

## Fifth Annual Turgut Ozal Memorial Lecture (full transcript)

Mar 13, 2002



### Brief Analysis

**O**n March 13, 2002, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz delivered The Washington Institute's Fifth Annual Turgut Ozal Memorial Lecture. Following is a full transcript of his presentation, as delivered. [Read a summary of his remarks. \(templateC05.php?CID=1491\)](#)

Rob [Satloff, Executive Director of the Washington Institute], I was all set to thank you for that wonderful introduction until you got to The Economist article [Laughter]. I will thank you, though, very much for the leadership you've given the Institute, the leadership the Institute has given the policy community over, by now, an impressively long period of time. And I want to thank Alan Makovsky and everyone else who was involved in setting up the Turkish studies program for recognizing the crucial importance of Turkey in trying to develop a modern, civilized Middle East.

It is a great honor to be asked to deliver the Turgut Ozal Lecture. I know that I have been preceded to this podium by a very impressive group of scholars and diplomats, the first of whom was that most distinguished scholar of the Middle East, Professor Bernard Lewis, who has taught generations of Turks, as well as non-Turks, how to better understand Turkey and its people. It's a great honor to be included in such company, and a privilege to have the opportunity to talk about Turkey, a truly indispensable nation, and about its indispensable partnership with the United States, which has become even more important in the wake of the crisis that has gripped the world since September 11.

To our Turkish friends, here and those watching from abroad (I'm told this is being broadcast in primetime in Turkey)—let me first say: Sayin Arkadashlar Merhaba [Applause.] And for those of you who don't understand Turkish, and for those of you who do understand Turkish, but don't understand my Turkish [Laughter], that means hello friends.

I know my Turkish leaves something to be desired. I also know that Turks are endlessly polite. But, what I'd like to talk today about two other qualities that characterize so many Turks and characterize Turgut Ozal in particular: those are the qualities of courage and tolerance.

Let me begin with a remarkable story, a story that has a place in humanitarian acts of courage beside the feats of a man like Raoul Wallenberg, but much less well known. In 1943, a man named Necdet Kent was the Turkish consul posted to the southern French city of Marseilles. One evening, a Jewish worker at the consulate alerted Kent that some Turkish Jews living in Marseilles had been loaded into cattle cars for transport to Germany. Kent rushed to the Saint Charles train station. He saw the cattle cars, heard the moans and sobs from within, and now I'll quote his words.

"The one single memory of that evening which will never be erased from my mind was the inscription which I saw on one of the wagons: 'This wagon may be loaded with twenty heads of cattle and 500 kilograms of grass.' Inside the wagons were about 80 people packed on top of each other.

"The Gestapo commander at the station, having heard of my presence, approached me and angrily asked me what I was doing there. I forced myself to civilly say that these people were Turkish citizens, that there had been a mistake, which must be immediately corrected. The Gestapo commander answered that he was merely following orders and

that these people were not Turks or anything of the sort, but just plain Jews.

"Realizing that my threats ... were in vain, I suddenly turned to [my assistant] Sidi Iscan and said, 'Come on, let's go; we, too, are getting on this train.'" Just imagine that.

"And, pushing aside the soldier who tried to stop me, I entered one of the wagons.... Now it was the Gestapo officer's turn to do the begging. I didn't respond to anything that was said, and the train began to move in sight of the Gestapo officer....

"[At the next station when the train stopped] a few German officers got on the wagon and said that there had been a mistake, that the train had left Marseilles without giving me a chance to get off, that those responsible would be punished, that I could return to Marseilles with the special [Mercedes they had placed] at my disposal....

"I explained to them that there was no question of a mistake, that more than 80 Turkish citizens had been loaded onto these animal wagons because they were Jews, and that I was a representative of a government that rejected such treatment....

"The officers, promising that all manner of wrongdoing would be corrected, asked if everyone in the wagon was Turkish. A crowd of women, men and children had surrounded us watching, motionless as stone, this play dealing with their lives. Probably due to the orders received from their superiors, as much as to my own uncompromising stance, all of us got off the train together. A little later, the Germans left us alone.

