

*A Conference Report*

# Turkey's Role in the Middle East

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DEACONS  
WORKS

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## SUMMARY

The end of the Cold War seemed to portend a decline in Turkey's strategic importance to the West; however, the political changes in the world since 1989 have also loosened the constraints within which Turkey can act. As a result, Ankara's foreign policy has been redirected from its strictly western orientation to one in which the countries of the Middle East have become potentially more significant. The changing relationship between Turkey—uniquely positioned in both the West and the East—and its neighbors in the Middle East was examined at a United States Institute of Peace conference entitled “A Reluctant Neighbor: Analyzing Turkey's Role in the Middle East,” held on June 1–2, 1994.

The foundations of Turkey's foreign policy are a legacy of the country's founder, Kemal Ataturk, who from the time of its establishment in 1923, had two fundamental goals for the new republic: modernization and westernization. Ataturk directed the country away not only from other Turkic peoples, but also, despite their historical relationship over centuries of Ottoman rule, from the rest of the Islamic world. He instituted a series of domestic reforms to bolster the new direction of the country, including secularizing the political and judicial systems and changing the alphabet from Arabic to Latin. As a result of these radical changes, Turkey experienced an almost complete

break with its past in both foreign and domestic spheres that remains a part of the nation's fabric. Although Ataturk's influence is not unshakable, his legacy endures, and any change in Ankara's foreign policy orientation must be examined against this background.

Ironically, Turkey's relationship with the Middle East is colored by the very past that Ataturk sought to repudiate. On the one hand, many current Arab suspicions about Turkey date back to the period after 1908, when the extremist Turkification campaign of the Young Turks led to the suppression of Arab language and culture. On the other hand, Turks remember that Arabs sided with the British during World War I, an act that, while motivated by the Arab drive for independence, is still viewed by many Turks as unforgivable treachery. Thus, despite the revolutionary and enduring nature of Ataturk's reforms, when Arabs and Turks confront each other today, the past is not as much a dead issue as many in Turkey may want to believe.

The greater attention being given by Turkey to relations with the Middle East results not only from changing world politics but also from factors such as the Kurdish rebellion in southeast Turkey, the water dispute with Syria, and the peace accords between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) signed in September 1993. Despite expanded relations with the Middle East, however, Turkey's most important political relationship will continue to be with the West, as will its principal trade relations.

### The Kurds

The Kurdish problem is one of Turkey's most vexing. Some 12 million to 14 million Kurds live in Turkey today, and their relations with the government have been troubled since the founding of the republic. The problem stems in part from Ataturk's dictum that, despite the presence of millions of Kurds, only the “Turkish nation” lived within the borders of the republic. To uphold this tenet, the Turkish government has suppressed any display of Kurdish linguistic or cultural distinctiveness and encouraged full assimilation. In the 1970s, a radicalized Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) was formed to fight for the rights of Kurds. When that group turned to violent terrorist tactics in the early 1980s, the government responded with force,

killing many non-PKK Kurdish villagers in the process. In the past ten years there have been thousands of deaths of Kurdish and Turkish civilian bystanders, as well as Turkish soldiers, PKK guerrillas, journalists, and human rights activists.

The Turkish government appears bent on a military solution to the problem. Yet one of the factors exacerbating the crisis is the government's failure to separate the broader Kurdish struggle for linguistic and cultural rights from the narrower—and more legitimate—issue of combating PKK terrorism. It appears that the most effective solution would be to accept a separate identity for the Kurds and to abandon the policy of assimilation. Indeed, to remain a stable, democratic country that can act as a secular model for others, Turkey must confront the Kurdish question in a more constructive manner.

## Iraq

Before the 1991 Gulf War, Turkey had better relations with Iraq than with any other Middle Eastern neighbor except Jordan, and the two frequently cooperated on the Kurdish problem. Relations worsened with the onset of the war, when Turkey supported the embargo against Iraq. Today, the Kurdish issue, ironically, unites more than divides them, since both countries want to contain Kurdish separatism. Other prominent factors that shape Turkish-Iraqi relations include the oil pipeline (which may also induce cooperation since both countries suffered economically from its closing) and the attitude of the West, particularly the United States, which would be extremely uneasy about any Turkish attempt to improve relations with Iraq.

## Iran

Although they are historical rivals, Turkey and Iran have enjoyed relatively good relations in this century, in part because of their mutual hostility to communism. The relationship was damaged by the 1979 Iranian revolution, but it has steadily improved since then, as the two countries have put aside ideological differences and as Turkey has sought to restrain the polarization between Islam and the West unleashed by the 1979 events. Turk-

ish-Iranian relations took yet another turn in the late 1980s as the two countries competed for influence in the former Soviet republics of Central Asia and the Caucasus. However, both Turkish and Iranian hopes have been dashed by the economic and political realities of Central Asia, and competition there is no longer as important a source of tension between them.

## Syria

Relations between Turkey and Syria, on the other hand, have been clouded by general Arab suspicion dating back to the Young Turk era and institutionalized during the Cold War, when the two were positioned on opposing sides. Syria has always suspected Turkey of being a gendarme, serving western interests in the region. Antagonism between the two heightened in the 1970s, when the Turks began construction of the Guneydogu Anadolu Projesi (GAP), the large dam project on the Euphrates River that, when completed in the mid-1980s, restricted the flow of water into Syria. Tensions since then have been compounded by Turkish claims that Syria gives safe haven to the PKK—claims that Syria officially denies. Furthermore, there remains the sleeping issue of Alexandretta (or Hatay, as the Turks call it), a contested area on the border that became part of Turkey in 1939, over Syrian opposition.

Water issues are particularly contentious with Syria. Turkey claims that the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers are “transboundary” water courses that belong to one country while the river flows through it and become the property of another after crossing the border. Syria, however, views these vital arteries as international waterways belonging to no one. Syria claims that Turkey drains off an unfair share of the water before it crosses the border and charges that Ankara lacks the political will to reach an equitable agreement on sharing water rights. Turkey, for its part, believes that Syria is harboring PKK terrorists as a weapon in the water dispute. As long as these mutual accusations persist, Turkish-Syrian relations are likely to remain tense.

## Israel

Turkey's uninterrupted diplomatic relations with Israel—even at the height of Arab-Israeli tensions—made it unusual among Muslim nations and contributed to Arab suspicions of Turkey's role. Yet Ankara's relations with Tel Aviv were reduced to a low level in the mid-1960s, and Turkey openly supported the Palestinian cause. In recent years there has been a warming of relations between Turkey and Israel, although in contrast to the situation before the early 1990s, it is now Turkey that is pursuing better relations. The September 1993 Israeli-PLO Peace Accords sped up the warming process, and relations have improved to the point that there has been discussion not only of a free trade agreement, but even of cooperation on security and intelligence.

## The Arab World

For Arabs, relations with Turkey have never been as important as the Palestinian issue. Although there is currently a constructive “reinvention” of Turkey in Arab political discourse, Arabs remain skeptical of each of Turkey's potential roles. For example, Turkey simply would not have the necessary military power to act as regional caretaker in the face of a serious threat to the region, and it has too many serious economic problems of its own to be a credible model of economic development. Furthermore, Arabs tend to see Turks as living in a perpetual identity crisis, neither fully a part of the West or the Middle East nor fully independent of either.

## Conclusions

Analysis of Turkey's roles in the Middle East leads to several conclusions:

- = Turkey's relations with the Middle East—as with the rest of the world—will be determined by its success in handling two critical domestic problems: the Kurdish rebellion and a dire economic crisis. Failure to solve either problem soon could threaten the country's political stability. Their effective resolution, on the other hand, could allow Turkey to become a significant force in the Middle East.

- = Not only has the Kurdish insurrection rapidly escalated in intensity in recent months, but Turkish society is becoming increasingly polarized between Turks and Kurds, substantially raising the risk of a broader civil war. The government's refusal to separate the Kurdish issue from the problem of dealing with PKK terrorism is at the heart of the problem. To be resolved successfully, the Kurdish issue must be addressed on a social, economic, cultural, and political basis and not simply through the application of military force.
- = Turkey's future role in the Middle East is likely to expand, but it will remain limited for a number of reasons. These include Turkey's differing political culture and geographic marginality, as well as the fact that other regions—such as the Balkans, Cyprus, and the states of the former Soviet Union—are of greater importance to Ankara than the Middle East is.
- = The most important Middle Eastern countries from Turkey's perspective will remain Iran, Iraq, and Syria, where problems of water, political ambition, religion, boundaries, and the PKK are factors. Iraq will continue to present Turkey's trickiest foreign policy problem among its neighbors, as the waves of Kurdish refugees to Turkey necessitate some accommodation with Saddam Hussein, which may complicate relations with the United States.

In contrast to the regions where Turkey plays a more significant role, its relations with the Middle East, though more active than in the past, will remain cautious and tentative. Many factors, from the Kurdish problem to the new political order, are forcing changes in Turkey's traditional foreign policy orientation, but the nations of the West will continue to be Turkey's most important political and economic partners and the focus of its foreign policy.

## PREFACE

The United States Institute of Peace has given special attention to a range of Middle Eastern problems in recent years. We have examined regional arms control in the post-Gulf War period, means to facilitate the Arab-Israeli peace process in the Madrid era, and, most recently, the phenomenon and implications of political Islam. In choosing these subjects, we have tried to examine aspects of the problems that are often overlooked, as part of the search for new approaches to traditional questions.

The future of Turkey in the Middle East is without doubt a topic that meets the Institute's criteria for Middle Eastern work. Turkey's long strategic relevance to the United States and to other countries east and west has been brought home to us by such events as the breakup of Yugoslavia, the fall of the Soviet Union, and the emergence of independent Turkic states in the Transcaucasus and Central Asia. Despite their recognition of Turkey's strategic location among regions in flux, scholars and policymakers have tended to disregard the fact that Turkey is part of the Middle East, long an unstable region. Although any Middle East specialist will acknowledge that Turkey has both a significant history in the region and distinctive relationships with Israel and the Arab states, Turkey is not often spoken of as a factor in the Middle East peace process. Nor does one hear much about Turkey's

relationships with its immediate neighbors—Syria, Iraq, and Iran— although those relations have every bit as much potential to shift as do Turkey's relations with Europe and the states of the former Soviet Union. As Turkey finds its way in the post-Cold War period, new developments—positive and negative—involving Turkey and other Middle Eastern states could create new dynamics in the region and cause a rethinking of the peace process.

To examine these issues, the Institute convened a two-day conference entitled "A Reluctant Neighbor: Analyzing Turkey's Role in the Middle East." The purpose of this June 1994 event was not only to initiate discussion on Turkey's relations with the countries of the Middle East and its role in the regional peace process, but also to bring together and into dialogue scholars and other experts from Turkey and its neighbors. As close as they are geographically, it is dismaying how rarely they have the opportunity to speak directly to one another about the issues affecting their countries. The Institute was pleased that this dialogue could occur in Washington—pleased not only for the scholars in attendance and their countries but also for the U.S. scholars and policymakers who had the opportunity to be enriched by the discussion.

