Editor's note: This is the fifth installment in a series of special reports that Dr. Friedman will write over the next few weeks as he travels to Turkey, Moldova, Romania, Ukraine and Poland. In this series, he will share his observations of the geopolitical imperatives in each country and conclude with reflections on his journey as a whole and options for the United States.

By George Friedman

We arrived in Istanbul during the festival of Eid al-Adha, which commemorates the willingness of Abraham to sacrifice his son Ishmael on God's command and praises the God who stayed his hand. It is a jarring holiday for me; I was taught that it was Isaac whom God saved. The distinction between Ishmael and Isaac is the difference between Hagar and Sarah, between Abraham and the Jews and Abraham and the Muslims. It ties Muslims, Jews and Christians together. It also tears them apart.

Muslims celebrate Eid with the sacrifice of animals (sheep and cattle). Istanbul is a modern commercial city, stunningly large. On this day, as we drove in from the airport, there were vacant lots with cattle lined up for those wishing to carry out the ritual. There were many cattle and people. The ritual sacrifice is widely practiced, even among the less religious. I was told that Turkey had to import cattle for the first time, bringing them in from Uruguay. Consider the juxtaposition of ancient ritual sacrifice so widely practiced that it requires global trade to sustain it.

The tension between and within nations and religions is too ancient for us to remember its beginnings. It is also something that never grows old. For Turkey, it is about a very old nation at what I think is the beginning of a new chapter. It is therefore inevitably about the struggles within Turkey and with Turkey's search for a way to find both its identity and its place in the world.

Turkey's Test

Turkey will emerge as one of the great regional powers of the next generation, or so I think. It is clear that this process is already under way when you look at Turkey's rapid economic growth even in the face of the global financial crisis, and when you look at its growing regional influence. As you'd expect, this process is exacerbating internal political tensions as well as straining old alliances and opening the door to new ones. It is creating anxiety inside and outside of Turkey about what Turkey is becoming and whether it is a good thing or not. Whether it is a good thing can be debated, I suppose, but the debate doesn't much matter. The transformation from an underdeveloped country emerging from the ashes of the Ottoman Empire to a major power is happening before our eyes.

At the heart of the domestic debate and foreign discussion of Turkey's evolution is Islam.

Turkey's domestic evolution has resulted in the creation of a government that differs from most previous Turkish governments by seeing itself as speaking for Islamic traditions as well as the contemporary Turkish state. The foreign discussion is about the degree to which Turkey has shifted away from its traditional alliances with the United States, Europe and Israel. These two discussions are linked.

At a time when the United States is at war in both Afghanistan and Iraq, and in confrontation with Iran, any shift in the position of a Muslim country rings alarm bells. But this goes beyond the United States. Since World War II, many Turks have immigrated to Europe, where they have failed to assimilate partly by choice and partly because the European systems have not facilitated assimilation. This failure of assimilation has created massive unease about Turkish and other Muslims in Europe, particularly in the post-9/11 world of periodic terror warnings. Whether reasonable or not, this is shaping Western perceptions of Turkey and Turkish views of the West. It is one of the dynamics in the Turkish-Western relationship.

Turkey's emergence as a significant power obviously involves redefining its internal and regional relations to Islam. This alarms domestic secularists as well as inhabitants of countries who feel threatened by Turks — or Muslims — living among them and who are frightened by the specter of terrorism. Whenever a new power emerges, it destabilizes the international system to some extent and causes anxiety. Turkey's emergence in the current context makes that anxiety all the more intense. A newly powerful and self-confident Turkey perceived to be increasingly Islamic will create tensions, and it has.

The Secular and the Religious

Turkey's evolution is framed by the collapse of the Ottoman Empire after World War I and the creation of modern Turkey under Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. Ataturk's task was to retain the core of the Ottoman Empire as an independent state. That core was Asia Minor and the European side of the Bosporus. For Ataturk, the first step was contraction, abandoning any attempt to hold the Ottoman regions that surrounded Turkey. The second step was to break the hold of Ottoman culture on Turkey itself. The last decades of the Ottoman Empire were painful to Turks, who saw themselves decline because of the unwillingness of the Ottoman regime to modernize at a pace that kept up with the rest of Europe. The slaughter of World War I did more than destroy the Ottoman Empire. It shook its confidence in itself and its traditions.