"I cannot forget those embraces around our necks and hands.... The inner peace I felt when I reached my bed towards morning that day is one that I have not savored much since then."

In later years, retiring as ambassador, Ambassador Kent said, with what I think is extraordinary humility: "What I have done is what I should have done. I knew I had to act."

But there are many who lack the courage to do what should be done. In Necdet Kent, the extraordinary qualities of courage and tolerance came forth at an important moment in history. And his was not an isolated example. It was the policy of the Turkish government, stated forcefully in a demarche to the Vichy government in the summer of 1941, that, I quote here: "Turkey itself makes no discrimination, as imposed by the French government on those of its citizens who are established in France, so that the Turkish government can only reserve entirely its right in what concerns those of the latter who are of the Jewish race." Through the determined and courageous efforts of a large number of Turkish diplomats, many Turkish Jews – and many non-Turks as well – were rescued from the Holocaust.

It is the great good fortune of the United States to have in Turkey a friend and ally that has stood with us through war and peace, going back to the days of the Korean War. That is where American troops got their first look at Turkish courage—a fighting spirit and self-reliance that is also legendary in the annals of history. It is a courage that is captured in a story that I imagine is apocryphal, but there is a large grain of truth in it as well; it's a story I first heard from a Turkish officer many years ago.

During the Korean War, the story goes, a Marine company came to relieve an Army battalion, a much larger unit, that was holding a crucial position, and the Army officer in command said, "You only have a company. How do you expect to hold this position? We can barely do it with our whole battalion" And the answer was, you can guess, "We're Marines." Not too long afterward, a Turkish platoon [Laughter] came to relieve the Marine company and the Marine commander now asked his Turkish relief, "Why do you think you can hold this position with just a platoon?" And the Turk responded, "We're Turks." [Laughter.]

Now, my old friend, General Al Gray, a former Commandant of the Marine Corps, fought with Turkish troops in Korea. And I imagine he would disagree with any implied comparisons with his beloved Marines, but he has told me that Turkish troops were as brave as any he's served with. Coming from Al Gray, who is one tough Marine, that is

high praise indeed. And it is an opinion that is shared, by the way, by many of my colleagues in the Defense Department today who have had the experience of serving with Turkish troops in Somalia, in the Balkans or now today in Afghanistan.

Only a nation of great courage could manage successfully to sit at the crossroads of so many contending international forces as Turkey has done through the crises of the Cold War and those that have followed. And only a nation of great tolerance could serve as a beacon to others.

It is a long history, going back at least 500 years to 1492, when the Jews were expelled from Spain, and the Ottoman Sultan welcomed them into his lands, supposedly having said, "In impoverishing Spain, [Ferdinand and Isabella] have enriched Turkey." And for several hundred years, the Sephardic Jewish communities of the Ottoman Empire enjoyed a far greater level of freedom and esteem than did Jewish communities in other parts of Europe.

During the period of the Nazis when Jews were being expelled from other countries in Europe, Turkey once again welcomed Jews—and other dissidents—into the country.

And at a moment when communist Bulgaria made life unbearable for ethnic Turks and other Muslims in the late 1980s, Turkey welcomed tens of thousands of refugees without distinction to their national origin and offered them the equality that had eluded them in their homeland.

More recently, the Turks welcomed more Kosovar refugees than any other country when they were fleeing Serbian attacks.

Today, Turkey's strategic role in the world continues to challenge it with many contending forces. It is perhaps a misfortune to be strategically located, but it is our good fortune that Turkey occupies the strategic location that it does. Turkey is central to building peace from Southeastern Europe to the Middle East and eastward to the Caucasus and Central Asia. Turkey is key to fashioning a Europe that is undivided, democratic and at peace. And Turkey is crucial to bridging the dangerous gap between the West and the Muslim world.