The response to the conference was impressive: more than 350 people attended, including a considerable number of experts from the broader Middle East and from Europe. It was pointed out that the event was likely the largest academic conference on Turkey ever held in the United States. Clearly, interest in Turkey and concern about the future of the Middle East peace process are high.

The Institute would like to thank Professor Henri Barkey of Lehigh University, an Institute grantee, for organizing the conference. Patricia Carley, Institute program officer and author of this report, was co-coordinator. Both contributed enormously to the success of the discussion that is reported here.

This report is one of two publications the Institute hopes to produce from the event. In due course, it also plans to issue an edited volume gathering the formal papers prepared for the conference.

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# 1

## INTRODUCTION

The radical political changes in the wake of the end of the Cold War directly affected the international role of Turkey, a country unique in its location in both the eastern and western worlds. Though the end of the bipolar world seemed to portend Turkey's decline in strategic importance to the West, in fact, the changing international order has loosened the constraints within which Turkey can act, potentially redirecting its foreign policy and, as a result, tempering its predominantly western orientation. Policies instituted by the founder of the modern Turkish nation, Kemal Ataturk, became part of the very fabric of the Turkish Republic. Thus, even a minor change in that orientation may have significant implications for the future of Turkey and its foreign relations.

In recent years, changes in world politics—specifically the dissolution of the Soviet Union—have produced considerable debate about Turkey's rapidly developing relationship with the newly independent Turkic republics. However, Turkey's increasingly important links with the countries in its immediate region have often been overlooked. To explore Turkey's changing relationship with the countries in this region, with particular emphasis on the identification of potential points of conflict, the Institute of Peace convened a conference entitled "A Reluctant Neighbor: Analyzing Turkey's Role in the Middle East," which was held June 1–2, 1994, in Washington, D.C. It brought together scholars and policymakers from Turkey, Egypt, Syria, Israel, Iran, the United States, and Europe to focus exclusively on this aspect of Turkish foreign policy. This report recounts the highlights of the conference.

## 2 BACKGROUND

There is little doubt that Turkey occupies a unique position in the world, in both its geographic location and its political aspirations. Few other countries so literally define the word “crossroads” as Turkey, lying as it does in both Europe and Asia and presenting itself as a Muslim country that aspires to be part of the western world.

### Turkey’s Strategic Importance

Since the end of World War II, Turkey’s strategic significance to the United States and to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as the only member of the western alliance to border the Soviet Union has been unquestioned. Turkey more recently demonstrated its importance to the West by supporting the coalition in the 1991 war against Saddam Hussein, a move that was opposed by many in Turkey. Turkey acts as a gateway to worlds less familiar to the West, such as the newly independent Turkic countries of Azerbaijan and Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) and is an important factor with respect to other Muslim countries, with which it has complex and sometimes troubled relations. Concern that the end of the Cold War might decrease Turkey’s strategic importance to the West in

one aspect (its border with the USSR) is countered by its increased potential in others.

Keynote speaker Paul Wolfowitz of the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies underscored Turkey’s strategic relevance. He said that there is no other country to which the word “strategic” applies more than to Turkey. It is perhaps a cliché these days, but Turkey truly does play an important bridging role between several poles: East and West; economic backwardness and modernization; an imperial past and a modern present; and religious obscurantism and civic modernity. Moreover, Turkey’s contributing role in the end of the Cold War should not be forgotten; its resolve as a NATO member on the Soviet frontier was crucial to that organization’s ability to stand up to the Soviet threat.

Turkey remains important today for several reasons, Wolfowitz continued: the war in the Balkans has demonstrated that the end of the Cold War did not bring with it the end of conflict in Europe; the country’s location on the Black Sea, including its proximity to Ukraine and Crimea, remains crucial; Turkey serves as a critical bridge to the Caucasus and Central Asia; and, in its least analyzed role, it occupies a strategic and possibly growing position in the Middle East. Wolfowitz concluded by noting that one legacy of Ataturk’s resolve to make Turkey a clearly defined nation-state and not an empire is the country’s reluctance (though not unwillingness) today to become involved in the affairs of the Middle East.

To underline the points made by Wolfowitz, Alvin Z. Rubinstein of the University of Pennsylvania declared that Turkey is simply the most important country in the Middle East. What Turkey does or does not do will critically affect the course of events, including stability, not only in the Middle East but also in the Caucasus, Central Asia, the Balkans, and the West. Cautioning those who take Turkey’s allegiance to the West for granted, Rubinstein proclaimed that, “The growing ambivalence in the West toward Turkey is reflected in Turkey’s growing ambivalence toward the West.” Rubinstein commented ruefully that “no major country in the Middle East has been less studied by American scholars or more ignored by the American media.”



## Origins of Turkey's Foreign Policy

To analyze contemporary Turkish foreign policy, it is essential to go back to the foundation of the Turkish Republic and to understand the critical role and legacy of Mustafa Kemal (later Atatürk). It is no exaggeration to say that Turkey would very likely not exist today as a modern country without Atatürk's determination to establish a Turkish nation-state and his possession of the military acumen to make it a reality. In 1919, the Ottoman Empire lay in ruins after the devastation of World War I. The empire's dismemberment was made official with the signing of the Treaty of Sevres in 1920, which stipulated that all its European territory except a small slice around Istanbul (occupied by the British) was to be cut away; all Arab lands removed; the region around Izmir (formerly Smyrna) given to the Greeks; the eastern Anatolian provinces divided between an independent Armenia and an independent Kurdistan; and, finally, large regions of south and southwest Anatolia granted to France and Italy to administer as spheres of influence. The last sultan, though still nominally on the throne in Istanbul, relinquished virtually all his powers to the British. The Straits of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles were demilitarized and administered not by the Turks but by a permanent Allied commission in Istanbul, and Anatolia was placed under the control of the Allied Financial Commission. In 1920, the very idea that an independent and sovereign Turkish state could or would emerge from this devastated and occupied territory would not have received serious attention.

Yet by 1923, in the wake of Atatürk's startling victories over the French, the Italians, the British, and the Greeks, and after he had regained control of Istanbul, the Allies were forced to sign the Treaty of Lausanne, recognizing the establishment of the Turkish Republic. After the military victory over the occupying powers, Atatürk went on to define the parameters of the Turkish nation-state in virtually all walks of pub-

lic and political life, including domestic and foreign policy. One of the fundamental bases for the new state laid down by Atatürk was that the Turkish Republic was to be a modern, westernized nation, and he spent the rest of his life, until his death in 1938, not only setting up the institutions needed to achieve this goal, but also molding the mind of the people in that direction.

Atatürk's foreign policy was oriented away from the East and away from other Turkic and Islamic peoples. From the very start of his military struggle for Turkey, he firmly eschewed any form of pan-Turkism or pan-Islamism. Pan-Turkism was a movement in the late nineteenth century in the Ottoman Empire promoting the ultimate unification of the world's Turkic peoples, most of whom, after the Anatolian Turks, lived under Russian (and then Soviet) tutelage. Atatürk believed that this and other such "foolish ideologies" were responsible for the humiliating defeat of the Turkish nation in the first place at the hands of the Allies. Not only did pan-Turkism represent a quagmire for Turkey, but it was not, Atatürk believed, an idea that was consonant with the western concept of the modern nation-state. Similarly, Atatürk had little interest in maintaining historical ties with the rest of the Islamic world. Pan-Islamism was for him as dangerous for the new state as pan-Turkism.

Despite Turkey's western orientation, however, Atatürk established good relations with the new Soviet Union, with the aim of making Turkey a modern, western—and neutral—state. But while the general western orientation of Turkish foreign policy was fortified by events immediately following World War II, those events also made it less neutral. In 1945, Stalin demanded from Turkey not only parts of its eastern region (the area containing Kars and Ardahan, which had been designated as part of Turkey by a friendship treaty with the Soviet Union in 1921), but also partial control of the straits. Turkey rejected both of these demands and headed straight into the newly formed NATO alliance. The West also began to dominate Turkey's foreign economic rela-

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tions. Turkey's relations with other countries, however, did not evaporate or become antagonistic. Ankara has usually maintained good relations with the countries on its periphery, although these relations have generally been limited because of its overarching prowestern stance.

Ataturk also instituted a series of domestic reforms to reinforce the new republic's movement away from the Islamic world and toward western civilization. The most important of these was the secularization of the government and, to a certain extent, of society—a policy that grew out of Ataturk's conviction that the Islamic religion as expounded by the Ottoman sultan was responsible for Turkey's backward economic and social state. First and foremost, political power was now proclaimed to come from the Grand National Assembly and was not, for the first time in Turkish history, bound to religious ideology. Sharia courts were abolished in 1925 and replaced by courts grounded in a civil code, thereby denying clerics power over judicial, criminal, and even social matters. By 1928, Islam was removed as the official religion from the Turkish constitution, and the state assumed many of the functions of the old Islamic institutions.

Another powerful reform toward modernization that moved Turkish politics and society more firmly away from its previous orientation was the reform of the alphabet. For centuries, Ottoman Turkish had been written in Arabic script, though that script was not entirely suited to the Turkish language. Pointing Turkey to the western world, Ataturk in 1928 decreed that Turkish would henceforth be written in the Latin alphabet. Furthermore, many non-Turkish words—primarily Arabic and Persian—would be discarded and replaced by “true” Turkish words (which in some cases were fabricated). This reform moved the Turkish people one step further not only from their religion (since Arabic is the language of the Prophet Muhammed), but also from their Ottoman history. Today a Turk who wants to read tracts and documents from the Ottoman period must first take the trouble to learn the Arabic script. (It is ironic that, as a result of these reforms, the Turkish language has changed to such an extent that a Turk today needs a dictionary to read

Ataturk's speeches.)

The modern Turkish Republic was thus built on the foundation of an almost complete break with its past in both the foreign and domestic spheres. It is not possible in this brief review to assess how successful Ataturk was in his efforts. Secularism, for example, and all its ramifications remain controversial to some segments of Turkish society. However, Ataturk's reforms shaped the grounding—the very definition—of the republic in a particular direction, especially for subsequent generations of ruling elites. It is not suggested here that this orientation was—or is—unshakable; events since the dissolution of the Soviet Union demonstrate a shift away from Ataturk's reluctance to become involved with other Turkic peoples. This report focuses on whether a similar development—a shift in orientation—is now occurring in Turkey's relations with the Middle East. What is incontestable is that Ataturk's relevance and legacy endure, demonstrated not least by the self-examination that Turkey is currently experiencing—the concern expressed by many inside Turkey over whether the country's foreign policy foundation is threatened by its new relations with the former Soviet republics. It is important to examine any changes in Ankara's foreign policy against the background of this fundamental fact of Turkish life.

