HISTORY, POLITICS and FOREIGN POLICY IN TURKEY

Edited by
KILIÇ BUĞRA KANAT
KADİR ÜSTÜN
NUH YILMAZ
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SETA
Nenehatun Caddesi No.66
GOP Cankaya 06700 Ankara Turkey
Pbx: +90 312 551 21 00
Fax: +90 312 551 21 90
www.setav.org
info@setav.org

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EDITOR’S PREFACE
This collection of essays, which covers a wide range of issues related to Turkish politics, history and foreign policy, was written by a distinguished group of young scholars, most of whom presented their papers as part of the Young Scholars on Turkey Conference. The selection of essays is intended to illuminate Turkey’s current politics and foreign policy as well as provide new insights into its historical background and identity debates. Both the Young Scholars on Turkey lecture series and its conference attracted the attention of an informed and enthusiastic audience of both established professionals and other young scholars. In order to create a volume that brought together some of these articles, we began to work on this collection in the summer of 2011. The articles were revised by the authors themselves with suggestions from the editors and prepared for publication. During the preparation of this volume, our copy-editor Nathania Ustun demonstrated invaluable dedication to the work. In addition, Maggie Simon worked diligently on the standardization of the text and citations and Ümare Yazar from SETA’s office in Ankara showed both patience and commitment in bearing with a first-time editor like myself. I hope the volume will be the first step in a long series of Young Scholars programs and lead to further collaboration of academia and think tank world in the field of Turkish studies. I would like to extend my profound gratitude to each of the contributors, to Nuh Yılmaz and Kadir Ustun for bringing me in on this very special undertaking, to Omer Ozbek for his help in the management of the publication process and to Taha Ozhan for his support and encouragement throughout this endeavor.

Kılıç Buğra Kanat
Washington, D.C.
INTRODUCTION
The Young Scholars on Turkey (YSOT) program, co-sponsored by the SETA Foundation at Washington D.C. and the Institute of Turkish Studies (ITS) at Georgetown University, completed its first year with an international conference in April 15, 2011. This volume draws on articles submitted by scholars who have presented their work to the Washington D.C. audience as part of the YSOT program.

The main idea driving the conception of the program was manifold. First, it aimed to bridge the gap between the academic world and the policy world in discussions on Turkey. Second, the program was intended to contribute to the depth of policy discussions on Turkey specifically in the think tank world by relying on already accumulated academic knowledge. Third, it strove to offer fresh perspectives on Turkey by engaging academics at the beginning of their careers.

This was definitely an ambitious project as it attempted to engage early-career scholars in the policy conversation. This was a difficult challenge because of the rapid pace of policy discussions compared to longer-term academic endeavors. The scholars we engaged often required much longer deadlines than we were willing to offer them. It was our challenge to make often highly specialized academic knowledge “policy-relevant” for our audience. It was also a highly rewarding experience as we witnessed true contributions being made to the policy conversation on Turkey.

As you will see in the content of this volume, we found that the academic research interests in various fields, including political science, international relations, history, sociology etc. are not necessarily far removed from the policy discussions. Many scholars focused on domestic issues such as Islamism and the Kurdish question and Turk-
ish domestic policy discussions often address these topics as well. In terms of foreign policy, much of the academic discussions focused on Turkey’s relations with the EU and the EU accession process. It proved more difficult to find scholars who were engaged in Turkish foreign policy with respect to Turkey’s relations with the U.S. or with the Middle East. This clearly correlates with Turkey’s foreign policy outlook to some extent as its relations with the U.S. and the Middle East have just begun to be scrutinized over the past couple of years more closely. Especially after the Arab Spring, there has been a lot of policy discussion on Turkey’s policies towards Middle Eastern countries and we can expect more academic interest in this area in the near future.

Over the course of the 2010-2011 academic year, the YSOT program organized a total of nine individual sessions where individual scholars presented their research findings along with policy recommendations in Washington D.C. The year 2010 was not a particularly easy one for U.S.-Turkey relations, which made the program even more interesting and relevant for the U.S. audience. We have received a lot of encouragement and feedback from our co-sponsors, presenters, conference participants as well as the broader audience. Based on the reaction so far, we can claim that the Young Scholars on Turkey Program reached its goals to a great extent in its first year.

We would like to thank Nuh Yılmaz and İbrahim Kalın for the conception of this program. Mr. Yılmaz, as the co-Director of the YSOT program, directed, guided, and supported this program in all its stages. We would like to thank the former co-directors of the YSOT program, Ufuk Ulutaş and Talha Köse. Ömer Özbek deserves special praise for his help with the organization of the program and the conference. We would like to thank David Cuthell and Cemil Aydı̇n for their wonderful support and encouragement. The Institute of Turkish Studies (ITS) at Georgetown University and the Ali Vural Ak Global Islamic Studies Center at George Mason University co-sponsorships made possible the YSOT program as well as the YSOT Conference 2011. We also thank Kılıç Buğra Kanat for editing this volume.

As we embark upon a new year of the YSOT program, we hope to build upon the success of the first year with a similar vision of enriching the policy discussions with in-depth academic knowledge through engaging early-career academics. We hope this endeavor will contribute to a deeper understanding of the realities of Turkey and better relations with its allies and neighbors.

