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ANALYSIS PAPER

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Number 26, June 2012

# ECHOES OF EMPIRE:

TURKEY'S CRISIS OF KEMALISM  
AND THE SEARCH FOR AN  
ALTERNATIVE FOREIGN POLICY

MICHAEL A. REYNOLDS

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Turkey and its foreign policy have undergone a fundamental transformation. Formerly a passive presence in the Middle East, an eager aspirant to the European Union, and close partner of the United States, Turkey has today become an active regional player that is ambivalent about joining the European Union, and behaves independently of, at times even at cross-purposes with, the United States. Turkey's current foreign policy represents a clear break with the tradition that characterized the republic's foreign policy for nearly eight decades. That change is the product of several factors, including a more permissive international environment and Turkey's increased wealth. By far the most important factor, however, is the rise of a new political elite with a distinctly different worldview. This worldview, and the foreign policy that it inspires, represents not just the preferences of this newly ascendant elite but also an emerging response to the exhaustion of the founding ideology of the Turkish Republic—Kemalism.

Kemalism was the culmination of more than a century of efforts to transform and save the Ottoman state from external predators and internal dissolution. Although those efforts nominally failed in so far as the Ottoman Empire ceased to exist in 1923, they bore fruit with the birth of the Turkish Republic that same year. Led by General Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk), a core of former Ottoman military officers and statesmen in Turkey's War of Independence defied the great powers' attempts to carve up Anatolia and ultimately succeeded in preserving Turkish sovereignty. They distilled the bitter lessons they took from the Ottoman experience as Kemalism, and concluded that survival in the twentieth

century demanded a powerful, technologically capable, and centralized state in tight control of a territory containing a homogenous population. The Kemalists therefore strove to create a secular national identity, sever Turkey's cultural ties to its Muslim neighbors, and inculcate a materialist philosophy of progress among the population of their new state. They maintained a suspicion of Islam, which they pegged as a key obstacle to the modernization of Turkey. The Kemalists made sure to embed these principles in the institutions of their new state.

Looking back some nearly nine decades after the formation of the Turkish Republic, one can say that the Kemalist project has by most standards been a marked success. From a desperately poor, overwhelmingly illiterate, and ethnically disparate mix of Muslims, Mustafa Kemal and his successors created an educated, dynamic, and intensely patriotic nation that has made Turkey a political and economic standout in the region. Yet by one critical criterion, the project has failed. Despite its effort to forge one common unifying identity for all its citizens, the republic has not assimilated the bulk of its Kurdish population, and thus its population remains ethnically divided.

### THE WORLDVIEW OF TURKEY'S NEW ELITE

The electoral victory in 2002 of the Justice and Development Party or AKP (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi) brought to power a new elite whose members self-consciously distinguish themselves from the old through above all an unapologetic affirmation

of their Islamic faith. This elite, including Turkey's current minister of foreign affairs, Ahmet Davutoğlu, regard Kemalism today as not the solution to but rather the source of Turkey's problems. Kemalism, with its core principle of Turkish nationalism, internalized the Western principle of ethno-nationalism and thereby perpetuates the disintegration of Muslim fellowship. By converting Turks and Kurds from brothers in faith into ethnic enemies, the Islamists hold, Kemalism created an insoluble problem that condemned Turkey to endless conflict with its own population and chronic tension with its neighbors. According to Foreign Minister Davutoğlu, the solution to the persistent/enduring challenge/threat of ethnic disintegration is to do the opposite of the Kemalists and reject ethno-nationalism as a political principle.

For Davutoğlu, the Kemalist project to build a Turkish nation-state in Anatolia has not merely run out of steam with its failure to assimilate the Kurds, but it has created within Turkey a ticking time bomb in the form of the Kurdish question. A Turkish-Kurdish civil war, however, is not inevitable. To the contrary, Davutoğlu emphasizes, Turks and Kurds share a history more than a millennium old of living together. To revive this legacy of harmonious coexistence is not impossible; it would require liberalizing politics at home, including lifting restrictions on Kurdish identity, and relaxing barriers to travel and trade throughout the region.

### FOREIGN RELATIONS: CHALLENGING THE WORLDVIEW

The AKP's Kurdish policy exhibits important parallels to Davutoğlu's effort to refashion Turkey's foreign relations. The themes of reconciliation, openness, and cooperation marked Turkey's foreign policy throughout 2003 and 2011. During that time, Turkey insistently expanded ties to Syria and Iran. Turkey's courtship of these two countries marked a substantial change from the 1990s, when Turkey threatened Syria with war and when Turkish

authorities routinely declaimed Iranian meddling in Turkey's internal affairs. The Turkish-Israeli partnership of that decade was based in substantial part on containment of Syria, and the avowedly secular Turkish Republic was portrayed as the opposite of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

For this reason, Turkey's outreach to the so-called anti-Western "resistance bloc" confounded observers accustomed to thinking of Turkey as intrinsically pro-Western. One interpretation based it on tactical expediency, the product of a bargain struck for cooperation in combating Kurdish separatism. To be sure, Syrian and Iranian willingness to collaborate with Turkey in fighting Kurdish separatism had generated goodwill in Ankara, placating Turkey's military and nationalist circles in particular, and Ankara understandably sought to reciprocate. Economic motives also contributed to the rapprochement. Turkey's rapidly growing economy is highly dependent on imported energy—natural gas in particular. The desire of Turkish industrialists to diversify and expand their sources of energy and turn Turkey into a regional energy hub has undoubtedly pushed the country closer to Iran. At the same time, Turkish exporters' search for more markets helped expand the country's ties with Syria.

Nonetheless, Turkey's decision to deepen relations with Syria, Iran, and other actors in the region, such as Hamas, cannot be reduced to a collage of tactics. Davutoğlu's program is grander, and reflects his quasi-mystical conviction that the Middle East constitutes a single, coherent region, the product of a unique process of cultural and civilizational gestation that has been unfolding since the expansion of Islam in the eighth century. The Ottoman Empire (1299–1923) played a crucial role in this process. As the primary heir of that empire, Turkey can and must draw upon the legacy that the Ottomans bequeathed to it. Turkey's geography and the historical and cultural links with its neighbors, according to Davutoğlu, lend it an extraordinary "strategic depth." By engaging its neighbors and drawing them closer, Turkey

can simultaneously meliorate its domestic tensions while acquiring greater influence throughout the region and thereby on the global stage.

Davutoğlu thus has been a forceful advocate of the free movement of people and goods throughout the Middle East, pushing Turkey and its neighbors to adopt visa-free travel regimes and to lessen or eliminate customs duties. Pursued under the slogan of “zero problems with neighbors,” Turkey’s initiatives to build and expand links with other states represented a marked shift from its traditional prickly aloofness. Syria was a key case for Davutoğlu’s concept of strategic depth and a model of sorts for how Turkey would develop relations with its other neighbors. Announcing that “a common fate, common history, and a common future” bound Turkey with Syria, he rapidly expanded Turkey’s political, economic, and even military relations with Syria.

That Turkey’s current government has sympathized with Iran is evident from Turkish diplomacy over the past eight years. Aside from deepening economic ties, Ankara has consistently sought to block or dilute any U.S. or EU sanctions imposed on Iran in response to its nuclear program. Ankara’s overt rationale has been that by acting as an intermediary between Iran and the West, rather than as a strict ally of the West, it will acquire more influence over Iran and thereby more effectively moderate Iran’s behavior.

The logic behind this pro-Iranian bent can be found in Davutoğlu’s worldview that sees Iran as a fraternal country with which Turkey can and must have good relations.<sup>1</sup> According to Davutoğlu, deep historical processes forged a geo-cultural axis linking the lands of the Iranian plateau, Anatolia, and the Balkans, and this makes it impossible for Turkey to isolate itself from Iran or to be indifferent to it.<sup>2</sup> Moreover,

because the Turks and Iranians know each other intimately for centuries, Davutoğlu believes, there is every reason they should have good relations.

To what extent such “Iranophilia” will continue to guide the Turkish position on Iran’s nuclear program is hard to say. Iran’s acquisition of nuclear weapons would have profound implications for Turkey, but the Turks have been more opaque than forthcoming on the possible consequences of an Iranian bomb. Turkey’s government has preferred to emphasize Iran’s right to pursue a peaceful nuclear program and the double-standard of the West in seeking to sanction Iran for pursuing nuclear technology while doing nothing about Israel’s possession of nuclear weapons. This position more likely represents an unwillingness to confront the issue openly than it does guile.

The debate over Iran’s nuclear program is occurring at a time when Turkey and Iran have each been engaging in intense efforts to project influence into Iraq and Syria. Although the two have managed to avoid open competition so far, instability inside Iraq and particularly Syria could open a rift between Ankara and Tehran by putting them at direct odds. This may already be occurring in Syria, where Tehran continues to back Assad while Ankara has excoriated him, hosted Syrian opposition figures, and intercepted Iranian arms shipments.<sup>3</sup> In the event that Assad does fall or his regime does crack, Turkey and Iran will likely find themselves competing to shape the future of Syria. Predictions of a showdown between Turkey and Iran over Syria represent wishful speculative thinking more than solid analysis at this point, however, as Turkish-Iranian relations are defined by more than Syria. Nonetheless, the potential for a clash in the “borderlands” of Syria and Iraq does exist.

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<sup>1</sup> A Turkish professor who advises Davutoğlu affirms that Davutoğlu’s Iran policy is a direct reflection of the worldview laid out in *Stratejik Derinlik*. See, Wikileaks cable 09ISTANBUL440.

<sup>2</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye’nin Uluslararası Konumu* (Istanbul: Küre Yayınları, [2001] 2009), pp. 426–27, 436.

<sup>3</sup> Bayram Sinkaya, “Türkiye–İran İlişkilerinde ‘Güz Sancısı,’” ORSAM, September 20, 2011.

The uprisings in Syria have endangered Davutoğlu's foreign policy. Ankara's misreading of Asad gave the lie to Davutoğlu's repeated claims that the Turks, as heirs to the Ottoman experience of four centuries of rule over the Middle East, possessed a unique understanding of the region. More importantly, the bloodletting conducted by the predominantly Alawi regime against Sunni Muslims revealed the fallacy of Davutoğlu's imagined unity of the Middle East. Moreover, the fracture of Syria has reverberated inside Turkey and elsewhere in the region. It has put Ankara and Tehran on opposite sides of a conflict of immense importance to both—something that could precipitate a rupture in their relations.

### ISRAEL AND THE PALESTINIANS

Turkey's newfound antagonism toward Israel offers a striking contrast to Davutoğlu's principle of "zero problems" and his efforts to positively restructure Turkey's relations with other states in the region. Perhaps this is not surprising since a central theme of Davutoğlu's worldview is that the Middle East prior to the twentieth century constituted a whole. Israel, in Davutoğlu's opinion, is not an organic part of the Middle East, but rather a transplant inside it. Moreover, for Davutoğlu, Israel's dealings with the Kurds are just one manifestation of its indifference to the territorial integrity of others, including Turkey. In both principle and practice, Israel promotes the division of the Muslim peoples of the Middle East, and this is directly antithetical to Turkey's wellbeing.

Davutoğlu's concept of strategic depth has provided the framework for Turkish activism on behalf of the Palestinians. The Palestinians, after all, are former Ottoman subjects, and by championing their plight in the international arena, Turkey has won the support of Arab and Muslim populations and governments, and thereby returned to the fold of the Middle East. Therefore, in distancing Turkey from Israel, Ankara's Palestinian advocacy nets practical benefits for its regional diplomacy. More so, such a position keeps Ankara in the good graces

of Europe, if not Washington. In addition, it also achieves a positive ideological synergy with Ankara's own democratizing reforms at home and its efforts at regional integration abroad.

### WHAT THIS ALL MEANS FOR AMERICA

For America, Turkey will remain a necessary, nearly indispensable partner in the Middle East and adjacent regions. Although Turkish foreign policy in the past year has encountered major setbacks, the hope that it will change and become reliably accommodating to American priorities is misguided. The AKP has dominated Turkish politics ever since it first contested elections in 2002, and there is no sign that this domination will come to an end anytime soon. The turbulence Ankara has encountered since early 2011 notwithstanding, Davutoğlu and Erdoğan have not abandoned their vision of re-making the Middle East by drawing its constituent parts closer together. Not least important, the values and conceptual framework underlining Turkey's new foreign policy are not the preserve of a narrow circle; they command support from a sizeable and influential segment of the country.

The good news is that the retrenchment of American power in the Middle East makes it easier for Turkey to collaborate with the United States, and that powerful incentives for Turkey to continue that collaboration remain. Turkey reaps multiple benefits from its membership in NATO, access to American military support, and its status as a long-time partner of the West. Nonetheless, it behooves American policymakers to grasp that behind the evolution of Turkish foreign policy lies an outlook that is profoundly skeptical of the ultimate beneficence of American and Western power in the Middle East. Although Ankara will continue to cooperate with the United States on the many issues where Turkey's immediate interests overlap with America's, unlike in the Cold War, there is no pretense inside Ankara that its long-term interests are in fundamental alignment with those of America.



On two key issues, Iran and Israel, the perspectives and priorities of Turkey and the United States differ substantially. Unlike the United States, Turkey does not perceive Iran as an urgent threat. Indeed, Turkey regards the current stability of its eastern neighbor as a net benefit to its own security, particularly with regard to countering the PKK. Tensions between Turkey and Iran however, do exist, and those tensions will inevitably increase as the two states run up against each other in their attempts to project influence throughout region. This has almost certainly begun in Syria.

Ankara is well aware that Israel also has long been a valued regional partner of the United States, and that the maintenance of a hostile stance toward Israel therefore negatively impacts Turkey's relationship with the United States. Washington's ability to chasten Turkey for feuding with Israel, however, is limited and that ability will likely only decline for the foreseeable future. American policymakers therefore will have to concentrate instead on managing and containing that antagonism. This in itself will not be easy and will demand constant monitoring, but given the key roles that both Turkey and Israel continue to play in American foreign policy, it will be essential.

There is little to cheer American policymakers in recognizing that the transformation of Turkey's for-

ign policy is not a function of short-term tactical thinking or the mere accumulation of wealth and resources but is instead the product of the systemic exhaustion of Kemalism and the ascension of an alternative, religiously informed worldview that identifies the imposition of the Western nation-state system on the Middle East as the source of Turkey's domestic and foreign policy predicaments. Nevertheless, knowledge is the beginning of wisdom. American policymakers can take some consolation in several facts: Turkey's leadership is not radical and seeks evolutionary, not revolutionary, change; Ankara recognizes that even as it seeks to redefine its relations with the West, Turkey derives prestige and benefits from its ability to continue playing the role of a partner of the West, and in particular that Turkey's security and military power is still closely tied to U.S. support in the form of arms supplies, intelligence cooperation, and the conduct of joint maneuvers and training; Ankara's vision of the fundamental unity of the Middle East notwithstanding, the reality of the region's cleavages will inevitably compel Turkey's elites to curb their ambitions and, with time, modify their outlook. Until then, the United States will need to listen and work with Turkey while exercising extra diligence to ensure it takes nothing for granted.