# 3

## HISTORICAL AND GEOSTRATEGIC CONTEXT

The conference opened with an examination of the larger historical context of Turkey's relations with the countries of the Middle East. In this century, those relations have been shaped largely by the western foreign policy orientation established by Ataturk. But they have also been colored by the Ottoman past that Turks and Arabs share, the very past that, in the end, motivated Ataturk to seek new international alliances. All of the countries of what is today called the Middle East, except for Iran, were once part of the Ottoman Empire. Within the empire, the Turks and Arabs lived together for centuries, forming the bulk (together with the Kurds) of the Islamic *umma*, or community of believers. As members of the *umma*, Arabs enjoyed rights and privileges that the non-Muslim *millets*—minority groups such as the Armenians, Greeks, and Jews—did not. Yet the Turks and the Arabs remained distinct groups, separated by language, history, culture, and ethnic makeup, as well as by the inescapable fact that the Ottoman Turks ruled and the Arabs were their subjects.

By the end of the nineteenth century, sentiments giving rise to nationalist movements elsewhere in the world had permeated the Ottoman Empire, which by that time had lost Greece and Egypt, as well as other territories. A small group of intellectuals initiated a movement to promote

“Ottoman” identity, aiming to rally different national groups in the empire around the Ottoman ruler. Part of that movement later abandoned the effort at kindling Ottoman identity and branched off to form instead a movement aimed at advancing the goals of the Turkish population. In 1908, these Young Turks, as they became known, succeeded in wresting political power from an increasingly impotent sultan and set up a new regime. In the end, it was events during the relatively short period of Young Turk rule that so damaged relations between the Turks and the Arabs, who were by this time themselves agitating for independence from Ottoman rule. On the one hand, extremist Turkification policies of the Young Turks, in the form of harsh suppression of Arab language and culture, resulted in an angry backlash that resonates even today in Turkey's relations with the Arab world. On the other, Arab attempts to break away from Ottoman rule drove them to side with the British during World War I—an act still viewed as treachery by the Turks.

Submitting that the Ottoman past is not quite as dead and gone as many would believe, Selim Deringil of Bogazici University noted that current statements and actions of many people and parties in and outside Turkey relate to the Ottoman period. Despite Ataturk's break with the past, history, for Turks, is still very close. For example, the Refah (Welfare) Party in Turkey declared as its aim in the March 1994 Turkish municipal elections the “instituting of Ottoman tradition in municipal affairs,” without precisely defining what that entailed. In response, an article in Turkey's prominent newspaper *Cumhuriyet* on the renowned Ottoman architect Sinan declared that a great civil planner like Sinan would never have allowed the kind of haphazard urban development advocated by the Refah Party. Furthermore, Deringil continued, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy of Russia's curiously named Liberal Democratic Party refers to the Ottoman past in his pronouncements on the Balkan war. And in the modern Turkish press the relative merits of Ottoman rulers such as Midhat Pasha and Abdul Hamid are still debated.

Deringil observed that even a spokesman for the government has suggested that nostalgia for the Ottoman Empire may derive from the fact that Ataturk's reforms happened so quickly that people were not given a chance to “grieve” over the changes. Obviously, the historical context is not as

completely a thing of the past as many in Turkey believe, and people sometimes even make reference to the Ottoman past without understanding what those allusions mean. In fact, their understanding of that past may be more important than the reality. Deringil cited President Suleyman Demirel's observation that "history is tugging at our sleeve," noting that this quote offers a suitable image of the Turkish perspective: Although the Turks want to look forward, the past still has a hold on their consciousness, compelling them to confront their history.

Still, as Heath Lowry of Princeton University explained, Turks only reluctantly face their past, in part because of the revolutionary nature of Ataturk's reforms. One result of those changes, especially the language reform, was a quite purposeful break from Turkey's own history. Under Ataturk, Turkey shifted from an empire, which was its past, to a more strictly defined country, with two goals in mind: modernization and westernization. A consequence of this development—and one perhaps intended by Ataturk—was that Turkey lost the ability to view its history through the eyes of its neighbors, either the contemporary ones in the Arab world and other former Ottoman districts or those from the past, whose documents could no longer be read. The result was an escalation of the fear and distrust between Turks and Arabs set in motion during Young Turk rule.

As a result, both Turks and Arabs tended to forget their shared 400-year history, concentrating only on the recent past. For example, the Arabs look back only to the brief five-year period of Young Turk rule, with its policy of Turkification and the attempted suppression of the Arabic language. In the same way, the Turks focus only on Arab cooperation with the British during World War I. In the meantime, Lowry continued, Turks and Arabs have tended to overlook their shared religion. It is true that the early decades of the Turkish Republic were characterized by militant secularism, but the recent gains by the religious Refah Party demonstrate that Islam does potentially join Turkey and the Middle East.

## Current Regional Context

Addressing the wider geostrategic framework of Turkey's changing foreign policy and relations with the Middle East, Henri Barkey of Lehigh University underscored the obvious yet critical fact that, for the first time in many centuries, Turkey no longer has a border with "Russia." Correspondingly, Turkey's once-crucial geographic position for NATO has been reduced. Before the end of the Cold War, Turkey's relations with the Middle East had always taken a back seat to its NATO membership. This situation is changing for several reasons: (1) the Kurdish rebellion in Turkey is affecting that nation's relations with its neighbors (Iraq, Iran, and Syria) and will do so increasingly; (2) the problem of water is growing for the entire region, and it is generating disputes with Syria and Iraq; (3) radical changes such as the end of the Cold War and the signing of the Israeli-PLO Peace Accords are making possible new economic linkages, which Turkey desperately needs; and (4) a number of Gulf states are coming to see the importance of a strong and stable Turkey as a balance to threats from the less stable regimes in the region, such as Iran and Iraq.

According to Barkey, Middle Eastern countries are likely to become more concerned with Turkey's future role in the region. One reason is that the demise of the Soviet Union has eliminated the possibility of playing off the superpowers against each other in order to garner economic aid. Turkey and the other countries in the region will now have to learn to stand on their own economically and compete with Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, Latin America, and others for badly needed capital and investments. The United States will no longer readily support regimes that have irresponsible economic practices. In this competition, Turkey is somewhat ahead of its neighbors, and its Middle Eastern neighbors are aware of this. Additionally, the collapse of the USSR has virtually eliminated the ideological legitimacy of one-party dictatorships and authoritarian rule. With many Middle Eastern regimes increasingly under pressure to democratize, and thus headed for a period of potential instability, Turkey's continued stability may prove critical to the region's political future. Furthermore, the Kurdish rebellion in southern Turkey compels Turkey and its neighbors to deal with each other more seriously.

That said, Barkey was quick to note that even in the face of expanded relations with the Middle East, Turkey's most important political relationships will continue to be with the West. The bulk of Turkey's commercial exports go to western countries, and this will likely remain the case. Arab suspicion of Turkey persists, and thus Turkey generally "runs from the region when it can." Yet, in light of the factors cited earlier, the time may fast be approaching when Turkey cannot be so exclusively focused on the West.

General Ahmed M. Abdel-Halim of the National Center for Middle East Studies in Cairo also described the way recent changes in the world have affected the region's relationships. One effect has been to create an enhanced role for the United States in the Middle East, leaving the United States as sole arbiter of the region's balance of power. This has resulted in several consequences for the geostrategic situation in the region. For example, there is now a potentially increased role for Israel and Turkey in the Middle East of the sort not possible before, and in Turkey's case at least, this increasing role is widely welcomed in the region. A stable and strong Turkey, Abdel-Halim said, is a vital component in regional peace and stability. Furthermore, Turkey should be a part of a new regional economic grouping that would include in its first stage Egypt, Israel, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, the Palestinians, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, and at a later stage Iraq. This would, he said, be part of the development of a "natural alliance" of certain Middle Eastern countries.

## Pan-Turkism

In response to a question on the possible emergence of a pan-Turkist movement, Deringil noted that pan-Turkism has always been a marginal movement in Turkey. It was only during the Young Turk period that the ethnic Turkic element came forth strongly in the Ottoman Empire, and at that time the Turkic peoples in the Russian Empire had little Turkic consciousness—they identified themselves primarily as Muslims. The movement never resonated more widely then or now. Barkey agreed, adding that pan-Turkism exists more in the minds of those outside Turkey than among the Turks themselves and usually because of some ulterior motive (as in the case of Serbian president Slobodan Milosevic, who has proclaimed that a menacing pan-Turkist movement is a threat to the Serbs).

# 4

## TURKEY, THE KURDS, AND RELATIONS WITH IRAQ

Of the 20 million to 25 million Kurds in the Middle East, some 12 million to 14 million reside in Turkey. (Other large Kurdish populations are in Iraq and Iran, with some also in Syria.) Turkey's relations with its Kurdish population have been troubled and at times violent since virtually the beginning of the Turkish Republic. To understand why this issue began as a "problem" for Turkey, and why it has intensified, it is important to refer again to the origins of the Turkish nation-state.

In addition to military victories and radical social reforms, another important legacy of Atatürk was the consolidation of Turkish ethnicity as the core identity of the Turkish Republic. During the centuries of Ottoman rule, nobody in the empire would comfortably be labeled a "Turk"; in fact, the term was most often used as a derogatory epithet to refer to an uncultured peasant. The ruling elites identified themselves as Ottomans or simply as Muslims; the rest of the Turkish population referred to themselves as Muslims or perhaps as residents of a particular village. This remained the case even in the latter part of the nineteenth century as the nationalist movement among the Turks in the Ottoman Empire was developing.

It was Atatürk who made the radical break with the past. He built the Republic of Turkey firmly around the idea of Turkish national identity and

language within a fixed territory and rejected the notion of a multi-national empire. (As noted earlier, Atatürk also tried to separate Turkish identity from the Islamic religion, but he was less successful in that endeavor.) As part of this process, the term "Turk" was elevated from derogatory epithet to an identity that every Turk would proudly adopt. In the course of those early years, it became a central tenet of the Turkish Republic that within its borders lived the Turkish nation. Atatürk even instituted population exchanges with Greece in order to "simplify" the population component of Turkey. The notion that the republic might hold people who belonged to some nation other than the Turkish one was seen as a threat to the very essence of the new Turkish state, and this aspect of Atatürkist thought has changed little through the generations.

The problem was—and is—that peoples other than Turks found themselves inside the Republic of Turkey, and the largest of these groups was the Kurds. Their very existence became an issue, most notably in 1925 and again in 1937, when the Kurds in the southeastern part of the country rebelled and were brutally suppressed. Since that time, the Turkish government has advanced stringent policies designed to promote the integrity of the nation, suppressing any element of Kurdish cultural or linguistic distinctiveness and encouraging the assimilation of the Kurds into the wider Turkish population by declaring them to be Turks. The use of the Kurdish language in any official or public capacity was banned until very recently; indeed, until only a few years ago, the very existence of the Kurdish people in Turkey continued to be officially denied. The formation in the late 1970s of a radicalized Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) with a stated aim of increased autonomy for the Kurdish region took the struggle to a new level. By 1984, the PKK was resorting to violent terrorist activities. For the Turkish government, these activities signaled the ultimate intention of dismembering Turkey, and, indeed, some PKK elements have demanded independence.

