

Sabancı University: Conference on Turkey and the Middle East

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Turkey's relations with and policies towards the middle east have normally been treated as subsidiary to and less important than its relations with the United States and Europe. However, over the last two decades they have clearly achieved vastly increased salience, and have had crucial effects on its relations with other world powers, notably the United States. In fact, it seems safe to say that Turkey's relationship with its Middle Eastern neighbors now constitutes one the most problematic - and potentially the most dangerous - of the diverse theatres in which Turkish foreign policy is actively engaged.

In spite of its critical importance, and although there have been valuable studies of particular aspects, the subject as a whole has received remarkably little academic attention in recent years. This conference aims to redress the balance by drawing together Turkish scholars and specialists on the politics of the Middle East from Britain and elsewhere. An assumption we are making is that Turkey's regional policies cannot be neatly detached from its wider policy concerns - in particular its relations with the United States and the European Union - since the two interact and influence one another at many levels. Hence, in the first two sessions, we plan to examine Turkey's general policy objectives, interests and strategies in the region, in the light of its wider foreign policy concerns, dealing first with political and strategic issues, and then with the vital economic sphere. In the following sessions, we hope to explore Turkish relations with the main regional state actors, and its policies in the most critical theatres, by exploring strategies and attitudes on both sides. In each case, our first speaker will be asked to outline the overall foreign policy positions of a particular state or non-state actor. Where required, we will then be asking a discussant to summarize Turkish policy. Since we would like to keep the discussions as informal as possible, each session will provide ample time for questions and comments by other participants.

We are particularly grateful to the British Council and the Research Committee of Sabancı University for their financial support which has made this Conference possible.

Day 1: Friday 2 May 2008

9.30: Opening: welcoming remarks by Sabri Sayarı and William Hale

Session 1, 9.45-11.00. Turkey, the Middle East and the Wider World: a Political and Strategic Overview.

Speaker: Professor Meliha Altunışık, Dept of International Relations, Middle East Technical University, Ankara.

Discussant: Dr Philip Robins, Middle East Centre, St Antony's College, Oxford.

Questions and answers from participants

11.00-11.15: Coffee Break

Session 2, 11.15-12.30. Turkey and the Middle East: Economic Issues and Policies.

Speaker: Dr Güven Sak, Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey (TEPAV), Ankara

Discussant: Professor William Hale, Sabancı University, Istanbul

Questions and answers from participants

12.30-2.00: Buffet lunch in Communications Center

Session 3, 2.00-3.30: Turkey, Iraq and the United States

Speakers:

(i) Iraq, the Iraqi Kurds and Turkey: Joost Hiltermann, Deputy Programme Director, Middle East and North Africa, International Crisis Group, Istanbul

(ii) Turkey, the United States and Northern Iraq: Strategic Aspects: Bill Park, Defence Studies Department, King's College, University of London

3.30-4.00: Tea break

4.00-5.00: Questions and answers from participants

Day 2: Saturday 3 May 2008

Session 4, 9.30-10.30: Egypt and the Arab-Muslim World

Speaker: Professor Robert Springborg, MBI Al Jaber Chair in Middle East Studies and Director of London Middle East Institute

Questions and answers from participants

10.30-10.45: Coffee break

Session 5, 10.45-11.45: Iran and its Foreign Policy

Speaker: Professor Ali Ansari, Department of Modern History, University of St. Andrews, Scotland

Discussant on Turkish Policy: Professor Süha Bölükbaşı, Department of International Relations, Middle East Technical University, Ankara
Questions and answers from participants

Session 6, 11.45-1.00: Syria and its Foreign Policy: Dr Alan George, Senior Associate Member, St Antony's College, Oxford

Discussant on Turkish Policy: Dr Ayşegül Sever, Department of International Relations, Marmara University, Istanbul
Questions and answers from participants

1.00-2.00: Buffet lunch in Communications Center

Session 7, 2.00-3.30, Turkey, Israel and the Palestinians

Speakers:

(i) Israel and Turkey: Professor Ofra Bengio, Senior Research Fellow, Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, Tel Aviv University

(ii) The Palestinians and Turkey: Professor Bülent Aras, Department of International Relations, Işık University, Istanbul

Questions and answers from participants

3.30-4.00, Tea break

4.00-5.00: Conclusions: Discussion led by Dr Philip Robins, Professor Sabri Sayarı, Professor William Hale