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# Turkey: A Bridge or an Island?

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“Mankind is a single body and each nation a part of that body. We must never say, "What does it matter to me if some part of the world is ailing?" If there is such an illness, we must concern ourselves with it as though we were having that illness.”
- Mustafa Kemal Ataturk (Turkey's Founder and First President)

Introduction

The geographic area consisting of modern day Turkey – located principally in Asia Minor between the Black Sea and Mediterranean Sea, but also extending to the European side of the Straight of Bosphorus – has one of the oldest recorded histories of any region on earth, and extends back thousands of years to the earliest human settlements. The region is considered the cradle of Western civilization and a crossroads between East and West. Turkish cities, like modern day Istanbul, served as a critical end point on the Silk Trade Route serving as a bridge from the Orient to the West for centuries. For much of human history, the region has also been a focal point of conflict where the “Clash of Civilizations” has included the energetic competition between religion, ethnicity, and politics.

Following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the early part of the 20th century and its creation as a modern republic, Turkey successfully transformed itself into a modern nation state and a critical player in global security affairs. Soon after the end of World War II, Turkey forged close relationships with the United States and its Western allies – as well as some of its neighbors in the Middle East – that reflected its unique history, culture, and geography. It actively participated in the development of many of the post-war political and economic institutions that remain vital to the existing international system.

In recent years, Turkey has developed a dynamic economy that has begun to complement its political and military status, and which has contributed to its renewed sense of importance to the region. Economic reforms that began in the early 2000s after many years of stagnation have modernized the domestic economy and opened it up to the global economy, drawing in large flows of foreign capital and direct investment. And, despite ongoing inherent weaknesses, the revitalization of the economy has resulted in Turkey now being among the highest middle income economies, ranking it 18th largest in the world.

Even as its importance to the West and to the region remains high, Turkey is changing. Many of the fundamental beliefs held by the nation's leadership over the past several generations – including most importantly its emphasis on a Western-oriented, secular governing structure – are no longer universally held by either its political establishment or the population at large. These attitudes have evolved in recent years into a new type of nationalism based on a greater role of religion in domestic affairs and a re-orientation toward its neighbors and away from Europe. Described as “Neo-Ottoman” the apparent policy shift seeks to re-introduce Turkey's influence – if not control – into its former empire, extending throughout much of the Middle East and North Africa.

This refocus is very much in flux, and Turkey's political leadership will need to determine over the next decade the direction and extent to which Turkey will go, whether to maintain a Western-oriented political and economic system, or develop a new one that results in a new model for itself and for the region. Whether Turkey retains its status in the West, as a reliable ally and counter-weight to the sometimes chaotic Middle East, or whether it takes a more independent role, remains one of the highest security concerns to the West, and a source of great uncertainty and possible instability in the larger region.

This paper is designed to help the reader understand some of the key domestic and foreign challenges facing Turkey today. As an additional resource, the World Affairs Council of Pittsburgh has provided a blog on the topic, which can be found at www.waipittsburgh.wordpress.com.
Timeline of Turkish History

2003—Recep Tayyip Erdogan elected Prime Minister.
1997—Pressure by militancy changes government.
1990—Military coup is staged, power returned to civilian government within a few years.
1990—First Turkish Army coup is staged, power returned to civilian government within a few years.
1962—Turkey joins the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.
1960—Mustafa Kemal Ataturk dies.
1938—The Republic of Turkey is created with Ataturk as its leader.
1922—Mehemet Vl, the last Ottoman Sultan, is forced to abdicate.
which had ceased to rule by 1918.
1918-1922—Turkish War of Independence against the Western occupying powers and the remnants of the Ottoman government.
1914—The Ottoman Empire enters World War I on the side of Germany and the Central Powers.
1915—Beginning of the Armenian massacres.
1912-13—The Balkan Wars force the end of Ottoman rule in much of the Balkans.
1908—The Young Turk Revolution began the constitutional changes leading to the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire in
1683—Battle of Vienna—the second and last attempt by Ottoman troops to extend the empire into Western Europe.
1529—Siege of Vienna—The first attempt by the Ottoman Turks to expand their empire into Western Europe. Their defeat
made the Turkish extent of the Ottoman Empire into Europe.
1453—The Ottoman Turks seize Constantinople as their capital, ending a thousand years of Greek Orthodox rule.
1299—The Ottoman Empire is formed in the heart of Anatolia in Asia Minor.
Modern Turkish History

The events of the first two decades of the 20th century shaped Turkey's future more than anything had in centuries. Beginning in the early years of the first decade, a group of young radical reformists, many of them from the officer corps and academia, took the first steps toward overthrowing the Ottoman Empire that had for more than six centuries ruled the region that includes modern Turkey as well as much of the Middle East, North Africa, and the Balkans in southeast Europe. Described as the Young Turks, the reformers sought a constitutional monarchy (a government ruled by a king or queen) as a first step in implementing what at times would become a radical nationalist agenda.

By 1908, the Young Turks had forced the empire's ruler, the Sultan, to accept a written constitution that had been rejected several decades earlier by the government. The new constitution diminished the powers of the Sultan and gave great power to three Turkish nationalists who ended up controlling the last years of the empire's existence. In one of their more significant and notorious achievements, the leadership dragged Turkey into World War I on the side of the Central Powers (Germany, the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, the Ottoman Empire, and Bulgaria) - a decision that ultimately led to the empire's defeat in 1918.

Not all reformists during these early years in the region considered themselves Turks, as remnants of the Ottoman Empire remained present. Nonetheless, a degree of Turkish nationalism among key members of the Young Turks soon took precedence and non-Turks were marginalized. In the years leading up to and during World War I, many of the Young Turks taking power adopted some of the earlier Ottoman rulers anti-Christian policies, and in the end targeted minority Christian groups, including Armenians and Greeks, for persecution.

As a result of a growing fear of Russian influence and disputes over predetermined land rights for ethnic Turks, the Turkish government instituted a series of pogroms from 1915 to 1922, systematically killing nearly one million Armenians (see ethnic conflict box). While the massacres were well documented by the Western powers, few if any of the Turkish leadership were prepared to take responsibility for the actions of the government during that period. As a way of deflecting responsibility for their internal actions against the Armenians, the Turkish wartime leaders were placed on trial even before the formal end of the empire in 1922 for their collaboration with the Central Powers. The three leaders were sentenced to death in absentia as they had fled the country in the chaos at the end of the war. The continued refusal of Turkish governments since to take responsibility for the actions by the leadership in the dying days of the Ottoman Empire remains a critical obstacle to normalization of relations with the nation of Armenia, created after the end of the Soviet Union, and continues to be used against Turkey in the United Nations and elsewhere.