Kadir Üstün
PART 2: POLITICS IN TURKEY
ATTITUDES TOWARDS EAST AND WEST IN TURKISH PUBLIC OPINION

Matt Dickenson and Ryan Kennedy
WHEN A COUNTRY SIMULTANEOUSLY DESCRIBES itself as European, Mediterranean, and Middle Eastern, foreign policy discussions involving national identity are inevitable. Turkey’s citizens and their leaders are not being untruthful when they cite their unique geography as a source of these plural identities, but the same qualities that gave the country leverage during the Cold War have recently contributed to tense international relations, especially with the US, EU, and Israel. Pundits, policy-makers, and even some academics have started asking the loaded question, “Who lost Turkey?”

Drawing on Samuel Huntington’s famous characterization of Turkey as a country “torn” between Western and Islamic civilization, the “lost Turkey” narrative argues that Turkey under the AKP has increasingly rejected its Western identity and embraced a leadership role in Islamic civilization (Huntington 1996, 144-49). This thesis has been advanced most notably by Soner Çağaptay, a Senior Fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, in articles with such titles as “Is Turkey leaving the West?” (2006; 2009; 2010). Similarly, Michael Rubin of the American Enterprise Institute has accused the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) of sending Turkish foreign policy “on a fundamentally different trajectory” that is “increasingly oriented around the most extreme elements” of Islamist foreign policy (Rubin 2010). Still others have argued that Turkey is moving towards greater cooperation with China and Russia, to the detriment
of Turkey’s NATO allies (Auslin 2010). As evidence, the supporters of the axis theory point to the rise of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), approval for Iran’s nuclear pursuits, tension in military relations with Israel and the US, and increased trade with China and Russia.

The view that Turkey has turned its back on the West, however, is not universal. Many observers, including Ömer Taşpinar of the Brookings Institution and former U.S. Ambassador to Turkey Ross Wilson, are skeptical of the idea that Turks are choosing along a one-dimensional East-West continuum. A special 2010 issue of The Economist devoted to Turkey rejected “the idea that Turkey is drifting towards Muslim fundamentalism and somehow ‘being lost’ by the West,” calling it “completely wrong” (2010). Building on the work of several other scholars, we suggest an alternative to the “axis theory,” which we label “autonomy theory.” Autonomy theory views Turkish foreign policy along a different spectrum, developing from bloc alliances to a self-directed policy, rather than a choice between East and West.

Arbitrating between these competing explanations of Turkish foreign policy behavior is difficult, since both sides have plenty of statements from political elites and events from recent history to back their claims. One area where both sides seem to agree, however, is that, if their theory is correct, we should be able to see the signs of it in Turkish public opinion. Ross Wilson has stated that, “When it comes to [Turkish] foreign policy, public opinion matters in a way that it did not even just a few years ago” (2010). Soner Çağaptay concurred with this assessment, calling Prime Minister Erdoğan «an astute politician» who is «reacting to changes in Turkish society... public opinion has shifted» (2009). In this study, we examine evidence from the 2002 to 2009 Pew Global Attitudes Project (GAP) surveys\(^1\) to answer three key questions: Is public opinion turning from a pro-Western orientation towards a pro-Eastern or pro-Islamic orientation? Are AKP supporters more anti-Western when compared to

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other parties? And are AKP supporters more favorably oriented towards Iran and other Islamist groups?

Based on our research, we conclude that the answer to all three questions is a qualified no. While AKP supporters are more sympathetic to Iran, Hamas, and Hezbollah than the general public, these attitudes are only marginally different from supporters of other parties and are minor when compared with the growing skepticism towards all international actors across the Turkish body politic. We offer policy implications for these findings in our concluding section.

**Background**

It is telling that as recently as 1990, the study of Turkish foreign policy was virtually unknown in the West (Robins 2006, 199). Although US-Turkey relations had endured several strains, the mid-to-late twentieth century was largely dominated by NATO and Cold War *realpolitik*. When the Cold War came to an abrupt end, they were left without a common enemy and, thus, a greatly diminished bond. During the first Gulf War, President Turgut Özal promised George H. W. Bush unilateral and unconditional support. After the swift conclusion of that conflict, however, the US turned its attention to other parts of the world and Turkey was largely marginalized by the EU and US. Even Turkey’s on-again, off-again relationship with the EU grew cold in 1997, when the Luxembourg Summit left Turkey out of its proposed expansion.

After the attacks of September 11, 2001 and the subsequent advent of the “War on Terror,” the US again adopted a mindset of existential conflict and turned to Turkey as an ally. The restored relationship, however, was short-lived. In 2003, the newly elected AKP-dominated parliament refused to allow coalition troops to enter Iraq from Turkey. This was due largely to domestic considerations involving the Kurdish minority. It may also have been motivated by Turkey’s European ambitions. The Iraq invasion was unpopular with France and Germany, whose approval would be important for gaining EU membership. If the latter is true, it paid off; in late 2004, the EU ap-
proved accession talks, which began in 2005. In either case, the US interpreted the rejection as an affront to its main policy aims.

The history of Turkey during this period is intertwined with that of its ruling AKP, which is where much of the cause for concern on the part of axis theorists originates. The party formed out of the ashes of the banned Welfare Party (RP) in the late 1990’s and came to power in the general elections of 2002. Other than the 2003 disagreement over Iraq, however, the AKP’s first term did not raise much concern among US policy analysts (Walker 2008, 103-104).

The party’s resounding victory in the 2007 elections gave it the confidence to begin shaping and pursuing an autonomous foreign policy. In its second term, the AKP announced its commitment to “no problems” with neighboring countries and began a series of “openings” centered on sensitive domestic issues. These included improved visa and trade relationships with Syria, Iran, Armenia, China, and Russia among others. Some of these developments were hailed as positive steps, but others resulted in controversy. In 2008, Turkey became the first NATO country to host Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, known in the West for his Holocaust denials and other anti-Semitic rhetoric. Turkey’s decision in 2009 to vote against tougher sanctions on Iran, accompanied only by Brazil, also raised the ire of the US and its allies. Tense relations were further inflamed during the Mavi Marmara flotilla incident off of the Israeli coast in May 2010. Turks, for their part, display rising levels of anti-American sentiment, with an opinion of the US that is among the lowest in the world.

