THE BROOKINGS PROJECT ON
U.S. POLICY TOWARDS THE ISLAMIC WORLD

AN UNEVEN FIT?
THE "TURKISH MODEL" AND
THE ARAB WORLD

OMER TASPINAR

THE SABAN CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST POLICY
AT THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

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NOTE FROM THE PROJECT CONVENORS

The *Brookings Project on U.S. Policy Towards the Islamic World* is designed to respond to some of the most difficult challenges that the U.S. will face in the coming years, most particularly how to prosecute the continuing war on global terrorism while still promoting positive relations with Muslim states and communities. A key part of the Project is the production of *Analysis Papers* that investigate critical issues in American policy towards the Islamic world.

In the wake of the Iraq War, American policy towards the Arab region has moved towards a goal of promoting democratic change. In pursuit of this agenda, a number of key policymakers, including the President, have articulated the Turkish secular democratic system as embodying the end-goal and thus promoted it as the model for emulation. However, the translation of this "Turkish model" into actual policy is a complex task and potentially one that may not work in the manner that the proponents hope. Turkey's history, including its often tense relations with Arab states, the unique Kemalist transition to democracy and secularism, and its continuing debate over the role of Islam in public life, raise key questions about the viability of such an effort.

As such, we are pleased to present *An Uneven Fit? The "Turkish Model" and the Arab World,* by Omer Taspinar. Professor Taspinar was the very first visiting fellow in the Project and will soon helm a new program at Brookings on U.S.-Turkey relations. We appreciate his contribution to the Project's work and certainly are proud to share his analysis with the wider public.

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Executive Summary

As the United States embarks upon the remaking of Iraq and pushes for reform across the Islamic world, it appears that Turkey is one of its key blueprints. In the words of President Bush, Turkey has "provided Muslims around the world with a hopeful model of a modern and secular democracy."[1]

There is good reason for selecting Turkey as a model. Of all the countries in the Islamic world, Turkey has come closest to the ideals of secularism and democracy. No Muslim country in the Middle East has a comparable tradition of pro-Western foreign policy. These crucial factors and its geographic proximity to Syria, Iraq, and Iran make Turkey the only regional candidate with a democratic model worthy of emulation.

However, all is not perfect with the "Turkish model." While there are crucial lessons that can be learned from Turkey's Kemalist modernization, it should be kept in mind that the primary target audience for such a model, the Arab world, will not always share American enthusiasm for the Turkish example. In the eyes of many Muslims in the Middle East, the problem lies with Turkey's "authoritarian secularism." Where Americans see the only Muslim, democratic, secular and pro-Western country in the Middle East, Arab countries see a former colonial master that turned its back on Islam.

There is a widely shared feeling among Arabs that Turkey's radical cultural revolution under Kemal Ataturk, the founder of the modern Turkish Republic, came at the expense of the country's Islamic identity. According to this point of view, Turkish secularism lacks democratic legitimacy because its survival depends on the vigilance of the military. Most of the Arab intellectuals, let alone pious Muslim masses, are therefore unimpressed by the idea of following a Turkish path to modernity. It is hard to deny that Turkish democracy often displays tendencies that can be termed as "illiberal." This is most evident in the Turkish military's conceptualization of internal threats such as Kurdish nationalism and political Islam.

Despite this gap, the Turkish model is still relevant for the Arab world. There are many lessons that can be learned from Turkey's Kemalist political system. Iraq, in the short-term, and the Arab world in the longer run can hugely benefit from Turkey's experience with free elections and parliamentary democracy as well as from the country's determination to improve its human rights and economic record. It would certainly be a major improvement to see Middle Eastern norms evolve along the lines of Turkey's democratic achievements.

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1 Laura Peterson, "The Pentagon Talks Turkey," *The American Prospect,* vol. 13, issue 16, September 9, 2002.

Such evolution will not be easy for Arab states, however. Proponents of the Turkish model need to be aware of the *sui generis* nature of nation building in Turkey. Turkey's deeply rooted Imperial state tradition, the unique role of Ataturk, and a gradual approach to democratization (starting in 1876) were all crucial components of its modernization. The absence of similar conditions in the Arab world creates an important applicability gap between the Turkish model and its target audience.

Ultimately, the relevance of the Turkish model for the Middle East will greatly depend on what happens in Turkey. For a Turkish model that can truly provide inspiration, better harmony between democracy and secularism must be found. Outsiders can hardly impose such a change. This is why the arrival to power of the Justice and Development Party in late 2002 presents a crucial opportunity for reconciling Turkey's Muslim roots with secularism and democracy. The relationship between this moderately Islamic political party and the staunchly secularist military will provide a litmus test of democratic maturity for the Turkish model. The significance of this political experiment will also have major implications on the perceived compatibility of Islam and democracy. Therefore, America's success in lauding Turkey as the goal for Arab states may well be determined by how well the U.S. is able to support the success of the model within Turkey itself.

The Author

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Prior to his teaching and research career, Dr. Taspinar worked as a consultant at the Strategic Planning Unit of TOFAS-FIAT (Istanbul). His recent publications include "Europe's Muslim Street," *Foreign Policy* (March–April 2003) and a forthcoming book on Promoting Educational and Economic Opportunity in the Islamic World, also sponsored by the *Brookings Project on U.S. Policy Towards the Islamic World.*

An Uneven Fit?
The "Turkish Model" and the Arab World

The message brought to New York and Washington on September 11th ended an erroneous premise about the state of affairs in the Middle East. It became painfully clear that autocratic stability in the Arab world no longer provided security. To the contrary, the status quo of undemocratic regional allies had created the worst of outcomes for the United States and therefore had to be challenged.

This newfound American willingness to defy the status quo in the Middle East has both realist and idealist undertones, often expressed simultaneously. These were clearly illustrated in the domestic debate leading to the invasion of Iraq. The realist voice prioritized security threats: weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, and the looming threat of potentially nuclear September 11s. The idealist voice, on the other hand, attached more importance to the liberation of Iraq and the hope of unleashing a democratic tsunami wave that would transform the region.

Democracy in the Middle East, and even in Iraq, may still be far away. However, the perception that underneath friendly Arab autocracies lie the most serious threats to U.S. national security has created a major sense of urgency for a reformist agenda. Since September 11th, the United States is no longer willing to wait too long.

Despite all the risks it entails, the idea of promoting democracy in the Arab world is based on a compelling logic. A major U.S. concern about democratization in the Arab world has traditionally been the fear of the Islamist alternative. Yet compared with the devastation brought about by the September 11th attacks, such fears are now being put in perspective. Weighed against the potential of terrorists equipped with weapons of mass destruction targeting the American homeland, an initial stage of Islamist proclivity in democratized Arab countries increasingly appears as a risk worth taking. At the very least, many feel that the opportunity cost of not pushing for liberalization and democratization in the Arab world has become unbearably high.

Such new resolve is fueled by the growing realization that the current dynamics of Arab politics are extremely detrimental. The rationale for change is simple. Authoritarianism in the Arab world creates mass discontent. The mosque is often the only institution not totally suppressed by autocracies. This exacerbates the Islamization of dissent. Similar dynamics apply to anti-Americanism. In most Arab autocracies, there is official tolerance only for anti-Israel demonstrations. Repressive regimes have a vested interest in channeling all kinds of domestic frustrations towards the legitimate plight of Palestinians. Therefore, domestic discontent is almost never able to address domestic problems. As masses

voice their frustration with Israel, they also turn increasingly anti-American, due to the special relationship between Israel and the United States.

Perhaps more important is the fact that American support for repressive regimes such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt bitterly alienates the pro-reform, educated middle classes in these countries. Disappointed with the double standards of the superpower, these groups that would normally support the United States end up sharing the same anti-American prejudices of the masses. The resulting climate of frustration and humiliation in the Arab world provides an ideal breeding and recruitment ground for anti-American radicalism.

The September 11th terrorist attacks thus transformed the Arab predicament into a national security priority for the United States. Today, it is primarily such security concerns and the need to address the root causes of terrorism that bring urgency and realism to the idealist discourse of democratization in the Arab world. This has thus led to the search for democratic models in the Islamic world, to which the U.S. can point as positive end-goals. At the forefront of this is what has become known as the "Turkish model."

I. TURKEY AS A MODEL

When discussing the Turkish model, it is important to note that a model does not mean an exact blueprint for necessary reforms. It would be a critical mistake to conceptualize a model as the exact emulation of a particular country. A more realistic conception should consider a model to offer relevant lessons from past political experience and a practical framework for a progressive agenda.

There is no quick fix or one-size-fits-all formula for democratization. Yet there are valuable lessons that can be learned from other democracies and countries in democratic transitions. One such lesson from the Western and Turkish experience is that democratization is a long and painful process. Its consolidation and successful internalization may take generations. Yet, partly because of the fast pace of globalization and modern technology, we often lack patience and have high or unrealistic expectations. There seems to be a utopian desire to witness the speedy emergence of liberal democracies in the Middle East. In that sense, one crucial mistake would be to set the bar too high. A healthy transition from authoritarianism to constitutional liberalism and "a sense of pluralism," where the governing center is more or less representative of the governed periphery would in itself be a great accomplishment for the Middle East. On the long path leading to democracy, it is crucial to remember that free elections are often the culmination, rather than the inauguration, of the process.

It is also important to remember that model countries or universal principles and guidelines for democratization are much less important than the domestic attributes of each country. Maximum attention must be paid to variables such as literacy rates, economic development, and past political experience. At the end of the day, the prospects for constitutional liberalism and pluralism will primarily depend on improvements in human and social capital. Since democratization has to come from within no external model or well-intentioned guidance can substitute the domestic willingness and demand for change.

With these caveats in mind, Turkey has become the role model which many in the U.S. encourage the Arab world to strive towards. Not only is Turkey often singled out as the only secular democracy in the Islamic world, but it also shares borders with Syria, Iraq and Iran. Indeed, President George W. Bush and many prominent members of the U.S. administration have repeatedly praised Muslim Turkey as a model that merits emulation in the wider Islamic world.

The strongest and most persistent pro-Turkish voice in the Bush administration has been that of Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz. As a long-time admirer of Turkey, Wolfowitz served as speaker for the annual Turgut Ozal Lecture at the Washington Institute for Near Eastern Policy on March 15, 2002. He offered a compelling case for the Turkish model:

To win the war against terrorism we have to reach out to the hundred of millions of moderate and tolerant people in the Muslim world, regardless of where they live…. Turkey is crucial in bridging the dangerous gap between the West and the Muslim world. In the United States we understand that Turkey is a model for those in the Muslim world who have aspirations for democratic progress and prosperity. Turkey gives us an example of the reconciliation of religious belief with modern secular democratic institutions.[2]

Similar beliefs have been voiced across the administration. For example, National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice has called Turkey "an excellent model, a 99 percent Muslim country that has great importance as an alternative to radical Islam." Perhaps, most importantly, President Bush has stated that Turkey "provided Muslims around the world with a hopeful model of a modern and secular democracy."[3]

Such praise was much welcomed in Turkey. During the Cold War, Turkey was a key ally of the United States, but one whose value was often expressed in only geo-strategic terms. As the only NATO country sharing a border with the Soviet Union, Turkey was considered the southern anchor of the alliance. After the superpower confrontation ended, instability in the Balkans, the Caucuses, and the Middle East prolonged Turkey's geo-strategic importance. Yet before the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, it was hard to predict that Turkey's importance would gain a new dimension that goes well beyond geo-strategic value.

The shocking acts of Islamic terrorism became an eye-opener for many Americans about the state of the Islamic world. As the debate about "What went wrong?" in the Islamic world unfolded, Turkey's secular and democratic political system stood out as a very positive exception. Attention shifted from Turkey's geo-strategic location to what Turkey represents. With the clash of civilizations turning into a self-fulfilling prophecy, the Muslim, democratic, secular, and pro-Western attributes of Turkey gained unprecedented relevance. The country's historic accomplishments therefore began to provide an encouraging "civilizational" dimension challenging a gloomy paradigm of confrontation on the horizon.

Soon after September 11, 2001, Turkey came to represent not only a crucial Muslim ally in the war against terrorism but also a unique example of secularism and democracy in the Islamic world. In that sense, Ankara's active presence in the anti-terror alliance strengthened the claim that the American-led "war on terrorism" is not a crusade against Islam. This is also why the leadership Turkey provided in ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) in Afghanistan had a major symbolic meaning. Equally important became Turkey's role in discrediting those with a tendency to equate Islam with political violence and radicalism. Indeed, by illustrating that Islam could be perfectly compatible with democracy and secularism, Turkey counters such extreme, yet occasionally vocal, viewpoints. As a corollary, Turkey's Muslim-secular-democratic identity provides much-needed intellectual ammunition for the feasibility of democracy in the Middle East.

Recently, in the context of war in Iraq, this rosy picture of Turkey came under a more critical light. Turkey's minimal support for the United States was an unexpected disappointment for American policy-makers. However, such frustration with Turkey also provided a crucial litmus test for Washington's commitment to democratization in the Middle East. The regional picture that emerged prior to the war in Iraq was rather disturbing. Most authoritarian Arab governments, whose populations were overwhelmingly opposed to a war in Iraq, had decided to silently cooperate with the American effort anyway. In contrast, Turkey–the only Muslim democracy in the Middle East–said no to the United States despite being offered billions of dollars. The irony of this situation was not lost on the superpower.

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2 Turgut Ozal Memorial Lecture delivered by Paul Wolfowitz on March 15, 2002, http://www.washingtonfile.net/2002/March/March14/EUR405.HTM.
3 For the statements of Condoleeza Rice and President Bush see "The Pentagon Talks Turkey," *The American Prospect,* vol. 13, issue 16, September 9, 2002.

The easy trap for the U.S. would have been to react negatively against Turkey and display a tendency to punish. Such an outcome would have certainly confirmed the skeptics' viewpoint that Washington's support for democracies and democratization is always contingent upon pro-American outcomes. Such a serious blow to U.S. sincerity for promoting democratization in the Middle East was thankfully avoided. Although disappointed, Washington reacted with maturity: Turkey was a democracy and its Parliament had to be respected. Not doing so would indeed have been self-defeating for the grand-project the United States was about to embark on in Iraq, as well as the pro-democracy message intended for the larger Middle East. Despite its minimal cooperation, Turkey still qualified for $1 billion in economic aid in the President's supplementary war budget. Moreover, Secretary Powell's wartime visit to Ankara, where he again described Turkey as a model for a future Iraq, helped repair damaged relations.

