

# **Turkish Foreign Policy to the East: Domestic Drivers and Implications**

by

**Mr. Suat Kiniklioglu**

**Suat Kiniklioglu:** It is a great pleasure being here and let me start by thanking the Sasakawa Peace Foundation USA and Charles Kupchan for the invitation. It is certainly an honor and a privilege to be here. I also would like to thank the audience—you chose on such a beautiful day to sit down here rather than roaming through the beautiful streets of Washington, which I did this morning.

Only four percent of our territory is in Europe and the rest is in Asia, but we don't tell the Europeans that that is the case. But it certainly gives enough legitimacy for us to speak at an Asian Voices Seminar. The topic, Turkish foreign policy, has become an issue of great interest for a number of reasons over the last couple of years.

## **Changes for Turkish Foreign Policy**

First, in November 2002, we elected a government that is described either as Islamist, post-Islamist, or Muslim-democrat. But it is certainly very different from the traditional Turkish political elite. This government's policy in its immediate neighborhood, particularly in the Middle East, its increasing activism, pro-activism, has brought about a new look and attempt to understand what Turkey's new foreign policy is, particularly in the Middle East.

The Iraq War in 2003, the rise of the East, that is, China and India, and now the nuclearization of Iran all brought attention to what Turkey is really doing in its neighborhood. So there is both a domestic and also an external component to why

Turkish foreign policy has become such an issue of interest.

In the Cold War years, Turkey was seen as a flank country. It was defending the Southeast corner of the NATO alliance, it had the longest border with the Soviet Union, and it was pretty much seen within a security paradigm. Much of the relationship was about security, defense cooperation, and in that perspective, Turkey's transatlantic orientation was pretty much within that confine.

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union though, Turkey immediately found itself with a multitude of countries that are independent and have ethnic and cultural links to it. The world, of course, on a global level, changed to such an extent that Turkish foreign policy, which was based really on a very pro-Western orientation, pretty much locked into the NATO alliance and Turkey's membership in the Council of Europe, Turkey's forty-odd years of a drive to join the European Union, and also Turkey's very pro-multilateralist approach and cooperative approach in foreign policy in general, was being challenged. Turkey realized that that sort of understanding of its foreign policy outlook is no longer responding to its needs or furthering its interests.

## **Normalizing with its Neighborhood**

Now what happened? There are a number of things that helped trigger this understanding on a conceptual level among the Turkish elite. But there are some

external factors as well.

In the middle of 1998, the leader of the PKK organization, which is a terrorist organization that ostensibly fights on behalf of Kurds in Turkey, whose leader was stationed in Syria, through pressure by the Turkish government and by a threat of military invasion, was chased out of the country. A couple of months later, in February 1999, he was apprehended in Kenya and an important milestone was achieved in the fight against this organization.

I am mentioning this for the purpose of this talk in relation to Syria, and that this event in itself, the removal of this person from the territory of Syria and the ensuing rapprochement and coming together with Syria, to this day continues. This is an external factor that helped Turkey to reintegrate with the Middle East. Of course, the war in 2003—the Iraq War, and as I mentioned, the nuclearization of Iran, were other external factors that helped Turkey devote more attention and time and human and financial resources into its immediate neighborhood.

The government we elected in November 2002 and its foreign policy elite underscored Turkey's need to normalize with its neighborhood. The chief architect of this policy has a book out called "Strategic Depth," Professor Ahmet Davutoglu, who is currently an advisor to the Turkish Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, basically argued that Turkey no longer can only have a one-dimensional foreign policy, and needs to reintegrate with this region and mark an end to what he described as an anomaly.

## **The End of an Anomaly**

Turkey for a very long time had been in the Black Sea, the Caucasus, the Eastern Mediterranean, and also the Middle East, and that needed to be remedied. The Cold War years were an anomaly if you look with a longer perspective on Turkish history. So the reintegration with the neighborhood particularly crystallized with Russia, Iran, Syria, Ukraine, and Georgia. Turkey's rapprochement with Greece already started in the late 1990s with the tremendous earthquake that brought the two countries together, and also the leadership of two foreign ministers on both sides.

With the exception of Armenia, which is a very special case and those who live in Washington probably hear enough about it from time to time, Turkey has really been able to normalize, reintegrate with its immediate neighborhood. Its trade volume, its political dialogue, its relationship with its immediate neighborhood has improved considerably. To give you some figures, for instance, Turkish trade with Iran in December 2006 had a 54.9 percent boost in comparison with the trade volume in December 2005. With Syria, a similar upsurge of 38 percent on an annual basis from 2004 to 2005. With Russia, where we had \$200 million of trade volume in 1989, currently the trade volume has reached \$20 billion.

The reintegration of Turkey and its immediate neighborhood is not only visible in trade statistics; it is also a phenomenon of elite exchanges and cultural interaction. To give you an example, an average of 2 million Russian tourists come to Turkey on an annual basis. Apart from the commercial aspect of it, it has had a huge impact on what we call people to people diplomacy and a better understanding

between two countries that had, for a long time, been plagued by extremely negative perceptions of each other.

Also, more and more Turkish op-ed pieces are being translated for the Arab press. In Lebanon, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and many other countries, people follow what Turkey is doing, what our thinking is. The same is true vice versa that we, our Turkish press, translate Arabic pieces for our press and we try to understand what the thinking and latest outlook of our Arab colleagues is.

### **Professor Davutoglu's Influence**

Now before I go into more details about Turkey's new outreach to the Middle East and its neighborhood and where that figures in Turkey's Asian outlook, let me give you some quotes from the architect of this policy, whom I mentioned, namely Professor Davutoglu. In his book on the role of Asia, he says, "The most important dimension of Turkey's redefinition of foreign policy strategy is the immediate continental basin of Asia. While other powers redefine their strategies towards Asia in the post-Soviet era, Turkey also needs to redefine its relationship with Central Asia, the Middle East, the Far East, and the Black Sea-Caucasus region."

He complains in his book that Asia is not well understood by Turks. There is confusion about how Turkish thinking towards Asia can be balanced with Turkey's traditional, pro-Western, pro-European vocation. He notes that, "Turkey's political position in Asia needs to be assessed within the framework of Turkey being a critical country in the East/West energy and transportation corridor, as well as the North/South divide." He here underlines the divide particularly with the Middle East. He then

ventures into the wisdom of an Asian depth and how that would constitute a hinterland for Turkey that is very little exploited and very little intellectually thought about.

Now what does this sort of intellectual language and thinking that he outlined mean in practical terms? I think two things really crystallized in response to this thinking when he and the current government got into office.

The first one was a strengthening of ECO, which is the Economic Cooperation Organization, which originally included Turkey, Iran, and now includes Central Asian Turkish republics and also Afghanistan. It is an organization that is not much known and it doesn't carry a lot of weight, but I think it's symbolic that the government actually followed up on its attempt to bring Asia into the foreign policy outlook. Also Turkey's accentuation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization needs to be seen within this perspective.

Now to give you examples of what this policy meant in the Middle East. When this government came to power, one of the first things that happened is that for the first time, the Islamic Conference Organization elected a Turkish secretary-general. Now this organization, by its name, was traditionally shunned and undervalued in Turkish foreign policy. But the fact that a Turkish professor became the first secretary-general from Turkey coincided with a time when the AKP and our foreign policy establishment understood that the Middle East is increasingly moving to the center of world attention and has become such a component of our foreign policy thinking that it could no longer be avoided and only treated with the distance that it traditionally had been.

For those who are not familiar with Turkish history, when the break-up of the Ottoman Empire occurred, a lot of the Turkish republican narrative on these events was very critical of the Arabs, that they stabbed us in the back, that they embraced the Brits and the French, and traditionally, for decades, we looked at the Arabs and the Arab countries with much disdain.