These events, taken together, offer some understanding as to the origins of the “Who lost Turkey?” question. These events, however, do not necessarily signify a shift on the part of Turkey away from its Western allies and into a new Eastern alliance. Indeed, the US and Turkey have disagreed on numerous issues in the past (e.g. Cyprus or the Cuban Missile Crisis), and remained valuable strategic partners.

**Axis Theory vs. Autonomy Theory**

There are a number of competing interpretations of Turkish foreign policy developments over the last decade. In this study, we concen-
trate on the way that Turkey’s policies are viewed from the outside, and specifically in the US. Two competing narratives have predominated. Axis theory argues that Turkey is in the process of abandoning Western institutions in favor of a leadership role among Islamic states and/or closer ties with Russian and China. Autonomy theory rejects the idea that Turkey is necessarily attempting to form a new bloc-alignment. Rather, they argue, the primary trend is towards a greater focus on nationalism and self-interest.²

Axis theory suggests that Turkey’s moves should be viewed along a horizontal, East-West axis; any choice either draws it closer to the US/EU, or puts it nearer to the orbit of Iran/China. Proponents of this view emphasize three inter-related points. First, many supporters of axis theory argue that the AKP has not moved far from its Islamic roots. They argue that underlying the worldview of the AKP is a division between Western and Islamic states. In foreign policy matters, this means that the leaders of the AKP support a foreign policy where Turkey becomes positioned as “the leader of the re-christened Muslim world.” They point, for example, to the statement of AKP Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu in his book, Strategic Depth, when he says, “Turkey’s traditionally good ties with the West are a form of alienation” (Çağaptay 2010).

Second, based on this worldview, the AKP has undertaken a project of radicalizing public opinion on foreign policy matters. The party, with the support of some media outlets and educational institutions, has fostered anti-Western sentiment, encouraging “an ‘us (Muslims) versus them (the West)’ worldview at the expense of Turkey’s historic flexibility” (Çağaptay 2010). They point to the growing distrust of the US and the EU in polls like Pew’s GAP survey as evidence that the AKP’s project has been successful at changing public opinion on these issues.

Finally, axis theory supporters argue that closer relations with Iran, Syria, Sudan, and even Russia and China are a product of the

² When we and other authors cited here refer to increasing “nationalism,” we are discussing it in a very limited way – as increasing national self-confidence and a concomitant skepticism of international actors. We are not discussing issues of Turkish identity, attitudes towards minority groups, or support for explicitly nationalist political parties.
AKP’s Islamist worldview. Similar to the views often associated with “neocons” in US politics, axis theory supporters argue that better relations with authoritarian and Islamist states inherently come at a cost to relations with Western states. Michael Auslin of the American Enterprise Institute puts it thusly: “If Mr. [Tayyip] Erdoğan chooses to increasingly ally himself with authoritarian regimes, such as China, Syria, and Iran, then Turkey will quickly find itself isolated from the liberal West” (2010). Thus, Turkey’s improvement in relations with the rivals of its Western allies must mean that Turkey is either joining or attempting to establish an anti-Western alliance.

Autonomy theory proposes an alternate view, which imagines Turkey moving vertically. The baseline for this would be isolationist or bloc foreign policies, where the concerns of smaller countries are subsumed by regional or global actors. At the upper end of this spectrum we find more autonomous foreign policies, in which countries speak and act in pursuit of what they define as their national interest, with less regard to how their traditional allies might react.

Those analysts who we would classify as “autonomy theorists” describe Turkish foreign policy in various interesting ways, but they have several points in common. They usually argue that modern Turkish foreign policy, more so than at any point previously, is responsive to public opinion. Since the AKP came to power—and especially since its re-election in 2007—military dominance in Turkey’s foreign policy has diminished substantially, and the traditional insulation of Turkey’s foreign policy elite from public opinion has eroded (Wilson 2010; Lesser 2010; State Department 2010). The result of decision-making in a democratic environment is that policies are often adopted on a case-by-case basis, based on the advocacy of various interest groups, with less focus on grand strategy. From this perspective, it is growing mistrust of the US and the EU, combined with the growing demand from business groups for trade with Iran and Syria, which have produced the policies that have worried some Western analysts.
Supporters of autonomy theory argue that the dominant trend is not a growing support for Islamic or Eurasian states versus Western powers. Rather, the main trend in Turkish foreign policy has been the rise of nationalism and self-interest. With its rapidly growing economy, young population, and growing diplomatic clout, Turkish foreign policy is no longer constrained to traditional bloc politics. Such an assertion of self-reliance can take on an isolationist tone; as expressed, for example, in the oft-quoted phrase that “the only friend of a Turk is a Turk.” It can also carry a distinctly internationalist tone. AKP leaders, for example, often suggest that their closer relations with Middle Eastern countries compliment its goals as part of Western alliances and vice versa. Greater nationalism could also carry with it a tone reminiscent of Gaullism in France, where, “Burdened by a sense that it never gets the respect it deserves, Turkey may increasingly act on its own in search of full independence and sovereignty, strategic leverage and, most importantly, ‘Turkish glory and grandeur’” (Taşpınar 2011a; 2011b, 11-17).