The Turkish government has responded militarily to PKK violence, often resulting in the killing of non-PKK Kurdish villagers. In the past ten years, the regional carnage has led to the deaths of thousands of Kurdish and Turkish civilians, as well as Turkish soldiers and Kurdish guerrillas; journalists and others who have taken up the Kurds'

plight have also been killed. Since the early 1990s, tourists in Turkey and Turkish diplomats abroad have become the targets of the PKK's violent operations. The situation deteriorated further, reaching its most tense and unstable level for decades in March 1994, when six members of Parliament from the then-legal and pro-Kurdish Democracy Party (DEP) were arrested. The party was legally banned the following June. The parliamentarians are charged under the law against terrorism and thus not only may not post bail, but face the death penalty if convicted.

It is Turkey's relations with the West that have been most affected by its actions against the Kurds. The Turkish government has come under steadily increasing criticism from international human rights groups, from many Western European governments, and recently from the United States government also. Its human rights record against the Kurds also has not helped Turkey in its attempt to gain membership in the European Community, now the European Union.

Taking on this difficult subject, Ismet Imset, editor of the *Turkish Daily News*, observed that freedom of speech in Turkey for anyone speaking on this issue has been significantly curtailed; the six Kurdish deputies arrested in March were imprisoned because of speeches they made demanding greater freedom for the Kurds, not because of any actions they had taken. Fifty-two journalists are currently under arrest because of their writing about the Kurds in Turkey. This is not to say, Imset continued, that there has not been progress on the Kurdish issue. Five years ago it would have been impossible even to mention the word "Kurd" or to see it in writing in Turkey. Now, in the face of a hundred thousand Kurds fleeing Iraq after the Gulf War, for the first time the Turkish government has admitted the existence of the Kurds as a distinct people. Still, other events have overshadowed that progress, and conflict with the PKK has complicated the problem immensely.

Imset noted that when the PKK emerged in the 1970s, it was seen at first as an outlaw organization, made up primarily of Marxist students. In large part because it was the only Kurdish alternative in Turkey, it steadily gained strength so that by the middle to late 1980s it had become a mass movement. The Turkish government's failure to separate the broader Kurdish problem from the narrow issue of PKK terrorism prevents the gov-

ernment from dealing effectively with the Kurds (or even admitting there is a genuine Kurdish problem) and provides an excuse not to take further steps toward democratization. The government's policy is to crush the Kurdish rebellion militarily and only then to implement reforms. In trying to contain the PKK in the southeastern region, the government has engaged in actions that involve serious human rights violations. The bottom line—and the real tragedy, according to Imset—is that Turkey can never become a fully modern, secular state, nor a model for any other country, until the Kurdish issue is dealt with in a realistic, humane, and nonviolent manner.

Amatzia Baram, senior lecturer at the University of Haifa and a 1993–94 fellow at the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, D.C., made a sharp rebuttal to Imset's assertion that it is not possible to solve a problem through violence. After all, he said, both Saddam Hussein in Iraq and Hafez al-Assad of Syria have shown that if a leader is prepared to go far enough, goals can be achieved through violence. Still, he continued, the democratic government of Turkey cannot "go the whole distance" with the course of violence in its dealings with the Kurds and remain even remotely democratic. Baram asked, If Turkey does give the Kurds some measure of cultural autonomy, what then becomes of Turkish identity and sovereignty? Is some wider form of identity possible in Turkey, some sort of modern-day "Ottoman" identity? It might be possible, Baram stated, for Turkey to integrate the Kurds into Turkish life, but the dilemma of defining Turkish identity remains.

Imset responded that one solution would be the establishment of a "constitutional citizenship" once suggested by Turkish president Suleyman Demirel. This would provide an alternative to the mistaken assumption that "people can be assimilated through repression and force." Under current circumstances, there is a complete polarization of Turkish society between Turks and Kurds: Turks believe that all Kurds have the same ideals and use the same methods as those of the PKK, and Kurds believe that all Turks share the attitudes of soldiers in the security forces who willfully destroy Kurdish villages. These erroneous beliefs serve only to encourage PKK membership and the government's harsh approach.

In conclusion, Baram outlined the wider dilemma caused by the Kurdish problem in Turkey. For a stable Middle East, a stable Turkey is needed. For Turkey to be stable, it must be democratic. Yet in the Kurds, democratic Turkey confronts a major problem, unresolved since 1919, when it began its fight to eject the foreign forces from Anatolia and establish a Turkish nation-state. And it is a problem, Baram said, that will not fade or simply go away.

## Turkey and Iraq

The presence of Kurds in neighboring countries has only recently become a significant foreign policy issue for Turkey, and even now it is not always a contentious one. During the Iran-Iraq conflict in the 1980s, Turkey and Iraq cooperated on the Kurdish issue, even to the extent that Baghdad allowed the Turks to carry out cross-border actions against PKK supporters who had fled to Iraq. Confrontation with Iraq over the issue began only with the 1991 Gulf War, when Turkey sided with the United States and its allies and supported the embargo against Iraq. Suddenly Turkey found itself in an unaccustomed hostile position in relation to its eastern neighbor. Immediately after the war, Saddam attacked the Kurds in northern Iraq and hundreds of thousands fled to Iran and especially to Turkey. The countries allied against Iraq moved in and created a safe haven for the Kurds in northern Iraq, leaving them with de facto autonomy.

Addressing the issue of Turkish-Iraqi relations, Phebe Marr of the National Defense University explained that before the Gulf War, Iraq had better relations with Turkey than with any other neighbor except Jordan. After the war, however, the situation changed radically; for example, trade was reduced to a trickle, and the oil pipeline closed down. According to Marr, there are a number of issues today, not all of them negative, that shape Turkey's relations with Iraq:

- = *Water and oil.* Marr asserted that Iraq and Turkey will eventually be pushed into uneasy, even prickly, cooperation on these two issues. The Southeast Anatolian Project—referred to by the Turkish acronym GAP (Güneydogu Anadolu Projesi)—is a large dam being built by Turkey on the Euphrates River. It will affect

Iraq's water supply, but Iraq does have other access to water, and the issue is not as contentious for them as it is for Turkey and Syria. When it was operating, the oil pipeline was advantageous to both Iraq and Turkey. Since its closing, Turkey is losing a considerable amount of money annually because of lost revenue from transit rights. Both countries, according to Marr, would like to see it reopened, although Turkey is searching for alternative sources of income, such as a pipeline through Baku and on to Kazakhstan that will go through Turkey. Iraq has significant oil reserves, and a pipeline from Iraq through Turkey makes money for both countries, so it is increasingly likely that there will be cooperation on this matter eventually.

- = *Demographics—the Kurds.* The main question here, according to Marr, is whether the Kurdish issue divides or unites Turkey and Iraq, since both want to contain Kurdish separatism. The solutions to this issue range from minimum to maximum autonomy for the Kurdish population in each country. For example, an autonomous region could emerge in northern Iraq even if the apparent collapse of power there is rectified. That said, no one except the radical Kurdish nationalists proposes a change in state boundaries. Indeed, Marr suggested, one should not underestimate the extent to which the state system has taken root in the world; it is not going to be easy to break up any state. And although on balance it is more likely that this issue will bring the two countries together rather than divide them, the longer Turkey fails to solve its Kurdish problem the greater the risk of negative developments in Turkey's relations with Iraq.
- = *Boundaries.* There is no lingering irredentism in either Turkey or Iraq, according to Marr. The issue of border control, and of maintaining the current borders, is of great importance to both countries.
- = *The West.* Turkey's relations with the West, and particularly with the United States, are a critical factor in its relations with Iraq. Turkey's attempts to build more conciliatory relations with Iraq must be made with an eye toward Washington, where they are bound to cause concern.



= *Domestic politics*. The removal of Saddam Hussein is the best hope for a negotiated settlement with the Kurds in Iraq, Marr concluded. In fact, it is no exaggeration to say that Saddam is the single most important negative factor in Turkey's relations with that country.

In response to Marr's remarks, Kamran Karadaghi of *Al-Hayat* newspaper in London underscored that the key element in Turkish-Iraqi relations is the United States. He said that if it is important to the United States that the Kurds remain a part of Iraq, the Americans should make a stronger effort to get rid of Saddam, since they cannot expect the Kurds to return to living under his rule. Furthermore, Karadaghi said, Turkey suffers very much from U.S. insistence on economic sanctions against Iraq. The issue of sanctions is further complicated by the fact that Turkish prime minister Tansu Ciller claims on the one hand, that Saddam is too strong and that sanctions will not work and, on the other, that Saddam is weak, implying that

Iraqi Kurds should take advantage of the current situation to get a good deal from him. Karadaghi also raised a pointed question for the Arab regimes: Why are people tolerant of Arab political aspirations, particularly those of the Palestinians, but not of Kurdish aspirations? Arabs have no inherent right to rule over Kurds, especially if they are brutal rulers. Looking at the broader dimensions of the Kurdish problem, Karadaghi noted that the politics of the situation have developed to the point where the Kurds of Syria consider Ankara, not Damascus, to be their main enemy, and many of them actively support the PKK struggle against the Turkish government.

In response to questions about the future of the Kurds in Iraq, Marr stated that although Kurdish autonomy in a more loosely structured Iraq is the most likely ultimate solution, she was not optimistic that this would happen soon. One of the requisites for such a scenario is a democratic Iraq, which is unlikely in the near future, certainly as long as Saddam is in power.

# 5

## TURKEY AND IRAN

Turkey and Iran have been rivals since the days when each was the center of an empire—Ottoman and Persian. The competition took many forms, including the quest for territory and power and the battle between the two largest sects of Islam—Sunnism and Shiism. The rivalry also involved a contest over which would be the dominant culture in the region: the Ottoman Turks have long sought acknowledgment of their cultural superiority over the sophisticated Persians.

Events in this century have changed the course of Turkish-Iranian relations. As each shed its empire and established itself as a nation-state, the rivalry abated almost entirely. Atatürk's inward-looking policies were based on the premise that the modern Turkish nation had few quarrels with its neighbors, including Iran. Relations warmed further when Iran adopted a western-oriented policy under the shah, and both countries became members of U.S.-backed security organizations such as the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO). However, the 1979 Iranian revolution quickly soured relations between the two. Although economic relations have gradually improved since then, and neither country has made a point of antagonizing the other, Ankara remains cautious about close ties to Tehran and skeptical of Iran's true intentions. Persistent suggestions of Iranian

support for Islamic-oriented extremist organizations in Turkey are particularly worrisome for Turkey's secularist leaders.

On the subject of Turkish-Iranian relations, Atila Eralp of the Middle East Technical University in Ankara noted the special problem that Iran poses for Turkey. Iran's domestic and foreign policy orientation since the 1979 revolution presents a direct challenge to Turkey's interests. Since the revolutionary Iranian regime appeared as a factor in international politics, Turkey has sought to restrain the increasing polarization between the West and Islam, which has potential consequences for Turkey's westernization process. During the mid-1980s, efforts were made by both countries to improve relations. Then—prime minister Turgut Ozal began the effort in the belief that trade links were the backbone of Turkey's relations with Iran and the Middle East, and a number of economic agreements were signed between Iran and Turkey during his tenure. Relations between the two are of such a pragmatic nature that Iran showed a level of restraint in exporting its Islamic revolution to Turkey that it did not show toward other countries in the Middle East.