Now this outlook is not only purely a foreign policy. It doesn't only have a purely foreign policy dimension; it also has a religious dimension. The government that we currently have is what we call Muslim-democrat, post-Islamist, Islamist, but it certainly comes from roots that have an Islamic dimension. The view to reintegrate with the Middle East is not only a hardcore foreign policy issue, it is also seen on a cultural-social level, and certainly on a religious level as coming back to a world of co-religionists. In a world where for a number of years the primary discourse was either you are with us or against us, it made it easier for many Turkish foreign policy elites to embrace the religious dimension of that policy.

Another concrete example of this coming back to the region and particularly the Middle East is the troop deployment of 1,000 soldiers to UNIFIL in Lebanon after the war there. Despite strong public protests in the streets, the government pushed it through. There was nothing domestically to be gained from this, but the government wanted to make a point that Turkey will and should become a player in the Middle East and provided 1,000 troops of the total 7,000, if I am not mistaken.

Now there have also been some mistakes, for instance, Hamas, the group in Palestine, was invited to Turkey on a very clumsy visit. Still a big liability and a problem

when our Turkish decision-makers come to Washington or visit Israel.

But many of those things have been corrected and are still in the process of being rehabilitated. A lot of people now understand that foreign policy is not as idealistic and romantic as one would like it to be. Now there is also a strong component of inexperience in this government, exemplified by these mistakes with Hamas. This party was founded six months before the general election and won the election, enough to almost change the Turkish constitution. So it's a huge turnaround. Our current prime minister is the former mayor of Istanbul and had very little international experience before becoming prime minister.

Now I don't know how much Russia figures in into Asian Voices, but I will dwell a little bit on Russia as well because Russia is also a very important part of how Turkey sees the non-Western, non-transatlantic dimension of its foreign policy. Russia has moved, over the last five to six years, to our second largest trading partner after Germany. As I indicated earlier, two million tourists annually visit Turkey. 65 percent of Turkish gas imports are coming from Russia, 20 percent of our oil imports are from the Russian Federation. Currently, we have almost \$20 billion of trade with an \$8 billion trade deficit in favor of the Russians.

### **Domestic Dynamics**

Let me move now to the domestic dynamics that precipitated this sort of change, which are rather monumental in our own foreign policy thinking. If you are at all accustomed to our conservative foreign policy culture, you would probably recognize easier how monumental these

changes actually are.

Turkey, as with most of the world, has been impacted by the global surge of religion. Identity politics have made their impact in Turkey as well. The rise of the AKP, as I indicated, a party that has Islamist roots, not only indicated a desire to remedy some of the excesses of the secular system, but also signified a change of elites. You have a younger, more devout, more provincial elite coming into office, into the bureaucracy, into the media, and now increasingly also in business. The old, polished, English-speaking elites that many people here in Washington are accustomed to are on their way out. And, of course, this brings about significant tensions among the Turkish elites.

The Ottoman Empire is being rehabilitated. Our history that normally viewed the Ottoman Empire as a backward, Islamic, not-to-be-proud-of past, now has become a past that one can be proud of, that reminds Turks about its immediate neighborhood and about its past imperial grandeur. Conflicts from Bosnia, Kosovo, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Karabakh, Iraq, and now Iran, remind ordinary Turks that all of these areas, to one extent or another, had some Ottoman past.

### **Is the West Losing Turkey?**

Now this sort of opening up and normalization with the region, coming back into both the East, and also the south with the Middle East, has caused some tension between us and our Western—particularly American and European—colleagues. These days, it is very popular to have panels that are called, “Are we Losing Turkey?” or “Who Lost Turkey?” I think the German Marshall Fund is, to some extent, responsible for that because we did

a number of those, too.

But I came to the conclusion that actually no one is losing Turkey, it’s just a different Turkey emerging. The difficulty is for our American and European colleagues to recognize the change. The change is that Turkey is no longer that flank satellite country of the Cold War years, but is a country that has a growing self-confidence, is becoming a more independent actor in its region, most significantly exemplified by the March 2003 decision not to allow U.S. troops to invade Iraq through Turkish territory. Now this has also precipitated extreme respect from many Arab and regional countries in the Middle East.

But the fact is that Turkey’s foreign policy is simply diversifying; it is not an either/or question. That Turkey now has increasing trade and political relationships with Syria, Iran, or Russia doesn’t mean that Turkey is going to lose or sacrifice its relationship with the United States or Europe; it is simply diversifying. It is understandable that it has a multi-dimensional foreign policy outlook. The place that we are located in simply requires us to engage and be part of those regions that we, for decades, had neglected.

The challenge for our American and European counterparts is to recognize this and make the mental shift that this is actually a positive and good development. That a country like Turkey, which is traditionally security producing, can be a moderate influence on a region that is, as we all know, extremely problematic and volatile, and the way things are going it will remain so for some time. I think in that respect, Turkey’s growing influence in this region and its impact can be very positive, although it has only been over a short period of time so far. But in time, Turkey

will grow into a positive, moderate influence on a very volatile region.

One of my primary research interests is in the Russia-Black Sea-Caucasus area. I remember when the Soviet Union disintegrated, we knew very little about Russia and the Caucasus. We suddenly learned about Uzbekistan and Tajikistan and all of those long lost ethnic brethren. But during the Cold War, it was extremely difficult to study the Russian language, Russian history. In those conditions, you could be easily accused of being a KGB agent if you studied the Russian language. From 1991 up until now, we have somewhat closed the gap and we understand that region much better.

I think the same is going to happen with the Middle East. At the moment, we are a naïve and sometimes romantic actor and have some illusions about the Middle East. But in time, Turkey will actually grow into that role and become, as I am very hopeful about, that moderate and influential actor that both our European and American colleagues will dearly appreciate.

I would like to close with one last remark. One thing that I notice, especially over the last year when I come to Washington, is that Turkey is being interpreted here with a very...with a slant, let me say.

There are people here in Washington that would like to see Turkey fit into a certain mold that it is not going to get into. I hope that more and more Turks would come to Washington and allow our American friends to benefit from the observations that we think reflect a more sober and a more realistic understanding of Turkey. Thank you very much.

**Pinar Bilgin:** I would also like to thank the

Sasakawa Peace Foundation USA and Charlie Kupchan for inviting me to talk and to discuss Turkish foreign policy.

### **Historically Hesitant about the East**

When I first saw the topic today, Turkish foreign policy towards the East, my first reaction was to say I didn't know Turkey had a specific policy towards the East. For a long time, Turkey was not really interested in the East. This was partly because Turkey wanted to be in the West, and any kind of close relationship with the East made many, especially the founding leaders of Turkey, quite nervous. When I say the East, I mean our immediate east, the Ottoman Empire.

Turkish foreign policy has, for a very long time, as Mr. Kiniklioglu has pointed out, been inward looking. Turkey's policy has been inward looking and foreign policy has served the purposes of domestic policy as well.

The East did not really play a prominent role and perhaps it played a role in its absence. Relations with the East were not really considered welcome, we did not really want to be Eastern. There are, of course, exceptions to this. There was the brief period during the 1960s and 1970s where there was a crisis in terms of the relationship with the West. We tried to strengthen our relationships with our Eastern neighbors and countries further east and, of course, the immediate post-Cold War period when Turkey tried to establish stronger relationships with Central Asian countries in particular.

More recently, we've had a closer relationship with the East. This includes Southeast Asia, Central Asian countries, Russia to our East and, of course, our

immediate interest, the Middle Eastern countries. I would argue that there are three dynamics behind this turn to the East.

### **Dynamics Behind the Turn to the East**

I will start with business relations, because I think that seems to be—Mr. Kiniklioglu has also pointed to the increasing business relations with the East—not always coordinated by the foreign policy makers in Turkey, but it is growing considerably. We have immense investment, for instance, in northern Iraq, which is not always mentioned. One can discuss whether this is of Turkish foreign policy's own making, this interest in the East, or whether this is just a side effect of the globalization of world politics. I wouldn't want to point to a direct relationship there. So there is one dimension, increasing relationships at the business level, at the cultural level, at the academic level, etc. There are two more dimensions to this opening towards the East.