It would still be naïve to think that the geo-strategic dimension of Turkey-U.S. relations did not suffer a heavy blow because of Iraq. Yet it is telling that the American disappointment appears to be more with the Turkish military than with Turkish democracy. This point was clearly conveyed in early May 2003, when Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz gave an interview to the Turkish press. After emphasizing that "Turkey, with a Muslim majority and a strong democratic tradition, remains an important model for a part of the world where the U.S. is trying to move in a positive direction," Wolfowitz singled out an unexpected institution to express his dissatisfaction with Turkey: "For whatever reason, the Turkish military did not play the strong leadership role we would have expected."[4]

Despite considerable disappointment with Turkey's lack of military cooperation, the fact that the country is still perceived as a model appears to confirm a new way of thinking about Turkey in Washington. The declining geo-strategic indispensability of Turkey is partially compensated by the appeal of its democratic and secular model. This, however, would not amount to immunity from American criticism. On July 4, 2003, the detainment of eleven Turkish special operation troops by the U.S. army forces in northern Iraq demonstrated how easily bilateral relations could still deteriorate.[5] This incident clearly illustrated that Iraq and the Kurdish question will be the most critical issues complicating Turkish-American relations in the near future. Yet so far, American foreign policy appears to have handled reasonably well an important case testing its respect for the only democracy in the Muslim Middle East.

Turkey's relevance for democratization in the Middle East is certainly not confined to Iraq. A well-known factor dampening international enthusiasm for democratic elections in the Muslim Middle East has been the fear of the alternative, namely the risk of handing power to Islamic fundamentalists. Algeria's experience with democratic elections and the degeneration of the process into a bloody civil war is the clearest and most tragic example of such a scenario. With respect to this rather risky dimension of democratization, Turkey's domestic experience with political Islam and secularism offers valuable lessons.

A fundamentalist theocracy coming to power through democratic elections based on a "one man, one vote, one time" scenario has been a major concern for secularist circles in Turkey since the transition to democracy more than half a century ago. In that sense, the major dilemma likely to face potential Arab democracies is not alien to Turkey's political dynamics. Turkey's long experience with free elections, combined with the recent landslide victory of a pro-Islamic party, makes Turkey's experiment with secularism, Islam, and democracy all the more interesting.

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4 For a transcript of Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz's May 6, 2003 interview with CNN Turkey see, http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/2003/tr20030506-depsecdef0156.html.

5 The detainment which ended with the release of the Turkish soldiers after 48 hours was described by the Turkish General Staff as a "crisis of trust" between Ankara and Washington. "Turkey Says U.S. Has Agreed to Free 11 Soldiers Suspected in Plot to Kill Kurdish Aide," *The New York Times,* July 7, 2003, p. A6.

II. How is the Turkish Model Perceived in the Arab World?

The balance between secularism, Islam, and democracy has been a problematic issue for Turkey. Especially in the eyes of the Arab world, presumably the target audience for the administration's Turkish model, Turkish secularism appears to have taken root at the expense of democracy and Muslim identity. In that sense, it is important for Turkey's American friends to understand that pious Muslims, particularly in the Arab world, have traditionally been unimpressed by the Turkish secularism they so extol.

A crucial factor hurting the popularity of the Turkish model among Arab countries is the authoritarian and anti-Islamic image of Kemalist secularism. Turkey's cultural revolution under Ataturk is perceived as a top-down imposition of Westernization on unwilling Muslim masses. This impression of forced Westernization in Turkey is compounded by the current role of the Kemalist military in enforcing and protecting Turkish secularism. Indeed, while the U.S. hopes to export the model abroad, Arab intellectuals question whether this Kemalist model has really conquered the hearts and minds of Muslims in Turkey itself.

This question of "authoritarian secularism" has major implications for the applicability of the model in the Arab world. The controversy over something as seemingly simple as daily symbols of piety illustrates this. Most Arabs are puzzled by the fact that the

Turkish secular establishment considers innocuous symbols of piety, such as headscarves, as harbingers of a fundamentalist conspiracy. Not surprisingly, most pious Muslims see the official ban on wearing headscarves in the public sphere (places associated with the state, including public education) as a direct assault on religious freedom. This ban, in their eyes, displays Turkey's proclivity for authoritarian secularism and betrays a clear sense of elitist disconnect between the Westernized upper class and Muslim masses in Turkey.

Given the role that the Turkish military plays in safeguarding such a militant understanding of secularism, it should not be surprising that most Arabs believe the Turkish model lacks democratic legitimacy. This naturally reinforces their impression that the Turkish model is a shallow project of Westernization rather than true democratization. Secularization, in this Kemalist framework, is perceived as an oppressive and superficial attempt at imposing Western dress, lifestyle and symbols on Muslims. That the headscarf, let alone the veil, is turned into a highly charged symbol, jeopardizing the future of secularism in Kemalist Turkey, proves to the Arab world that the Turkish model itself lacks domestic legitimacy.

The legitimacy dilemma that the anti-headscarf tendency presents for Turkish secularism is compounded by the fact that the majority of Turkish women cover

their heads.[6] Their reasons for doing so range from tradition to political symbolism. As the Kemalist establishment is always keen on emphasizing, the traditional headscarf of the older generation and rural areas is certainly not perceived as a political threat. It is the group of urban girls and young women who cover their heads that are subject to secularist scrutiny. Their political motivation appears to be easily detectable because of a particular style of wearing the headscarf *(turban)* that is different from traditional ways *(basortu)*. Not surprisingly, in the eyes of most Muslims this is hardly a winning argument. For them, the state's attempt to judge individual motivations behind the headscarf is a senseless task that can easily become arbitrary. The state's approach to the headscarf issue is therefore perceived as a clear example of secularist paranoia and elitist disconnect–liabilities rather than assets for a "model" to the Muslim world.

Yet the threat of political Islam is very real in the eyes of Turkey's Kemalist establishment. This threat perception has grown considerably stronger since the end of the Cold War and has led to an increasingly active political role for the Turkish military in its attempt to safeguard secularism. The anti-Islamic image of the Turkish model therefore gained even more visibility in the Arab world during the 1990s. The Kemalist military already had a habit of corrective interference in civilian politics during the Cold War. Between 1946—when multi-party democracy was inaugurated—and 1980, the military intervened three times in civilian politics, in 1960, 1971, and 1980. However, these Cold War era military interventions, especially the last two, were essentially law and order reactions against the leftwing-rightwing ideological polarization in Turkey, without negative implications for the Muslim identity of the country. In fact, the last military take-over in 1980 was even perceived by many Turkish analysts as overly pro-religion in its anti-left campaign that sought to de-politicize society.

The internal and external political dynamics have significantly changed since the end of the Cold War. In the 1990s, Kurdish nationalism and political Islam came to replace the communist threat in the eyes of the military. Compared to the communist-anti-communist ideological conflict of the 1960s and 1970s, the post-Cold War threats were much more intimately grounded in Turkey's own identity problems and therefore presented existential challenges to the very heart of the Kemalist model. Identity-based polarization was also a harder challenge for the military. Secularism and Turkish nationalism, the two major constituents of the Kemalist system, were at stake.

This aggravated perception of threats to Turkey's Kemalist identity required maximum military vigilance. Throughout the 1990s, domestic polarization between Turkish-Kurdish nationalism and secularist-Islamist factions drew down hopes of political liberalization. In addition to these political problems, the erratic boom and bust cycles of the Turkish economy did little to improve the situation. Since the economy followed a high inflationary path without sustained growth, Turkey's income distribution became one of the worst in the world. Making matters worse was the fact that Turkey's identity cleavages increasingly overlapped with the country's economic cleavages. In other words, Kurdish and Islamic political formations found their constituency among the most deprived segments of Turkish society.

In this complicated and potentially explosive configuration of political and economic forces, the military refrained from overt interventions. Thanks to the legal mechanisms institutionalized after the last military take-over in 1980, there was simply no need to stage a blatant coup. The 1982 Constitution, written and approved under the 1980–83 military rule, strengthened a subtler channel of influence through the National Security Council (NSC). In effect, the NSC often amounts to a shadow cabinet made up of six high-ranking military officers and six civilian

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6 According to a recent survey 70 percent of Turkish households have one member in the family who wears the headscarf, Milliyet, May 29, 2003, p. 6.

representatives of the government. The military wing of the Council is composed of the Chief of Staff, the heads of the army, navy, air force, and of the police, along with a sixth general acting as the Council's general secretary. The President of the Republic, the Prime Minister, and the ministers of defense, foreign affairs, and interior represent the civilian group. The rise of political Islam and Kurdish nationalism during the 1990s significantly enhanced the advisory role of the National Security Council in Turkish politics. In practice, this amounted to an illiberal turn for Turkish democracy. Any hope for a liberal democratic agenda was therefore hijacked by the security-first approach against Islamic and Kurdish dissent.

CRITICAL RESPONSE TO THE TURKISH MODEL

The Arab world has had no willingness to emulate a democracy that militarily suppressed Kurdish dissent or a militant type of secularism that punished religious conservatives no matter how popular they became. The Arab view that Turkey's secular democracy was far from operating without military interference found further credibility in 1997, when the pro-Islamic Welfare Party coalition government and Prime Minister Erbakan had to resign due to political pressure coming from the National Security Council. Both the party and its leader were subsequently banned from politics.

However, it was from Europe that the harder blow would come to the Turkish model. Ankara's difficult relationship with the European Union took a very negative turn after the 1997 Luxembourg summit excluded Turkey from the EU's enlargement plans. The Arab reaction to the European Union's rejection of Turkey was even-handed: it was viewed as a testimony of Europe's racism as much as it was a slap on the face of Turkey's undemocratic Westernization. With a sense of historic justice, the Kemalist model's failure to find acceptance in Europe appeared to validate the Arab viewpoint that Turkey's authoritarian Westernization and nationalism came at the expense

of democracy, Islamic identity, Kurdish cultural rights, and liberalism in general.

As most Turks and Americans would argue, Arab autocracies are not well placed to criticize Turkey's democratic standards. Thus, the utility of the model would be proven if it could push even some modicum of change within them. To see the human rights standards of Egypt, Syria, or Saudi Arabia evolve along Turkey's norms of representative democracy would certainly be a major accomplishment compared to the current state of authoritarian politics in the Arab world. Yet, given the European reluctance to embrace Kemalist Turkey, exporting the Turkish model to the Arab Middle East may become a tough sell for U.S. foreign policy. Faced with Arab intellectuals ready to blame Americans for their Orientalist tendencies, Washington should be ready to answer questions along the following line: "If the Turkish model of democracy is not good enough for the European Union, why should it be more than enough for Arabs?"

Beyond the contemporary Arab perception of the Turkish model, it would also be an important mistake for the United States to fail to take into consideration the legacy of the Ottoman Empire in the Arab world. The U.S. would be ignoring history at its own risk. In Turkish collective memory the Arabs are most vividly remembered for having betrayed the Ottoman Empire by cooperating with the British forces during World War One. The mirror image of the Ottoman legacy in Arab countries is one of heavy-handed suppression. In that sense, there is a lack of mutual sympathy based on shared history and traditions. Thus, where Americans see the only pro-Western secular democracy in the Muslim world, most Arabs see a former colonial master that turned its back on Islam.

Egypt is probably the only Arab country where the historical legacy of the Ottoman Empire is slightly more positive. This is in great part due to the modernizing role of Muhammad Ali Pasha, an Ottoman governor (who later turned against Istanbul) in the middle of

the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, the very few cases where Turkey's achievements resonate positively in the Islamic world involved the emergence of power-ful leaders willing to shape their country's destiny along Western lines. Examples of leaders who followed Ataturk's programs include Habib Bourguiba of Tunisia, Reza Shah Pahlavi of Iran, and King Amanullah of Afghanistan, but none of these leaders' regimes or programs are still in place.

The one exception may be in Pakistan, where the Turkish model has traditionally been admired because of the role of armed forces both as guardians and protectors of the constitution. Not surprisingly, it is often the Pakistani military leadership itself that is most willing to emulate a political-constitutional arrangement similar to the National Security Council in Turkey. This is not a ringing endorsement for democratic rule. The fact that General Pervez Musharraf, the self-appointed President of Pakistan, is most probably the only leader in the Muslim world who would wholeheartedly support the Turkish model may be a case of the exception proving the rule.

The fact that there is no comparable admiration of the Turkish model in the Arab world is also a result of foreign policy dynamics in the Middle East. In that sense, Turkey's pro-Western foreign policy during the Cold War and its more recent openings to Israel played an important role in alienating it from the Arab world. Especially after becoming a NATO member in 1952, Ankara increasingly identified its national interests with those of the West, and particularly the United States. After 1952, Turkey began to approach the affairs of the region with a sense of moral and political supe-riority. Ironically, this absolute identification with Western perspectives and policies came under Adnan Menderes and his Democrat Party administrations (1950–1960), whose historical mission had been to tame Turkey's radically secular Westernization.

In a period of political radicalism that swept the Arab world with the vocabulary of pan-Arab nationalism, Turkey zealously pursued a policy to defend Western interests without being sensitive in the least to the political aspirations of the Arab states. A series of policies, such as becoming the first Muslim state to recognize Israel, voting in favor of France at the United Nations during the Algerian war of independ-ence, and allowing American marines to use the Incirlik air base in the Lebanese crisis of 1958, did almost irreparable damage to Turkey's relations with the Arab Middle East.

