

Summer Institute on International Affairs 2014

Mustafa Akyol

Description of who this person is

“Turkey at a Crossroads”

Week 4

Wednesday, July 16

4:00 - 8:00 PM

DUE DATES

DQ Group C: Ashley, Jensen, Nava, Selena, Sofia, Zoe LD and Zoe PR	Tuesday, July 15
Vocab Group A: Alex, Anand, Chloe, Jackie, Joyce, Jordan, Monica	Tuesday, July 15
NRU Group B: Elise, Janani, Kelsey, Laurence, Mi, Vivian, Whit	Wednesday, July 16
Response	Monday, July 21

Program Description

On the boundary between East and West, Turkey’s democracy has thrived by balancing its Islamic heritage with a modern secular state. However, recent protests and increasing authoritarian actions taken by Prime Minister Erdogan’s government have observers questioning Turkey’s current political leadership. The loss of over 300 miners in the country’s biggest industrial disaster and the recent corruption allegations leveled against Erdogan adds fuel to existing tensions between the government and Turkey’s citizens. Turkish political commentator and author Mustafa Akyol will discuss recent developments in Turkey and explain what they mean for the broader Muslim world.

Speaker Biography



Mustafa Akyol is a Turkish political commentator and author based in Istanbul, Turkey. Akyol was born in Ankara in 1972 and had his early education there. Later he graduated from Istanbul Nisantasi British High School and from the International Relations Department of the Bosphorus University. He had his master thesis on the Kurdish question at the History Department of the same university. Since 2002, he has been a regular

commentator in the Turkish media. He is currently a regular columnist for Hurriyet Daily News, Turkey's foremost English-language daily. He writes a regular column for a Turkish-language daily, Star, as well. He also appears regularly on Turkish TV, on political discussion shows. He has spoken on many platforms, including the Council on Foreign Relations, Brookings Institution, Heritage Foundation, Mont Pelerin Society, Cato Institute, Acton Institute, Discovery Institute, Mises Institute and many universities around the world. His talk at TED, 'Faith Versus Tradition in Islam,' was widely acclaimed. Akyol has a book in Turkish titled "Rethinking The Kurdish Question: What Went Wrong? What Next?" (Dogan Publishing, 2006), which is a work partly based on his English-language graduate thesis, The Origin of Turkey's Kurdish Question: An Outcome of the Breakdown of the Ottoman Ancien Régime. He has four other books in Turkish, three of which are collections of his essays. His latest book, "Islam Without Extremes: A Muslim Case For Liberty," which was defined by the Financial Times as "a forthright and elegant Muslim defence of freedom," was published by W.W. Norton in July 2011. The book was long-listed for the 2012 Lioner Gelber Prize, along with other titles by Henry Kissinger, Francis Fukuyama and Niall Ferguson.

Required Reading #1:

How Not to Win Friends and Influence the Turkish People

Mustafa Akyol
Foreign Policy
June 3, 2013

"Where they gather 100,000, I can bring together 1 million."

That was not only one of the highlights of Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's initial reaction to the massive protest against his government that shook Turkey in the past weekend. It was also the gist of his problem.

Erdogan, the most popular premier Turkey has seen in the past half-century, believes in what political scientists would call a "majoritarian democracy." In other words, he believes that once he gets the majority of the votes -- which he has done successfully throughout the past decade - - he has the right to make every single political decision in the country. He disregards all opposing views, and, furthermore, employs an overbearing tone to shout them down.

The recent dispute over Istanbul's Taksim Square, which triggered the demonstrations, was a perfect example. Erdogan wants to rebuild the square according to his own vision, so the Istanbul municipality, which is controlled by his political party, initiated a reconstruction project. One of the details is the replacement of Gezi Park, a small green area, with a reconstructed Ottoman military barracks, which, as Erdogan said in passing, can also serve as a shopping mall.

But many Taksim residents want to keep their park as it is, and some founded a civil society initiative asking to be heard. But the prime minister never wanted to listen. Instead, when they launched the "Occupy Taksim" campaign last week, a movement with a similar spirit to the "Occupy" movements in Western countries, Erdogan's government responded in a way one should not see in any democracy -- with a police attack on peaceful demonstrators with tear gas and water cannons.

As the news of the crackdown spread quickly on Twitter, thousands gathered in Taksim to help the initially small group of demonstrators. Continuing police brutality only added more fuel to the

fire, and in a couple of hours the crowd had already grown into tens of thousands. They were soon joined by masses protesting all across the country. One of the demonstrators, appearing on Al Jazeera, summed up the basic demand: "We just want Erdogan to listen to us."

But listening is not Erdogan's strong suit. Instead, he branded the protesters as "a bunch of looters" guided by extremist elements, and denounced Twitter as "a menace to society" that was spreading lies about what was happening in Turkey. (There were indeed some false tweets about imaginary police atrocities that provoked the crowd, but they were also soon proved false on Twitter as well.)