Although its stubborn refusal to take responsibility frustrates many of its current allies in the West, it is not entirely surprising that a proud and nationalistic modern Turkey would refuse to admit to the wrongs committed by a former political entity that was overthrown so decisively in 1923.

Nevertheless, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, modern Turkey's founder and a career army officer in the Ottoman Army, was quoted in the American press as early as 1926 condemning the actions of the Young Turks against the Armenians. The wartime leadership's policies targeting the Armenians and others reflected a religious bigotry not unusual at the time and may have played a role in Ataturk's strong secular orientation. Though Ataturk was considered a Young Turk during the early years, he was not directly linked to the policies or actions against the Armenians.

Turkish War of Independence

Apart from the pogroms against the Armenians, Turkey was deeply involved in combat against the Allies in Asia Minor and the Middle East. Although often overlooked, Turkey's emergence as a republic in the 1920s came after a four-year war of independence against a large array of foreign forces.

After the end of the World War in 1918, Turkey was occupied by Great Britain, France, Greece, and Italy as a result of Turkey's loss in the war, and there was an effort to carve out zones of interest in Turkey. These forces initially joined together in propping up the Sultan and the Ottoman empire from 1918 until 1922.

During the war of independence, many of the Turkish nationalists rallied behind the Turkish National Movement, which quickly became part of the formation of a new Grand National Assembly based in Anatolia, far from the traditional seat of power in Constantinople. The forces, led by Ataturk, eventually overthrew the Sultan and forced
all the occupying powers out of the country. The Republic of Turkey was formally established in 1923 following the signing of The Treaty of Lausanne. At Ataturk's insistence, the treaty called for all foreign forces to leave and allowed Turkey to emerge as a fully independent nation with self-determination in all areas and without any of the restraints imposed by the Western powers following the end of World War I.

In the years following the end of the war, Ataturk began a modernization process that radically changed the nation's civil and religious society, including the system of government as well as many social norms that had characterized much of Turkey's existence for centuries. He effectively rejected much of Turkey's past beyond its ethnic origins. In forcing the end of the Ottoman Empire, Ataturk envisioned a political system focused predominately on the Turkish national identity and free of the religious influences of the past. In establishing a secular republic with a prime minister as head of government, a president as head of state, and a parliament, Ataturk modeled a republic on what he had perceived as the modern nation states of Europe, including those which had been defeated in Turkey's War of Independence.

Since its inception, Turkey's population has been educated to embrace a secular and Western-oriented future, described often as "Kemalism." Throughout most of the rest of the century, Turkey's domestic politics fluctuated between an instinct for authoritarian rule to deal with internal ethnic strife and political divisions and a 20th century belief in a secular progressive democracy that had successfully rejected the corruption of centuries of decaying Ottoman rule. The fez, a traditional men's head piece, along with women's headscarves, were banned at the outset of the republic as a highly symbolic change, while the separation of the state from the nation's predominant religion, Islam, was implemented over the objections of many. The capital was moved from Constantinople, the heart of all religious and political power in the Ottoman Empire, to Ankara, a small city three hundred miles to the east on the Anatolian plateau.

The new nation shrank dramatically in size, while shedding its former colonial possessions in the Middle East and North Africa. It instead focused on Asia Minor, the region populated primarily by ethnic Turks. Although...
Turkey's Ethnic Conflicts in the 20th Century

Turkey's expansive territory has long included diverse minority ethnic groups. Tensions between the majority Turks and other groups have flared into open conflict numerous times over the centuries. The modern Turkish nationalism that began in the late 19th century led Turkey's leaders to implement increasingly harsh policies toward many of its minorities in the early part of the 20th century, with some conflicts continuing well into recent decades.

Some of the most important ethnic groups in modern Turkey have included:

**Armenians:** Armenians have lived in the central Asian region and Turkey in particular for thousands of years, and were one of the earliest adopters of Christianity as an official state religion. At their peak in the late 19th century, Armenians in Turkey numbered close to two million. Like other groups, Armenians were subjected to periods of discrimination through most of that time, as well as brutal suppression by Ottoman forces in the far eastern regions. In the waning years of the Ottoman Empire, the Armenians living in Asia Minor proper were systematically targeted in an unprecedented effort to eliminate them from Asia Minor. Starting in 1915, Armenians were arrested, executed and forced into long death marches by government forces that by some estimates killed anywhere from 600,000 to more than a million. Historians have speculated that motivations for the attacks included Turkish fears of Russian influence over the Christian Armenians in the eastern provinces of Turkey, as well as a brutal determination to take Armenian lands and pass them on to ethnic Turks who had been expelled from the Balkans following the wars there in 1912 and 1913.

Although many executions occurred, it appears that the majority of deaths occurred during the long marches to distant areas of the crumbling empire to the southeast, including Syria. Those who did not die from exposure, disease, and starvation were meant to be isolated and forced far from their ancestral homes. The large scale deaths during the war prompted many protests from western powers and represented an almost unprecedented level of mass murder, even genocide, of civilians that had been rarely been seen before in Europe or the Middle East.

By the early 1920s, few Armenians were left in Turkey proper. Most remaining Turkish Armenians lived in Istanbul where the population today is estimated at well under 100,000. Turkish governments throughout the 20th century continued to reject international demands to take responsibility for the Armenian deaths, refusing to admit to any systematic effort to commit genocide or mass murder. Turkey has argued the deaths were the consequences of civil war, and represented at worst an early form of “ethnic cleansing,” a term used most recently to describe the events in the Balkans in the 1990s. The Republic of Armenia, a nation located just outside Turkey's traditional borders and to the east in central Asia, was reformed after the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s. It remains determined to force Turkey to take some responsibility for what its predecessor government did almost a century ago.

**Greeks:** Conflicts between ethnic Turks and Greeks go back millennia. Since Greece declared its independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1821, tensions between the two countries and between their ethnic groups have continued unabated. The two ethnic groups have been at odds over territory in the eastern Mediterranean and Aegean Seas as well as the Balkans throughout their histories, and treatment of their respective ethnic minority populations within each country also remain contentious. In various numbers, Greeks have lived in Asia Minor for much of this period, and have endured many efforts at dislocation and expulsion at the hands of the Turkish majority.