One has to do with the European Union, our attempt to become a member of the European Union. There are those in Turkey who do not necessarily want European Union membership. Not necessarily that they do not want to join the EU, but because they are not necessarily comfortable with what European Union membership brings in terms of domestic changes. Change is not always welcome because it's destabilizing, it challenges the positions of those who have so far been quite comfortable. So there are those who have actually tried to make the point that the EU is asking too much, this is going to be destabilizing, and perhaps we should turn towards the East. Russia was proposed as an alternative, Iran was proposed as an alternative—this was a couple of years ago, not recently—then quickly backtracked and

China at some point was proposed as an alternative, but not necessarily seriously. These were just ideas that were being tossed around. Much of it is not necessarily because of Turkey's interest in an eastward orientation, but rather due to attitudes towards European issues. So that is the second dimension to Turkey's turn towards the East in recent years.

There is a third dimension and that is the AKP dimension, the government, the conservative, Muslim-conservative, or conservative-democratic, they like to call themselves, government that is in power. Ahmet Davutoglu, the professor who is the advisor to both the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Prime Minister, has been the driving force behind this. I believe he received his Ph.D. in Malaysia. He is quite interested in what is going on in Southeast Asia. He has been the driving force behind Turkey's turn towards the East. I would argue once again that Turkey is turning towards the East, thanks to the agency of the AKP this time, not necessarily because we are really interested in an actual turn towards the East, I would argue that there aren't actually, at this point, concrete plans there, but mostly because there is interest in reviving Turkey's Eastern identity.

So my point would be that it's a welcome change that Turkey is now making its foreign policy more multi-dimensional. It may not necessarily be for the right reasons, there might not necessarily be the right kind of thinking behind this, but in terms of what is going on on the ground, there is a lot that one can build upon if one wants to. Thank you.

**Ian Lesser:** Thank you very much for the invitation, thank you Charlie, it is a pleasure to be here to comment on my colleague's very interesting and I think very

correct and accurate assessment of what is happening on the Turkish scene. Let me just make a few comments from an American perspective, and I would stress that it's really just one American perspective, you can find many, many different perspectives on Turkey in Washington. And as Suat rightly says, some of the debate about Turkey now has gotten quite heated, in fact, because a lot of Americans who watch Turkey understand that Turkey really is changing in some very profound ways. And Americans are trying to understand what this means for American foreign policy.

### **Identity Politics and Nationalism**

Let me just make three points briefly. I think this point about domestic change in Turkey is very, very significant. I think that Suat underscored exactly the right things about new elites and new identities and identifications. There has been some interesting polling that has been done in Turkey that clearly shows that people are thinking more about their Muslim identity alongside their Turkish identity. And it does affect how they see the world and what Turks care about, including issues that are highly emotive for Turks, like the Palestinian issue or other things. So that has implications.

I would also underscore this question of Turkish nationalism. Nationalism, of course, is unfortunately a rising tide in many parts of the world. Turkey is not alone in this. You can find it in Europe, you can find it in Asia, you can find it in the United States, although we don't use the same terminology to describe it. But Turkey is part of this, and it is a very, very potent force in Turkey today and I think it conditions much of the way Turkey sees Europe, sees the United States, deals with

its neighbors and so on. A very tough measurement.

### **Change and Continuity**

There is this point about a more diverse foreign policy, I think it is also absolutely true. Because of changes inside the country, but also things that are happening nearby, Turkey is compelled to develop a more active, more engaged, more interesting, more diverse, to use that term again, foreign policy. And that, obviously, touches on the United States in different ways. We've had big differences with Turkey over Iraq strategy. Much of the American strategic establishment was very disappointed that Turkey didn't accept the plan before the invasion of Iraq to open a second front through Turkey, and so on. But the truth is that Turkey actually has been extremely helpful on Iraq and some other things. A lot of this is coming out, but Turks don't talk about it very much and I don't know how many people in the room know that despite all of these disagreements about Iraq, probably 75 percent of all the materiel that goes to support American operations in Iraq goes through Turkey. And a lot of the aid and trade that is going to sustain reconstruction, to the extent that it is possible in Iraq, goes through Turkey. So Turkey is much more engaged in this than I think a lot of Turks realize as well.

Finally, on this Asian dimension, which I find interesting and don't actually think about a great deal, but is actually quite interesting if you think about it. A couple of points here: First, I think that in this development of a more active Turkish foreign policy with different directions, there was inevitably an Asian piece to this and it fits very well with what the Turks like to talk about as their soft power advantages, to use that very fashionable

term. Turkey has a lot of hard power, but it is only relevant in its immediate neighborhood—it has the second largest standing army in NATO, for example. This is not something you project to Asia, obviously, but in terms of Turkish soft power, the economic dimension, the cultural dimension and so on, Asia is a very fertile field. I think a lot of Turks feel that.

On another dimension, Turkey will be affected by the extent to which the United States, above all, but also Europe, spends more time in the future thinking about Asia as opposed to other things. I mean, if American foreign policy ten years from now is concentrating much more on Asia for various reasons and much less on Europe or even the Middle East, this is going to affect the Turkish state, the Turkish interests.

And then finally, just an anecdote about this man who has been mentioned several times, Ahmet Davutoglu, who is a very interesting person. I mean, not only was he trained partly in Southeast Asia, but he also takes a continuing very strong interest in this area. I had a long conversation with him about Turkish foreign policy, focusing mainly on the United States, about a year ago. But I would say half of the conversation was taken up by his talking about Indonesia and Malaysia and models elsewhere, and India as well. So I think there is a lot of interest in this and it does affect what Turkey is doing in the world and how we see Turkey in the future. So let me just stop with that. Thank you again.

**Charles Kupchan:** Thanks to all three of our speakers. Let me, perhaps, keep the discussion up at the table for another ten minutes or so and then we will open it up to the floor for the second hour.

## Identity and Ideology

Let me begin by asking all three of you to try to unpack a little bit the dimensions of Turkey's shift to the East that is about identity. Because I heard three different versions of how we could understand what role identity and ideology is playing in this. One is, and I think it was you, Suat, who mentioned the Ottoman Empire, that this is, in some ways, a return to a past in which Turkey becomes a more influential actor by focusing on its traditional neighbors and areas over which it once held more sway. And this is, in some ways, a more nationalistic version. A second would be, and I think this was your word, Ian, that it was a Muslim identity and that these are our brethren, this is our place, this is our home. And then a third version would be that this is more about religion—not Islam as an identity, but Islam as practice. I'm wondering if, you mentioned that there was poll data that suggests that Muslim identity is increasing, are we also seeing an increase in practice? Are people going to the mosques more? Are there more women wearing scarves? Is this actually about faith as well as identity? Do you want to start, Suat, and then we will just go down the table?

**Kiniklioglu:** Sure. Yes, thank you, that is actually a very interesting question. I think there are a number of things going on at the same time, and the three issues that you raised are actually interrelated. We Turks originated in today's Mongolia and drove west for thousands of years, so the people's most instinctual direction is probably and still remains the West.

I think the rejection by the European Union and the increasing fragility of Turkey's EU drive coincided with the impact of globalization, the rise of identity politics,

and the embracing of our Ottoman past, which is not only about territory and neighborhood and Imperial grandeur, but is also about religion. The rise of religion in the world has certainly had an impact on Turkey as well.

I would say that in my opinion, there is a more recent fundamental upsurge in our society about being more religious and in practice that means yes, more people go to the mosque, more women are veiled. But it coexists with the modern, Western life; it is not segregated. It is sort of a strange societal harmony and actually the fight among the elite about the headscarf and these kinds of things is not really, on the public level, visible.

But I have to say that I think a pretty dominating motivation behind the turn to the East, to discover the East, is conditional upon the potential rejection by the European Union and by the West. Because the Republic really is a modernization project, a nation building project, that came out of a multiethnic empire. And it was supposed to be crowned by full membership in the European Union. Full membership in the European Union would have meant that the republican project, Atatürk's vision of a Western Turkey, would be finally crowned and confirmed. I think this search for identity reflects the way the Republic has brought us up, the inconsistencies in understanding our past and history. I think there are a number of elements, to give a short answer to you. I think all three elements have some truth to them, and it is very complicated. And I would not be surprised if it looks too confusing for you to understand this phenomenon.

