

Khashoggi, Education, Energy & Elections:

a collection of articles on

Turkey & U.S.–Turkey Relations

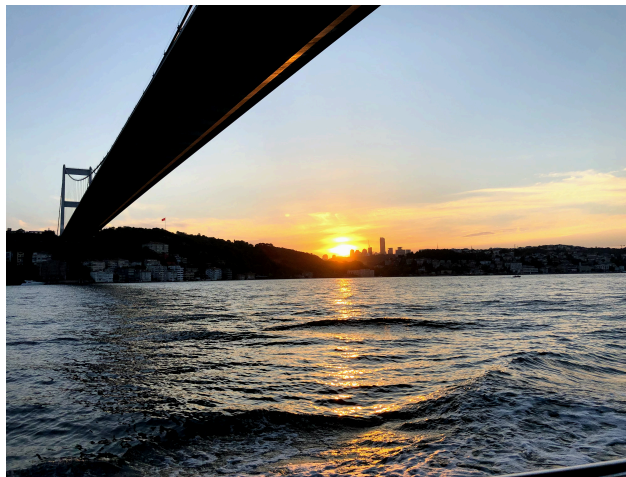
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The Wind that Blew Too Hard: Jamal Khashoggi and Turkey-U.S. Relations



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Dec 4, 2018 · 4 min read

By: *Ezra Mannix, THO Non-Resident Fellowship*



As I looked out my window on a recent blustery fall day in Washington, I remembered when I was a small child, I believed that the swaying of tree branches caused the wind to blow — not the other way around — and those that would shake too much did so at their own peril. After all, the forest was littered with examples of toppled over trees that thought they were stronger than their roots.

People in high places in autocratic regimes seem to have a similar misunderstanding of cause and effect. They believe that outspoken individuals who want to make a storm so badly shake and dance so much that they practically beg for their own demise.

So was the thinking, it seems, of Saudi Arabia's opaque government who ordered the killing of Jamal Khashoggi.

Khashoggi, who was outspoken against his regime, went into his consulate in a foreign country that has strong diplomatic relations with his own country, and he was murdered. The government clearly made a statement that he was causing the winds to blow in a way unkind to Saudi interest.

In response, Turkey's unwillingness to let the world forget about the killing has been mostly on pitch. Turkey's law enforcement is using evidence during a crime investigation to urge allies to put pressure on the kingdom: sharing evidence, making Riyadh look like the shadowy scofflaw. Erdogan has even evoked proper Islamic burial, an adherence to a post-mortem closure that Muslims share with Judeo-Christian world.

This event has shown that the U.S. and Turkey relations are not teetering on the verge of collapse as is often suggested. The sharing of police and intelligence information between the countries in a variety of areas that takes place every day is finally getting its 15 minutes of fame. The Ankara INTERPOL office is one of the first, established in 1930. The cooperation between intelligence agencies underscores on a public level how international intelligence and law enforcement sharing works harmoniously. Law enforcement cooperate on a global level on everything from the movement of terrorists to counterfeit pharmaceuticals thanks to international agreements.

In an op-ed in the Washington Post (the same media outlet for which Khashoggi wrote), Erdogan stated that the crime was a blatant violation of the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations. It seems like an unusually wonky line for a populist leader with little formal education, but it was a reminder to me that in this day and age that political expediency and international cooperation are not always at odds.

The Turkish president also took the opportunity to evoke the military ties that bind the U.S. and Turkey, publically affirming NATO solidarity. It was a sort of reaffirmation of vows in a lately rocky military partnership between Turkey and the largest NATO contributor, the U.S.

Turkey could have told the U.S. to butt out, after all, it was a crime that happened on its own soil. Turkey's willingness to expose an ally — while at a time when relations are

fragile — shows that the Turkey is not a country willing to abandon the West.

In fact, there are signs that the Khashoggi killing has born pressure on the Saudi government in its far more evil pursuit: the indiscriminate Saudi airstrikes in Yemen. U.S. Defense Secretary James Mattis and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo have, the past few weeks, called for Riyadh to end airstrikes on its impoverished southern neighbor. The U.S. ended mid-air refueling of Saudi military aircraft, an action with which Saudi Arabia has made a show of agreeing to wholeheartedly. It's a small gesture, not sanctions, which should have been put on kingdom long ago for the humanitarian disaster in Yemen that the last four years have become. But if there is a small silver lining to Khashoggi's murder, it's that it has raised awareness of the Yemen crises, and the brutal way the kingdom has dealt with opposing citizens and proxy enemies alike.

One might cynically view this attempt to use international law and pressure as an opportunistic moment to go after a "frienemy." Erdogan critics, including myself, could and should point out all the areas where the Turkish regime eschews most international law and cherry picking ones he likes. Almost all governments do it.

It's almost with comical irony that Erdogan, his country one of the world's most infamous jailer of journalistic critics, described Khashoggi, a journalist who was harshly critical of his regime, as a "kind soul." Turkey's government also fundamentally and repeatedly misunderstands cause and effect when it comes to dissidence and heavy-handed governance.

But the oppressive, brazen tempest that the Saudi regime unleashed on someone willing to seriously criticize it toppled a towering oak of a Saudi mind who dared to stand too tall, and jumped a line that Turkey and its NATO allies wouldn't cross.

After all, it wasn't Khashoggi creating the storm of his undoing; it was the other way around.

Khashoggi, the War in Yemen and U.S.-Turkey Relations: How a Journalist's Death Can Help Turn the Screws to End a Humanitarian Nightmare



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Feb 26 · 9 min read

By: *Ezra Mannix, THO Non-Resident Fellow*

This article argues that the Khashoggi murder presents an ideal smoking gun for Turkey and the US to strengthen bilateral relations by working together to pressure Saudi Arabia to stop its worst human rights transgression: participation in the war in Yemen, which is one of the world's lesser known humanitarian crises, yet one with an annual cost of lives in the thousands.





A replica street sign honoring slain journalist Jamal Khashoggi anonymously appears near the White House (Dec. 2018, Credit: Ezra Mannix).

From a humanitarian perspective, this is one of the worst ongoing conflicts in the world. An estimated 17,000 have died and a whopping 75 percent (22 million) of the impoverished population are in need of some form of humanitarian aid. The idealist in all of us says that should be enough reason for the international community to get involved.

Strategically, given that the two sides have profound disagreements over Syria, specifically the role the Kurds play in the resistance, and given that the two sides have shared animosity toward Saudi Arabia as a result of the Khashoggi affair, teaming up on Yemen could usher in another period of stronger U.S.-Turkey relationship. The U.S. should opt for political and economic pressure to allow for Turkey-U.S.-led, robust

humanitarian operations in Yemen. In the memory of Khashoggi, the two can in this way extend bilateral cooperation beyond a police investigation.

The Magnitsky Act: A Proactive First Step

With intelligence sharing at the highest level, there have already been shows of bilateral strength that have silenced those who have argued that Turkish U.S. relations are dead. pleasantly surprising has been how strongly Washington acted concurrently with its NATO ally to at least take superficial action against Riyadh.

The US evoked the newly put into effect Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act, which freezes US assets of foreign perpetrators of gross human rights violations.

The law, passed by Congress in 2016, provides the executive branch with authority to administer targeted financial and visa-related sanctions against foreign individuals and entities if they are found to have committed human rights violations or engaged in corrupt practices.

Recently, the act — named after a Russian accountant cum whistleblower who died in a Russian prison in 2009 — was finally given teeth when President Trump put his signature on sanctions laid out in Executive Order 13818, “Blocking the Property of Persons Involved in Serious Human Rights Abuse or Corruption.” The order states that “the prevalence and severity of human rights abuse and corruption” outside of the United States “have reached such scope and gravity that they threaten the stability of international political and economic systems.”