Within Turkey itself, the most significant crackdown against ethnic Greeks in modern times came during the Turkish War of Independence that ended in 1922. In a complicated series of events, the Turkish nationalist movement moved against indigenous Greeks as well as Greek forces that had, along with other Western allies, attempted to take Turkish territory following the end of World War I. In the end, most Greeks in Turkey were either expelled or ended up in Istanbul where a small group persisted.

Although each nation has long recognized the other’s existence, the treatment of minority populations in each country remains a highly contentious issue, often involving national religions. The Greek Orthodox church, for example, retains its headquarters in Istanbul as it has since the Byzantine Empire (which existed for a thousand years following the collapse of the Roman Empire in the 5th century). The leader of the church, known as the Greek Patriarch of Constantin-
people, is recognized by the Turkish government as the spiritual leader of the Greeks in Turkey and has been subject to Turkish authority since the Ottomans took Constantinople in 1453. Although he is required to be a Turkish citizen by law, he and his church have become a focal point for many of the disputes between Turkey and Greece over the years, even as his presence in Istanbul remains secure for now. Also known formally as the Ecumenical Patriarch and as the Archbishop of Constantinople, he is considered the first among equals of the leaders of all Eastern Orthodox religions and a spiritual leader of 300 million Orthodox Christians worldwide. This role further complicates Turkey's treatment of minority Greeks as it attracts international attention.

For example, in 1971 the Halki Seminary, a Greek Orthodox school of theology founded in 1844 and located on an island in the Sea of Marmara near Istanbul, was closed by the government. Since then a broad wide array of international leaders—including several presidents of the United States and leaders in the EU—have asked that it be reopened. Instead, the Turkish government has allowed it to operate only as a conference center, and as recently as 2007 the increasingly Islamist government destroyed a 17th century chapel on the seminary's grounds.

Because the Treaty of Lausanne following the end of the Turkish War of Independence resulted in the transfer of most Greeks out of Turkey and back to Greece (and vice versa), the Greek population in Turkey remains quite small. But, many of the disputes between Turkey and Greece remain based on persistent ethnic tensions that developed over the centuries. In particular, in recent years Greek and Turkish military forces have periodically clashed in small confrontations over the control of certain islands in the eastern Aegean Sea. Turkey has warned Greece not to extend underwater territorial claims to areas around many of the islands, some of which are located within a few miles of Turkey's mainland. While access to underwater resources—including oil and fishing—around the many islands in the Aegean Sea remain the proximate cause for the ongoing conflicts, the ultimate cause are the ancient claims from both sides over the islands themselves. Related to the Aegean Sea disputes is the simmering Greek-Turkish dispute over Cyprus where Turkish military forces remain in control of more than a third of the island in a determined effort to protect Turkish interests there and prevent Cyprus coming under the control of Greece.

As part of Turkey's EU accession process, Greece has offered its support for a "Europeanized" Turkey as a way of encouraging (or forcing) Turkey to abide by what Greeks believe are the merits of international law which they feel favors them. Although overall relations between both countries have avoided direction confrontations in the last few years, underlying tensions remain barely hidden.

Kurds: The Kurds in Turkey consist of a distinct ethnic population that can also be found throughout the Middle East and central Asia. Turkish Kurds make up a little more than half of the estimated total population of 30 million Kurds in the region, and are around 20 percent of Turkey's total population today. The other countries with significant Kurdish populations include Iraq, Iran, and Syria. Generally, Kurds are not considered Arab or Turkish and therefore have been at odds with their national governments for decades, most notably in Iraq and to a lesser extent in Turkey to gain autonomy if not outright independence. Kurds share an ethnic background with the Iranian people.

In Turkey, the Kurds have been categorized officially at various times as Mountain or Eastern Turks given their location in those regions. Beginning in the late 1970s, the Kurds organized an armed resistance movement as a way of gaining greater rights within Turkey and ultimately an independent Kurdistan. As originally formulated, the Kurdish separatists in Turkey were secular and Marxist, but that has been downplayed in recent years. The Kurdish Workers Party, or PKK, battled Turkish troops throughout the Southeast region of the country during the 1980s and 1990s, with tens of thousands of deaths and casualties. As it spread violence to cities elsewhere in Turkey and to civilians, the PKK was ultimately designated a terrorist organization by many governments in the West, as well as the EU. In 1999, Turkish officials captured the head of the PKK and worked out a cease fire that has tenuously held since. The Turkish parliament now includes several dozen Kurds as members.
would be controlled and dominated by a Greek majority into two zones. They feared an independent Cyprus of the Island, and by 1983 it established the Turkish minority (amounting to around three quarters), and would discriminate against the Turkish minority (amounting to around one-fifth of the population). The coup in 1974 by a military junta as a way of annexing Cyprus. The ultra-nationalist Greeks within the Cypriot National Guard overthrew the elected independent government in Cyprus, led by President Makarios who quickly fled to Great Britain.

For years, Turkey had argued for a partition of the Island into two zones. They feared an independent Cyprus would be controlled and dominated by a Greek majority population (around three-quarters), and would discriminate against the Turkish minority (amounting to around one-fifth of the population). The coup in 1974 gave Turkey the opportunity to take control of 40 percent of the Island, and by 1983 it established the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). Although recognized only by Turkey, this small republic was also intended as a way of preventing any further takeover by the Greek controlled south of the entire Island, and has, for better or worse, succeeded. It also re-established Turkish control of at least part of the Island that was lost to Britain after World War I.

The conflict over Cyprus highlights an awkward dilemma for NATO of having two member nations almost going to war over a nearby territory. Greece and Turkey's disputes have extended to other islands in the Aegean Sea as well, and have led to the two nations being at the point of war several times during the post-World War II period.

Even as Turkey's accession to the EU has stalled, the Republic of Cyprus moved ahead in 2004 and it became a full member of the EU that year even as it rejected the a referendum to reunify the Island of Cyprus.

**Current Domestic Political Situation**

Since its founding in 1923, Turkey's domestic situation has been complicated by its contentious politics as well as internal security threats from various ethnic and political groups, often resulting in violence and periods of authoritarian rule or even coups. From near civil war involving Kurdish separatists to periodic clashes with leftist demonstrators, Turkey's internal affairs have long been in flux.

By the beginning of the 2000s, Turkey was able to focus on economic reforms and improvements in a wide range of social and security issues. Modernization of Turkey's economy helped generate a steady rise in incomes that alleviated much of the frustration generated by previous decades of turmoil and economic stagnation. The advances in the everyday lives of Turks helped improve Turkey's outlook, even as its politics continued to move further away from the founding principles of Ataturk's secularism. After nearly a decade of strong economic growth, the public confidence in Turkey's outlook reflected not just the charismatic leadership of the Prime Minister elected in 2002, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, but also a perception that Turkey's success could serve as a model for the region, both in its economic performance and in its conduct as a democracy with Islamic roots.