But to conclude, I would say, while there is a strong, as I said, anxiety about being

rejected by the West, confirming Turkey's curiosity and interest in becoming more part of the East, there is, I think, also the fact that Pinar indicated about globalization, of the world becoming a smaller place and the rise of the East. The global theater, the center of gravity, is moving more to Turkey, Turkey's east. I think there is a global shift, and Turkey is no longer at the edge of the radar screen, but at the center of the radar screen.

**Bilgin:** I would say that there are two major dimensions to this issue of identity. Let me start with your third dimension, that faith is on the rise, whether it is practiced or just for foreign policy purposes. It is difficult to figure out what is on the rise. It is very difficult to measure religiosity. They do public opinion polls, these are social scientists, most often, who do the public opinion polls, they ask people on the street if they are religious. It's very seldom that they say no. In the case of the men, they don't have to practice religion in the mosque, but when they ask men, they say they go to the mosque once a week—they say that yes, I am religious. Whereas if you ask the same question here, if someone goes to church once a week, they do not necessarily always consider themselves to be religious. So measuring religiosity, whether it's on the rise or not, is very difficult. One has to be very careful about that.

The headscarf is a very complicated issue. I mean, there may be an increasing number of women who are covering their heads, but that may not necessarily be a sign of religiosity. Islam has become the language of opposition throughout the Muslim world, so they may not necessarily be covering their heads for religious purposes. So that is a difficult one and I'm not really going to touch that.

I would argue that there are two dimensions to Turkey's turn towards the East and its relationship to identity. One has to do with the reaction towards the European Union, not because the European Union may not necessarily let the Turks in, but because they are asking for too much. The price may be too high, as I suggested, and they may be asking for too much in terms of the kind of reforms that Turkey may need to undergo. This may be showing itself in terms of a reaction towards the West and saying that well, we have an Eastern alternative, too, maybe we should do more about that. So if the Ottoman Empire is increasingly being brought in by some circles in Turkey, it is as a reaction towards the European Union. Again, not necessarily because they are saying no, but because they are asking for too much and this is not comfortable for everyone in the Turkish context, as is the case with many other places as well—not many people like change.

The second dimension has to do with, I tried to point to this as well in my commentary, the AKP's turn to the East. I would say that if Ahmet Davutoglu, for instance, is talking a lot about the Asian dimension to Turkish identity and Muslim brethren, this has partly to do with the AKP project of making Islam a bigger part of identity at home as well. So in terms of foreign policy, they are trying to strengthen the religious dimension of Turkish identity, which has not been close to the surface for quite a long time. Thank you.

**Lesser:** Just a couple of points on this. My own observation is that there is more visible religiosity in Turkey, part of it is about headscarves and so forth. Turks are very keen commentators on this. I suppose a part of it, I agree very much with the comment about it being the language of

opposition, so some of this may not be religiosity; it's a political statement or a social statement or a class statement or an authenticity statement. It's also, I think to a certain extent, a product of the urbanization of Turkey and the very large internal migration in Turkey over past decades. With the result that, visibly, cosmopolitan places in western Turkey, Istanbul and so on, have many more people who have come from the countryside, from more provincial places where it is more common to wear head scarves and there is more religiosity. But that is a process that has been going on for some time and Turks have observed and commented on that for some time.

I think, on this question of how this translates into Turkey's external vocation, East versus West, a couple of things: In the 1990s, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, there was a great interest in Turkey about a rediscovery of this Turkic world to the east that Turks had not thought about very much for a long time. Partly nostalgia, partly geopolitical, and it turned out to be somewhat less impressive than a lot of people imagined. The real new relationship turned out to be with Russia. But in any case, I think it's interesting to remember that a lot of that new activism and interest wasn't so much because that the Turks felt that was an alternative, but rather because many Turks, including official Turks, thought that that was a way to make Turkey more important to Europe and to the West. Here was a special role for Turkey as a Western actor.

So you come back to this question, my final point, of what Turkey is up to in its region, in the Middle East, or with Russia, or in other places, and today you do see much more activism in those directions. But the weight of Turkish economic and political engagement, I would argue, is still very

much in Europe, if you want to put a center of gravity to it.

A distinction, in a way, between foreign policy energy and orientation. I think that the two are not exactly the same. You can rush around and be very busy with Hamas or with Iran or with pipeline deals in Moscow or whatever it is, but it doesn't necessarily mean that Turks of various stripes have given up this Western sort of feeling that the center of gravity for Turkey lies in the West.

**Kupchan:** Let me put one more question to the panel and then we will open it up for general discussion. And that is, I want to bring the conversation down to concrete policy questions and ask whether the Turkish government has a view on the following two issues. And if it doesn't, I would ask you to state your personal views on these questions from a Turkish perspective.

### **Iraq and Iran**

One is Iraq. Does the government have a vision of what should be taking place there, does it support the surge, does it have advice for the United States given its proximity to Iraq that can help us get out of what appears to be a dire predicament?

Second, what is the Turkish government's view of the nuclear program in Iran? I presume that Turkey certainly does not want Iran to become a nuclear weapons state. If it comes to, essentially, an Iran that is unwilling to suspend enrichment and continues to develop nuclear technological know-how, if it comes to that versus the prospect of an American strike against Iran, what position would Turkey take?

**Kiniklioglu:** On Iraq, Turkey's position is

that Iraq should remain a unitary state, probably federal. The Turkish establishment has probably—I mean, it is still bitter and angry that advice given to our American colleagues in 2002 and 2003 wasn't listened to. But I think there is now a growing recognition that we need to look forward and see how we can stabilize that part of the world.

Turkey is opposed to U.S. withdrawal from Iraq, ironically. Turkey does not want a speedy withdrawal of the United States from Iraq. But, of course, Iraq is very much colored by the ethnic component of the Kurds in the north, and that has an impact on Turkey's own Kurds and the overall regional security situation. Turkey does not want an independent Kurdistan to emerge out of Iraq and believes that a speedy withdrawal of the United States from Iraq would, under current conditions, create chaos in the region for decades to come. And of course, when Iraq is talked about, there is the particular terrorist threat that the PKK organization presents, which I mentioned earlier; they have bases in Northern Iraq, which is currently controlled by the Kurdish regional government there. I would say that the most central problem in Turkish-American relations at the moment is the removal of these camps and the ease of operation out of that part of Iraq and the inability of the United States, at the current time, to do something about it or influence the Kurds there to do something about it.

**Kupchan:** Do something about PKK camps in Northern Iraq?

**Kiniklioglu:** Yes.

**Kupchan:** And do they then cross over the border and operate in Turkey?

**Kiniklioglu:** Exactly. They cross over the

border and do hit and run operations. Last year there was a period of a couple of months that there were more Turkish soldiers being killed by PKK attacks than American soldiers being killed in Iraq. There was a period of two to three months where I think 96 Turkish soldiers were killed by PKK operatives, more than the number of American deaths in Iraq at that time.

On Iran, Turkey has a very clear position. I mean, despite the decision to open up to the East, as all three of us have outlined, I think on the nuclear issue there is a very clear position: Turkey opposes, of course, the nuclearization of Iran. In response to this, at the moment, the Turkish government has been discussing the establishment of two nuclear power plants in Turkey. Although all of this is very much energy oriented, I think few people hide the fact that it also has the potential to provide know-how to Turkey on nuclear issues, which would come in handy if Iran actually goes nuclear. Turkey is actually playing a moderating role that is pretty much in line and in tune with both the United States and our European colleagues, but to the extent that you asked about, is Turkey strongly opposed to a military operation against Iran? What we bring to the table is not really much different from what our European colleagues say on this.