Also, Magnitsky’s authors wrote into the law that “the President shall consider... information provided jointly by the chairperson and ranking member of each of the appropriate congressional committees; and credible information obtained by other countries and nongovernmental organizations that monitor violations of human rights.”

The last sentence is key, because it allows the U.S. to also take a stand against not only high-profile murders like Khashoggi’s, but also against human rights abusers everywhere, giving broad reaching power to punish those such as — at least theoretically — high leaders ordering out large scale human rights abuses in wars in Yemen, Syria and elsewhere.

Moving from Micro Sanction to Political Reprimand

About a month later, the Senate voted to end American military assistance to Saudi Arabia for the war in Yemen, a clear show that anger over the Khashoggi killing turned into the political will to do something not only on the microeconomic level to those seen as guilty, but something tangible in the realm of foreign policy. Although likely to be vetoed by the president, the move is a stunning rebuke of the president's reticence to implicate the Mohammed bin Salman and the kingdom for its role

The 56-to-41 vote “was a rare move by the Senate to limit presidential war powers and sent a potent message of disapproval for a nearly four-year conflict that has killed thousands of civilians and brought famine to Yemen,” the New York Times stated. Moments later, Congress also passed a unanimous resolution last month holding the Saudi crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, responsible, suggesting the will to go higher to implement Magnitsky.

This time, the administration is on a different page. Foreign Policy magazine noted that “senators voted on the measure just hours after Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis delivered a rare classified briefing for the entire upper chamber.” The two men argued, unsuccessfully, that U.S. support for the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen is critical to countering terrorism in the Arabian Peninsula and curtailing Iran's regional influence.

The White House is set to veto the measure anyway, claiming that evoking the War Powers Resolution, which Senate has evoked is a “flawed” approach because U.S. forces aren't fighting in Yemen they are merely providing support to the Saudi-led coalition. The resolution, passed after the horrors of unchecked military aggression in Vietnam, bars armed forces from engaging in a conflict for more than 60 days without Congressional approval.

The Yemen Civil War

The primary reason Saudi Arabia got involved in the first place — and why the US supported them — is that aggression was instigated by the Houthi rebels, were backed nominally by Iran. They took over the capital Sanaa from an internationally recognized regime. Saudi responded in March 2015 by beginning the Operation Decisive Storm, a

mostly air campaign whose targets are one-third civilian. With the Saudi-led coalition air strikes behind them, the pro-Saudi, anti-Houthi military force led by Yemeni President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi has been going at it for more than three years against the Houthis, whose members adhere to Zaidism, a sect of Shia Islam.

There are parallels between the Houthi movement, started formally in 2004, and the civil war in Syria. Like the civil war in Syria, the smoking gun was a mass protest amongst innocent civilians. In this case, the Zaidi tribe and religious freedom in their northern stronghold of Sa'da. The protests were quashed and a bounty was put on the head of the Houthi leader, Hussain Badr al-Din al-Huthi, who was assassinated 14 years ago, sparking the first of six mainly internal conflicts between the Houthi establishment and the Yemeni government.



Former U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and Yemeni President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi in Washington (Jul. 2013, Credit: U.S. State Dept.)

The president of Yemen for 22 years, Ali Abdullah Saleh, was forced to resign in 2012 as a result of Arab Spring-inspired unrest, but repressions continued with forced disappearances and killings. Although the transition to Hadi's leadership was peaceful,
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Hadi fled to Saudi Arabia in 2015 and lived there temporarily in exile. Saudi bombings and a spread of the war across Yemen commenced,

With Saudi atrocities such as the bombing of a school bus that killed 40 children with munitions sold to Riyadh by the U.S, the U.S. has a moral imperative to make good on its past transgressions of feeding the war beast. Like Russia and Iran supporting the regime of Bashar Al Assad with weapons and logistical support, so too have the U.S. with its military-industrial complex. For their parts, so has the U.S. Since 2015, the US and UK have supplied more than \$5 billion in arms sales to Saudi. Like the Russians and Iranians in Syria, the US and its allies have fed the beast of this war.

Like Riyadh, Washington has also argued that they need to stop Iranian influence in the region, but true Iranian influence in Yemen has been exaggerated. For all the talk of feeding a bloody military campaign as necessary to fight the menace of Iranian, there is evidence to suggest that Iranian influence in the war is limited at best, and certainly not at the level of airstrikes killing civilians in the triple digits. Juneau uses the example of small arms support from Tehran by pointing out that Yemen has so many — gun ownership rates are second only to the US — that Iran’s modest contributions likely have little impact. Religiously, Zaidis actually practice a form of Shia Islam that’s different from the Twelver Shiism practiced in the region.

State of Turkey-Yemeni Relations

In 2018, a Turkey-based academic, Ali Bakeer, teamed up with Giorgio Cafiero, a Washington-based geopolitical risk consultant, to write an overview of Turkey’s foreign policy approach toward Yemen. Until the 2014, Turkey’s approach toward its one-time Ottoman colony had been limited to some humanitarian interventions and other expressions of soft power and goodwill to a vulnerable country.

For its part, Turkey, while Sunni like Yemen government supporters and Saudi Arabia, feels little kinship with the House of Saud (except that they are custodians of Islam’s holiest sites), nor the Yemenis.

Nevertheless, relations were on positive footing (until Turkey sided with Qatar against the UAE and Saudi Arabia during the diplomatic row) and thus stayed out of all things Yemen.

All soft power influence came to a halt when a Saudi-led coalition of Arab armies kicked off the bombings in 2015, beginning a long and protracted civil war that has taken a toll far greater than most had anticipated.

Turkey remained out of the civil war but sided with the Yemeni establishment and Riyadh on paper. Riyadh's support was seen as a bulwark against Iran encroaching in the region, which it referred to in a statement as "foreign supporters." Ankara's was reportedly aware of Operation Decisive Storm before it commenced. It "believed the operation would revive legitimate state authority and prevent the risk of civil war." On Ankara's side was a UN Security Council resolution, in which members (including Russia, but not Iran or Turkey, who were not on the Council) were unanimous in demanding that Houthis withdraw from government institutions, which they occupied at the time (including the presidency: a surrounded Hadi was under house arrest at the time).

Next Step? U.S. and to Help End the Yemen Suffering

In another piece, Cafiero argues that Ankara-Riyadh relations for 2019 will be affected by the Khashoggi murders. "Unquestionably, the unresolved Khashoggi case will fuel greater tension between these two powers." He continues by noting that "A nightmare scenario that MBS fears for 2019 is that Washington will begin shifting toward the Turkey-Qatar alliance as a favored bloc in the Sunni Muslim world in order to counter Iran, rather than continuing to make the Saudi Arabia-United Arab Emirates-Egypt axis its preferred bloc to coordinate with in efforts aimed at pushing back against Tehran's consolidating influence in the Arab world."

While MBS might not like a scenario where bilateral U.S.-Saudi relations are cooler, it certainly doesn't have to be a nightmare scenario for Yemen. And it doesn't require some sort of massive realignment either. Let's face it: the US and Saudi won't stop their energy-based intimate relationship, nor will it hurt its strategic relationship with NATO ally Turkey.

On the Turkish and U.S. domestic home front, the conflict in Yemen is unique for a couple reasons, and there are reasons why taking a more active role in stemming the atrocities in Yemen can and should be a lot easier to stomach than Syria for both US and

Turkish electorate, a lot more clear cut from an ethical perspective, a lot cheaper, and a lot more within reach than getting involved in Syria.

Unlike in Syria, the main power that has caused suffering is not a US foe — perennial US enemies Russia and Iran that is causing a disproportionate amount of the suffering — but rather a close ally.

It can and therefore should be a lot easier for the US and Turkey to get to the table with Saudi Arabia than is the case with Syria, an ally of neither country. They might listen to their ally and cease perpetuating bombardment of the country.

