

# Praise for The New Turkish Republic

*“A Turkey rejected by Europe will bring the Middle Eastern problem into Europe. Fuller’s incisive analysis of this dilemma is truly of great and even immediate geopolitical import.”*

—**Zbigniew Brzezinski**, Counselor and Trustee, Center for Strategic and International Studies

*“Timely and lively, Graham Fuller’s latest book makes a valuable contribution to the debate about Turkey and its role in the world. Drawing on a range of interviews in Turkey and the region, it reflects on recent events and trends in a way that is not found in other works on Turkish foreign policy. It is an essential read for those looking to understand the new Turkey—and its meaning for others.”*

—**Ian Lesser**, Senior Transatlantic Fellow at the German Marshall Fund of the United States, and Public Policy Scholar at the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, D.C.

*“In this very timely study of Turkey, Graham Fuller provides an objective and balanced assessment of Turkish domestic and foreign policy. Factoring in the country’s unique social, economic, political, and cultural dynamics, he presents a multidimensional perspective often missing in other studies of Turkey. Written in a highly readable, easy flowing style, this is an excellent study of Turkey for a wide audience.”*

—**Omer Taspinar**, Brookings Institution

*“Graham Fuller is one of the most sensible analysts of Turkish politics in particular and political Islam in general. This high-quality work makes a valuable contribution to the study of Turkey and Islamic politics and breaks new ground by stressing the transformation of Turkey and its role in the region.”*

—**Hakan Yavuz**, University of Utah



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TURKEY  
AS A  
PIVOTAL  
STATE  
IN THE  
MUSLIM  
WORLD

**Graham E. Fuller**



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# Foreword

**M**omentous changes have been under way in Turkey for two decades, and as the Turkish Republic continues to define its role in international politics, there is little doubt that more change lies ahead. Turkey is an important member of NATO, and it has been a valued ally of the United States since World War II. But the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 exposed some of the fundamental contradictions in U.S.-Turkish relations. With little consultation with its ally, U.S. war planners simply assumed that Turkey would serve as a land and air bridge to northern Iraq. In fact, the invasion was profoundly unpopular in Turkey, and the democratically elected parliament rebuffed the United States. This action prompted Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz—a proponent of democracy in Iraq—to suggest that the Turkish government could have short-circuited the democratic process. But, as Graham Fuller reveals in this volume, democracy is alive and well in Turkey.

Democracy is only sixty years old in Turkey, and the military, which sees itself as the guardian republic, has regularly intervened to counter threats to Kemalism, the ideology espoused by the founder of the republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Inspired by French laicism, Kemalism insists on a subordination of religion to state authority. Atatürk, a military hero and the dominant political personality of his generation, was a giant of Turkish history, but he was no democrat. His vision of Turkey insisted on an autocratic state that dominated both politics and the economy. Turkey's democratic experiment began in 1950, a dozen years after Atatürk's death. The first democratically elected leader of the republic, Adnan Menderes, was hanged by the army in 1961. Since then, Kemalists have periodically—without intending irony—called upon the military to intervene to “save democracy.”

A key twenty-first century debate is whether Muslim societies will embrace democracy. To that debate Turkey, where Muslims accounts for over 98 percent of the population, brings a very hopeful example. In the course of three short generations, Turkey has developed a vibrant, exciting, and responsive democracy that is now dominated by a competent political party with a decided Islamic personality. It is noteworthy that the Turkish democratic experiment is being closely watched in Muslim societies.

The ruling Justice and Development Party (often known by its Turkish acronym, AKP), led by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, spurns the label “Islamist.” AKP embraces secularism, which, as Fuller reveals, privileges the individual's right to religious freedom, in contrast to the trademark laicism espoused by the Turkish military elites and fervent Kemalists. In

contrast, some of the Kemalists reveal a fundamentalist obsession with laicism, which is no less exclusionary than the perspectives of mirror-image Islamists. In any case, AKP has found a *modus vivendi* with the military. In 2007, when the generals vetoed the parliament's selection of Abdullah Gul, a leading AKP figure, to become president of the Republic, Erdogan called for new elections. AKP won a resounding victory. Gul is now the president.