It should be noted that not every group that hit the streets are as liberal-minded as the initial "Occupy Taksim" group. Erdogan has enemies from all walks of life, including Turkish ultra-nationalists who despise him for granting too many rights for Kurds and initiating a historic peace deal with armed Kurdish separatists. Some left-wing groups despise him for making Turkey too "capitalist," and bash him for opposing the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, who they see as an "anti-imperialist" hero. Some of these more ideological protesters also engaged in vandalism in the second day of the protests, including the arson of the headquarters of Erdogan's political party in the city of Izmir.

But still, the overwhelming majority of the protesters were peaceful, and their basic demand was just: a more *liberal* and *participatory* democracy than what Erdogan has constructed. They want the government to stop manipulating the media, restrain the police, and try to build consensus with the opposition on major political issues.

The tension between Erdogan's moral conservatism -- which some call "soft Islamism" -- and the more secular part of Turkish society is also a component of this whole story. Erdogan did not turn Turkey into an "Islamic state," and he probably never will impose *sharia*, or Islamic law. But he asserts religious values and symbols all the time and recently pushed through a law that places new limitations to alcohol consumption. In a recent TV program, he defended such measures by saying, "I love my nation, and I want to protect them from bad habits." But there are many Turks do not want to live under such a "loving," and imposing, national father.

The big question is where Turkey will head from here. There is no reason to think that Erdogan lost too many votes in the face of these protests -- some even argue that his voting base is even more intact. But he, and his party, should now see that ballots are not the only thing that counts. In the several speeches he made after the beginning of the events, Erdogan remained defiant, while still acknowledging "mistakes" in police behavior. Meanwhile President Abdullah Gul, who comes from the same political camp as Erdogan but has repeatedly proven more moderate and liberal, declared, "in a democracy, elections are not everything" and "the messages [of the protesters] have been taken."

The optimistic view is that these protests will be watershed event that will help shape a more mature Turkish democracy. Erdogan and his political allies will restrain their hubris and seek more consensus than confrontation and imposition. The other alternative is that Erdogan, as his instincts and his hardcore supporters demand, will maintain his intimidating style, turning Turkey into a fully *illiberal democracy* -- and putting it on the path to be shaken again and again by massive protests.

Sadly, that would result in the destruction of the success story Erdogan has created in the past decade by his own hands.

Source:

Akyol, Mustafa. "How Not to Win Friends and Influence the Turkish People." *Foreign Policy*. Foreign Policy Magazine, 3 June 2013. Web. 08 July 2014.

Required Reading #2:

McCarthyism Comes to Turkey

Mustafa Akyol
New York Times
March 19, 2014

ISTANBUL — For several months, Turkey has been in the throes of a political war. The latest controversy emerged after a series of wiretapped phone conversations between Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and members of his inner circle were exposed systematically on the Internet. These audio files immediately went viral and confirmed to millions of Turks that many of the rumors they'd been hearing about government interference in the media and judiciary were quite real.

In one of the recorded conversations, Mr. Erdogan called Fatih Sarac, a top executive at Haberturk, a popular news channel, to reprimand him for airing the critical views of an opposition leader. Mr. Sarac, a confidant of Mr. Erdogan who suddenly became a top executive at Haberturk in 2012, apologized to the prime minister, telling him: "Yes sir, I will have it cut in just two minutes, sir." He then made a hasty call to tell his subordinates to take it off the air. In another phone call, Mr. Erdogan questioned Mr. Sarac about a story on Haberturk that criticized the government's health reforms. The reporters and editor responsible for the story were soon fired.

In yet another wiretapped conversation, Mr. Erdogan was heard asking his justice minister to ensure a heavy sentence against Aydin Dogan, a disobedient media boss who was facing charges of tax evasion. The justice minister responded by saying that the judge in the case could unfortunately not be controlled because he was an Alevi — a religious minority that is often politically at odds with Mr. Erdogan's Sunni-dominated government.

What's most shocking is that Mr. Erdogan has openly confirmed the authenticity of many of the conversations. (He did deny one alleged call between him and his son about colossal sums of cash stashed in the latter's apartment.)

In a press conference, Mr. Erdogan admitted that he called the Haberturk executives to tell them to refrain from publishing "insults" against him. "We have to teach them," he explained, referring to the media. With regards to his attempted interference in the Dogan case, Mr. Erdogan was again unapologetic, saying: "What could be more natural than that? I had to ask this in the name of my country and nation."

All this has confirmed that, after a dozen years in power, the system Mr. Erdogan established is a textbook case of illiberal democracy — a system whereby the ruler comes to power through elections but is not bound by the rule of law and shows little respect for civil liberties. It is much more similar to Vladimir V. Putin's Russia than the liberal democracies of Western Europe that Turkey hopes to emulate.

And yet all this does not seem to be a problem for many Turkish voters. Surprises are always possible, but polls suggest that Mr. Erdogan is still popular and his Justice and Development

Party, known as the A.K.P., will not suffer dramatic losses in the local elections on March 30. Although this is a municipal vote, Mr. Erdogan has defined it as a test for his own popularity.