But after nearly a decade of stability and economic growth, Turkey's underlying instabilities, both old and new, have emerged. As with its foreign policy, the outlook for Turkey's domestic politics and its economic performance is unclear. Although Erdogan's increasingly conservative authoritarian rule, and deep aversion to criticism, is increasingly cited for the problems Turkey continues to face, many other long-term issues remain as complicating factors as well.

**Constitutional Reform**

In the 2011 elections, Prime Minister Erdogan's party (AKP) won a majority of seats in Parliament for the first time. Shortly following, Erdogan began to seek fundamental changes to Turkey's political system. The most significant of these changes included a re-writing of Turkey's constitution. Although most of Turkey's political establishment recognizes the need for a new constitution, as the current one was drafted following the 1980 military coup, many are concerned with the direction and extent of Erdogan's reforms; most critically, his ambitious plans to give significant new powers to Turkey's presidency.

As in most parliamentary systems, Turkey's president is head of state with little direct control of the functions of government. The proposed changes to the constitution are designed to allow Erdogan – who is barred from seeking another term as Prime Minister – to run for an enhanced presidency when elections take place in either 2014 or 2015. This would ensure Erdogan's continued control of Turkey's government and politics for many years ahead. (His ambitions can be compared to those of President Vladimir Putin and the way he has manipulated Russia's political system to allow him to retain control there.) A change to the constitution in Turkey would diminish the role of parliament and Prime Minister, and give to the new president unprecedented powers in an even more centralized national government in Ankara.

As of mid-2013, Erdogan apparently lacks the two-thirds majority required to pass the reforms by Parliament. As an alternative, he may instead seek change through a referendum that ultimately would require just 60 percent of the vote in Parliament. However, the opposition he faces has grown since he began the process, and
The Coups

Turkey has endured several military coups since its founding, resulting in sometimes dramatic changes in the country's leadership. Of the four events defined as coups, just two involved active participation of military forces, while the other two consisted primarily of the threat of force by military commanders. In each of the coups, the military justified its actions based on the need to stop government leaders seeking to destabilize Turkey's traditional secular, mildly authoritarian political system. The most serious coup involving bloodshed was the Coup of 1960. A group of colonels, working outside the top military command, intervened to stop what it perceived was an attempt by the Prime Minister Adnan Menderes to seek alternatives to the existing system based on close ties and aid from the United States and the West. Within a few weeks, coup leaders had the Prime Minister and two of his top officials in the government, the Foreign and Finance Ministers, executed. In contrast to typical coups, the leaders then turned the government over to a moderate retired general who allowed the political system to re-establish itself over the next few years.

The only other coup that involved force was in 1980, when the military staged a bloodless coup in response to the street fighting between leftists and nationalists that had plagued the nation off and on for years. Although involving little violence, the 1980 coup proved to be the most damaging to the democratic foundations of the country as the leaders suspended the constitution, and took direct control of the government for several years afterward.

The other two coups, in 1971 and 1997, consisted primarily of threats by the military to the civilian leadership to do more to preserve the secular foundation of Turkey as founded by Ataturk. Although no military force was used, the threat of force brought some change. These interventions—argued to have resulted in a political system more aligned and supported by NATO and the West in general—ended up undercutting the military's influence. In the 2000s, with the election of Prime Minister Erdogan and the Justice and Development Party (AKP) to power, the military’s influence was eventually contained. The military also began to lose credibility because of the manner in which the crackdowns against dissident forces, like the Kurdish separatist movement, took place from 1970 through the 1990s. The severity of the political repression against the Kurds, resulting in the deaths of tens of thousands of Kurds, reflected an intolerance among the military and its unwillingness to accept any threat against the nationalist government in Ankara. These actions have also tarnished Turkey's human rights record for years.

By the early 2000s, the Turkish military had lost much of its moral authority in Turkey. The rise of the more fundamentalist AKP party put the military on the defensive through public opinion. Ultra-nationalists accused of terrorist activities within Turkey and plotting against the government including military personnel, were identified as Ergenekon and several hundred were arrested and jailed beginning in the mid-2000s. In mid-2013, after years of court proceedings described by critics as show trials, the courts delivered guilty verdicts with long-term prison sentences for most of the defendants. Many outside observers felt the convictions were unfair, especially as they affected many civilians, including journalists. It has had a chilling affect on public criticism of the government, especially among public officials and journalists.

reflects not just questions inherent in the difficulty of parliamentary maneuvering, but also fundamental questions about whether others in the country, including members of his own party, want him to have the kind of enhanced power he is seeking.

Gezi Park

Beginning in late May of 2013, demonstrations began in Istanbul's Gezi Park as a protest against plans to redevelop the urban park into a shopping mall. The protests grew rapidly and eventually spread to many other cities in Turkey and consisted of hundreds of thousands of protestors nationwide through the early weeks of summer. The original demonstrations evolved into a general protest against the national government and its increasingly heavy-handed approach toward the opposition in Turkey. Prime Minister Erdogan dismissed the protestors originally and ordered a crackdown which resulted in thousands of injuries, five to ten deaths, and global attention. Although the size and energy of the protests ebbed during the summer months, the government was forced to back down and Erdogan’s reputation was substantially damaged. Speculation remains that the protests to his rule may resume in the fall.

The government's response to the peaceful demonstrations highlighted the change in Turkey's politics over the last 12 years, since the AKP party first came to power. In spite of, or perhaps in response to victories in three successive elections, Erdogan's rule has become increasingly authoritarian. Erdogan's style has been characterized by a steady move away from the secular roots of Turkey's founding in 1923 to a more open expression and willingness to re-introduce a form of Islam into the day-to-day life of Turkey's people and the government. This expression has influenced many of his opponents who have used the Gezi Park protests as an opportunity to act out.

Kurdish Separatists

Another long-term issue for the Turkish government is the Kurdish separatist movement in the Eastern parts of the country. From the 1970s through the 1990s,
On May 28th 2013, a group of people began protesting against the disruption of Gezi Park in Istanbul, Turkey. The protest spread to the main Turkish cities, generating a massive confrontation with the current Turkish Government. Since the beginning, Twitter has been used as an effective media to coordinate and spread news about the protest. Following Twitter’s most popular hashtags related to the protest, it is possible to have a spatiotemporal mapping of the Turkish events.

