A MIDDLE EAST STUDY TOUR:
PERSPECTIVES FROM JORDAN, TURKEY, AND ISRAEL

November 25–December 4, 2007

Trip Report
A MIDDLE EAST STUDY TOUR:
PERSPECTIVES FROM JORDAN, TURKEY, AND ISRAEL

NOVEMBER 25–DECEMBER 4, 2007
Board of Trustees Middle East Study Tour

Trip Itinerary
Jordan, Turkey, and Israel—November 25–December 4

Jordan

Day 1: Sunday, November 25
Depart for Amman, Jordan

Day 2: Monday, November 26
Arrive in Amman
Hotel check-in at Grand Hyatt
Buffet dinner at hotel with David Makovsky and Hassan Barari

Day 3: Tuesday, November 27
Breakfast at hotel with:
- Bassem Awadallah, minister of the Royal Court
- David Hale, U.S. ambassador to Jordan
- Maj. Gen. Mohammad Dahabi, director of General Intelligence
- Ilah Khatib, former foreign minister
Travel to meet with Prime Minister Nader Dahabi and Jacob Rosen, Israeli ambassador to Jordan
Dinner with Jordanian hosts

Day 4: Wednesday, November 28
Breakfast at hotel with Suhair al-Ali, minister of planning
Discuss important Jordanian issues including Iraqi refugees, election results, and the role of Islamists with:
- Oreib Rantawi, columnist and director of al-Quds center for political studies
- Hani Horani, expert on Jordanian elections and director of the New Jordan Center
- Yousif Mansour, political economist and Iraqi refugee expert
- Mohammed Abu Ruman, former member of the Muslim Brotherhood and current managing editor of al-Ghad
- Abdul-Salam Majali, former prime minister
Lunch
Helicopter to Petra
Dinner with Dr. Fawzi Zayadinm, archeologist
Stay overnight in Petra

Day 5: Thursday, November 29
Tour Petra
Leave for Jerusalem
**Day 1: Sunday, November 25**

Depart for Ankara, Turkey

**Day 2: Monday, November 26**

Arrive in Ankara
Hotel check-in at Hilton
Greetings and hot chocolate with Soner Cagaptay

**Day 3: Tuesday, November 27**

Breakfast briefing with Soner Cagaptay
Briefing on U.S.-Turkish relations and Israeli-Turkish relations with Ambassador Vefahan Ocak, director-general of the Americas
Discussion with Onur Oymen and Ilhan Kesici, both vice chairs of CHP, on Turkish foreign policy
Luncheon panel discussion with:
- Asli Aydintasbas, Ankara bureau chief of Sabah
- Ambassador Faruk Logoglu, former Turkish ambassador to United States and current director of one of Ankara’s top think tanks
- Murat Yetkin, Ankara bureau chief of Radikal
- Narinc Ataman, Ankara bureau chief of Sabah
Discussion on Turkish domestic politics, Turkish-Middle Eastern ties, and U.S.-Turkish relations with:
- Ambassador Tahsin Burcuoglu, secretary general of Turkey’s National Security Council
- Suleyman Demirel, former president of Turkey
- Oktay Vural, vice chair of the MHP
Visit Meral Aksener, deputy speaker of the parliament
Dinner with Turkish policymakers at U.S. ambassador Ross Wilson’s residence

**Day 4: Wednesday, November 28**

Breakfast with Israeli ambassador and deputy chief of mission in Ankara
Visit Ataturk’s Mausoleum
Meeting with Ergin Saygun, deputy chief of Turkish general staff
Working lunch with Ambassador Ýrtuqul Apakan, undersecretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Late afternoon flight to Istanbul
Hotel check-in at Ciragan Palace Kempinski
Home hospitality meeting with TUSIAD members, academics, journalists, and individuals from the Turkish Jewish Community

**Day 5: Thursday, November 29**

Breakfast with U.S. Consul General Sharon Wiener
Coffee conversation with Turkish Jewish Community members Silvyo Ovadya, president of the Turkish Jewish Community; Sami Herman, vice president of Turkish Jewish Community; and members of the community’s executive board, Daniel Navaro, Adil Anjel, Deniz Saporta, and Izak Kolman
Drive across old city and along the Golden Horn
Early afternoon flight to Tel Aviv
**ISRAEL**