Relations with Syria were already marked by ill feelings arising from Turkish sovereignty over Alexandrette (Hatay) since 1939. Relations with Nasser's Egypt were also far from cordial. The first American attempt to construct a regional alliance in the Middle East was achieved by bringing together Turkey and Egypt in 1951–52, but there was little enthusiasm for this option in either country, since relations between Turkey and Arab countries were strained by Turkey's recognition of Israel. After 1952, as the only NATO member in the Middle East, Turkey began to approach the affairs of the region with a sense of superiority. In search of tightening the Western security chain around the Soviet Union, Ankara signed a treaty of coopera-tion with Pakistan in 1954. This was followed in 1955 by a treaty of cooperation and mutual assistance with the Kingdom of Iraq under the prime ministry of Nuri al Said. Turkey actively participated in the creation of the ill-fated Baghdad Pact in 1955 by rather unself-consciously proposing to the former colonies of Britain to join an alliance with their colonial masters.[7]

A TURKISH TURNAROUND

Turkey's identification with the West and the diplo-matic distance with the Arab Middle East slowly began to change in the second half of the 1960s. This gradual

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7 As Andrew Mango notes, the Baghdad Pact which ended up including Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Turkey and the U.K. "was flawed from the very beginning since the United States, which had urged it, did not enter for fear of irreversibly alienating Nasser's Egypt." Andrew Mango, "Turkish Policy in the Middle East" in Clement H. Dodd, (ed.), *Turkish Foreign Policy: New Prospects,* (Huntington: Eothon Press, 1992), p. 62.

change of heart was essentially related to the first Cyprus crisis of 1964 and the American reluctance to support Turkey. Such reluctance was clearly expressed by President Johnson in a letter warning that, in case of a conflict with the Soviet Union resulting from Turkish intervention on the island, NATO countries would not automatically side with Ankara. The letter convinced the Turkish political establishment that the time had come for Turkey to become more independent in the conduct of foreign affairs.

The new foreign policy aimed at gradually moving towards a more pro-Palestinian position, in order to generate support for the Turkish position in Cyprus. Turkey's shift was also partly due to domestic political pressures, including the growing saliency of Islam and leftist movements in national politics. As a result, Turkey went to great lengths to undo the damage inflicted on Turkish-Arab relations in the 1950s. For instance, before the Six-Day War in 1967, Turkey sided with the Egyptian position and refused to join the group of maritime powers demanding the reopening of the Gulf of Aqaba to Israeli shipping. In its first major break with secular principles in international relations, Turkey participated in the proceedings of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) in Rabat in 1969 and became a full member of the organization in 1976. During the 1973 Israel-Arab war, Ankara denied the United States the use of American bases to help supply the Israelis and allowed Russian planes to use Turkish airspace to support the Syrians. Turkey's pro-Arab tilt continued in 1979 with the opening of the PLO representative's office in Ankara, which was given a quasi-diplomatic status.

Another important factor helping Turkish rapprochement with the Middle East was the 1973–74 oil crisis. Turkish governments endeavored to meet the rising oil bills from the Arab states and Iran by expanding Turkey's exports of goods and services to the region. Indeed, Turkey's exports to the region more than doubled from $2 billion in 1975 to $4.9 in 1980.[8] Trade volume with the Middle East continued to increase throughout the 1980s. The exploding volume of trade in the 1980s, during which the Middle East briefly surpassed Europe as Turkey's number one trade partner, was essentially related to exceptionally high exports to Iraq and Iran, which were locked in a disastrous war between 1980–88.

THE TURKISH MODEL RECAST IN CRITICISM

However, despite such improvements in diplomatic and trade relations, a series of other factors pushed Ankara to reconsider its Middle East policy during the second half of the 1980s. An obvious source of discontent was the failure of the Arab countries and the PLO to support Turkey's Cyprus policy. Neither at the United Nations nor at the Organization of the Islamic Conference had the Arab world recognized the Turkish Cypriots' demand for self-determination. Indeed, many Arab states, as well as the PLO, enjoyed cordial relations with the Greek Cypriots and recognized the Greek Cypriot government as the only legitimate administration on the island.

Another grievance was the Arab camp's attitude concerning Bulgaria's treatment of its Turkish minority. More than 300,000 ethnic Turks had fled Bulgaria to Turkey following the Zhivkov regime's forced assimilation campaign in 1986–87, leading Turkey to call for the international isolation of Bulgaria. Counting on the support of its Muslim neighbors and partners, Ankara prepared a draft resolution denouncing Sofia's behavior at the OIC summit of 1987. To the dismay of Ankara, Algeria, Syria, and the PLO refrained from supporting the resolution, so as not to offend Bulgaria and its Soviet patron.[9]

In the meantime, Turkey's bilateral relations with Syria and Iraq began to deteriorate following the initiation

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8 Republic of Turkey, State Institute of Statistics, *Foreign Trade Statistics,* (Ankara, 1981).
9 Aykan, Mahmut Bali, *Turkey's Role in the Organization of the Islamic Conference: 1960–1992,* (New York: Vantage Press.1994), pp. 75–76.

of the ambitious Southeast Anatolia Project (GAP) in 1983. This ongoing project plans to irrigate some 1.6 million hectares of land by utilizing the waters of the Euphrates and the Tigris after the construction of twenty-one dams and nineteen hydro-electric stations. Not surprisingly, such prospects greatly increased Iraqi and Syrian concerns over the future volume and the flow of water. Since 1983, both Damascus and Baghdad have demanded a trilateral water sharing treaty for the Euphrates and the Tigris.

Starting with the second half of the 1980s, the Kurdish question emerged as the single most important factor complicating Turkey's relations with Syria, Iraq and Iran. As the war against Kurdish separatists escalated so did Turkey's sense of regional encirclement by hostile neighbors. There was ample evidence that Syria, Turkey's southern neighbor, was harboring the Kurdish leader Abdullah Ocalan and his guerrilla organization the PKK (Kurdish Workers Party). Things did not look any better in northern Iraq where the PKK and two Iraqi Kurdish groups found a haven in the aftermath of Saddam Hussein's defeat in the first Gulf War of 1991. Finally, there were also strong signs that Iran was turning a blind eye to PKK activities within its borders.

By the mid-1990s Ankara's frustration with its Arab neighbors was compounded by the fact that relations with the West had also reached an impasse. The Kurdish problem had hijacked Turkey's democratization agenda. Due to a security-first approach excluding non-military, cultural and political solutions to the Kurdish question, the United States and particularly the European Union turned increasingly critical of the role of the Turkish military in setting an authoritarian tone in domestic politics. Moreover, military sales to Turkey from both Europe and the United States were becoming subject to increasing scrutiny due to the country's human rights problems.

Such negative dynamics in relations with Muslim neighbors and Western allies led to an unprecedented development. To the dismay of the Arab world, Turkey signed a military co-operation treaty with Benjamin Netanyahu's Israel in 1996. The logic behind such an agreement was simple: Turkey needed a reliable pro-Western regional ally to break its sense of political and military encirclement.

Interestingly, it did not take very long for Turkish policymakers to realize that military co-operation with Tel-Aviv would also be the key to a very valuable asset in Washington: the powerful pro-Israel lobby. Considering the need to counter-balance the influential Greek and Armenian lobbies, for Ankara the Israeli card amounted to hitting two birds with one stone. Although the Turkish government officially maintained that the cooperation agreement with Israel did not target any third countries, there was a strong sense that a thinly veiled message was sent to Damascus as well. Tensions with Syria culminated in 1998, when Turkey mobilized its military on the Syrian border and forced Damascus to expel the leader of the Kurdish guerilla organization.

Not surprisingly, Turkey's ongoing military partnership with Israel is perceived as a major handicap in the Arab world. This situation not only hurts Turkey's chances of being accepted as a model, but it also puts into sharp relief the preponderant role of the military in Turkey's foreign policy. Moreover, the timing of the alliance in the mid-1990s when the Islamist Welfare Party was on the rise seemed to indicate that the army wanted to prove its autonomy and political determination to follow a "secularist" foreign policy, in opposition to political Islam at home. It also appeared that the civilian government did not know the exact details of the military cooperation and training agreement. Even the civil bureaucracy in the Ministry of Defense was informed inadequately.

The partnership with Israel can also be analyzed as an attempt by the Turkish military establishment to embarrass the 1996–1997 Islamist-led government of Prime Minister Erbakan by exposing its powerlessness to halt an alliance it openly opposed. For instance, although Prime Minister Erbakan was an

avowed opponent of a free trade agreement with Israel, he was forced to sign such an agreement during the Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy's visit to Ankara in late 1996.

Such foreign policy preferences and the problem of "authoritarian secularism" in Turkish politics have, therefore, crucial implications for the applicability of the model. Yet all is not lost for Turkey. As Graham Fuller astutely observes:

> Turkey is a successful model that merits emulation not because it is "secular"; in fact, Turkish "secularism" is actually based on state control or even repression of religion. Turkey is becoming a model precisely because Turkish democracy is beating back rigid state ideology and slowly and reluctantly permitting the emergence of Islamist movements and parties that reflect tradition, a large segment of public opinion, and the country's developing democratic spirit.[10]

Given the multi-dimensional aspect of Turkey's democratic development, sweeping generalizations about the model are often misleading. In light of the complex picture that the Turkish model offers, one needs to first address the historical factors behind Kemalist modernization. Judging the Turkish model's applicability to the Arab world thus necessitates a good understanding of Turkey's *sui generis* characteristics and its multifaceted national identity.

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10 Graham Fuller, "The Future of Political Islam," *Foreign Affairs,* vol. 81, no. 2, March/April, 2002.

III. A *Sui Generis* Model?

One of the most vexing problems for those that advocate the use of Turkey as a model for change within Islamic countries is that the model itself may be one of a kind. Many think that Turkey is a unique, *sui generis* case.

Having a complex civilizational identity or being perceived as a "torn country," to use Samuel Huntington's terminology, is nothing new in Turkish history.[11] The difficulty of assigning Turkey to a specific geographical region or to a wider civilization derives from the fact that it has always been a frontier country. A glance at the map shows why Turkey does not fit into any of the clear-cut geographical categories which Western scholars have formulated in order to study a complex world. The country straddles the geographical and cultural borders between Europe and Asia, without really belonging to either. Such an "in between" Turkish identity is made all the more complicated by a number of historical factors.

The Ottoman Empire was historically the intimate enemy of Europe. In religious and military terms, the Turk represented the Islamic 'Other,' which played a crucial role in consolidating Europe's own Christian identity. However, as centuries of imperial splendor came to an end and territorial regression began, the Ottoman elite sought salvation in one of the earliest projects of modernization. A deeply-rooted imperial state tradition enabled Ottoman bureaucrats to have the pragmatism to understand the need for reform.

Modernization in what would become Turkey—in its military, legal, and political framework—thus came to be identified with Europe. Not surprisingly, the Ottoman Empire faced major difficulties in adapting to this Western paradigm without compromising its self-esteem and Islamic pride. Under the late Ottomans, the result was a half-hearted attempt at Westernization. Not unlike the state of the Muslim Middle East today, the nineteenth century Ottoman world displayed a chaotic co-existence between traditional and modernized institutions. This situation did not change until the Westernization project gained new momentum during the first half of the twentieth century, first under the leadership of the Young Turks (1908–1918) and later under their Kemalist successors.

The modern Turkish Republic, founded in 1923 by Kemal Ataturk (1881–1938), is indeed the product of the most radical secular revolution of any state in the Islamic world. This radical aspect of secularism and nation-building in Turkey will be studied in more detail in the following sections. What should be kept in mind is that the Kemalist cultural revolution took the form of "social-engineering." In that sense, Turkish

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11 Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order,* (New York, Simon & Schuster, 1996), p. 74.

secularism and nation-building were formulated as an elitist project based on Westernization from above. Given the cultural gap between the Westernizing elite and Anatolian masses, democratization was not high on the agenda. Instead, it probably lay in the back of minds as a desirable scenario for the future.

Such Westernization from above and social engineering was also very much in tune with the global political context of the 1920s and 1930s. These were decades when democratic and liberal ideals were on the retreat across the globe. Not surprisingly, creating enlightened, Westernized, Turkish citizens out of the religious masses of Anatolia turned out to be a daunting task: a task that required an authoritarian grip on power and, perhaps more importantly, a leadership legitimized by a military victory that saved the country from foreign occupation. Such leadership legitimized by military victory against foreign occupiers and a sense of visionary nation-building is hard to find in the current political context of the Arab world.

For instance, a vexing comparison can be made to the situation in present day Iraq. Consider the following factors that set the scene in Iraq, as compared to Turkey in the 1920s and 1930s: (1) A domestic liberator such as Ataturk with high prestige and legitimacy is missing. (2) Liberation from tyranny only came as a result of Western intervention. (3) Such liberation, to make things worse, is viewed by many internal groups as external occupation. (4) Finally, the global and national expectation for democracy is strong.

In each of these ways, the situation in Iraq is more or less the opposite of Turkey under Kemalist leadership. This should not necessarily trigger unbounded pessimism. Change for the better is not only possible but also very likely in Iraq, especially in comparison to the tyranny of Saddam Hussein. However, the point is that the Turkish model is the product of a unique set of historical conditions upon which Ataturk built and may not be as easily transferable as the statements by the Bush administration proponents appear to claim. As Bernard Lewis points out in an essay titled "Why Turkey is the only Muslim Democracy":

> Turkey alone was never colonized, never subject to Imperial rule or domination, as were almost all Islamic lands of Asia and Africa…. The Turks were always masters in their house, and, indeed, in many other houses. When they were finally challenged they won their war of independence … In Turkey democratic institutions were neither imposed by the victors nor bequeathed by departing imperialists.[12]

THE UNIQUE ROLE OF ATATURK

Prior to a discussion of Turkish secularism and Turkish nationalism—the two components of the Kemalist model—it is important to reiterate the importance of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk as a factor providing a genuinely popular personality cult for the vast majority of Turks. The fact that not only national independence but also the whole modernization project is closely associated with Ataturk, leaves no mystery around his profound veneration in contemporary Turkey. As noted above, the first, and undisputed, legacy of Ataturk is national independence. Ataturk's crucial leadership in the military resistance against occupying powers between 1919–1922 still vividly resonates in the Turkish collective memory. Such refusal to surrender and triumph in the military field equates Ataturk with values such as patriotism, independence, and national sovereignty that unite all Turks.

Mustafa Kemal was the uncontested mastermind behind the military victory leading to national independence. There is no doubt that without Mustafa Kemal's military skills—already confirmed with the heroic defense of Galipoli in 1915—and his diplomatic shrewdness, the outcome of the war would have been much different. His Machiavellian handling of relations with the Bolshevik regime, assuring desperately

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12 Bernard Lewis "Why Turkey is the Only Muslim Democracy," *Middle East Quarterly,* vol. 1, no. 1, 1994, p. 15.

needed Soviet military support during the War of Independence, and his pragmatic acceptance of Muslim Indians' financial contributions for the struggle to save the Caliphate are just two examples of his diplomatic and tactical genius.[13] The general failings in both the military and diplomatic realms by Arab states over the last few decades indicate a comparable absence of such resources among the top leadership.

