

Three Legacies:

Ataturk, Inonu, and Ozal and the Making of the U.S.-Turkish Relationship

by [Eric Edelman \(/experts/eric-edelman\)](/experts/eric-edelman)

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

[Eric Edelman \(/experts/eric-edelman\)](/experts/eric-edelman)

Eric Edelman served as U.S. undersecretary of defense for policy from 2005 to 2009.



Brief Analysis

On June 19, 2006, Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Ambassador Eric Edelman addressed The Washington Institute's Eighth [Turgut Ozal Memorial Lecture \(templateC11.php?CID=84\)](#). From 2003 to 2005, Ambassador Edelman was U.S. ambassador to Turkey. The following are excerpts from his remarks. [Read the full text \(templateC07.php?CID=299\)](#) of his prepared remarks and watch steaming video of the event.

[Read \(templateC11.php?CID=415\)](#) Turkish press coverage of this event.

Read past [Turgut Ozal Memorial Lectures \(templateC11.php?CID=84\)](#) and learn more about this annual event.

This institution's excellent work in promoting U.S.-Turkish relations does not go unnoticed and I am proud to be a part of it. . . .

The United States values Turkey as a great ally and friend. . . . For half a century Turkey has served as NATO's southern anchor. From Korea to Kosovo to Kabul, the United States and Turkey have stood together in defense of peace and prosperity. . . .

It is no secret that the U.S.-Turkish relationship has been through a bit of a turbulent period. . . . In that context it seems a worthwhile exercise to go back and revisit the fundamentals of the relationship. In particular, it is worth reviewing the special characteristics of Turkey, the shared values, as well as the common geopolitical interests that have underpinned the desire of the United States to have a strong partner and ally in Turkey. . . .

Because this annual speech is dedicated to Turgut Ozal, I thought it appropriate to take a closer look at this great man and discuss how his courageous leadership and progressive policies helped shape the kind of Turkey which we have sought as a valued partner. Building on the work of others, Ozal was:

- a visionary, who was proud of Turkey and confident in Turkey's future;
- a devout Muslim, who was comfortable in separating his private piety from his secular governance;
- a democrat, who restored multi-party politics and understood the importance of accountability of government;
- a realist, who was not afraid to open Turkey up to the world;
- a creative thinker, who immediately grasped the significance of Central Asia's liberation from Soviet domination;

- a perceptive leader, who valued the legacies of his predecessors and was able to apply them to modern times; and
- a true friend to the United States.

Ozal's strong leadership was a product of the hard work of past leaders. It goes without saying that Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's remarkable leadership provided the base for a modern, democratic Turkey. He was a forward-looking leader with faith in the concept of a Turkish republic. He led Turkey on a path toward modernization with a series of innovative reforms, all geared toward setting Turkey on a Western course. Among his many lasting accomplishments, he made Turkey a secular democracy.

Ataturk was committed to the preservation of the independence and integrity of the Turkish Republic. He realized the nation would not be a success unless the people were proud of it. . . .

He understood the advocacy and intellectual role leaders must play in the modern world. In today's parlance, he understood strategic communications.

The fundamental governing principals set by Ataturk continue to guide Turkey today. Ataturk clearly saw that Turkey's future was in the West. . . .

Following Ataturk's death, Mustafa Ismet Inonu's presidency led Turkey to successfully fulfill Ataturk's reforms and to consolidate a secular, democratic order. One of his key accomplishments was the introduction of democratic elections and opening Turkish politics to a multiparty system. Inonu recognized that a loyal and constructive opposition is important for the democratic functioning of a nation. It is the crucial mechanism for ensuring accountability of government to the governed. . . .

Inonu recognized that the world had changed after World War II. He saw the value of collective security and strong global alliances. Under his leadership, Turkey became one of the original members of the United Nations, joined the IMF, and expressed immediate interest in joining NATO. . . . Inonu's pivotal role and Turkey's eventual entry into NATO taught an important lesson: serious leaders and nations do not stand by in crisis situations.

Crises require choices and those choices frequently require leaders (both in government and opposition) to educate and to shape the perceptions of their countrymen about the real alternatives confronting the nation.

Inonu went on to reform the political system to reflect the emerging world order of capitalism and democracy. . . . Turkey's democratic success can be attributed to Inonu's commitment to the principles of democracy and free choice. . . .

The next few decades were somewhat troubled for Turkey. While Turkey did not fully stray from Ataturk's founding principles, the nation was missing a strong leader needed to further carry out these reforms. . . .

In 1982 [Ozal] . . . founded the Motherland Party and was elected prime minister. It was then that Ozal successfully became leader of Turkey as a whole, not simply representative of a small group. He rose beyond his original constituency to become a true national figure. . . .

Under Ozal's leadership . . . the Turkish economy opened to competitive world markets. . . . He understood that Turkey's internal process of change needed a broader international context. He believed that long-term economic stability could only be based in cooperation with the West. He was confident that this was the direction for Turkey and renewed the quest for Turkish membership in the European Economic Community.