**DAY 5: THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 29**

Leave for Jerusalem
Dinner with President Shimon Peres at his residence

**DAY 6: FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 30**

Meeting with U.S. ambassador Richard Jones, and debriefings from Jordan and Turkey trip delegations
Discussion with Ehud Yaari, Israel-based Lafer international fellow of The Washington Institute and a Middle East commentator for Israeli television
Preview of Ramallah visit with Dennis Ross
Visit City of David
Walk to Western Wall for Shabbat
Shabbat dinner with Dr. Yehuda Mirsky and Rabbi Gordis while discussing religious and secular relations

**DAY 7: SATURDAY, DECEMBER 1**

Synagogue or free time
Meeting with Steve Erlanger, New York Times bureau chief
Lunch at Hotel
Option 1: Walking tour of Old City with Oded Eran
Option 2: Bus tour of Jerusalem
Discussion with Dennis Ross and David Makovsky on “Dealing with Misconceptions: Iran to Settlements”
Cocktails and dinner with friends and alumni
- Opening Remarks by former minister of justice Dan Meridor and senior political commentator Yaron Deckel

**DAY 8: SUNDAY, DECEMBER 2**

Breakfast with Benjamin “Bibi” Netanyahu, former Israeli prime minister
Leave for Ramallah
Meet with Salam Fayad, Palestinian prime minister
Lunch with Young Guard members of Fatah: Qadura Fares, Mohammed Hourani, Ziad Abu Ein, and Ahmed Ghanem
Leave Ramallah
Meet with Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Minister of Foreign Affairs Tzipi Livni
Dinner with Maj. Gen. Moshe Kaplinsky, recently retired deputy IDF chief of staff

**DAY 9: MONDAY, DECEMBER 3**

Early checkout of hotel
Breakfast with U.S. Lt. Gen. Keith Dayton
Meeting with Finance Minister Yarom Ariav
Meetings in Tel Aviv with leading members of defense establishment:
- Brig. Gen. Yossi Baidatz (Syria and Lebanon)
- Mike Herzog, chief of staff of defense minister (Hamas)
- Ariel Levite, deputy director of Israel’s Atomic Energy Agency (Iran)
- Maj. Gen. Amos Gilead, Defense Ministry’s director of political and military affairs (Palestinians)
- Amos Yadlin, head of military intelligence (Regional Overview)

Dinner in Jaffa discussing Israel in 2008 with Aluf Benn, chief diplomatic correspondent for
*Ha’aretz*, Israeli daily newspaper

**DAY 10: TUESDAY, DECEMBER 4**

Depart for the United States
2007 Middle East Study Tour Participants

Turkey

Soner Cagaptay  Newton Becker
Benjamin Breslauer  Michael Fedak
Rachel Gindi  Howard Gottlieb
Carol Green  Barbara Greis
Rochelle (Shelly) Kassen  Daryl Kulok
Bernard Leventhal  Phyllis Leventhal
Laura Milstein  Peymane Rothstein
Lawrence Phillips  Mark Rothstein
James Schreiber  Wendy Schreiber
Yvonne Silverstein  Walter Stern
Akin Hamid Unver

Jordan

Howard Berkowitz  Joanna Campione
Carl Covitz  Carolyn Edenbaum
Stephen Eisen  Lois Eisen
Jeanne Epstein  Dana Feldman
Leslie Feldman  Ann Fromer
Robert Fromer  Howard Gottlieb
Harold Grinspoon  Ruth Lapidus
Sid Lapidus  Peter Lowy
David Makovsky  Azita Sayan
Diane Troderman  Josh Weston
Judy Weston  Nina Wexler

Israel

Lorraine Abramson  Arlene Fisher
Daniel Fisher  Janine Lowy
Dennis Ross
A group of Institute trustees and fellows recently visited Amman, Jerusalem, Ramallah, and Tel Aviv, meeting with policymakers, scholars, journalists, and community leaders. In Jordan, the delegation found widespread concern over Iran’s expanding regional influence. In Israel and the Palestinian territories, it seemed apparent that real changes on the ground were necessary to sustain the momentum from Annapolis.