The political experience Mustafa Kemal gained as the military commander of the War of Independence played a crucial role in shaping his views about the social influence of religion in Anatolian society. With his great sense of timing and pragmatism, Mustafa Kemal mobilized provincial notables and pious Anatolian masses in the name of saving the Sultanate-Caliphate. In that sense, he personally witnessed the organizational strength and moral authority of local religious leaders that joined the military resistance. Indeed, the proclamation of a Turkish Republic and the following radical secularist reforms came as a surprise to most religious leaders, who had joined the resistance movement with Islamic ideals.[14]

Similarly, the pragmatic Islamism of Mustafa Kemal during the War of Independence (1919–1922) emphasized the goal of saving the Sultanate-Caliphate from the infidels' invasion and therefore efficiently mobilized all Muslim ethnic groups of Anatolia, particularly the Kurds. This was clearly illustrated in the gathering of 22 Kurdish delegates at the Erzurum Congress in 1919. As was the case of Muslim conservatives, Kurdish landlords were also surprised when Turkish nationalism came to be the defining policy of the emerging secular republic. The fact that Turkish nationalism did not engage in ethnic discrimination against Kurds but only expected them to be assimilated within the Turkish nation-state is also a clear illustration of Kemalist pragmatism.

The unique role of Mustafa Kemal is rooted in a crucial quality that appears to be missing in most of the contemporary Arab leaders, who either inherited or have clung onto power for decades. Ataturk was a multi-talented leader, whose idealism was deeply ingrained in realism. As a military leader, he illustrated this quality by defining realistic borders for the new Turkish nation-state. In the early days of the War of Independence, he had already adopted a manifesto called the 'National Pact' *(Misak-I Milli),* which determined militarily defensible borders for the future state. There was to be no room for imperial nostalgia or pan-Turkic nationalism in Turkey's borders, as he stated:

> I am neither a believer in a league of all the nations of Islam, nor even in a league of Turkish peoples. Each of us here has the right to hold his ideas, but the government must be stable with a fixed policy, grounded in facts, and with one view and one alone— to safeguard the life and independence of the nation within its frontiers. Neither sentiment nor illusion must influence our policy. Away with dreams and shadows! They have cost us dear in the past.[15]

Such realism urged Mustafa Kemal to stay away from military adventures in Macedonia or Mosul. The National Pact, which more or less corresponds to Turkey's present borders (with the exception of the Mosul province), in time, came to symbolize the sacrosanct concept of territorial integrity.

While refusing to be seduced by imperial nostalgia for lost Ottoman lands, Ataturk was still able to put in political practice the deeply rooted imperial state tradition of Turkey. His genius was in channeling the political skills and energy of the imperial state

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13 For a very comprehensive biography of Ataturk see Andrew Mango, *Ataturk,* (Woodstock, NY: Overlook, 2000).

14 Paul Dumont, 'Hojas for the Revolution: The Religious Strategy of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk,' *American Institute for the Study of the Middle Eastern Civilization Journal,* vol.1, no.3, winter, 1981, pp. 17–32.

15 Quoted in Hugh Poulton, *Top Hat, Grey Wolf and Crescent, Turkish Nationalism and the Turkish Republic,* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), p. 93.

tradition towards a new civilizational project based on Westernization. Without a centralized bureaucracy, a culture of loyalty to the state and an efficient state apparatus such radical change would certainly have failed. In that sense, what Ataturk had to focus on was nation-building, not state formation. The state, with its imperial tradition, was already at his service. In discussing the Turkish model and the uniqueness of Ataturk, it is therefore crucial to remember that, unlike many countries in the contemporary Middle East, the Turkish state has deep bureaucratic and imperial roots.

THE PECULIARITY OF TURKISH SECULARISM

More than Ataturk's personal popularity, it is the radical project of top-down secularization that continues to be a matter of sociological debate and political controversy in Turkish society. More recently, with the post–9-11 global focus on political Islam, the secular aspect of the Turkish model gained additional relevance. Since secularism appeared as a missing concept in the Islamic world, Turkey's Kemalist heritage was positively singled out.

Perhaps most importantly, secularism became a crucial question for the democratization debate in the Arab world. The fear of the Islamic alternative—the potential product of free elections in the Arab world—creates a difficult dilemma for the objective of spreading democracy in the Middle East. Will secularism and democracy be mutually exclusive in the Arab world? Does one have to come at the expense of the other? Even Iraq, despite its reputation for relatively better human capital compared to the rest of the Arab word, is not immune to these difficult questions.

The experience of the Turkish Republic, the only Muslim country coming close to the ideals of secularism and democracy in the Middle East provides interesting lessons regarding the challenge of transition to democracy without sacrificing secularism. Yet an important part of Turkey's relative success once again appears to be deeply rooted in its imperial state tradition. Turkey's success is indeed "relative" because most scholars agree that the country's secularist model is often maintained at the expense of liberal democracy.

Despite considerable scholarly focus on Turkey, a relatively unexplored aspect is the model's peculiar understanding of secularism. A comparison between Europe and Turkey may be useful in explaining the unusual characteristics of Turkish secularism. In most of Europe, secularization took root parallel to a long process of Reformation, wars of religion and finally economic development and democratization. The centuries-long and often bloody struggle between the Church and sovereign kings were an essential part of this historical process at the end of which the necessity of separating political and religious realms emerged as an imperative to avoid the devastation of wars.

At the popular level, the internalization of secularism by European masses took even longer. The emergence of a truly secular Europe became possible only after substantial progress had been made in mass education, living standards, and representative democracy. Secularism, in that sense, emerged as the outcome of an evolutionary process, during which religion slowly lost its primary relevance in shaping society and politics. To these historical factors, most Orientalists would add that Christianity, as a religion, is more conducive to secularism than the all-encompassing religion of Islam. The answer to this question requires a theological debate that goes beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice to say, it took centuries for the separation of state and church to emerge as the norm in the Christian world and there was nothing particularly harmonious and peaceful about the process.

In its Turkish context, secularism followed a different path. In contrast to Europe, there was no confrontation between state and religion. Ottoman state-religion relations had two main characteristics. Contrary to the stereotype of an Islamic theocracy, the first and most important trait of the Ottoman system was state hegemony over the religious establishment.

Ultimate authority and sovereignty rested with the Sultan and palace officials. Such authority was based on a legal framework operating independently of Islamic law. Accordingly, the Ottoman Sultan could make regulations and enact laws entirely on his own initiative. These laws, known as *Kanun,* were based on rational rather than religious principles and were enacted primarily in the spheres of public, administrative and criminal law as well as state finances.

The second characteristic of Ottoman state-religion relations was harmony. The Sultan's political hegemony over religion had to be legitimate. The Ottoman Sultans believed that only the rightful application of religion generated consent and legitimacy. In that sense, the legitimacy of Ottoman hegemony owed a great deal to Islam. Religion was the key in maintaining political control without undermining social harmony. In order to have religious legitimacy, confrontation with the religious class *(ulema)* had to be avoided. Therefore, from very early on in Ottoman history, "co-optation through integration" emerged as the best way of avoiding confrontation between state and Islam. Religion simply came to be incorporated within the bureaucratic apparatus of the state: the top of the Islamic hierarchy, represented by the *Seyhulislam* (Sheik of Islam), became part of the Imperial council. This imperial integration of 'Islam and state' was most evident in the official language used to describe the Ottoman Empire as one entity: "*din-ü devlet*"—"religion and state."[16]

The *Seyhulislam,* however, could easily be dismissed in case of any serious conflict with the Sultan. He therefore excelled in the intellectual exercise of fitting the *Kanun* within the proper Islamic framework.[17] Not surprisingly, this mechanism assured effective cooperation and harmony between state and religion. It is important to emphasize that the Islamic legitimacy of the state was not merely a symbolic matter. This is why

behind the omnipotent sovereignty of the Sultan there also existed a moral framework based on the religious duties and obligations of the state. The Sultan had to provide a good and just order for his subjects. This religious understanding amounted to a tacit social contract between state and society. Such an approach to governance took its inspiration from the Islamic concept of *hisba*—the requirement for "the pursuit of a just order and the avoidance of tyranny *(zulm).*"[18]

Although not secular, the Ottoman Empire was nevertheless far from being a theocracy. In that sense, the Young Turks and their Kemalist successors inherited a political system where the role of Islam in shaping politically important decisions was rather minimal. The state tradition and *raison d'état* were deeply rooted in the Ottoman framework. Islam certainly played a crucial role in the educational, cultural and social context. And it was precisely these areas that Kemalist secularist reforms targeted. Like Western Orientalists, the Kemalists saw in Islam the causes of social, political and economic backwardness. They complained that Islam had a theological insistence on incorporating all social and political forces within the religious realm.

It is hard to deny that Islam and particularly the widespread religious sects and brotherhoods represented a worldview that penetrated into every aspect of daily life. Faced with such an all-encompassing force, the Kemalist model aimed at nothing less than the eradication of parochial allegiances in order to constitute a society that would function according to rational rather than religious parameters. Ataturk's secularism therefore turned into a cultural war against the social power of Islam. Religion had to be strictly confined to the private sphere.

In that sense, the Turkish concept of secularism *(laiklik)* became part of a republican revolution aimed

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16 Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey,* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1964), p. 185.

17 Most of these laws were later formulated as *Ferman*—sultanic decree. Not surprisingly, *Fermans* always contained a formula stating that the enactment conformed to the Sheriat and previously established Kanuns, Berkes, p. 92.

18 For the concept of Hisba see Serif Mardin, "Freedom in an Ottoman Perspective," in State, Democracy and the Military: Turkey in the 1980s, Mertin Heper and Ahmet Evin, (eds.), (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1988).

at transforming society. As such, it is much closer to the revolutionary paradigm of French *laïcité* than the evolutionary and more liberal tradition of Anglo-Saxon secularism. Similar to post-Revolutionary France, *laicism,* in its Kemalist context, became part of a republican revolutionary project with strong anti-clerical proclivities against the social, cultural and political symbols of the *ancien régime.*

Not surprisingly, the fact that Ottoman political legitimacy was symbolically rooted in Islam was unacceptable to the Kemalist founding fathers. The Sultanate and Caliphate had to be abolished because they were pre-national Islamic and Imperial institutions inhibiting the development of a secular national identity. The Kemalist elite therefore created a secular Republic where there would be no Islamic legitimization of political rule. Legitimacy was to belong to the Turkish nation.

There was, however, a crucial exception to revolutionary change. Despite this radical break with the past, in one crucial aspect the Kemalist Republic was to show remarkable continuity with Ottoman patterns: secularism in modern Turkey did not attempt to strictly separate state and religion. Instead, the Kemalist regime maintained a firm control over the religious establishment. Ankara, like imperial Istanbul, sustained governmental monopoly over Islamic functions and there was to be no change in the incorporation of religious personnel into state bureaucracy.

Understandably, the "secularist" republic wanted to control Islam even more effectively than the "Islamic" Ottoman Empire. The Kemalists were fully aware that any kind of opposition to secularist reforms could only be mobilized in religious form. They, therefore, feared that the Caliphate could become the rallying point of a counter-revolutionary Islamic backlash. This is why, after the abolition of the Sultanate-Caliphate and all other Islamic institutions of the Ottoman Empire, a new Republican governmental agency, called the Presidency of Religious Affairs (PRA), was established in 1925.

Today, the PRA continues to supervise and regulate the religious realm in Turkey. Its president is appointed by the Council of Ministers upon the nomination by the Prime Minister. Thus, in striking continuity with the past, the religious establishment remained under the direct supervision of central authority. It is also important to note that the incorporation of the PRA into the state apparatus allowed the centralized nation-state to greatly expand its control over the religious establishment.

Indeed, with hundreds of offices *(muftuluk)* at the province and sub-province levels, the Presidency of Religious Affairs is in charge of administrating and supervising all religious institutions and services. The PRA is also entrusted with the task of appointing imams, preachers, muezzins and all other religious personnel. The secular Republican regime also exercises political control over all establishments specializing in the instruction of men of religion. The teachers, textbooks, and curricula of all religious schools are under the supervision of the Directorate-General of Religious Education, a branch of the Ministry of Education. Like the Ottoman *ulema,* all religious personnel are state functionaries paid by the government.

As a result of its supremacy over the religious establishment, the fledgling Kemalist regime was able to use religious education in enhancing national and civic consciousness. In fact, in their attempt to generate a collective sense of Turkish national identity, the founding fathers did not wish to be deprived of the potentially constructive role a 'civic' and reformed Islam could play. Since the pious Anatolian masses were likely to react negatively against Ankara's secularist reforms, an instrumentalist approach towards religion had considerable appeal. In practice, this meant placing a reformed, civic type of official Islam at the service of citizenship building. Such a plan made an effective separation of state and religion all the more difficult.

The instrumentalization of religion was particularly apparent in textbooks used in the education of Islam. For instance, as early as in the late 1920s, a certain number of

clerics were commissioned to compose new books of religious teaching adapted to the demands of Kemalist authorities. The new textbooks of religion prescribed the love of the fatherland, obedience to orders, zealous work, strict compliance with military rules, respect for the Turkish flag, submission to the laws and to the state requirements, sacrifice of one's life for the safety of the nation, and other practices of devotion towards the state.[19]

Other textbooks published during that period aired similar prescriptions: a Muslim truly worthy of that name had to love his country, pay his taxes regularly, respect the laws of the Republic, submit to the progressive guidance of the state officials, do his utmost to learn modern sciences, apply scrupulously the principles of good hygiene, consult a doctor in case of illness to avoid being the cause of epidemics, and work energetically for the development of the country.[20] In short, the main responsibility of a Muslim was to become a model citizen. Educational institutions such as the Schools for Preachers and Chiefs of Prayers (*Imam Hatip Okullari*) were also opened with the objective of producing religious personnel equipped with such a vision.

It is important to note that such instrumentalization of religion in Turkish secularism is related to the "social engineering" aspect of Kemalism. Out of an Anatolian community that defined itself primarily on religious terms, a secular Turkish national identity had to be created. In fact, only when analyzed in the framework of nation-building and Westernization does Kemalist secularism gain greater coherence.