According to Eralp, the Turkish foreign policy establishment went through a period of self-examination beginning in 1989, triggered primarily by the dramatic changes in the international political system. There were considerable anxieties in Turkey over the decline in the country's geopolitical significance, and as a result, Turkey began to give more consideration to a regionally oriented foreign policy, stressing such projects as the Black Sea Cooperation Initiative, which involves the development of economic cooperation among the countries bordering the Black Sea. The dissolution of the Soviet Union and the independence of the states in the Caucasus and Central Asia accelerated this re-orientation.

After 1991, an increasing competition between Turkey and Iran for influence in those regions of the former Soviet Union defined a new period in Turkish-Iranian relations. The climax of this phase, as described by Eralp, was the June 1992 presidential victory in Azerbaijan of Abulfaz Elchibey, a decidedly pro-Turkish leader who curtailed his country's relations with Iran. The fall of Elchibey one year later signaled yet another point in Turkey's relations with Iran, as some observers claimed that Elchibey's overtly pro-Turkish stance (which agi-

tated the Russians as much as the Iranians), was one of the reasons for his ouster. Although the future may bring more confrontation between the two countries, Eralp suggested that that would not be desirable for either country, and Turkey's policymakers are generally careful not to escalate bilateral tensions with Iran. At the same time, they continue to operate on the principle that Islam should not be pitted against the West and that Iran should not be isolated. Instead, more western—including Turkish—attempts are needed to foster cooperation with the moderate elements in Iran.

The Iranian point of view was offered in a paper by Changiz Pahlavan of the University of Tehran, delivered by Farhad Kazemi of New York University in Pahlavan's absence. Pahlavan described the cordial relations between Turkey and Iran throughout most of this century, beginning with the meeting between Reza Shah Pahlavi and Atatürk not long after their nations were established in the 1920s. The two leaders had many common concerns, including a shared opposition to communism and a strong commitment to modernization. Good relations were made more concrete through adherence by both to several agreements such as the Sadaabad Pact in 1937 and the Baghdad Pact in 1955 (which became CENTO in 1959), both of which were signed under the reign of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. According to Pahlavan, the important areas of commonality and mutual understanding continued even after 1979 under the Islamic regime.

There are four broad areas of tension, however. The first is ideology, Pahlavan said, referring to the basic conflict between the Islamic worldview and Atatürkist secularism. To this day, Iranian foreign dignitaries have refused to visit Atatürk's tomb. Second is the issue of Turkey's relationship with the West and whether, in Iran's view, Turkey is only an ally of the West or its agent. The Iranians believe that Turkey's prowestern policies have come at the expense of its Islamic heritage. A third area of tension is Kurdistan. Although Turkey and Iran generally have common interests vis-à-vis the Kurds, Pahlavan asserted, they are not likely to have a common policy toward them for a long time to come. A fourth issue between the two countries involves the Caucasus and Central Asia. Initially, Turkey had great expectations for increased influence in those regions—until the real situation became apparent. The Iranian effort has also come

up against the reality of Central Asian nationalism and the people's unwillingness to embrace Islamic universalism. The result is that Turkey and Iran, in fact, have something in common in their experiences in the newly independent regions of the former Soviet Union; despite suspicions about each other's intentions, these relations are not necessarily a source of tension.

Finally, Pahlavan described the way an Iranian diplomat of today would view Turkey. There would be four key beliefs:

- = The separation of church and state in Turkey is contradictory to Islamic ideology and thus doomed to failure.
- = Turkey's role in Central Asia is too closely tied to the West and thus has unnecessary anti-Iranian overtones.
- = Despite its secularist policies, Turkey, like Iran, uses religious propaganda in Central Asia, which may result, inadvertently, in the strengthening of Islamic tendencies there.
- = Turkey's anti-Armenian policies will ultimately lead to a confrontation between Turkey and the West, so even that relationship is fraught with problems.

In Pahlavan's view, there are areas of both cooperation and tension between Turkey and Iran; however, several of the areas now seen as antagonistic, such as the Kurdish problem and the policies in Central Asia, need not, perforce, cause friction.

Commenting on the two papers, Shaul Bakhash, a professor at George Mason University and a 1993–94 fellow at the Institute of Peace, agreed with Eralp that the primary sources of potential hostility between Turkey and Iran are the Iranian revolution and the competition in Central Asia. Bakhash also agreed that these issues have generally been overcome. In fact, he said, the conflict between Turkey and Iran over these matters was the "disaster that did not happen." Bakhash contended that the Iranians eventually came around to the traditional Iranian foreign policy view prevalent in the days of the monarchy, that good relations with neighboring countries were paramount. As a result, the Iranians now make a point of maintaining cordial ties with Turkey, Pakistan, and the Gulf states. Even in Central Asia, where Iran initially exhibited a great deal of enthusiasm, it has recognized the primary importance of

stability. Tehran has not, Bakhsh maintained, encouraged Islamic radicalism there and has in fact even welcomed the return of the Russian role in the region as a source of stability. On the issue of Iraq, here too the Iranians and Turks have come to understand that they have more in common than not. Neither favors Kurdish independence. As a result, the Iranians are restrained in their dealings with the PKK, according to Bakhsh, and they are reluctant to promote Islamic revolution in Turkey.

Similar views were expressed by Farhad Kazemi, who noted that three important factors define the relations between these two states. One is that the relationship is dynamic, not static, and contains a kind of “self-correcting” mechanism. No matter how tense the situation becomes, the two countries eventually find ways to cooperate. The Iranians, for example, are now somewhat less aggressive in their antagonism toward Ataturk than in the years immediately after the revolution, and the Turks are currently more willing to acknowledge their Middle Eastern roots. In the face of competing ideologies, Kazemi stated, “trade and economic issues speak loud and clear” and serve to moderate the political differences. A second factor is the issue of exactly what constitutes the Middle East. Both Turkey and Iran believe that the Middle East should not be defined on strictly Arab terms, and they share a desire to have a much wider interpretation of what constitutes the region, including not just themselves but also Central Asia and Azerbaijan. Finally, Kazemi noted that the Kurdish issue is also important for the Iranians. While Iranians sometimes try to hide behind the belief that the Kurds are of Iranian origin and their language is related to Persian, these beliefs do not translate into a Kurdish willingness to submit to Iranian political authority. The Kurds are a problem for Iran as well as Turkey.

Steve Grummon of the Department of State concluded by noting that the common theme of the panel was that Iran and Turkey seem to have more that unites than separates them at the moment—which is not, he pointed out, what one would expect from reading the popular press.

## The Azeri Turks

One issue that has recently begun to appear on the agenda of the two countries is the presence of 15

million to 20 million Azeri Turks in Iran. Before the fall of the Soviet Union and the opening of Central Asia and the Caucasus to the outside world—particularly to their ethnic kin in Turkey—the Turkish government did not make an issue of the Azeri Turk population in Iran. This approach was a legacy of Ataturk’s determination not to link the fate of the Anatolian Turks with other Turkic peoples east of Turkey. Now, however, Turkey has developed close relations with the newly independent Azerbaijan, strongly buttressed by Turkish public opinion, which is sometimes even more fierce in its support for Azerbaijan than is the government. This support extends, for example, to the Azeri-Armenian dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh. In light of these developments, it seems clear that were a more overt dispute to arise between the Iranian government and its Azeri population, the Turkish government might be inclined—and be under public pressure—to side openly with the latter.

Even what the Azeris in Iran are called is a reflection of the problem and a potential source of tension between Iran and Turkey. They are invariably identified as “Turks” by the Turks of Turkey and frequently called “Turkish-speaking Iranians” by ethnic Iranians. Kazemi said that the Azeris are highly integrated into Iranian society. There are very high rates of intermarriage, for example, and in Kazemi’s opinion the vast majority of Azeris in Iran think of themselves as Iranians who happen to speak Turkish. (Turkmens, another Turkic group with kin across the border in Turkmenistan, number about a million and are not nearly so integrated, not least because most are Sunni, not Shiia.) Kazemi asserted that this issue of Turkic peoples in Iran is very important for Iran and warned that attention from Turkey toward either Azeris or Turkmens would be met with anger from any regime in Tehran, regardless of its political stripe. According to Kazemi, Turkey recognizes this and so has done little to upset Tehran on the matter.

Graham Fuller of the RAND Corporation, in a comment from the floor, posited that the situation between Turkey and Iran on this issue was far more contentious than the panel described. He suggested that on the matter of the Azeris in Iran the debate is still open as to whether they are in fact “Iranians who speak Turkish” or “Turks living in Iran.” Although it may be true that the Turks do not want to upset Iran over the Azeri issue, the

Azeris in Azerbaijan may do just that, and in fact did so already under the short-lived Elchibey government, to the great consternation of Iran. The issue is far from closed, Fuller said; in fact, it may just be opening up, and it remains a potentially serious source of friction.

Bakhash responded that the Azeris are well integrated into Iranian society and will thus not be-

come an issue between Turkey and Iran. Kazemi seconded this, saying that he did not see an “Azeri problem” in Iran. Every Iranian family, he maintained, has some Azeri blood—it is impossible to separate the two groups. In the end, obvious disagreement remained on how this issue will develop, even on whether the Azeris in Iran are in fact an issue at all.

# 6

## TURKEY, SYRIA, AND THE WATER CRISIS

**R**elations between Turkey and Syria have not been warm for most of this century, clouded from the start by general Arab suspicions dating back to the Young Turk era. During the Cold War, the two countries were positioned on opposing sides—Turkey as a member of NATO and Syria as an ally of the Soviet Union. Before that, they both claimed title to Alexandretta (or, as the Turks call it, the Hatay region), which was under French mandate when the Turkish Republic was founded. In 1938 a plebiscite determined that the majority of the population was Turkish—a result strongly disputed then and now by the Arabs. After a year of independence, Hatay became part of Turkey in 1939.

Antagonism between the two countries heightened in the 1970s when the Turks began construction of the GAP, the large dam project on the Euphrates River (and eventually the Tigris) that, when completed in the mid-1980s, restricted the flow of water into Syria. That friction was compounded by Turkish claims that the Syrian government gives safe haven to PKK members—something Syria has never acknowledged, though PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan is now based in Syria. The end of the Cold War has tempered the relationship somewhat, as each no longer automatically sees the other as the lackey of an opposing superpower. With the end of the bipolar divide, however, Turk-

ish-Syrian relations have become more focused on regional issues, particularly water.

Reviewing the Turkish-Syrian relationship, Muhammad Muslih of C. W. Post College contended that the principal overarching issue is Syria's conception of how Turkey perceives its own role in the region. Turkey portrays itself to the Arab world as an island of stability in an unstable region. According to Muslih, this only confirms the Syrian belief that Turkey is merely a "gendarme" serving western interests. The water problem is a symptom of this larger problem of Syrian suspicions over Turkey's aims in the region. Muslih noted that until the dissolution of the Soviet Union the two had always been on opposing sides of the Cold War divide.