The main reason for Mr. Erdogan's impressive political endurance in the face of protests and investigations is that most Turkish voters do not care much about his authoritarianism and his party's corruption as long as the economy is fine. Moreover, most religious conservatives support him reflexively simply because they share his worldview and ideology. Finally, Mr. Erdogan has also been successful in galvanizing his base with a best-defense-is-a-good-offense strategy. He argues that all the wiretapped conversations, and a preceding corruption probe that targeted some of his ministers and his son, are in fact a "coup plot" against his elected government.

"Coup" is an overstatement, but Mr. Erdogan has a point: The very existence of the recordings confirms that there is an effort to embarrass the government. Somebody has been wiretapping the prime minister and his inner circle (along with thousands of others), archiving these audio files and releasing them on the Internet for public consumption.

For Mr. Erdogan, and many others in Turkey, this somebody is also quite obvious: The "parallel state" allegedly created within the police and other key branches of the bureaucracy by the religious followers of Fethullah Gulen, a moderate Islamic preacher based in Pennsylvania.

That is why Mr. Erdogan has spent the past couple of months condemning the "parallel state," reassigning thousands of policemen and stalling the work of prosecutors who initiated the corruption probe against him. He has also depicted the "parallel state" not as a domestic rival, but a fifth column of "foreign powers" that supposedly want to weaken Turkey. (The pro-Erdogan media refer to these foreign powers as the "interest rate lobby," the "neo-cons" and "Zionism.")

He has gone so far as to seek the support of the military, an institution that his government has systematically sidelined over the last decade. Mr. Erdogan's advisers recently declared that the extensive purges of the military had been executed by the treacherous "parallel state," and Parliament passed a law which freed dozens of inmates, including the former chief of the general staff, Gen. Ilker Basbug, who were in jail for forming alleged military juntas.

On March 30, Mr. Erdogan hopes to win yet another strong mandate and initiate an extensive purge of his political opponents, which may well turn into a McCarthyist witch-hunt.

He has declared that his war against the "parallel state" is actually Turkey's "second war of liberation" — after the first one that Mustafa Kemal Ataturk fought 90 years ago against foreign occupying armies. Unfortunately, if too many voters buy the prime minister's claim that Turkey is in the midst of such a "historic battle," liberals' complaints about the lack of rule of law or civil liberties will simply be dismissed as trivia or condemned as unpatriotic.

Source:

Akyol, Mustafa. "McCarthyism Comes to Turkey." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 19 Mar. 2014. Web. 08 July 2014.

Required Reading #3:

Erdogan V. Gulen: Zero sum game?

Yavus Baydar

Al Jazeera

December 28, 2013

In what looks like a perfect political storm, the vessel called Turkey is now in uncharted waters, increasingly adrift. During the last ten days that shook the country - following a police operation linked to a massive graft probe which involved four government ministers, an Iranian businessman and the CEO of a public bank, Halkbank, the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) government and the judiciary are now at what can be described as a full-scale war.

The developing story has two layers. At the top, there are allegations of bribery, money-laundering, racketeering, and organised crime of immense proportions. If the accusations have ground, the suspects - two of the detained are the sons of government ministers - have received bribes that surpass \$120m.

In a so-called "second wave" graft probe, which was blocked by a stunning row between the government and the judiciary, one of the suspects is Bilal, son of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

As the corruption inquiries seem to engulf Erdogan's family, the confrontation between the executive and the judiciary has - perhaps expectedly - turned into an existential battle for the separation of powers, threatening the stability of Turkey.

In the second layer, there is open warfare between two men, who, in their own way, have defined the course of the country, and its national brand of Islam - Erdogan representing its vertically political and Gulen its horizontally social side.

Erdogan, who had accused an array of enemies - the interest rate lobby, Israel, international media, and business circles in Istanbul - as the real culprits behind the early summer's Gezi Park protests and general urban unrest, has now added Fethullah Gulen and his followers as the top player to oust him from power, claiming that "the gang" associated with Gulen's Hizmet Movement, has operated within the state, plotting against his rule.

The adversary

Gulen is a 72-year old reclusive cleric, writer and preacher, who lives in self-imposed exile in Pennsylvania, US, after being persecuted by the Turkish military's top brass in the 1990s. The old, ultra-secular establishment regarded him as a dangerously subversive leader; however, he is loved by millions of followers in and outside of Turkey for his staunch advocacy of a moderate, tolerant, modern brand of Islam, and peace and interfaith dialogue.

Gulen preaches that education is vital in promoting a new version of Islam, and endorses a global movement to operate schools - now active in more than 140 countries.

His followers in various business sectors - often small and mid-scale - have become key players, spreading around the world - comparable to Calvinists - to be part of the trade globalisation.

In Turkey, Gulen encouraged massive social engagement, on a voluntary basis, for the support of democratisation and diversity. His pious civilian movement called "Hizmet"(Service), is present in media, academia, education, and the bureaucracy - security and judiciary.