TURKEY'S DIFFERING TRANSFORMATION: DEMOCRATIC GRADUALISM AND TOP-DOWN SECULARIZATION

Secularization, Westernization and nation-building were all integral parts of Turkey's radical transformation.

Democracy, on the other hand, was to come only gradually. The Kemalist regime's secular nationalism easily won the hearts and minds of the educated urban elite. Yet, in the Turkish context of the 1930s, any attempt to win the hearts and minds of the Anatolian masses necessitated the use of traditional and religious symbols that were anathema to secularist modernizers. Unavoidably, this situation created an "elitist disconnect" between Kemalist Westernizers and rural masses. Faced with such a predicament, the secularist cultural revolution failed to mobilize and embrace the vast majority of the rural countryside. "Secularization from above" therefore emerged as the only alternative for implementing a progressive program.

Holding free elections in this political context would have been political suicide. Ataturk, with his keen sense of timing, did not believe in democratic shock therapy. The vicissitudes of democracy were too obvious for a country where experiment with parliamentary representation had it roots in the 1870s. The Ottoman, Young Turk, and Kemalist modernizers were certainly influenced by the French Revolution and adopted many traits of French enlightenment in the education system. However, they also saw in French democracy the tribulations of elections, mass mobilization, and unstable republics. Thus, it did not take very long for Ataturk to realize that holding free elections would derail the whole modernization process. A very cautious approach to the adoption of democracy thus emerged as an important dimension of the Turkish model.

Democracy in Turkey, in the words of Bernard Lewis, came to be seen as "a strong medicine, which had to be administered in small and gradually increased doses. Too large and sudden a dose could kill the patient."[21] An important fact, which few American proponents of the Turkish model acknowledge, is that the first free elections were not held in Turkey until 1950, 27 years

19 Xavier Jacob, *L'Enseignement Religieux dans la Turquie Moderne,* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1982), pp. 18–19.
20 Bahattin Aksit, "Islamic Education in Turkey Medrese Reform in Late Ottoman times and Imam-Hatip schools in the Republic," in Richard Tapper ed., *Islam in Modern Turkey* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 1991), pp. 160–162.
21 Bernard Lewis, "Why Turkey is the Only Muslim Democracy," *Middle East Quarterly,* vol. 1, no. 1, March 1994, p. 17.

after the foundation of the modern Turkish Republic. In fact, the possibility and necessity for multi-party free elections emerged only when the post-World War II global dynamics forced the country to make a choice. In order to find its place in the "free world" and to qualify for the Marshall plan, Ankara could no longer postpone the transition to democratic rule. By then, almost three decades of single-party Kemalist rule had accomplished a major cultural revolution. Yet, as previously mentioned, an important part of these achievements were confined to the urban areas.

Indeed, an often unnoticed fact about Turkey's Kemalist model is that it met with major domestic resistance in Anatolia when first put in place. Between 1923 and 1938, it took the suppression of a long series of Kurdish and Islamist rebellions for a sense of Kemalist stability to be established. This effort at modernization, nationalization and secularization from above found its ironic expression in the Republican People's Party (RPP) maxim: "For the People, Despite the People."

During their 27 years in power, the secularist drive of the Kemalist founding fathers first targeted the Islamic institutions within the state apparatus. The abolition of the Sultanate and the proclamation of the Turkish Republic in 1923 were followed with the abrogation of the Caliphate a year later. During their fight against Kurdish and Islamic reactions, the Kemalist ruling elite prioritized education and modernization. Instead of taking electoral risks, the Kemalist political center believed in progress through the pursuit of scientific knowledge. Their political and social agenda was designed to replace the God-centered traditional social life of Anatolia with an enlightened public mind. Such positivist determination is clearly illustrated in Ataturk's own words:

> I flatly refuse to believe that today, in the luminous presence of science, knowledge, and civilization in all its aspects, there exists,

in the civilized community of Turkey, men so primitive as to seek their material and moral well-being from the guidance of one or another sheik…the Republic of Turkey can not be the land of sheiks, dervishes, disciples and lay brothers. The straightest, truest sect is the sect of civilization. It is enough to do what civilization requires.[22]

This view of "civilization" required modernization and, most importantly, secularization. Democratization could wait for another generation. Once the Sultanate and the Caliphate were abolished, secularist reforms continued with the radical re-modeling of the Turkish legal system along European lines. Prior to these Kemalist reforms, despite extensive secularization of public law during the nineteenth century, the duality of the Ottoman legal system still allowed family law to be conducted by the *ulema* in accordance with Islamic precepts. This legal framework was radically changed with the adoption of the Swiss civil and Italian penal codes in 1926. With the new civil code, the family law was completely secularized.

The secularization of the state was only the first wave of Kemalist reforms. Since Kemalism was, above all, a project aiming at civilizational change, even greater importance was attached to the replacement of Islamic-Ottoman cultural symbols with European ones. The second wave of secularist reforms leading to the emergence of the Turkish model can therefore be interpreted as the symbol-oriented, sartorial aspect of modernization. It is also in this stage that we see the clearest patterns of secularization from above. Measures taken to replace the fez with the European style hat—the "hat revolution" as it is known in Turkey—and the restriction of religious attire to the mosque fall under in this category. Similar symbol-oriented policies included the adoption of Western calendar, clock, numerals and weight measures, and the ban on reciting the call to prayer *(ezan)* in Arabic. A government decree in 1935 made Sunday the official

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22 Quoted in Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1961,) pp. 410–411.

day of rest instead of Friday, the traditional day of observance in the Muslim world.

The gender issue was also at the heart of Kemalism's sweeping secularization. Radical changes related to women's rights were particularly important in changing Turkey's civilizational image. Kemalist policies in the field not only consisted of formal emancipation such as the right to vote and eligibility to public office, but also the active promotion of new role models such as professional women, women pilots, opera singers and even beauty queens.[23] Although there was no general ban, the government also prohibited head covering and veiling for those working in state institutions.

The adoption of the Latin alphabet in 1928 was probably the most multidimensional of all Kemalist reforms. This certainly had a 'civilizational' as much as a 'symbolic' meaning. While the argument based on the phonetic compatibility of the Turkish language with the Latin rather than the Arabic alphabet is probably correct, it is hard to imagine that such a drastic reform can be solely legitimized on technical grounds. One can logically argue that the abandonment of Arabic letters can best be analyzed within the framework of a 'civilizational' transformation, aimed at loosening the Kemalist Republic's ties with the Ottoman-Islamic past. The cultural and 'civilizational' symbolism of the new alphabet was clearly expressed in the words of a prominent member of the Kemalist intelligentsia in the 1930s: "The goal is to unite Turkey with Europe. Thanks to alphabet reform the country will irrevocably be forced to face modernity."[24] Following the same logic, the next step after alphabet reform was to purge Arabic and Persian words from the Turkish language.

As far as the educational system was concerned, primary and secondary schools were also completely secularized through the Law on the Unification of Education enacted in 1924. The unification of education under this law led to the abolition of the *medreses* (religious colleges) and Sufi brotherhoods. One of the most significant reforms in the educational arena was the formation of People's Houses and Village Institutes, which were to instill positivist, nationalist values among rural segments of Anatolia.[25]

In short, it is important to note that in such a transitional juncture of Turkish history, secularism represented much more than a constitutional principle separating state and religion. Instead, it was perceived as a crucial component of the Turkish nation, as it was 'imagined' by Kemalists. Secularization also turned into a positivist weapon used to suppress the undesired remnants of the Ottoman-Islamic past.

However, transition to democracy after 1946 was to seriously change the political and societal dynamics of the Republic. That the Kemalist revolution did not win the hearts and minds of the Anatolian countryside became obvious in 1950, when the opposition Democrat Party came to power in a landslide after the first free elections in modern Turkish history. An important part of the reaction against the political party carrying Ataturk's legacy had it roots in the elitist disconnect between 1923–1950.

The nature of the Kemalist cultural revolution was so radical that what is often perceived as the rising visibility of Islam in Turkish society since 1950 can simply be explained as the natural outcome of gradual democratization. The traditional culture of the Anatolian periphery therefore gradually made inroads to the Kemalist political center. Not surprisingly, the gradual democratization of state-society relations caused a healthy departure from aggressive *laicism.* Even after the first military intervention in 1960, which sought to re-establish the progressive Kemalist agenda, a quick return to free elections and democracy became unavoidable.

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23 Nilufer Gole, *The Forbidden Modern, Civilization and Veiling,* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1993), pp. 71–74.
24 Yunus Nadi, cited in Feroz Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey,* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 82.
25 M. Asim Karaomerlioglu, "The People's Houses and the Cult of the Peasant in Turkey," *Middle Eastern Studies,* vol. 34, no. 4, October 1998, pp. 67–69.

Perhaps more importantly, the opening of the political arena to multi-party competition assured that the mosque would not develop into the "only" source of opposition, as it is the case in most Arab autocracies. As democracy took hold, particularly after the liberal Turkish Constitution of 1961, Turkish politics began to reflect the rightwing and leftwing ideological cleavages of Western democracies. The ideological climate of the Cold War also helped. A domestic polarization along Islamic-Secularist or Turkish-Kurdish identity lines was avoided thanks to the fact that Islamic tendencies found their place in rightwing political movements while Kurdish dissent moved towards the radical left. As a result, throughout the 1960s and 1970s polarization occurred along ideological lines. And when political polarization turned into street violence and anarchy the military did not hesitate to intervene twice, in 1971 and 1980.

It was only after the more radical 1980 military intervention and the end of the Cold War that Turkey's political cleavages would rediscover their identity dimensions. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Kurdish nationalism and Islam came to challenge the Kemalist identity of the republic. What became increasingly obvious in the 1990s was that a return to the secularist-nationalist Kemalist paradigm was far from providing the liberal and democratic answers that Turkish society needed.

LESSONS FROM TURKEY'S EXPERIENCE

Turkey's imperial tradition, the role of Ataturk and the Kemalist understanding of secularism clearly illustrate the *sui generis* nature of the Turkish model. A contemporary attempt at similar reforms to what went on in Turkey under Ataturk would undoubtedly face serious legitimacy and implementation problems in the Arab world. Such radical reforms would be perceived as anachronistic, authoritarian, and culturally insensitive, especially for political systems aspiring to become democracies. A softer and less militant effort at secularization thus appears the only feasible way of winning the hearts and minds of millions of Muslims in the Islamic world.

The United States should certainly promote political reforms in the Arab world. However, it is not hard to imagine that the Kurdish and Islamic rebellions of the 1930s against Ankara would have been much stronger had Kemalism been perceived as a foreign attempt at nation-building and modernization. The U.S. should keep this point in mind when exerting pressure during nation building in Iraq and in its attempts to influence the choice of leadership within the Arab world. The U.S. goal in Iraq and in the wider Middle East may well be democratization from bottom-up rather than secularization from above. However, the perception that such pressure is coming from the United States— or by local leaders favored by external forces—can undermine the whole project.

The kind of elitist disconnect that Kemalist modernizers faced in the 1920s and 1930s need not be the case for contemporary Arab reformers. The Middle East in 2003 is a place where the popular expectation for participatory democracy is much higher. An elitist and secularist agenda of nation building similar to Ataturk's Turkey is no longer feasible, nor really desirable. Instead of a top-down process of modernization, the U.S. and the international community would much prefer to see a bottom-up wave of democratization in the Arab world, motivated by a "For the people, With the People" spirit.

Turkey's experience with democratization also indicates that a better balance between democracy, secularism and Islam can be found if political liberalization is adopted gradually. Ideally, such an agenda should be accompanied with economic development and investments in human capital. Yet even when free elections and democracy came to be fully adopted after 1950, the Kemalist military remained vigilant in order to assure that democracy would not come at the expense of secularism.

In Iraq, with the ascendance of Shia revival, it should not come as a surprise if the United States shares the Kemalist perception of political Islam as the most problematic dimension of democratization. Such

apprehension is very likely to render a placid separation of political and religious realms politically unrealistic. With democratization, Iraqi and Middle Eastern political dynamics may evolve along the lines of a polarized zero-sum game, with either the state dominating religion, or religious conservatives overtaking the state. Such dynamics would certainly not be conducive to a Western style of secularism based on separation of state and religion. This is a familiar dilemma for Turkish modernizers.

Therefore, given the risk posed by political Islam in the Arab world, an early stage of state control over the Islamic establishment may have to be tolerated. In other words, at least in the short-run, governmental supervision of the religious establishment will prove more prudent than total separation of religion and state along Western lines of secularism.

The most positive dimension of the Turkish model is democracy. Yet it is important to remember that what characterized this process in Turkey is democratic gradualism and not democratic shock therapy. With mixed success, Kemalists targeted investments in education as the road to a successful transition to democracy. They failed to embrace masses but they had noble goals such as: improving literacy rates, living standards, gender equality and the creation of a middle class that would itself push for a gradual process of democratization. Democratization also proved crucial in Turkey in that it led to the multiplication of opposition alternatives. The mosque was therefore saved from becoming the only source of mobilization for opposition to the ruling party.

Turkey's Kemalist transformation between 1923 and 1950 thus conveys three major lessons of major relevance for transition to democracy in the Arab world: (1) Free elections should be seen as the culmination of the democratization process, rather than the inaugu-

ration; (2) A clear separation of mosque and state may not be feasible, especially in the short-run; and (3) Establishing a positivist education system should be the top priority.

This last aspect of Turkey's modernization can be a guiding factor for the United States in the attempt to bring about orderly and gradual democratization in the Arab world. Indeed, reforms in education systems and national curricula will prove crucial for creating a domestic constituency that would itself demand democratization. Education reform would tackle the essential problem of "human development" that plagues the Arab world.[26] As the UNDP Arab Human Development Report made it abundantly clear, problems such as illiteracy and the gender gap have to be urgently addressed. It is worth remembering that out of 280 million Arabs, 65 million adults are illiterate and that two-thirds of this figure are women. In an environment where there is no civil society and only the clergy can mobilize pious masses with no basic education, holding elections can become a recipe for demagogues and potential radical Islamic rule.