For Ataturk, Turkish national survival depended on modernization, which he equated with the creation of a secular society as the foundation of a modern nation-state in which Islam would become a matter of private practice, not the center of the state or, most important, something whose symbols could have a decisive presence in the public sphere. This would include banning articles of clothing associated with Islamic piety from public display. Ataturk did not try to suppress Muslim life in the private sphere, but Islam is a political religion that seeks to regulate both private and public life.

Ataturk sought to guarantee the survival of the secular state through the military. For Ataturk, the military represented the most modern element of Turkish society and could serve two functions. It could drive Turkish modernization and protect the regime against those who would

try to resurrect the Ottoman state and its Islamic character. Ataturk wanted to do something else — to move away from the multinational nature of the Ottoman Empire. Ataturk compressed Turkey to its core and shed authority and responsibility beyond its borders. Following Ataturk's death, for example, Turkey managed to avoid involvement in World War II.

Ataturk came to power in a region being swept by European culture, which was what was considered modern. This Europeanist ideology moved through the Islamic world, creating governments that were, like Turkey's, secular in outlook but ruling over Muslim populations that had varying degrees of piety. In the 1970s, a counter-revolution started in the region that argued for reintegrating Islam into the governance of Muslim countries. The most extreme part of this wave culminated in al Qaeda. But the secularist/Europeanist vision created by Ataturk has been in deep collision with the Islamist regimes that can be found in places like Iran.

It was inevitable that this process would affect Turkey. In 2002, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power. This was a defining moment because the AKP was not simply a secular Europeanist party. Its exact views are hotly debated, with many inside and outside of Turkey claiming that its formal moderation hides a hidden radical-Islamist agenda.

We took a walk in a neighborhood in Istanbul called Carsamba. I was told that this was the most religious community in Istanbul. One secularist referred to it as "Saudi Arabia." It is a poor but vibrant community, filled with schools and shops. Children play on the streets, and men cluster in twos and threes, talking and arguing. Women wear burqas and headscarves. There is a large school in the neighborhood where young men go to study the Koran and other religious subjects.
Geopolitical Journey, Part 5: Turkey
A private Koran school in the Carsamba neighborhood of Istanbul (Photo by STRATFOR)

The neighborhood actually reminded me of Williamsburg, in the Brooklyn of my youth. Williamsburg was filled with Chasidic Jews, Yeshivas, children on the streets and men talking outside their shops. The sensibility of community and awareness that I was an outsider revived vivid memories. At this point, I am supposed to write that it shows how much these communities have in common. But the fact is that the commonalities of life in poor, urban, religious neighborhoods don't begin to overcome the profound differences — and importance — of the religions they adhere to.

That said, Carsamba drove home to me the problem the AKP, or any party that planned to govern Turkey, would have to deal with. There are large parts of Istanbul that are European in sensibility and values, and these are significant areas. But there is also Carsamba and the villages of Anatolia, and they have a self-confidence and assertiveness that can't be ignored today.

There is deep concern among some secularists that the AKP intends to impose Shariah. This is particularly intense among the professional classes. I had dinner with a physician with deep roots in Turkey who told me that he was going to immigrate to Europe if the AKP kept going the way it was going. Whether he would do it when the time came I can't tell, but he was passionate about it after a couple of glasses of wine. This view is extreme even among secularists, many of

whom understand the AKP to have no such intentions. Sometimes it appeared to me that the fear was deliberately overdone, in hopes of influencing a foreigner, me, concerning the Turkish government.

But my thoughts go back to Carsamba. The secularists could ignore these people for a long time, but that time has passed. There is no way to rule Turkey without integrating these scholars and shopkeepers into Turkish society. Given the forces sweeping the Muslim world, it is impossible. They represent an increasingly important trend in the Islamic world and the option is not suppressing them (that's gone) but accommodating them or facing protracted conflict, a kind of conflict that in the rest of the Islamic world is not confined to rhetoric. Carsamba is an extreme case in Istanbul, but it poses the issue most starkly.