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# INTRODUCTION

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Turkey and its foreign policy have undergone a fundamental transformation. Formerly a passive presence in the Middle East, an eager aspirant to the European Union, and close partner of the United States, Turkey has today become an active regional player that is ambivalent about joining the European Union, and behaves independently of, at times even at cross-purposes with, the United States. Indeed, the old but comforting bromides about Turkey being the staunchly pro-Western creation of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk have long ceased to be reliable guides to Turkish behavior. All this has confused and alarmed American policymakers.

Speculation about the motives of Turkish policy has been rife, but insights into the worldview behind the policy have remained rare. Given its location sitting astride the crossroads of the greater Middle East and Eurasia, its waxing economic might and political clout, and its ambition to project its influence throughout its neighborhood and beyond, Turkey is necessarily a priority of U.S. foreign policy. Yet the same factors that boost Turkey's importance to the United States also invest Turkey with enhanced independence and room for maneuver. On multiple questions critical to U.S. foreign policy, Turkey exerts profound influence, but the framework through which its decision makers approach these questions remains opaque to Americans. A better understanding of the sources of Turkish conduct is therefore essential for successful U.S. diplomacy.

Turkey's current foreign policy represents a clear break from the tradition that characterized the republic for nearly eight decades. Whereas Turkish foreign policy had, generally speaking, been passively inward-looking, risk averse, and marked by a surly defensiveness, over the past decade it has become dynamic, activist, and colored by a buoyant optimism. That change is the product of a more permissive international environment, Turkey's increased wealth, and the rise of a new political elite with a distinctly different worldview, among other things. What is critical to note is that Turkey's outlook, and the foreign policy that it inspires, represents an emerging response to the exhaustion of the founding ideology of the Turkish Republic—Kemalism. Recognizing, in particular, Kemalism's fundamental inability to resolve Turkey's "Kurdish question"—the greatest challenge facing the republic—Turkey's new elite has sought to defuse that existential challenge in part by drawing upon the country's Ottoman legacy in reformulating Ankara's foreign policy.

Rooted in a Turkish Islamist interpretation of the Ottoman past that stands the old Kemalist vision on its head, the new worldview proposes to resolve Turkey's Kurdish dilemma by gradually depoliticizing ethnicity at home and abroad. In practice, this means combining an emphasis on the cultural and religious links of the Middle East's Muslims with liberalization and the opening of borders to

the free movement of people and goods. This outlook has proven compelling for several reasons: it appeals to Turkey's devout, it indirectly flatters Turkish nationalist pride, and it offers an alternative to an obsolescent Kemalism that is attractive to liberals, businessmen, and others. It has implications for the region because it also informs Turkey's relations with Syria, Iran, and Israel. To understand Ankara's perspective, it is helpful to analyze the career and ideas of Turkey's foreign minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu, who is both this worldview's most articulate exponent and the person who oversees its implementation. By considering Turkey's perspective about its place in the region and international community, U.S. policymakers can better construct policies that advance American interests during a time of ongoing change in the Middle East.

### THE ISSUE OF ISLAM, A MORE PERMISSIVE INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT, AND A WEALTHIER AND MORE CONFIDENT TURKEY

The debate over the causes and consequences of Turkey's changing foreign policy is now more than eight years old. Regional volatility generated by the Arab Spring, Iran's persistent pursuit of nuclear technology, the sharp deterioration in Turkey's relations with Israel, and uncertainty about the future of American power in the Middle East have only invested this debate with greater urgency. Yet, whereas the debate over the urgency has spiked, its clarity has not. This is largely because it has been overshadowed by a broader debate over the compatibility of Islam and democracy.

Driving the transformation of Turkish foreign policy has been Turkey's ruling political party, the Justice

and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, or AKP). The AKP was founded in 2001 by a reformist faction from the avowedly Islamist Welfare Party after the latter had been banished from politics for violating Turkey's constitutional principle of secularism. The key founders of the AKP included Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Abdullah Gül, and Bülent Arınç—the current prime minister, president, and deputy prime minister of Turkey respectively. Although the leaders of the AKP, particularly in the party's early years, were keen to downplay their long involvement in Islamist circles and to affirm their commitment to the principle of secular governance, their personal piety has never been in doubt, and so the AKP has always been tagged as the “Muslim” party.<sup>4</sup>

The theoretical debate over the compatibility of Islam and liberal democracy is well over a century old. As of yet, no empirical evidence has resolved it conclusively. Turkey's election of an unabashedly devout political party therefore has excited many inside and outside the country, who have hoped that the example of the AKP will settle that debate and demonstrate to Muslims and non-Muslims alike that Islam and liberal democracy are not fundamentally irreconcilable. Others, however, fear that the AKP's actions at home and abroad, such as its cultivation of ties to Iran, Hamas, and other hard-core Islamists, suggest that the opposite is true, namely that Islam is incompatible with democracy and that the AKP is a wolf in sheep's clothing. Citing Erdoğan's own words, “Democracy is like a streetcar. When you come to your stop you get off,” this school holds that the AKP has no sincere commitment to a liberal order and sees democracy only as a tool to gain power.<sup>5</sup> This interpretation echoes former assistant secretary of state Edward Djerejian's pithy warning that some

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<sup>4</sup> Because the AKP disavows any intention to implement Islamic law or establish a formally “Islamic” state, some argue that the use of the term “Islamist” to describe the AKP is misplaced. This is a fair objection. This paper, however, uses the term “Islamist” more broadly to describe any actor or ideology that seeks the greater influence of Islam on public life, whether achieved through the voluntary assent and autonomous activism of citizens or through the legislative power of the state.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Matthew Kaminski, “Turkey's ‘Good Dictator,’” *Wall Street Journal*, June 10, 2011.

Islamists' idea of democracy is "one man, one vote, one time."<sup>6</sup>

However important this broader question of the ultimate compatibility of Islam and democracy may be, it has led analysts of Turkish politics to ask the wrong question of whether Turkey's new leaders are understood best as liberal democrats or as Muslims. Those who believe in the former emphasize those words and deeds of Ankara that suggest support for Western-style democracy, whereas those who believe in the latter focus on Ankara's democratic failings and ties to anti-Western elements. What analysts operating within this framework miss is that the question is largely irrelevant to understanding Turkish foreign policy. In formulating their policies, the AKP's leaders do not see a dichotomy between Islam and democracy, and there is no reason to expect that they have to choose between one or the other. Democracy and Islam are sufficiently broad and flexible concepts to accommodate multiple interpretations and can be mutually compatible in practice, even if there may be tension in theory.

This is not to suggest that the religious faith of the AKP leadership is irrelevant. To the contrary, it is a primary factor informing their *weltanschauung* and has been critical to the transformation of Turkish foreign policy. To be understood properly, however, that faith and its attendant worldview need to be situated and analyzed in their specifically Turkish context. This paper seeks to do precisely that. Before investigating the ideas and concepts that drive Turkish foreign policy, however, it would be useful to address briefly two structural factors that have made possible a new direction in Turkish foreign policy: the emergence of a new regional balance of

power and the unprecedented growth of the Turkish economy over the past decade. Although these two developments cannot themselves account for the new direction of Turkish foreign policy, without them a new direction would have been impossible.

The disappearance of the Soviet Union as an existential threat fundamentally redrew the regional balance of power and gave Turkey far greater room to maneuver after the Cold War. Thus in the early 1990s, Turgut Özal, the founder of the center-right Motherland Party and prime minister (1983–89) and then president (1989–93), advocated a more active role for Turkey in Iraq, the Balkans, the Caucasus, and Central Asia before dying of a heart attack in 1993. But resistance from a risk averse foreign policy establishment and particularly the Turkish general staff impeded Özal's attempts to refashion the country's foreign policy. Later, from the left, İsmail Cem, Turkey's foreign minister from 1997 to 2002, continued to try to redefine the country's foreign policy by famously breaking the cycle of Greek-Turkish animosity and initiating a rapprochement with Greece. He also espoused a new "policy of balance" to improve relations with Syria, Iraq, and Iran. Turkish foreign policy, which for long had been stuck in a defensive crouch, slowly began to change.<sup>7</sup>

A weak and unstable economy, however, meant that Özal and Cem never had the resources to really pursue their visions. By contrast, Turkey under the AKP has become a markedly wealthier country. Between 2002 and 2009, Turkey's overall GDP increased over two-and-a-half times, making it one of the world's fastest growing economies.<sup>8</sup> The contrast between today's booming economy and the

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<sup>6</sup> Edward Djerejian, "The US and the Middle East in a Changing World," *U.S. Department of State Dispatch* 3 (June 8, 1992), available at <<http://dosfan.lib.uic.edu/ERC/briefing/dispatch/1992/html/Dispatchv3no23.html>>.

<sup>7</sup> For more on Özal, Cem, and the contest between the passive and risk averse "Republican" and the interventionist "Imperial" tendencies in Turkish foreign policy, see Malik Mufti's fascinating analysis, *Daring and Caution in Turkish Strategic Culture: Republic at Sea* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009); See also Ömer Taşpınar, "The Three Strategic Visions of Turkey," *US-Europe Analysis Series* No.50, Center on the United States and Europe at Brookings, March 8, 2011, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> According to World Bank Development Indicators, Turkey's GDP was \$232.535 billion in 2002 and \$614.603 billion in 2009. Data available at <[http://data.worldbank.org/data-catalog/world-development-indicators?cid=GPD\\_WDI](http://data.worldbank.org/data-catalog/world-development-indicators?cid=GPD_WDI)>.

chronically anemic economy of the 1990s has infused the Turks with an unaccustomed confidence, while the vast increase in revenues and resources has allowed them to become more assertive in the international realm. Needless to say, this economic performance has benefited the AKP's popularity. In short, a more permissive international environment and greater wealth have endowed the Turkish Republic with unprecedented opportunities for maneuver in its foreign relations.

Paradoxically, at the same time that Turkey has acquired unprecedented power and freedom for maneuver abroad, it has entered the most severe iteration of its perennial existential crisis: the question of the place of Kurdish citizens within the country. The Kurdish question has been with the Turkish Republic from the very beginning, when the republican elite under Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) decreed that the sole acceptable identity for the republic's Muslims, nearly 99 percent of the population, was "Turk."

In its first two decades, the republic witnessed three large-scale Kurdish revolts, but suppressed them relatively quickly, despite having far fewer resources at its

disposal than it does today. The Kurdish question effectively remained dormant until 1984, when a group calling itself the "Kurdistan Workers Party" (Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan, or PKK) initiated a comprehensive campaign of violence and terror. Within ten years, Turkey found itself battling a burgeoning insurgency in its southeast. The capture by Turkish special operations forces of the PKK's founder and leader, Abdullah Ocalan, in Kenya in 1999 dealt a heavy blow to the PKK's operations and morale, compelling the organization to refrain from serious attacks for nearly five years. Nonetheless, the capture of Ocalan failed to knock the PKK out. Ensnared in the mountains of northern Iraq, it retained both internal cohesion and influence over the Kurdish political movement inside Turkey. By 2004, the PKK had resumed sporadic attacks, and in the summer and fall of 2011 it demonstrated its enduring potency by executing some of its most deadly attacks ever against Turkish military targets. After nearly three decades, the Turkish Republic remains locked in armed struggle with the PKK, and the mobilization of Kurds along ethnic lines in Turkish politics has meanwhile only grown more institutionalized.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>For a recent and incisive analysis of Turkey's Kurdish question see, International Crisis Group "Turkey: Ending the PKK Insurgency," Europe Report No. 213, September 20, 2011. See also the recent report of the Turkish think tank TESEV, Cengiz Çandar, *Dağdan İniş: PKK Silah Nasıl Bırakır: Kürt Sorunu'nun Şiddetten Arındırılması* (Istanbul: TESEV Yayınları, 2011). On Kurdish politics inside Turkey see, Nicole Watts, *Activists in Office: Kurdish Politics and Protest in Turkey* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010).

# KEMALISM AND ITS CRISIS

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When the Turkish Republic was founded in 1923, its ruling elite consisted of a resolute class of military officers and civil servants whose efforts had brought forth, against great odds, a sovereign Turkish state from out of the rubble of the Ottoman Empire. The process of imperial dissolution had impressed upon them two lessons: that ethnic heterogeneity undermined states and that religion retarded technological advancement and social progress. Under their victorious leader Mustafa Kemal, the republican elites were determined that their new state would reflect those lessons by forging from its population an ethnically homogenous citizenry and putting religion under tight control. The institutions they created embodied this vision, known as Kemalism, and ensured its replications for several generations.

But today the ideology that once animated the republic is exhausted. Despite its many successes, Kemalism can no longer offer, or pretend to offer, a solution to Turkey's most pressing challenge—the Kurdish question. Whereas as late as the 1990s Turkish official public discourse refused to recognize the existence of the Kurdish question, today all

sectors openly debate it. In effect, Turkish society has conceded that Kemalism has failed and is incapable of offering a resolution to this central problem. The AKP, for reasons to be described below, does offer, or at least believes it offers, a credible path out of the impasse into which Kemalism has brought Turkey.

## THE BIRTH AND EXHAUSTION OF KEMALISM

Turks, including their decision makers, take as reference points historical events and experiences that are largely unfamiliar to Americans. The foundation of the modern Turkish state supplies perhaps the most important of those reference points. Whereas Americans tend to take for granted the existence of the Turkish Republic, the fact is that the republic's formation in 1923 was by no means a “natural” or foreordained event.<sup>10</sup> Rather, it represented the product of a desperate and near-run struggle by the remnants of the defeated Ottoman officer corps to defy geopolitical pressures to partition Anatolia. That struggle exacted a wrenching social and cultural transformation that inflicted lasting trauma

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<sup>10</sup> Most Americans never puzzle over the origins of the Turkish Republic. They either tend to assume Turkey to have been more or less coextensive with the Ottoman Empire—an understandable simplification given the practice of Westerners to use “Turkey” as shorthand for the Ottoman Empire long before the Ottomans or Turks themselves began to use the term itself—or they take its emergence for granted, an outcome of the natural and inevitable movement of nations toward self-determination. Turkish speakers began using “Türkiye,” a modified version of the European name, only in the final decade of the Ottoman Empire. Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, [1961] 1968), p. 333.



on Turkish society. The scars are visible in Turkey today and indeed inform much of its politics.

The conceptual matrix that provided the ideational basis of the Turkish Republic is known as Kemalism, after Mustafa Kemal,<sup>11</sup> the general who led the military campaign that culminated in the creation of the republic and then ruled it until his death in 1938. Kemalism functioned as a comprehensive worldview that supplied both a historical diagnosis of the challenges facing Turkish society as well as a vision of how to overcome those challenges. Turkish nationalism and secularism were key components of the Kemalist prescription.

Despite its etymology, Kemalism's general tenets took their shape before Mustafa Kemal ever came to power. The last four decades of the Ottoman Empire constituted a turbulent and bloody period that saw the Ottoman state, other states great and small, and multiple local actors all join in a struggle for control of what still remained of the polyethnic, multi-confessional, and polyglot Ottoman Empire—namely, the Balkans, Anatolia, and the Arab lands. These territories were the focus of intense competition among the great powers, who, on numerous occasions, dismembered the Ottoman Empire by galvanizing its subjects to rebel under the banner of nationalism and then intervening on their behalf. The Ottoman Empire for a host of reasons—technological, military, economic—was hopelessly outclassed, a “sub-peer” competitor playing in the brutal game of nineteenth-century power politics against rivals who were bigger and who hit faster and harder. Try as the Ottoman elites might—and try they did—they could never reform their institutions and society quickly enough. They watched with bitterness as the European powers, sometime working in concert with former Ottoman subjects, dismantled their once magnificent empire from within and without, each loss of territory resulting in a stream of Muslim refugees flee-

ing lands that in many cases they had lived in for centuries.