**Bilgin:** On Iran and its nuclear program, I do not really have more to add, actually. But on Iraq, let me say a couple of things.

First, the 2003 decision of the Turkish Parliament not to allow its bases to be used to open a northern front in the operation against Iraq, whether that was a decision by design or by mistake, we do not know. Now, the government and quite a few people in Turkey would like to say that we

saw what was coming and we decided to say no to this, but when the voting actually took place, a lot of us were very surprised. Not many people wanted Turkey to allow its bases to be used in the operation against Iraq, but we more or less took it for granted that it was going to happen. So whether the decision was by design or by mistake, I wouldn't be so sure about this. Some would like to boast now that it was by design—of course we were going to say no and we knew that this was not going to work, etc., so there is that dimension.

Of course, the AKP has been very reluctant to say yes to the United States, it has to do with the AKP and Islamic activists in Turkey in general, their orientation so far has been not to cooperate with the United States and with the West in general, especially when it comes to operations in the Middle East. Cooperating with the United States in the war against another Muslim country was going to be very problematic if the AKP was openly behind this, if the AKP supported this decision. So the AKP's base is important, they actually had to manage public opinion.

The turning point, I would argue, in terms of the current government's change of rhetoric towards the United States and the War on Iraq is the Abu Ghraib revelations and the photos coming out. When those photos came out and when there were a number of killings, one in a mosque, taking place in Iraq, that was the turning point. That is when the Prime Minister's rhetoric towards the United States and the Iraq War became harsher. So Turkey behind the scenes has been quite supportive of the war effort, but on the other hand, our Prime Minister has been publicly very critical of the war as well.

This has to be, of course, all understood

within the context of the rise of, I wouldn't say it's anti-Americanism, but anti-Westernism in Turkey. That has partly to do with the European Union process and it is also partly to do with the IMF. We have been going through an IMF program since the 2001 economic crisis, and you know better than I do that no country which is under strict IMF regulation comes out very supportive of it. Public opinion isn't very supportive of anything to do with the West, given that context, so that would be my last point. Thank you.

**Lesser:** Well, I agree very much with what has been said on Iraq. I think it's been very accurately characterized. Turkey sees Iraq through the lens of its own Kurdish problem and its concerns about the rise of an independent Kurdistan. It wants to keep Iraq in one piece. It disagrees with American strategy in Iraq, but also doesn't want to see the United States disengage from Iraq any time soon because of the fear of chaos over the border. So it creates a certain tension in their strategy for Iraq.

Normally we are talking about engaging Syria or Iran, which is very controversial for other reasons. Very rarely is Turkey put at the center of this and my own view is that we ought to be spending much more time thinking about how to work with Turkey as a way of bringing about some sort of marginally acceptable result in Iraq. Turkey has a lot of leverage over much of the Iraq situation and we ought to be doing more with Turkey.

**Kupchan:** Would you just say one or two more sentences about what that would entail?

**Lesser:** For example, it is virtually impossible to conceive of any sort of redeployment or even some disengagement

scenarios for the United States in Iraq without Turkish cooperation, operational cooperation. How do you sustain forces if you were to take forces into the North, smaller forces, and leave them in the North to do whatever they are going to do? You can talk about what that might be and this is one option. You couldn't possibly sustain that without Turkey's cooperation. It would be very, very difficult.

The one piece that is relatively stable in Iraq is the north, PKK notwithstanding. And to at least salvage that out of the Iraq situation is going to require the active cooperation of Turkey because Turkey is the leading political and economic, external anyway, actor in the north of Iraq. They have long-term leverage over what Iraq will look like over the next decade, which we have a clear stake in. So we ought to be doing much more on that, and we need to do something with Turkey, too. I really do think this PKK issue, Turkey doesn't—I think that you would agree with this—doesn't need the United States necessarily operationally to deal with the PKK security challenge but politically, it is essential that the United States be supportive. And I don't think we have been as supportive as we could be.

On Iran, if you will allow me a word, I think Turkey is increasingly concerned about its exposure to an Iranian nuclear program, to Iranian ballistic missiles. Turkey is the most exposed in NATO to this problem. So this is something that concerns Turkish strategists; does Turkey prefer a military option? Obviously not. Turkey is also extremely concerned about new trouble in its neighborhood and it economically has a lot at stake. It doesn't even want to see heavier sanctions, really. But on the whole, I would say Turkey is in the European mainstream on this. It

doesn't want to see the consequences of one or more new nuclear powers in the region, which would bring about profound and very negative changes for Turkey over coming years. Doesn't want to see that. The only circumstance that I can imagine Turkey being supportive, actively supportive of a military strike, would be if there was a U.N. mandate, and I'm guessing at this, or a NATO mandate or something of that kind.

**Kupchan:** Let's turn to questions from the floor.

### **The Kurds and the *Acquis***

**Questioner:** Thank you very much. I want my remark understood as a plea against binary oppositions that attenuate the differences between Turkey and other countries on some issues that we have been discussing. Both of these have to do with the European Union problematic.

So the question is, one, it is not just a question of Turkey and the EU, it is a question of at least a trilateral relationship between Turkey, the EU, and the United States when it comes to some problems confronting the Turks vis-à-vis the EU. You brought up the issue of the Kurds—the Kurds have played famously in the European Parliament and other places. So that would be one point that perhaps you would want to address.

The second one, how different really are the Turks in their response to the appeals for doing the *acquis* than countries that have recently become members of the EU or those that are in the queue? We have been treated to all sorts of examples of this lately. The Poles now are famously asking for, let us say, culturally conservatizing elements to be brought in with regard to the EU constitutional treaty and things of that

sort. So is there actually less difference here than meets the eye when it comes to Turkey and the EU when you look at what is going on within Europe itself?

**Kiniklioglu:** On your first issue, if I understood it correctly, that the Kurdish issue has a European component. I didn't fully understand the first part of your question, really. But it is true that the Kurdish issue is not only a PKK issue and is not only about having bases in northern Iraq or being able to operate out of northern Iraq. Obviously, the Kurdish issue also has a domestic component, how we treat our citizens, our Kurdish citizens, and what sort of cultural and political rights they enjoy. And in that respect, the EU process over the last three and a half years has produced some very tangible results. But unfortunately, the expectations of our Kurdish citizens have changed over time, particularly as the Iraq War unfolded and a semi-independent entity emerged in northern Iraq. The influence of Barzani and the Kurdish leadership has not always been constructive in that respect.

But it is a very complicated issue and I think if the PKK problem can be eradicated from northern Iraq, it will take a lot of pressure out of the equation that would probably allow for the government to take some more meaningful steps vis-à-vis Kurdish representation in the Turkish Parliament and also, I and many others expect that after the Turkish election, which will take place in November, Turkey will re-energize its EU drive. I think the Kurds can only benefit from that.

Now how different are the Turks from other countries that are going through the humiliation of applying the *acquis* to their countries? The problem is, the criticism that comes from our European colleagues is

not because X, Y or Z provision has not been completed, although the freedom of expression one is one that would stand out, but many of the European criticisms against Turkey are based on the assumption or make the argument that Turkey is not European. Poles don't get asked whether they are European or not, but they get criticized for some other things, and Croats are not being asked whether they are European or not. But we constantly are—it's about identity. It's not about whether we complete this part or that part of the *acquis*, therefore it's so difficult for us to stomach some of that. It is true that at the beginning I said that 4 percent of our geography, whatever that means, is in Europe. I mean, there is no doubt that Turkey and the Ottoman Empire have always been part of the European political system and had a long history in what is today the Balkans and Central Europe. But I think the difficulty on our part is that we feel very injured when Sarkozy says the Turks are not European, they don't have any place in Europe. And that moves the discussion to another plane rather than completing the environmental chapter or the external chapter for the *acquis*. That is the difficulty, but I tend to have faith in our European colleagues that they will be able to figure out what kind of union they want and how complicated, how deep and wide it will be. I think that Turkey will eventually have a place in it.