**JORDAN**

Throughout the tour, Jordanian officials gave the impression that an array of Arab states and parties needed to mobilize to contain the destabilizing influence of Iran—a critique that extended far beyond the issue of its nuclear program. Jordan’s containment strategy involves a coalition of Arab states and support for the Lebanese government, the Palestinian Authority, and the Iraqi government—each of which contending with Iranian proxies, Hizballah, Hamas, and pro-Iranian elements in Iraq, respectively. Moreover, Jordan would like firm U.S. resolve in confronting the Iranian threat.

Over the past year, Jordan has undertaken two diplomatic initiatives to shore up this Arab coalition. To encourage Saudi economic leadership, a top Jordanian official has made numerous trips to Riyadh to improve bilateral ties that were frayed during the first Gulf War. The second initiative involved reaching out to Syria, capped by King Abdullah’s recent trip to Damascus, to lure Syria away from Iran’s political orbit—a goal that Israeli defense officials also believe to be well worth the effort. Jordan believes success on this front could have profound implications for Iran’s relations with its other allies, Hizballah and Hamas.

From Jordan’s viewpoint, Syria chafes at the devolving junior partner role it plays today, unlike the role it had for years as Iran’s equal. Jordanians were careful to state they were not certain what was required with Syria, except that no one would yield Lebanon to appease Damascus. It is unclear whether Abdullah was authorized by Riyadh to dangle Saudi assistance as part of this new diplomatic drive.

On the Palestinian issue, top Jordanian officials favor a vigorous peace process in the aftermath of Annapolis, believing the alternative could be a spillover of radicalism across the Jordan River. Indeed, the Hamas takeover of Gaza this summer led Jordanian officials to increase their scrutiny of mosques. In order to halt radical sermons and extremism, Jordanian authorities have sacked Imams over the last two years who were suspected of fostering Islamism. Jordanian authori-
ties said the moral basis for the move was the “Amman message”—King Abdullah’s initiative to enlist Muslim scholars who believe there is no religious basis for the fatwas (decrees) issued by radical Imams.

**ISRAELIS AND PALESTINIANS, POST–ANNAPOlis**

Visiting Jerusalem, Ramallah, and Tel Aviv in the immediate aftermath of Annapolis was a curious mix. The leaders were hopeful, the people were disengaged, and it was unclear what would happen next. There was a consensus among Israeli and Palestinian leaders—and even from a top Israeli opposition leader—about the importance of moving forward, since the only winners of a collapsed peace process would be Hamas and its patrons in Tehran. The Israelis think the economic context will be key for shaping the new peace process, given the roles of Palestinian prime minister Salam Fayad, former British premier Tony Blair, and the donor conference that pledged over $7 billion.

However, it also emerged that there is no post-Annapolis strategy to engage the skeptical populations. Revitalization of the constituencies is crucial for peace if the leaders are to be empowered to make historic decisions, since domestic opinion in both societies will be swayed only by changes on the ground. So far, it is unclear whether the newly appointed U.S. envoy, Gen. Jim Jones, will be a “judge” of objectionable behavior for the first phase of the Roadmap or will focus on a long-term security plan for a Palestinian state. Although leaders in the region are careful to avoid criticism of the United States regarding Annapolis, there is a sense that Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice is more focused on reaching a grand peace breakthrough rather than incremental change on the ground.

The key to sustaining the Annapolis momentum is to find ways for the people, and not just policy mandarins, to see serious progress. First, the old argument over security roadblocks and Palestinian movement needs to change. If Israel were to increase personnel at key arteries, Israeli security and Palestinian movement would be both served and zero-sum outcomes would be averted. Second, there could be value to having the Palestinian Authority (PA) take over the Palestinian side of Gaza’s Karni crossing for exports to Israel. (Of course, Israel would man its side of the crossing.) The PA already runs the Erez crossing for humanitarian movement and expanding this to Karni could give the PA a foothold in Gaza. In addition, if the PA were to remove incitement from state-run television, the Israeli public would certainly see this as a positive gesture even though few Palestinians actually watch the station.

One wild card in the post-Annapolis situation is Gaza. To regain popularity, Hamas may step up Qassam attacks on Israel to provoke an Israeli incursion into Gaza to portray the PA as indifferent to Gaza’s plight.