This is something the main opposition secularist party, the People's Republican Party (CHP), can't do. It has not devised a platform that can reach out to Carsamba and the other religious neighborhoods within the framework of secularism. This is the AKP's strength. It can reach out to them while retaining the core of its Europeanism and modernism. The Turkish economy is surging. It had an annualized growth rate of 12 percent in the first quarter of 2010. That helps keep everyone happy. But the AKP also emphasizes that it wants to join the European Union. Now, given how healthy the Turkish economy is, wanting to join the European Union is odd. And the fact is that the European Union is not going to let Turkey in anyway. But the AKP's continued insistence that it wants to join the European Union is a signal to the secularists: The AKP is not abandoning the Europeanist/modernist project.

The AKP sends many such signals, but it is profoundly distrusted by the secularists, who fear that the AKP's apparent moderation is simply a cover for its long-term intentions — to impose a radical-Islamist agenda on Turkey. I don't know the intentions of the AKP leadership, but I do know some realities about Turkey, the first being that, while Carsamba can't be ignored, the secularists hold tremendous political power in their own right and have the general support of the military. Whatever the intentions imputed to the AKP, it does not have the power to impose a radical-Islamist agenda on Turkey unless the secularists weaken dramatically, which they are not going to do.

The CHP cannot re-impose the rigorous secularism that existed prior to 2002. The AKP cannot impose a radical-Islamist regime, assuming it would want to. The result of either attempt would be a paralyzing political crisis that would tear the country apart, without giving either side political victory. The best guard against hidden agendas is the inability to impose them.

Moreover, on the fringes of the Islamist community are radical Islamists like al Qaeda. It is a strategic necessity to separate the traditionally religious from the radical Islamists. The more excluded the traditionalists are, the more they will be attracted to the radicals. Prior to the 1970s this was not a problem. In those days, radical Islamists were not the problem; radical socialists were. The strategies that were used prior to 2002 would play directly into the hands of the radicals. There are, of course, those who would say that all Islamists are radical. I don't think that's true empirically. Of the billion or so Muslims, radicals are few. But you can radicalize the rest with aggressive social policies. And that would create a catastrophe for Turkey and the region.

The problem for Turkey is how to bridge the gap between the secularists and the religious. That is the most effective way to shut out the radicals. The CHP seems to me to have not devised any program to reach out to the religious. There are some indications of attempted change that came with the change in leadership a few months ago, but overall the CHP maintains a hostile suspicion toward sharing power with the religious.

The AKP, on the other hand, has some sort of reconciliation as its core agenda. The problem is that the AKP is serving up a weak brew, insufficient to satisfy the truly religious, insufficient to satisfy the truly secular. But it does hold a majority. In Turkey, as I have said, it is all about the AKP's alleged hidden intentions. My best guess is that, whatever its private thoughts and political realities are, the AKP is composed of Turks who derive their traditions from 600 years of Ottoman rule. That makes Turkish internal politics, well, Byzantine. Never forget that at crucial points the Ottomans, as Muslim as they were, allied with the Catholics against the Orthodox Christians in order to dominate the Balkans. They made many other alliances of convenience and maintained a multinational and multireligious empire built on a pyramid of compromises. The AKP is not the party of the Wahhabi, and if it tried to become that, it would fall. The AKP, like most political parties, prefers to hold office.

Turkey and the World

The question of the hidden agenda of the AKP touches its foreign policy, too. In the United States, nerves are raw over Afghanistan and terror threats. In Europe, Muslim immigration, much of it from Turkey, and more terror threats make for more raw nerves. The existence of an Islamist-rooted government in Ankara has created the sense that Turkey has "gone over," that it has joined the radical-Islamist camp.

This is why the flotilla incident with Israel turned out as it did. The Turks had permitted a fleet to sail for Gaza, which was blockaded by Israel. Israeli commandos boarded the ships and on one of them got into a fight in which nine people were killed. The Turks became enraged and expected the rest of the world, including the United States and Europe, to join them in condemning Israel's actions. I think the Turkish government was surprised when the general response was not directed against Israel but at Turkey. The Turks failed to understand the American and European perception that Turkey had gone over to the radical Islamists. This perception caused the Americans and Europeans to read the flotilla incident in a completely unexpected way, from the Turkish government's point of view, one that saw the decision to allow the flotilla to sail as part of a radical-Islamist agenda. Rather than seeing the Turks as victims, they saw the Turks as deliberately creating the incident for ideological reasons.

At the moment, it all turns on the perceptions of the AKP, both in Turkey and the world. And these perceptions lead to very different interpretations of what Turkey is doing.

