

RELUCTANT NEIGHBOR

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Turkey's Role in the Middle East

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UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE PRESS
WASHINGTON, D.C.

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United States Institute of Peace
1550 M Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20005

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Printed in the United States of America.

The paper used by this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1984.

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication Data

Reluctant Neighbor: Turkey's Role in the Middle East/Henri J. Barkey, ed.

p. cm.

ISBN 1-878379-64-X (pbk.: alk. paper)

1. Middle East—Relations—Turkey. 2. Turkey—Relations—Middle East. 3. East and West. I. Barkey, Henri J.

DS63.2.T8 R 1996

327.561—dc21

96-39739

CIP

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PREFACE

"Turkey after the Cold War is equivalent to Germany during the Cold War—a pivotal state, where diverse strategic interests intersect."

—Richard Holbrooke

As former Assistant Secretary of State Holbrooke indicates, Turkey's long-standing strategic relevance to the United States and the West has been cast in a new light by such recent events as the fall of the Soviet Union, the breakup of Yugoslavia, and the emergence of independent Turkic states in the Transcaucasus and Central Asia. Still, despite their recognition of Turkey's strategic location among regions in flux, scholars and policymakers have tended to neglect the fact that it is also part of the Middle East, long an unstable region. Although any Middle East specialist will acknowledge Turkey's significant role in the history of the region and its distinctive relationships with the Arab states and Israel, it is not often spoken of as an important factor in the peace process or in Western calculations in the Persian Gulf. Nor does one hear much about Turkey's relationships with its immediate neighbors—Syria, Iraq, and Iran—although they have every bit as much potential for upheaval as its relations with Europe and the states of the former Soviet Union.

But Turkey's burgeoning importance in the Middle East can be seen in such instances as Ankara's deepening engagement with the Kurds in northern Iraq, stresses in its relations with Syria over the Kurds and sharing Tigris and Euphrates water, and its controversial military cooperation with Israel.

In June 1994, the United States Institute of Peace convened "A Reluctant Neighbor: Analyzing Turkey's Role in the Middle East," a conference designed to initiate a discussion of these issues and

bring together scholars and other experts from Turkey and the Middle East, as well as American and European specialists on the region. The overwhelming response to this conference indicates the growing interest in understanding this dimension of Turkey's foreign policy, and the liveliness of the discussion helped persuade us to develop a book creating a document of the debate on which students and policy-makers might draw. The present volume includes chapters developed from papers presented at the conference and subsequently considerably expanded and updated, as well as a new essay by Alan Makovsky designed to complete the overview. Contributors come from Turkey, Syria, Iran, and Iraq, as well as the United States and Britain, bringing to bear varied backgrounds, viewpoints, and disciplines.

I would like to acknowledge the invaluable assistance of Patricia Carley, program officer at the United States Institute of Peace, who worked with me to organize the original conference. I would also like to express my gratitude to Institute President Richard H. Solomon, who supported the conference and book projects throughout their development, as well to Kenneth M. Jensen, who as the Institute's then-director of research and studies was the first to approve of the conference idea. In addition, Priscilla Jensen worked diligently on bringing the manuscript to fruition.