**Kupchan:** You would like to add something?

**Bilgin:** Just very briefly, I get slightly uncomfortable when people make it seem like the European Union is imposing all of these things on Turkey and we are trying to resist. I get very uncomfortable with this. It's not just the AKP. Quite a few groups, quite a few of Turkey's intellectual and

social movements, some of them, have been pushing for these reforms for many, many years. Many of them have only become possible through EU membership leverage. So the European Union *acquis* has been instrumental for quite a few groups and intellectuals in Turkey. We have to keep that in mind.

On the rise of Muslim activism in Turkey, the government, the AKP, is very much a product of that, in terms of business, and also in terms of culture. The government has actually tried to use EU membership to make people more comfortable with the AKP's part in Turkish political culture, to make Islam a more important part of Turkish political culture, and also to make the Kurds more comfortable living in Turkey. Increased political rights and freedoms can help to solve the Kurdish problem, and the political Islam problem, to a certain extent, would be addressed as well.

So there is that dimension to the EU *acquis* performance, some of us have been using the European *acquis* to get things done and it has been quite effective in that sense. There is also that dimension. I am not disagreeing—I am trying to compliment the previous answer.

**Lesser:** Well, I think it's scale. I think the scale matters, to be honest. If Turkey were a country of 15 or 20 million people, some of these issues of identity which are so controversial wouldn't have quite the same weight. But in the time frame we are talking about, which is perhaps ten or fifteen years or more, Turkey would be the largest member of the European Union if it came in. So this has real meaning and it has real political costs for Europe, if they want to go ahead with it. A lot of it depends also on what Europe looks like in

ten or fifteen years time. A looser Europe with many different speeds or multiple speeds could more easily find a place for Turkey as a full member. A tighter Europe, it's going to be much, much tougher because there is a lot of cultural resistance to it in Europe.

### **The EU, the SCO, and Further East**

**Questioner:** Thank you very much for a very interesting presentation. When I visit Istanbul, I feel deeply that Turkey is exactly between East and West. So the advantage of Turkey is that Turkey understands both East and West.

The international order has been changing, according to the latest issue of *Foreign Affairs*. BRIC—Brazil, Russia, India, China, these four countries probably will overcome the G-7 in economic power in the next few years and in maybe 25 years time their power will double. Probably Turkey will be a member of the EU, which is celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Once Turkey belongs to the EU, maybe Eurabia will come about and Islamic influence will be very strong, but the advantage of that is maybe the EU will be able to solve the issue of Iran or other Middle East issues.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization is getting stronger. Iran is an observer, as are Mongolia and India. You mentioned that Turkey is going to move East, do you think Turkey is going to join the SCO? Japan is located in Asia, the Far East, but Japan is like the West. If Turkey doesn't join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, do you think that Turkey has an idea of how to cooperate with APEC or with Japan or how to solve the issues in the Middle East? This is my question.

**Kiniklioglu:** Thank you. That is a very

interesting question. I remember a couple of years ago, there was a prime minister talking to an American official and the issue of NAFTA came up. Our prime minister, in his infinite wisdom, said, "Well, maybe we can join NAFTA."

There are some people who talk about the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and we have an internal struggle between the nationalists and the Islamists/liberals, which, of course, goes to the very heart of where Turkey belongs, what identity we should have and whether we should join the European Union or not. As Pinar earlier indicated, our National Security Council chief in 2002 said that Turkey should abandon the EU and instead cooperate with Russia and Iran. This is an ongoing discussion within Turkey and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, at times, although very little, is being mentioned as the sort of organization that Turkey could potentially look into. But to be honest with you, it's very far off and it's an extreme fringe component within the elite who actually think seriously that the Shanghai Cooperation Organization could be something that would appeal to Turkey.

Unfortunately, I think we are too early in the process to contemplate the things that you've indicated, APEC or a stronger link to Japan and the Far East. I think it's quite a bit of a leap for us to even now think of India, Malaysia, Indonesia—this is new territory for us and I think you need to give us some time so we understand it better and we know what we are doing. It's not always the case that our human resources have enough capability to function effectively in these new territories. Even the Middle East is quite new to us. There are very few people who speak Arabic, we have very few people who speak Persian, and I think the step that you outlined is very

much far ahead for us. I would be shy to say that there is any potential at the moment for that to happen.

But of course, the wild card, we shouldn't forget that the world is getting smaller and that the EU drive is, by no means, a certain destination. I mean, as Ian just said, it depends on what the Union will look like and if the Union will, indeed, not be able to become a more loose or a more flexible organization and will, in the end, reject Turkey or Turkey will be fed up and choose not to pursue it anymore. I think Turkey will, obviously, look to alternatives and one of the reasons why I think Turkey's relationship with Russia has been deepening is because Turkey's foreign policy elite and business community want to hedge their bets and gain some maneuverability in their dealings with the European Union. But as I said, with all due respect, I think it's a little too far of a step for us to take.

### **A Regional Approach to the Iraq Issue**

**Questioner:** The Baker Hamilton Report called for a regional approach to Iraq. Other influential voices have said much the same thing. We've heard little in the way of specific recommendations. I would like to hear some and see what you three, for example, might think about what the United States should do in attempting to set a regional approach in motion and whether such an approach would, say, subsume the Iraq problem for the time being and concentrate on Iran, which many would argue, is the strategic pivot in West Asia. Bearing in mind, I guess, that what the Iranians have wanted for a very long time is the absence of any threat of regime change, progress towards normalization of relations, and a security guarantee from some combination of the United States and other

major players, whether they are members of the P5 or the big three of the EU.

**Lesser:** It's an extremely interesting question and I think that you can probably tell from my earlier reference to this that I think that something along those lines is a good idea. The question though is, as you rightly say, where do you start and how far does it go? I think to have, at this point, a kind of cooperation and engagement with Iran on trying to fix parts of the Iraq problem would be extremely difficult without a much broader-gauged strategic dialogue. I think it would have to be regional, it can't just be with Iran, obviously. I think that it has to be with Turkey and others as well. Syria I find rather a marginal actor, although it clearly plays in part of this. Iran, I think, would be after a wider strategic dialogue with the United States on a number of issues that matter to them so that they are taken seriously, broadly. We have to decide whether we are willing to do that. I happen to think that we have little to lose from at least exploring that. I think if we had done that three years ago, probably the dynamics of the nuclear issue, as well as some things like Hezbollah in Lebanon and some other things might have been quite different. But I think at this point, it's got to be broader, I think the idea that Henry Kissinger and others—well, many people have written about this—this idea of convening a sort of Congress of Vienna or a Congress, maybe it should be a Congress of Ankara.

**Kiniklioglu:** Istanbul, maybe.

**Lesser:** Or Istanbul, which in fact Turkey is trying to do now. It is very, very valuable. I think Turkey does have a real role to play there. I think as much as we may be bothered occasionally by Turkey's dialogue with Iran or with Damascus, this

can be turned into an advantage. Look at what is happening now with the British trying to negotiate the release of these forces in Iran, Turkey is playing a role in that. Turkey is playing a role in that because it seems like a good interlocutor.

**Kiniklioglu:** Yes, the Turkish ambassador has been able to see the captured British soldiers, he was the ambassador allowed to do that. Obviously, that is one very practical and recent occasion where I think Turkey's new activism and reintegration with its region works as a real plus for the transatlantic community. But just to add to what Ian said, I think the recent initiative—Iraq's neighbors conference—that started in Baghdad and will be followed up at the ministerial level, hopefully, in Istanbul, is an encouraging development. I think that many stipulations of the Baker-Hamilton report were also very much welcomed in Turkey because they included the postponement of the referendum in Kirkuk and many other issues, and the involvement of neighbors fully coincides with how Turkey looks at Iraq. But the primary difficulty is, of course, once you engage the neighbors, can you limit that discussion to Iraq or will—Ian gave the example of Iran—they use that opportunity to widen the discussion and get other strategic issues that are of concern with the United States on the table? I think the challenge that remains is if you can limit this discussion if, of course, the United States is not willing to discuss some of the other issues with Iran, the nuclear issue or other issues. But I think that the neighbors conference and hopefully the one at the ministerial level are certainly steps that are welcome and in the right direction.