For the Turks, the high tide of this onslaught came in the eleven years stretching from 1911 to 1922, when the Tripolitanian War (1911–12), Balkan Wars (1912–13), World War I (1914–18), and the Turkish War of Independence (1919–22) came one after another—an era Turkish schoolchildren know as the “National Mobilization.” Between 1911 and 1913, the Ottoman Empire lost more than one-third of its territory and one-fifth of its population. At the same time, war caused some nearly half a million desperate Balkan Muslims to flee into Anatolia, where they joined earlier waves of destitute refugees from the Balkans and Caucasus. During World War I, the British, French, and Russians prepared to divide Anatolia among themselves. The process of partition nearly reached its culmination following the defeat of the Ottomans, when in 1920 the victorious powers gathered in the French town of Sèvres to divvy up the last stretch of Ottoman-held lands. The victorious allies modified their earlier plan by reassigning the lands of eastern Anatolia designated for Russia to a greater Armenia, and awarding Greece a chunk of western Anatolia. To the compliant sultan and the Ottoman dynasty, the Treaty of Sèvres left a nominal sultanate in central Anatolia.

However, a committed group of Ottoman military officers and state servants were not willing to go along with their sultan and see Anatolia partitioned. Their one hope was to mobilize grassroots resistance, and so throughout Anatolia they began setting up multiple local organizations, typically with a variant on the name “Association for the Defense of the Rights of Muslims.” Led by the exceptionally talented General Mustafa Kemal, they rallied the war-weary and exhausted Muslims of Anatolia under the banner of Islam and took up arms. Condemned to death by the sultan and

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<sup>11</sup> Mustafa Kemal adopted the surname “Atatürk” (“Father Turk”) in 1934.

opposed by their own government, Kemal's followers drove back the Armenians in the east, then expelled the Greek army from the west, and stared down the British, French, and Italians, who all eventually abandoned their claims on Anatolia. Kemal and his national forces managed to salvage Anatolia and create a new country, which they called "Türkiye"—a term that was still rather new and unfamiliar to Anatolia's Muslims. The creation of an independent Turkey was no mean feat: only a handful of lands, such as Japan, Thailand, Afghanistan, and Arabia, had escaped European colonization or domination up through the Second World War.

Turkey's new elite—who hailed disproportionately from the Balkans and western Anatolia—drew a lesson from the lost battles to hold on to the Balkans and the Arab lands, and from their own near-run struggle to defend Anatolia. For them, these experiences showed that survival in the twentieth century demanded a powerful, centralized state in tight control of a territory hosting a homogenous population. A state with a polyethnic population would always find itself vulnerable to outside agitation, subversion, and ultimately partition. The abortive Treaty of Sèvres underscored the latter point to Mustafa Kemal and the officers who served under him in the War of Independence.

Another key lesson that Turkey's founders drew from the historical experience of Ottoman decline was the inescapable necessity of elitism. The salvation of the Turkish state and society, they believed, demanded radical reform. But they felt the Turkish people—overwhelmingly illiterate peasants—were too ignorant to comprehend fully the need for revolutionary change, let alone to know what sort of reforms were needed. Thus, the founders believed that the Turkish people's own survival dictated that a select vanguard guide and impose upon them reforms for their own good. Populism (*halkçılık*), named by Mustafa Kemal's Republican People's Party as one of its six key principles, implied not the idea that the people should exert more control over

politics but rather the very different notion that the political elite should rule for the sake of the people. The Kemalists viewed the people with a certain disdain, acting in their name but seeing them as akin to inert matter that has to be reshaped and restructured. The Kemalist elites' cultivation of an identity distinct from, and in some sense opposed to, that of the common people reinforced the sociological rift between the two groups. This came on top of a geographic division that existed as well. The Kemalists, who dominated the ranks of the educated and bureaucratic class, made Turkey's urban centers their strongholds. This situation lasted until the onset of mass migration from the countryside to the cities in the 1970s began to change Turkey's demographic and political landscape. It is worth noting that Istanbul's newly urbanized and devout migrants were the constituency that gave Erdoğan his start in politics by electing him mayor in 1994.

### KEMALISM, ISLAM, AND THE CULTURE WARS

Kemalists reserved a special scorn for Islam, pegging it as the key cultural obstacle to the government's ambition to modernize Turkey. Although they had invoked the defense of Islam in order to mobilize Anatolia's Muslims in the War of Independence, Atatürk and his followers regarded Islam negatively. They did so for two reasons: First, they believed Islam was a retrograde influence. It impeded scientific and technological innovation and consequently had led the Ottomans to defeat on the battlefield and in the market alike. Second, they feared Islam was inherently transnational and thus subversive of the nation-state. So in the Kemalists' telling, Islam in the Ottoman era had led the Turks astray from their real interests and caused them to spill blood on behalf of non-Turks in faraway lands.

The Kemalist solution was to adopt secular nationalism, sever Turkey's cultural ties to its Muslim neighbors, and embrace a materialist philosophy of progress. The Kemalists rejected the Ottoman

tradition of decentralized rule over a polyglot and ethnically heterogeneous society, and resolved to forge a homogenous nation under a rationalized, centralized, and autarchic state along the European model. Central to this grand effort was transforming Anatolia's ethnically diverse Muslim population into a homogenized and indivisible "Turkish" nation that would be loyal and bound to the state. These Muslims may have been predominantly Turkish but they were still ethnically heterogeneous: Albanians, Bosnians, Circassians, Kurds, Laz, and Pomaks, among others. These non-Turks would need to assimilate, and in an effort to facilitate this process, the new republic suppressed expression of non-Turkish ethnic identities.

In the 1920s, Atatürk subjected Islam to central state control through such measures as abolishing the caliphate, seizing endowed religious properties, placing mosques and institutions of religious education under state administration, banning the Sufi brotherhoods, and abolishing all remnants of Shari'a law in favor of the Swiss legal code. The Turkish Republic sharply circumscribed the role of Islam in public life, permitting public expressions of religious commitment only when under the supervision of state authorities and when used to underscore loyalty to the Turkish state. This effort went beyond merely taming Islam; it grew into a form of social engineering through the deliberate reorientation of the minds and mores of the Turkish population away from Islam as they had traditionally practiced it. Thus, Kemal and his followers switched alphabets from the holy Arabic script to the mundane Latin alphabet of European modernity, purged the Turkish language of much of its Arabic and Persian vocabulary, and instituted compulsory sartorial reforms in an attempt to drive out Islamic categories and concepts from the Turkish intellectual consciousness.<sup>12</sup>

Yet the Kemalist elites dared not attempt to stamp out religious belief. Such a move would have been too abrupt and would have invited a popular backlash. They opted rather to co-opt religious sentiment by creating an official Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*) to administer and supervise worship. Islam, when under state control, could prove useful to the government in teaching schoolchildren and citizens such values as honesty and loyalty.

Nonetheless, the Kemalists waged a culture war against religious belief, disparaging Islam as obsolescent, reprobate, and pernicious, and its followers as backward and ignorant. The ruling republican elites frowned upon the more devout and ostracized them socially and professionally. Interestingly, recent generations of religiously observant Turks have returned the ridicule by borrowing from the history of the American civil rights movement and calling these privileged secular people "white Turks." Prime Minister Erdoğan invoked an earlier variant of such "culture war" rhetoric in 2009, when he derided the retired diplomats who criticized the way he upbraided Israeli president Shimon Peres at Davos as "*mon cher*," a biting reference to the habit of some nineteenth-century Ottoman bureaucrats to flaunt their knowledge of French to underscore their elite Westernized pedigrees, a habit carried into the twentieth century by republican officials. The term also implies a combination of inauthenticity with fecklessness.<sup>13</sup>

## THE KURDISH CONUNDRUM

Looking back some nearly nine decades after the formation of the Turkish Republic, one can say that the Kemalist project has by most standards been a marked success, the aforementioned social and cultural tensions notwithstanding. From a desperately poor, overwhelmingly illiterate, and ethnically disparate mix of Muslims, Mustafa Kemal and his

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<sup>12</sup> The classic brief for this effort is Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey* (London: Hurst and Co. [1964] 1998).

<sup>13</sup> See Aydoğan Vatandaş, *Monşer: Saklı Seçilmişler* (Istanbul: Timaş, 2009).

successors created an educated, dynamic, and intensely patriotic nation that has made Turkey a political and economic standout in the region. Yet by one critical criterion the project has failed. Despite its effort to build one common identity, the republic has not assimilated the bulk of its Kurdish citizens, and thus its population remains ethnically divided. Kurds account for somewhere around 15 percent, perhaps even as much as 20 percent, of Turkey's population and are dominant in one part of the country, the southeast. Whereas for much of the Turkish Republic's existence its leaders could hope or pretend that the Kurds would one day assimilate, by the 1990s even pretense was no longer possible. The Turkish state was in its second decade battling the insurgent Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) with no end to the conflict in sight.

Meanwhile, by this time, it had become clear that Turkey's Kurdish question remained tied to a larger regional one. Kurds in neighboring Syria and Iran were restive, and those in Iraq had attained de facto autonomy in the wake of the 1991 Gulf War. Whether it was attempting to solicit cooperation against Kurdish separatism or trying to compel such cooperation, Ankara found the conflict with the Kurds consuming considerable energy and limiting its diplomatic options. Worse, Turkey's battles against the PKK threatened to escalate into a regional war. In the 1990s, the Turkish Armed Forces mounted operations inside the borders of Iraq and, most famously, in 1998, Turkish generals brought Turkey to the verge of war with Syria over the latter's backing of the PKK. It was proving impossible to contain the Kurdish question inside Turkey's borders. All of this amounted to a great burden for a country with a weak economy and limited resources. The harder Turkey tried to clamp down on the Kurds, the stronger the Kurds reacted. As a result, more and more Turks came to recognize that

Kemalism's dogmatic suppression of Kurdish identity was proving counterproductive.

## KURDS AND ISLAMISTS

The long experience of marginalization at the hands of the Kemalists endowed Turkey's Islamists with a certain empathy for the Kurds. Indeed, the Turkish Armed Forces, the self-appointed guardians of Kemalism, have long ranked Islamic "reaction" alongside Kurdish separatism as the greatest threats facing the republic. In fact, the two threats had been linked from the beginnings of the republic. The first instance of serious armed opposition to the new republican order came in 1925 when a prominent Kurdish Sheikh of the Naqshbandi Sufi order, Sheikh Said of Palu, led a rebellion. Although scholars differ about whether religion or Kurdish nationalism was the dominant motive, they agree that both were present and were intertwined. Sheikh Said was, after all, a religious authority and the immediate precipitant of the revolt was the abolition of the caliphate. It is worth noting too the sectarian fallout. Sheikh Said and his followers were Sunnis, and fear of Sunni domination spurred the neighboring Alevi Kurds to support the Turkish government against Said's Kurds. Republican authorities cited "religious reaction" and the desire to reestablish the caliphate as the primary cause of the Kurdish insurrection. Later, up through the 1990s, republican historians and pundits replicated the depiction of the revolt as an act of religious fanaticism.<sup>14</sup>

Almost uncannily, the most famous and influential dissident Islamist figure in the republic's history, Bediüzzaman Said Nursi (1878–1960), was a Kurd. Nursi's critique of Kemalism so unsettled the republican authorities that they tried him multiple times, keeping him in prison or under house arrest for much of his life. Indeed, they could not leave

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<sup>14</sup> Robert Olson, "The Kurdish Rebellions of Sheikh Said (1925), Mt. Ararat (1930) and Dersim (1937-8): Their Impact on the Development of the Turkish Air Force and on Kurdish and Turkish Nationalism," *Die Welt des Islams* 40 (March 2000): pp. 69–72; David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (New York: I.B. Tauris, [1996] 2004), pp. 192–96.

him alone even after his death. Fearing that his grave would become a pilgrimage site and a focus of resistance to the state, they dug it up overnight and buried his body in an unmarked site. But all this was not enough; republican authorities failed to stifle Nursi's repeated condemnations of ethno-nationalism as contrary to Islam and his endorsements of Turkish-Kurdish brotherhood.<sup>15</sup>

The Islamist critique of Turkish ethno-nationalism, coupled with the attachment of many Kurds to Islam, likely explains why Turkey's Islamist parties, including the AKP, have demonstrated a consistent—and unique—ability to compete with Kurdish parties in heavily Kurdish territories.<sup>16</sup> The AKP has not been afraid to criticize the Turkish state on behalf of the Kurds, albeit after refracting those criticisms through an Islamist prism. Prime Min-

ister Erdoğan stunned citizens in 2010, when he referred to the infamous operation that Turkish security forces undertook against the predominantly Kurdish inhabitants of Dersim<sup>17</sup> in the late 1930s as a “massacre.” He followed up on this criticism in November 2011, presenting official documentation that listed the number killed in Dersim by Turkey at 13,806 and offering on behalf of the state an apology for the deaths—an unprecedented act for a Turkish prime minister. To be sure, political calculation motivated Erdoğan's condemnation of the “Dersim Tragedy.” He made sure to remind his audience that the officials who authorized the operation, including then-president İsmet İnönü, belonged to the same political party as his opponents, the Kemalist Republican People's Party. Nonetheless, his willingness to betray Turkish nationalist orthodoxy with his criticisms is telling.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> On Nursi, see Şerif Mardin, *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey: The Case of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989). There is a great need for a newer and more comprehensive study of Nursi's life, thought, and impact in English. The great majority of the works in Turkish are hagiographical.

<sup>16</sup> Nicole Watts, *Activists in Office: Kurdish Politics and Protest in Turkey* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010), pp. 60, 109.

<sup>17</sup> The province officially was renamed “Tunceli” in 1935.

<sup>18</sup> Also notable was Erdoğan's citation of the work of a staunch Islamist critic of the republic, Necip Fazıl Kısakürek (1904–83), to describe the Dersim massacre. Although the repression of Dersim has long been an issue for leftist and Kurdish nationalist writers, Erdoğan credited one of Kısakürek's books for revealing the truth about Dersim to him and his generation, and pointed out that the Kemalists had at various times banned the book. “Erdoğan Dersim'in belgesini gösterdi,” CNN Türk, November 11, 2011, available at <<http://www.cnntrk.com/2011/turkiye/11/23/erdogan.dersimin.belgesini.gosterdi/637777.0/index.html>>. The fact that the Dersim victims were heavily Alevi adds a further twist. Kısakürek, as Erdoğan observes, counted the Alevis alongside Sunnis as victims of the Turkish Republic's persecution of religion.

# DAVUTOĞLU: EXPONENT AND IMPLEMENTER IN CHIEF

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In order to understand the conceptual framework of contemporary Turkish foreign policy, it is necessary to examine the career and ideas of that policy's foremost exponent, Turkey's foreign minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu. A loquacious, extraordinarily energetic, supremely confident, and quirkily charismatic figure, he has acquired a degree of influence and power unprecedented for a foreign minister, and has become a celebrity on the diplomatic circuit.<sup>19</sup> Yet, although the title of his book, *Strategic Depth* (*Stratejik Derinlik*), and his trademark mantra, “zero problems with neighbors,” are familiar even to those who follow Turkey casually, few explore the contents of that book or probe the worldview behind his mantra.<sup>20</sup> Davutoğlu laid out his vision in detail before entering politics, and his writings provide direct insight into the thinking that has reshaped Turkish foreign policy. The significance of Davutoğlu and his ideas lay not in their originality but in the fact that millions of other Turks share them.

