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TURKEY IN THE LATE 1970's

Summary Comments on a Conference held at the Department of State,

23 April 1976

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James A. McHenry, Jr

Department of History

University of Kansas *New*

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A. The Current Setting: Parties and Politics

While studies of electoral statistics are interesting, I do not believe that the turbulent political scene in Turkey can be fully understood in quantitative terms. The MSP is a case in point. In spite of the fact that its fortunes declined in the last election, it still is able to influence key appointments (Şaban Karataş to TRT and İsmail Yaraş to the Directorship of the Iskenderun steel mill) and to ~~substantively~~ influence the content of both domestic and foreign policy. Within the framework of coalition politics, both the MSP and the MHP continue to exercise leverage which is completely out of proportion to their actual electoral strength. This fact tends to increase the polarization between the forces of the right and those of the left. I suspect both the right and the left of manipulating student unrest to advance their own political ends. This is an old game which I first witnessed at Ataturk University during the 1966-1968 period.

These considerations lead me to agree with Professor Frey's observation that we need more studies of non-electoral politics in Turkey. Family, school, and friendship patterns are extremely important though they are rarely understood by outsiders. Let me illustrate this point with a personal experience. Fulbrighters in Turkey are accustomed to waiting three months or more for their residence permits. Owing to the fact that the Ankara Emniyet Müdürlüğü (Security Director) was a classmate of my adviser's, my own permit was processed in less than one hour.

I would also argue that the element of personal charisma cannot be ignored in considering the course of Turkish politics in the late 1970's. Many Turks hunger for a charismatic leader who will embody and articulate their own national aspirations. Even if the bloom has

gone off of Ecevit, he still wears the mantle of a Gazi. Admittedly his work in reorienting the RPP has been very important in increasing that party's political base. But I expect him to derive great benefit from the degree to which he conforms to an ideal image of the modern Turk. The more widespread presence of television in Turkey may very well aid him in projecting precisely that image. I recall that in the fall of 1974, many bookshops in Ankara displayed posters of Ecevit with the words: "Dün Atatürk, Bugün Ecevit." If Demirel tried that line everyone would laugh.

B. The Political Role of the Military

I am in agreement with Professor Rustow's view that the military is extremely reluctant to take over the reins of government. The shock and tremors from the Lockheed scandal may well reinforce this disposition at least in the very immediate future.

On the other hand, a large number of my Turkish friends seem to view the military as an umpire and internal peacekeeper. There is a rather fatalistic popular assumption that, when things get bad enough, the military will simply have to step in and clear the air.

Higher education in Turkey has been at a standstill for nearly two years. Violence and political assassination are moving down into the Lises and are by no means confined to major metropolitan areas. If the Demirel Government cannot reverse the current trend, then I think popular unrest might well evoke some dramatic gesture from the military.

C. The Economy: Conditions and Problems

I do not see any developments which make me hopeful that Turkey's current economic situation will improve very much in the late 1970's. Confronted with a balance of payments deficit of over \$3 billion,

Turkish politicians speak of increasing agricultural exports to turn the tide. The prospects of achieving success via this route seem remote.

Measures such as the increase in fees for the overland transit trade may yield \$50 million or so, but they cannot begin to offset expected increases in Turkey's import bill. Some Turkish economists have recommended greater austerity, but this course is unlikely to be adopted by the Demirel Government.

D. Trends in Turkish foreign relations and implications for the U.S.

I do not share the view held by some participants that the U.S. should take yet another step away from Turkey by withholding military assistance. Nor do I support the contention that, in an age of ICBMs, Turkey's strategic position has become obsolete. That argument seems to suppose that nothing short of a massive nuclear exchange between the superpowers can be contemplated. My own view is that the fear of a nuclear holocaust requires the superpowers to jockey for position and relative advantage at levels well below the nuclear threshold. If this is true, then a strong and friendly Turkey remains critical to the protection of U.S. interests in the eastern Mediterranean.

Turkey is obviously still experiencing "embargo shock", and her relations with the U.S. are unlikely to warm very quickly. Turkey's acceptance of the invitation to observe maneuvers in the USSR early this year and her more active diplomacy in Eastern Europe suggest a desire to broaden her foreign policy options. We are obviously entering a period of redefinition and reassessment in Turkish foreign policy. I personally welcome this development, for it offers the prospect of rebuilding relations with Turkey on a firmer foundation.

I must admit my surprise at hearing some of my colleagues argue that the Cyprus issue is of minor importance in the context of U.S.--Turkish relations in the late 1970's. I realize that my own research interests in Cyprus may make my view somewhat parochial, but I think the U.S. must deal with the fact that the public passions and the national prestige of both Greece and Turkey are fully engaged on the Cyprus question. Neither Government is in a position to withstand the charge that it is soft on Cyprus. The Demirel Government in particular, appears far too shaky to risk offering any meaningful territorial concessions on Cyprus.

The ability of the U.S. to advance the negotiating process seems limited at this point. Our influence will be further reduced if Congress fails to approve the new agreement with Turkey. Whatever the outcome of that vote, U.S. policy toward Turkey in the late 1970's should be restrained and attuned to Turkish domestic sensitivities. We should respond promptly to overtures from the Turkish Government but refrain from appearing too free with our advice. If the relationship is to be rebuilt (and I believe that it can be) then Turkey must be given maximum latitude to define the areas in which there is a mutual interest and in which beneficial endeavors can be undertaken.

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