But it is the latter which has been at the focus of controversy - now at full display after the graft probe. Erdogan, who since Gezi Park tends to see enemies in every corner, openly targets those whom he believes are Gulenists among the police, prosecutors and judges.

He seems so convinced that he reportedly threatened Hizmet, by saying, in private conversations, that it may be charged as a "terrorist organisation". Among his public accusations: There is a "parallel state" and those in the police and media are involved in "spying".

This is Erdogan's well-known pattern that after such a long time in power, and unchallenged by opposition, he - reminiscent of Margaret Thatcher or Helmut Kohl - targets all the dissenters, and creates imaginary enemies to antagonise them in order to boost his popularity.

Yet, although it partly and correctly explains it, there are deeper reasons behind the fallout between Erdogan and Gulen. After all, these two popular figures were allies in dismantling much of Turkey's ultra-secular state structure, which ruled for eight decades with the military the master sponsor.

Clashing views

Erdogan had the backing of the Hizmet Movement in consecutive elections, in the trials of attempted coup leaders, and in a referendum that led to a patchy, but crucial constitutional reform, which radically changed the structure of the judiciary.

But, for insiders, the fact of the matter is, the friction started to develop between the two men in 2010. And it has always had to do with two clashing views within the sphere of Islam stemming from the old traditions of Turkey.

The first element had to do with Erdogan's deviation away from Turkey's European Union membership aspiration. When Gulen, who has been vocal in supporting a civilian constitution, saw delays in the process, his patience grew thin.

When the Gaza Flotilla episode in May 2010, ended with a tragedy, it was Gulen who, in a surprise move, criticised the violence. His blunt criticism, it was reported, was never "forgiven" by Erdogan.

First, a deep division emerged on Erdogan's choice to conduct the so-called "Kurdish Peace Process". Erdogan's methodology was to negotiate directly with the PKK, both with its leader Abdullah Ocalan, and its "military command" in Iraq's Qandil Mountains.

But, Gulenists, who see the PKK as the main adversary in the mainly Kurdish regions - as the PKK considers them - were discreetly dismayed. They argued reasonably, that Erdogan could and should focus on broader political reform, push for a civilian constitution and grant all the rights the Kurds of Turkey demand, such as recognition of ethnic identity, education in their mother tongue, and endorsement of local governments - without talking to the PKK. This approach, Hizmet's supporters argued, would weaken the PKK, because it would "disarm" the armed movement from all the reasons it continued to wage guerrilla warfare. The AKP and the Gulen Movement have never recovered from this difference of opinion.

Finally, a series of developments brought the rift to new heights. Gulen never had sympathy for Hakan Fidan, the head of Turkey's Intelligence Service (MIT), whom he suspected secretly profiled his followers.

When Fidan was summoned for interrogation in the probe of the PKK-related Kurdish Communities Union (KCK) network in February 2012, and when some bugs were later found in Erdogan's offices, the mistrust became visible. Hizmet started to see itself as the next target for Erdogan's action for submission.

Final break?

The last straw came months ago, when Erdogan declared that he would terminate all the private prep schools in the country, more than half of which were owned by Hizmet affiliates. And when he insisted on passing a law for their closure, all the remaining bridges were burned.

The estrangement is now irreversible. The two lines are now on separate paths, and a historic bond, which previously broke down much of Turkey's rigid system, is broken.

Is it a zero sum game? It's hard to tell. Yet, it would be simplistic to claim that it is a power struggle between the two lines. Gulenists are not in power, in the police or the judiciary: Both contain a wide blend of people. Thus, Erdogan will have a hard time to do a convincing "cleansing", considering that he is already facing accusations of a McCarthyesque witch-hunt. He will end up as a leader whose hunger for control knows no limits.

Will the fallout effect the local elections scheduled for March 30, 2014? Two pollsters, who wish to remain anonymous, told Al Jazeera that unless dramatic changes occur in the economy, and unless Erdogan continues with his erratic behaviour, the AKP may end up winning, with a possible loss of 4 to 7 points. But, the 2014 elections in Istanbul demand attention: This is where anything can happen. Both AKP and CHP have strong candidates and if the AKP loses there, it may signal very bad news for Erdogan indeed.

Sources:

Baydar, Yavuz. "Erdogan v Gulen: Zero Sum Game?" *Al Jazeera*. Al Jazeera, 28 Dec. 2013. Web. 08 July 2014.

Required Reading #4:

Turkey's Kurdish Buffer

Soner Cagaptay
Foreign Affairs
July 1, 2014

If anything good comes out of the turmoil in Iraq, it will be improved ties between Turkey and the region's Kurds.

Until recently, they were bitter enemies. Ankara had never been able to stomach the idea of Kurdish self-government -- in Iraq or Syria or Turkey -- and it had generally refused to give in to Turkish Kurds' demands for cultural rights. Instead, it preferred to crack down. Meanwhile, the region's Kurds had never been able to stomach Iraqi, Syrian, or Turkish rule and, taking issue

with Ankara's treatment of Kurds within Turkey's borders, threw their support behind the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a violent separatist movement in Turkey.