Turkey, with support of US and allied development organizations, should act on the international community to provide U.N. patrolled safe zones where Turkish and international NGOs can implement reliable humanitarian aid supply chains. Many Turkish organizations, such as IHH, Kimse Yok Mu? and other organizations that have faith-based motivations to help and would be respected by the pious Muslim citizens of Yemen.

This is a modest first step, but it's a modest step that shows Turkey and the U.S. have a path forward to continue to tighten the screws on Saudi Arabia, a political win-win for both countries and a way to strengthen their relationship even more. The legacy of Khashoggi could then extend its hand in unpredictably positive ways.

Turkey Needs Better English to Boost Global Profile



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Apr 4 · 5 min read

By: Ezra Mannix, THO Non-Resident Fellow

When I was an academic ESL teacher at a private university’s English preparatory program in Istanbul, a familiar scene would play out during one of my lessons a couple times a year: I’d notice a diligent student — one not particularly interested in learning English — writing on papers in a Perso-Arabic script.

“What are you doing, Mehmet?” I would ask. “It’s my homework. I’m learning Ottoman Turkish, *hocam* [my teacher]!” I’d ask him to put it away. My job, after all, was to get them to focus on the learning the language he would need for his coming four years of university study and the one they would likely use in their careers.

I appreciated that a few students were taking on the challenges of learning a second foreign language while beefing up their English, but it also underscored a problem: Turkish students, already exposed to substandard English education in public schools, are being told by Erdogan and neo-Ottoman domestic scholars that the language ought to learn Ottoman Turkish in schools. All of this with its requisite tinge of late-Ottoman nationalism.

This is unfortunate, because what Turkish schools really need is better English.

I’m not saying that Turks should forget about their heritage. I’m not saying that Ottoman Turkish isn’t an important language which should live in on in academic circles, in literature, and through the diligence of university students who have a desire to learn it.

But in K-12 education, Turkey needs substantial improvements in quality ESL curricula and pedagogy. Turkey lags behind almost all European countries, 31st place out of 32 countries scored, in English-language proficiency.

There are limited school hours in the day, and we can't teach everything, as proud as we are of our ethno-national histories. After all, there's no clamor in British or American schools to learn Early Modern English, even though it was Shakespeare's vernacular. It might be great for youth to know, but sacrifices must be made.

Most Turkish students learn English badly and for a long time.

It isn't that students don't have English classes. Many students in Turkey have English lessons for five, six or even eight years of compulsory education. This education, however, consists of rote rehearsal of grammar rules and vocabulary so they can answer multiple-choice only questions on exams, some of which aren't even vetted by truly fluent speakers.

This is a problem on many levels for Turkey's image abroad, relations with the global political community, and so much more.

Turkey can't express itself, from the ordinary Turk up to Erdogan himself.

The media is one realm where this manifests itself. *Dark Tourist* is a Netflix alternative travel show hosted by New Zealand journalist David Farrier, who experiences places like radioactive Fukushima and crossing the U.S. Mexican border. One episode took the host to Cyprus, where he visited the abandoned idyllic Greek beach resort town of Famagusta, located in an uninhabited zone patrolled by the Turkish military since 1974.

The host interviewed a Greek Cypriot woman who described the heart wrenching experience of being forced out of her home as a girl, never to return, her neighborhood frozen in time, overgrown with weeds. Though she lived on another part of the island for most of her life, her English was excellent. Perhaps it's simply because he didn't care to, but the host didn't engage a single member of the Turkish Cypriot community to surface another side of the story. Sure, it could have been journalistic laziness — and I don't believe the Turkish military occupation of the northern part of the island is justified — but the relative absence of English speakers there who can speak about the issue makes

it so the picture painted of Turkey and Turkish Cyprus, its history and its worldview, is by outsiders.



This is also the reason we have such high visibility small brain trust of Turkish urban, middle-class, private school educated millennials interviewed, blogging, and on social media about issues like Gezi Park. They learned English through non-state directed curricula or abroad, so they tell the story of Turkey through a particular perspective that means something to them, and the rest of the world is left to throw up its collective hands as to why Erdogan keeps winning elections and why there is pervasive mistrust of West.

Knowing English well works the other way, too.

It helps from the inside out, too. If English fluency is common among the Turkish general population in general, a whole new world of discussion, thought, perspectives and so much more opens itself. Instead of learning about the US or UK from often mediocre subtitles running across the bottom of the screen of their favorite foreign TV shows, Turkish students can learn about the world through articles, watch documentaries and

low-budget shows on YouTube, and become regulars on news sites that tens of millions in the educated global audience read: BBC, Al Jazeera, New York Times, etc.

Then they might see that the Christian world is not (usually) rabidly Islamophobic, as Erdogan has suggested following the New Zealand mosque massacre (and has repeatedly done so). Knowing English might mean their worldview isn't largely formed by Turkish dramas such as *Kurtlar Vadisi* (Valley of the Wolves), a TV thriller in which Israeli Mossad agents are depicted as operating in Turkey, literally snatching babies, and the CIA and the Kurds are behind a plot to destroy the country. The problem is not that the show is popular, the problem is when people begin to see this as reality and can't find corroborating evidence in non-Turkish media because they don't know English.

Of course, I am somewhat of a hypocrite: I'm American. I learned but two years of Spanish in high school. We're woefully monolingual, a joke to the rest of the global north. But the unfair reality is that our language is the universal language.

("Why did you learn Turkish, *hocam*? You know English. It's enough because people speak it everywhere," one of my students remarked.)

How to fix the English gap

Turkey needs to revamp its curriculum throughout state schools to focus on English as a tool for global communication, not a subject where mastering grammar rules is akin to memorizing mathematic formulas. Creative writing, oral presentations on topics of students' choosing — coupled with learning about concepts such as bias — would help middle and high school students be prepared for global citizenship. It would help for teacher training to have educating English teachers with intensive, advanced English immersion. Millions of dollars needs to be invested for this to happen, and make a truly bilingual workforce, as South Korea has attempted to do since the 1990s.

I'm not saying that English is the magic bullet for success, but the world has always had a *lingua franca*, and now it happens to be this arrangement of letters you're reading on screen.

When students who study English for eight years and enter university barely able to utter a sentence or write a simple paragraph about themselves, the consequences reach much

farther than writing term papers or doing business abroad, it improves how the world perceives the country.

April 23 is Children's Day in Turkey. Let's honor them by improving the robustness of English education. Turkey's place in the global community is at stake.

The Answer to Political Straw Men in Turkey? Investment in Education



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Nov 7, 2018 · 4 min read

By: Ezra Mannix, THO Non-Resident Fellow



There was once a time when Erdogan really enjoyed being a politician. Kissing hands of the elderly, embracing his friends, members of his own party genuinely gave the leader professional fulfillment. Rattling on his stump speech about outside forces trying to destabilize and provoke, rattling on about how his giant base of salt-of-the-earth, heartland voters had been forgotten for the sake catering to political elites or the military. Now the job is getting old. There isn't a lot of upward mobility at the top. So he has turned to attacking the one area of political orthodoxy that he didn't dare question before: economic orthodoxy.

A Fletcher School classmate, reflecting on his days at the University of Chicago, once told me that the joke at his alma mater's famed economics department was economists

are like a do-no-harm physician. Got interest rate pain? Take an aspirin and things will sort of sort themselves out. Except taking aspirin is boring. Kicking and screaming about how that aspirin is a tool of Western manipulation is a lot more fun.

Erdogan and a lot of autocratic leaders on the rise share a lot of things in common. But a thing often overlooked is that they all are smart. Not quoting Proust at a dinner party or solve equations in their head smart, but understanding playing people off one another and the ability to stay in the headlines, knowing what provokes a lesser educated electorate and what keeps them interested, and how to get predictable reactions from the media.