## THE FORMATION AND RISE OF DAVUTOĞLU

Davutoğlu was born in 1959, in Tashkent, a small central Anatolian town located not far from Konya,

the former capital of the Seljuk Empire that is known for its whirling dervishes and the tomb of one of Islam's greatest mystics, the Central Asian-born Persian poet Jalal al-Din Rumi. Davutoğlu was raised as an observant Muslim in an earnest but temperate mold common among Turks. The stark beauty of the surrounding mountain peaks and cliffs evoked in the young boy a sense of awe before the divine.

Davutoğlu was the son of Turkmen nomads who, before arriving in Tashkent, had over the centuries passed through Iran and Mesopotamia, assimilating elements of culture along the way. As Davutoğlu recalled the lines of verse recited by his grandmother: “Horasan was our province, through Isfahan passed our road.”<sup>21</sup> The rhythms and traditions of the Turkmen past echoed in Tashkent's social life, in the celebrations of births, weddings, and holidays, the holding of funerals, and the practice of the sacred principle of hospitality.

The Ottoman legacy of heterogeneity, too, was palpable in Tashkent and the surrounding areas. Alongside the Turkmen lived Bosnians, Albanians,

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<sup>19</sup> For example, the *New York Times Magazine* ran a profile of him (James Traub, “Turkey's Rules,” *New York Times Magazine*, January 20, 2011, and *Foreign Policy* in 2011 named him and Prime Minister Erdoğan as number sixteen in a ranking of the top one hundred most influential global thinkers. See “The FP Top 100 Global Thinkers,” *Foreign Policy*, December 2011, available at <[http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/11/28/the\\_fp\\_top\\_100\\_global\\_thinkers?page=0,15#thinker16](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/11/28/the_fp_top_100_global_thinkers?page=0,15#thinker16)>.

<sup>20</sup> One reason for this may be that Greek is the only foreign language into which *Strategic Depth* has been translated.

<sup>21</sup> Gürkan Zengin, *Hoca: Türk Dış Politikasında “Davutoğlu Etkisi”* (Istanbul: İnkılâp Kitabevi, 2010), p. 29.

Circassians, Kurds, and Arabs. Even memory of the Armenians—and of harmonious coexistence with them—was present; the unusually beautiful door of his childhood home, Davutoğlu recalled, was the handiwork of an Armenian craftsman. Growing up in Tashkent imbued Davutoğlu with a powerful nostalgic consciousness of being the heir to a rich spiritual tradition and civilization that once upon a time had joined peoples across vast expanses of territory and epochs. The dissolution of the Ottoman Empire had sundered that unity, and Davutoğlu regretted this loss.<sup>22</sup>

As the new Turkish Republic worked to disavow the old, sprawling civilization of Islam as obsolescent, outmoded, and dead, and embrace the modern civilization of Europe, Davutoğlu balked. Even as a child, Davutoğlu nurtured doubts about claims of the universality and superiority of Western civilization. When asked as a twelve-year-old to write an essay about what profession he would choose when he grew up, he responded that what was important was not “our choice of profession” but rather the formation of citizens “tied to the history, culture, and values of the country.” The unusual response impressed the teacher enough to retain it.<sup>23</sup>

Davutoğlu remained skeptical of the West through adulthood. It should be noted that his reservations were not based on unfamiliarity with Western culture. He attended a prestigious German-language high school in Istanbul where he read Goethe, Kafka, and Brecht, among others. He then studied at Turkey’s elite English-language Bosphorus University, where he earned his BA and PhD degrees. Davutoğlu made the refutation of Western claims of superiority and universality and the defense of an Islamic “worldview” the focus of his graduate studies. In his doctoral dissertation, published in 1994 under the title *Alternative Paradigms: The Impact*

*of Islamic and Western Weltanschauungs on Political Theory*, he categorically rejected both the superiority of the Western tradition of political philosophy and its applicability to Muslim societies. In particular, he blamed the nation-state model of the West for creating a global crisis of identity among Muslims. Fortunately, he concluded, this crisis will not be eternal. Globalization, he wrote, is undermining the nation-state system, and thus “the core issue for Islamic polity [sic] seems to be to reinterpret its political tradition and theory as an alternative world-system rather than merely as a program for the Islamization of individual nation-states.”<sup>24</sup>

Davutoğlu expressed his convictions in his subsequent career choices. Rather than pursue an academic path to Europe or the United States, as was typical for ambitious Turkish academics, Davutoğlu opted to teach at the International Islamic University in Malaysia for three years in the early 1990s, underscoring and reinforcing his attachment to the idea of a greater Islamic community. When he returned to Turkey, he worked in comparative obscurity as a professor of international relations before rocketing to prominence with the rise of the AKP. Appointed by Erdoğan in 2003 as his chief advisor and then in 2009 as foreign minister, Davutoğlu finally had the chance to overhaul Turkish foreign policy.

His profound skepticism of the claims of contemporary Western civilization notwithstanding, it would be a grave error to classify Davutoğlu as inveterately hostile toward the West; rather, he steadfastly refuses to identify with it. Writing in 1992, a year before the emergence of Samuel Huntington’s controversial *Foreign Affairs* article “A Clash of Civilizations?,” Davutoğlu warned, “There is an increasing tendency towards a civilizational confrontation between Islamic and western civilizations.”<sup>25</sup> Emphatically rejecting the

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., pp. 27–36.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>24</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Alternative Paradigms: The Impact of Islamic and Western Weltanschauungs on Political Theory* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994), p. 202.

thesis of Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man*<sup>26</sup> that Western liberal democracy represents the final stage of human political development, Davutoğlu charged that such "endism" represented a hollow optimism that was not merely false but also implicated in sustaining an international order in which the "Euro-Christian and Judaic powers" dominate Muslims. Nonetheless, the revival of "Islamic civilization" need not pose a political threat to the West, Davutoğlu argued. If the "civilizational challenge" does not generate "prejudices and hypocriticism [sic]," it could lead to a new "civilizational vivacity" that would "not only provide a solution for the "Muslim World" but offer also "an alternative for entire humanity [sic]."<sup>27</sup>

As Davutoğlu's upbringing, career choices, and writings reveal, his worldview is built on an emotional and intellectual attachment to the idea of a distinct Islamic civilization. This view has currency among the new socially conservative business and political elites from Anatolia who make up the backbone of the AKP and as a rule share Davutoğlu's pride in the heritage of Islam. Indeed, some of these people became successful businessmen precisely because of their commitment to their faith; many devout Anatolian men who might otherwise have followed the traditional route and taken jobs as civil servants opted instead to establish their own businesses in order to avoid dependence upon what they regarded as an impious state.<sup>28</sup>

A shared Islamic identity that transcends the borders of the Turkish Republic helps explain this constituency's enthusiasm for Turkey's new activism in the Middle East. A more basic national pride of Turkish citizens in seeing their once destitute and diffident country reassert itself and win plaudits abroad in

the bargain explains the support of much of the broader public for the AKP's foreign policy. To be sure, one of the benefits of raising Turkey's regional profile for the AKP has been the opportunity to stir national pride and convert it into electoral gains, but the AKP's motivations are more profound than short-term tactical populist gambits.

## WHAT WENT WRONG? STANDING KEMALIST HISTORY ON ITS HEAD

To understand Davutoğlu and the Islamists' worldview, it is helpful to examine the differences between the ways they and the Kemalists view Turkey's history. Although by definition Turkey's Islamists do not share the same enthusiasm for the republic as the Kemalists, they do agree with the Kemalists that something went very wrong in Ottoman history. Their diagnosis, however, points to a radically different solution. When the Kemalists look at the Ottoman past, they see cause for embarrassment: a state that was despotic, weak, corrupt, and backward because it was too Islamic and not sufficiently Turkish nationalist. This portrait is in many aspects ahistorical and inaccurate, but Turkey's Islamists do not so much correct the picture as turn it upside down. Ottoman history for them is a source of pride, conjuring images of an era when a mighty Muslim state rode astride the world. Glory, however, was far from the Ottomans' sole achievement. In the interpretation of Turkey's Islamists, the Ottoman Empire afforded its subjects unparalleled justice, security, and prosperity. Analyzing a speech that the foreign minister gave in Sarajevo in late 2009, American ambassador to Turkey James F. Jeffrey succinctly summarized Davutoğlu and the Islamists' outlook: "His thesis: the Balkans, Caucasus, and Middle East were all better off when

<sup>25</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Civilizational Transformation and the Muslim World* (Kuala Lumpur: Mahir Publications, 1994), p. 117.

<sup>26</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

<sup>27</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Civilizational Transformation*, pp. 1–8, 116–17.

<sup>28</sup> M. Hakan Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 81–91. See also see Ayşe Buğra, "Class, Culture, and State: An Analysis of Interest Representation by Two Turkish Business Associations," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 30, no. 4 (1998): pp. 521–39.



under Ottoman control or influence; peace and progress prevailed.”<sup>29</sup>

What is more, according to popular belief among Turkey’s Islamists, the benevolence of Ottoman dominion extended to Muslims and non-Muslims alike. As the recently opened museum of the 1453 conquest of Istanbul highlights, the petitions and letters of Christians and Jews to Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror (1432–81) testify to the magnanimity and tolerance of the Ottoman sultans. What better proof could there be of the sublime justice of the Ottoman order than its success in making the Muslim world strong and keeping its non-Muslim subjects satisfied? This narrative is appealing to contemporary Turks—both Islamists and secularists—raised in a country that has long portrayed itself as perpetually besieged by enemies and where the strident Kemalist emphasis on internal unity paradoxically only underscored the existence of chronic strife between elements of society—Turks and Kurds, Sunnis and Alevis, landowners and peasants, the religiously observant and the militantly secular. For many of Turkey’s Islamists, the Ottomans’ attainment of the sort of society about which contemporary liberals today dream—a prosperous, peaceful, tolerant, and multi-ethnic Middle East—only further underscores the timeless relevance of Islamic faith.

To the crucial question of what explains the splintering and downfall of this once mighty and magnificent empire, the Islamists offer a dodge, but an attractive one: the Europeans accomplished this destruction not through the projection of material power alone but through the export of ideas, nationalism in particular, that introduced new inter-communal tensions to the Ottoman lands and sun-dered social unity. Working through local Christian communities, whom they seduced with preferential commercial and extralegal privileges, and networks

of missionary schools, they promoted sedition. They incited first Christians and later Muslims to rebel, turning Albanians, Arabs, Kurds, and others against Turks and one another, thereby ensuring their collective downfall. Therefore, contrary to what the old Orientalist scholars and their Kemalist pupils taught, it was not Asian despotism and lassitude but European intrigue that caused the demise of the Ottoman Empire. In this vein, Davutoğlu draws on the Ottoman record to warn his contemporaries: “From our historical experience, we know that despite our having carried out the most comprehensive development projects in the Danube and Baghdad provinces, they were lost to outside powers exploiting internal tensions.”<sup>30</sup>

Davutoğlu and Islamists thus regard Kemalism as not the solution to the problem of decline but as the very manifestation of decline. Kemalism, with its core principle of Turkish nationalism, internalized the Western principle of ethno-nationalism and thereby perpetuates the disintegration of Muslim fellowship. By converting Turks and Kurds from brothers in faith into ethnic enemies, the Islamists hold, Kemalism created an insoluble problem that condemns Turkey to endless conflict with its own population and chronic tension with its neighbors. As Davutoğlu himself has argued, Kemalism estranged Turkey from its history and geography, crippling its ability to influence the region, putting it on the defensive inside its own borders in southeastern Anatolia, and leaving it vulnerable to Western coercion and intrigue.<sup>31</sup>

### STRATEGIC DEPTH: GETTING OUT OF A DEAD END BY GOING BACK TO THE FUTURE

For Davutoğlu, the solution to the relentless process of ethnic disintegration is to do the opposite of what the Kemalists had sought to do and reject

<sup>29</sup> Wikileaks Cable 10ANKARA87.

<sup>30</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu* (Istanbul: Küre Yayınları, [2001] 2009), p. 447.

<sup>31</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik*, p. 57.

ethno-nationalism as a political principle. As Davutoğlu argues in *Strategic Depth*, Turkey inherited from its Ottoman past a rich endowment of historical links and cultural ties. Turkey therefore should embrace, not discard, that legacy, as it not only joins Turkey to its neighbors but also binds Turkey's citizens to one another. Doing so, moreover, will allow Turkey to leverage its geographic position to become not a peripheral power sitting uncomfortably on the edges of several regions—the Middle East, Europe, the Black Sea, Balkans, Eastern Mediterranean, Caucasus, etc.—but a central player in all of them. The Ottoman example, Davutoğlu and his fellow AKP leaders believe, should guide Turkey to loosen its identity politics at home and to engage with its neighbors, particularly in the Middle East. It is a compelling vision that holds appeal for liberals and business circles as well as Muslim activists.

Although inspired by a romanticized understanding of the Ottoman past, Davutoğlu's and the AKP's vision of a future Middle East resembles, in broad strokes, a modern-day model: the European Union's ideal of a zone of free commerce and travel. This similarity is not coincidental, as both the AKP's project and the European Union are rooted in critiques of nationalism and the nation-state. A hallmark of Davutoğlu's regional pursuit of "zero problems"—a doctrine that stresses close diplomatic and economic ties with Turkey's neighbors—has been an almost giddy enthusiasm for visa-free travel and lowered tariffs and customs duties between Turkey and Syria, Iran, Lebanon, Jordan, Greece, Bulgaria, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Russia, among other countries. Whereas demarcating a distinctly Turkish territory and erecting borders to sever it from its neighbors was central to Kemalism, erasing national boundaries has been an aspiration of the AKP.

The AKP's domestic policy is in line with its foreign policy and has also challenged Kemalist tradition. In doing so, it has enabled the party to assemble

broad and diverse coalitions. The AKP's willingness to assert civilian control over the military and remove restrictions on the expression of ethnic identities are key factors that have won the AKP support from liberals. At the same time, the AKP's eager reengagement with the Middle East (and reaffirmation of Turkey's Ottoman Muslim heritage) has pleased Turkish Islamists, and the resulting economic opportunities have delighted Turkish businessmen.

From its beginning, the AKP has persistently downplayed Turkish ethno-nationalism in favor of a more inclusive ideal of citizenship. This has allowed it to appeal simultaneously to liberal as well as Islamist audiences. The former interpret favorably the AKP's concept of citizenship as civic while the latter approve it as "*ümmetçi*," i.e., an expression of the fellowship of the *umma*, the community of the Muslim faithful. The AKP's description of Turkey as an ethnic mosaic, once unthinkable, has become fashionable, opening the way to loosening restrictions on the Kurds and the expression of Kurdish ethnicity.