In this sense, the ballistic missile defense (BMD) issue was extremely important. Had the Turks refused to allow BMD to be placed in Turkey, it would have been, I think, a breakpoint in relations with the United States in particular. BMD is a defense against Iranian missiles. Turkey does not want a U.S. strike on Iran. It should therefore have been enthusiastic about BMD, since Turkey could argue that with BMD, no strike is needed. Opposing a strike and opposing

BMD would have been interpreted as Turkey simply wanting to obstruct anything that would upset Iran, no matter how benign. The argument of those who view Turkey as pro-Iranian would be confirmed. The decision by the Turkish government to go forward with BMD was critical. Rejecting BMD would have cemented the view of Turkey as being radical Islamist. But the point is that the Turks postured on the issue and then went along. It was the AKP trying to maintain its balance.

The reality is that Turkey is now a regional power trying to find its balance. It is in a region where Muslim governments are mixed with secular states, predominantly Christian nations and a Jewish state. When you take the 360-degree view that the AKP likes to talk about, it is an extraordinary and contradictory mixture of states. Turkey is a country that maintains relations with Iran, Israel and Egypt, a dizzying portfolio.

It is not a surprise that the Turks are not doing well at this. After an interregnum of nearly a century, Turkey is new to being a regional power, and everyone in the region is trying to draw Turkey into something for their own benefit. Syria wants Turkish mediation with Israel and in Lebanon. Azerbaijan wants Turkish support against Armenia in Nagorno-Karabakh. Israel and Saudi Arabia want Turkish support against Iran. Iran wants Turkey's support against the United States. Kosovo wants its support against Serbia. It is a rogue's gallery of supplicants, all wanting something from Turkey and all condemning Turkey when they don't get it. Not least of these is the United States, which wants Turkey to play the role it used to play, as a subordinate American ally.

Turkey's strategy is to be friends with everyone, its "zero conflict with neighbors" policy, as the Turks call it. It is an explicit policy not to have enemies. The problem is that it is impossible to be friends with all of these countries. Their interests are incompatible, and in the end, the only likely outcome is that all will find Turkey hostile and it will face distrust throughout the region. Turkey was genuinely surprised when the United States, busy finally getting sanctions into place against Iran, did not welcome Turkey's and Brazil's initiative with Iran. But unlike Brazil, Turkey lives in a tough neighborhood and being friendly with everyone is not an option.

This policy derives, I think, from a fear of appearing, like the Ottoman Empire, so distrusted by secularists. The Ottoman Empire was both warlike and cunning. It was the heir to the Byzantine tradition and it was worthy of it. Ataturk simplified Turkish foreign policy radically, drawing it inward. Turkey's new power makes that impossible, but it is important, at least at this point in history, for Turkey not to appear too ambitious or too clever internationally. The term neo-Ottoman keeps coming up, but is not greeted happily by many people. Trying to be friendly with everyone is not going to work, but for the Turks, it is a better strategy now than being prematurely Byzantine. Contrary to others, I see Turkish foreign policy as simple and straightforward: What they say and what they intend to do are the same. The problem with that foreign policy is that it won't work in the long run. I suspect the Turkish government knows that, but it is buying time for political reasons.

It is buying time for administrative reasons as well. The United States entered World War II without an intelligence service, with a diplomatic corps vastly insufficient for its postwar needs and without a competent strategic-planning system. Turkey is ahead of the United States of

1940, but it does not have the administrative structure or the trained and experienced personnel to handle the complexities it is encountering. The Turkish foreign minister wakes up in the morning to Washington's latest demand, German pronouncements on Turkish EU membership, Israeli deals with the Greeks, Iranian probes, Russian views on energy and so on. It is a large set of issues for a nation that until recently had a relatively small foreign-policy footprint.

Turkey and Russia

Please recall my reasons for this journey and what brought me to Turkey. I am trying to understand the consequences of the re-emergence of Russia, the extent to which this will pose a geopolitical challenge and how the international system will respond. I have already discussed the Intermarium, the countries from the Baltic to the Black seas that have a common interest in limiting Russian power and the geopolitical position to do so if they act as a group.

One of the questions is what the southern anchor of this line will be. The most powerful anchor would be Turkey. Turkey is not normally considered part of the Intermarium, although during the Cold War it was the southeastern anchor of NATO's line of containment. The purpose of this trip is to get some sense of how the Turks think about Russia and where Russia fits into their strategic thinking. It is also about how the Turks now think of themselves as they undergo a profound shift that will affect the region.