Despite the relative success of Turkey's gradual democratization, the problem of Kemalist modernization manifests itself in the contemporary challenges facing Turkey. With the benefit of hindsight, one can argue that behind the façade of Westernized nation-building, the repression of Kurdish and Islamic identities remained the Achilles' heel of the Kemalist project. The present relevance of the Kurdish question in both Turkey and Iraq requires additional focus on the issue of nation-building. With its assimilation-oriented model, Turkey can provide crucial lessons in this field as well.

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26 "Human development" is a concept that goes beyond the rise and fall of national incomes. Encompassing much broader dynamics, human development is about creating an environment in which people can develop their full potential and lead productive, creative lives in accord with their needs and interests.

IV. Turkish Nationalism: A Civic or Ethnic Model?

Parallel to secularism, Turkish nationalism has been another crucial component of the Kemalist model. Any analysis of the Turkish model would therefore be incomplete without a clear understanding of Turkish nationalism, its tensions with the Kurdish question, and the problems faced with non-Muslim minorities in Turkey.

The literature on nationalism often refers to a conceptual difference in the nature of citizenship along 'civic' and 'ethnic' models. In the case of the so-called Western civic nationalism, national identity is understood as something established by legitimate membership in a constituted political state; members of the nation are understood first and foremost through their political identities as citizens. In the ethnic model of nationalism, national identity is instead defined on the basis of primordialist criteria such as common descent or genealogy. According to this influential typology, the German case is the most frequently cited type of ethnic nationalism, while France represents civic nationalism.

Turkish nationalism has both civic and ethnic dimensions. The fact that a deeply rooted Ottoman state tradition already existed prior to Kemalist-Turkish nation-building allowed Turkish nationalism to incorporate an important civic dimension, typical of state-led nation building experiences. In other words, the historical presence of a state-centered political culture and tradition facilitated a code of nationalism and citizenship along political and territorial lines, rather than ethnic roots.[27] In that sense, the Kemalist understanding of Turkish nationalism did not formulate an elaborate ethnic definition of "Turkishness." Instead, it defined the fundamental elements of the Turkish nation in terms of a "territorial, linguistic, and political unity strengthened by a sense of common roots, morals and history."[28]

However, behind this civic façade, Turkish citizenship and nationalism remained intimately linked to religion. Islam continued to play a thinly disguised role in determining what can be cynically termed "authentic Turkishness." Despite the secularist policies of the

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27 Ethnic nationalism was not a concept close to the hearts and minds of Ottoman statesmen. The Sultan and his political establishment were primarily concerned with preserving the political and territorial integrity of a multi-national empire. The cosmopolitan ethos of the Ottoman world weighed heavily in their decision-making and there was no inclination toward formulating a nationalist agenda, which would have worked against the imperial goal of holding multi-cultural domains together. It took considerable territorial loss, nationalist separatisms and ensuing demographic changes for the Ottoman state to eventually endorse a less cosmopolitan identity for itself. At the end of the day, the Turkish core within the Ottoman political establishment and intelligentsia had no other alternative than seizing upon an imitated nationalism that had to be invented and constructed from scratch.

28 Although Ataturk's reference to common lineage and roots can be interpreted as having ethnic-racial implications, his popular maxim—"Happy is whoever says 'I am Turkish'"—seems to prioritize a personal identification with 'Turkishness' rather than an ethnic or racial scrutiny of individual citizens. In that sense, 'becoming Turkish' always remained an option for the Kurds, or any other non-Turkish Muslim ethnic group.

Kemalists government, religion continued (as in Ottoman times) to play a crucial role in the conceptualization of national identity. For instance, in the case of Kurds, their Muslim identity was the main reason leading Ankara to believe that assimilation to "Turkishness" was not only possible but also a necessity for the integrity of the nation.

In that sense, the urge to assimilate the Kurds stood in stark contrast to the eagerness with which non-Muslims were recognized as official minorities. In continuity with the Ottoman past, religion—rather than ethnicity or language—continued to determine official minority status in the modern secular Turkish Republic. Armenians, Greeks and Jews were once again recognized as official minorities, while no Muslim ethnic group could qualify for a comparable status. Moreover, unlike in the case of assimilated Kurds, the loyalty of non-Muslim minorities is still a problematic issue in contemporary Turkey. This is partly why the secular Turkish Republic has no non-Muslim officials in its civilian or military bureaucracy. Indeed, even a pronounced sense of loyalty to the Turkish nation, or energetic acceptance of the Turkish nationalist cause may not be enough for non-Muslim Turkish citizens to gain upward mobility in sensitive state jobs.

The historically and religiously determined mental test of Turkishness is indeed a very hard one to pass for non-Muslims. As Bernard Lewis argues, "One may speak of Christian Arabs, but a Christian Turk is an absurdity and a contradiction in terms. Even after thirty years of the secular Republic, a non-Muslim in Turkey may be called a Turkish citizen, but never a 'Turk.'"[29] In that sense, non-Muslim groups (Greeks, Armenians and Jews) are, even today, called "Turk" only in respect of citizenship but not nationality. Such implicit reliance on Muslim identity in judging "Turkishness" might seem paradoxical given the radically secularist

policies of the Kemalist state. Yet one of the simplest explanations for this effective yet subtle discrimination is to be found in the Ottoman tradition.

While seeming to reject its Ottoman and Islamic heritage, the secular Republic adopted an official understanding of nationality reminiscent of the Ottoman *millet* system. The crucial difference, however, was the fact that the newly formed nation-state lacked the Ottoman ethos of cosmopolitan tolerance. The secular Turkish Republic perceived all Muslim ethnic communities as natural members of the Turkish *millet,* and gave a rather unequal minority status to non-Muslim communities. In that sense, the willingness to assimilate all the Muslim groups into a larger Turkish identity failed to embrace non-Muslims.

Discrimination was thinly disguised. For instance, starting with the early years of the Republic, Christians and Jews were excluded from military schools and academies. Not only did public sector hiring policies officially begin to discriminate against non-Muslims but also certain state organization, such as the Turkish Railways and the Anatolian Press Agency, laid-off their non-Muslim personnel. In 1939, soon after the outbreak of the Second World War, the government mobilized all Jewish, Greek and Armenian males between 18 and 45 years old and sent them to special camps in Anatolia.

The most systematic governmental discrimination against non-Muslim minorities occurred in the framework of the 1942 Wealth Tax *(Varlik Vergisi),* which targeted those people who allegedly made excessive war-time profits.[30] Although the tax was supposed to be levied without any discrimination, in practice it was almost exclusively used against non-Muslims. Due to the absence of proper standards, non-Muslims had to pay an arbitrary amount that often was a substantial part of their total wealth. Defaulters—all of them

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29 Bernard Lewis, "Turkey: Westernization," in G.E. von Grunebaum (ed.), *Unity and Variety in Muslim Civilization,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), p. 326.
30 See David Brown in Foreword to Faik Okte, *The Tragedy of the Turkish Capital Tax,* (London: Croom Helm, 1964).

Greeks, Jews or Armenians—were deported to labor camps in eastern Anatolia. Needless to say the 1942 Capital Tax law came as a shock to the non-Muslim bourgeoisie of the secular Republic, who painfully experienced the religious discrimination involved in the implementation of economic nationalism.

Such official and blatant discrimination has since been absent. Yet in its wake, the numbers of non-Muslim minorities has also shrunk tremendously. This was particularly the case of the Greek minority of Istanbul. Turkish citizens of Greek origin numbered 120,000 in the 1930s. Starting with the mid-1950s this community began to be negatively affected by the deterioration in Turco-Greek relations, mostly because of the "Cyprus Question." Today, only 3,000 of this once thriving Greek community remain in the city.

It is surprising that despite its democratic and secular credentials, Turkey has a very difficult time integrating its non-Muslim citizens to its political and bureau-cratic system. As previously mentioned, the mental identification of Turkish identity with Muslim religion appears to be an ongoing problem. Ironically, in less democratic and less secular Arab countries, such as Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Syria and Egypt, Christian minorities appear to have a much better chance of being accepted as Arab citizens with access to state jobs. Turkey, therefore, fails to provide a positive model to Arab countries when it comes to embracing its non-Muslim citizens.

THE KURDISH QUESTION

Another challenge to the civic dimension of Turkish nationalism came when the assimilationist and cen-tralist efforts encountered active Kurdish resistance. As a reaction to the Kurdish rebellions, Turkish nation-building displayed a particularly strong eth-nic character during the first twenty years of the Republic. Indeed, of all the Muslim ethnic communi-ties of the fledgling Turkish nation-state, it was prob-ably the Kurdish notables of eastern Anatolia who

regretted most the passing of the Ottoman age. This was hardly surprising since the Kurdish provinces enjoyed quasi-autonomy under the Ottomans. Large-scale land tenure and feudalism differentiated the Kurdish provinces from the rest of Anatolia. Despite Imperial attempts at imposing central authority throughout the nineteenth century, tax collection and regular conscription remained virtually absent in Kurdish regions.

In the imperial unity between Kurdish provinces and Istanbul, Islam played a cementing role. The Caliphate, especially under the reign of Abdulhamid II (1876–1908), was at the heart of the Ottoman-Kurdish alliance. In addition to Islamic solidarity, Armenian nationalism in eastern Anatolia had also strengthened Ottoman and Kurdish military co-oper-ation throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. Abdulhamid II was particularly successful in exploiting both Islam and the Armenian factor in his co-optation of Kurdish sheiks and notables. By adopting a similar policy during the 1919–1922 War of Independence, Mustafa Kemal emphasized the anti-Armenian and Islamic nature of the resistance against Christian invaders and received strong military and political support from Kurdish notables and religious leaders. However, once military victory was at hand and the common enemy uniting Turks and Kurds had been eliminated, there was to be no room for a Kurdish 'exception' to soften the Turkish nation-building project.

The Ottoman *modus vivendi,* based on quasi-autonomy for Kurdish provinces, was certainly not acceptable for Ankara. The Kemalist elite wanted to establish nothing less than a centralized Turkish nation-state. Thus, the Kurds, with their deeply rooted cultural, political and economic traditions, became the primary targets of not only nation-building, but also state formation. In other words, for the first time in their history, Kurdish provinces had to come to terms with centralized state functions such as tax collection, land registration, public administration and conscription. It is, therefore, not surprising that state

formation and nation-building encountered their most serious resistance in Kurdish provinces.

It is under such circumstances that, between 1925 and 1938, the Turkish army had to combat seventeen rebellions instigated by Kurdish tribal and religious leaders. In analyzing these Kurdish rebellions of the 1920s and 1930s, it is important to remember that the Kemalist project of nation-building subscribed to a version of nationalism that did not advocate ethnic purity or racial authenticity. Turkishness came to be defined as an all-inclusive identity, based on a common national territory and language. However, it is equally important to note that Turkish nationalism displayed an 'ethnic' dimension when its assimilationist efforts were challenged. Indeed, it seems that especially from the late 1920s to the mid-1930s governmental practices departed from a civic understanding of Turkish nationalism.

Understandably, the Kurdish uprisings were perceived as an existential threat to the very foundations of the nascent nation-state. They exacerbated the insecurity of the Kemalist regime. Assimilation, under such circumstances, gained an authoritarian and ethnic dimension. The most dramatic display of ethnic Turkish nationalism occurred in the aftermath of the Kurdish rebellions against the Kemalist Republic. In 1934, a law regulating the distribution and settlement of Turkey's population was enacted in the Grand National Assembly.

The Settlement Law (No. 2510) divided Turkey into three zones.[31] The first zone, where migration and settlement were permitted, was composed of communities determined to belong to Turkish culture and ethnicity. The second zone was composed of communities in which Turkish was not the dominant language, but which were considered culturally Turkish. This group included past immigrants from the Balkans and the Caucasus, who were considered Turkish even if ethnically they might have been

Albanians, Circassians, Pomaks, Tatars and others. These people had varying levels of fluency in the Turkish language for a variety of reasons. In respect to the new immigrants, the law authorized the government to determine who would be considered "as belonging to the Turkish culture." Finally, the third zone was composed of communities who "neither spoke Turkish nor belonged to Turkish culture" (i.e. Kurds and Arabs). These regions were closed to civilian settlement and migration for security reasons. In the second and third zones, the development of the Turkish language and culture was to be supported through official settlement and migration policies.

Both the 1934 Settlement Law and the 1942 Capital Tax were important examples of Turkish nationalism's ethnic dimension. Both instances went beyond the understanding of civic equality and clearly displayed elements of ethnic nationalism. Especially in the case of the sizable Kurdish minority in eastern Anatolia, the escalation of military conflict exacerbated the authoritarian and ethnic dimension of assimilationist efforts. As a result, Turkish nationalism developed an official understanding, which from the mid-1920s until the early-1990s denied the existence of the ethnic Kurds on Turkish territory. In an effort to create a "purely Turkish" state, Kurdish was banned from public use. The ethnic and political resistance of Kurdish communities was equated with reactionary politics, tribal resistance and regional backwardness.

As previously mentioned, the suppression of Kurdish identity remained one of the most problematic aspects of Kemalist nation-building. Each attempt at forced assimilation and brutal repression of Kurdish dissent led to an increased sense of ethnic awareness among the Kurds. The latest example came in the wake of the 1980 military coup, as the army strongly suppressed Kurdish provinces suspected of separatism. Toward the mid-1980s, such policies and a degree of foreign instigation had provided an ideal breeding ground for resentful Kurdish nationalism. Between

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31 For a full text of the Law, see *The Republic of Turkey Official Gazette,* June 21, no.2733, 1934.

1984 and 1999, Turkey had to fight a bloody counterinsurgency war against Kurdish separatist rebels. As the next section on the crisis of the Turkish model will explain, the military largely defeated the rebels, but the Kurdish region was left smoldering.

Today, the Kurds yearn for recognition of their existence and cultural rights and for some degree of autonomy over their local affairs. Yet many Turks—including parts of the security establishment and members of nationalist groups—believe that any such concessions would lead down a slippery slope to the division of Turkey. In many ways, the Kurdish issue continues to generate a sense of domestic and international insecurity for the Turkish Republic. In its most extreme form, this sense of insecurity turns into a fear of disintegration. And it reinforces the ethnic dimension of Turkey's unity at the expense of multicultural civic nationalism.