Erdogan and the current government understand that given the lack of critical thinking skills and journalistic freedom wrought on his citizens thanks to education system founded by predecessors who did not value critical thinking, so politicians' words are taken as gospel. Journalistic integrity has long been undervalued in Turkey, so corroboration and confirmation of "Erdomics" is not necessary to score points. Mainstream Western media, in theory, cannot entertain bizarre notions the way Turks can (something President Donald Trump is slowly changing in the U.S.).

Erdogan knows that raising interest rates doesn't cause inflation. He also knew that saying that would draw gasps from anyone who has taken an undergraduate level economics course. He also knew that the central bank would inevitably raise interest rates.

So why say it? In short, malaise. Most knew he would coast to an electoral win. He's locked in the votes of multiple generations of voters who do not question his abilities and credentials. Attacking economic orthodoxy is a fresh way of keeping the strawman alive, and his electorate will not question it.

He doesn't want to focus on the positives. There is some good news. Turkey is going all in on making Istanbul a global hub for business travelers with the opening of a new airport. Tourism was up in Istanbul and coastal resorts this year thanks to the cheap lira (though it meant higher prices for local tourists).

These short-term and perennial strengths of the Turkish economy will always be there, barring a major domestic security attack that drives tourists and business away. But

these will keep Turkey a developing country in perpetuity. Turkey needs to get out of the habit of claiming its natural strengths are the ways to maintain economy security and grow a more robust and diversified political economy.

The short-term fixes are few, but for the long-term sake of Turkey's prosperity, the country ought to invest on significant research and development, foster and encourage the private sector and industrialists to incubate technology firms on a large scale, provide professional development for a nimbler and flexible workforce, and radically change its education system to foster critical thinking. Turkish millennials have travelled and come into contact with foreigners like never before thanks to recent economic prosperity, but economic woes are derailing opportunities for the next generation.

Perhaps, then, the media would simply be better served doing what we all do when someone tries to get attention: ignore him and reach for the soft power.

Educational development is what I see as key to Turkey's long term prosperity. I believe Turkey has a lot going for it in the education realm to train a generation of more critically minded youth than the one currently entering the workforce. In my more than five years working in and with higher education in Istanbul, I saw budding signs of greatness and have taught a number of bright international and Turkish students.

With this as a driver, the U.S. government could solidify relations with the Turkey by encouraging American universities to open satellite campuses not unlike "Education City" in Qatar (and, let's face it, Istanbul is a far more exciting city for a student than Qatar) and offer subsidies and scholarships for American university students to study at them. This would encourage Turkish universities to raise their standards to compete for partnerships with U.S. institutions, or to raise their own standards, and develop campuses like Middle East Technical University's Technopolis in Ankara.

Letting successes of economic do-no-harm liberalism speak for themselves and adapting the education would render Erdogan...boring, but it's how most highly educated societies prosper. Instead, Erdogan is incentivized to stay ahead of the curve by resorting to trick plays from the autocrat's playbook while soft-power wielding bureaucrats and technocrats keep the world spinning.

With a more educated population, the relatively recent spate of so-called authoritarianism will be just that...a spate. Turkey, a relatively strong democracy, will continue to be so, albeit one with a more informed electorate.

Hydrocarbons and the Cyprus Wound That Won't Heal



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Dec 27, 2018 · 5 min read

By: *Ezra Mannix, THO Non-Resident Fellowship*



Last year, while pursuing my graduate studies at The Fletcher School of Law & Diplomacy at Tufts University, I took a fascinating course called Petroleum in the Global Economy, taught by Prof. Bruce Everett, former energy executive turned associate professor at his alma mater.

One of the assignments was to — as employees at our made-up energy company — evaluate the profitability of a near certain hydrocarbon resource offshore of the fictitious country of East Abalone and agree on contractual terms of revenue sharing with our host government. Prof. Everett would send out regular political “news” while we were working on the assignment that could affect our agreement. One such update stated that

East Abalone's rival, West Abalone, sent a naval destroyer into its rival's territorial waters to intimidate us.

Sound familiar? The latest flap over the promise natural gas wealth in the Cyprus' exclusive economic zone (EEZ) south of the island nation — and Ankara's provocative statements and grand entrances of military vessels — is a case of life imitating art.

Who's Right?

The short answer is: Cyprus. The internationally-recognized Republic of Cyprus has a complete right to explore in its EEZ per international maritime law. Turkey has no claim on any hydrocarbons in that zone.

From a political standpoint, however, both sides can and should be criticized.

Firstly, I see an interesting political irony. Let's say lots of profit-making hydrocarbons are found and its drill baby drill, and the status quo of a divided island remains. Since neither Cyprus nor the international community recognize Northern Cyprus as an independent country, excluding the well-being of northern Cypriot citizens would amount to a *de facto* recognition of Northern Cyprus as Turkish territory, or unethical exclusion of an ethnic minority on its territory at least. Turkey does have a point by arguing that sharing the windfall with the northern part of the island must be guaranteed.

The irony on the Turkish side is that since Turkey has deployed its own naval ships and exploratory drilling rigs to the disputed area in Cyprus' EEZ, it is, *de facto*, joining the rest of the world in *not* recognizing the "independence" of Northern Cyprus. These vessels are from the Republic of Turkey, not Northern Cyprus (which doesn't have any navy or drilling rigs of its own, anyway). In short, it's treating Cyprus waters as Turkish territorial waters, thus further confirming that Turkey is an occupier and illegal claimant of Cyprus territory.

Also, Turkey claims its threats are to protect the interests of Turkish Cypriots, but it knows full well that those interests don't include a petrol windfall unless its troops leave the island. After all, Turkey has stationed thousands of troops in Cyprus, a symbolic hostility, a status quo that is a non-starter for reunification.

The Real Losers May Be Ordinary Cypriots

Are Turkish Cypriot interests being listened to? Or is Turkey acting in its own best interests?

Mainland Turkey would lose a lot if Northern Cyprus gets absorbed into the Republic of Cyprus. The north is a playground for Turks, who are heavily invested in real estate there. It's a place where gambling is legal, and booze is cheap.

But a lot of Turkish Cypriots whose families have been there for generations will tell you they want reunification of the island so that they can get EU passports and access to resources and jobs on the Greek side. During my personal travels and conversations in Northern Cyprus, it's possible that they want this even more than proportional political representation. My hunch is that the prospect of energy revenue would only strengthen the desire for economic integration over loyalty to mainland Turkey.

The U.S. Role

For regional energy stability and security, the U.S. has supported the Cypriot deep water exploration efforts in the Mediterranean, to the visible point where the U.S. Ambassador to Cyprus boarded the ExxonMobil vessel drillship Stena IceMax, posed for a picture with top Cyprus political leaders, and reaffirmed the country's sovereign right to develop its resources.

Why would a U.S. ambassador feel so comfortable reaffirming America's stalwart support? Because just by virtue of initial investment, ExxonMobil, a U.S. company, is confident that exploration will continue unimpeded and it won't lose out if and when the gas starts flowing, according to Prof. Everett.

"Companies don't like operating in disputed areas, because you're spending a lot of money on a property right you won't be able to keep," he said during a recent phone conversation. He noted that the exploration was south of Cyprus, instead of between it and Turkey. "If it (the area of exploration) were much farther north, these people would get more nervous."

Photo ops of U.S. ambassadors on drill ships don't help, however, and even if Turkish claims to the reserves are not credible, it's easy to see why the country might be

suspicious about Washington's motivations and dismissive about statements urging Cyprus to share the wealth with the north side.

If no compromise will be made toward the eventual reunification, the U.S. could play a part to convince Turkey to back off the threats, and convince Israel, Turkey and Cyprus to agree on trilateral cooperation for exploiting the Levantine and Aphrodite natural gas fields. If it's multi-source energy security Turkey's after, The U.S. could encourage Turkey to pursue the long game of developing renewable energy.

