

**By Mehmet Ali Yalcindag, Chairman of the Turkey-U.S. Business Council (TAK)**

The U.S. State Department's newly announced sanctions against Turkey mark a rare occasion where one NATO ally imposes economic restrictions against another. This was a disappointing move for my organization, the Turkey-U.S. Business Council. As the oldest business council in Turkey representing some of the largest and most well-known companies, our mission is to advocate for stronger ties between our countries through business and trade and we oppose any policy that drives us further apart. To our members, the State Department's sanctions are a step in the wrong direction.

The U.S.-Turkey relationship does not need to be contentious. Our alliance is vitally important for the national security and defense of both countries, but it's more than that. It's a decades-long economic partnership that ensures the livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of Americans and Turks. Turkish companies have billions of dollars invested in the United States. We also represent an astonishingly untapped market for many American products and services like agricultural products.

Since Turkey will be one of President-elect Biden's most pressing diplomatic issues in his first 100 days, he and Ankara should take an approach that Democratic administrations in the United States have employed for decades. It's an approach that creates a platform for direct and regular communication and it's produced tangible results in improving relations at times of enormous tension. Given the stakes, we suggest both governments commit to establishing a U.S.-Turkey Binational Commission.

The Clinton Administration used this model to great effect during the 1990s. In 1995, after Nelson Mandela was elected President of South Africa, then Vice President Gore led a binational commission to open diplomatic ties between the two countries. As bilateral diplomacy had been frozen for years due to America's anti-Apartheid position, the U.S. and South Africa could have easily spiraled into misunderstandings and grievances. But the commission created opportunities for trust to build between the new leadership in South Africa and the Clinton Administration. One [American diplomat](#) described the commission as having been "one of the most important instruments in the new relationship between South Africa and the United States."

A binational commission also helped the Clinton Administration forge a path forward for relations with Russia in the post-Cold War order. Among that commission's accomplishments were the denuclearization of Ukraine and Kazakhstan and joint agreements to fight diphtheria and other diseases.

Arguably the challenges those commissions tackled at that time were far more complicated and contentious than those that Turkey and the US face today. If a binational commission helped Russia and the U.S. forge a diplomatic framework following the Cold War, why not give it a shot between two countries that have well established ties, lots to gain by cooperating and even more to lose by not?

Trade, investment and jobs should be top of the agenda. Both economies are yearning for creative strategies to bounce back from the devastation of COVID. According to [recent research](#) by the Boston Consulting Group, industries like digital technology, electronics and construction are ripe for closer cooperation as these are sectors where Turkey would benefit from US expertise and vice versa. Taking a business-first approach lessens the influence of politics which can provide space to start resolving some of the differences. Business is something we do well together. Let's build from there.

Both countries lose when we drift away. Speaking on behalf of the Turkish business community, I urge leaders in Washington and Ankara to demonstrate willingness to come to the table. Our differences are worth resolving and business cannot thrive if it is subservient to the whims of politics and disagreements between governments. There's too great a need in both countries to create and save jobs to allow the untapped economic potential of the U.S.-Turkey partnership to remain.

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