It is a challenge made for Turks—and it is the great good fortune of the United States, of the NATO Alliance, of the West, and indeed of the world, that occupying this most important crossroads we have one of our strongest, most reliable and most self-reliant allies. We may recall the words of Ataturk, the "Father of the Turks": "Mankind is a single body and each nation a part of that body. We must never say, 'What does it matter to me if some part of the world is ailing?' If there is such an illness," Ataturk said, "we must concern ourselves with it as though we were having that illness."

Those same views of courage and tolerance were characteristic of Turkey's late-20th century leader, Turgut Ozal. The same broad view shaped Ozal's leadership, to the lasting benefit of us all.

Perhaps Turgut Ozal was well prepared for the trials he encountered as Turkey's leader because, from relatively humble origins, he worked his way up to the most important positions in his country. He was a man of the people who proved that ability and talent and determination could result in success, what we in the United States would call a self-made man. Not surprisingly, Ozal strongly believed that everyone should have an equal opportunity to advance, without regard for race, religion, or ethnic background.

In another display of courage, Ozal championed another form of tolerance when he publicly acknowledged his Kurdish ancestry. Somewhat like John F. Kennedy pioneered in the United States, Ozal showed all of Turkey that Turkish democracy was strong and vibrant—vibrant enough to elect as President one who was partly Kurdish. Ozal was a statesman who confidently took his place on the world stage, and as a close friend of President George H.W. Bush, or Number 41 as we like call him, he understood that Turkey had a responsibility as a regional power to join with other nations in standing up for what is right.

When Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in the summer of 1990, Ozal remarked he was sure there would be war and when it came it would be "quick, cheap, and easy." Very few people dared to make that kind of prediction. When pressed to support his opinion with evidence, Ozal explained: "Not a week passes without a large number of Iraqi officers deserting and crossing our frontiers. An Army from which officers are deserting on the eve of battle is not in good shape."

When war did come, Ozal acted decisively, and with great personal courage. He did not hesitate a moment in supporting the West to oppose Saddam's aggression. He bravely closed the border with Iraq, which was, before that, one of Turkey's largest trading partners. He demonstrated courage in closing the Iraqi oil pipeline to the Mediterranean, and deploying close to 150,000 troops on the Iraqi border when it would have been much easier—and might have seemed far safer—to turn a blind eye to the dangerous neighbor right next door. That same courage led Ozal to grant the United States permission to operate from air bases in Turkey, something we have done once again recently in supporting our flights, including our humanitarian relief flights to Afghanistan.

When Ozal was asked why he decided to get involved in these important and risky—and, to some extent, controversial—measures, he is said to have answered: We wanted to be at the peace conference—and we wanted to be on the guest list, not on the menu. [Laughter.] I would add, appropriately at this point, that the United States, like Ozal then, and we're encouraged by our understanding of Ozal then, supports, now and always, the full territorial integrity of Turkey and Iraq.

Beyond Turkey's borders, Ozal had a vision of a tolerant, peaceful world, a legacy Turkey has supported with its own troops in the years since: in Operation Northern Watch in Iraq; in Somalia; in Bosnia; in Kosovo and in Macedonia. And when the "illness" of international terrorism struck the United States last September, Turkey quickly offered unconditional support for the United States that included the deployment of Turkish ground forces in Afghanistan. Turkey today is considering taking on an even tougher responsibility as the leader of the International Security Assistance Force, which will help ensure that terrorists no longer find Afghanistan a hospitable place for evil.

Turgut Ozal will probably be remembered best for implementing a vision of a modern, democratic Turkey embracing the possibilities and benefits offered by a free economy. It took not only vision but courage to put Turkey on that course.

But, today, visitors to Turkey are struck by internet cafes in some of the most remote villages of Eastern Turkey; by companies on the outskirts of Istanbul that write software for firms in Silicon Valley; and by Turkish manufacturers who are joint partners with American, European and Japanese firms that produce all manner of goods, from luxury automobiles to F-16s. Turgut Ozal's vision was one of openness, in which the old world accepts the new, and, in so doing, each is enriched.