**Bilgin:** My reading of the Baker-Hamilton report was that it was asking for more than engagement with Iran and Syria in terms of

recognition of multiple dimensions of insecurity in the Middle East. I thought it was under-appreciated in that sense. The administration seems to be doing part of it in terms of trying to bring about, to introduce some kind of resolution to the Palestinian issue. Decoupling the two main aspects of insecurity in the Middle East has been traditional U.S. foreign policy for very many years. The Baker-Hamilton report, James Baker himself actually, was the person who brought the two dimensions together and he tried to do that again in the Baker-Hamilton report. The administration did not necessarily like it, but they seem to be doing it in terms of two tracks now.

In terms of public opinion in the Middle East, they see the linkages between those problems and it's not just Iran who would want to introduce new problems to the table, it would be public opinion in the Arab world in general, actually, and in the Middle East in general, who would want to introduce new dimensions to the table. That is exactly why a region-wide conference is not considered as so desirable by many. I wouldn't know what the Turkish government's perspective on that would be because Turkey's perspective on the Middle East in general is very much driven by what happens in Northern Iraq. It's a single issue approach to the Middle East, it has been reduced to a single issue approach. It began as a broader perspective but unfortunately, it has become like that. So that is one Turkish person's perspective, not necessarily Turkey's perspective.

### **An Opportunity for Turkish Leadership**

**Questioner:** I very much appreciate your presentation today; I think it is very stimulating. One of the stimulating possibilities that I can see here is that Turkey has a very special place in the world

because you understand Europe and you also have long experience with Americans, so you understand where we are coming from.

The U.S. has got its tail stuck badly in Iraq and needs help, and there is a moral imperative here, I think, and you can gain great merit here in the U.S. and in Europe by stepping up, because you are a secular Islamic state. And you have a lot of friends that are in the same situation, whether it be Indonesia, Malaysia, or India, democracies, which are secular, these are not Islamic states, but states that have a large proportion of their population that are Muslims. Including places like Azerbaijan—there are new resources, there is new dynamism, there is new movement. And if the OIC could be persuaded to take the lead in helping Iraq, Afghanistan, and Iran get back into the world, into the swim of things, it would be an enormous service to all of us. The OIC would provide the platform for this and there is a meeting in Baku coming up very shortly on a very related topic of the media and the image of Islam. So it would seem very logical that Turkey do this, because you also have military experience and command and control capabilities that other nations don't have. So you have all kinds of attributes to contribute, not the least of which is the Ottoman legacy of a government that was eclectic and accepting of all sorts of ideas and persuasions.

So I think you've got a great opportunity and Turkey, if that should happen, even if it were unsuccessful, still, the attempt to do it would gain you enormous world appreciation, especially here. So I think many things could be solved. I know the Kurdish problem is difficult, but that is not going to go away any time soon and that will have to be treated separately. And I

don't think it's a Middle East problem, I think it's a Central Asia problem that you've got. If it's taken in that light, I think there is a great opportunity. The Iranians are smart, I think they want to get out of this just as much as anybody else does. So you are in the catbird seat. I would suggest you pick it up and run with it.

**Kiniklioglu:** Thank you very much for your comments. I think I can agree very much with them. While you listed all of the advantages and capabilities we have, let me also outline a deficiency that we have. I think there's a saying: if there are two Turks, there are three political parties. We are a very divided country, and those who have read *The Clash of Civilizations* by Huntington, we were one of those torn countries he outlines. We are, indeed, torn, and what you just outlined, Turkey playing that role, both with that outreach and capability in the Islamic world, but also its military strength, its European or pro-Western vocation, would instantly spark a very intense domestic debate. I am afraid we would not be able to come to a consensus on these things because we are a very deeply divided country. We are divided between those who do not want to budge from any of the secular gains or the republic's primary principles and those who want a more liberal, open Turkey that can be more comfortable with the East, with its past, with its non-Turkish citizens, and with its borders.

But if I can offer any hope for the future, I think once you have your elections done, I think there will be a lot more prospect and opportunity for us to engage in the capacity that you just outlined. I think one of the problems with our current leadership is that regardless of what your current administration says or does, it just doesn't have the credibility, especially in an

election year, in Turkey for our leadership to engage at a level that you and I would like to see.

One other thing that should be added is if the EU drive continues to be as fragile as it is at the moment for an extended time period, I could see actually—of course with a new administration—that Turkey could come back into a strong partnership with the United States. I think this would have very direct consequences in the Middle East and also in the Black Sea and the Caucasus and Central Asia. It's not too far out, but it would really depend on one external factor: how we fare with the Europeans.

**Lesser:** The economy is another big factor in this. I mean, we've been talking much more about politics and security than we have about the economy. But the fact that Turkey has done very, very well since its financial crisis in 2000-2001 has impressed a lot of people around the world, has generated very high levels of foreign direct investment in Turkey, and a lot of interest in the United States. And it will make a difference over time. I really do believe that even though traditionally the constituency for Turkey in the United States has been a strategic constituency—it has been in the Pentagon, above all, because of where Turkey is—there is a lot of interest in financial circles in doing things in Turkey. In New York, on Wall Street, as I've said in a couple of meetings this week, people don't ask who lost Turkey or are we losing Turkey; it's only in Washington that people ask who is losing Turkey.

### **National Identity and Regional Investment**

**Questioner:** I would like to amplify the point made by Mr. Lesser, because I wanted

to ask you, there are too many things in a state of flux in Turkey. When people discuss the issue of identity, I'm not very knowledgeable about Turkey, but when I visited last November, I was very struck—there are so many currents, so many things that express the fact that it is a divided country. How long would it take to see a new Turkish identity emerge that would be, essentially, more uniform? Istanbul and Anatolia emerging leads to a sort of complicated structure. In the meantime, would an economic strategy that is more decentralized be a sort of holding pattern that would allow you to make progress without resolving some of your issues?

I can see that your trade with Iran is expanding, your trade with Russia is expanding, and the center of gravity is shifting. One lesson of Iraq is that the Middle East does not want to put its money in New York, they want to keep it at home. That is a big difference with the past, dollar recycling is staying in the Middle East, that is another opportunity for Turkey.

Essentially my question is, is there an explicit view of how to handle the new economic agenda, or is it just an incremental process taken by leaders at the corporate level?

**Kiniklioglu:** I actually had it in my notes, but I forgot to say it in my speech. One change over the last several years is foreign direct investment coming from the Middle East and the Gulf. You now have quite a bit of money that is coming into Turkey from these regions, though obviously the revenues made from high oil prices have something to do with it. The ease with which our leadership and our government handles this and the growing networks in these areas—I mean, our telecom, Turk Telekom, was bought by a Lebanese

company. There are now some Gulf companies who put billions of dollars into real estate in Istanbul. You see that the reintegration of Turkey into the region is not only a political phenomenon, it's also people to people, in investment, and in economics and trade.

So on every level, on the cultural level as well. I mean, we now have more movies that have some sort of Arab or Middle Eastern component and we have Turkish TV series that are about the Middle East or southeastern Turkey and the lifestyle over there.

But is there an economic strategy out there? I think we are doing, as Ian outlined, pretty well with the economy. It has had 6.5, 7 percent average growth over the last five years. We had a year in 2005, I think, of 9.6 percent growth. It is pretty impressive in comparison with what is happening in the European Union.

But the primary problem remains political. The dominance of the Turkish state, the limitations and the negative energy that comes out of the political apparatus and political life impedes some of those investments that would have probably come a decade earlier to Turkey. I mean, despite the fact that we have very impressive FDI, more last year than the past 20 years combined, the fact remains that potential is still there—it could be much better if Turkey's domestic political chaos and fighting could be subdued. I have full faith that there is a lot more potential for Turkish growth.