Turkey, like many countries, is dependent on Russian energy. Turkey also has a long history with Russia and needs to keep Russia happy. But it also wants to be friends with everyone and it needs to find new sources of energy. This means that Turkey has to look south, into Iraq and farther, and east, toward Azerbaijan. When it looks south, it will find itself at odds with Iran and perhaps Saudi Arabia. When it looks east, it will find itself at odds with Armenia and Russia.

There are no moves that Turkey can make that will not alienate some great power, and it cannot decline to make these moves. It cannot simply depend on Russia for its energy any more than Poland can. Because of energy policy, it finds itself in the same position as the Intermarium, save for the fact that Turkey is and will be much more powerful than any of these countries, and because the region it lives in is extraordinarily more complex and difficult.

Nevertheless, while the Russians aren't an immediate threat, they are an existential threat to Turkey. With a rapidly growing economy, Turkey needs energy badly and it cannot be hostage to the Russians or anyone else. As it diversifies its energy sources it will alienate a number of countries, including Russia. It will not want to do this, but it is the way the world works. Therefore, is this the southern anchor of the Intermarium? I think so. Not yet and not forever, but I suspect that in 10 years or so, the sheer pressure that Russian energy policy will place on Turkey will create enough tensions to force Turkey into the anchor position.

If Moldova is the proof of the limits of geopolitical analysis, Turkey is its confirmation. There is endless talk in Turkey of intentions, hidden meanings and conspiracies, some woven decades ago. It is not these things that matter. Islam has replaced modernism as the dynamic force of the region, and Turkey will have to accommodate itself to that. But modernism and secularism are woven into Turkish society. Those two strands cannot be ignored. Turkey is the regional

power, and it will have to make decisions about friends and enemies. Those decisions will be made based on issues like energy availability, economic opportunities and defensive positions. Intentions are not trivial, but in the case of Turkey neither are they decisive. It is too old a country to change and too new a power to escape the forces around it. For all its complexity, I think Turkey is predictable. It will go through massive internal instability and foreign tests it is not ready for, but in the end, it will emerge as it once was: a great regional power.

As a subjective matter, I like Turkey and Turks. I suspect I will like them less as they become a great power. They are at the charming point where the United States was after World War I. Over time, global and great powers lose their charm under the pressure of a demanding and dissatisfied world. They become hard and curt. The Turks are neither today. But they are facing the kind of difficulties that only come with success, and those can be the hardest to deal with.

Internally, the AKP is trying to thread the needle between two Turkish realities. No one can choose one or the other and govern Turkey. That day has passed. How to reconcile the two is the question. For the moment, the most difficult question is how to get the secularists to accept that, in today's Turkey, they are a large minority. I suspect the desire to regain power will motivate them to try to reach out to the religious, but for now, they have left the field to the AKP.

In terms of foreign policy, they are clearly repositioning Turkey to be part of the Islamic world, but the Islamic world is deeply divided by many crosscurrents and many types of regimes. The distance between Morocco and Pakistan is not simply space. Repositioning with the Islamic world is more a question of who will be your enemy than who will be your friend. The same goes for the rest of the world.

In leaving Turkey, I am struck by how many balls it has to keep in the air. The tensions between the secularists and the religious must not be minimized. The tensions within the religious camp are daunting. The tensions between urban and rural are significant. The tensions between Turkey and its allies and neighbors are substantial, even if the AKP is not eager to emphasize this. It would seem impossible to imagine Turkey moving past these problems to great power status. But here geopolitics tells me that it has to be this way. All nations have deep divisions. But Turkey is a clear nation and a strong state. It has geography and it has an economy. And it is in a region where these characteristics are in short supply. That gives Turkey relative power as well as absolute strength.

The next 10 years will not be comfortable for Turkey. It will have problems to solve and battles to fight, figuratively and literally. But I think the answer to the question I came for is this: Turkey does not want to confront Russia. Nor does it want to be dependent on Russia. These two desires can't be reconciled without tension with Russia. And if there is tension, there will be shared interests with the Intermarium, quite against the intentions of the Turks. In history, intentions, particularly good ones, are rarely decisive.

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