Another issue will be the Israeli response to the National Intelligence Estimate (NIE). There is a sense of bitterness about the NIE’s emphasis on weaponization rather than the ongoing enrichment and missile development. On one hand, Israel has been supportive of international sanctions, but it has obviously pondered other options if sanctions fail. Some argue that the NIE raises the cost to Israel if it acts alone against Iran, since Israel would be seen as reacting disproportionately. At the same time, the NIE may change the dynamics of Israeli decision-making, weakening those who believe that the United States will ultimately act while Israel remains on the side.

Along these lines, it remains unclear whether the NIE will create lingering friction in the intelligence relationship between these countries, despite the sudden visit of U.S. chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to Israel and the decision to follow up with more talks. If Israel thinks it is being kept in the dark, this could reinforce the Zionist ethos of self-reliance, leading Israel to act on its own before the next U.S. administration potentially engages Iran.

David Makovsky is a senior fellow and director of the Project on the Middle East Peace Process at The Washington Institute.
The mission of the trip was to study Turkish foreign policy, Turkish relations with the United States and the Middle East, and the future of Turkey’s secular democratic institutions. Meeting with policymakers, scholars, journalists, and community leaders, the delegation spent two days in Ankara, and one day in Istanbul. The delegation received a warm welcome in Turkey and had the chance to meet several high level policymakers. We were given unique opportunities to hear from some of the country’s top leaders, including the Secretary General of the National Security Council, the Deputy Chief of Staff, and the Deputy Speaker of the Turkish Parliament.

WHAT WE FOUND

Through meetings with the country’s political elite in Ankara and the business elite in Istanbul, the mission was able to scrutinize Turkish politics and Turkish foreign policy at their source. Below are some of the key findings of the mission:

1. The Turkish economy is booming. The political stability provided by the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), which came to power in 2002, has resulted in notable and strong economic growth. As a result, Turkey now benefits from an improved European-style infrastructure, a dynamic private sector, and a vibrant middle class. Income per capita is almost 10,000 USD on a purchasing power parity basis. The country’s major businesses, most of which are secular, have benefited significantly from the economic growth and are generally supportive of the AKP, although some seem to disagree with the AKP’s social and cultural agenda.

2. At present, the chief determinant of Turkish foreign policy is the highly volatile issue of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). This issue shapes the way Turkey views the Middle East, turning countries that help Turkey in this respect into ‘friends,’ and all others into ‘enemies,’ as far as public opinion is concerned. While Syria and Iran were considered ‘enemies’ throughout the 1990s because of their support for the PKK, most Turks today regard the United States as the ‘enemy.’ Much of this change in outlook is based on American inactivity in northern Iraq, until recently, against the PKK’s presence. On the other hand, public sentiment toward Iran and Syria is now quite warm due to the support they have provided against the PKK. Regrettably, opinion makers stand too close to this perspective and are also suspicious of the United States. In this regard, recent U.S. intelligence aid to Turkey concerning PKK presence and positions in northern Iraq has been the first positive step. It should be noted that a November 5 meeting between President
Bush and Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan, in which the President designated the PKK as an enemy to the United States, proved useful in mobilizing U.S. policy toward a position of support for Turkish military action against the PKK. The PKK issue is a central dynamic of Turkish foreign policy, as well as an active determinant of it. Subsequently, further high level U.S. commitment to help solve the problem will be well received in Turkey and shall also serve the interests of the United States.

3. U.S.-Turkish and Turkish–Israeli strategic partnerships remain strong. There is cooperation between them in both Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as with numerous military projects and intelligence sharing. However, it should be added that during our meetings, we saw signs that Turkish-Israeli military cooperation, the pillar of bilateral ties between the two countries, faces some challenges, as do the U.S.-Turkish military ties.