The geolocalized Twitter signal associated with the Turkish protest has been resolved at various geographical resolutions. At the country level we use as a proxy of international concern for the Turkish events the relative volume of tweets signal associated with the protest hashtags. Within Turkey the signal reveals the geographically hot spots for the protest. The language used for tweets reveals the level of international focus on the events. Inspecting the ranking of hashtags related to locations identifies peaks of activity in different cities. Twitter signal also provides a real time monitoring of the ongoing events as shown on the timeline below.
government forces fought a series of internal military-scale actions against Kurdish rebels, resulting in tens of thousands of deaths. Kurdish separatist groups, such as the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), aimed their attacks at the Turkish state and surrounding regions in an effort to establish an independent Kurdistan. Their demands also included greater autonomy and political and cultural rights.

Conflict continued for decades and by the late 1990s, the Turkish government even threatened war with Syria if that country continued to protect Abdullah Ocalan, the leader of PKK rebel group. Eventually, Ocalan was captured in Kenya and he remains in a Turkish jail. At the time of his arrest, Ocalan announced a ceasefire, but it quickly fell apart and conflict resumed in 2004. More recently, Ocalan and PKK rebels agreed to a ceasefire in March 2013. Although the conflict remains quiet and the Kurds now have members of Parliament in Ankara, the fear that the violence will reemerge never goes away. This is especially true in light of the ongoing strife in Iraq, Iran, and Syria involving other Kurdish groups.

Syrian Refugees

The ongoing struggle in Syria brings the most Sunni rebels who are members of many jihadist groups and generally supported by Turkey, in conflict with the Assad regime. As a consequence of the violence, Turkey has had to deal with as many as 500,000 Syrian refugees entering the southeast parts of the country. Prime Minister Erdogan has complained publicly that Turkey has had to absorb most of the refugee-related costs (housing and food), which he claims have amounted to close to $2 billion to date. The refugee problem will continue indefinitely, and will likely remain a cost and complication to Turkey for many years to come.

Turkey's Economy

Turkey’s economy has made impressive gains over the past 15 years, and weathered the global recession that began in 2008 better than most economies of a similar size. Since 2002, the economy has nearly doubled in nominal (or current) terms. The “real” economy that is, the economy adjusted for inflation has increased by nearly 50 percent during that same time, and has been a critical indicator of Turkey’s improved economic performance. Real GDP rose at an average annual rate of 5 percent throughout the 2000s and ranked the country among the fastest growing economies in the world, during that period.

The economy's performance has positioned Turkey among the top economies in size, where it is now ranked in 18th place. It is also now considered an upper middle income economy with a total GDP of nearly $800 billion. Gains in per capita GDP (that is, individual) income has been probably the single most impressive indicator, which has tripled to around $10,500 in 2012.

At the same time, unemployment also fell with a rate dropping from somewhere in the teens to an average of just under 10 percent.

Inflation, known as a general rise in the prices of goods and services, plagued Turkey's economic performance for many years beginning in the 1970s. It was finally tackled successfully in the early 2000s. After decades of double digit increases in consumer prices, the annual rate of inflation dropped to below 10 percent by 2005 and has remained more or less under 9 percent ever since. While still too high by the standards of most advanced economies, the trend has been encouraging and has helped boost the nation's currency, the lira, which typically weakens dramatically when inflation is high. The value of a nation’s currency affects the nation’s export competitiveness as well as its ability to import needed goods.

Despite the impressive gains, the outlook for Turkey's continued economic performance is unclear. Much of the improvements were due to economic reform measures taken in the early part of the last decade resulting in a limited role of the government in domestic industries and an open economy to foreign participation. The economic liberalization process also allowed domestic capital markets to open up to both domestic and foreign investment that helped break Turkey's traditional reliance on government direction and funding. Whether the reforms can be sustained or expanded is unclear given recent trends in domestic politics.
Recently, Turkey’s economy is beginning to show the weaknesses typical of many middle income economies that have experienced similar rapid growth from sharp rises in consumer consumption and large trade deficits. In particular, Turkey’s rapid increase in lending to consumers has resulted in a credit bubble that has been fueled in large part by foreign capital (money) flowing into Turkey’s financial markets, and less into actual investments of plants and machinery, typically described as foreign direct investments. The relative dependency on flows of “hot” money into investments such as the stock market instead of direct investments in plants and machinery, means that Turkey is vulnerable to sudden changes in foreign confidence in the economy.

The possibility of “capital flight” – or sudden outflows of foreign money from Turkish financial markets – leaves Turkey vulnerable to a financial crisis. This is compounded by the relatively high rates of consumer lending and relatively low levels of technical education (compared to countries in Asia in particular). Turkey’s productivity growth, an indicator typically used to measure the overall competitiveness of an economy and its ability to sustain real increases in income, has been lagging. The World Bank has cited this as a real source of anxiety.

Another area of concern is Turkey’s external sector, which involves exports and imports of goods and services. Although much of the economic success of the last two decades can be attributable to domestic reforms and a de-emphasis of government control of the economy, another major change has been the emphasis put on an outward orientation that has led to a sharp rise in imports and exports and a more competitive industrial sector.

Turkey’s foreign trade and investment has grown substantially over the last few decades, with the European Union being the major trading and investment partner. However, Turkey’s streak of rapid economic growth will end quickly without strong confidence in the domestic economy, political situation, and competitive exports in global trading partnerships.

In the services sector, for example, Turkey depends in large part on earnings from foreign visitors (that is, tourism), which generates $25 billion per year in foreign exchange earnings. A key factor there is not just maintaining a relatively stable currency that is predictable, but also a political and social environment that is conducive to attracting visitors. The riots in Istanbul and elsewhere in the country in late spring and early summer could be seen as a warning to the government that maintaining the domestic peace is important not just to the government’s own political survival, but also to the health of the critical tourism sector. Ankara views the collapse of the tourism sector in Egypt as a worst case scenario, even when compared to Egypt’s status as a much lower income country, and the significantly more complex political and social issues it faces.

To compound the concerns, Turkey’s current account (a broad measure of its trade balance between exports and imports) has been moving rapidly into an unsustainable deficit equal to around 10 percent of GDP. Turkey’s growing dependence on the external sector to boost exports and to finance domestic investments means it must remain competitive against other middle income economies. Its economic and political climate must remain attractive to foreign investors and its exports must remain of a high enough quality and remain at competitive prices to attract foreign buyers of its goods.