Conclusion: A Wound that Won't Heal

Statements and actions by both sides have shown that Turkey and Cyprus are uttering rhetoric about looking out for the best interests of their citizens. It seems, rather, it's a case of hotheaded political rivalries played out in the realm of energy exploration. If both sides were looking out for best interests of Cypriots, there would be serious talk of troop withdrawal, how much gas the island plans on keeping, how much windfall would trickle down to schools, infrastructure, etc.

From Turkey's energy security perspective, challenges are better dealt with in the long term by deeper investment in education of its people, so that research and development can be enhanced to the point where the country can proactively develop energy technologies, instead of swooping in to try and take what isn't theirs.

Regardless of historical interpretation, Turkey should cease making bellicose and aggressive statements about re-invading another country. And for the sake of long-term regional stability, Turkish politicians should consider foregoing short-term political gains from bellicose rhetoric.

Cyprus and Energy: Huge Gas Find Raises the Stakes in the Eastern Mediterranean



Turkish Heritage Organization [Follow](#)

Mar 5 · 3 min read

By: *Ezra Mannix, THO Non-Resident Fellow*

In December, I wrote about how the potential for massive hydrocarbon reserves below the eastern Mediterranean sea in the internationally recognized Republic of Cyprus's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) could raise tensions between Cyprus (and, by extension, Greece and the EU) and Turkey. My conclusion was that this is a case of political rivalries being played out in a new realm, and I was skeptical that the ordinary interests of Turkish or Greek Cypriots were represented.

I mentioned that Turkey blocked an exploratory drillship from Italian energy company ENI, and nationalist rhetoric in Ankara has escalated to thinly veiled threats. There seemed to be little recourse from international law on the part of Turkey, as their insistence that Northern Cyprus was an independent country precludes them from any real right to Cyprus's international waters per the law of the sea.

Since I wrote that, things have changed.

ExxonMobil announced recently that it's discovered a likely giant proven reserve of 142 to 227 billion cubic meters of natural gas in its Glaucus-1 well, which would make it the third-biggest natural gas discovery in two years.

"It's an amazing development for all of Cyprus," the Cyprus Energy minister was quoted as saying.

Turkey, meanwhile, has dispatched its own drill ship to the region.



But would an energy bonanza be a positive development for all Cypriots, or any Cypriots? It's possible that Cypriot elite could skim licensing fees paid by oil multinationals to explore blocks could be skimmed off the top by unscrupulous Cypriot government officials, as corruption on the island is still a problem.

I wonder if badly needed investments on both sides of the island would be made that are needed to ease ethnic tensions as much as peace on paper. There have been mentions of the Cypriot government creating a sovereign wealth fund on the island for the benefit of both Turkey and Cyprus to share, though trust advancing measures would need to be implemented on both sides for that to succeed, such as freedom of travel for Turkish Cypriots, and some repatriation of Greek Cypriot land on the Turkish side.

Perhaps speculating about revenues is putting the cart before the horse, as there are still questions about the quality of the petroleum, and it will be a few years before the gas comes online. Turkey would probably be unwise to seriously challenge actual extraction if it comes to pass however, as no gas for anyone is not a great baseline scenario for Turkey's trading partners in the EU, and EU energy independence can only mean good things for Ankara, one of the EU's biggest trading partner and NATO member.

Nevertheless, Greek media has reported that Turkey has increased military presence on the Green Line, the cease fire boundary on Cyprus. They've also performed large naval exercises in the eastern Mediterranean. Because it doesn't recognize the Republic of Cyprus, Turkey doesn't recognize the EEZ that surrounds it.

Turkey Part of a Pipeline Solution

Perhaps a mutually agreed upon percentage of natural gas to mainland Turkey could be shipped to Turkey so that even if a proposed EastMed gas pipeline linking the reserves of Cyprus and Israel through Greece and Italy doesn't go through Anatolia, Turkey would still get the cheap energy it needs for its growing economy (natural gas prices there shot up 14 percent in September). Better yet for Turkey would be for a pipeline or spur from the pipeline go to Turkey on its way to Europe, (or, in the case of a gas link, terminate there). This would strengthen Turkey's economic ties to the EU by lessening its dependence on energy from Russia or states friendly to it (or Iran), and making energy cheaper. Since the EastMed pipeline is far from reality now because no investors exist, perhaps Turkey could divert some proposed funding for its figurative pipe dreams (like the Istanbul Canal) to this literal one to help defray the costs.

But Turkey shouldn't use the threat of force to make this happen only as a last resort. There is plenty of leverage on both sides for a peaceful solution, and this is an opportunity to show that energy wealth can heal more than divide.

Democracy Stands Tall (For Now)

By: THO Non-Resident Fellow, Ezra Mannix



Turkish Heritage Organization [Follow](#)

May 16 · 5 min read

UPDATE: On May 6th, 2019, the Supreme Electoral Council of Turkey decided to annul the Istanbul mayoral election. A rerun will take place on June 23rd. This article was written before the decision was handed down.

Imagine a fence with a separate garden on each side, with two very different gardeners tending to their respective plots. Both gardeners claim to be experts on maintaining and growing their respective gardens.

On one side, the gardener looks at the other, smirks, and says over the fence “I work my land right. Your flowers will wither. But I’m an expert, my craft honed over time. Look, see how beautiful my vegetables are? If you do exactly what I do, you’ll reap a bounty!”

The gardener on the other side blurts back, “Your garden works for you, but I know my plot — the soil, the rocks, the kinds of seeds we can use — and we do it much better. Mind your own business; we’ve done far better than you could have ever done under our conditions. You criticize our garden, but really, you just don’t like me!”

For more than a decade now, this has been, in a nutshell, the rhetoric back and forth about democracy in Turkey. The first “gardener” is the global democracy building elite: civil society organizations, the European Union and the like. The second “gardener” is Erdogan, along with his allies in the Turkish government and abroad.

A big test of the resiliency of that second garden came on March 31. The razor thin margins of victory for the opposition CHP in the municipal elections in Istanbul — and to a lesser extent Ankara and Izmir — have been a test of whether Turkey’s garden of

democracy has borne fruit. CHP's Ekrem İmamoğlu won Istanbul by fewer than 30,000 votes, initially. AKP, as often is the case when one side loses by a razor thin margin, wanted to make sure that every vote is cast was counted and there were no irregularities. Any party has, by law, the right to submit formal objections within 48 hours of polls closing, which they did.

In the days following the election, spoiled ballots and votes from certain polling places in parts of the city were recounted, the margin of İmamoğlu's margin of victory shrank to fewer than 14,000.



Yet, he was still the winner. The YSK, the Turkish Supreme Election Authority, stood strong: this committee of judges who are appointed by two different high courts in Turkey (whose judges are mostly AKP appointees) has the final say.

Case closed. Right?

Hopefully. Probably (at the moment I write this, at least).

On Thursday, April 17, the results of the election were officially certified by the YSK 16 days after election day (by comparison, it took 35 days before the controversial 2000 US presidential election results become official). The YSK is an institution that could've bowed to pressure from the ruling party and taken extraordinary measures under extraordinary circumstances and called for a complete recount of every single vote in Istanbul. Or, the YSK could have pushed to hold a total redo, which the AKP has called for (a hypothetical election which the CHP, for its part, said it would boycott). But they didn't.

If a key measure of the health of a democracy is the strength of its institutions, then this standing tall is a good sign, and, assuming the AKP drops further protests, is proof of what Erdogan has been trying to tell the EU and civil society elites: democracy in Turkey is strong, pluralistic and the will of the people (turnout for this election was a whopping 84 percent) must be respected.

