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## U.S.-Turkish Relationship 'Exceptionally Strong,' Mullen Says

By Gerry J. Gilmore  
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, June 2, 2009 – The United States and the Republic of Turkey remain steadfast allies and friends in a modern-day relationship that stretches back decades, the U.S. military's top officer said here yesterday.

The U.S. and Turkish governments worked together during the Cold War to surmount "some big, big challenges," Navy Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said during his keynote remarks at the 28th Annual Conference on U.S.-Turkish Relations dinner held at the Gaylord resort and convention center at National Harbor, Md.

The annual conference provides a forum for U.S. and Turkish government, military, commerce and academia leaders to discuss issues and opportunities in the two nations' mutual interest.

Turkey fought on the allied side with the United States during World War II and joined the United Nations after the war. The then-Soviet Union's demands to place military bases in the Turkish Straits prompted U.S. President Harry S. Truman to establish the Truman Doctrine in 1947, which spelled out America's intent to preserve Turkey's sovereignty, and that of Greece, which was then experiencing communist-inspired civil strife. Turkey joined NATO in 1952 and its soldiers fought alongside U.N. troops during the Korean War.

The relationship between the United States and Turkey today is "exceptionally strong" and "vitaly important," Mullen said. Turkey has deployed troops to Afghanistan as part of Operation Enduring Freedom since 2001.

Turkey is a secular Muslim republic of some 70 million citizens. U.S.-Turkish relations soured in March 2003 after Turkey's parliament declined to allow U.S. forces to pass through southern Turkey into northern Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

However, Mullen said, the United States in recent years has provided more support to Turkey in its fight against Kurdistan Workers' Party terrorists, known by the acronym PKK. The PKK wants to establish a socialist, Kurdish state, parts of which would include southeastern Turkey and northeastern Iraq; both regions have majority-Kurdish populations.

The increased American support for Turkey in its battle against the PKK, Mullen pointed out, has contributed toward a vast improvement of U.S.-Turkish relations.

Mullen also cited President Barack Obama's early April visit to Turkey's capital of Ankara, where he addressed the Turkish parliament.

Obama told Turkish legislators that he supports Turkey's desire for membership in the European Union and that he appreciates Turkey as a partner in the fight against terrorism. The president also praised Turkey for enacting many societal reforms, including the lifting of prohibitions on Kurdish teachings and broadcasts.

Turkey also has good relations with Pakistan, Mullen said, noting that he has discussed that issue with senior Turkish military leaders, including Gen. Ilker Basbug, the chief of the Turkish General Staff.

The Pakistani military is currently engaged in an offensive against Taliban militants that operate in Pakistan's northwestern region near its border with Afghanistan.

Basbug, too, hailed U.S.-Turkish relations during remarks he made prior to Mullen's speech.

"Turkish-United States' cooperation in various areas has become a 'must,'" Basbug said, for resolving thorny regional issues. Terrorist-inspired violence, he said, constitutes the key threat that all peace-loving nations must confront together.

Turkey's strategic location amid Europe and the Middle East, Basbug said, means that the United States could benefit from Turkey's "soft power" diplomatic credentials to help settle problems in its "immediate neighborhood."

Wrapping up, Mullen recounted his first experiences with the "open and warm" Turkish people during a military assignment in the early 1970s.

"We need your friendship," Mullen told the mostly-Turkish audience. "We need your support."

**Biographies:**  
[Navy Adm. Mike Mullen](#)