Their enthusiasm for the Ottoman heritage notwithstanding, Davutoğlu and the AKP have objected vociferously when Westerners have applied the label of "neo-Ottoman" to describe their policies. The reason for this is not because they abjure the Ottoman example, but because they reject the implication of exploitative domination that the term implies. The Ottoman Empire, in their imagination, bore no resemblance to the colonial empires of Europe but instead was closer to a voluntary commonwealth of sorts. One might better describe their policies as "Hamidian," i.e. inspired by Sultan Abdülhamid II (1876–1909), who responded to the continuing aggression of the imperial powers by emphasizing the theme of Muslim solidarity. His goal was to bind the remaining Ottoman core of Turks, Kurds, and Arabs more closely together and to assert some geopolitical leverage against the British, French, and Russian empires, each of

which had quite large Muslim subject populations and accordingly feared the possibility of pan-Islamist subversion and agitation. It is worth noting that Abdülhamid II is a polarizing figure in Turkish memory. Whereas Turkey's Islamists hail him as a devout defender of an embattled Muslim world, Kemalist historiography casts him as a villainous reactionary despot who retarded the development of Turkish society. In *Strategic Depth*, Davutoğlu conspicuously credits Abdülhamid II for successfully obstructing the partition of the Ottoman Empire, a favorable judgment motivated more by Davutoğlu's esteem for the pious sultan than by any objective reading of diplomatic history.<sup>32</sup>

### DAVUTOĞLU AND THE KURDS

The Kurdish question is what makes the embrace of "strategic depth" an existential necessity for Turkey. The Kemalist project to build a Turkish nation-state in Anatolia has not merely run out of steam with its failure to assimilate the Kurds, but it has created within Turkey a ticking time bomb in the form of the Kurdish question. By politicizing ethnicity and making Turkish the sole acceptable identity, Kemalism inevitably alienated Turkey's Kurdish citizens and guaranteed their opposition and resistance to the Turkish Republic. The conventional strategy of countering that resistance by suppressing Kurdish identity and policing Turkey's borders cannot disarm that bomb. By applying these methods for decades, Turkey ineluctably catalyzed a smoldering internal insurgency and in the process subjected relations with Syria, Iraq, and Iran to repeated strain.

A Turkish-Kurdish civil war, however, is not inevitable. To the contrary, Davutoğlu argues, Turks and Kurds share a history of living together more than a millennium old. It was, moreover, an alliance of Turks and Kurds that won Turkey's War of Independence in

defiance of the West.<sup>33</sup> To revive this legacy of harmonious coexistence is not impossible in the minds of the AKP's leaders; it requires liberalizing politics at home, including lifting restrictions on Kurdish identity, and relaxing barriers to travel and trade throughout the region. As a result, a Kurd from Diyarbakir who would be able to freely express his identity at home and travel and do business in Istanbul, Kerkuk, or Aleppo would no longer be a force for conflict and separatism but one for regional integration and cooperation. This vision may be a fantasy, but it is not fantastic. It is, moreover, vastly preferable to any scenario that would attempt to "unmix" and separate the two peoples. Substantial numbers of Kurds now live in central and western Anatolia. Indeed, the city with the world's largest Kurdish population is not Irbil or Diyarbakir but Istanbul. The partitioning of Anatolia into separate Turkish and Kurdish states would likely incite large scale violence and in any event would inflict vast harm on both peoples.

Shortly after coming to power, the AKP, on November 30, 2002, abolished the fifteen-year-old state of emergency that had existed in two Kurdish provinces in the southeast. Three years later, speaking in the predominantly Kurdish city of Diyarbakir in August 2005, Erdoğan declared, "Turkey had always looked through the security window [at the Kurds], but we will look through a different window." Feeling it necessary not to provoke the ire of Kemalists and hardcore Turkish nationalists, however, AKP officials in their early years in power limited themselves to hinting at their desire to redefine Turkish citizenship in a new constitution.<sup>34</sup> The AKP was rewarded for its implicit promise of a new start for the Kurds in the 2007 general elections when in the heavily Kurdish east and southeast the party won the provinces of Van, Bitlis, Siirt, Batman, Elazığ, Bingöl, and Mardin. Even in the Kurdish provinces where the AKP lost, it nonetheless managed to run

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<sup>32</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik*, pp. 35, 53, 67, 86–87.

<sup>33</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik*, p. 449.

<sup>34</sup> International Crisis Group, "Ending the PKK Insurgency," p.6.

strongly, winning 28 percent of the vote in Şırnak, 29 percent in İğdir, 33 percent in Hakkari, 39 percent in Muş, and 41 percent in Diyarbakır. Only in Tunceli, where it netted only 16 percent of the vote, was the AKP's performance decidedly lackluster.<sup>35</sup>

Davutoğlu's approach to the Kurds was put to the test in the summer of 2009. In July of that year, the AKP launched its "Democratic Opening," an initiative that marked a radical break from precedent and was intended to bring about an eventual grand solution to the Kurdish question. Never before had a Turkish government addressed the Kurdish issue so openly and forthrightly. In its promotional materials for the initiative the AKP was at pains to emphasize the once heretical notion that "to be one nation [*millet*] does not mean to be one ethnic group [*ırk*]" and that "many ethnicities [*birçok etnik unsur*] can form a nation by coming together."<sup>36</sup> The AKP held discussions of the Kurdish issue in parliament and sent speakers on tour throughout the country to explain its new approach, which aimed to achieve reconciliation by removing remaining restrictions on expressions of Kurdish identity and taking steps to ensure further integration of the Kurds into Turkish life. The initiative sought comprehensive reforms in three areas: language, education, and media; criminal justice and amnesty; and participation of Kurds in politics. Specifically, the teaching of Kurdish was made legal and earlier in the year, in January 2009, the Turkish State Radio and Television Company debuted a new television station that broadcasts twenty-four hours a day in Kurmanji, the language of the majority of Turkey's Kurds. In addition, among a raft of reforms implemented or promised were the adoption of a "zero tolerance for

torture" policy and the lifting of restrictions on the establishment of civic associations. The Democratic Opening, the AKP emphasized, was more than a package of discrete reforms, it was a process that was to continue until Turkey attained the legal standards required by the European Union.<sup>37</sup>

The AKP hoped that October 2009 would mark a major step toward reconciliation, when thirty-four Kurds from a PKK-camp in Iraq, eight of them fighters, were returned to Turkey under a new amnesty agreement. The expectation of the AKP was that the promise of the Democratic Opening would induce Kurdish militants to "come down from the mountains," join their fellow citizens, and take up peaceful lives. But the move backfired when the main Kurdish political party in Turkey, the Democratic Society Party (Demokratik Toplum Partisi),<sup>38</sup> used the return of eight amnestied fighters, an event the AKP expected would yield a symbolic expression of gratitude for the AKP's magnanimity, as a pretext to stage a victory celebration of sorts. The sight of unrepentant PKK fighters being greeted as heroes by throngs of well-wishers provoked a backlash from the Turkish public that effectively stalled the opening.<sup>39</sup>

The failure of the Democratic Opening notwithstanding, the AKP continued to compete hard for Kurdish votes in the 2011 elections. Campaigning in the Kurdish southeast, Erdoğan openly acknowledged Turkey's ethnic diversity and hailed the ties of Sunni Muslim faith and culture that hold Turkey's mosaic together. Although the AKP's performance in the Kurdish southeast did fall off from 2007, it remained impressive.<sup>40</sup> The AKP, with its message

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<sup>35</sup> A precise breakdown of the results is available at <<http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/secimsonuc/default.html>>.

<sup>36</sup> AK Parti, *Soruları ve Cevaplarıyla Demokratik Açılım Süreci: Milli Birlik ve Kardeşlik Projesi* (January 2010). The Turkish word "ırk" is often translated as "race" but here its meaning is much closer to the English "ethnic group."

<sup>37</sup> AK Parti, *Soruları ve Cevaplarıyla Demokratik Açılım Süreci: Milli Birlik ve Kardeşlik Projesi* (January 2010), 119.

<sup>38</sup> Turkey's Constitutional Court, which is independent of the AKP, banned the Democratic Society Party in December 2009. "Turkey: Kurdish Party Banned," Human Rights Watch, December 12, 2009, available at <<http://www.hrw.org/news/2009/12/11/turkey-kurdish-party-banned>>.

<sup>39</sup> International Crisis Group, "Turkey: Ending the PKK Insurgency," pp. 6-10.

of political liberalization, economic dynamism, social conservatism, and Muslim fellowship has repeatedly demonstrated itself capable of challenging Kurdish nationalists in their heartland. No other Turkish party is capable of this. The PKK itself rec-

ognizes the danger the AKP presents to it, and so has responded directly with violent attacks on AKP party offices.

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<sup>40</sup> Of the heavily Kurdish provinces, only in Mardin (32 percent), Iğdır (28 percent), Şırnak (26.8 percent), Hakkari (16 percent), and Tunceli (16 percent) did the AKP receive less than one-third of the votes, and only in Iğdır, Hakkari and Tunceli did it fail to win any seats.

## FOREIGN POLICY: COMPLEMENT TO DOMESTIC

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The AKP's new Kurdish policy exhibits important parallels to Davutoğlu's effort to refashion Turkey's foreign relations. The themes of reconciliation, openness, and cooperation that underlined the Democratic Opening efforts also marked Turkey's foreign policy for much of the period between 2003 and 2011. This was not a coincidence. The thinking behind the foreign policy was similar to the one behind the AKP's domestic politics, including the Democratic Opening. The most obvious manifestation of this synergy has been Ankara's outreach to the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in northern Iraq. Previously, Turkish policymakers had viewed an autonomous Kurdish entity as a mortal threat. Their perspective framed by the Sèvres Syndrome, Turks feared an autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan would mark the first step toward the establishment of a greater Kurdistan that would encompass Turkish territory.<sup>41</sup> Under the AKP, however, Ankara has eagerly built economic and political ties with the KRG.

Similarly, between 2003 and 2011, Turkey insistently expanded its ties to Syria and Iran. Turkey's courtship of these two countries represented a substantial change from the 1990s, when it threatened

Syria with war and when Turkish authorities routinely declaimed Iranian meddling in its internal affairs. The Turkish-Israeli partnership of that decade was based in substantial part on containment of Syria, and the avowedly secular Turkish Republic was portrayed as the opposite of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

This "fraternization" with the so-called anti-Western "resistance bloc" confounded observers accustomed to thinking of Turkey as intrinsically pro-Western. One interpretation of Turkey's shift sees it as tactical expediency, the product of a bargain struck for cooperation in combating Kurdish separatism. To be sure, Syrian and Iranian willingness to collaborate with Turkey in fighting Kurdish separatism had generated goodwill in Ankara, placating Turkey's military and nationalist circles in particular, and Ankara understandably sought to reciprocate. But, economic motives also contributed to the rapprochement. Turkey's rapidly growing economy has been highly dependent on imported energy—natural gas in particular. The desire of Turkish industrialists to diversify and expand their sources of energy and turn Turkey into a regional energy hub has undoubtedly pushed the country closer to Iran. At

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<sup>41</sup> The publication in 2006 of such a map in *Armed Forces Journal* stirred controversy in the Turkish media given the journal's links to the United States military. The accompanying article advocated redrawing state borders throughout the Middle East and slated Turkey for territorial loss and a Kurdish state for territorial gain. Ralph Peters, "Blood Borders: How a Better Middle East Would Look," *Armed Forces Journal* (June 2006), available at <<http://www.armedforcesjournal.com/2006/06/1833892>>.

the same time, Turkish exporters' search for more markets helped expand the country's ties with Syria.

Nonetheless, Turkey's decision to deepen relations with Syria, Iran, and other actors in the region, such as Hamas, cannot be reduced to a collage of tactics. Davutoğlu's program is grander, and reflects his quasi-mystical conviction that the Middle East is a single, coherent region, the product of a unique cultural and civilizational gestation that has been unfolding since the expansion of Islam in the eighth century.

### SYRIA: THE CENTERPIECE CRACKS

That Davutoğlu visited Damascus over sixty times between 2003 and 2011 is suggestive of the passion behind his vision of reintegrating Turkey into the Middle East. In 2009, when he was in Syria, he declared that "a common fate, common history, and a common future" unite Turkey and Syria.<sup>42</sup> The rhetoric marked a fundamental and stark break from the Kemalist principle of maintaining distance from neighbors, particularly Middle Eastern ones. Deeds confirmed the rhetoric. That year the Turkish and Syrian governments established a High Strategic Cooperation Council and began hosting joint cabinet meetings. In April, the Turkish and Syrian armed forces held joint military exercises.<sup>43</sup> And as testament to the personal nature of the relationship, Erdoğan and Syrian president Bashar al-Asad vacationed together with their families.

Syria constituted a key test case for Davutoğlu's concept of strategic depth and a model of sorts for how Turkey would develop relations with its other neighbors. Speaking at the Turkish-Syrian High Strategic Cooperation Council on October 14,

2009, Davutoğlu stated that Turkey might establish with Egypt and Iraq the same relationship it had with Syria, and added that "our neighborly relations with Iran are extremely sound. We also have very good relations with [Saudi] Arabia." He made sure to remark that Turkey had close ties to Lebanon, too. Noteworthy is the fact that he made no mention of Israel.<sup>44</sup>

No part of the Ottoman Arab world was more closely tied to Istanbul than Syria, but in the republican era, no Arab country was a more vexing irritant to Ankara. Syria's persistent contestation of Turkey's claim to the once heavily Arab province of Hatay, which it annexed in 1938, repeated objections to Turkey's building of dams on the Euphrates and Tigris rivers, and support for the PKK incensed Turkish policymakers. These problems, of course, had their origins in the breakup of the Ottoman Empire. Land, water resources, and people that formerly constituted a unit had been divided between two states, condemning each to perpetual discord. Converting Syria from antagonist to partner was therefore essential to demonstrate the validity of Davutoğlu's thesis of the fundamental underlying unity of the Muslim Middle East and also to realizing his vision of transforming the Middle East into a zone of freely moving people and goods. With Syria under its influence, Turkey could become a major player in the Arab world, arguably even *the* major player. Seen from this perspective, the logic of Turkey's diplomatic investment in Syria, and in particular the regime of Bashar al-Asad, becomes apparent.<sup>45</sup>

In early 2011, Erdoğan announced that Turkey and Syria would partner on six projects: building a common customs gate in Nusaybin, creating a joint

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<sup>42</sup> Servet Yanatma, "Sınır artık ayırmayacak, birleştirecek," *Zaman*, October 14, 2009; "Şam ile sınırlar fora, hedef AB modeli," *Radikal*, October 14, 2009.

<sup>43</sup> Saban Kardaş, "Turkish-Syrian Security Cooperation Testing Turkish Foreign Policy," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 84 (May 1, 2009).

<sup>44</sup> "Suriye'yle tam gaz askeri işbirliğine," *Radikal*, October 15, 2009.

<sup>45</sup> The fact that Turkey has a population nearly three times larger than Syria's and an economy nine times the size of Syria's gives Turkey enormous power disparity in its favor, and supplies strong incentives for Syria to partner with it.