For the most part, it's been hard for me to side look at Turkey and see a lush cornucopia of democracy, with hundreds imprisoned for speaking out against the government. But it does bears fruit, even if it isn't the kind I and most Turkey watchers worldwide particularly like. Turkey has held elections, and if nothing else, these elections have been relatively free, with citizens going to the ballot boxes on their own accord, unintimidated, yet with a very limited picture of what the different parties stand for thanks to a biased mainstream media. The EU, global educated elite, CSOs and so many have been claiming for years that Turkey is backsliding to authoritarianism. Its leader stocked the judiciary, military the bureaucracy and has cowed opposition media and intellectuals. Frankly, it's mostly been true. Turkey is once again near the bottom of recently released global press freedom rankings, for example.

But whether İmamoğlu is the good guy or bad in the AKP's book, the elections have been properly and fairly certified. Just as it was hard for opposition supporters to grit their teeth and accept that the AKP was hugely popular, election after election, over the last two decades, so too should the AKP accept that Turkey's three largest cities are now under opposition control, and should work to offer a fresh platform with new ideas that would truly benefit the country.

Education is a good place for policymakers to start. The new administration and the new opposition can support the longer-term health of democratic institutions by investing in

higher education in Istanbul. To the extent possible, İmamoğlu should provide land and resources to universities that have serious commitments to higher education for STEM research, but also liberal arts and humanities that teach critical thinking skills to the country's global citizens. He should attract major tech titans to invest in facilities in Istanbul that will woo the best Turkish minds who have fled to more developed countries, and further integrate minorities and refugees into the educational fold.

The results of these measures are difficult to see within one political cycle, and it can be hard to get the word out, but İmamoğlu's team should continue to leverage social media to get the word out about little wins, so that these wins become internalized by the voters as a priority for the city's next level of development.

But for now, a little win has been scored in Turkey's garden of democracy. Kudos to the YSK for sticking to its mandate.

The S-400: Is Turkey Just a Practical Customer?



Turkish Heritage Organization [Follow](#)

Jul 19 · 5 min read

Disclaimer: The THO Non-Resident Fellows do not represent the Turkish Heritage Organization's Positions or Policies



What's the big deal about Turkey buying the S-400 anti-aircraft defense system from Russia?

Firstly, I'll concede that I don't know much about strategic defense issues. I have a standard international affairs degree-holder's knowledge about security and military affairs. My expertise is in the softer topics: education, democracy, and the refugee issue as they pertain to Turkey.

I do have a passing knowledge of how the global economy works. I'm also an American who grew up during the 90's with NAFTA and the end of America's industrial might. I know the "buy American" argument *doesn't* work. People buy the widget that's most cost effective (in theory): the one that best fits their needs at the best possible price, alliances or not.



And in the case of the S-400, that price is half: \$500 million vs. \$1 billion for the U.S.-made Patriot system. And there are tactical advantages to the S-400. Charlie Gao The National Interest wrote back in October about the S-400's advantages: A "key aspect of the S-400 is the ability to use four different types of missiles with different weights and capabilities, allowing the system by itself to form a large portion of a layered air defense. This makes the S-400 a more flexible system. It also can utilize missiles employed by earlier S-300 variants."

This is how I'm seeing Turkey purchasing the S-400 system from Russia over the competing system from the US. It seems to be a simply better product purchased on an open, globalized market.

So, again, what's the problem? It's hard to see exactly. The Washington Post notes that the S-400, "has advanced radars and isn't compatible with NATO technology." But that's all it says. (This child of the 90's also remembers when Mac and Windows weren't compatible. Sorry to be flippant, but surely there's a workaround). Meanwhile, Reuters

stated that it “may compromise (America’s) Lockheed Martin F-35 fighter jets” without elaborating.

You might be thinking to yourself: C’mon Ezra, this is Russia we’re talking about. *Russia!* Why is a country in NATO, whose very founding was to create a security block to counter Soviet belligerence, buying from the very rival that spurred its creation? It should be a no brainer that a NATO country buy a weapons system from another NATO country.

Other Friendlies Use Russian Systems

Back in January, I attended a Turkish Heritage Organization panel discussion with Ret. Adm. James Stavridis, a brilliant, thoughtful former NATO supreme allied commander, and Ret. Adm. Deniz Kutluk, a distinguished Turkish counterpart. The two sparred over a number of issues, one of them was Turkey’s insistence on going ahead with the S-400. Adm. Kutluk pointed out that a number of NATO allies and friends utilize Russian-built weapons systems.



As a 2018 graduate of the Fletcher School, I’ve seen Adm. Stavridis speak many times and have chatted with him in person and over email. I’d never seen him as visibly perturbed as he was on that day. I wasn’t taking notes, but while Adm. Kutluk was listing off NATO and friendly neighborhood countries that use the S-300, Stavridis cut him off with something to the effect of “that’s a completely different scenario and you know it!” In a slightly threatening tone, he warned Adm. Kutluk by urging him not to go down the rabbit hole of technical reasons why purchasing and installing the S-400 was a terrible idea.

In terms of the other countries, Adm. Kutluk was technically correct about the proliferation of Russian-made weapons. Countries like Slovakia and Ukraine indeed

have active, S-300 weapons systems. Greece owns an older version of the defense system, the S-300. It should be noted that Greece did not purchase the S-300, the system was transferred from Cyprus and installed on the island of Crete in 1998. Cyprus, which is not a NATO member due to the island's divided status, purchased the system in 1997 and pointed its missiles at Turkey. Turkey threatened all-out war; a compromise was reached in 1998 and the S-300 system was transferred to Greece's largest island, where they still operate. This last clause is important, because while Greece didn't purchase the system, it's still active and on the frontier of the alliance. It should also be noted that several other strategic allies — such as Saudi Arabia, India and China, and Qatar — are mulling over or have already received deliveries of the upgraded system.



But back to the heated exchange between Adms. Kutluk and Stavridis. I wish Adm. Stavridis HAD gone down that rabbit hole of technical reasons why this case is different and why, from a strategic defense standpoint, it's a bad idea (there wasn't enough time in the talk and Adm. Stavridis had a plane to catch). From my view, it seems like the reasons for pressuring Turkey to purchase the Patriot system are more economic: Turkey is an enormous patron of the U.S. military-industrial complex, and they ought to continue to be one.

Send Me Your Reasons

Technically, perhaps there is a glaring reason why, besides compatibility and potential threat to U.S. equipment. Maybe the S-400's advanced software would fail Turkey if there were a military escalation with Russia or a Russian ally. Or perhaps there's an unfortunate bi-product of the missile system's software, such as a Trojan horse, that would allow the Russians to spy on or steal data from the NATO country, or undermine

its cyber defense in another way. This has been hinted at in other news sources, again without elaboration.



Lastly, it's worth reminding ourselves that while defense against the Soviet Union was clearly its motivator for forming NATO, nowhere in the most recent or original treaty is there mention of "Russia" or "Soviet Union." Also, NATO stresses that missiles are used for internal defense, and that its envoys meet regularly to discuss regional issues, albeit with strong disagreements.

If Adm. Stavridis or another security expert does read this post, perhaps he or she can explain to a lay audience in greater detail why the S-400 is such a bad idea for Turkey (I understand a lot of things are classified). I'm all ears. Right now, it seems more a case of sour grapes.

Interview with Jared Wall: Expat American Twitter Star on Humor, Who to Follow, Cultural Ambassadorship and More



Turkish Heritage Organization [Follow](#)

Feb 1 · 6 min read

By: *Ezra Mannix, THO Non-Resident Fellow*

Jared Wall is an American living in Turkey. Unlike most North American and European expats — who live in Turkey for short to medium-length stints for adventure, work or study — Wall, a language and literature teacher by day, Twitter star by, well, pretty much anytime he has a few moments to let the mood strike him, has lived in Turkey for nearly a decade. For someone like me, who’s also lived in Turkey long term and speaks the language, Wall’s use of “Turkish” (mostly English with Turkish words where Anglo translations just won’t do) to bring to light joys and travails of everyday life in the country is downright hilarious and always on point. The Twitterverse has noticed, too: Wall has amassed more than 22,000 followers, among them Barack Obama and pop star Kenan Doğulu. I met Wall in 2010, when I first moved back to Turkey after studying abroad in Ankara several years early, and we acted together in comedy sketches with a now defunct expat theater troupe, Square Peg. We fell out of touch for years. When I started frequenting Twitter a couple years ago, I was surprised — but not too surprised, given the tweet quality — that this old friend had become a Twitter mainstay, so I decided to take a fun little break from my usual IR-heavy posts to interview him.