In his view, Turkey's geographic location made it a natural partner for Europe. . . . Ozal believed that the values which tie Europe and Turkey are based on secularism, not religion. He was confident that faith—no matter which one—was a private matter and ought not impact on democratic governance. Accepting Turkey as a member would globalize the European Community, strengthening its values of tolerance and peace. . . .

Ozal was able to take the principles of Atatürk's modernizing reforms and apply them to his contemporary situation. He saw that it was important to . . . encourage dignity and confidence among the people, while pursuing a more open approach to foreign policy. . . . In 1985 his official visit to the United States was the first of any Turkish leader in over a decade. Ozal had made the revitalization of U.S.-Turkish relations an integral part of his leadership.

As a new world order emerged with the collapse of communism, Ozal saw the opportunity for Turkey to redefine its role in global politics and position itself as a strategic ally. He was president for less than a year when Iraq invaded Kuwait. This was a pivotal moment in defining Turkey's global stature. While some advised that he should proceed with caution, Ozal acted resolutely and courageously. Despite the domestic, economic, and political risks, he stood firm in his support of Turkey's historic allies. He granted allied use of Incirlik Air Base and overflight rights and participated in the Iraqi oil embargo. These measures were widely criticized in Turkey. However Ozal saw the importance of standing by friends and allies. . . . By supporting the United States and Europe and recognizing the dangers the Iraqi regime posed to Turkish national interests, Ozal remained committed and true to the vision of a modern, secular democracy. . . .

Leadership requires the courage to carry out difficult decisions, the ability to look beyond the partisan disputes of the moment, and the willingness to make sacrifices in defense of the nation's basic values and long-term goals. In describing his security policy, Ozal once said, "The only thing not to do in a crisis situation is to remain in the status quo." . . .

Today, the global community of democracies faces numerous challenges, and Turkey's role in addressing these challenges remains critical. As in the past, the United States continues to count on Turkey as a leader and friend in defending the values we share; and we vow to continue our support to Turkey in pursuit of our common goals. . . .

We are committed to continuing our backing of Turkey's accession to the European Union. The recent successful conclusion of the first round of talks is a positive first step. As Turkey makes its way toward the EU, there will undoubtedly be some hurdles. . . . The United States will stand side by side with the Turkish people in support of their EU aspirations.

At the forefront of our common security agenda lies the future of Iraq. . . .

No nation knows the security implications of an unstable Iraq better than Turkey. For years, northern Iraq has served as a safe haven for the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). Just in the past weekend these brutal and bloody terrorists appear to have struck again. . . . In our ongoing battle against terror, the international community cannot overlook the PKK. The United States stands side by side with Turkey in this struggle. In fact, our information sharing has never been closer on this subject. We remain committed to working with Turkey and Iraq, as well as our European friends, to put an end to this hateful terrorist organization. As we work toward securing Iraq from terrorist activity, we should also keep in mind that there are various ways—beyond the use of conventional force—to tackle terrorist networks. Regional development in the southeast is also a critical imperative.

Afghanistan is another vital battleground in the global war on terror. It is also a place with many linkages to Turkey and where the government of Turkey and the Turkish military have played a very helpful role. Turkey has twice taken the command of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and has assumed special responsibilities, along with France, for improving the security situation in Kabul. The Turkish private sector is also on the cutting edge in Afghanistan by taking a leading role in the country's reconstruction.

Let me turn my attention to another one of Turkey's neighbors: Iran. Iran's pursuit of nuclear enrichment capabilities is extremely troublesome, to say the least. A nuclear Iran would pose a great threat to the peaceful nations of the world, particularly those in geographic proximity to Iran—nations like Turkey and Israel and our other friends in the Middle East and the Gulf region. The United States is fully committed to resolving this issue

diplomatically and has devoted time and attention in support of the EU-3 effort. As we work to find a solution to a potential highly destabilizing situation, we need allies like Turkey standing resolutely by our side, sending a firm message: Peaceful nations will join together with certainty to prevent a nuclear Iran. . . .

As we face today's security challenges, the United States needs strong, decisive partners—partners like Ataturk, Inonu, and Ozal—who were not afraid to make controversial decisions for the progress of their great nation. In describing his policies, Ataturk once said, "I never cared to be loved. I only cared to create a strong, proud country." It is leaders like him who make a lasting historical impact.

Today Turkey holds a strategic place in the world and with that important position come critical responsibility, numerous challenges, and sometimes difficult decisions. However, the nation's strength remains in its strong founding principles, which still hold true decades later. Turkey can proudly look back on a great heritage for guidance in today's world: Kemal Ataturk's vision of a modernized Turkey anchored in the West; Ismet Inonu's commitment to carrying out democratization; and Turgut Ozal, whose courageous leadership during critical times made decisions that restored multiparty democracy, opened the economy, and positioned Turkey as a reliable ally committed to working with partners and friends on a shared vision for a better future. May Turkey's leaders and people look to the legacies left by each of these great men for inspiration as their nation continues its progressive advance through the twenty-first century.

Tesekkur ederim. Thank you. ❖

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