4. In general, the Turkish public has an extremely caustic attitude toward the United States. Furthermore, Turkey is witnessing emerging anti-Semitism. While the government has close ties with the United States and Israel, and benefits from these relations, it fails to explain openly these relations and their benefits to the Turkish public. Moreover, the government often spins anti-American and anti-Israeli public opinion, as well as supports activities that foster negative feelings towards the United States and Israel. One such set of incidents took place on November 11, when Turkey invited Israeli president Shimon Peres to Ankara, casting itself as promoter of peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians. It is ironic, but also telling of the AKP’s strategy of double speak towards Israel, that only days later on November 15-17, an anti-Israeli fundraiser, the ‘Hamas Conference,’ was held in an Istanbul convention center owned by the AKP-controlled Istanbul municipality. About 3,000 people participated in this conference, whose closing statement called for the annihilation of Israel. Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan’s chief advisor, Nabi Avci, attended this conference, which was funded by pro-AKP MUSIAD (a businessmen’s association that does not accept Jewish members). Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ali Babacan, was reportedly scheduled to speak at the conference, but dropped out at the last minute, apparently due to efforts by top bureaucrats from his Ministry of Foreign Affairs (this last bit information is private and should not be shared).

5. The general lack of confidence towards the United States is also reinforced by House Resolution 106, also known as the Armenian Genocide Resolution (AGR). Together with the PKK issue, the debate surrounding the AGR and the Anti-Defamation League’s (ADL) earlier support for this resolution was the only issue voiced continually in each of our meetings. Although the AGR has, for now, disappeared, the Armenian genocide issue poses potential challenges to the U.S.-Turkish relationship, as well as for Turkish-Israeli relations since most Turks see American Jewish support for Turkey as the glue of Turkish-Israeli ties. Moreover, some of our most friendly contacts have pointed at the fact that ADL’s change of position on AGR is being used by the government to further foment anti-Semitism in Turkey, as the government has publicly blamed ADL and “the Jews” for bringing the AGR to a vote in the House committee.

This issue notwithstanding, most Turks view the AGR as a national insult. Although the Bush administration has been able to stall the AGR, arguing that it would curb vital Turkish aid to the U.S. in Iraq and Afghanistan, it has not gone away. Should this issue become the official U.S. government position, U.S.-Turkish relations will suffer significantly and potentially produce long term negative effects.

6. Turkish foreign policy, which has traditionally been categorically pro-Western, now appears to have become complicated by a rapprochement with Iran and Syria. Turkey’s relations with the United States and Israel remain valid, but relations with Syria and Iran in the form of official visits and energy-trade deals are flourishing. It is notable that in none of our meetings did we sense negativity towards Syria. In fact, we felt quite the opposite, with the government promoting Syria as a reasonable state whose hand should be held by the international community. With the exception of the military and opposition parties, few Turks voiced
concerns about Iran's prospective nuclear capability. Rapprochement with Syria and Iran is happening in the background of significantly improved public opinion towards those two states. It is also worth noting that Ahmadinezhad is one of the most popular leaders in Turkish public polls.

**WHAT SHOULD WE DO?**

When the Institute established the Turkish Research Program in the mid-1990s, it aimed to celebrate Turkey as secular democracy and pro-Western society in the Middle East. Turkey did not represent the malaise of the Middle East but rather a country that symbolized what U.S. policymakers wanted to achieve in the region. Today, that picture is changing. Turkey remains a thriving democracy and an economically Europeanizing country, yet Turkish foreign policy has assumed many non-Western attributes. Moreover, Turkey is witnessing record amounts of anti-American sentiment and emerging anti-Semitism—both alarming developments, given the non-existent history of potent anti-Semitism in Turkey. Increasingly, the political and social malaises of the Middle East seem to be surfacing in Turkey. The Institute could follow a four-fold strategy to address the challenges that are now on the horizon for Turkey:

1. **Invest new resources into the Turkish Research Program.** One contact we met characterized Turkey as a situation that resembles the allegorical glass—either half full or half empty, depending on one’s perspective. With Turkey, the glass is indeed not entirely full. Given the challenges that U.S.-Turkish relations face, the Institute should invest new resources into the Turkish Research Program. Our trustees voiced strong support for this strategy during our mission once our findings crystallized.

2. **Raise immediate awareness on the issue of the Armenian Genocide,** including reaching out to the leadership and the grassroots sectors of major organizations that our delegation and membership participate in. The Institute welcomes suggestions in this regard.

3. **Raise further awareness on the PKK issue.** The Institute is the apparent authority in Washington in explaining the PKK issue—the New York Times recently used one of our maps to show PKK camps in northern Iraq. U.S.-Turkish relations will not improve until further concrete steps are taken regarding the PKK, and we can do more to promote better understanding of the details of this issue.