AKP has been buoyed by the rise of an Anatolian middle class, which is more socially conservative than many of the Kemalist entrepreneurs but is deeply committed to Turkey and to the model of the republic. The party's constituents evince "Muslimhood," tempered by Turkish nationalism. Many of these people participate in the Nur (light) movement, which is the largest social movement in Turkey. As Fuller explains, this movement, which takes the premise of a strong Turkish state more or less for granted, is based in Islamic modernism.

While military intervention in politics is still possible, it has been less plausible, particularly so long as Turkey is vying for membership in the European Union. AKP has been leading the Turkish campaign for EU membership. During the cold war, Turkey's key relationship was arguably with the United States, but, as Fuller emphasizes, Turkey now is pursuing interests in Europe, Eurasia, and the Middle East. Turkey's agenda does not necessarily coincide with the agenda of the United States, as Washington policymakers are discovering. While the embassy in Washington remains keenly important to Ankara, the end of the cold war, the growing salience of the European Union and Europe in politics and trade, and the changes and opportunities that inevitably come with Turkey's geopolitical setting dictate a *toutes directions* foreign policy for Turkey.

Turkey turned its back on the Middle East after the founding of the republic, which Fuller refers to as a product of the "Kemalist historical lobotomy." Well into the 1990s, neither Turkish officials nor scholars paid much attention to the Middle East, despite the centrality of the region to the former Ottoman Empire. Now Turkey is reconnecting to the region after a long hiatus in Turkish-Arab relations. It is instructive that Turkey's border with Syria was officially recognized by Ankara only in 2004, in conjunction with Prime Minister Erdogan's visit to Damascus in 2004.

While Turkey has developed an important strategic relationship with Israel, it balances that orientation with a variety of other developing relations in the Middle East. Perhaps most indicative of the Turkey independent foreign policy is its relationship with non-Arab Iran, an important trading partner and neighbor. After years of tense relations, particularly in the decade following the toppling of the shah of Iran in 1979, the two countries have developed reasonably cordial relations.

Restive Kurdish minorities are found in both Turkey and Iran. Violent Kurdish nationalists, benefiting from sanctuary in Iraqi Kurdistan, have

grown more active in both countries. With U.S. occupation forces consumed by the challenges of civil war and insurgency in Iraq, an ineffectual Iraqi government in Baghdad, and few incentives for Iraqi Kurdish authorities to act against popular nationalist groups, the challenge of Kurdish nationalism now preoccupies and unites many in Turkey. Turkey and Iran have found they have some common security interests as well, despite Washington's dismay.

As the "new Turkish republic" finds its way and its voice, there will be no turning back to the simpler dynamic of the cold war. Thus the quality of U.S.-Turkish relations will inevitably be maturing and evolving, just as Turkey is doing. This timely book is an indispensable primer to the challenges that lie ahead and the context in which those changes are occurring.

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# Acknowledgments

**T**his book draws on a lifetime of interest in and involvement with Turkey, specifically its history, politics, culture, language, and society. Therefore, I wish to express thanks to the United States Institute of Peace for the grant to write this book. I am especially pleased to have had the chance to explore the role of Turkey in the Middle East and the broader Muslim world for two principal reasons: it is a topic that has received relatively little attention from Turkish, Western, and Arab analysts; and Turkey's relations with its neighbors and coreligionists will only grow in importance in the decades ahead, particularly as many parts of the Muslim world lurch toward further instability and turmoil. I also wish to thank the Earhart Foundation for an earlier grant to explore the character of contemporary religious movements in Turkey—in particular, the Fethullah Gülen movement—which has greatly helped inform this book.