The Syrian civil war and developments in Iraq have started to change all that. These days, from Turkey's perspective, Kurdish autonomy doesn't look half bad. The portions of northern Iraq and Syria that are under Kurdish control are stable and peaceful -- a perfect bulwark against threats such as the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS). And that is why Turkey has been on good behavior with the Iraqi Kurds, is working on its relations with the Syrian Kurds, and might finally be breaking the impasse with the Kurds in its own territory. It is a tall order, but the stars may be aligned in favor of a Turkish-Kurdish axis.

BACK TO IRAQ

Relations between Turkey and the Iraqi Kurds started improving just after the Iraq War, when Iraqi Kurds pivoted toward Ankara to counter Baghdad's centralizing pull. To the Kurds' dismay, post-Saddam Iraq remained an Arab country to the core; the power only shifted from Sunni Arabs to Shia Arabs. In those days, Iraqi Kurds started offering assistance to Turkey in its fight against the PKK and also opened markets in Iraqi Kurdistan to Turkish exports and companies. Turkey reciprocated, sending merchants, airlines, and consumer goods into the area. More recently, Iraqi Kurds opted to start selling their oil through Turkey, bypassing Baghdad and giving Ankara a huge gift in transit fees and tax revenue, as well as boosting Turkey's claim to be a regional energy hub.

ISIS' advances in Iraq -- including a June 11 attack on the Turkish consulate in Mosul, during which the group took Turkish diplomats and security officials hostage -- has added urgency to the drive to improve relations between Turkey and Iraqi Kurds. It also made Turkey go back on some clear redlines it had previously set for the Kurds; back in 2005, Turkey had threatened military action should they occupy Kirkuk, an oil-rich city in northern Iraq. Kirkuk's oil reserves would have given the Kurdish regional government independent income (it relies on Baghdad for financial transfers), which would have been a first step toward full sovereignty. But on June 12, when Kurdish forces moved to occupy Kirkuk, Ankara did not utter a word.

It now seems safe to say that if the Iraqi Kurdish regional government declared independence Ankara would be the first capital to recognize it. In today's Middle East, in other words, ISIS is a bigger threat to the Turks than Kurdish independence in Iraq.

SYRIAN SITUATION

Whereas Turkey's ties with the Iraqi Kurds have improved in recent years, Ankara's relations with the Syrian Kurds have remained rather bitter. This is because, unlike in the KRG where

Iraqi Kurdish groups hold more sway than the Turkish PKK, the PKK is very popular among the Syrian Kurds. (Assad's father allowed the PKK to grow inside Syria to use the group as a proxy against Turkey.) When the group's Syrian branch, Party for Democratic Unity (PYD), which is not shy about its ties to the PKK, took control of Kurdish areas in northern Syria in July 2012, Ankara feared that it was witnessing the birth of a PKK-led state on its doorstep. In response, it stopped shipments of aid and supplies into the Kurdish enclaves.

As the war against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad heated up, though, Turkey saw an opportunity. Wishing to take advantage of all opposition factions in Syria, Turkey reached out to the PYD and invited the group's leader to Ankara. The PYD demurred, though. All along, the Kurds' strategy in the Syrian civil war has been simple: take over Kurdish areas and let the others fight among themselves. At times, the PYD has even collaborated with the Assad regime, for instance by allowing supplies to flow into regime-controlled enclaves. In return, Assad has not targeted PYD territory. It didn't make much sense, then, for the PYD to cooperate outright with Turkey.

But with the emergence of ISIS, the Syrian Kurds' calculations might be changing. The PYD and PKK have strong secular tendencies and oppose ISIS and its austere version of Islam. The PYD now controls three Kurdish exclaves in northern Syria, all of which are flanked by Turkey to the north and ISIS to the south. And unlike the Assad regime, ISIS has shown no inclination to trade favors with the Kurds. In other words, the Syrian Kurds' future could now be in Turkey's hands. It could allow more aid and supplies to flow to the Kurds to support their defensive lines against ISIS and, if the Syrian Kurds play nice, full military and security cooperation could be forthcoming.

Over time, Turkey believes, the Syrian Kurdish exclaves could become forward operating bases against ISIS -- a friendly force that guards over 450 miles of Syria's 540-mile long Turkish border. The idea is appealing: the PYD is the only force, Assad regime included, that has been able to win any battle against ISIS in Syria. For instance, in March 2013, PYD fighters successfully pushed back an ISIS advance to take over Kobani, one of the three Kurdish exclaves in Syria.

TURKISH TROUBLE

Turkey cannot grow closer to Iraqi and Syrian Kurds without making peace with its own. After decades of battle, the PKK could still easily derail any rapprochement between Turkey and other Kurdish groups, especially the Syrian Kurds, by telling the PYD to reject Turkish offers. What is more, the PKK could launch attacks in Turkey if it feels that it is being left out of a potential deal between Turkey and the Iraqi Kurds.

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has a personal stake in this as well. He is facing a presidential election in August. In local elections in March, his party received 43 percent of the vote. The support of the pro-PKK Peace and Democracy Party, which won about 6.5 percent of the vote in March, could help him clinch the presidency.

