

**“PARTNER OF FREEDOMS AND DEMOCRACY:
THE TURKISH GRAND NATIONAL ASSEMBLY”**

SPEECH BY

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Honorable Mr. Hamre,
Distinguished guests,

I would like to express my heartfelt thanks for this opportunity to address the distinguished group of friends at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, which is one of the leading think tanks in the USA.

The important activities organized by your Centre in the service of promoting international understanding are indeed praiseworthy.

I feel privileged to enjoy your company thanks to the invitation extended by my distinguished friend, the Honorable Speaker Mr. Dennis Hastert.

Distinguished guests,

Every time I visit the US, I see an opportunity to look to the World from different angle. My visits to the US have always enabled me to observe issues from the distance of another continent and another longitude. It has also enabled an enrichment of ideas in the cultural field.

In fact, world history has mostly been shaped in “the old continent”, as some would call it, on which Turkey is located. The humanity has established civilizations and given birth to new cultures on these soils.

I believe in the existence of an invisible flag of civilization. This flag was handed over from hand to hand among the human races throughout thousands of years. The geography I live in is the land where that flag was passed on several times.

The civilizational flags of Hittites, the magnificent Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman Empires waved on the territory I was born. Thus, my territory has been the cradle of a very rich cultural heritage.

Each one of them had represented certain goodness and glory. The sacred values of humanity were moulded and matured on this basin of civilization. Each civilization had tried to glorify the human being that is the most sacred being of the world. All of them had vied for happiness and welfare of the humanity irrespective of colors and races.

Unfortunately, seizing this happiness and welfare exacted heavy costs on the humanity.

The American continent joined somewhat later in the amazing story of the adventure of humanity. Taking into account the span of history of the old world, the exploration date of this continent may be considered rather recent.

Recent as it may be, the story of America's participation in the journey of humanity has been interesting. One of the outstanding presidents, Woodrow Wilson (1913-1921), attributed a divine mission to this continent.

Wilson says: "This continent was left to us unused by the will of God. It waited for the peaceful Nation who gives utmost importance to human rights, to arrive and to settle and to establish a non selfish unity."

This is indeed a very exciting thought. The reluctance in participating in World War I was an expression of his deep attachment to his words.

Distinguished Guests,

Today, the US is the most important player in the continuing adventure of humanity. I believe that the flag of civilization was carried to your continent, and is now hoisted on the mast of your country.

Today, the history of humanity is being influenced by every achievement of the US in science, industry, politics, medicine and culture.

Being a powerful state in the world is not only a source of pride but also requires responsibility. This responsibility is fulfilled by using the power that has been given to you for the happiness and future of humanity and acting, in the words of Wilson, in accordance with the divine will.

America had also paid a heavy price during its active involvement in World Wars as a great power.

One of the outstanding presidents of these times of war, Franklin Roosevelt, expressed his lessons learned as follows:

"We learned that we can not live alone in peace. Our own welfare depends on the welfare of other nations far away. We learned to be the citizen of the world and member of the world of humanity"

There is no doubt that the rest of the humanity is expecting a lot from the US who is a member of the world of humanity.

Cureless diseases, ongoing global starvation, people who cannot even find clean water to drink...One can add to those problems education, fair distribution of wealth, environmental problems and several important issues. Those issues should undoubtedly be dealt with by all the members of the humanity. However, being a leader and having the strongest economy and military power of the world necessitate a different responsibility.

Continuing crises around the world await just and peaceful solutions. Solutions must be found to those problems in accordance with democratic and universal human values, although at times this may not be fully compatible with our interests. Democracy is not a virtue to be defended only when doing so benefits our country. We must act on the requirements of democracy even when that may be to our disadvantage. This is what peoples that live in crisis ridden regions of the world expect from the US.

President Thomas Jefferson (1801-1809), as he was reading the Declaration of Independence with great passion, sincerely used similar virtuous words when he asked for justice, equality, liberty and moral values for a suppressed nation:

”We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.--That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed...”

Leaders of great states should follow the mottos of these brave men who have expressed such virtuous words in order to bring about happiness and justice to peoples.

Distinguished Guests,

Our world is struggling against such global predicaments as global environmental problems, global terrorism and economic crises, political problems and wars. Our contemporary world needs virtuous people and virtuous words. The peoples of the countries desire to hear the words of these wise men rather than the sounds of arms.

I believe the geography in which I live, surrounded by the Caucasus, the Balkans and the Middle East, is the region that has been the most problematic in the preceding century. Therefore, it is the people of this region that require such virtuous voices the most.

Here, once again, the great importance of the strategic partnership between the United States and Turkey becomes once again prevalent. I believe, the happiness of the peoples can easily be provided by our partnership and cooperation.

My visit, as the first visit of a Speaker of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, is coinciding with the 85th anniversary of the inauguration of the Turkish Parliament. I think this coincidence is very meaningful.

There are dates that nations are proud of. The date of the inauguration of our Parliament, April 23, 1920, is one of the most meaningful dates for my nation.

Our people started the struggle for freedom and independence under the leadership of our national leader Mustafa Kemal Atatürk on that very day.

We are celebrating the 2005, the 85th anniversary of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, as the “National Sovereignty Year”. Our motto is “full democracy in Turkey, parliamentary diplomacy in the World”.

Turkey has made important progress on democratization. The Grand National Assembly of Turkey, as the representative of the Free Will of the Turkish Nation, has taken great steps in

cooperation with the government and the opposition party. These reforms have played a great role in the fulfillment of the Copenhagen criteria culminating in the EU decision to start the accession negotiations with Turkey. On this occasion, in behalf of our people I would like to reiterate our thanks for the very valuable support given by the US in every step towards the membership of the Turkey to the EU.