How long have you lived in Turkey? Where? Why Turkey? What drew you to the culture?

JW: I've lived in Turkey, mostly in Istanbul, for the better part of a decade. I originally came to Istanbul to study at Boğaziçi. I enjoyed the experience so much that I made it my goal to come back to Istanbul to learn Turkish and immerse myself in Turkish culture. Turkey and Turkish culture drew me in from the start. In terms of language, I liked how easy learning survival Turkish was. Being able to learn the basics quickly really helps you feel at home in a foreign country. When it comes to interpersonal relationships, I find that Turkish people are very friendly and hospitable to foreigners. Indeed, most people who I've met show at least some interest in and knowledge of international issues.

You're a regular expat (no offense). How did you develop a massive following?

JW: Honestly, I'm not quite sure. I think it probably has something to do with being able to read and write in Turkish as well as in English. If you're tweeting about Turkey, your audience should also include Turks who don't speak English, or who only speak a bit of English. Another thing is having an understanding of what Turks find important and funny.

Barack Obama even follows you. How did that happen?

JW: I think President Obama was one of my first followers. I volunteered for his campaign in 2008.

In three (English) words, describe your Twitter identity.

JW: Not a journalist/correspondent/reporter/writer/analyst

How do your tweets add to non-Turks' understanding of Turkish culture? Do you see yourself as some kind of cultural ambassador? Why or why not?

JW: Whether or not it's true, I like to think that my tweets are approachable for both foreigners who are interested in Turkish culture, and for Turks who may find it refreshing to see that a foreigner understands and sympathizes with the issues that affect them on a daily basis. While I don't consider myself a cultural ambassador, when a person travels or lives in a different country, he or she is representing his own culture whether he likes it or not. On the other hand, Turkey is a beautiful country full of fantastic people, so I hope that I'm also representing Turkey in a positive way to people from other countries.

Where do you find your inspiration? You're fluent in Turkish. Do things just come to you watching shows/reading news or do they just come to you?

JW: I try to follow popular trends for inspiration, and also try to understand what issues are important to people. Turkey is a very dynamic place, so something important happens almost every week. Such a dynamic country offers a lot of opportunity for material. As for news, most Turks get their news from TV, so I try to follow prime time tv news so that I know what they know.

How would you compare Turkish and American humor?

JW: That's a question that I would love to explore at length one day, but I'll try to keep the answer short. Turkish people have an amazing sense of humor that seems to shine brightest when things are darkest. Turkish and American humor, though, is very different in many respects. In my estimation, humor in Turkey has been both stunted and interestingly developed by the cultural and political issues that people feel that they can and cannot joke about. In Turkey, there are no comedians who publicly and regularly push the limits of what is unacceptable in society. Professional comedy, while funny, is not a tool used to criticize the status quo or traditional power hierarchies. On the contrary, public comedy, the comedy that we see on TV and in cinemas, functions in a very comfortable, acceptable, vanilla sphere that is meant to offend as few people as possible. In other words, it is the farthest thing from edgy. That is different than a lot of

the US and British comedy that I find interesting. In a private sense, though, Turkish people are hilarious. They love to laugh, they make great jokes, and Turkish memes are some of the funniest that I have seen. That's a big reason I'm on twitter: to experience the creativity and comedy of Turkish people.

Any other famous Twitter accounts following you?

JW: Kenan Doğulu recently followed me, which was exciting because I'm a fan. Naturally, I was hoping that Beren Saat would soon follow, which I fancied would start a domino effect whereby all the actors from *Aşk-ı Memnu*, Kıvanç, Selçuk Yöntem and Hazal Kaya would start following me. It was never going to happen, but hey, a man can dream. Ece Temelkuran follows me, and some friends told me that Mehmet Şimşek followed me, though he doesn't seem to be following anymore.

What are your top 5 Twitter accounts that you recommend for those who want to know more about life and culture in Turkey?

JW: Paul Osterlund tweets about many different Turkey-related subjects, food chief amongst them. Nick Ashdown writes about a range of issues, often about Turkey and Turkish culture. Jennifer Hattam tweets almost solely about events happening in Turkey. If you're interested in daily Turkish news, there's an indispensable account called Ankaralı Jan. Finally, I love pictures of old Istanbul, so I would recommend Mehmet Dilbaz's account for that.

Your tweets are great at making people who've lived in Turkey laugh, but they're never offensive or overtly political. How do you pull that off?

JW: I have chosen not to write about Turkish politics. There are plenty of other people who do that. I have nothing to gain by going down that road. In my experience, Turkish people love reading about shared life experiences, especially if those experiences affect them deeply or daily. That's why I regularly write about such things as Istanbul traffic and price increases.

Do you plan on continuing living in Turkey long term?

JW: I hope so.

How has living in Turkey long term changed you?

JW: I'm not sure. I got my first case of reverse culture shock when I went to California a few years ago. To be honest, I'm not sure whether it was my being in the US after so long abroad, or my being in California that did it, though I'm guessing it was more to do with the latter. I can say that living in any one place for a long time helps you to understand the perspective of those people. I would say that I understand the Turkish view of society, religion, interpersonal relationships, politics and history very well.

Teşekkürler!

Follow Wall: @JaredWall01

Currents and Eddies: Reflections on the THO Fellows Trip to Turkey



Turkish Heritage Organization [Follow](#)

Sep 25 · 8 min read

By: THO Non-Resident Fellow Ezra Mannix

It's hard to believe this is my last post as a Non-Resident Fellow for the Turkish Heritage Organization. Along the way, I've written about a number of issues, some perennial, such as the shortcomings of the Turkish education system — including English-language education (I was an ESL teacher at a university in Istanbul) — and some more current events based, such as the Khashoggi killing and the Turkish municipal elections.

When I told a coworker at my day job in Washington, D.C., that I was going on the Turkish Heritage Organization Fellows trip to Turkey, she sounded excited.

“Oh, I'm sure you'll have a great time!” She then proceeded to tell me, in surprising detail, about the recent local elections and the S-400 missile debacle.

“You really follow Turkey closely!” I remarked. “Yes. It seems like a fascinating and beautiful place.”

Then the enthusiasm quickly melted from her face. “Just...be careful.”

Here was an international development professional who follows the region on her international news channels, yet she still couldn't shake the notion that somehow, I might come across danger while in a country she knows I've lived in for more than 7 years, a country that's a NATO ally, one of the 25 most developed countries in the world (economically speaking), and still a growing tourist destination.

This was a reminder that my work as an ambassador of U.S.-Turkey relations is never over. There are prevalent stereotypes — often exacerbated by media reports — of what Turkey and Turks are like amongst Americans, and vice versa, and when something comes a long that promotes confirmation bias, it's always a big step back away from change. The experience of my Non-Resident Fellowship with THO has taught me that we must be active and vigilant to counter misconceptions with honest dialogue and continuous contact.

Ankara like I've never experienced

I wasn't sure what to expect from this trip — or whether the trip would even happen, given the political uncertainties leading up to Istanbul's mayoral election rerun. Who were these supposed meetings going to be with? Could we speak our minds? Or was this just going to be a glorified vacation?

Finally, the arrival day came. We approached the Ankara Swissotel by taxi. After more than 11 hours in the air — including a sneak peek into the new Istanbul Airport — seemingly harried hotel security guards waved our airport taxi into the hotel driveway, urging us to hurry and grab our bags and get into the lobby. Meanwhile, two limos with security guards in sunglasses looked around anxiously. What was happening? Memories of the 2016 coup attempt penetrated my bleary-eyed consciousness.

