a shared view for us to reduce the threat of nuclear proliferation not just in the region but around the world. And as President Gul noted, we also talked about business and commerce, because all too often the U.S.-Turkish relationship has been characterized just by military issues, and yet there's enormous possibilities for us to grow the economy and to make sure that trade between our countries and commerce and the lines of communication between our two countries continually strengthen, because we think that that's going to be good for Turkey, but it's also going to be good for the United States.

So we also discussed the issue of terrorism more broadly. And I reiterated my support to make sure that we are supporting Turkey in dealing with terrorist threats that may—they may experience. So overall it was an extremely productive meeting, and it gives me confidence that, moving forward, not only are we going to be able to improve our bilateral relations, but as we work together, we're going to be able to, I think, shape a set of strategies that can bridge the divide between the Muslim world and the West that can make us more prosperous and more secure. And so I'm proud that the United States is a partner with Turkey, and we want to build on that partnership in the years to come.

*President Gul.* Thank you.

*President Obama.* Thank you. Okay. We were going to call on one——

*President Gul.* One and one, yes. Sorry.

*President Obama.* Do you want me to start or you?

*President Gul.* You can start, yes.

*President Obama.* Christy Parsons, Chicago Tribune—hometown newspaper.

### *Armenia and Turkey*

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. As a U.S. Senator you stood with the Armenian American community in calling for Turkey's acknowledgement of the Armenian genocide, and you also supported the passage of the Armenian genocide resolution. You said, as President you would

recognize the genocide. And my question for you is, have you changed your view, and did you ask President Gul to recognize the genocide by name?

*President Obama.* Well, my views are on the record, and I have not changed views. What I have been very encouraged by is news that under President Gul's leadership, you are seeing a series of negotiations, a process in place between Armenia and Turkey to resolve a whole host of longstanding issues including this one.

I want to be as encouraging as possible around those negotiations which are moving forward and could bear fruit very quickly, very soon. And so as a consequence, what I want to do is not focus on my views right now but focus on the views of the Turkish and the Armenian people. If they can move forward and deal with a difficult and tragic history, then I think the entire world should encourage them.

And so what I told the President was I want to be as constructive as possible in moving these issues forward quickly. And my sense is, is that they are moving quickly. I don't want to, as the President of the United States, preempt any possible arrangements or announcements that might be made in the near future. I just want to say that we are going to be a partner in working through these issues in such a way that the most important parties, the Turks and the Armenians, are finally coming to terms in a constructive way.

*Q.* So if I understand you correctly, your view hasn't changed, but you'll put in abeyance the issue of whether to use that word in the future?

*President Obama.* What I'd like to do is to encourage President Gul to move forward with what have been some very fruitful negotiations. And I'm not interested in the United States in any way tilting these negotiations one way or another while they are having useful discussions.

*Q.* Thank you.

*President Gul.* Let me also share my views on the subject. This is an issue under great discussion. But it is not a legal or political issue, it's a historical issue. What is being discussed is a situation that was experienced in 1915 under the conditions of World War I, when the Ottoman Empire was battling on four fronts. And unfortunately, some citizens of the empire then were provoked by some other countries and there were many internal clashes and many people lost their lives. And we share the sorrow of all those who lost their lives, but we have to remember that the Muslim population also suffered greatly at the same time.

And at the time, from the Balkans, from the Caucasus, there were millions of Muslim Turks who were displaced, who were having to come to travel to Turkey, and there were many losses as they traveled. So the losses there took place during the chaotic times of the situation then.

But when the Turkish republic, the modern republic, was established, the Turkish republic did not create this into big issue in order not to create greater hatred or hostility in future generations. But unfortunately, these issues, politically, especially by the diaspora, have been brought to the agenda as a way to perhaps cling to their identity.

And our view to that has been that we should let the historians, the experts on the subject, sit down and talk about this issue. We are ready to face the realities, the facts. It cannot be the politicians and the legal experts who can make decisions here as to what happened when, under what conditions, and who lost more lives and who is right and who is wrong. It is not a parliamentarian, a politician who can make a decision on this without knowing the circumstances to the situation.

So that's why we suggested that a joint history commission be established and that we would agree to the results of the—or the conclusions of this commission. And Turkey opened—made its archives available for that purpose. And we invited everyone, including the Armenians, and we took one more step forward and we said that if another country, for example, the United States or France, if they are very much interested in this issue, then they too could be a part of this joint commission, and we would be ready to listen to the conclusions of that commission.