Ozal understood the ultimate benefits that could come to Turkey, but he also knew there would be difficulties in making the transition to a modern economy. We appreciate the extraordinary difficulties that face Turkey's economy today. But, I think that, from this crisis, Turkey has the opportunity to emerge even stronger than before, after implementing the necessary reforms. These reforms must come, not only in economic policy, but in the fundamental institutions that are critical for the Turkish economy to fully enter the 21st Century.

With the support of the International Monetary Fund, the leadership of Prime Minister Ecevit and the deep economic understanding of Economy Minister Kemal Dervis, Turkey's coalition government formulated a reform plan that has stabilized the economic situation and corrected long-standing weaknesses in the economy. Although short-term impacts have made the going tough, Turkey has shown the courage to correct these weaknesses, and should be encouraged by signs that the economy may have begun to turn the corner toward growth. Over the long term, most experts believe that Turkey will come out much better through implementation of these reforms.

When Prime Minister Ecevit met with President Bush—43—here in Washington in January, among the important measures that resulted were an intensification of business contacts between our countries and the formation of the Economic Partnership Commission. In the Commission's first meeting in Ankara a couple of weeks ago, Under Secretary of State Alan Larson brought to Turkey the message that the United States sees our relationship as one of economic partners. We want to help in Turkey's recovery; we want to help promote Turkey's economic growth, and we want to help Turkey become competitive in the global economy. As an example of this commitment, President Bush has largely excluded Turkey's steel imports from higher duties.

Reforms to ensure effectiveness and transparency in regulations concerning foreign investment will make Turkey even more attractive to outside investors. There is no question that Turkey's continued economic success will serve as a model for other countries seeking to raise standards of living through private sector-led growth.

I am told that Turgut Ozal often used to tell a story that illustrates his view of the process of economic reform in Turkey. A police official came to Ozal to talk about some border problems. The official told him, "Many of our shepherds have made arrangements to take their flocks across the border to fatten them up because it is cheaper. Then they are smuggling them back into Turkey in violation of our customs laws." And Ozal is said to have replied: "You may regard that as a violation of customs; I regard it as trade. [Laughter.] We should be encouraging such enterprise, not making it a criminal act." And with that, Ozal added, "There's a simple solution: change the law."

So they changed the law and it became legal to import sheep with a license. Some months later, the senior official came back to Ozal and said, "We have a problem now. A lot of shepherds are applying for import licenses." [Laughter.] Ozal replied: "What is the problem with that?" The answer: "We can't grant the licenses to many of these shepherds—most of them used to be smugglers." [Laughter.]

So even for Ozal, reform came one step at a time, and sometimes difficult steps. But, it is always important to remember how far along the journey Turkey has progressed. There is no doubt Turkey will continue to move forward. For, as Ataturk understood so deeply about the Turks: they have an enormous ability to survive and persevere—through their patience and, above all, through their pride, their courage, and their openness to new things.

In thinking about Turgut Ozal's lasting legacies to Turkey, the free economy is certainly one, which Ozal knew held out enormous promise, and, the second is Ozal's view of religion as fully compatible with a free economy and democracy. Turgut Ozal was a man deeply devoted to Islam, but also a man, as journalists have noted, who was "as comfortable with Western leaders as in a Mosque." Ozal understood that the separation of religion from the state can be completely compatible with personal piety, and he offered as proof his own example.

Ozal knew the tolerance inherent in democracy would offer the Turkish people a future that theocracy would deny them. And it was a vision for Turkey that very much included the women of Turkey. Ataturk also understood this, and, in the 1920s, argued that Turks would never catch up with the modern world if they modernized only half of their population. Accordingly, women in Turkey were among the first in Europe to win the right to vote. In the 1930s, Ataturk even put women into the Turkish Air Force, including his adopted daughter, and had them flying airplanes.