Economic policy cannot be separated from politics, in Turkey or in any other country. In many ways Turkey’s problems are shared by many in the West. Credit bubbles have plagued many Western economies in recent years, and the economic fallout has been dramatic, including to those EU members closest to Turkey, Greece, and Cyprus. That is why the stakes are so high for Turkey’s political future. It is unlikely that the growth in consumer lending, which is leading to a credit bubble, can continue despite the Erdogan government’s desires. The expansion of credit has become too dependent on foreign financing and that is unlikely to be maintained. If the government loses the confidence of the domestic business community and of overseas investors, then economic growth will slow, possibly dramatically.
This would have serious consequences for domestic political and foreign policy issues that concern not just Turkey, but all of its neighbors and allies.

**Turkey and the Middle East**

Turkey’s foreign policy is complex. As a longtime member of NATO, Turkey is obligated by treaty to cooperate with its Western allies on a number of issues, including a common defense of Europe. Complicating that relationship is that one of Turkey’s allies within NATO (Greece) remains a country against which Turkey harbors many historic resentments and disputes. At the same time, Turkey’s historic ties to the Middle East continue to evolve in many sometimes contradictory ways.

Several years ago, beginning in the mid-2000s, the Erdogan government began to promote what it called a “zero problems” policy with its neighbors, especially in the Middle East and North Africa. Turkey would seek to accommodate differences with its neighbors politically, and to allow for greater economic integration to create long-lasting bonds. Announced during a period when Erdogan was rising in popularity at home and in the region, the concept in large part was predicated on the idea of keeping an “equidistance,” as Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu termed it, between the region’s actors, both within and outside governments. It was intended to re-work Turkey’s traditionally Western-oriented foreign policy toward one focused more on its neighborhood that would, avoid ongoing conflicts by the practical tools of diplomacy and economic trade.

The Arab Spring brought increased volatility to the region. This combined with the United States decision to eliminate its military presence in both Iraq and Afghanistan has the region worried that violence will continue to escalate. Turkey’s ability to address these concerns in the role of an honest broker in many parts of the Middle East has ended, as their diplomatic actions have not lined up with the aspirations of the government in Ankara.

**Syria:** Turkey’s relations with the Assad regime in Syria went from one of warm cooperation to total collapse in just two years. After forging a strong alliance with Assad, Erdogan is now, along with many in the West, calling for Assad’s ouster, with no indication of a logical replacement. Rebel groups in Syria remain divided and Turkey’s focus has been on the number of refugees (estimated at over 500,000) that have crossed the border into Turkey. It also remains concerned about Syria’s potential for aiding Kurdish separatists in Turkey itself. The split reached a new level of animosity in 2012 when...
Along with other border disputes between the two countries, how this affects the Kurdish issue for Turkey is unclear, and could poison relations for years to come.

Erdogan has almost completely removed any influence Turkey might have had on Egypt's political environment. Following the upheavals during the Turkish War of Independence, many of Turkey's minority populations fell. Ethnic Turks today represent more than 75 percent of the total population with Kurds, located primarily in the southeastern areas, making up just under 20 percent of the total. The population is overwhelmingly Muslim (99.8 percent) with most of those considered Sunni.

Following the coup, Erdogan went so far as to blame the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt for the overthrow of the elected Islamist government of Morsi. As a further criticism of the Egyptian military, he has criticized by Erdogan, reflecting not just his Islamic roots but also his calculation that opposing Israel would raise Turkey’s standing in most of the Middle East. Turkey’s relations with Israel hit a low point in 2010 when Israeli officials forcibly boarded a Turkish ship on its way to the coasts of each of the countries. This form of economic cooperation would, ironically, be an example of how Turkey’s “zero problems” policy was supposed to work, and could help smooth over some of the contentious bilateral issues that poison the region. It would also represent a win for Israel by bringing together two of its feuding neighbors while allowing Israel to most effectively develop its gas reserves.

One offsetting factor to the Turkish-Israeli relationship may be in a far less contentious area, energy. According to local sources, Israel is seeking cooperation from Turkey, and from Cyprus, on how they might participate in the development of Israel’s offshore natural gas fields. Israel has approached Turkey and Cyprus to discuss pipeline routes to both countries, and the construction of a liquefied natural gas facility in Cyprus. This would make the three countries partners in both a regional exploration, and the development of gas fields located off the coasts of each of the countries. This form of economic cooperation would, ironically, be an example of how Turkey’s “zero problems” policy was supposed to work, and could help smooth over some of the contentious bilateral issues that poison the region. It would also represent a win for Israel by bringing together two of its feuding neighbors while allowing Israel to most effectively develop its gas reserves.

**Turkey and the West**

For more than a century, Western powers have been deeply involved in the Middle East. In the early years of the last century, the great powers were often in conflict with the Ottoman Empire. The Great Game, the 19th century's struggle for influence in the Middle East, was characterized by a series of secret alliances and backroom deals, with Britain and France vying for control of the region.

While the Ottoman Empire had been a dominant force in the region for centuries, it had been weakened by internal corruption and external pressure. In the late 19th century, the empire was forced to cede control of various territories to the European powers, leading to a period of instability and conflict.

The collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1918 marked the beginning of a new era in Middle Eastern politics, as the region was thrown into chaos and various nationalist movements emerged. The League of Nations, successor to the Ottoman Empire, was established after World War I to oversee the administration of former Ottoman territories, but its authority was challenged by various Muslim nationalist movements.

The division of the Ottoman Empire into various mandates by the League of Nations in 1920 led to the establishment of several countries in the region, including Syria, Palestine, Iraq, and Lebanon. These new states were often plagued by internal conflicts and external interventions, leading to a period of instability and conflict.

Despite the challenges faced by the new states, they also enjoyed periods of relative stability and growth. The 20th century saw the rise of various nationalist movements, including the Ba’athist movement in Syria and Iraq, which sought to establish a unified Arab state.

However, the region remained动荡不安，with various conflicts and crises unfolding over the decades. The Cold War, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the rise of various militant groups and regimes all contributed to the region’s turbulent history.

The 21st century has seen a number of new challenges, including the rise of Islamic extremism and the ongoing conflict in Syria. The region continues to be a source of tension and conflict, with various powers vying for influence and control.

**Turkey’s Demographics**

Since the late-1970s, Turkey’s population has nearly doubled to just under 80 million in 2013. But the growth rate, as is common in rapidly developing nations, has slowed significantly. From as much as 2.5 percent annual growth in the early 1980s, Turkey’s population now grows at just 1.1 percent per year, a rate more in character with other European nations.