Enter ongoing peace talks with the PKK. Through those negotiations, Turkey has granted the Kurds additional rights to use their own language in public, which had long been seen as a threat to Turkish nationalism. Kurdish language is now ubiquitous in universities and city governments in southeastern Turkey, where the Kurds dominate. More recently, on June 26, Erdogan declared a new reform package that promises amnesty for thousands of PKK fighters should negotiations with the PKK conclude successfully.

Erdogan will try to keep Turkish Kurds happy while building deeper security ties with the Iraqi and Syrian Kurds, which Turkey will guarantee de facto autonomy. This turn of events is rather ironic. Soon after Erdogan came to power in 2003, he launched a policy, called “strategic depth,” which aimed to make Turkey a major power in the Middle East, with allies and influence across the region. A decade later, Ankara’s only allies in the Middle East might just be the Kurds. Likewise, the Kurds’ main ally might soon be Ankara. Working together, they will try to escape the old politics of the Middle East and stand alone as peaceful and stable success stories.

Source:

Cagaptay, Soner. "Turkey's Kurdish Buffer." *Foreign Affairs*. Foreign Affairs, 1 July 2014. Web. 08 July 2014.

Required Reading #5:

Turkey’s Turns Its Back on the EU

Alan Cowell
New York Times
April 3, 2014

LONDON — At the height of the Cold War, Turkey’s great landmass cemented its place in the Western alliance, its huge conscript army deployed across the sweeping expanse of Anatolia to safeguard NATO’s southeastern flank.

Even now, with crisis just across the Black Sea in Crimea and Ukraine, that same geography offers Western strategists an anchor in a troubled region stretching from the borders of Iran, Syria and Iraq to the far-flung outposts of the European Union.

A generation ago, it was Ankara’s assumption that its central role in the region’s geopolitics would translate into acceptance as a member of the prosperous European Union, now numbering 28 countries.

But that assumption has frayed. After months of increasingly authoritarian rule by an embattled Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the portals of the club seem more than ever to be

closing on Turkey. And paradoxically, Turkey's most may deepen its estrangement, raising questions not only about European readiness to embrace Turkey but also about Mr. Erdogan's interest in pursuing it.

"It is becoming clear that Erdogan's Turkey does not belong to Europe," a prominent German politician, Andreas Scheuer, said after the Turkish leader accepted his party's victory in the municipal ballot on Sunday not just as a personal vindication but a mandate for what an opponent called a "witch hunt" against his adversaries. "A country in which the government threatens its critics and tramples democratic values cannot belong to Europe," Mr. Scheuer said.

"What happens next will worry many Turks as they hear Erdogan vowing to get even with his critics and opponents," the columnist Simon Tisdall said in The Guardian. "That Turkey is now a deeply divided nation is only too clear. That Erdogan's future actions may serve to deepen those divisions is the great fear."

Since the creation of the modern state in 1923 by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, Turkey has been caught in the overlapping dilemmas thrown into sharp relief by its geography. While it straddles Europe and Asia, only a fraction of its soil lies west of the Bosphorus that divides the two continents. For all the boutiques and businesses of Istanbul that look west to Frankfurt and Milan, the country's distant east surveys a much rougher neighborhood.

The effort to accede to the European Union — haltingly underway since 2005 — pulls at one set of reflexes, while Mr. Erdogan's style tugs at another. Last year, he deployed the police against protesters in Istanbul's Gezi Park. In December a major corruption scandal broke over his aides and his family. Just in recent weeks, his government has moved to block Twitter and YouTube — depicted as his enemies' tools in a campaign to besmirch him with faked evidence of malfeasance.

But the elections on Sunday showed something else. While Western-looking, secular, middle-class Turks are frequently hostile to him, Mr. Erdogan and his Islamist-rooted Justice and Development Party still command the political bedrock among the working class and in the countryside where Islam — Turkey's dominant faith — is strong.

The question of identity is not limited to Turkey. Divided among themselves over the very idea of Turkish membership of their largely Christian club, the Europeans find themselves caught between the Western values they demand of Turkish society and the realpolitik of a volatile region.

"We need Turkey as an important ally," said a German government foreign policy specialist, "but we can't observe with indifference developments in the country."

In an interview before the election, Fadi Hakura, a specialist in Turkish affairs at London's Chatham House policy research body, said there seemed to be little appetite in Turkey for the kind of reforms the European Union is demanding to create a more liberal, transparent and inclusive society. "The main concern now," he said, "seems to be to consolidate power, not promote reform."

Mr. Erdogan's uncompromising tone since the vote, Mr. Hakura said later, had merely strengthened that conviction.

Source:

Cowell, Alan. "Turkey Turns Its Back on the E.U." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 03 Apr. 2014. Web. 08 July 2014.

Required Reading #6:

Turkey Turns Inwards as War Spreads from Syria to Iraq

July 4, 2014

(Reuters) - As al Qaeda-inspired Sunni militants spread right along Turkey's southeastern border last month from Syria through Iraq, seizing Turkish hostages as they went, the normally loquacious Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan had little to say.