The most recent example of Turkey's insecurity about the Kurdish issue caught international attention during the U.S.-led war to topple the regime in Iraq. The overwhelming majority of Turks justified their opposition to this war on grounds ranging from religious solidarity with a Muslim neighbor, to skepticism about American regional hegemony. But when it came to the Turkish military and civilian bureaucracy, there was no doubt that the Kurdish question was the most troubling issue.

In fact, ever since the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, the spatial distribution of the Kurds—today stretching across four states in the region, (12 to 15 million in Turkey, 4–5 million in Iraq, 5–6 million in Iran and 1 million in Syria)—had important implications for Turkish foreign policy. For instance, the seventeen Kurdish rebellions of the 1925–1938 era played a major role in curbing Ankara's enthusiasm in pursuing territorial claims over the oil-rich Mosul and Kirkuk in northern Iraq. The fledgling Republic was very eager to have these lands as part of Turkey. However, it did not take very long for the British Foreign Office to conveniently determine that

these diplomatically disputed territories should become part of modern Iraq, administered under British Mandate.

The loss of Mosul and Kirkuk has left a deep mark on Turkish collective memory. To this day, the majority of Turks believe British forces instigated the Kurdish rebellions. The British Foreign Office, it is argued, wanted to demonstrate the difficulties involved in ruling over a large Kurdish area and thus deter the Turks from pursuing their claim on Mosul. Interestingly, more than resentment over the loss of an oil-rich region, it is this British role in inciting Kurdish uprisings that still resonates in the Turkish nationalist psyche. As a result, the idea that imperialist forces are supporting Kurdish separatism became conventional wisdom in Turkey. Imbued with the painful memory of Western powers partitioning Ottoman-Turkish lands, the Kurdish question came to be seen as the last chapter of a conspiracy written in Western capitals.

During the 1984–1999 wave of Kurdish uprisings, the familiar Turkish reflex of looking for foreign instigation re-emerged. Ankara's suspicions were compounded as the European Union blamed Turkey for suppressing the Kurds and saw Kurdish activists as freedom fighters. Making things worse was the American decision to incite the Iraqi Kurds to rebel against Baghdad in the wake of the 1991 first Gulf War. Unprotected, the Kurds were brutally suppressed by Saddam Hussein's partially defeated, yet still very effective war machine. More than a million-and-half Kurds had to flee towards their only sanctuary: the mountains. Neither Turkey nor Iran was willing to totally absorb such a magnitude of potentially troublesome refugees.

In the absence of a better alternative, Turkey reluctantly accepted to house an American and British initiative that enforced a no-fly zone in northern Iraq for protecting Iraqi Kurds. At the same time, throughout the 1990s, Ankara complained that northern Iraq had become a safe-haven for Turkey's Kurdish separatists. Making things worse was the formation of a

quasi-independent Kurdish entity in northern Iraq under a Western umbrella housed by Turkey. This strategy ran totally counter to Turkey's traditional Iraq policy, which favored a strong Baghdad that could control its Kurdish population.

By 2003, after spending more than a decade in finally suppressing its restive Kurds, Ankara feared that an American invasion of Iraq would revive Kurdish nationalism, or result in massive refugee inflows. Such security concerns managed to shadow Turkey's cooperation with its most important strategic ally. Today, as Ankara looks across the border into a post-Saddam Iraq, it sees another group of Kurds making a bid to entrench Kurdish autonomy. They are poised to take over Kirkuk's oil wealth and Turkish analysts worry that they will use it to fund Kurdish nationalist ambitions.[32] Not surprisingly, this echoes ominously across Turkey and revives historical memories of Western powers inciting ethnic rebellions.

Yet such fears also betray a deep lack of self-confidence in Ankara. In reality, the majority of Turkey's Kurds seek only recognition of their existence as an ethnic community and some cultural, linguistic and local administrative rights. Ironically, if the Turkish government were to choose to improve the cultural rights and economic standards of its own Kurds, that would leave Turkey largely immune to what happens in Iraq. It is, after all, primarily Turkey's failure to meet Kurdish cultural rights that renders the Turkish Kurds so vulnerable to events in northern Iraq and constantly open to manipulation by Ankara's regional opponents. Unfortunately, the sight of American and Kurdish forces patrolling the cities of Kirkuk and Mosul is only worsening Turkish nightmares about Western manipulation and Kurdish independence. This may become a self-fulfilling prophecy if Turkey continues to index all its strategic decisions to the Kurdish question.

Today, in post-war Iraq, a federative solution to the Kurdish question appears to be the most feasible scenario. Yet Turkey made it clear before the war that it would not be pleased by such an outcome. In fact, Ankara may even seek to exert political influence against a federative Iraq divided along ethnic and sectarian lines. In the eyes of Americans, the recent discovery of armed Turkish Special Forces penetrating deep into Northern Iraq raises questions as to the goals of their activities. As previously mentioned, in early July, U.S. troops arrested 11 Turkish commandos in northern Iraq, triggering what Turkey's General Staff described as a "crisis of trust" between Ankara and Washington.[33]

In sum, it is clear that Turkey fails to provide an optimal model on matters related to tolerance for cultural and ethnic diversity. As in France, from very early on, the Turkish model of nationalism has been based on assimilation and centralization. The unitary nature of the centralized Turkish nation-state is considered sacrosanct. Proponents of a Turkish model should be aware that allowing education and broadcasting rights in Kurdish language, let alone federalism, has been an uphill struggle for Turkish democracy.

While understanding Turkey's concerns about separatism, the United States should help Turkey come to terms with the political, cultural and ethnic dimension of the Kurdish question. A general tendency in Turkey has been to focus on a generic problem of illiberal democracy without addressing specifically the need to tackle the Kurdish question. The United States is now extremely well placed, with its presence in northern Iraq, to illustrate that political and federative rights for Kurds would not necessarily lead to Kurdish separatism against Baghdad. By better communicating its commitment to the territorial integrity of both Turkey and Iraq, Washington has an opportunity to show that federative solutions to the Kurdish question can work.

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32 Soner Cagaptay, "U.S. Must Address Turkey's War Fears," *Baltimore Sun,* November 3, 2002
  http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/media/cagaptay/cagaptay110302.htm.
33 "Turkey Says U.S. Has Agreed to Free 11 Soldiers Suspected in Plot to Kill Kurdish Aide," *The New York Times,* July 7, 2003, Page A6.

Yet there is little the United States can do if Turkey does not change its approach. The obvious starting point for Ankara should be to give up its paradigm of forced assimilation. Thanks to pressure coming from the European Union, the process of reforms on education and broadcasting in Kurdish language has already started. The United States should also support improvements in the field of Kurdish cultural rights. These reforms need to be combined with economic growth and investment in quality education in southeastern Anatolia. Such an agenda would: (1) Win the hearts and minds of Turkey's sizable Kurdish minority; (2) Pre-empt Kurdish ethnic separatism's breeding and recruitment ground; and (3) Create an environment where Kurds would end up voluntarily identifying with a civic Turkish national identity while proudly keeping their Kurdish ethnic roots.

The United States can certainly become a facilitator for such progress in Turkey by setting an example in northern Iraq. In that sense, helping to create a civic Iraqi national identity without allowing ethnic or sectarian fragmentation to take place would provide a valuable model for Turkey, rather than the reverse as proponents often describe it.

V. The Crisis in the Turkish Model

In exploring the question of whether the Turkish model fits the Arab world, evaluating where that model stands now is also essential. Turkey is certainly not a country in stasis, but rather has changed a great deal since the Kemalist program was launched. Moreover, it is presently in what many believe is an economically and politically fragile stage, obviously not the optimal starting point for the model's application elsewhere.

In the 1920s and 1930s, the founding fathers of the Turkish Republic had envisioned a linear process of modernization, at the end of which an ethnically homogenous and unambiguously secular state would emerge. Not surprisingly, this authoritarian edge of Turkish modernization considerably softened after the transition to competitive politics in 1946 and the first free elections in 1950.

Interestingly, throughout the next forty years of the Cold War, neither Kurdish dissent nor political Islam constituted major political threats, yet they certainly did not disappear as socio-political forces. The transition to democracy and Cold War dynamics had a major impact on them as they came to be absorbed by the newly emerging rightwing-leftwing polarization in Turkish politics. In other words, Islam and Kurdish dissent—these two identity-related cleavages—found new political homes in the domestic (and international) climate of ideological polarization characterizing the Cold War decades.

The departure from militant secularism was greatly facilitated by this new political climate. An anticommunist tone dominated Turkish politics during most of the Cold War era. This, in itself, legitimized the use of religion against communism. As late as in the early 1980s, even the staunchly secularist Turkish military needed to marshal pro-Islamic rhetoric to combat leftist tendencies. In doing so, neither the political parties nor the military faced a secularist dilemma. The state had under its control the institutional apparatus of official Islam with hundreds of religious high schools and thousands of mosques, imams and Koranic schools. Needless to say, Turkish *laicism* allowed a convenient instrumentalization of religion at the hands of the state. Therefore, rightwing political parties and the military faced no major problems in using the religious functions of the state in their efforts against communism.

In the ideologically-charged political environment of the 1960s and 1970s, the instrumentalization of Islam by the state was strongly supported by rightwing political movements, for whom "alla turca secularism" presented major advantages in the political battle against communism. The increasing number of state-controlled Islamic Preacher (*Imam Hatip*) high schools and a generous allocation of resources to the Presidency of Religious Affairs clearly illustrated this tendency.[34]

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34 Whereas there were only 26 *Imam Hatip* schools until 1965, 72 new ones were opened between 1965 and 1971, and another 147 were opened between 1975 and 1977.

In a global environment influenced by bipolar Cold War dynamics, the cleavages of Turkish politics evolved along the lines of class conflict and leftist-rightist ideological polarization. In the unfolding struggle between rightwing and leftwing formations, Kurdish and Islamist groups often took positions according to larger political and economic issues. Kurdish discontent had a tendency to turn leftist, while Islamic conservatives naturally sided with the anticommunist-right. As long as activist Kurds and Islamists were contained within rightwing and leftwing formations, they did not represent a systemic threat to the Kemalist identity of the Republic.

Probably because of its own ideological divisions and inner rivalries, the army had a higher level of tolerance for political polarization between leftist and rightist movements, as long as it did not result in violence and anarchy. In the absence of the secular-Islamist or Kurdish-Turkish polarization during most of the Cold War era, there was a sense that Kemalism had lost its relevance in influencing the political cleavages of the country. In the eyes of the military, the external and domestic threat of communism presented a much more serious threat than Islamic fundamentalism. Particularly the last two military interventions in 1971 and 1980 were motivated to a larger degree by anticommunist apprehension.

As far as Kurdish dissent was concerned during the Cold War, separatism was not on the agenda of politically active and ethnically conscious Kurds. These Kurdish groups strongly cooperated with the Turkish left and considered ethnic nationalism harmful for their socialist-communist agenda. Such Kurdish-Turkish cooperation on the left further exacerbated the military's fear of communism. In retrospect, one might argue that the 1980 coup and the ensuing military regime, which lasted three years, constituted the last chapter in Turkey's struggle against communism. Although the 1980–1983 military regime tried to show even-handedness and shut down all political parties, there was a clear anticommunist tilt. The coup not only targeted leftist political groups, but also heavily

suppressed the Kurdish provinces suspected of leftist and separatist activities. Such heavy oppression of Kurdish dissent aggravated regional discontent and created an ideal breeding ground for Kurdish nationalism in Turkey's economically most deprived provinces.

By the mid-1980s, with the return to democratic politics, the rightwing-leftwing divide came to be replaced by a less ideological political environment. The end of military rule had also opened room for the autonomization and strengthening of the Islamic and Kurdish identities in civil society. Yet at the same time there was also a very negative development in the Kurdish southeast. By the late 1980s, Turkey was facing what increasingly looked like a civil war in Kurdish southeastern Anatolia. To the dismay of the military, not only was Kurdish nationalism on the rise but there was also a growing sense that Islamic groups had become too active in the country. In the absence of a communist threat, Islam's socio-political rise and Prime Minister (and later President) Ozal's liberal approach toward religion began to disturb secularist circles. As a result, by the time the Cold War was ending, Turkey was once again face to face with Kurdish nationalism and political Islam, the two identity-related threats of the Kemalist 1923–1950 era.

Throughout the 1990s, the increasing polarization of Turkish society over issues such as political Islam and Kurdish nationalism illustrated the return of deeply rooted socio-political cleavages, which many modernization theorists believed to have been successfully 'solved' by Kemalism. As a result, a deep sense of malaise, coupled with a growing crisis of confidence with Europe, gripped Turkey's pro-West establishment. The potent resurgence of Kurdish nationalism and political Islam was strongly related to the fact that by the mid-1980s, right and leftwing political movements seemed no longer able to accommodate ethnically and religiously motivated sociopolitical demands in a rapidly changing Turkish society.

The military became restless again, and not surprisingly, its reaction to internal threats to Turkey's

national and secular identity lacked democratic tolerance. The re-emergence of Kemalism's historical enemies coincided with the disintegration of the Soviet Union, fuelling ethnic separatism in the immediate periphery of Turkey. The disintegration of Yugoslavia along ethnic lines, the ethnic wars in the Caucasus, and the unfolding of events in northern Iraq heightened Ankara's concerns regarding the national unity and territorial integrity of the country. Such security concerns, compounded by the electoral rise of the Islamist Welfare Party, led to an increasing involvement of the military in politics. Especially after the death of President Ozal in 1993, the military gained the upper hand in dealing with Kurdish dissent and political Islam. As a result, at a time when Turkey needed to improve its democratic standards in order to join the European Union, the country began to project the authoritarian image of an illiberal democracy.

The military and civilian Kemalist establishment adopted a zero-sum game approach to even minor displays of religious loyalty (such as headscarves) and Kurdish nationalism. In that sense, the military was determined to deal with Kurdish nationalism and political Islam by re-asserting the Kemalist foundational principles of the Republic, namely Turkish nationalism and militant secularism. The kind of Turkish nationalism the military supported was characterized by its emphasis on national homogeneity and opposition to Kurdish cultural rights. Since the Kurdish problem presented an existential threat to the Republic, the military's attitude was uncompromising. Accordingly, any concession in the cultural and in particular linguistic domain came to be considered as the first stage of Kurdish nationalist demands, which would incrementally lead to Kurdish autonomy and separatism.