Although Alexandretta/Hatay is not a burning issue for Syria, Muslih argued, it is a "sleeping question," and "like all things that sleep, it may one day wake up." Three factors keep the issue alive for Syria: Syrian patriotism; demographics—the fact that in 1938 a significant portion of the population of Alexandretta were Alawites and the majority are today; and Syrian intellectuals, for whom the city has retained its significance as a symbol of injustice against the Arabs. Muslih also pointed out another matter on which Syria and Turkey have taken opposing positions: Syria has never recognized Israel, whereas Turkey not only recognized but entered into cooperative agreements with Israel, deepening Syria's conviction that Turkey serves western interests.

Without a doubt, Muslih continued, the water crisis is the most important single political problem between Turkey and Syria. Syrian concerns, however, are not just about water per se but also about its effects on other crucial strategic factors. First, Syria is trying to recover economically, and it will be difficult to attract foreign investment if there are water or electricity shortages. Second, many in Syria, Muslih explained, believe that Turkey escalated the water crisis during Syria's negotiations with Israel in order to force Damascus to make concessions. The third, more general strategic factor goes back to the issue of Turkey's new role in the region. Turkey's ascendance after the Gulf War, Muslih said, has been grudgingly accepted by Arab countries. Still, there is concern not only that Turkey is playing the role of containing Iran on behalf of the western powers, but also that Ankara's ascendance could result in the marginal-

ization of Arab influence, including that of Syria.

On the other hand, Turkey and Syria share several interests. Both want to maintain the territorial integrity of Iraq—in Turkey’s case because it does not want to see an independent Kurdistan on its border, and in Syria’s because it does not want to see an Arab country broken up. And both states understand the need to curtail Saddam Hussein and to curb Iraq’s ambitions in a post-Saddam era.

Yet, Muslih continued, neither contentious nor cooperative issues between Turkey and Syria will get much attention as long as the Syrian-Israeli problem is not resolved. Only when a peace with Israel is reached will Syria turn serious attention to such issues as the water dispute. At that time Syria will also give more attention to the border issue of Hatay—that sleeping question—which may ultimately put Damascus and Ankara on a collision course. On the other hand, if peace is agreed between Syria and Israel, Syria will no longer have a reason to suspect Turkey of being a “Trojan horse” for insinuating western aims into the Middle East.

Addressing the water issue more directly, Gun Kut of Bogazici University pointed out that there are no clear principles yet in international law to secure the rights of all users sharing river basins, and resolving the dispute between Turkey and Syria is hindered by the mutual suspicion that exists between upstream and downstream users. Furthermore, the water problem between these two countries is tied to other issues, such as the PKK and the intra-Baath conflict between Syria and Iraq, which are major factors in the search for stability in the region.

According to Kut, Turkey’s policy of noninvolvement in the Middle East historically kept it at a fair distance from the intra-Arab and Arab-Israeli disputes, as Turkey pursued a policy of active neutrality, seeking good relations with all sides. During the Cold War there were more pressing issues for Turkey as a member of NATO. Beginning in the mid-1980s, however, the situation began to change. The Iran-Iraq War, PKK violence, the decline of the Soviet threat, the Gulf War—all of these combined to turn Turkey’s attention towards its southeastern borders. The most important issue compelling Turkey to reassess its relations with its Arab neighbors, according to Kut, was the GAP dam project in southeastern Turkey that precipitated the water conflict between Turkey and, primarily, Syria.

Kut explained that Turkey has proposed plans to share the region’s water; however, the Turkish government has constructed a new concept that is not accepted by the others. Calling the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers “transboundary” water courses, Turkey explains that they belong to one country while they flow through that country and after crossing a border become the property of the neighboring country. Syria and Iraq consider the Tigris and Euphrates to be international waters that do not belong—at any point in their flow—to any one country. The issue here is not water but scarcity, Kut noted. When a commodity is scarce, dividing that commodity up, or negotiating agreements to share it, is not a solution to the ultimate problem of diminishing supply. Moreover, in the case of these particular waterways, the demand will only increase, creating a widening gap between supply and the amount needed to sustain irrigated agriculture.

Kut claimed that the Turkish government has long had evidence that PKK terrorists are granted safe haven in the Bekaa Valley, controlled by the Syrian government. Whenever the issue is raised by the Turkish government, Syria routinely denies complicity and then immediately raises the water issue, making it clear that Syria is linking the two issues and, in fact, “playing the PKK card.” Yet, according to Kut, it is in the interests of both countries to avoid such linkages. Turkey believes that it should not have to give anything in return for asking Syria not to harbor terrorists; to accept such an exchange would, in Turkey’s eyes, be yielding to blackmail, a technique that could be used again on other issues, such as the issue of Alexandretta. Syria should not want to appear to be engaged in blackmail, since if the water flow were released in return for certain favors, it could just as easily be interrupted again in the future for other reasons.

According to Kut, a solution to the water problem could include conservation measures and a reduction in demand, for example, by importing food rather than growing it in the area. To solve the issue of water, Kut concluded, it is necessary to go beyond claims of who owns the water and definitions of “international” and “transboundary” waterways. “Intra-basin cooperation will not perhaps bring about an automatic end to all the conflicts in the Middle East,” he said, “but it is a necessary precondition. Unless more effort is spent on lessening the mutual suspicions, the deep historical animosi-

ties, and the general perception of insecurity prevailing in the region, the whole water issue will always be prone to degenerate into other conflicts.”

Murhaf Jouejati of the University of Utah presented the Syrian view of the issue. According to Jouejati, water rights were not a problem until the breakup of the Ottoman Empire after World War I. Before then, the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers were technically located in the same country. Riparian rights became a source of friction in 1970, when Turkey launched the GAP, which itself was driven by criticism from Turkish leftists about the poor economic conditions for Kurds in the southeastern part of the country. As a result of this project, however, Turkish consumption of water from both rivers increased substantially.

The Euphrates River alone represents 86 percent of Syria’s water supply, Jouejati said. An increase in pollution upstream means an increase in pollution and salinity downstream, which means that more money is needed for agricultural investment in the downstream country, Syria, where agriculture is the mainstay of the economy. The consequences for Syria have been dire, he continued. Internal measures to deal with the falling water supply have included the cutoff of electricity for up to 19 hours a day (leading to such graffiti witnessed outside Damascus as: “Assad, we have given you our loyalty, now give us some electricity”).

Jouejati argued that Turkey’s lack of concern for downstream riparians is not least the result of the generally bitter relations between Turks and Arabs. Syrian views of Turkey as an instrument of U.S. power affect Syria’s policies toward Turkey. For their part, the Turks considered the Arabs’ nationalist and separatist drive in the late Ottoman days and their alliance with the British during World War I a stab in the back. Moreover, all Syrian regimes, regardless of political sympathies, consider Alexandretta/Hatay to be Syrian and are bitter at its loss to Turkey. Over the years, these issues have led to few contacts between Turks and Syrians until the Assad regime. “Cooperation on issues of ‘low politics,’ such as water sharing,” Jouejati maintained, “can be attained only if there are ‘high politics’ issues on which the states already collaborate.” Political conflict, for example, is a high politics issue.

To buttress his argument that political conflict is a major obstacle to basin-wide cooperation, Jouejati

cited the case of the Johnston Plan of the 1950s, which failed because of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The idea behind the U.S.-engineered plan was that cooperation among conflicting parties over sharing the water of the Jordan River would have a positive “spillover effect” on the wider conflict between the Arabs and the Israelis.

Generally, Jouejati reflected, upstream riparians are not interested in binding agreements on sharing water; downstream riparians, for whom water is an issue of national security, are. A country may be an upstream riparian on one river and a downstream riparian on another and may therefore take conflicting stances on river agreements. For example, Turkey is calling for an agreement with Bulgaria on the Maritsa River, which, Jouejati noted, Turkey calls international waters. Similarly, Syria calls for an agreement with Turkey contrast with its self-interested behavior toward Iraq over the Euphrates. In the case of the Tigris and Euphrates, Turkey has by and large neglected the concerns of the downstream riparians; it is not interested in sacrificing some water for the sake of its neighbors, nor does it seem to care about the effects of the GAP dam on downstream countries. If a binding agreement between Turkey (the upstream riparian) and Syria and Iraq (the downstream riparians) is ever reached, Turkey will have less water for its own use; without an agreement, Turkey will have more water. Accordingly, there is now no binding agreement on the use of these two rivers.

Commenting on these presentations, *Sabah* journalist and TV commentator Mehmet Ali Birand declared: “There is no water problem between Syria and Turkey.” Syria receives the amount of water that it needs—there is no shortage. What Damascus wants is a guarantee for the future. This is because, in Birand’s words, “They don’t trust the Turks and the Turks don’t trust the Syrians.” It is true that the Turks have not been very attentive to Syrian concerns. And when the Syrians began training leftist groups in the 1970s, and then the PKK in the 1980s, suspicion increased markedly. Birand agreed that Turkey will resist signing a binding agreement. It may sign an allocating agreement—that is, one that allocates a certain amount of water to Syria—but an equal sharing agreement is unlikely, certainly not until the PKK problem is solved and perhaps not then.

In response, Jouejati noted that the Syrian government denies supporting the PKK. Damascus



maintains that because its army is stationed along the Golan front with Israel and in Lebanon, it does not have the resources to maintain complete control over its 900-kilometer border with Turkey. If links exist between Syria and the PKK, it would only be part of the larger reality that downstream riparians, if treated unfairly, sometimes feel they must resort to forceful measures. However, Jouejati maintained, he has not seen any clear evidence that Syria supports the PKK explicitly because of the water issue. If the Syrian government is supporting the PKK, Jouejati continued, it is more likely a response, a kind of “tit for tat,” to Turkey’s harboring of the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1970s.

Birand replied that there are checkpoints every two to three kilometers along the Turkish-Syrian border; it is thus disingenuous to suggest that Syria does not fully control those borders. Furthermore, according to Birand, there is convincing evidence that the PKK and its leader Ocalan are regularly received in Damascus. Whether or not Syria is using the PKK issue to force a water agreement, that is certainly the way that Turkey reads the situation, Birand concluded, since, as Kut had noted, every time the Turks bring up the subject of the PKK, the Syrians respond by mentioning the water problem. Future water supply is clearly a source of tension between the two countries.

# 7

## TURKEY AND THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS

An area of Turkish foreign policy that is sometimes overlooked is Turkey's relationship to the crisis at the heart of the Middle East: the Arab-Israeli conflict. In the past, Turkey demonstrated its distinction from its neighbors by being the first Muslim country to recognize Israel in 1949, and by maintaining diplomatic relations even at the height of Arab-Israeli tensions. In 1956, however, after the invasion of Egypt by France, Britain, and Israel, Turkey withdrew its ambassador from Israel; representation was reduced further in the 1960s as relations between Israel and the Arab world deteriorated. Although diplomatic relations were not broken, Turkey continued to support the Palestinian cause and routinely condemned Israeli actions against its Arab neighbors. But the fact that Turkey—a Muslim country—did not fully break off diplomatic relations is significant—and was important for Israel. Since the middle to late 1980s, relations between Turkey and Israel have warmed, and more substantive agreements have been signed. Yet the role for Turkey in the larger peace process has not yet been defined. As Samuel Lewis, former U.S. ambassador to Israel, noted, Turkey represents a kind of “gray eminence, a potential player of great importance in a new, peaceful Middle East.” The problem is that “neither Arabs nor Israelis have quite figured out how to make that happen.”