Turkey's outspoken opposition to the crackdown in Syria gained it global headlines as it opened its border and poured aid across to help refugees and rebels alike. But three years later the situation has morphed into a security and humanitarian nightmare on Ankara's doorstep, that has now spread to Iraq.

The Sunni militant advance and hostage crisis there is overshadowing Erdogan's campaign to become Turkey's first elected president in a vote due next month.

His response has been muted, shorn of the bombastic rhetoric or global calls to action employed in previous regional crises, a sign of a newly tentative regional policy which could have wide repercussions.

Stopping short of calling the militants terrorists, he said only that air strikes against them should be avoided.

"Turkey now has security concerns it didn't have two years ago, therefore its own security is the number one foreign policy aim, rather than transforming the region," said Ozgur Unluhisarcikli of the German Marshall Fund.

Recent pronouncements on Syria, where Erdogan previously led calls for military intervention when it cracked down on Sunni protesters in 2011, have been similarly muted, as has his once-scathing criticism of the military in Egypt which ousted an Islamist elected president last year.

While a foreign policy pullback may ease some of the tensions that have built up, it could also mean a dangerous limbo at a time when Turkey's security is increasingly threatened by the gaping power vacuums opening up on its south-eastern borders.

EXPOSED

After he came to power in 2003, Erdogan bolstered Turkey's influence, maintaining warm relations with neighbors as its traders poured into Egypt and post-conflict Iraq, whilst winning plaudits as a model for the region of a democratically-elected, moderate Islamist government.

Many analysts say a more inward-looking Turkey would be a serious loss to regional stability, although some say Erdogan, a devout Sunni, had long since undermined the positive impact of his early foreign policy with a Sunni bias.

Erdogan and his allies deny sectarianism, instead blaming the outside world for turning a blind eye to abuses by the leaders of both Syria and Iraq.

The kidnapping of 80 Turkish nationals, including the consul-general, when militants from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), since renamed the Islamic State, seized Iraq's second city of Mosul on June 10, has left Erdogan exposed as he campaigns for the presidency.

The government has imposed a media blackout on the hostage standoff but has been unable to duck fierce criticism over it, prompting Erdogan to accuse the opposition of wanting "the 80 Turks to come to harm so they can (lambast) the government."

On Thursday, 32 truck drivers were released but diplomats and government sources say the other hostages, who are thought to be unharmed, are being used as human shields to keep Ankara at arm's length as the militants push on towards the Iraqi capital.

"Turkey's influence on the internal dynamics of Iraq right now is extremely limited; they can't make any significant moves," Osman Bahadir Dincer, Middle East expert at the Turkey-based, International Strategic Research Organisation (USAK) think tank.

This week Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Arinc said the government hopes to have the captives freed within a month. Even if this happens, Ankara's behavior is likely to remain cautious as the region continues to fragment.

IDEOLOGY

Ankara's softly-softly approach to the Iraq crisis marks the end of a period in which analysts say ideology trumped pragmatism and Erdogan's desire to appear powerful to his largely Sunni conservative voter base saw a toxic mixing of foreign and domestic policy.

A "zero problems with neighbors" policy had crumbled and was replaced by degraded relations with Egypt, Syria, Israel, Iraq and Iran, as well as U.S. and European partners.

Turkey's ambassador to Iraq between 2007 and 2011 says Ankara has been sucked into a semi-sectarian rivalry with Iran and has, in the process, lost its reputation as a non-partisan force for good within the region.

"Three years ago Turkey was considered a wonderful regional power working inside Iraq using its soft power. All of our brothers in the Middle East were looking up to us," Murat Ozelik told a briefing in Ankara.

Increasingly strained relations with Iraq's Shi'ia-dominated government of Nouri al-Maliki, coupled with allegations Turkey has backed militant Sunni groups in neighboring Syria, have fueled suspicions Erdogan has abandoned traditional Turkish foreign-policy principles of secularism, democracy and trade, Ozelik said.

"If we can manage to come (back) to the center ... there's no reason why we cannot again become friends of the Shi'ia and be respected in the region. At the moment I don't think Turkey has much influence to shape events in a positive sense, in Iraq or in the region."

Turkish officials deny backing extremist groups and express frustration at what they say is the failure of international and regional actors to heed their mounting criticism over worsening relations between Maliki's government and the Sunni population in Iraq.

"We warned repeatedly that the exclusionary policies used against Sunnis ... could lead to a large explosion of violence. Now no one can control this, Turkey cannot control this, and neither can Iran. A wave of uncontrollable violence has blanketed the region," Yasin Aktay, vice-chairman of the ruling AK Party, told Reuters.

Ankara's sense of frustration and abandonment by the U.S. and other western allies - a regular theme in foreign-policy speeches - makes Turkey even less likely to take a lead in tackling regional instability, according to Sinan Ulgen, head of Istanbul-based Centre for Economic and Foreign Policy Studies.