Such courage to break from tradition and encourage new ways offers great promise for all Muslims today—especially as we consider this struggle against terrorism. The fight against terrorism is not just a fight of the Western countries. It is a fight of all those who aspire to peace and freedom throughout the world and, most emphatically, in the Muslim world itself.

From my own experience in Indonesia, a country with the largest Muslim population of any country in the world, I think that Ozal's vision of the relationship between religion and state is one that is shared by the vast majority of the world's Muslims. They have no use for the extreme doctrines espoused by such groups as Al Qaeda and the Taliban.

To the contrary, they abhor terrorism and the way that the terrorists have not only hijacked airplanes but also attempted to hijack one of the world's great religions. They have no use for people who interpret their religion to deny basic rights to the women of the Muslim world.

To win the war against terrorism, we have to reach out to the hundreds of millions of moderate and tolerant people in the Muslim world, regardless of where they live. They are, in many cases, on the frontlines of the struggle against terrorism. We in the West not only have an obligation to help them, but by helping them to stand up to the terrorists without fear, we help ourselves. Equally important, we help to lay the foundations for a better world after the war against terror has been won.

Our goal should be more than just defeating the terrorists and eliminating terrorist networks. As President Bush said in his State of the Union message in January, "we have a great opportunity during this time of war to lead the world toward the values that will bring lasting peace.... Let the skeptics look to Islam's own rich history, with its centuries of learning, and tolerance and progress. We have no intention of imposing our culture. America will take the side of brave men and women who advocate these values around the world, including the Islamic world, because we have a greater objective than eliminating threats and containing resentment. We seek a just and peaceful world" the President said, "beyond the war on terror."

In the United States, we understand that Turkey remains on the frontlines of the war on terror. And we also understand that Turkey is a model for those in the Muslim world who have aspirations for democratic progress and prosperity. Turkey gives us an example of the reconciliation of religious belief with modern secular democratic institutions.

If we are serious about minimizing the influence of the voices of Islamic extremism, we must all be serious about maximizing the influence of the voices of reason. Were Turgut Ozal alive today, there is no doubt that he would have been a leader in the fight against terror. He would have railed against a mode of thought bent on imposing on all an erroneous interpretation of Islam.

Ozal's was a forward-looking, outward view that was born in modern times with Ataturk. The people of Turkey will always remember the great leadership of Ataturk, who gave them their nation, and Ozal, who advanced it into the 21st Century. The courage, the tolerance and the fierce pride of the Turks themselves will ensure Turkey's continued progress.

Let me close with a story told by an American writer named Mary Lee Settle. She spent many years in Turkey, and chronicled her fascination with a land she grew to love in a book called "Turkish Reflections." The book closes with a story of an American friend who had been a prisoner of war in a Korean camp, along with some Turkish soldiers, half a century ago.

The American GI told Settle about how the Turks were always steadfast in their prayers. When Chinese soldiers hit them with their bayonets to make them stop praying, the Turks remained defiant until their captors left them alone. The GI said: "I think [the Chinese soldiers] were afraid of them, even though [the Chinese] were armed and the Turks were not, not with guns anyway."

The old GI also remembered that when he was so sick he thought he was about to die, his Turkish friend Hakim gave him some of his food, and sat with him, and saw him through the worst of it. The GI said, "I think Hakim gave me courage. So many GIs died because they gave up, but the Turkish soldiers in the camp didn't lose a single man. They looked after each other."

The young American taught Hakim English and Hakim taught the GI some Turkish. Hakim studied it so well, said the GI that, after the war, he became a driver for an American officer in Turkey. But, after the passage of so many years, the American could remember only one Turkish phrase, which he happily recalled for Settle: "It is Iyi arkadasum, my

good friend."

As Turkey looks to the West, across the waters of the Atlantic, know that your good friends are looking back. For we are good friends, and we still must look out for one another. Cok tesekkur ederim [many thanks]. [Applause.] ❖

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