### Turkey and Israel

Anat Lapidot of Tel Aviv University addressed the issue of the peace process and the extent to which it has a direct bearing on Turkish-Israeli relations. Lapidot stated that although the peace process has occurred in parallel with the recent warming in relations between Turkey and Israel, this warming was not a result of the process per se but of the readjustment of both countries to the new world order. The changes in Middle Eastern politics have, however, allowed the improvement in Turkish-Israeli relations to move ahead relatively unimpeded. To understand the dynamics of these relations today, Lapidot said, it is necessary to examine the relationship from the standpoint of Turkey's foreign policy rather than Israel's, because it is Turkey that sets the tempo and determines the nature of the relationship.

Although there is now much good will between Turkey and Israel, Lapidot suggested that this will not necessarily be the case in the long run. There are problems even now that need resolution and others that may develop over time—for example, the increasing pressure on Israel to get off the fence on such issues as the Kurdish problem, Cyprus, and the 1915 Armenian genocide. Another potential problem is politicized Islam, which, according to Lapidot, has not been adequately addressed by many Turkish academics even after ten years of steady growth in influence in Turkey.

Without a doubt, the end of the Cold War has opened up many foreign policy opportunities for Turkey, Lapidot continued. From the late 1980s to the end of 1991, Turkey tried to present itself as a political and economic model to the Central Asian republics of the former Soviet Union, a policy from which Turkey hoped to gain points in the West as well. However, the policy failed, Lapidot claimed, because the Central Asians were reluctant to give up their unique characteristics. Starting in 1992, Turkey began pursuing Israel, rather than the other way around, and doing so with some urgency. According to Lapidot, the peace process demonstrated that new foreign policy opportunities would be opening up for Israel, including with some of Turkey's adversaries, such as Greece and Bulgaria, so Turkey had to rush to upgrade its representation in Tel Aviv ahead of them. Israel, for its part, has not defined its policy vis-à-vis Turkey

since the end of the Cold War, although the need to do so has become increasingly apparent. Turkey's stepped-up interest in improving relations caught Israel unaware.

Alan Makovsky of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy suggested that, contrary to Lapidot's assertion, it was precisely the progress in the peace process—specifically the September 13, 1993, Declaration of Principles—that set in motion the dramatic improvement in relations between the two countries. According to Makovsky, the declaration freed Turkey to pursue the kind of relations with Israel that most of the Turkish security and foreign policy establishment have long desired. Before the agreement, Turkey shied away from overtly close relations with Israel for fear of offending Arab sensibilities. Relations between them have grown since then, as one of the most noteworthy examples in a wider trend of improved relations between Israel and Muslim countries. Makovsky pointed out that when Turkish foreign minister Hikmet Cetin went to Israel in November 1993 for the first-ever visit at that level, he touted the onset of a new chapter in Turkish-Israeli relations. Turkish officials stated that topics discussed at the meeting included a prospective free trade agreement and security and intelligence cooperation—marking, according to Makovsky, a “radical departure in traditional Turkish policy,” particularly public policy, toward Israel. Cetin claimed that the two sides even discussed possible cooperation against “Syrian-sponsored terrorism,” a remarkable term for a Turkish foreign minister to use on Israeli soil.

Since that time, Makovsky continued, the Israeli president and prime minister have both visited Turkey. Interestingly, there has been almost a reversal of roles between the two countries. Previously, Israel pursued Turkey as a bridge to the Islamic countries—part of its strategy of building ties with states bordering the Arab world. Now, as Lapidot had noted, Turkey is pursuing Israel for trade links and agricultural technology, and Israel (concerned that Syria will think it is opening up a “second front”) appears reluctant to get too publicly involved with Turkey, at least in the realm of security cooperation. Makovsky also described what has become almost a ritual in Turkey's relations with the peace process players for many years: Arab or Israeli officials would invite Ankara to become more engaged in the process; Turkey

would answer yes, of course; and nothing would happen. Yet, Makovsky suggested, greater involvement as a mediator in the peace process has never been Turkey's goal, nor was it genuinely desired by any of the other players. Turkey seeks to participate in the process only insofar as it can derive economic benefits or global prestige, or contribute to regional stability without risk to itself.

## Turkey and the Arab World

Ibrahim Karawan of the University of Utah addressed the topic of Turkey's relations with the Arab countries. Arabs who grew up in the 1960s had several missions placed before them: first and foremost, the liberation of Palestine, but also other tasks such as regaining “Arabistan” (a region in Iran inhabited by Arabs). These matters were part of their socialization, Karawan said, part of their education. Compared with the issue of Palestine, Turkey has simply not been very important to Arabs. Even the issue of Hatay/Alexandretta between Turkey and Syria has not evoked the kind of passion that Palestine has.

Arabs, Karawan noted, talk about Turkey's dependence on the West, and particularly the United States, as if many of their countries were not equally dependent on the United States, some even more so. Part of their criticism of Turkey may come from the fact that they do not get the same kind of hearing in Washington that Turkey enjoys. Still, Karawan declared, there is now a “reinvention of Turkey in Arab political discourse” and, within that, there have been many characterizations of Turkey's potential role in the region. There is, for example, the paradigm of Turkey as “regional caretaker,” though it is doubtful that Turkey could or would use the necessary power to play such a role in the face of any serious threat to the region, or a major regional war. Turkey is also seen as a model of economic and political development, though here again there is reason for skepticism. Turkey has serious economic problems of its own, and for economic models the Arabs look to Asia, not Turkey. Furthermore, many in the Arab world, and especially the politicized Islamic movements, see Turkey not as a model but as a secular country in crisis whose problems could be solved by closer adherence to Islamic teachings. Arabs tend to see the Turks as having a confused identity: They are

accepted neither by Europe nor by the Middle East. And so far as the peace process is concerned, Karawan continued, Turkey is not perceived by Arabs as having much leverage one way or the other.

Commenting on Turkey's relations with the Arab world, Hisham Melhem of *As-Safir* wryly noted that, although the Turks and the Arabs live in the same neighborhood, "both have often wished that their neighborhood had different zoning laws." Both Turks and Arabs have allowed themselves to remain prisoners of the past, with Arabs, especially Syrians and Iraqis, "chafing under the cruelty of geography." According to Melhem, although there are many different attitudes among Arabs about Turkey, there is a general rule: The closer a country is geographically to Turkey the more problematic the relationship is. Turkey's closing of the Iraqi pipeline was an act not lost on other Arabs, Melhem asserted. No one wants to have the spigot for its resources located in Turkey.

To the question of geography is added the "bitter memory of the past." For Arabs in the Levant, the last, nasty days of the Ottoman Empire—the Young Turk period—are still a vivid memory. The earlier, and better days of the empire have generally been forgotten. The Ataturk period added another layer of suspicion, as Arabs generally view modern Turkey's founder as anti-Muslim and anti-Arab. Events during the Cold War only intensified these suspicions. Melhem mentioned, however, that the Arabs' negative attitudes toward the Ottoman period may now be changing. Among some Arab intellectuals, there is even a noticeable and growing nostalgia for the Ottoman period, perhaps in reaction to the appalling conditions in so many Arab countries, including the prevalence of

both low- and high-intensity conflicts.

Melhem said that Turkey's foreign policy has always contained a duality: It is involved in the western system of states and at the same time reflects the reality that "whether Turkey likes it or not," it has a Muslim heritage and is part of the Middle East. Ankara recognized Israel and participated in the Baghdad Pact largely to please the West. However, the West's arms embargo in the mid-1970s was a great shock to Turkey; in fact, according to Melhem, the rise of Islamic groups in Turkey dates back to this period. In essence, the West's action was a way of saying to Turkey, "You don't belong in the West." At the same time, while Turkey will engage in greater economic cooperation with the Middle East, its largest trading partners will continue to be western countries. And overall, despite a tendency in the West to exaggerate Turkey's role in the Middle East—just as its role in the Central Asian republics was exaggerated three years ago when they gained independence—that involvement will remain limited for the foreseeable future.

# 8

## CONCLUSION: TURKEY'S FUTURE ROLE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Clearly, Turkey's relations with the countries on its periphery have not been smooth. With the Arab world, the relationship has been tense; with countries such as Iran and Israel, relations have been less so. Until the collapse of the Soviet Union, Turkey's foreign policy was fairly unequivocal in its western orientation, an orientation that was built into the very fabric of the country by its founder. However, recent developments in the world political system made changes in that orientation inevitable, and it was the consensus of the conference participants that the result was a shift eastward. The question is: How great a shift?

Ellen Laipson of the National Security Council staff pointed to three factors that make the issue of Turkey and the Middle East—and the Institute of Peace conference—more relevant in 1994 than even two years earlier. The first is a redefinition of exactly what constitutes “the Middle East.” Laipson suggested that the Middle East includes Turkey today in ways that were not the case previously, because two issues crucial to Turkey's future resonate in many if not all other Middle Eastern countries: the Kurdish issue, which directly affects Iran, Iraq, and Syria, and the future of Islam and politics, an issue central to Turkey's future as a secular state. Second, the Middle East peace process is paving the way for groupings of states and political

and economic networks that would have been unheard of before, as those who were once sworn enemies begin to forge new relations. Third, Turkey's foreign policy is undergoing a general re-evaluation, which has involved the development of relations with Turkic peoples outside Turkey (something that had been eschewed by the Turkish foreign policy establishment since the founding of the republic) and the demise of the nation's primary enemy, the Soviet Union. Now, instead of one hostile neighbor to the north, Turkey is surrounded by smaller, unstable countries. The old regional categories that defined Turkey's foreign policy no longer apply. This situation may allow Turkey to consider the opportunities and challenges from the Middle East in a new light.

Looking to the future of Turkey's foreign policy and its place in the world, four scenarios were outlined by Graham Fuller of the RAND Corporation. Fuller was careful to point out that these scenarios were not offered as probabilities, but as “food for thought” in a discussion about Turkey's developing role in the world. The first is a “straight-line” scenario under which Turkey will continue to be strictly allied to the West and leery of involvement in the Middle East. According to this scenario, Turkey will continue to pursue a liberal free-market economy as it follows the general U.S. foreign policy line and, as an element of that line, continue to act as a link between the United States and the Middle East.

