

**Katonah Chapter of Great Decisions
December 4, 2012 Discussion Synopsis**

**Turkey -- Eight Decades into the First Middle Eastern Spring
Topic Leader – Dr. Mehmet Fevzi Ozkaynak, M.D.**

Dr. Ozkaynak opened the discussion with a history of modern Turkey. Born out of the ashes of the Ottoman Empire modern Turkey dates to 1923 when Army Colonel Mustafa Kemal organized the opposition that drove both the British occupation army and the former Ottoman Caliph out of the country. For the next 15 years Kemal (known by his adopted surname, Attaturk) ruled Turkey with both an iron hand and an overriding commitment to westernizing its culture and economy. Attaturk's government enforced edicts that banned traditional Middle eastern dress styles in favor of European suits, hats and dresses. He required all families to adopt western style surnames, imposed a western alphabet for the written form of the Turkish language and forbid the public exercise of many old Moslem traditions, such as the wearing of headscarves and veils.

In the years after Attaturk's death, many tentative steps toward democratization were taken, but "Kemalist" secular orthodoxy was maintained by the Army, which on three separate occasions after World War 2 intervened to remove civilian officials and "restore" the nation to its progressive path.

Turkey is a nation of contrasts:

- A traditionally pious Islamic population with an 80 year record of secularism;
- A member of NATO and candidate for EU membership, it is increasingly looking south and east for partners to drive its growing economy;
- Expanding Human Rights and democratization since 2000 have ironically resulted in both the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and increasing coalescence of political power in a single populist leader.
- At a time of dramatic domestic economic growth (5 to 8% a year, against the trend in much of the rest of the world) Turkey is facing increasing violence and refugee problems along its southern border with Syria and internal unrest among its Kurdish minority whose still poor homeland adjoins the more prosperous autonomous Kurdish region in reconstructed Iraq.

In recent years the role of the Army in domestic affairs has been reduced and the nation has begun to cash in on the benefits of its advanced education system and relatively open economy. Dr. Ozkaynak emphasized the word "practical" in describing the Turkish character. That practical approach to trade has resulted in trade partnerships with Israel as well as Arab nations, despite their mutual boycotts. Turkish engineering firms are building some of the biggest projects in the Middle East and Turkish Universities are attracting students from throughout the developing world.

Through the 1990s Turkey remained strongly linked to the U.S. through its important role as the southern flank of NATO. The U.S., Turkish and Israeli armies frequently planned and exercised together, sharing technology and intelligence. The declining importance of NATO in the post Soviet world has loosened those bonds. Turkey's parliament refused U.S. requests to use its airspace during the Iraqi war. Most recently Turkey's Prime Minister has moved away from close support for Israel and become increasingly critical of its government. Likewise, while its application for EU membership languishes because of Greek and French opposition, Turkey has successfully developed broad new markets for its products and technology throughout the Islamic world.

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