Turkish-Syrian bank, establishing rapid rail service between Gaziantep and Aleppo, linking the natural gas networks of the two countries, and arranging a loan from the Export Credit Bank of Turkey to the Syrian government.<sup>46</sup> But the eruption of widespread protests against Asad soon after the announcement derailed Ankara's plan, at least for the foreseeable future. Asad's bloody suppression of popular demonstrations was cause enough for confusion and embarrassment in Ankara. Worse still was Asad's rejection of Erdoğan's and Davutoğlu's earnest, repeated pleas for him to cease violence and conduct reforms. With several thousand Syrians fleeing into Turkey, the Turks had no choice but to recognize that Asad had no intention of following their advice.

The uprisings in Syria have endangered Davutoğlu's foreign policy project in at least three ways. The first is that Ankara's misreading of Asad gave the lie to Davutoğlu's repeated claims that the Turks, as heirs to the Ottoman experience of four centuries of rule over the Middle East, possessed a unique understanding of the region. The reality was, if anything, the opposite. After some seven decades of Kemalist-endorsed isolation, Turkey lacked the cadres of diplomats and experts with substantial experience in the region. Davutoğlu's romantic reading of the Ottoman past failed to prove a reliable guide to developments, and his misinterpretation of Asad revealed an embarrassing gullibility. The second is that the bloodletting conducted by the predominantly Alawi regime against Sunni Muslims shows the fallacy in Davutoğlu's imagined

unity of the Middle East. The clash in Syria, in fact, has generated sectarian tension inside Turkey. Erdoğan and Davutoğlu have been careful to avoid inflaming that tension, but other leaders in their party have been less circumspect.<sup>47</sup> The continued sight of Sunni Muslims suffering in Syria is generating discontent among the one of the AKP's core constituencies. The third way events in Syria have disrupted Davutoğlu's foreign policy is through the sectarian rifts it has created in the region, putting Ankara and Tehran on opposite sides—something that could precipitate a rupture in their relations.

The above notwithstanding, Ankara can recover from the foreign policy fiasco that Syria has become. Although Davutoğlu's courtship of Asad made sense to the extent that it facilitated regional integration, it did not fit with Ankara's advocacy of liberalization. In contrast, opposition to Asad is quite consistent with the AKP's message of democratic change and populism, and that message provides ample ideological cover for Ankara to champion change inside Syria, just as it did in Egypt and eventually in Libya. Toward the end of his Arab Spring tour of Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya in September 2011, Erdoğan warned Asad that the "era of repressive regimes has ended" and that "he personally will pay the price" if he does not relent in his crackdown.<sup>48</sup> In June 2011, Turkey began hosting meetings of Syrian opposition figures.<sup>49</sup>

As Syria has descended into civil war, many have looked to Turkey to provide leadership and even invade Syria to protect unarmed civilian populations.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> "Türkiye-Suriye Dostluk Barajı'nın temeli atıldı," *Dünya Bülteni*, February 6, 2011, available at <<http://www.dunyabulteni.net/?aType=haber&ArticleID=146299>>.

<sup>47</sup> In response to criticism of the AKP's Syria policy from the opposition party leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, the deputy chief of the AKP, Hüseyin Çelik, alluded simultaneously to the CHP's authoritarian past, its long-standing popularity among Turkey's Alevites, and Kılıçdaroğlu's own Alevi origins by asserting that the CHP shared a "genetic link" with Syria's Baath Party and insinuating that Kılıçdaroğlu might harbor personal sectarian sympathies for Asad's regime. "Çelik'ten 'Baas ve Alevilik' suçlaması," CNNTürk, September 9, 2011, available at <<http://www.cnnurk.com/2011/turkiye/09/08/celikten.baas.ve.alevilik.suclamasi/628672.0/index.html>>.

<sup>48</sup> "Erdogan Tells Assad: 'Time for Oppressors Has Past [sic]," *The Telegraph*, September 16, 2011, available at <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocan/libya/8769419/Erdogan-tells-Assad-time-for-oppressors-has-past.html>>.

<sup>49</sup> Ortadoğu Stratejik Araştırmalar Merkezi, *Antalya'da 1-2 Haziran 2011 Tarihlerinde Gerçekleşen 'Suriye'de Değişim Konferansı'nın Tam Deşifresi* 61 (July 2011).

<sup>50</sup> See, for example, former chief of policy planning in the State Department Anne-Marie Slaughter's call for Turkey to take direct action against Asad. Ann-Marie Slaughter, "Turkey's Test," *Project Syndicate*, February 13, 2012, available at <<http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/slaughter5/English>>.



As a neighbor with a large army, Turkey would appear to be relatively well positioned to intervene and influence the future course of events there. Yet one must note that any such an intervention would entail multiple hazards. There is no good reason to expect that the overthrow of Asad would secure stability in Syria any more quickly than the toppling of Saddam Hussein did in Iraq. Lebanon's experience in the wake of Syrian and Israeli interventions is also cautionary. Any Turkish occupation of Syrian territory would over time cause Arab sympathy for Turkey to erode. It would obviously also expose the Turkish army to attack from Kurds and Syrians alike, threatening a dynamic of escalating conflict. Given the unresolved and contentious legacy of Turkey's Cyprus intervention and its ongoing war with the PKK, it should be no surprise that Ankara has not made any preparations to intercede.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, the readiness of the Turkish armed forces to undertake major operations in Syria should not be taken for granted, particularly given that since 2007 Turkish police have arrested and detained more than three hundred Turkish military officers, many of them from the senior ranks, for alleged plots against the AKP government.<sup>52</sup>

Still, Turkey's geographic position and regional influence endow it with leverage when it comes to Syria. Recognizing this, Washington has reportedly been working to coordinate its Syria policy with Ankara's. Turkish-American collaboration can make good sense since Turkey and the United States share a number of key objectives in Syria, including the removal of the Asad regime and the preservation of Syrian territorial integrity. At the same time, it will behoove American policymakers to recall that Ankara courted Asad assiduously for years and prioritized solidarity with Syria because

of its belief in an innate, organic unity between the two countries. Turkish-Syrian relations were built on a form of identity politics that not only excluded the United States but, especially in the case of Syria, was centered on opposition to the West. Only belatedly did the governing AKP start to employ its narrative of being a vehicle of populist democracy to explain its distaste for Asad's regime. Concerns that Turkey might favor Syria's Muslim Brotherhood and thereby inflate the Brotherhood's stature among the Syria's opposition are not illegitimate.<sup>53</sup> The Muslim Brotherhood, after all, is an attractive ally for the AKP, given its grassroots orientation and modernist Sunni Islamic outlook.

### IRAN: PARTNER MORE THAN RIVAL

It is quite common in analyses of Turkish-Iranian relations to invoke the trope of rivalry. There is good reason for this. Geography predisposes the two countries to contention. The Anatolian and Iranian plateaus neighbor one another but are distinct, and, unlike the surrounding areas, each is capable of supporting a large population. History is filled with the antagonism of these two lands: Romans, Byzantines, Parthians, and Sassanids clashed and later the Ottomans and Safavids competed on the battlefield for regional dominance. Today's Turks and Iranians hold memories of that rivalry, a rivalry that was as much sectarian as it was geopolitical. The Ottoman and Safavid empires each saw themselves as the standard-bearer for Sunni and Shi'ah Islam respectively.

The issue of rivalry, however, should not be over-emphasized. The histories and cultures of the Persians and Turks are, in fact, deeply intertwined. The Turks learned most of their Islam, and much

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<sup>51</sup> Şaban Kardaş, "Turkey's Syria Policy: The Challenge of Coalition Building," German Marshall Fund, February 17, 2012.

<sup>52</sup> Ahmet T. Kuru writes that among the more than three hundred officers detained in the investigations of these alleged plots are sixty active duty generals and admirals. Ahmet T. Kuru, "The Rise and Fall of Military Tutelage in Turkey: Fears of Islamism, Kurdism, and Communism," *Insight Turkey* 14 (Spring 2012): p. 39. Despite the tremendous import of the investigations for Turkish politics and Turkish military readiness, reliable analyses are very hard to come by. For brief background, see "Q&A: Turkey's Military and the Alleged Coup Plots," *BBC*, April 4, 2012, available at <<http://m.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-16447625>>.

<sup>53</sup> Jim Zanotti, *Turkey: Background and U.S. Relations* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, February 2, 2012), pp. 18-19.

of their culture, from the Persians as they passed through first the greater Persianate sphere of Central Asia and then Iran proper on their way into the Middle East and Anatolia in the ninth through eleventh centuries. The Safavid dynasty (1501–1736) was of mixed Turkic ancestry, and Turkic nomads founded Iran's later Qajar dynasty. In fact, Grand Ayatollah Sayyed Ali Hosseini Khamenei, the current supreme leader of Iran, is an Azerbaijani Turk. His predecessor, the architect of Iran's Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, was exiled to Turkey in 1964 by the shah and grew quite close to his Turkish hosts, the family of a colonel in Turkish military intelligence. He even took it upon himself during his eleven-month stay to learn to speak Turkish. Khomeini's departure from Turkey was emotional, and he retained a fondness for the Turkish people.<sup>54</sup>

It is worth remembering that Iran's Islamic Revolution in 1979 did not provoke a sharp downturn in relations between the countries, let alone a crisis. In fact, Turkey declined to join in embargoes against Iran or to assist in operations to rescue the U.S. hostages taken by the Iranians.<sup>55</sup> Still, the fundamentally opposed ideologies of secularist Turkey and Islamic Iran are a source of friction between the two countries. So, what has mitigated the divide? The answer is a sense of solidarity. For some Turks like Davutoğlu, this solidarity is rooted partly in a shared cultural and religious identity that began to form a millennium ago. For most Turks, however, the solidarity is motivated by more recent experiences. Turks across the political spectrum see Iranians as fellow Muslims exploited by the great powers. This sentiment dates back to the nineteenth century and remains salient

today. Thus even leftist secularists in Turkey derived some satisfaction from the Iranian Revolution and have taken pleasure in the Islamic Republic's continued defiance of the West. For Turkey's Islamists, pan-Islamic solidarity has often been stronger than sectarian divide between Sunni Turks and Shi'i Iranians. As testament to this, the staunch Sunni and unreconstructed Islamist Necmettin Erbakan made a pointed gesture upon becoming prime minister in 1996 by selecting Iran as the destination of his first official foreign trip.

The logic behind this pro-Iranian bent can be found in Davutoğlu's worldview, as discussed above, that sees Iran as a fraternal country with which Turkey can and must have good relations.<sup>56</sup> According to Davutoğlu, deep historical processes forged a geocultural axis linking the lands from Iran through Anatolia into the Balkans, and this makes it impossible for Turkey to isolate itself from Iran or to be indifferent to it.<sup>57</sup> Because the Turks and Iranians know each other intimately, Davutoğlu believes, there is every reason they should have good relations. This attitude, that the Turks know the Iranians (and others in the region) rather well—far better than the Americans—and are therefore unusually capable of finding an understanding with them has been taken up by the Turkish Foreign Ministry.<sup>58</sup> To illustrate his thesis of the fundamental compatibility of Turkey and Iran, Davutoğlu points to the unusual stability of the Iranian-Turkish border. Defined nearly four centuries ago in the Treaty of Kasr-ı Şirin, that border predates the unification of Germany and even the birth of the United States. It has stood the test of time, he claims, because it reflects a fundamental geocultural reality.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Baqer Moin, *Khomeini: Life of the Ayatollah* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 1999), pp. 129–39.

<sup>55</sup> Gökhan Çetinsaya, "Turkish-Iranian Relations Since the Revolution," *Turkish Review of Middle East Studies* 14 (2003): pp. 1–4; Suha Bolukbasi, "Turkey Copes with Revolutionary Iran," *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* 13 (Fall/Winter, 1989): pp. 94–99; Unal Gundogan, "Islamist Iran and Turkey, 1979-1989: State Pragmatism and Ideological Influences," *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 7 (March, 2003): pp. 1-12.

<sup>56</sup> A Turkish professor who advises Davutoğlu affirms that Davutoğlu's Iran policy is a direct reflection of the worldview laid out in *Stratejik Derinlik*. See, Wikileaks cable 09ISTANBUL440.

<sup>57</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik*, pp. 426–27, 436.

<sup>58</sup> Interviews conducted by the author in Ankara at the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, March 2011.

<sup>59</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik*, pp. 21, 434. Notably, in this regard Davutoğlu contrasts the Turkish-Iranian border with the Turkish-Iraqi border.

That Turkey's current government has sympathized with Iran is evident from Turkish diplomacy over the past eight years. Aside from expanding economic ties, Ankara has consistently sought to block or dilute any international sanctions imposed on Iran in response to its nuclear program. Ankara's rationale is that by acting as an intermediary between Iran and the West, rather than as a strict ally of the West, it will acquire more influence over Iran. A benevolent interpretation of this approach might describe Turkey's ambition as being to "adam etmek,"<sup>60</sup> or "civilize," Iran much as one might civilize or mentor an unmannered adolescent. The motive to civilize in this case stems from a sense of obligation and sympathy for Iran. Alone, this aspiration to rehabilitate Iran and redeem it as a responsible member of the international community can only be laudable, but in the context of Ankara's hesitance to criticize Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, it takes on the quality of being a rather ambiguous, even unsettling, indicator of Ankara's priorities. Following Iran's controversial presidential elections in 2009, President Abdullah Gül and Prime Minister Erdoğan not only refrained from criticizing Ahmadinejad's regime for voting irregularities and its crackdown on protestors, but were quick to congratulate Ahmadinejad on his victory.<sup>61</sup> It is worth noting that the AKP's policies toward Iran are largely in sync with Turkish public opinion. When asked in 2010 whether Turkey should support or oppose an embargo or attack directed against Iran's nuclear activities, a solid majority of 60 percent answered that Turkey should oppose these measures; only 26 percent believed Turkey

should support embargoes or attacks.<sup>62</sup> Other research shows that Turks consistently rank Iran comparatively low as a threat. When asked in a 2011 poll which country posed the greatest threat to Turkey, only 3 percent of Turks answered Iran. In the same poll, 43 percent named the United States as the country posing the greatest threat. Israel came in second with 24 percent.<sup>63</sup>

To what extent such "Iranophilia" will continue to guide the Turkish position on Iran's nuclear program is hard to say. The Turks have been more opaque than forthcoming on the possible consequences of an Iranian bomb. Turkey's government has preferred to emphasize Iran's right to pursue a peaceful nuclear program and the double-standard of the West in seeking to sanction Iran for pursuing nuclear technology while doing nothing about Israel's possession of nuclear weapons. This position more likely represents an unwillingness to confront the issue openly than it does guile. Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons would have profound implications for Turkey. Although some Turkish analysts note with approval that a nuclear Iran could deter the United States from attempting to intervene and reshape the regional order through force,<sup>64</sup> most are skeptical. As Davutoğlu's biographer-cum-hagiographer confesses, Iran's possession of nuclear weapons would deliver a psychological blow to the Turks, who are not accustomed to playing number two in their rivalry with Iran.<sup>65</sup> Yet there has been remarkably little public discussion inside Turkey of what the consequences of a nuclear Iran would be. The fact that Turkey has in recent years expanded

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<sup>60</sup> I owe a debt to Dr. Hamit Akın Ünver for using this very apt idiom to describe Ankara's attitude toward Tehran.

<sup>61</sup> Sami Kohen, "Ankara İran'a nasıl bakıyor?" *Milliyet*, June 19, 2009.