It turned out just a coincidence: several high-level military officials in town for a meeting just happened to be exiting the hotel just as we arrived, and hotel security made the split-second decision to allow us to park and get out of the car quickly. Adding to the hubbub, a bride walked through the lobby by a photographer and members of a wedding party. Put that together with quick introductions and immediate bonding with other US-based fellows, and I had myself a director's cut, long-take “Welcome back to Turkey!” scene.

During our first two days in Ankara, we met with Afad, the disaster response department of the government (Turkey's version of FEMA), an organization that has been tasked with — perhaps unfairly — of coordinating the government's humanitarian response to the Syrian refugee crisis, something it's being weaned off of. The organization's natural and man-made disasters that could befall a vulnerable territory like Anatolia. Despite a total staff of more than 600 in its large, white, gleaming headquarters in Ankara, the

building seemed almost empty except for a few workers (and a lonely, caged parrot). We were led to a room that looked like a cross between the UN General Assembly room and NASA mission control. There were hundreds of work stations facing each other. The room was eerily silent and seemingly never used. Our hosts flipped a switch and giant monitors all over the walls shined to life, each showing a different Turkish television station along with weather radars, natural gas pipeline maps and more. This was the rapid response room, to be filled with people who don't want a repeat of the 1999 Izmit earthquake that killed at least 20,000.

Afterwards, we dined in a food court at Armada. When I studied abroad in 2003, Armada was the hottest new shopping mall in Ankara and the whole country, with its sleek lines highlighted by a bowed high-rise office building above it. In 2019, Armada is the bald, 50-something bachelor across the highway from young, Johnny-come lately-skyscrapers where shabby *gecekondu* and empty fields used to be.

Our next stop was the most dynamic Turkish thinktank you've probably never heard of. TEPAV (the Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey) is the self-styled Brookings Institute of Turkey. It takes largely centrist positions on a wide range of issues about which it researches. We listened to presentations on issues like customs union, the "middle-income trap" Turkey finds itself in, and the economic integration of refugees and migrants.

We also visited the International Republican Institute, which conducts polling and data collection on behalf of a number of political parties in Turkey. A spartan white office in an apartment building, the organization was tight lipped on many of its findings, and can't be found on Google Maps.

The next day was a real treat. In all my years in Turkey, I'd never been inside the parliament building. The most striking part of our tour was the damage to one of the inner atriums caused by the aerial bombings during the coup attempt. The building's damage was left intact to showcase as a reminder of the destruction. We toured through the classical inspired corridors where MPs horse trade, and got to sit in the nosebleeds of the Grand National Assembly. With smooth wooden ceiling beams and horizontal white panels, the assembly hall vaguely resembles a giant sitting room in a traditional Japanese house (the building was designed in the 1960s by Austrian architect Clemens Holzmeister).

It's been said that foreigners are allowed to speak their minds about all sorts of issues — while Turks get censored or worse. While this might be true, I was surprised by the frankness with which some of our hosts spoke.

This was especially true after the parliament tour, our German Marshall Fund host, Özgür Ünlühisarcıklı, called the S-400 crisis a “funeral” of US-Turkish relation while discussing deteriorating relations between the US and Turkey in the context of the dead Cold War order. He also told us the GMF outside his office in an upscale neighborhood was taken down because of an attempted nationalist's attack.

On to my second home

After two days in the capital (we also met with the deputy energy ministry and the foreign affairs ministry's thinktank), it was on to Istanbul.

We left the long faces and bureaucratic vibe of my old study abroad city, we stayed smack in the heart of Istanbul's Eminönü district — home to tourists and markets galore — in an Ottoman era *han*.

Our meetings there were just as diverse as the city I called home for so many years. We met and dined with officers from the Istanbul Ticaret Odası (Istanbul Chamber of Commerce), where our hosts insisted that they are a-political and work with any municipal administration. We ate on the most delicious steak I've ever eaten — really! — while enjoying sweeping views of the Golden Horn and Galata.

A nod to the prominence of the city's private sector, we also visited Türkven, the first independent private equity firm in Turkey perhaps most famous for owning a major stake in Domino's. I asked the founder, Seymour Tarı, about an article in the *New York Times* regarding capital flight in the country and whether it spells doom for the economy, he countered that the fact that capital can leave Turkey easily and is a sign of the high level of development and transparency.

When I first moved to Turkey in 2009, I worked a short stint as a sub-editor for İhlas News Agency. So, nostalgia hit me when our *servis* bus took us to the sprawling commercial building of CNN Türk, not far from İhlas. We met in the office of Bora Bayraktar, the news director who, below a picture of him shaking hands with Yasir Arafat, told us about things that we promised to keep off the record. We then went

downstairs and played on the set of some of Turkey's favorite game show. We got to spin the giant wheel of "Çarkıfelek," Turkey's Wheel of Fortune.

Our meeting with the Istanbul Policy Center, a Sabancı University-affiliated think tank which tackles social issues in the country, was a reminder of the stodginess and lack of imagination of Turkish academia. We listened to rather dry presentations of the history of Turkish-EU relations and Turkish foreign policy of this decade. It was also a reminder of the shortcomings of an academic culture always under pressure: the lack of interactivity and overreliance on literature reviews, and descriptive research at the sake of unique research that could add to the body of qualitative and data-driven work in social sciences.

An exception was a presentation by a young Lebanese researcher, Maissam Nimer, on education of refugees in the country. Her insights into Turkish language education will hopefully inform policy recommendations on integration of refugees.

Our last stop was the U.S. Consulate in Istanbul. The employees do lunchtime yoga there in a central courtyard area. Also, it never ceases to amaze me that every consulate toilet, meeting table and chair looks like it was shipped directly from the rural county courthouse in Oregon where my father, a former small-town lawyer, sometimes took me as a child.

How this experience influenced me

How will this experience foster honest dialogue and continuous contact? The thinnest tight rope to walk regarding U.S.-Turkey relations is trying to be positive about Turkey without seemingly like I'm a mouthpiece for government propaganda. On the other hand, it's difficult to be critical of American actions in the region without seeming like an attention-seeking opportunist or someone who doesn't love his country.

I remember a pamphlet I received in high school about approaching conflict (this was back in the 90's, when people still mainly read pamphlets and brochures for this kind of stuff), there was one tip that stuck with me: don't use the kitchen sink tactic. That is, don't bring up everything but the kitchen sink when having a disagreement about something, stick to the issues at hand, which is how often dialogue between the countries devolves. This is especially important for the Turkish psyche, because there is a

tendency to reflect every issue through a prism of historical misgivings and wrongdoings, which leads to elaborate conspiracy theories about intentions (Özgür Ünlühisarcıklı of GMF noted a poll showing that 85 percent of Turks surveyed believed in “Sevres Syndrome,” that world powers are trying to carve up Turkey, compared to 75 percent who believed it a few years ago). Let’s keep discussions about issue-based grievances as focused as possible.

On the American side, the pamphlet also advised us to listen first and all the way through before formulating a response. Not every culture leads with the five Ws. I once spoke with a former state department worker who dealt with Turkey until she got totally frustrated and moved on, she said, after about a year. It seemed to me that she just wanted to deal transactionally with her Turkish counterparts. Acknowledge emotions; and just because the emotions are a message and one swallows them for a long time, doesn’t make the listener overly soft, weak or indecisive.

But it wasn’t all heavy discussions about politics and diplomacy. On our last night of the formal trip, we cruised the Bosphorus on a private boat. I got married on a boat in the Bosphorus, so that cruise brought back fond memories of dancing and romance surrounded by the love of my wife, friends and family in the warm summer breezes, in the constantly moving currents and eddies of life that brought me back to my second home.

Thank you, Turkish Heritage Organization, for this experience!