The median age of the population has also risen from 28.8 in 2009 to 29.2 in 2013, where half of the population is both younger and older than this age. This reflects the aging population, and the consequences of strong economic growth on fertility rates.

Although the 2.1 fertility rate (that is, the number of children born per woman) remains well above the European average, it has dropped considerably over the years and is a concern to the current Erdogan government. Prime Minister Erdogan has publicly called for Turkish families to have at least three children to keep the population young.

Turkey’s demography is strongly defined by its Turkish character. Following the upheavals during the Turkish War of Independence, many of Turkey’s minority populations fell. Ethnic Turks today represent more than 75 percent of the total population with Kurds, located primarily in the southeastern areas, making up just under 20 percent of the total. The population is overwhelmingly Muslim (99.8 percent) with most of those considered Sunni.

The concept of a minority population in Turkey is quite limited. Officially, the government recognizes minority status only as defined in the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, and restricts it to the few remaining Turks of Armenian, Greek or Jewish decent. As of 2008, the government reported just 89,000 Turks as being members of a minority. In large part, this small number reflects official Turkish policy that refuses to recognize Kurds as anything other than a specific type of Turk.

the Syrian violence spread to within Turkey. Syrian mortars hit Turkish towns across the border, killing at least five Turks, a Turkish F4 fighter jet was shot down over Syrian territorial waters in 2012, while other bombings have occurred along the Turkish-Syrian border.

Turkey must now develop a new plan for combating the Syrian crisis now that Assad’s survival is more likely as Russia has convinced the US to allow Assad to play an ongoing role in Syria despite his apparent use of chemical weapons against civilians in August 2013. Along with other border disputes between the two countries, how this affects the Kurdish issue for Turkey is unclear, and could poison relations for years to come.

**Egypt:** In another reversal for Erdogan, the Egyptian military’s decision to remove President Morsi, an ally of Erdogan and a supporter of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, has almost completely removed any influence Turkey might have had on Egypt’s political environment. Following the coup, Erdogan went so far as to blame Israel, with no proof, of supporting the military regime’s overthrow of the elected Islamist government of Morsi.

As a further criticism of the Egyptian military, he has argued “that state terrorism is currently underway in Egypt.” The collapse of the relationship stands in stark contrast to his visit to Cairo in September 2011 when he received a "hero's welcome" following the removal of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. Erdogan’s continuing support for the ousted government of Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood has placed his country in opposition to much of the West, which has come to form a more accepting view of the new military government compared with the Islamist regime of Morsi.

**Israel:** Although relations with Israel have long been difficult for any government in Turkey, its alignment with the West and its membership in NATO resulted in a degree of cooperation that removed Israel from Turkey’s problem list. Under Erdogan’s more conservative Islamist orientation, that has changed. Israel now is routinely criticized by Erdogan, reflecting not just his Islamic roots but also his calculation that opposing Israel would raise Turkey’s standing in most of the Middle East. Turkey’s relations with Israel hit a low point in 2010 when Israeli officials forcibly boarded a Turkish ship on its way to break an Israeli blockage of non-screened deliveries of supplies and materials to Hamas in the Gaza strip. Although Israel’s embargo was considered legal, the resulting deaths of nine Turkish citizens who violently fought off the Israeli boarding party proved to be a sharp blow to Turkish-Israeli relations.

One offsetting factor to the Turkish-Israeli relationship may be in a far less contentious area, energy. According to local sources, Israel is seeking cooperation from Turkey, and from Cyprus, on how they might participate in the development of Israel’s offshore natural gas fields. Israel has approached Turkey and Cyprus to discuss pipeline routes to both countries, and the construction of a liquefied natural gas facility in Cyprus. This would make the three countries partners in both a regional exploration, and the development of gas fields located off the coasts of each of the countries. This form of economic cooperation would, ironically, be an example of how Turkey’s “zero problems” policy was supposed to work, and could help smooth over some of the contentious bilateral issues that poison the region. It would also represent a win for Israel by bringing together two of its feuding neighbors while allowing Israel to most effectively develop its gas reserves.
century rivalry between Great Britain and Russia in Central Asia and India, exposed the Western powers to the vast reserves of crude oil in Iran in May 1908. During World War I, British forces fought against the remnants of the Ottoman Empire's army across the Middle East in part to ensure access to these newly discovered reserves. Following the capitulation by the central powers in 1918, Britain and France assumed control over key areas of the former Ottoman Empire throughout the Middle East and Northern Africa.

In subsequent decades, Turkey became a partner to many of the same Western powers, sharing strategic interests against expansion of Soviet influence in the Middle East and North Africa. In providing the United States and its allies some degree of support during various wars and crises in the Middle East, Turkey helped to counter Soviet influence as well as aggressive actions by various regimes in the region. As a NATO member, Turkey became an effective ally not just of the United States and Britain, but also Israel and other moderate regimes in the area.

More recently, domestic political developments in the last decade have begun to transform Turkey from one of the West's most reliable allies to one with a much more independent foreign policy. Turkey's successful involvement in the Korean War helped open the door to Turkey's admission into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in 1952. Though still a member of NATO, Turkey has repositioned itself in several key areas, especially within the Middle East.

United States: Turkey's relations with the United States have been strong and deep since the start of the Cold War. Recognized both for its Western-orientation and its highly strategic location, Turkey was a natural partner in the West's Cold War with the Soviet Union. Its ability to monitor Soviet military activities in the Black Sea and throughout its Central Asian republics made it an invaluable ally.

Beginning in the 1950s, the United States established numerous facilities throughout Turkey, from missile installations and listening posts in the eastern parts of the country to fully functioning U.S.-controlled air bases in the south. Many of the active bases have closed or shrunk considerably with only the Incirlik Airbase located near Adana, Turkey in the south central part of the country. Turkish Air Force has used the base along with smaller contingents of Britain's Royal Air Force.

Recep Tayyip Erdogan
Prime Minister of Turkey, 2003 - present

Recep Tayyip Erdogan has served as Turkey's Prime Minister since 2003, longer than any other Prime Minister in Turkey's history, with the exception of Ataturk.

Erdogan was born in 1954 in a suburb of Istanbul, Turkey's largest and most cosmopolitan city, but his family's roots go back to Rize, a distant province in Turkey's northeast. He grew up in Rize as a member of an observant Muslim family, and later returned to Istanbul as a student where he attended the University of Marmara's Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences. Soon thereafter, in the early 1980s, Erdogan's life in politics began.