From this perspective, recent moves by Turkey in strengthening ties with Asian and Middle Eastern states have less to do with ideology and more to do with strategic and economic interests. A foreign policy that is simultaneously trying to promote stability among its Middle Eastern neighbors, diversify its energy resources, and expand its trade opportunities will necessarily involve some difficulties. It is almost impossible to have zero problems with neighbors in Turkey’s neighborhood.

Put simply, axis theory focuses on blocs and membership. These are usually placed in dichotomous choices: “secular” versus “Islamic,” or “eastern” versus “western.” Autonomy theory words the choices more in terms of “bloc politics” versus “independent” foreign policies. It also places more emphasis on the growing nationalism across the political spectrum, not just among AKP supporters. We acknowledge that these are not the only schools of thought on this issue, and that there are many subdivisions within these two groups, but they seem to be the dominant arguments in US discussions of Turkish foreign policy.
Evaluating the accuracy of these competing theories is difficult. Scholars on both sides have plenty of anecdotes to support their view. Moreover, many of Turkey’s recent actions can be successfully interpreted by both theories. For example, growing skepticism towards the EU integration process is often cited by supporters of axis theory as evidence that Turkey is turning away from the West. Opponents of axis theory, however, point out that this can also be explained by greater levels of nationalism, and that Turkey may even withdraw from NATO or stop the elusive pursuit of EU membership without any reference to the tension between “secularism” and “Islam,” or between “eastern” and “western.”

The common ground between both theories is their agreement that political elites’ attitudes should be reflected in broader public opinion. To determine which of the two frameworks is more accurate, we will analyze Turkish public opinion as it was measured by the most recent Pew Global Attitudes Project (GAP) surveys. Overall, the results seem to support the hypotheses of autonomy theory.

Is Turkey shifting its Axis?

As discussed above, proponents of both the axis and autonomy theories agree that public opinion is a very salient factor in Turkish politics, including foreign policy. However, the two sides disagree on the direction of causality; whether the AKP platform is representative of the broad views of the Turkish public or whether its rhetoric is leading to radicalization of public opinion.

Soner Çağaptay, banner bearer for the axis theory, asserts that the AKP is responsible for a “transformation of Turkish identity” that will have “potentially massive ramifications” (2009). The danger, according to axis theorists, is that the AKP has brought Islam into the political discourse of Turkey. Formerly praised for its secularism, Turkey’s perceived shift away from the West must be at least partially due to the AKP’s Islamism. In a time when the US is fighting several wars against Islamic extremists and European nations are concerned with the restlessness of their own burgeoning Muslim populations, this mechanism is appealing.
The scholars in the autonomy camp argue that the direction of influence is exactly the reverse: AKP officials are reflecting the views of Turks who elected them. Has Turkish opinion of the US and EU declined in recent years? Yes. Is this because of the AKP? Not completely. Is it moving in favor of an alternative coalition with other Muslim actors, Russia or China? Not likely. There are many reasons for the shift in public opinion other than “radicalization” by the AKP or the desire for building an alternative bloc: disappointment at continued delays by the EU in accession talks, the US intervention in Iraq, its complication of Kurdish issues, and sympathy with Palestinians suffering from the Israeli blockade, to name just a few.

In either case, we should be able to detect the patterns of axis or autonomy theory in public opinion. If axis theory is correct, we should see opinion of Western states and institutions worsening over time, and a corresponding increase in support for Islamic and Eastern groups. By contrast, if autonomy theory is correct, we should see a general pattern of growing mistrust on the part of a Turkish public that is increasingly nationalistic.

What does the evidence tell us? Figure 1 shows the trend in opinions (those saying that they have “favorable” or “very favorable” views) of the US, EU, Iran, Russia, China, Hamas, and Hezbollah. Supporters of axis theory often cite declining approval of the US and EU in the GAP survey as evidence of greater Islamism, but Western nations are far from alone in this trend. All of the actors of whom the approval question was asked have experienced a drop in their popularity. Indeed, in the latest poll, the EU was the highest rated of these actors, and the US was the only actor to see its favorability rating increase.
Figure 1: Opinion of International Countries and Actors, 2002-2009.

Axis theory's suggestion that there should be a trade-off between support for "Western" actors and support for "Islamic" or "Eastern" actors also finds little support within individuals. For example, respondents with more positive views of the EU also tend to have more positive views of Iran ($r = .435$). Table 1 shows that the same is true for all of the other international actors in this poll. Not only has the declining opinion for the US and the EU not resulted in a corresponding increase in the approval for non-Western actors, but the respondents who view the US and EU more positively are also likely to view Iran, Russia, China, Hamas and Hezbollah more positively. This division into a scale of international approval/disapproval contradicts the expectations of axis theory, but fits comfortably with autonomy theory.³

³ Factor analysis also shows that there exists only weak evidence of two competing identities within these responses. A forthcoming working paper by these authors explores this using generalized latent variable models.
Table 1: Correlation of Approval for International Actors, 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>US</th>
<th>EU</th>
<th>Russia</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>Iran</th>
<th>Hamas</th>
<th>Hezbollah</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamas</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hezbollah</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both of these findings seem to contradict the contention of axis theorists that decreasing support for the US and EU signal a shift in alliances. Instead, public opinion is increasingly skeptical of all international actors, including Islamic groups.

Is the AKP anti-Western?

Of course, the above research only deals with the overall trends in Turkish public opinion. The concerns expressed by axis theorists deal specifically with the attitudes of the AKP, which they argue has an inherently anti-Western/Islamist agenda. Put succinctly, axis theorists believe that, “As the AKP goes, so will the Turkish population” (Çağaptay 2010). If the AKP has been promoting anti-Western sentiment, then we would expect for the supporters of the AKP to hold more hostile views of the West than supporters of the other major political parties.