We, as Turkey, we would like to have good relations with all the countries in our region. Our relations with Armenia, unfortunately, did not exist so much, although there are some Armenian citizens in Turkey now. There are more than 70,000 Armenians who work, live in Turkey, who send money back to their families, and there are some cultural activities, some flights. But we didn't have other relations. And our goal in order to normalize these relations, as Mr. President has just said, we initiated some discussions to normalize relations, and we would like to see a good resolution of these discussions.

No doubt there's a new situation in the Caucasus. We saw how potential events could flare up in the Caucasus last year. So it's important that in this process we work together to try to resolve the issues in the Caucasus. We should work to resolve issues between Armenia and Azerbaijan and all the conflicts in the region so that the area becomes fertile ground for greater cooperation. And we have a lot of work, with the best of intentions, in that regard. And I do believe that when we reach a conclusion, we will have resolved many issues.

Yes, now——

#### *Turkey-U.S. Relations/Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)*

Q. A question to both Presidents, both leaders. Mr. Obama, during the Bush Presidency there were some difficulties in Turkish-American relations, and certain steps were taken to resolve those difficulties. We are in the third month of your Presidency and there is a high expectation in the Turkish public opinion as well about Turkish-American relations. So what will be changes in your outlook on Turkish-American relations as opposed to the previous administration?

Another question to both Presidents. You said that you discussed fighting against terrorism. There's, again, a lot of expectation in the Turkish public opinion regarding the elimination of the PKK. What sort of concrete steps will we see in that regard?

*President Obama.* As I mentioned at the outset, I think, despite some of the problems that we saw beginning in 2003, that you have seen steady improvement between U.S.-Turkish relations. I don't think they ever deteriorated so far that we ceased to be friends and allies. And what I hope to do is to build on what is already a strong foundation. As I indicated earlier, commercial ties can be improved. That's an area where I think the President and I share a vision.

I think, when it comes to our cooperation on terrorism, I've been very clear that PKK is on our terrorist watch list. As a NATO ally of Turkey's, we are very comfortable with providing them the assistance they need to reduce the threat. We have seen that cooperation bear fruit over the last several months, over the last year. You've seen a lessening of the attacks that have been taking place. We'll continue to provide that support, and President Gul and I discussed how we can provide additional support on that front. But we have been very clear that terrorism is not acceptable in any circumstances.

I think that where there's the most promise of building stronger U.S.-Turkish relations is in the recognition that Turkey and the United States can build a model partnership in which a predominantly Christian nation and a predominantly Muslim nation, a Western nation and a nation that straddles two continents—that we can create a modern international community that is respectful, that is secure, that is prosperous; that there are not tensions—inevitable tensions between cultures, which I think is extraordinarily important.

That's something that's very important to me. I've said before that one of the great strengths of the United States is—although, as I mentioned, we have a very large Christian population, we do not consider ourselves a Christian nation or a Jewish nation or a Muslim nation; we consider ourselves a nation of citizens who are bound by ideals and a set of values.

I think Turkey was—modern Turkey was founded with a similar set of principles, and yet what we're seeing is—in both countries—that promise of a secular country that is respectful of religious freedom, respectful of rule of law, respectful of freedom, upholding these values and being willing to stand up for them in the international stage. If we are joined together in delivering that message, East and West, to the world, then I think that we can have an extraordinary impact. And I'm very much looking forward to that partnership in the days to come.

Okay.

*President Gul.* Okay. Thank you.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 1:55 p.m. at Cankaya Palace. In his remarks, the President referred to Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey. President Gul spoke in Turkish, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter. Portions of this news conference could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.

*Categories:* Interviews With the News Media : Joint news conferences :: Turkey, President Gul.

*Locations:* Ankara, Turkey.

*Names:* Erdogan, Recep Tayyip; Gul, Abdullah.

*Subjects:* Afghanistan : NATO, role; Afghanistan : U.S. policy review; Armenia : Relations with Turkey; Arms and munitions : Nuclear weapons and material :: Nonproliferation efforts; Iraq : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; Italy : Earthquake in L'Aquila, damage and recovery efforts; Middle East : Peace and democracy efforts ; North Atlantic Treaty Organization; Turkey : Afghanistan, role in; Turkey : Counterterrorism efforts; Turkey : Iraq, role in; Turkey : Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK); Turkey : President; Turkey : President Obama's visit; Turkey : Prime Minister; Turkey : Relations with Armenia; Turkey : Relations with U.S.

*DCPD Number:* DCPD200900235.