In adopting conservative Islamic values early in his political career, Erdogan rejected the secularism found in Turkey's political establishment. Nevertheless, his populist and charismatic style allowed him to advance quickly, and he was elected mayor of Istanbul in 1994. As mayor, he was credited with a down-to-earth approach to addressing the needs of the rapidly growing city. However, his strong Islamic orientation eventually ran up against the central government's opposition. In 1998, he resigned as mayor and was jailed for publicly reciting a poem championing Islam as a force in Turkey's politics. Released in 1999 after serving just four months, Erdogan quickly reentered politics and helped form the Justice and Development Party (AKP), a new Islamic based party that quickly contested elections nationwide against Turkey's ruling secular parties.

Erdogan gained enough political support to remove the existing regulations that prevented him from running for political office due to his conviction, and won a Parliamentary by-election (a special election to fill a vacant seat) in early 2003. He was asked by Turkey's President to form a new government in May 2003, and has been in power ever since. This extended time frame has allowed Erdogan to pursue fundamentalist policies, while also continuing with European Union membership negotiations, and establishing peace talks with neighbors in the Middle East and Greece.

Erdogan’s politics have generated strong support from a large part of the conservative, mostly rural population, while opponents in the cities fear and distrust his actions. Described as stubborn, authoritarian, and charismatic, Erdogan remains a major force in Turkish politics. He is in a strong position to continue ruling Turkey for some years to come, to introduce Islamic principles into domestic politics, as well as position Turkey as a key regional power with global ambitions.
Trade with the West

A concern for Turkey's economic policy-makers is its fading wishes for further integration into the international economy. As with much of its foreign policy, Turkey's international economic relationships are at a crossroads. In particular, Turkey's economic (and to a lesser degree political) relationship with the European Union (EU) has become tenuous in the light of the decision by the EU and the United States to pursue an enhanced economic agreement intended to deepen the economic ties between them. Negotiations for a Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) began in July 2013 and are intended to go beyond the benefits of the World Trade Organization in further reducing tariffs and non-tariff barriers to trade, as well as to further liberalize any restrictions on services (such as banking and insurance) while improving domestic rules for foreign investment in both the United States and the EU. The problem for Turkey is that it is not a member of the EU and therefore is unlikely to gain from any advantages that come from the negotiations.

Further compounding these worries are the negotiations underway between the United States and most of the major economies in Asia (outside of China) on a Trans-Pacific Partnership. Enhanced trade and investment agreements from Asia to the United States to most of Europe could mean that Turkey would be left out of substantial future gains, leaving them at a competitive disadvantage. Turkey would be obligated to extend the concessions demanded by the TTIP, to the other signatory party, in this case the United States, and would not necessarily be able to benefit from any concessions the United States would be making to EU member states. The customs union that Turkey has with the EU, in lieu of full membership, does not allow Turkey to benefit from any agreements the EU signs with third parties. This unequal status will be highlighted as the EU moves on to sign other partnerships outside of its economic relationship with Turkey, and will likely begin to have significant political, as well as economic repercussions in just a few years.

Although it appears likely that Turkey's interests with the United States and NATO have diverged in places such as the Middle East, they continue to share concerns about Russia's role in Central Asia and the Caucasus. Russia's invasion of Georgia in 2008 highlighted the concerns that the Black Sea powers have with Russia's intent. Concerns such as these may be enough to keep Turkey a NATO member for some time to come.

European Union: Turkey's efforts to join the European Union as a full member have apparently reached a dead end, with both sides showing little interest in pushing the issue. Although the economic integration between the EU and Turkey has remained the focus of both sides, Turkey's domestic human rights record appears to remain an obstacle, as well as its position in Cyprus and the rest of the Middle East. Many members of the EU have been reluctant to see a large middle income economy, far from the heart of Europe, join. Issues related to economic and political compatibility have been debated for years with little real progress. Maintaining an associate membership may be the most practical and realistic relationship for the foreseeable future.

Conclusion

Despite its economic successes of the last decade, many challenges remain for Turkey. In just a few short years, Turkey has gone from a nation looked at as a model for many of its neighbors in the Middle East to one now seemingly marginalized. With Turkey's rapidly developing domestic (non-oil) economy and growing international economic integration, along with its democratically elected Islamist government, many were hopeful it could serve as a model for other countries in the region. But now, through a series of domestic and foreign challenges, Turkey seems to be a region inherently at odds with itself. Turkey's ambitious Prime Minister Erdogan has increasingly appeared less willing to work with his traditional allies and unable to bring about the results he wants abroad. His ability to control events in Turkey but to flail internationally is not unusual for dynamic leaders popular among the people. Erdogan's desire to change Turkey in ways not seen in nearly a century may succeed, but not in the way he or his people want or expect.

Even still, Turkey continues to remain a center of economic development and growth, guiding the country on a path to become a leading economic and political force in the global community. The country's growing influence can strengthen its role as a bridge connecting its allies to the East and West. Whether Turkey continues to support this role, or reverts back to more isolationist policies in light of its growing domestic challenges and frustrations with the Middle East, remains to be seen.
Questions left unanswered include, most importantly, whether the Turkish republic created by Ataturk 90 years ago can survive the political changes taking place in recent years. A focus on Turkey’s pre-republic past and the reintroduction of religion back into Turkey’s political life has raised many doubts within Turkey’s political and business establishment.

Further, many question how and whether Turkey will remain a member of NATO given its aspirations for a new foreign policy. Whether Turkey will continue to seek membership in the European Union is also a major question for both Turkey and the EU. These questions, along with Turkey’s evolving foreign policy, suggests Turkey may no longer want to be as close as it has been to the United States or its European neighbors. If so, will Turkey become more a part of the Middle East or will it end up in a new form of isolation, part of neither Europe or the Middle East?

Considering the West and its historic allied relationship with Turkey, can it continue to depend on Turkey’s support in providing the barrier between the West and the radical influences emanating from the Middle East? Likewise, can the West count on Turkey’s continued vigilance to its northeast and keep Russia’s ambitions in check? And finally, can the West count on Turkey’s support for Israel’s right to exist, or will Turkey become steadily more hostile toward that nation as it has since Erdogan’s rise to power?

If you were a policy strategist, what approach would you take to the domestic and foreign challenges facing Turkey today? As you prepare for the World Affairs Institute, think creatively about how Turkey’s challenges have an impact on its relations with the global community.

Be sure to visit the Institute blog for updated information, www.WAIpittsburgh.wordpress.com.
Sources and References


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