**Bilgin:** The diversity in Turkey in terms of ethnic background, orientation towards religion, etc., was mentioned and let me add another dimension to that diversity. I do not necessarily consider that to be a

problem so long as there is agreement on the rules of the game in how to disagree with each other. The differences are not a problem and I wouldn't necessarily label Turkey as being a torn country as such. Of course you are going to see lots of Kurds in Istanbul and of course you are going to see lots of Laz, Caucasians, Arabs. We have people from a variety of different ethnic backgrounds. I am myself a mix of three different ethnic backgrounds, 50 percent, 25 and 25. So, I mean, many of us are like that. Bad governmental policies over the past 20 or 25 or perhaps 30 years that misrepresented what Turkish identity is, have, I would say, brought us to this rather difficult position. So some, and it seems that our current prime minister is of the same opinion, want to recover Turkish identity based on citizenship.

**Kiniklioglu:** Turkey, after all, inherited a multiethnic empire with people from all sorts of places—the Balkans, the Caucasus, the Black Sea, the Middle East, the Eastern Mediterranean. It's only natural, and it's a very multiethnic society, although our nation-building effort has imposed one particular identity. But the fact remains that we have Kurdish, Circassian, Arab, all sorts of identities. The challenge, of course, is will we be able to coexist under a constitutional order?

**Kupchan:** Why don't we gather together any remaining questions and then turn to the panel for some closing comments?

**Questioner:** I'm curious about China and not so much in terms of the security question and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, but investment, economic interest in Turkey. China is obviously interested in the Middle East, interested in virtually every country around Turkey, and I'm curious whether China has expressed

specific interest in Turkey.

**Kupchan:** One final question: one of the things that stood out, and you made a comment in passing, Suat, about this, but nevertheless, my ears pricked up. You mentioned that the older generation of elites tended to be English-speaking with good ties to the United States and that the younger generation is somewhat different. And I'm wondering what is that younger generation? I would have thought that the younger generation, the digital era, travel, cosmopolitan, but I get the sense that you are suggesting something else. That in fact the younger generation may be more inward looking and perhaps less cosmopolitan than the older generation. I am wondering, is that what in fact you meant and if so, why is that happening?

### **Chinese Interest in Turkey**

**Kiniklioglu:** On the first question, to be honest with you, I'm not aware of a particular sector that the Chinese have an interest in. I know that the Turkish textile industry is extremely nervous about the Chinese and that there has been a transitional ban and some measures implemented that would not allow Chinese textile imports for a certain time, but I think it's running out next year or in two years and there is some nervousness about what to do. I think Turkey is not different from other parts of the world—Chinese products are taking over and of course in the end many local businesses will go out of business. But we don't have the energy resources that they are after in Africa or other places, so we are not attractive. We are a net importer of energy.

The primary problem with China or the issue with China is a political one. With the Uyghur minority, the Chinese are very

concerned about potential Turkish interference in that community. But I would say that the interest is more on the Turkish side towards the Chinese rather than the Chinese towards the Turks. Because, as I said, we do still have an important component among the elite, particularly in Ankara, who views with suspicion the European Union, and now the United States since 2003, and, of course, is in search of alternatives. There are sometimes astounding pieces and op-eds that see China in a romanticized and idealized position, which doesn't always correspond with conventional wisdom about what China is.

### **A New Turkish Elite?**

On your question, Charles, this is really another topic of discussion and Ian, I'm sorry, you are going to hear this again. We've been doing a lot of talking with Ian this week and he has probably gotten sick of what I have said. But what is happening is the older English-speaking cosmopolitan elite is secular to such an extent, not being able to embrace or digest or recognize the incoming AKP and other religious groupings, be they in the political or social field, that they are inevitably moving out. You have former ambassadors, retired ambassadors, running around different cities and complaining that the old golden days are gone and that these inexperienced, sometimes provincial, sometimes less polished elites now are overtaking Turkey.

You are, of course, right. Globalization and the age we live in, you would expect the younger elite to be cosmopolitan. But the elite I am really talking about is the political class. In general, Turkish society is much more English-speaking, at ease trading, traveling, just like the rest of the world does. But that is not the kind of elite that usually makes it into politics in Turkey.

In Turkish we have a saying: Turkish politics is third-rate players playing on a soccer field while the first-rate and second-rate players are watching on the sides. And the third rate players, I'm glad there are no Turkish politicians in the room, the third rate players in the field and those aspiring to replace them are the ones that are more inward looking, more nationalist, sometimes paranoid about Turkey disintegrating, infuriated by the rejection of the European Union.

That sort of youth and elite are there, but what is really important to note is that the more devout elite that is more in tune and at ease with an Ottoman past and more conservative tends to have fewer networks in Washington and in European capitals. They tend not to be as at ease as our diplomats, who are conversing in French and over a glass of champagne and can go into deep cultural arguments with their colleagues. These people are more provincial and they have, over the last four and half years, become part of the government, they have now penetrated the bureaucracy, and the business elite of that sector is also moving up. I think that both our American and European colleagues should brace themselves, because they will be talking to different sorts of Turks.

**Kupchan:** Interesting. Any final thoughts?

**Bilgin:** Very briefly on your question. There is a cost I mentioned to this whole thing, the complaints about the rise of the so-called provincial elite. There is a new political elite that has emerged in the last couple of decades, but more significantly in the last decade or so. As I said, the AKP is a product of this political movement, it is not the creator, it is not the agent behind this movement. And the established elite, of course, are not very comfortable with

this. But the new elite is not inward looking at all. They are also English-speaking, they are very comfortable when they go abroad. Actually, some of the things that they are trying to do and introduce in Turkey are things that they have picked up when they spent time here in the United States. Quite a few of them have degrees from U.S. universities and they are trying to introduce the U.S. way of secularism, for instance, back in Turkey, as opposed to the French model. This has to do with their educational backgrounds and their experiences here. It's just a different way of doing politics that they are trying to reintroduce. They are not inward looking at all. It's just that when they look abroad, they see other things, I would say.

**Lesser:** It won't surprise you that I agree with all of this. At the risk of saying some other things, which you probably have heard, I think it's appropriate that you have put a label of class on it. I think a lot of the AKP phenomenon, I think a lot of their electoral success, I think a lot of this sort of new elite business and so on is much more about class, to use the old Marxist jargon, than it is about religion versus secularism. I really do think that in some ways, it is about that. And it's in the political sphere, of course, but I think it's also in the economic sphere. I think the private sector in Turkey, which is very dynamic, is a different private sector and a much more diverse private sector than it was a few years ago. And it is important in terms of Turkey's international affairs because 20 years ago, Turkish foreign policy, Turkish international policy, international engagement, was what the foreign ministry did and what the Turkish general staff did in military to military cooperation—I mean, that was pretty much it.

Today, that coexists with a lot of other

things, including what big Turkish business does with partners abroad and, increasingly, with what small and medium sized enterprises in Turkey, who do tend to come from this more Anatolian background and are similarly dynamic and increasingly internationally oriented, are doing out there. There are groups like that that are now opening offices in Washington and it is actually quite significant. So I think it is obviously not only a discussion about who we are, as Huntington would have put it in Turkey, but it's also about how Turkey will act in the world. I quite agree, it's not quite the same player it was, but that's not a bad thing.

**Kiniklioglu:** One thing to add that probably would bridge what I said and what Pinar said is that these groups, because they feel the need to prove that they can be as efficient as the traditional elite, actually are often more effective and more motivated. I just had a meeting this morning with the Ambassador here and he was complaining about how divided the traditionally secular Turkish-Americans in Washington are. Whereas the more devout organizations here could bring Hillary Clinton to speak and instantly gather 500 people to a gathering, the others would fight over who would be running X organization or what. I think this is really an expression of the need to prove yourself, and I think I also have to admit that a good portion of it is not inward looking but outward looking and wanting to reach out. But it is very much conditioned by this need to prove that you are legitimate and that you can be as effective as others can be.

**Kupchan:** Please join me in thanking the panel for a very rich discussion.