"It's certainly to the detriment of the region that Turkey is pulling back, but a lot of that pullback is due to congressional politics in Washington," Ulgen said.

RETURN TO REALPOLITIK

Analysts say Turkey's mounting internal challenges - elections, a faltering economy and growing polarization - mean a return to the realpolitik of the ruling AK Party's early years.

"The government doesn't have the luxury to be active in the region (anymore). Erdogan is more concerned with his presidential designs than the fate of Assad," said Cengiz Aktar, a senior scholar at the Istanbul Policy Center.

One Turkey-based diplomat sees a return to the pragmatic, money-driven approach to foreign policy which marked the beginning of Erdogan's premiership and saw Turkish businesses booming in the region, especially in post-conflict Iraq.

"What are Turkish interests now? Prosperity, cheap energy, and no terrorism on their territory, so perhaps it's a case of anything to achieve that, even if it's distasteful, is ok," the diplomat said, asking not to be named.

Such pragmatism is not without challenges. One potentially tricky issue is whether Turkey would tolerate, or possibly back, an independent Kurdish state in northern Iraq, with even government officials appearing to give contradictory statements.

Having wrestled with a decades-long separatist Kurdish uprising within its own borders that killed 40,000 people until Erdogan negotiated a ceasefire last year, Turkey could find a fully independent Iraqi Kurdistan fraught with danger.

But Ankara has in recent years enjoyed ever closer relations with the semi-autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), signing billions of dollars worth of energy deals to cement one of the few bright spots in its regional policy.

"They might be encouraged to acquire more autonomy, if not independence, knowing that Ankara is agnostic to the idea, and wouldn't try to actively stop it," Ulgen said.

"From the perspective of ISIL, Turkey's less interventionist and aggressive stance (in Iraq and Syria) is certainly a boon."

A more docile role might leave it less exposed to damaging rifts with neighbours and will likely chime well with voters who have little stomach for further regional adventures.

But with events unfolding at dizzying speed, Turkey may struggle to adapt to changing realities, warns USAK's Dincer.

"We are talking about a war zone all along Turkey's southern borders. Everything is getting more complicated for Turkey day by day, and even the decision makers don't have real plans," he said. "They're in limbo."

Source:

Hogg, Jonny. "Turkey Turns Inwards as War Spreads from Syria to Iraq." *Reuters*. Thomson Reuters, 04 July 2014. Web. 08 July 2014.

Optional Readings:

After Opening Way to Rebels, Turkey is Paying Heavy Price

Ben Hubbard and Ceyland Yeginsu

June 24, 2014

<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/25/world/europe/after-opening-way-to-rebels-turkey-is-paying-heavy-price.html>

Turkey's open borders with Syria, allowing militant groups to cross over to fight against the Assad regime has helped cause much instability in the region, making it difficult for groups to trade in the region, among other things

Turkey's Economy: The Mask is Off

The Economist

January 11, 2014

<http://www.economist.com/news/finance-and-economics/21593496-political-turmoil-exposes-economic-malaise-mask>

A description of the somewhat worrying state of Turkey's economy and some of the structural problems making a fix difficult.

Q&A: Turkey's Military and the Alleged Coup Plots

BBC

August 5, 2013

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-16447625>

More information on the government crackdown on conspirators of the alleged coup plots in Turkey.

Multimedia:

Radio

Podcast

Fethullah Gulen: Turkish Scholar, Cleric – And Conspirator?

NPR

January 8, 2014

<http://www.npr.org/2014/01/08/260808000/fethullah-gulen-turkish-scholar-cleric-and-conspirator>
An NPR interview with a journalist who caught a rare interview with Turkish politician Fethullah Gulen.

Video

VIDEO

Mustafa Akyol: Faith versus tradition in Islam

Ted Talks

March, 2011

http://www.ted.com/talks/mustafa_akyol_faith_versus_tradition_in_islam

Excellent TED talk with Mustafa Akyol on the differences between tradition and faith and some perception problems on Islam. He also goes into Turkish history as a moderate democratic state.

VIDEO

Turkish press silence over Gezi Park protests – animated film

Ayce Kartal

The Guardian

March 11, 2014

[http://www.theguardian.com/world/video/2014/mar/11/turkish-press-silence-gezi-park-protests-
animated-film](http://www.theguardian.com/world/video/2014/mar/11/turkish-press-silence-gezi-park-protests-animated-film)

An animated short made by Turkish filmmaker, Ayce Kartal illustrating the lack of media coverage in Turkey during the Gezi Park protests in 2013.

Graphics

GRAPHICS

Gezi Park during protests in May, 2013.



TurkishPress.com



Circa.com

Sample questions for the speaker:

Career Related

What motivated you to become a journalist? What the most memorable discussion you covered?

What is the best way for young people to become journalists?

What is the best advice you've ever received?

Topic Related

Do you think Prime Minister Erdogan will win the presidential elections in August?

Will the peace talks between the Turkish Government and the PKK end amicably? What do you think will come of them?