Thanks to her secular and democratic structure, Turkey has become an inspiration for her region and the World. In that sense, Turkey is monitoring with great happiness and excitement the democratization winds blowing over her region and making concrete and original contributions in every possible manner.

The value added provided by Turkey is very important for supporting the democratization process in our region. Turkey has been continuing her contributions since the G-8 Summit held last year in Sea Island as the co-sponsor of the Democracy Assistance Dialogue.

At the same time, Turkey fully supports the reforms on democratization and good governance at every occasion in the international fora, including at the Organization for the Islamic Conference.

These characteristics of Turkey add to the level of friendship and allied relations between Turkey and the US the dimension of her status as a partner for democracy. There is a concrete and positive common agenda ahead on the relations with the US. This common agenda allows us to move in a complementary way against difficult issues in our region and the World.

In this context, Turkey is making special efforts to strengthen the Euro-Atlantic links within the Alliance.

Following the NATO Summit held in Istanbul last June the visit of the President Bush to Ankara brought Turkish-American contacts to its peak.

Recent visits of delegations composed of dignitaries from the US Congress and their meetings with the members of the Turkish Grand National Assembly facilitated useful exchange of views.

I am also always more than happy to meet these esteemed representatives and find our contacts very useful.

Honorable Dennis Hastert, Speaker of the House of Representatives, visited Turkey in 2002 and most recently had a stopover at the Incirlik Base on December 2004. I would like to stress that it was indeed a pleasure to talk to my distinguished friend Mr. Hastert on both occasions.

Turkish American relations have entered the New Year with an intensive diplomatic traffic. Frequency of the contacts between the two partners, including Dr. Rice's visit to Turkey, demonstrates the strategic nature and vibrancy of our relations.

President Bush, during his visit to Turkey last year, has stated in his impressive speech at the Galatasaray University in Istanbul that:

“Turkey with her powerful, secular democracy is a close ally of the free countries.....

....Turkey is a model with her 150 year democratic and social reforms.....
Turkey can rely on USA's support and friendship".

I would like to emphasize that similarly the US should also rely on Turkey's friendship and support at all times. The reason why our relations are considered strategic is due the positive influence of our solidarity in a wide geography and on many different subjects.

Our partnership creates a positive impact on a very wide range of issues extending from the support of the democratization to the fight against terrorism and from the promotion of the transatlantic relations to the territorial and national integrity of Iraq.

Whether at the bilateral or NATO context, Turkey cooperates with the US towards the objective of establishing peace and democracy in a broad geography spanning from the Balkans to the Middle East, the Caucasus and Asia.

As for the ongoing political process in Iraq, our two countries share the same views on reinforcing the territorial and national integrity of Iraq in order to become a democratic and peaceful nation and a respectful member of the international society.

In the time ahead, difficult turning points await Iraq. Turkey provides concrete support for the development of Iraq. The opening of the second border gate in Ovaköy is very important in order to achieve the potential of our support and contributions. We do have specific expectations and concerns regarding Iraq.

Turkey, as a country who has deeply felt the pains of terrorism, has always advocated the necessity of international solidarity, called on the entire world, and acted as a vanguard to that effect.

I believe that, Turkey and the US must be in even further cooperation and solidarity now more than ever before in order to rid the humanity of terrorism.

The terror organization PKK which has aimed at Turkey's secular, democratic and modern existence, should not find refuge on the Iraqi territory. This is as greatly important for our country as for the real success in the international fight against terrorism.

In the Middle East, resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian problem is another issue to which both Turkey and the US pay great importance. Turkey being a friend of both Israel and Palestine will continue her efforts to this end in the time ahead.

We attach great importance to the development in peace, democracy and welfare of the friendly and fraternal people of the Caucasus and Central Asia, which are regions of common interest and solidarity for our two countries.

Since the last year, 13 Presidents, 12 Speakers of Parliament, and 12 Prime Ministers visited our Assembly, and overall 320 international delegations visited our Groups and Commissions.

On the same time frame, the Turkish Grand National Assembly has realized 650 international contacts with its counterparts.

In this framework, I would like to express with pleasure that close working relations have

been established between the Turkish Grand National Assembly and the US Congress. The structures such as “The Turkish Caucus” which already has over 65 members, the “Congress Working Group” established by the former US Congressmen, and the Turkey-USA Friendship Group have been enriching the parliamentary dimension of the relations between our two countries. At this point, I would like to thank to everyone who have contributed to this successful achievements.

Our bilateral relations having such an important and intensive agenda also contain various issues. As Mr. Tip O’Neill, Former Chairman of the House of Representatives once said, “All politics are local.” Accordingly, those who make politics only with local concerns are seen to try to exploit legislative organs for local political gains. At this point, we find it wrong that the US Congress be forced into a position of passing judgment on historical issues. It must be incumbent on us all who believe in the need for objectivity vis-à-vis history, and who attach importance to Turkish-American relations, to oppose such narrow minded attempts.

Relations between Turkey and US have been progressing in a wide spectrum of topics towards important common objectives. What unites us is by far more pronounced than what may divide us. In that sense, there is no reason why we should not be successful in addressing the risks and threats that we are both facing.

In the 21th century, the common objective for all nations is for humanity to live in peace, democracy, welfare, respect for human rights. The existing strong alliance ties and deep friendship between Turkey and the US must be strengthened even further.

Thanks for your patience and attention.

Now, I am ready to take your questions.