4. **Develop an inter-programmatic approach across the Institute.** When the Turkish Research Program was established, it dealt with issues not necessarily part of the focus of the Institute’s other programs. Today, however, there is emerging convergence on issues relating to Turkey and other Institute programs, such as the Stein Program on Counterterrorism and Intelligence, Project Fikra, and the Project on the Middle East Peace Process. In this regard, the following avenues of cooperation could be pursued between these programs:

   A. **Counterterrorism:** Work with the Turkish Research Program to study the PKK issue through appointing a fellow (perhaps an endowed fellow) to raise the profile of the issue within the Institute and in Washington. It would be very useful, for instance, if a visiting fellow (preferably with law enforcement background) would follow the issue by organizing a strategy session on the PKK, Hamas, and Hizballah, highlighting their abuses of the media in the West, as well as the PKK’s criminal fundraising activities in Europe. The fellow could also focus on the PKK’s networks in Europe and the law and order problems created by such networks in Turkey and Europe. The same fellow could also produce a policy focus to suggest ways of combating PKK, Hamas, and Hizballah in Europe.

   Cooperation between the Counterterrorism and Turkish programs on the PKK issue would be beneficial for both. The collaboration would provide the Turkish Research Program tools it currently lacks in studying this aspect of the PKK. It would also eliminate the biggest gap in
the Counterterrorism program’s focus of the major terrorist groups in the Middle East.

B. Project Fikra: Part of the mission of Project Fikra is to find and support untapped ways to change the attitudes in the Middle East towards the United States. In this regard, as a country with existing Western and liberal forces, Turkey provides a ripe opportunity. Project Fikra might consider giving support to existing, though increasingly marginalized, liberal, secular, pro-Western voices, including women’s groups, in its foci and programs. It should also raise awareness of the erosion of secular, liberal institutions and values, and the stifling of secular media in Turkey—an issue we heard in some of our meetings.

C. Peace Process: This program could work with the Turkish Research Program to study the challenges to U.S.-Turkish-Israeli relations and suggest ways to promote the trilateral relationship. This strategy could be pursued, for instance, through a visiting or adjunct fellow who could generate a policy focus for us on the bilateral relationship with an emphasis on Turkish-Israeli military ties.

*Soner Cagaptay is a senior fellow and director of The Washington Institute’s Turkish Research Program.*
Left: Washington Institute delegation with President Shimon Peres

Right: David Makovsky with Brig. Gen. Yossi Baidatz

Left: Jerusalem

Right: Palestinian prime minister Salam Fayad shaking hands with Institute trustee Rachael Gindi

Bottom: Jordan delegation leaves for Petra via helicopter
Pictorial Itinerary

Dennis Ross speaking to Prime Minister Ehud Olmert

Board of Trustees with new prime minister of Jordan, Nader Dahabi

Left: Trustees in front of the Palestinian Council of Ministers

Right: Wally Stern, Jim Schreiber, Bud Leventhal, Ben Breslauer, and Soner Cagaptay with Turkish deputy chief of staff Gen. Ergin Saygun

Bottom: Trustee delegation with Turkey’s ninth president, Suleyman Demirel
Rachel Gindi, Ziad Abu Ein (Fatah member), and Robert Fromer discuss Palestinian issues

Trustee Newton Becker with delegation leader Soner Cagaptay on their way into Ataturk’s Mausoleum

Dennis Ross with Fatah young guard members (from left to right) Qadura Fares, Ahmed Ghanem, Ziad Abu Ein, and Mohammed Hourani

Turkish Jewish Community leader Silvyo Ovadya with delegation leader Soner Cagaptay
Pictorial Itinerary

Trustees at the Western Wall tunnels

Michael Fedak, Shelly Kassen, and Ben Breslauer in front of the work-luncheon venue in Ankara

Turkey delegation at the Turkish Grand National Assembly with Nationalist Action Party foreign relations committee members Meral Aksener and Oktay Vural

Trustees Harold Grinspoon, Azita Sayan, and Howard Berkowitz with Jordanian minister of planning Suhair al-Ali