The second scenario entails a nationalist course, with an emphasis on the ideology of pan-Turkism. In its broadest application, this course was not possible in the past; now, most of the world's Turkic peoples reside in independent states. The Turkish nationalist Alparslan Turkes, long-time head of the Nationalist Action Party (Milli Hareket Partisi), is now an important figure in Turkish politics. Although he has been on the Turkish political scene for decades, Turkes has been a fringe figure until now; his increasing popularity has been aided by the great enthusiasm of the Turkish population for ties to the other Turkic peoples. Frustration over the deteriorating Turkish economy, the continued impasse on the Kurdish problem, Armenian territorial gains in Azerbaijan, and the West's determined indifference to the plight of the Bosnian Muslims just might, Fuller opined, add up to a more stridently nationalist Turkey, determined to lead and even avenge the Turkic peoples of the

world. The downside to this scenario would likely be an ardent hostility on the part of Russia and Iran (among others) and a possible deterioration in Turkey's relations with the West, including the United States.

A third potential scenario for Turkey involves the renewal and strengthening of the Turks' Islamic identity. Although the Turks still have not reached a full reconciliation with Islam, nor a truly comfortable understanding of where their religion fits into their secular ideology, there is now a much greater acceptance of—and pride in—the Ottoman past, when the sultan was not only the ruler of the Turkish people, but also the caliph, head of the world's Muslims. An Islamist course for Turkey need not mean Islamic fundamentalism such as that in Iran, Fuller continued. It may involve only a greater recognition of Turkey's historical and present role in the Islamic world. On the other hand, as in the previous scenario, resurgent Turkish national or even religious fervor might look to the Arabs like resurgent Turkish imperialism.

The final speculative scenario offered by Fuller involves Turkey's establishment, together with several other countries, of a greater Middle East democratic federation. In this scenario, Turkey would maintain its generally moderate and secular orientation and would seek out other countries in the region with similar values. Possible partners in this federation include Egypt, Iraq, and Iran, though of course a change of government would be a prerequisite for Iraq or Iran.

Other than the first—straight-line—scenario, Fuller stressed that he was not suggesting that any one of these outcomes was likely. Other variables not discussed could affect Turkey's future, such as the course of U.S. policy, the final outcome for the Muslims in Bosnia, how politics develop in the other Middle Eastern countries, the evolution of security in the Gulf, and the future of Arab nationalism. The point in outlining these scenarios was not to predict, but to underscore that Turkey has a full and rich past involving many traditions that could recur. No country's past is ever buried and forgotten forever, and Turkey is no exception.

Turkey's ability to forge a new role for itself in the Middle East was analyzed in a different vein by Philip Robins of the Royal Institute for International Affairs in London. Robins contended that Turkey's role in the region will remain limited. In other regions of the world, Turkey plays an active

and high-profile role. In the Middle East, in contrast, Turkish policies have been reactive, cautious, and tentative. Whatever its drawbacks, this prudence provides a brake on what otherwise might be impulsive actions of the Turkish government.

Robins offered five factors that hinder Turkey's ultimate ability to carve out a more proactive role in the Middle East. First, Turkey has a different political culture from most of the Middle East countries, mainly because the political process over the decades has become more formalized in Turkey than elsewhere in the region. Politics in Turkey have become institutionalized to a degree not found in most other Middle Eastern countries. Second is the fact of Turkey's geographic marginalization; the bottom line is that Turkey sits at the edge of the Middle East. Third is the draw of a competing foreign policy agenda—the Middle East is not as important to Turkey as such areas as the Balkans, the former Soviet Union, and Cyprus.

The fourth factor inhibiting Turkey's role in the Middle East is what Robins characterized as Turkey's own foreign policy contradictions. As examples, he cited the Turks' support for a Kurdish safe haven in Iraq in the face of a denial of the existence of a Kurdish problem in their own country and Ankara's close relationship with Saudi Arabia, even though it is known that the Saudis financially support opposition Islamic groups in Turkey. The fifth factor that Robins suggested will inhibit a greater Turkish role in Middle East politics is the unpredictability and importance of Russia and the nature of its relations with Turkey. Recently, for example, Turkey has let Russia take the upper hand in negotiations on the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, despite Turkey's keen interests there. And the Turks acquiesced to the presence of Russian troops in Bosnia. They are also beginning to feel great pressure from Russia on the issue of access through the straits. All of these are signs that Turkey is still very susceptible to Russian foreign policies that may contradict Turkey's own interests.

Despite these factors, and despite the fact that Turkey is uniquely a member of many subsystems of states—the Balkans, the Black Sea region, the western flank, and the Middle East—Robins said Turkey cannot simply ignore the Middle East. The states of the region will not let Turkey, as a regional power and as an economic factor, ignore them. Furthermore, Robins asserted, the Kurdish insur-

gency will inevitably push Turkey toward greater dealings with neighboring countries—for example, to contend with the power vacuum in northern Iraq. Ankara cannot escape the fact that Turkey borders on Syria, Iraq, and Iran and has major problems with all three.

Mehmet Ali Birand asked the question that has tormented Turks since the founding of the republic: What are Turks? Europeans? Middle Easterners? Where do they belong? This eternal question can have, according to Birand, only one answer for the people: “We are Turks.” Turks generally know that once they had close relations with the Arabs but then something happened and the Arabs stabbed them in the back, leaving the Turks feeling that they were better off without them. In fact, Birand said, the Middle East is seen as “quicksand” that is best avoided. The problem, according to Birand, is that “we use a different language—we simply don’t understand each other.” Turkey’s foreign policy has been based on keeping as far as possible from the intricacies of the Middle East.

The Arabs, on the other hand, view Turkey as a U.S. agent, making it an object of suspicion and giving it an image that Turkey has done little to dispel. But if the Turks are agents of the Americans, Birand asked, what about the Arab regimes of Egypt’s Hosni Mubarak, or Jordan’s King Hussein? The Arabs also view Turkey as a Muslim country of sorts and as a symbol of stability, more or less. However, Turkish diplomacy had not adapted itself to the new world realities yet; Turkey still lacks a clear policy toward the Middle East.

Iraq represents Turkey’s greatest problem, according to Birand. Turkey’s help to the United States in the Gulf War was based on genuine fear of the extent to which Saddam was arming himself. Also, the embargo against Iraq has exacerbated Turkey’s “Kurdish problem” by leading Iraq to provide a safe haven for the PKK. To deal with this problem, Turkey must improve its relations with Iraq, including eliminating the embargo.

The most important role for Turkey in the Middle East, according to Birand, is as a model of a secular state. If Turkey is lost to the *Sharia*, to Islamic radicals, it will be the end of the struggle in the world between secularists and religious radicals. A second role Turkey must play relates to water, where some level of cooperation will be necessary. The third most important issue for Turkey is its stability, and here Birand referred again to the Kurdish question. “Turkey cannot solve the Kurdish problem through the [military] policies it pursues today.” And while the PKK cannot win the war either, it gains strength from the discontent of the Kurdish people. The Turkish government must

therefore satisfy the Kurdish population socially, economically, and politically, and not simply try to solve the problem through the application of force. Birand agreed with Robins that the Middle East is not, nor will it soon be, at the top of the list of regions critical for Turkey’s foreign policy. The West is number one and is likely to remain so. Russia, the Caucasus, and Central Asia are also of great significance. Relations with Israel and with Arab countries will develop, but they will not supplant the existing priorities.

Morton Abramowitz of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace encapsulated the issue of Turkey’s future role in the Middle East. Abramowitz saw little reason to project the development of a serious pan-Turkist movement and suggested that, as the Turkic world knows, pan-

Turkism is more of a “buzzword” for western academics and think tanks than a relevant ideology for Turkey’s future. This does not mean, of course, that Turkey cannot play a constructive, if modest, role in the future of the Turkic states.

Abramowitz stated that, contrary to earlier remarks, Turkey never offered to send troops to the Gulf War, despite U.S. wishes. Most of the Turkish public was either opposed to or at least skeptical of going to war with a neighboring country. The Turkish military was firmly opposed to becoming

**A**bramowitz stated that, contrary to earlier remarks, Turkey never offered to send troops to the Gulf War, despite U.S. wishes. Most of the Turkish public was either opposed to or at least skeptical of going to war with a neighboring country.

embroiled in any land combat with Iraq. Abramowitz explained that he raised this point to highlight the “tenuous nature” of Turkish-Arab relations and the caution and conservatism—or realism—of the Turkish military, who remain a leading determinant in Turkey’s foreign policy.

According to Abramowitz, Turkey’s policy toward the Middle East since the end of the Adnan Menderes government (of the 1950s) has been for the most part “on the mark.” Turkey’s role in the region needed to be cautious, limited, and largely confined to trade and investment, since Turkey had to be leery about being drawn into Middle Eastern quarrels—especially since it did not have the economic and political wherewithal to be a major player. What is more, Turkey was not particularly welcomed by Middle Eastern countries in any case. Turkey’s future role in the region will be determined primarily by internal developments in Turkey. Of those, the two most important are the economy and the Kurdish problem; if they are not resolved, Turkey’s ability to influence the wider area is going to remain low. Turkey’s Middle East policy will be further affected by what happens in the religious sphere. That issue arouses considerable debate in Turkey, and there are many different views of its significance, though there is generally an increased level of concern. The potential influence of the Refah Party cannot be ignored. How this issue plays out in the end will depend in part on the policies and effectiveness of the other Turkish political parties and on whether they increase the Islamic element in their platforms to enhance their appeal to the Islamic interests of the electorate. Abramowitz commented that, absent other developments, there seems to be “more rhetoric than reality” in the “Islamic component” of Turkish foreign policy.

Turkey’s involvement in the Middle East will thus remain limited, Abramowitz concluded, with the exception of its relations with the three neigh-

boring states of Iran, Iraq, and Syria, where many problems exist and are likely to remain. These include water, political aspirations and ideologies, religion, boundaries, the development of unconventional weapons, and the PKK. The very political nature of these three states generates concern for Turkey. Iraq will, in Abramowitz’s opinion, prove the most difficult problem, and policies toward Iraq will continue to reflect conflict between the objectives of Turkey’s foreign and domestic policies. On the one hand, Turkey does not want to see a Kurdish state on its border; on the other, Turkey knows that the return of centralized rule in Iraq, whether under Saddam or under a successor, is likely to result in more waves of Kurdish refugees to Turkey and Iran. As the Kurdish problem drags on, the Turks are increasingly inclined to make peace with Saddam, in the belief that they can and must live with him or his successor. This, in turn, according to Abramowitz, will complicate relations with the West, particularly the United States, and render the future of the Kurdish security zone very uncertain. Thus, Abramowitz declared, “Iraq is a profound dilemma for Turkey because the Kurdish issue for Turkey is such a profound dilemma.”

Abramowitz finished by noting that, “since World War II, Turkey’s policy in the Middle East, from a western perspective, has been derived from the fact that it is not a bridge but a bulwark and a beacon for others in the area.” A stable and economically dynamic, increasingly secular and democratic state is a “rare bird” in the region and one of great value to the world. Despite its very serious problems, Turkey has the capacity to maintain itself in this role. Moreover, Abramowitz concluded, “If Turkey resumes rapid rates of growth, maintains its cohesion, and deals with the Kurdish issue in some real fashion, it could indeed become a more significant force in the changing politics of the Middle East.”



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First published January 1995

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