In Table 2, we analyze this hypothesis of axis theory, while controlling for the respondent’s gender, age, religiosity, income, and level of education. We include the details of this analysis in the endnotes for the interested reader. Four political parties are included in the model: the Justice and Development Party (AKP), the Republican

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4. Gender is a dummy variable coded 1 if the respondent is male, age is the respondent’s reported age in years, religiosity is measured in a 7-point scale of how often the respondent prays, and income is measured as a 7-point ordinal scale. Analysis was done using ordinal logistic regression (for ordinal dependent variables) and logistic regression (for bivariate dependent variables). All models use Pew’s survey weights and robust standard errors.
People’s Party (CHP), and the Nationalist Action Party (MHP). These are the only parties currently represented in parliament and the only ones that look likely to surpass the 10 percent threshold for representation in the upcoming June 2011 elections. Supporters of these parties are compared against individuals who support none of the main parties. Statistical significance, which indicates our level of confidence that these relationships exist in the broader population, are indicated by the number of stars beside the estimated effect. More stars indicate greater confidence that the relationship observed in this polling sample exist in the broader Turkish population.

The first column predicts opinion of the US (from “very unfavorable” to “very favorable”). The results suggest that attitudes towards the US are relatively uniform across the Turkish population. None of the political or economic factors play a large enough role to make them distinguishable from the rest of the population with any acceptable level of confidence. There is no evidence to support the claim that AKP supporters are any more anti-US than the general Turkish population.

Another question from the GAP survey that is often cited by supporters of axis theory asks whether the respondent thinks the US is or might become a military threat. In response to this question, 52 percent of Turks responded that they were “very worried” or “somewhat worried” that the US could become a military threat someday. While this is disconcerting, looking at the second column of Table 1, we see that this viewpoint seems to be spread across the population.5 There is no higher threat perception among AKP supporters, and, in fact, CHP supporters seem to be the most worried of the three major parties.

The results for attitudes towards the EU are even more problematic for axis theory. We find that supporters of the AKP do hold significantly different attitudes, but that those attitudes are more posi-

5. It should also be noted that Turkish threat perception about the same as or lower than in the other countries where this question was asked (Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Indonesia, the Palestinian Territories, and Pakistan). For an explanation of why this question may reflect other issues than serious threat perception, see “Turkey’s Greatest Threat,” Today’s Zaman, January 16, 2011.
tive towards the EU than non-AKP supporters, and support is much higher than among the supporters of the nationalist MHP.

Table 2: The Effect of Partisan Orientation on Attitudes Towards the US and EU

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Opinion of US</th>
<th>View US as Threat</th>
<th>Opinion of EU</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AKP</td>
<td>0.300</td>
<td>0.015</td>
<td>0.364*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHP</td>
<td>0.183</td>
<td>0.193</td>
<td>0.115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MHP</td>
<td>0.171</td>
<td>-0.041</td>
<td>-0.503</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-0.257</td>
<td>-0.069</td>
<td>0.034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-0.008</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.004</td>
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<td>Religiosity</td>
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<td>-0.025</td>
<td>0.033</td>
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<td>Income</td>
<td>-0.017</td>
<td>0.078***</td>
<td>-0.140***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.039</td>
<td>0.062</td>
<td>0.191****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cut 1</td>
<td>0.75*</td>
<td>-0.525</td>
<td>1.22***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cut 2</td>
<td>1.49***</td>
<td>0.183</td>
<td>1.83***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cut3</td>
<td>3.65***</td>
<td>1.96***</td>
<td>4.04***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>670</td>
<td>678</td>
<td>639</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIC</td>
<td>1239</td>
<td>1816</td>
<td>1297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIC</td>
<td>1289</td>
<td>1865</td>
<td>1346</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>log-likelihood</td>
<td>-609</td>
<td>-897</td>
<td>-637</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Legend: * p<.1; ** p<.05; *** p<.01.

Tables of numbers are limited in the information they can convey, so we utilize computer simulation to further explore these results (King, Tomz and Wittenburg 2000, 341-355). Through simulation we can produce expectations of political attitudes for individuals with any combination of the above attributes, allowing us to illustrate the differences in attitudes of supporters in each political party for the “average” person in the GAP survey (in this case, a 36-year-old female who has completed primary school, makes 701-900 YTL a month, and prays more than once a week).

Figure 2 shows the results of these simulations. In terms of approval of the US, the three parties are nearly identical, and large majorities of all three parties tend to have a somewhat or very unfavorable view of the US. In terms of threat perception of the US, the supporters of all three parties are again very close in their responses.
Surprisingly, given the contentions of axis theory, the CHP supporters are about 4 percent more likely to be worried or very worried that the US may someday pose a military threat to Turkey than AKP supporters. CHP and AKP supporters are also very close in their view of the EU. There is no more than a 3 percent difference in any category between the two parties, and both have a substantially more favorable view of the EU than MHP supporters.

Figure 2: Opinion of the US and EU for Turkish Political Parties

All of these results make one thing clear—AKP supporters are no more likely to be anti-Western than the supporters of the other major political parties. This poses a serious problem for axis theory, since its main thesis rests on the role of the AKP in promoting anti-Western attitudes.

Is the AKP Pro-Islamist?
Supporters of axis theory argue that the AKP is supportive, not just of Muslim groups generally, but some of the most radical elements in the Middle East. Specifically, they accuse the AKP of supporting Iran and its nuclear ambitions, lending aid to Hamas, and being positively oriented towards Hezbollah. As noted above, if this is correct, we
would expect to see some manifestation of this support in the attitudes of AKP supporters.