The Turkish military adopted a similar alarmist approach toward political Islam. In 1994, at the height of the military struggle against Kurdish separatists and an acute financial crisis, Turkey's Kemalist establishment came to be haunted by another existential threat. The Islamist Welfare Party (WP) came first in nation-

wide local elections. To the dismay of secularist circles, Ataturk's Republic had now pro-Islamic mayors in most of its major cities, including Ankara and Istanbul. A year later, in late 1995, another WP victory after parliamentary elections aggravated the Kemalists' sense of insecurity. Now an Islamist-led coalition had come to power in Ankara. As a result, starting in the mid-1990s, Turkey's political agenda appeared to be dangerously polarized along ethnic (Turkish versus Kurdish nationalism) and religious (Islamist versus secularist) lines. In the eyes of the staunchly Kemalist Turkish military, nothing less than the secular future and national unity of the country was at stake.

Unwilling to recognize its role in supporting Islam during the years when communism was a more important threat, the military establishment now decided to wage a battle against the social, political, and economic power of the Welfare Party. This military-led campaign against Islamic groups reached its peak during the short incumbency of the Welfare Party in 1996–97. With their militant and anti-clerical understanding of *laicism*, Kemalist hardliners within the military, political and judiciary establishments played a major role in forcing the WP out of power in 1997, in what came to be called a soft-coup. The party was shut down in 1998 and its leader Necmettin Erbakan was banned from politics.

In this process, the anti-clerical nature of Turkish secularism played an important role in polarizing society. An elitist-Kemalist approach that missed the social, cultural and economic dynamics behind the Islamic vote fueled a new sense of secularist alarm. Political Islam, in addition to important socio-economic factors, has also been fueled by a return to the authoritarian precepts of militant *laicism*. In many ways, more than a model, Turkey increasingly appeared as an illiberal country fighting against its own ethnic and religious identity. Once again, cultural symbols such as the headscarf gained exaggerated civilizational importance. This projected to the Islamic world at large the image of Turkey as a truly troubled country when it came to tolerating its

Muslim identity. The fact that the secular establishment remained determined to ban successors to the Welfare Party by shutting down, for example, the Virtue Party in 2000, exacerbated this negative image.

Ironically, it is in this period of crisis and instability in the domestic Turkish political environment that the United States began to praise the Turkish model, mainly as a result of its own post-September 11 policy goals. Within Turkey, the November 2002 landslide electoral victory of a moderately Islamic Party now offers fresh hope for optimists about the Turkish model. This new turn of events in Turkish politics may indeed prove a golden opportunity to test whether Turkey can really provide a model worthy of emulation for the rest of the Muslim world.

The most notable aspect about the Turkish electoral campaign that culminated on November 3rd with the victory of the Justice and Development Party was the absence of such debates about secularism and Islam. This suggests that the Justice and Development Party learned its lesson well. Having repudiated the Islamist political tradition of its banned predecessors, the party ran on a pro-European Union electoral platform and mobilized the impoverished and excluded masses with bread and butter issues. As in the case of Lula da Silva, the President of Brazil, the constituents of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the Justice and Development Party's leader, are the millions who have borne the brunt of Turkey's economic crisis. Mr. Erdogan was also greatly helped by the abject failure of all the other main parties to overcome their reputation for corruption, clientelism, and infighting.

However, in the eyes of Turkey's devout Muslims—the same impoverished and excluded masses—the Justice and Development Party is the "pragmatic Muslim" party with which they identify. This is why a Turkish model more acceptable to the rest of the Muslim world will depend on mutual accommodation between the new government and the staunchly secularist Turkish military. In that sense, the Justice and Development Party is an opportunity for Turkey

to reconcile its Muslim roots with democracy and Western orientation. Turkey's Western partners, and particularly the European Union and the United States, should therefore be supportive of Turkey's new test of democratic maturity. This may be the best chance for a truly popular model.

Turkey has a tendency to be introverted and self-centered. Washington should play a subtle role in reminding Turkey's secularist establishment that the current government is perceived as a litmus test of Muslim democratic maturity both in Turkey and beyond. Its functioning without military intervention would have remarkable resonance in the wider Islamic world. Reminding Turkey of its global potential to set an example could help put an end to the unnecessary polarization between secularist hardliners and Muslim conservatives. Therefore, American foreign policy's success in promoting Turkey as a goal may well be determined by how America helps support the success of the model within Turkey itself.

VI. Conclusions

It is important for Turkey's American friends to understand that pious Muslims, particularly in the Arab world, have traditionally been unimpressed by what has been described as "the Turkish model." In other words, the model they so promote has a problem connecting with its target audience in the Middle East. Where Americans see the only pro-Western secular democracy in the Muslim world, Middle Eastern Muslims see a former colonial master that turned its back on Islam and adopted a pro-American and Israeli security policy.

In the eyes of many Muslims, the problem lies with Turkey's "authoritarian secularism." There is a widely shared feeling among Arabs that Turkey's radical cultural revolution under Ataturk, the founder of the modern Turkish Republic, came at the expense of the country's Islamic identity. In their view, Ankara is simply not a good model because the much-acclaimed Turkish secularism is undemocratic and its survival is owed to military protection.

Although most educated Turks would disagree, such critics of the Turkish model may well have a point. It is hard to argue that Turkish secularism is based on a separation of mosque and state. To the contrary, it is inspired by the revolutionary fervor of French anticlericalism. This is why Turkish *laiklik* (secularism), as in the early stages of French *Laïcité,* is based on state control of religion. It is also hard to argue that

Turkey's own pious Muslims are very happy about such a definition of secularism. That wearing a headscarf in Turkey is often perceived as a seditious act of Islamic fundamentalism strengthens their argument. Such radical secularism is a liability for the acceptability of the Turkish model in the wider Muslim world.

The fact that the Turkish military regularly intervenes in politics, restores a sense of law and order, and returns to its barracks became an important characteristic of the Turkish model. In that sense, the Turkish military displays higher discipline and professionalism compared to its other developing country counterparts. Yet a proclivity for military intervention is not an appealing quality to promote. This is probably why the Turkish model is greeted with enthusiasm in the Islamic world only in a country like Pakistan, where the military desires to assume a similar secularist safeguard against political Islam.

There are two factors that will ultimately transform Turkey into a much more popular model in the Arab world. Turkey, with U.S. support, must find a way to achieve: (1) A more liberal balance between secularism, Islam and democracy, and (2) A civic and multicultural understanding of Turkish citizenship illustrating the country's coming to terms with the Kurdish question.

Most importantly, a more acceptable Turkish model for the Middle East will depend on better domestic

harmony between Muslim tradition and secularism. This is why the arrival to power of the Justice and Development Party in late 2002 presents a crucial opportunity for reconciling Turkey's Muslim roots with secular democracy. The relationship between this moderately Islamic political party and the staunchly secularist military will provide a litmus test of democratic maturity for the Turkish model. The significance of this political experiment will also have much larger implications hinging on the compatibility of Islam and democracy.

Ultimately, much of the relevance of the Turkish model for the Middle East will depend on what happens in Turkey. Given the current state of anti-Americanism in the Arab world, to create the perception of Turkey as America's favorite model for the Middle East may even end up diminishing the appeal of this effort. In any case, the American goal of promoting democracy in the Middle East would be better served by adopting a more balanced strategy of constructive engagement with Turkey. The following issues will prove important in setting a positive tone with Ankara and the wider Middle East.

- In order to clearly illustrate its commitment to democracy in the Middle East, the United States should respect Turkey's parliamentary process and show no tendency to punish Ankara for its lack of expected support during the war in Iraq.

- As a result of its respect for Turkish democracy, Washington should also hold Ankara up to European standards of liberal democracy and human rights. Liberal reforms in a series of issues ranging from Kurdish cultural rights to the role of the military in politics should be unambiguously supported by the United States.

- In addition to firmly supporting Turkey's bid to join the European Union, Washington should synchronize its democratization agenda for Turkey with the European Union. Such an effort would also correct Ankara's impression that the United States represents a politically less demanding alternative to the European Union when it comes to anchoring Turkey to the West.

- If the United States is serious about spreading democracy to the Middle East, it should also be supportive of Turkey's new experiment in balancing its Muslim, democratic and secular identity. American policy makers should play a subtle role in reminding Turkey's secularist establishment that the current government is perceived as a litmus test of democratic maturity and that its functioning without military intervention would have global resonance for the compatibility of Islam and democracy. Such friendly advice may help the country focus on its potential to provide a truly popular model and stop unnecessary polarization on issues such as headscarves.

- To improve the image of the Turkish model in the Arab world, the United States should provide Turkey an opportunity to play a constructive role as a partner in broader initiatives, such as the Middle East Partnership Initiative and even the regional peace process. As the only country in the region with good relations with Israel and improving ties with the Arab world, a secular, democratic, Muslim and pro-Western Turkey can become the ideal platform to launch a new "Istanbul Peace Process" in the Middle East. Such efforts would underscore that American praise for a Muslim democracy is more than just rhetoric.

Although not a perfect fit, the Turkish model also conveys important lessons for the critically important issue of transition to democracy in the Arab world. Since the United States will be responsible for Iraq's progress towards democracy and has wider aspirations for democratization beyond, the following are key lessons from the Turkish model that U.S. policymakers should keep in mind:

- The first and most important lesson is the need to establish a positivist education system. Education

reform and a literacy campaign were probably the most important accomplishments of Turkey under Ataturk. Investing in Iraqi and Arab human capital would not only be the most efficient way for an enlightened process of nation building, but it would also assure domestic demand for democratization. Liberal democracy can take root only if it comes from within.

- The second lesson relates to the threat of political Islam and the kind of secularism necessary to adopt in order to counter this threat. A clear separation of mosque and state may not be feasible in the short-run. Turkey's secularism may prove too radical for Arab countries. Yet, at least in the short run, it may still be preferable to have a moderate degree of governmental supervision over the Islamic establishment rather than face the risk of an Islamist political take-over.

- Finally, there is also a clear need for democratic gradualism. Free elections should be seen as the culmination rather than the inauguration of the modernization process. Strengthening civil society, the legal framework and constitutional liberties may prove a better short-term strategy compared to democratic shock therapy.

THE BROOKINGS PROJECT ON
U.S. POLICY TOWARDS THE ISLAMIC WORLD

The *Brookings Project on U.S. Policy Towards the Islamic World* is a major research program, housed in the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution. It is designed to respond to some of the profound questions that the terrorist attacks of September 11th have raised for U.S. policy. The project seeks to develop an understanding of the forces that led to the attacks, the varied reactions in the Islamic world, and the long-term policy responses that the U.S. can make. In particular, it will examine how the United States can reconcile its need to eliminate terrorism and reduce the appeal of extremist movements with its need to build more positive relations with the wider Islamic world.

The Project has several interlocking components:

• A Task Force made up of specialists in Islamic, regional, and foreign policy issues (emphasizing diversity in viewpoint and geographic expertise), as well as government policymakers, who meet on a monthly basis to discuss, analyze, and share information on relevant trends and issues;

• A Visiting Fellows program that brings distinguished experts from the Islamic world to spend time in Washington D.C., both assisting them in their own research, as well as informing the wider work ongoing in the project;

• A series of Brookings Analysis Papers and Monographs that provide needed analysis of the vital issues of joint concern between the U.S. and the Islamic world;

• A series of Regional Conferences, which will bring together local experts in the Middle East and South Asia with their American counterparts. This component will not only provide an opportunity for scholars to discuss their own diagnoses of current trends and possible responses, but also promote a much-needed exchange of ideas and information;

• An Education and Economic Outreach Initiative, which will explore the issues of education reform and economic development towards the Islamic world, in particular the potential role of the private sector;

• A culminating Brookings Institution Press book, which will explore U.S. policy options towards the Islamic World. The aim of the book is to synthesize the project's findings for public dissemination.

The Project Convenors are Professor Stephen Philip Cohen, Brookings Institution Senior Fellow; Ambassador Martin Indyk, Director of the Saban Center for Middle East Policy; and Professor Shibley Telhami, Professor of Government at the University of Maryland and Brookings Senior Fellow. Dr. P.W. Singer, Brookings Olin Fellow, serves as the Project Coordinator.

THE BROOKINGS TASK FORCE ON
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THE SABAN CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST POLICY

The Saban Center for Middle East Policy was established on May 13th, 2002 with an Inaugural Address by His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan. The establishment 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's purpose is to provide Washington policymakers with balanced, objective, in-depth, and timely research and policy analysis from experienced and knowledgeable people 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. Its central objective is to advance understanding of developments in the Middle East through policy-relevant scholarship and debate.

The Center's establishment has been made possible by a generous founding grant from Mr. Haim Saban of Los Angeles. Ambassador Martin S. Indyk, Senior Fellow in Foreign Policy Studies, is the Director of the Saban Center. Dr. Kenneth M. Pollack is the Center's Director of Research. Joining Ambassador Indyk and Dr. Pollack in the work of the 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 in the Middle East. They include Professor Shibley Telhami, who holds the Sadat Chair at the University of Maryland; Professor Shaul Bakhash, an expert on Iranian politics from George Mason University; Professor Daniel Byman from Georgetown University, a Middle East terrorism expert; Dr. Flynt Leverett, a former senior CIA analyst and Senior Director at the National Security Council who is a specialist on Syria and Lebanon; and Dr. Philip Gordon, a Senior Fellow in Foreign Policy Studies at Brookings who specializes in Europe's and Turkey's relations with the Middle East. The Center is located in the Foreign Policy Studies Program at Brookings, led by Vice President and Director, James B. Steinberg.

The Saban Center is undertaking original research in six areas: the implications of regime change in Iraq, including post-war nation-building and Gulf security; the dynamics of the Iranian reformation; mechanisms and requirements for fulfilling a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; policy for Phase III of the war on terror, including the Syrian challenge; and political change in the Arab world.

The Center also houses the ongoing *Brookings Project on U.S. Policy Towards the Islamic World,* directed by Dr. Peter W. Singer, Olin Fellow in Foreign Policy Studies at Brookings. This Project, established in the wake of the September 11 terror attacks, focuses on analyzing the problems that afflict the relationship between the United States and the Islamic world with the objective of developing effective policy responses. It includes a Task Force of experts that meets on a monthly basis, an annual Dialogue between American and Muslim intellectuals, a Visiting Fellows program for experts from the Islamic world, and a monograph series.