<sup>62</sup> Özer Sencar, Sıtkı Yıldız, and Ünal Bilir, "Türk Dış Politikasının Yeni Yüzu", Metropoll Stratejik ve Sosyal Araştırmalar, January 2010, available at <<http://www.metropoll.com.tr/report/turk-dis-politikasinin-yeni-yuzu>>.

<sup>63</sup> İhsan Dağı, Büyük Türkiye'nin Büyük Düşmanı, *Zaman*, January 11, 2011. Opinion research done last year in Adana revealed the region's youth were pro-American only relative to youth elsewhere in Turkey. Only 19 percent saw the United States as a friendly country whereas 47 percent described Iran as friendly. Seventy-nine percent saw Israel as a threat, putting it ahead of even Armenia (78 percent) and Greece (74 percent). İhlas Haber Ajansı "Gençler İran'ı 'Dost', İsrail'i 'Düşman' Olarak Görüyor," October 27, 2011, available at <<http://www.haber3.com/gencler-irani-dost-israili-dusman-olarak-goruyor-1059904h.htm>>.

<sup>64</sup> Arif Keskin, *İran'ın Nükleer Çabaları: Hedefler, Tartışmalar ve Sonuçlar*, TürkSAM, January 25, (25.01.2005), TürkSAM, available at <<http://www.turksam.org/tr/a77.html>>.

<sup>65</sup> Zengin, *Hoca*, 260.

its own nuclear research, in addition to pursuing the development of nuclear power, suggests that some Turkish decision-makers anticipate that Turkey may soon need its own nuclear weapons program.<sup>66</sup> Davutoğlu's confidence in the fundamental compatibility of Iran and Turkey, therefore, is by no means universal.

The debate over Iran's nuclear program is occurring at a time when both Turkey and Iran have been engaging in intense efforts to project influence into Iraq and Syria. Although they have managed to avoid open competition so far, instability inside Iraq and particularly Syria could open a rift between Ankara and Tehran by putting them at direct odds. This may already be unfolding in Syria, where Tehran continues to back Asad while Ankara has excoriated him, hosted Syrian opposition figures, and intercepted arms shipments from Iran.<sup>67</sup> In the event that Asad does fall or his regime does crack, Turkey and Iran will likely find themselves competing to shape the future of Syria. Predictions of a showdown between Turkey and Iran over Syria represent wishful speculative thinking more than solid analysis at this point, however, as Turkish-Iranian relations are defined by more than Syria. Nonetheless, the potential for a clash in the Turco-Iranian "borderlands" of Syria and Iraq does exist.

### ZERO PROBLEMS WITH NEIGHBORS... OTHER THAN ISRAEL

Turkey's newfound antagonism toward Israel offers a striking contrast to Davutoğlu's principle of "zero problems" and his efforts to restructure Turkey's relations with other states in the region. Perhaps this is not surprising since a central theme

of Davutoğlu's worldview is that the Middle East prior to the twentieth century constituted an organic whole. Ottoman rule may have represented the apex of this union, but the foundations were laid by the Arab conquests and subsequent process of Islamization that gave a cultural coherence to the broader Middle East. Turkey's destiny is to reclaim this unity, for the good and future prosperity of Turkey and of the entire region.

Israel, in Davutoğlu's view, is not an organic part of the Middle East, but rather a transplant inside it. Indeed, Israel is an end product of the same processes of Western expansionism that created the "Eastern question" and led to the disintegration of the *Pax Ottomanica*.<sup>68</sup> Davutoğlu describes Israel as a creature of colonialism and the Atlantic powers.<sup>69</sup> The creation of Israel, Davutoğlu writes, "changed the geo-cultural character of a region that from the eight century onward had become identified with heritage of Islamic civilization."<sup>70</sup> Ottoman rule had made peaceful coexistence in the polyethnic and multi-confessional Middle East possible through a cosmopolitan order known as the *millet* system that endowed each religious community (*millet*) with legal and cultural autonomy. Because Israel was founded on the principle of particularistic nationalism, its formation introduced a fundamentally disruptive presence into the very heart of the Middle East.

This fact makes close relations with Israel problematic for Turkey, according to Davutoğlu. Not only is Israel in principle an alien entity, he argues, but it is a destabilizing factor in the region—it has predicated its survival on sowing dissension among the Muslims of the Middle East, playing on their ethnic and sectarian differences in order to keep them

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<sup>66</sup> For example, see Karl Vick, "Energy, Iran Spur Turkey's Revival of Nuclear Plans," *Washington Post*, March 7, 2006. For background on Turkey's nuclear program and Iran, see Mustafa Kibaroglu, "Iran'daki Gelişmelerin Türkiye'nin Güvenliğine Etkileri ve Alınabilecek Tedbirleri." Paper presented to the Turkish Armed Forces Academy, March 2006, available at <<http://mustafakibaroglu.com/db1/00032/mustafakibaroglu.com/download/Kibaroglu-HarbAkademileri-Sempozyum-Iran-Mart2006.pdf>>.

<sup>67</sup> Bayram Sinkaya, "Türkiye-İran İlişkilerinde "Güz Sancısı,"" ORSAM September, 20, 2011.

<sup>68</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik*, p. 248.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 329, 384.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 329.

divided.<sup>71</sup> Davutoğlu's charge is not baseless. David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime minister, championed a foreign policy based on building ties and alliances to the non-Arab states of the Middle East in order to counter the Arab bloc. Israel for decades cultivated relations with the Kurds of Iraq as a way to keep Saddam Hussein off base.

There is, of course, nothing remarkable about Israeli efforts to exploit the internal communal fissures of its opponents. Such tactics are routine in the Middle East, whether it be Syrian support of the PKK, Iranian support of Lebanon's Hizballah and Iraq's Mahdi Army, or Saudi support for Arabs and Sunnis in Iran and elsewhere. But it is more than Israel's strategic actions that is problematic for Davutoğlu. Israel, by definition, cannot take part in a process that looks to revive concord among the Muslims of the region and restore the area's organic unity.

Moreover, for Davutoğlu, Israel's dealings with the Kurds are just manifestations of its indifference to the territorial integrity of others, including Turkey. Reciting the belief widespread in the Muslim world that Israel's ambitions "extend from the Euphrates to the Nile," Davutoğlu asks rhetorically, "From Israel's point of view, how important is the territorial integrity of the countries that inhabit this geography?"<sup>72</sup> In both principle and practice, Israel promotes the division of the Muslim peoples of the Middle East, and this is directly antithetical to Turkey's wellbeing.

Yet, Turkey has at times maintained close relations with Israel, and in the 1990s the Turkish-Israeli relationship even took on the character of being a "strategic partnership" that helped define the region's geopolitics. Davutoğlu, however, maintains that the price Turkey paid for this outweighed any benefits it might have accrued. Strategic partnership with Israel

required that Turkey throw away its most valuable asset, strategic depth: "By giving the appearance of following policies indexed to the strategic needs of Israel, a country which possesses a mere fifty-year history in the region," Turkey, "despite its five hundred year heritage ruling the region" had "again begun a process of alienation from" that region.<sup>73</sup> Davutoğlu contends that Turkey, to the detriment of its own security, subordinated its foreign policy to the imperative of maintaining close relations with Israel.

Davutoğlu's explanation for why Turkey would pursue such a self-destructive policy, it is worth noting, refers back to the domestic structure of Turkish politics. There has existed, he contends, a logical relationship between Kemalism, military rule, and Turkey's pro-Israeli foreign policy. Turkish-Israeli cooperation peaked in the wake of the "soft coup" of February 28, 1997, when the Turkish military engineered the ouster of the Islamist Welfare Party from the ruling coalition government of which it was a part.<sup>74</sup> The belief in the connection between the maintenance of the Kemalist order and ties to Israel is not unique to Davutoğlu, but is shared by many Turks, Islamists and non-Islamists alike.

## THE NEXUS OF THE KURDISH AND PALESTINIAN QUESTIONS

Turkish interest in the Palestinian cause predates the AKP by many decades. Indeed, it may be said to date back to the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II, who was wary of the Zionist settlers arriving in Ottoman-controlled Palestine at the end of the nineteenth century. Sympathy for the Palestinians has been strong among both Turkey's secular "Third Worldist" left, which sees the Palestinians as victims of imperialism, and the Islamist right, which identifies with the Palestinians as Muslims and regards Jerusalem as a sacred Muslim city.

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., pp. 388, 497.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 389.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., pp. 89, 159, 260–61, 497.

But under the AKP Turkey has been more than passively sympathetic, and it is Davutoğlu's concept of strategic depth that has provided the framework for Turkish activism on behalf of the Palestinians. The Palestinians, after all, are former Ottomans who cut their ties to the Sultan only after the British conquest of Palestine in World War I. The fact that Davutoğlu's own grandfather fought as an Ottoman soldier against the British in Gaza during World War I gives his thesis of strategic depth personal dimension.<sup>75</sup> By championing the Palestinians' plight in the international arena, Turkey has won the support of Arab and Muslim populations and governments; this has returned it to the fold of the Middle East. In distancing itself from Israel, Ankara's Palestinian advocacy nets practical benefits in regional diplomacy. Moreover, such a position keeps Ankara in the good graces of Europe, if not Washington. As Davutoğlu has observed, the countries of the European Union and the Muslim world are largely in agreement on the Palestinian question.<sup>76</sup> In addition, it also achieves a positive ideological synergy with Ankara's own democratizing reforms at home and its efforts at regional integration abroad.

Indeed, Ankara has preferred to critique Israel and couch its support for the Palestinians in the language of democracy and human rights. Thus, "The Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief," a Turkish NGO created by Islamists, was the organization that, with the tacit support of Ankara, manned the *Mavi Marmara* in the 2010 flotilla that tried to sail to Gaza. The *Mavi Marmara* incident, in which nine Turks were killed by Israeli commandoes, damaged Israel precisely because it compelled Israel to choose between maintaining the

image of a democracy that observes human rights and is restrained in its use of force or living up to its deterrent reputation of being ever ready to employ decisive force to stop its foes at any cost.

Israel has been tempted to retaliate in kind with its own criticism of Turkey's democratic and human rights failings, particularly toward Armenians and Kurds. Israel's volatile foreign minister, Avigdor Lieberman, allegedly contemplated going beyond rhetorical criticism. The Israeli news media reported in September 2011 that Lieberman's was planning meetings with PKK leaders in order to "cooperate with them and boost them in every possible way."<sup>77</sup> This was no great surprise for the Turks. The Turkish state and media alike have long fomented almost paranoid suspicion of outside powers manipulating and exploiting the Kurdish question. Israel is no exception to this suspicion. Israel's long-time support for the Kurds of northern Iraq was widely known and openly discussed in Turkey in the 1990s.<sup>78</sup> Israel's involvement with the Kurds reinforces the aforementioned belief of Davutoğlu and others that Israel's territorial interests extend from the Nile to the Euphrates.<sup>79</sup> As such, the fact that Israel has supplied the Turkish military with arms and expertise counts for little in public opinion. In this way, Turkish suspicions of Israel do not differ significantly from doubts Turks have of the United States. Despite the considerable assistance the United States has provided Turkey against the PKK, the belief that the United States exploits the issue, in the words of Davutoğlu, as a "sword of Damocles" to keep Turkey in line, persists and is nearly ubiquitous across the Turkish political spectrum.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Wikileaks 10ANKARA87.

<sup>76</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Küresel Bunalım: 11 Eylül Konuşmaları*, ed. Faruk Deniz (Istanbul: Küre Yayınları, [2002] 2009), p. 199.

<sup>77</sup> Shimon Shiffer, "Israel to 'Punish' Turkey," *Ynet News*, September 9, 2011, available at <<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0.7340.L-4119984.00.html>>; "İsrail'den PKK Tehdidi," NTVMSNBC, September 9, 2011, available at <<http://www.ntvmsnbc.com/id/25248799/>>.

<sup>78</sup> As just one example of coverage of the issue, see Enis Berberoğlu, "Ankara-İsrail Dostluğu ve Kürtler," *Hürriyet*, February 16, 1998.

<sup>79</sup> The reference is to the promise made by God to Abraham in Genesis 15:18. Islamists in Turkey and elsewhere often point to the flag of Israel as evidence of this ambition, claiming that its two blue stripes represent the Nile and Euphrates.

<sup>80</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik*, p. 447.

## CONCLUSION

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Ankara's effusive proclamations of "zero problems with neighbors" notwithstanding, by the spring of 2011 it was forced to confront the reality that fissures in the Middle East are real, often deep, and by no means confined to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Turkey's relations with Armenia, Greece, and Cyprus have again grown tense. A bold attempt at rapprochement with Armenia brought the two countries close enough for Davutoğlu and his Armenian counterpart to sign an accord to normalize relations in October 2009. The process fell apart afterward, however, when, amidst disagreements over the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and Armenian charges that the Ottoman Turks perpetrated genocide, both sides failed to ratify the agreements. The collapse left Turkey and Armenia trading recriminations.<sup>81</sup> When in the fall of 2011 Cyprus, together with Israel, began exploring for offshore natural gas fields in disputed waters in defiance of Turkish warnings, Turkey ratcheted up the tension by dispatching a warship to intimidate the Cypriots. The crisis and its potential for vio-

lence alarmed Greece and NATO officials.<sup>82</sup> Israel, meanwhile, has energetically expanded economic and military ties to Greece and Cyprus alike, making up for its lost ties to Turkey and complicating Turkey's position in the eastern Mediterranean.<sup>83</sup>

At the same time, the eruption of sustained popular anti-government protests in Syria and the Syrian government's ruthless suppression of those protests led to a rupture in Syrian-Turkish relations and knocked out a linchpin of Turkey's new foreign policy. Moreover, the possibility of a struggle over a post-Asad landscape has raised the likelihood of a fallout between Turkey and Iran. The PKK's resumption of military operations in the summer of 2011 has reminded the AKP that the resolution of Turkey's Kurdish question will require more than magnanimous gestures, empathic rhetoric, and religious solidarity.

The turbulence and setbacks Ankara has encountered since early 2011 notwithstanding, Davutoğlu

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<sup>81</sup> Tigran Avetisyan, Suren Musayelyan, "One Year On, Turkey-Armenia Rapprochement Stalled," *Eurasianet*, October 10, 2010, available at <[http://www.rferl.org/content/One\\_Year\\_On\\_TurkeyArmenia\\_Rapprochement\\_Stalled/2186246.html](http://www.rferl.org/content/One_Year_On_TurkeyArmenia_Rapprochement_Stalled/2186246.html)> Hostility in Turkey toward Armenia remains high, and the AKP is now abetting it. When Minister of the Interior and AKP member İdris Naim Şahin this past February addressed a mass demonstration held in Istanbul in memory of the 1992 massacre of Azerbaijanis at Hocali, he indulged in aggressive and chauvinistic language. Ümit Türk, "Hocalı Katliamına Dev Protesto," February 26, 2012, available at <<http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/20004588.asp>>.

<sup>82</sup> Peter Apps, "Cyprus-Turkey Gas Spat May Be Harbinger of Future Disputes," *Daily Star*, October 7, 2011, available at <<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2011/Oct-07/150675-cyprus-turkey-gas-spat-may-be-harbinger-of-future-disputes.ashx#ixzz1mhM8RIV3>>; "Turkish PM Calls Cyprus, Israel Drilling 'Madness,'" Reuters, September 21, 2011, <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/09/21/turkey-cyprus-idUSL5E7KL40Z20110921>>. Turkey's dispute with Cyprus continues to negatively impact its relations with the EU. See "Turkey threatens to freeze EU relations over Cyprus presidency," *The Telegraph*, September 19, 2011, available at <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/turkey/8772708/Turkey-threatens-to-freeze-EU-relations-over-Cyprus-presidency.html>>.