Table 3 looks at five questions related to Iran, Hamas and Hezbollah. In each of these questions, we find that AKP supporters are indeed more sympathetic towards these Islamic groups than are non-partisans, but the differences between parties are surprisingly small. The asterisks beside the first row of numbers in the first, second, fourth, and fifth columns indicate that we are relatively certain from the data that AKP supporters have a higher opinion of Iran, are more supportive of Iran’s nuclear program, and are more favorably disposed towards Hamas and Hezbollah than non-partisans. AKP supporters, however, are not any more likely than the general population to downplay the threat that a nuclear Iran might pose towards Turkey. Rather, it is CHP supporters who differ significantly from the general population in viewing an Iranian nuclear program as more of a threat. Also interesting is that MHP supporters seem to share the AKP’s more positive disposition towards Hamas.

Table 3: Partisan Orientation on Attitudes Towards Iran, Hamas, and Hezbollah

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Opinion of Iran</th>
<th>Favor Nuclear Iran</th>
<th>Nuclear Iran Threat</th>
<th>Opinion of Hamas</th>
<th>Opinion of Hezbollah</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AKP</td>
<td>0.556***</td>
<td>0.661***</td>
<td>-0.004</td>
<td>0.644***</td>
<td>0.702***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHP</td>
<td>0.168</td>
<td>0.275</td>
<td>0.651***</td>
<td>-0.077</td>
<td>-0.557</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MHP</td>
<td>0.365</td>
<td>0.511</td>
<td>0.118</td>
<td>0.701*</td>
<td>0.341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>0.509***</td>
<td>0.726***</td>
<td>-0.573***</td>
<td>0.254</td>
<td>-0.014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-0.000</td>
<td>-0.00572</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>0.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religiosity</td>
<td>0.144***</td>
<td>0.0797</td>
<td>0.006</td>
<td>0.055</td>
<td>0.107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>-0.131***</td>
<td>-0.023</td>
<td>0.026</td>
<td>-0.058</td>
<td>-0.039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.165***</td>
<td>0.0411</td>
<td>0.072</td>
<td>0.136**</td>
<td>0.166***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cut 1</td>
<td>1.75***</td>
<td>-2.22***</td>
<td>-0.643*</td>
<td>2.75***</td>
<td>3.35***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cut 2</td>
<td>2.45***</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>-0.22</td>
<td>3.77***</td>
<td>4.72***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cut3</td>
<td>4.35***</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>1.07***</td>
<td>5.47***</td>
<td>6.22***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>617</td>
<td>686</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>580</td>
<td>596</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIC</td>
<td>1315</td>
<td>727</td>
<td>1796</td>
<td>813</td>
<td>639</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIC</td>
<td>1363</td>
<td>768</td>
<td>1846</td>
<td>861</td>
<td>688</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>log-likelihood</td>
<td>-646</td>
<td>-354</td>
<td>887</td>
<td>396</td>
<td>-309</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Legend: * p<.1; ** p<.05; *** p<.01.
On its face, these results would seem to suggest that the proponents of axis theory are at least half correct. The AKP may not be shifting its supporters away from the West, but it is shifting them more towards Islamic groups. This is, however, where statistics can be misleading. The above table only tells us whether we can be certain that there is a difference between AKP supporters and individuals who do not support any of the main three political parties; it does not tell us the substantive differences between the political parties on these issues. To understand this, we again utilize computer simulation to look at the differences between “average” Turks, based on their political party affiliation.

Figure 3 shows the differences among supporters of the three main political parties. Most of the graphs show a surprising consensus of opinions on actors and policies across the major political parties. In terms of their opinion of Iran, AKP supporters have only a marginally more favorable opinion of Iran than supporters of the CHP, and their overall distribution is almost indistinguishable from supporters of the MHP. On the Iranian nuclear issues, a higher percentage of CHP supporters oppose Iranian nuclear ambitions and view a nuclear Iran as a serious threat to Turkey. The differences here are substantial. However, AKP supporters have a surprisingly similar profile on these issues to MHP supporters, and the large majority in both of these parties both oppose Iran gaining nuclear weapons and view Iran’s acquisition of nuclear weapons as a significant threat to Turkish national interests.6

The situation is similar in terms of opinions of Hamas and Hezbollah. The charts confirm what Table 3 suggested, that there are significant differences between the AKP and CHP. A closer look, however, reveals that these differences are primarily between the “very unfavorable” and “somewhat unfavorable” categories. Overwhelming majorities of all parties view both Hamas and Hezbollah very

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6. Responses in the Turkey sample to these questions are not much different from the other countries where these questions were asked. Turks were more likely than any other surveyed country to oppose Iran acquiring a nuclear weapon, and only Nigeria had a higher threat perception of a nuclear Iran.
unfavorably. The differences between parties are dwarfed by their similarities in disapproval of these actors.

So, from the above analysis, we conclude that a higher proportion of AKP supporters have a more favorable opinion of Iran, Hamas, and Hezbollah. We also find that a higher proportion view Iran’s nuclear program as less of a threat than do CHP supporters.

Yet, looking at the substantive differences between parties, we cannot say that these results support the overall worldview of axis theory proponents. The differences of opinion between AKP supporters and the supporters of other parties, especially the MHP, tend to be marginal. Moreover, the differences in opinion are much less than the similarities. An overwhelming proportion of supporters for all parties, at least in the 2009 GAP survey, have a highly unfavorable opinion of Iran, Hamas and Hezbollah, and large majorities of all of the parties both oppose Iran gaining nuclear weapons and see such an acquisition as a threat to Turkey.

Conclusions
Two main conclusions can be drawn from this analysis. The first is that, while opinion ratings of the US and EU have dropped substan-
tially in the last decade, this does not mean that Turks are becoming interested in forming a coalition with Iran, Russia, China, or with groups like Hamas or Hezbollah. By far the largest trend in Turkish public opinion since 2002 is increasingly unfavorable views of all international actors. This suggests that axis theory is wrong to say that greater skepticism of the EU or stronger criticism of the US necessarily means that Turkey is attempting to become a leader of an anti-Western Islamic or Eastern bloc.

Second, there is little evidence to suggest that the AKP is responsible for either a decline in support for Western actors or an increase in support of Islamic actors. While we were able to find some differences, these differences in opinion between the AKP and the other major political parties were minor when compared to the similarities in opinion. Supporters of all three major political parties are skeptical of the US, EU, and Iran. They also generally have very unfavorable views of Hamas and Hezbollah, and oppose a nuclear-armed Iran. Axis theory misses the proverbial forest for the trees, highlighting certain aspects of public opinion while missing the larger trends across demographic categories and party allegiance.

None of this suggests that US policy-makers should not be worried about the growing distrust of the US and EU in Turkish public opinion. A more confident and independent Turkey presents both opportunities and perils for Western policy-makers. A more influential Turkey can be a valuable ally in dealing with Iran (as when it negotiated the release of British sailors from Iranian custody) and Middle East peace (as when it helped mediate between Syria and Israel in 2007 and 2008). A more nationalist Turkey could also, however, decide that its relationship with NATO and its elusive search for EU membership are no longer serving its interests. As Taşpinar notes, increasing nationalism in Turkey can translate into a more active role in international affairs, greater isolationism and general mistrust of international actors, and/or a search for “full independence and sovereignty, strategic leverage and, most importantly Turkish glory and grandeur.” Unfortunately, current data is not sufficient to distinguish between these preferences.7

7. See Taşpinar 2011a; 2011b. We hope to explore this further in future research.
It seems clear, however, that adopting the recommendations of axis theory supporters, who recommend punishing Turkey’s policy-makers and the AKP, or expressing paranoia about growing “Islamism” in Turkey is unlikely to improve this situation and risks making relations much worse. Moreover, the hyper-intensive focus on the security aspects of relations with Turkey, as they relate to the “War on Terror” or Iranian policy, ignores the many opportunities for deepening economic and social ties with this rapidly emerging country. Those ties will be more important than short-term policy agreements in producing a strong and durable long-term relationship between the US and Turkey.
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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Neslihan Çevik is a post-doctoral fellow at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture, University of Virginia. Cevik recently received her PhD from Arizona State University. Her research focuses on religion and modernity, gender, and civil society and democratization. Her dissertation, titled “Religious Revival in Modern Turkey: Muslimism, The New Muslim Entrepreneurs, and Sites of Hybridity,” examines the emerging linkages between late-modernity and religion in Turkey. This project is based on extensive field research with the leaders of pro-Islamic civil/political formations including the Justice and Development Party. A previous Fulbright scholar, Cevik has published reports and op-ed articles in national Turkish papers. As a post-doctoral fellow, she is revising her dissertation for a book publication.

Nick Danforth is a Ph.D. candidate in the Georgetown University History Department, where he is researching the relationship between ideology, history-writing and foreign policy in mid-century Turkey. Before coming to Georgetown, Danforth served as the Turkey analyst for the Project on Middle East Democracy. His writing about contemporary politics has appeared in Foreign Policy, the American Prospect and the San Francisco Chronicle. Danforth received his MA in Turkish Studies from the School of Oriental and African Studies in 2007 and his BA from Yale University in 2005.

Matthew deTar is a PhD Candidate at Northwestern University in the Program in Rhetoric and Public Culture and received his BA from the University of California at Berkeley. His work focuses on national identity, secularism, and cultural difference. He is currently working on a dissertation which explores the way that symbolic figures in political speech overlap to organize national identity in modern Turkey. His dissertation is based on fieldwork in Istanbul and Ankara that he completed during 2009-2010, funded by the Keyman Modern Turkish Studies Program at Northwestern University’s Roberta Buffett Center for Comparative and International Studies. His dissertation writing in 2010-2011 is being supported by the Institute of Turkish Studies.

Matthew Dickenson is a recent graduate of the University of Houston, where he now works as a research assistant in the Democratization and Foreign Policy Working Group. His academic interests include political violence, religion-
and-politics, and the Middle East. An analysis of terrorist leadership removals that he conducted for the Department of Homeland Security has also been presented to the Department of Defense as well as the Southern Political Science Association. He plans to begin work on his Ph.D. in political science this fall.

SARAH FISCHER’s research investigates the relationship between religion, political participation, and gender in Turkey. In addition to presenting research at conferences such as the American Political Science Association’s Annual Meeting, the World Congress on Middle Eastern Studies, and the Midwest Political Science Association’s Annual Meeting, she has won numerous scholarships and fellowships. Ms. Fischer received her undergraduate degrees from Iowa State University. Currently a Ph.D. candidate at American University in Washington, D.C., she has also studied at Koç University and Boğaziçi University in Istanbul.