<sup>83</sup> Amy Teibel and Menelaos Hadjicostis, "Israeli Leader Pays Historic Visit to Cyprus," *Seattle Times*, February 15, 2012.

and Erdoğan have not abandoned their vision of re-making the Middle East by drawing its constituent parts closer together. Commenting on the events in Libya in March 2011, Davutoğlu effused, “There is a need to reconnect societies, communities, tribes, and ethnicities in our region.”<sup>84</sup> In his election night victory speech in June 2011, Erdoğan gave this vision the clearest and most powerful endorsement he has to date: “Today, once again Turkey has won. Today, once again democracy has won. . . . Today my 74 million Turkish, Kurdish, Romanian, and Laz brothers have won. . . . Believe it, today Sarajevo has won as much as Istanbul; Beirut as much as Izmir; Damascus as much as Ankara; Ramallah, Nablus, Jenin, the West Bank, Jerusalem [Küdü] have won as much as Diyarbakir. . . . Today, Turkey has won maturity as a democracy.”<sup>85</sup> Erdoğan’s claim to have achieved, in the context of Turkish national elections, a victory on behalf of the peoples throughout the Balkans, Caucasus, and Middle East was, even for him, unprecedented in its grandiosity. His recitation in that speech of five Palestinian place names, his juxtaposition of Diyarbakir with Jerusalem, and his boasting of contemporary Turkey’s democratic credentials were not coincidental. Speaking to university students in Albania in September 2011, he reminded them that Albania’s capital, Uskup, was the realm of Sultan Bayazid and the heritage of the sons of Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror. Although, he warned that “the imperialist powers will never, ever forego their desires” in the Balkans and elsewhere, he reiterated his hope that the twenty-first century would see the region again unify and enjoy peace.<sup>86</sup>

In a recent restatement of Turkey’s foreign policy principles amidst the challenges posed by the ongoing upheaval in the Arab world, Davutoğlu remained adamant that Turkey’s “domestic transformation and reform processes” and its “parallel undertaking... to consolidate ties to its region”

remain inseparable and essential. Turkey, he announced, is “[no] longer driven by fear of internal problems thanks to the expanded scope of basic freedoms” and therefore “now is more self-confident about its international position.” This ostensibly more democratic and thus more self-assured Turkey will “pursue a value-based foreign policy” that supports “such norms as democracy, good governance, transparency, and rule of law.” Turkey’s “vision is a regional order that is built on representative political systems reflecting the legitimate demands of the people where regional states are fully integrated to each other around the core values of democracy and true economic interdependence [sic].” Furthermore, Davutoğlu declared, “we will extend our assistance to the people who rise up to demand such values.”

In such a forceful declaration of support for democratic norms, there would seem to be much to excite American foreign policymakers. Davutoğlu, however, has sought to disabuse anyone expecting Turkey to play the role of a junior partner in any campaign to export democracy. Turkey, he insists, will conduct its foreign policy “autonomously.” Today’s Turkey does “not receive instructions from any other powers,” is not “part of others’ grand schemes,” and will not “only perform the roles assigned to” it. One reason for this insistence on autonomy is pride. As Davutoğlu counsels his fellow citizens, “We need to do away with this psychological sense of inferiority which has permeated in many segments of our society and amongst political elites [sic].” Another reason is resentment of the West. The Middle East, in his view, should have made its transition to democracy in the 1990s when the end of the Cold War triggered a wave of democratization across the globe. Yet it did not make that transition because “the preference of major powers was more for stability than democracy in this region.” A third reason is Davutoğlu’s resilient belief that the Turks and their Muslim neighbors share a “common destiny.” Thus, it must fall

<sup>84</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, “We in Turkey and the Middle East Have Replaced Humiliation with Dignity,” *The Guardian*, March 15, 2011.

<sup>85</sup> A transcript of Erdoğan’s speech is available at <<http://www.t24.com.tr/74-milyonun-hukumeti-olacagiz/haber/150677.aspx>>.

<sup>86</sup> “Emperyalist Güçler Vazgeçmiyorlar,” *Yeni Şafak*, September 20, 2011.



to Turkey to “enmesh” “universal principles” with “local values.”<sup>87</sup> Whatever these local values may be, it is clear that Davutoğlu conceives of Turkey and its Middle Eastern neighbors as constituting a distinct entity.

## LOOKING AHEAD

The AKP has dominated Turkish politics ever since it first contested elections in 2002. There is no sign that this domination will come to an end anytime soon. Indeed, it has only increased its share of the popular vote from 34 percent in 2002 to 47 percent in 2007 and 50 percent in 2011. The main opposition party, the Republican Peoples Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi or CHP), won a mere 19 percent and 21 percent of the vote in 2002 and 2007. AKP-opponents had big hopes for the CHP going into 2011. Although it improved its performance, it netted just 26 percent of the vote.<sup>88</sup> The CHP remains demoralized and in some disarray. Moreover, any assumption that a CHP-led government would yield a more pro-Western foreign policy would be a faulty one. It is worth noting that when asked how they would vote in a referendum on Turkey’s entrance into the European Union, 64 percent of AKP voters said they would vote yes, whereas just 30 percent said they would vote no. CHP voters were far more negative, with only 36 percent answering yes and 55 percent saying no. Only voters for the Kurdish BDP rivaled the AKP in enthusiasm for EU membership, with 61 percent in favor and 32 percent against.<sup>89</sup>

For America, Turkey will remain a necessary, nearly indispensable partner in the Middle East and adjacent regions. The retrenchment of American power at a time when governments across the Middle East are falling means that Turkey’s value to America will only rise. The good news is that this same retrenchment makes it easier for Turkey to collaborate

with the United States, and that powerful incentives for Turkey to continue that collaboration remain. Turkey reaps multiple benefits from its membership in NATO, access to American military support, and its status as a long-time partner of the West. Nonetheless, it behooves American policymakers to grasp that behind the evolution of Turkish foreign policy lies a worldview that is profoundly skeptical of the ultimate beneficence of American and Western power in the Middle East. Although Ankara will continue to cooperate with the United States on the many issues where Turkey’s immediate interests overlap with America’s, unlike in the Cold War, there is no pretense inside Ankara that its long-term interests are in fundamental alignment with those of America. This could have very real consequences in any effort to define a post-Asad Syria, a place where American and Turkish visions of the future of the Middle East may be in conflict. Turkey’s earlier comfort in dealing with Asad indicates that there is no reason to believe that the consolidation of a pro-Western successor government would be a top Turkish priority.

Moreover, on two key issues, Iran and Israel, the perspectives and priorities of Turkey and the United States differ substantially. Unlike the United States, Turkey does not perceive Iran as an urgent threat. Indeed, Turkey regards the current stability of its eastern neighbor as a net benefit to its own security, particularly with regard to countering the PKK. Tensions between Turkey and Iran however, do exist, and those tensions will inevitably increase as the two states run up against each other in their attempts to project influence throughout region.

This has almost certainly begun in Syria. In addition, Turkey’s agreement in September of 2011 to host a NATO anti-missile radar base—intended as a precautionary measure against Iran’s development of nuclear weapons—has further irritated relations

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<sup>87</sup> All quotes taken from Ahmet Davutoğlu, “Principles of Turkish Foreign Policy and Regional Political Structuring,” Ed. Şaban Kardaş, *Turkey Policy Brief Series* No. 3 (Türkiye Ekonomik Politikaları Araştırma Vakfı, 2012).

<sup>88</sup> Results for the three elections are available at <<http://secim2011.ntvmsnbc.com/>>.

<sup>89</sup> Metropoll, “Türkiye Siyasal Durum Araştırması: Halkın 2011’e Bakışı,” December 2011, p. 29.

with Iran. In November, an Iranian Revolutionary Guard commander pledged to strike NATO's anti-missile installations inside Turkey in the event of a U.S. or Israeli attack on Iran. Such rhetoric notwithstanding, a wholesale breakdown in Turkish-Iranian cooperation is hardly foreordained. Turkish-Iranian relations are multifaceted, and the incentives for Turkey to constrain any conflict with Iran remain. It would be an error to preclude the possibility that Ankara agreed to host the anti-missile base more as a way to underscore to Washington the United States' dependence on Turkey than as a way to maximize Turkish security against a future Iranian threat. In other words, hosting a fundamentally defensive radar base offers Ankara a comparatively painless way to highlight tangibly America's continued need for Turkey. It is worth noting that at a press conference with NATO secretary-general Anders Fogh Rasmussen in February 2012, Davutoğlu made a point of obtaining from Rasmussen public assurances that the base was wholly defensive and that no intelligence from the base would be shared with any parties outside NATO, and then for good measure explicitly mentioned Israel as such a party.<sup>90</sup>

This leads to Turkish-Israeli relations. Ankara is well aware that Israel also has long been a valued regional partner of the United States, and that the maintenance of a hostile stance toward Israel therefore negatively impacts Turkey's relationship with Washington. Indeed, some Israelis have warned the Turks of precisely such a consequence. Washington's ability to chasten Turkey for feuding with Israel, however, is limited and that ability will likely only decline for the foreseeable future. As the deployment of the NATO anti-missile radar base illustrates, the United States is reliant on Turkey to operate diplomatically and militarily in multiple arenas.

American policymakers have little hope of resolving Turkish-Israeli antagonism. Despite the release in September 2011 of a UN report that, contrary to

Turkish assertions, found Israel's blockade of Gaza legitimate, Davutoğlu remains adamant that Israel must apologize and pay compensation for the Turkish lives lost on the *Mavi Marmara*. The prospects that either the current Israeli government will comply with these demands or that the current Turkish government will drop them are slim. So too is the prospect that Ankara will lose interest in the Palestinian question. American policymakers therefore will have to concentrate instead on managing and containing that antagonism. This in itself will not be easy and will demand constant monitoring, but given the key roles that both Turkey and Israel continue to play in American foreign policy it will be essential.

There is little to cheer American policymakers in recognizing that the transformation of Turkey's foreign policy is not a function of short-term tactical thinking or the mere accumulation of wealth and resources but is instead the product of the systemic exhaustion of Kemalism and the ascension of an alternative, religiously informed worldview that identifies the imposition of the Western nation-state system on the Middle East as the source of Turkey's domestic and foreign policy predicaments. Nevertheless, knowledge is the beginning of wisdom. American policymakers can take some consolation in several facts: Turkey's leadership is not radical and seeks evolutionary, not revolutionary, change; Ankara recognizes that even as it seeks to redefine its relations with the West, Turkey derives prestige and benefits from its ability to continue playing the role of a partner of the West, and in particular that Turkey's security and military power is still closely tied to U.S. support in the form of arms supplies, intelligence cooperation, and the conduct of joint maneuvers and training; Ankara's vision of the fundamental unity of the Middle East notwithstanding, the reality of the region's cleavages will ineluctably compel Turkey's elites to curb their ambitions and, with time, modify their outlook. Until then, the United States will need to listen and work with Turkey while exercising extra diligence to ensure it takes nothing for granted.

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<sup>90</sup> "Rasmussen Assures Missile Defense System Data Won't Be Shared with Israel," *Today's Zaman*, February 17, 2012.

## THE SABAN CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST POLICY

The Saban Center for Middle East Policy was established on May 13, 2002 with an inaugural address by His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan. The creation of the Saban Center reflects the Brookings Institution's commitment to expand dramatically its research and analysis of Middle East policy issues at a time when the region has come to dominate the U.S. foreign policy agenda.

The Saban Center provides Washington policymakers with balanced, objective, in-depth and timely research and policy analysis from experienced and knowledgeable scholars who can bring fresh perspectives to bear on the critical problems of the Middle East. The center upholds the Brookings tradition of being open to a broad range of views. The Saban Center's central objective is to advance understanding of developments in the Middle East through policy-relevant scholarship and debate.

The center's foundation was made possible by a generous grant from Haim and Cheryl Saban of Los Angeles. Ambassador Martin S. Indyk, Vice President of Foreign Policy at Brookings, was the founding Director of the Saban Center. Tamara Cofman Wittes is the center's Director. Within the Saban Center is a core group of Middle East experts who conduct original research and develop innovative programs to promote a better understanding of the policy choices facing American decision makers. They include Daniel Byman, a Middle East terrorism expert from Georgetown University, who is the center's Director of Research; Kenneth M. Pollack,

an expert on national security, military affairs and the Persian Gulf, who served on the National Security Council and at the CIA; Bruce Riedel, a specialist on counterterrorism, who served as a senior advisor to four presidents on the Middle East and South Asia at the National Security Council and during a twenty-nine year career in the CIA; Suzanne Maloney, a former senior State Department official who focuses on Iran and economic development; Natan Sachs, an expert on Israeli domestic politics and the Arab-Israeli conflict; Stephen R. Grand, Fellow and Director of the Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World; Salman Shaikh, Fellow and Director of the Brookings Doha Center; Ibrahim Sharqieh, Fellow and Deputy Director of the Brookings Doha Center; Shadi Hamid, Fellow and Director of Research of the Brookings Doha Center; and Shibley Telhami, who holds the Sadat Chair at the University of Maryland. The center is located in the Foreign Policy Studies Program at Brookings.

The Saban Center is undertaking path breaking research in five areas: the implications of regime change in Iraq, including post-war nation-building and Gulf security; the dynamics of Iranian domestic politics and the threat of nuclear proliferation; mechanisms and requirements for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; policy for the war against terrorism, including the continuing challenge of state sponsorship of terrorism; and political and economic change in the Arab world, and the methods required to promote democratization.

## THE CENTER ON THE UNITED STATES AND EUROPE

The Center on the United States and Europe (CUSE) fosters high-level U.S.-European dialogue on the changes in Europe and the global challenges that affect transatlantic relations. The Center offers independent research and recommendations for U.S. and European officials and policymakers, and it convenes seminars and public forums on policy-relevant issues. CUSE's research program focuses on three key areas: the transformation of the European Union; strategies for engaging the countries and regions beyond the frontiers of the EU including the Balkans, Caucasus, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine; and European security issues such as the future of NATO, forging common strategies on energy security and transatlantic counter-terrorism coordination. The Center also houses Brookings' specific programs on France, Italy, and

Turkey, as well as the Brookings Arms Control Initiative, which analyzes the critical challenges of arms control and nonproliferation.

The substantive work of CUSE is carried out by an accomplished team of scholars on Europe, including Brookings President Strobe Talbott; Center Director Fiona Hill; Senior Fellows Clifford Gaddy, Robert Kagan, Steven Pifer and Justin Vaïsse; Non-resident Senior Fellows Pavel Baev, Carlo Bastasin, Helga Flores Trejo, Jonathan Laurence, Richard Kauzlarich, Cesare Merlini, Andrew Moravcsik, Mark Parris, Daniel Speckhard, Angela Stent and Ömer Taşpınar; Visiting Scholar Michael Calingaert; a number of Visiting Fellows from Europe, including an annual visiting fellow from Italy; and other Brookings scholars from various disciplines.

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