RAVZA KAVAKÇI KAN is a Graduate Teaching Associate and PhD student at the Political Science Department of Howard University in Washington, D.C. Her current concentration areas are postcolonial theory, Turkish-EU relations, and Turkish Foreign Policy. She has most recently worked as a project coordinator of the first EU-funded project of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality. She holds an MA (2008) degree in European Studies from Bogazici University in Istanbul, Turkey and a BS (1993) degree in Software Engineering from University of Texas at Dallas.

KILIÇ BUĞRA KANAT is an assistant professor of Political Science at Penn State University, Erie and Moynihan Fellow of Moynihan Institute for Global Affairs at Syracuse University Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs. He is also a research fellow at SETA Foundation in Washington, DC. He received his PHD degree in Political Science from Syracuse University (Syracuse, NY). He received his MA in Political Science from Syracuse University and his MA International Affairs from Marquette University (Milwaukee, WI). He also holds Certificate of Advanced Studies in Middle Eastern Affairs and Certificate of Advanced Graduate Study in Conflict Resolution. His main areas of research interest area foreign policy analysis and domestic politics and foreign policy interaction. He teaches Introduction to International Relations, International Relations of the Middle East and Foreign Policy Making at Penn State, Behrend. Kiliç Kanat’s writings are published in Foreign Policy, Insight Turkey, Zaman Daily and Radikal Daily.

RYAN KENNEDY is an assistant professor of political science at the University of Houston and a research associate at the Hobby Center for Public Policy. He received his PhD from Ohio State University. His previous work has been published in the American Political Science Review, the Journal of Politics, International Studies Quarterly, and Foreign Policy Analysis, among others.
BRIAN MELLO is Assistant Professor of Political Science at Muhlenberg College. He earned his Ph.D. in 2006 at the University of Washington, Seattle. His areas of study include comparative politics, international relations, and the politics of social movements, with a regional specialization in the Middle East, and a particular focus on Turkey. His doctoral research focused on comparative labor politics, and in particular, on the political importance of the labor movement in Turkey. He served as guest editor for a special issue of the *European Journal of Turkish Studies* (October 2010) on this topic. In addition, he has an on-going research project comparing civil-military relations and their affect on Islamic politics in both Turkey and Bangladesh. At Muhlenberg College, Dr. Mello teaches courses in comparative politics and international relations, including courses on the interdisciplinary study of peace and conflict; Middle East politics; and government and politics in Europe.

SELÇEN ÖNER is currently Assist. Prof. Dr. at Bahçeşehir University at the Department of EU Relations. She finished her PhD in 2008 at Marmara University at the Department of EU Politics and International Relations. Her PhD thesis was on “Construction of European Identity within the EU”. She finished her MA in 2002 at Marmara University at the Department of Political Science and International Relations. Her main research interests are EU politics, European identity and citizenship, Turkey-EU relations, identity politics, Turkish foreign policy, civil society in Turkey and Europeanization. Her recent publications include *Turkey and the European Union: The Question of European Identity*, Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Pub., July 2011; “The External Identity of the EU in Terms of Common Foreign and Security Policy and the Possible Impacts of Turkey” in Łukasz Donaj and Marek Sempach (Eds.), *Turcja w Stosunkach Miedzynarodowych*, Łódz International Studies Academy, Poland, 2011; “Turkey’s Membership to the EU in Terms of “Clash of Civilizations”, *The Journal of Interdisciplinary Economics*, Vol. 20, No.3,4, 2009.

JULIETTE TOLAY is a PhD doctoral candidate in political science and international relations at the University of Delaware. Her dissertation looks at Turkish approaches to immigration and studies the historical and cultural sources of these complex attitudes and policies. She is a former fellow at the Transatlantic Academy where she conducted research on Turkish foreign policy and co-authored the book: “Turkey and Its Neighbors: Foreign Relation in Transition,” Lynne Rienner, 2011. She has also authored a number of articles on Turkey, asylum, migration and Turkey-EU relationships. A French and Turkish national, Juliette Tolay has also studied at Sciences Po in Paris, from which she has received a B.A and M.A. Juliette is the 2010 recipient of the first prize of the Sakip Sabancı International Research Award for a paper on multiculturalism in Turkey. In Spring 2012, Juliette Tolay will be Assistant Professor in the department of international relations at Bucknell University, PA.
KADIR USTUN received his M.A. degree in History from Bilkent University. He is currently pursuing a doctoral degree in Middle East Studies at Columbia University. Mr. Ustun has taught numerous undergraduate classes on history, politics, culture, and art in the Islamic World as well as Western political thought at Columbia University and George Mason University. He is currently the Assistant Editor of Insight Turkey, an academic journal published by SETA Foundation. His research interests include civil-military relations, social and military modernization in the Middle East, US-Turkey relations, and Turkish foreign policy. He has contributed to various SETA reports and his writings have appeared in Insight Turkey, insideIran.org, and Al Jazeera English.

NUH YILMAZ currently serves as the Head of Quality Assurance, Al Jazeera Turk. He has taught aesthetics, critical theory, and Turkish Politics in the US and in Canada. Mr. Yilmaz received his BS in Sociology from Middle East Technical University (METU) in Ankara, and completed his M.F.A in Graphic Design from Bilkent University. He is currently pursuing a doctoral degree at George Mason University’s Cultural Studies Program. Mr. Yilmaz has served as the Washington representative for Turkish media outlets STAR, 24 Haber, ATV and CNNTürk. He was the founding director of SETA Washington DC Office, and served as the executive director of SETA-DC between 2008-2011. His comments and writings have been featured by major media outlets including Al-Jazeera English and Arabic, BBC, Washington Times, The National, and Foreign Policy. Mr. Yilmaz is a member of the Board of Directors of SETA Foundation at Washington DC.