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EXERCISE/EXERCICE NEW HORIZONS

**Stable Allies or Possible Adversaries?**

**A Critical Assessment of Saudi Arabia and Turkey**

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## ABSTRACT

The events of September 11 have galvanized the attention of Western nations in a Global War on Terror. In particular the focus has been squarely on removing adversarial governments in Afghanistan and Iraq and neutralizing known centers of terrorism in other areas of the Middle East, wither State-sponsored (Iranian backed) or quasi-independent (Al-Qaeda). Our ability to effectively operate in this region is due in large part to the support of Western allies in the region such as Turkey and Saudi Arabia. A loss of either as an ally would most likely have serious consequences for the West, but is this something we should be concerned about?

The strategic analysis contained within this paper serves to answer this very question, and identifies many considerable threats to the status quo within both countries. In the final analysis, although it appears these threats are being effectively contained by the current pro-Western regimes, the paper clearly shows evidence for concern within Saudi Arabia, and recommends that the West should not assume it will remain a stable ally of the West.

### Middle East



Source: [http://www.theodora.com/maps/new/middle\\_east.html](http://www.theodora.com/maps/new/middle_east.html), used with permission.

## INTRODUCTION

I am persuaded that this is a righteous judgment of god upon these barbarous wretches, who have imbrued their hands in so much innocent blood....<sup>1</sup>

Islam, currently the fastest growing of mainstream monotheistic religions, has recently surpassed Roman Catholicism as the largest religion in the world.<sup>2</sup> A 1400 year-old history of violence between the West, dominated by Christian<sup>3</sup> ideology, and the Middle East, similarly dominated by Islam, suggests recent history to be more a continuation of long-standing normative dynamics rather than a new and unknown phenomenon.<sup>4</sup> Historically these conflicts were more regional in nature, characterized by a struggle for control of the Middle East region. However, the unprecedented spread of Islamic influence suggests future frictions between it and the West will most likely become more global in nature, reinforced by general trends which have emerged within each culture. Global discontent with the West and an emergence of China and India suggests the long-standing social and economic dominance of the West may finally be seriously challenged. Islamic nationalism is on the rise as Muslim countries seek to

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<sup>1</sup>Oliver Cromwell in 1649 after the infamous storming of Drogheda by the English. One of the more grotesque distortions of religion to justify an act of genocide, it also was also performed as a purely Christian affair (Protestant vs Catholic). The Cromwell Association, "Quotes 2ve 1(n)0016 Tc -0003 Tw -37.825 -.1.1

collectively reconnect with and perhaps reassert a global Islamic influence, which Islam enjoyed in earlier times. Indeed, this has led to assertions that it is most probable the next great conflict will occur next between the West and Islam.<sup>5</sup>

Relations between Western and Middle Eastern nations have been mixed to say the least, however Turkey and Saudi Arabia are two nations that have maintained long and stable alliances with the West. Many consider the possibility of either becoming anti-west to be miniscule, but as the classic example of Iran in the late 1970's has demonstrated, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism within a country can occur quickly and with devastating consequences to Western relations. Islamic terrorists have recently demonstrated an increased proclivity to target their attacks against Islamic nations allied with the West, adding further destabilizing forces to governments increasingly under pressure from mainstream Islam. Although 9/11 has galvanized Western attention to the direct threat of Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism, the indirect threats caused by the Islamicisation of key Middle Eastern allies could in fact be more damaging to the West in the longer term. Could Turkey or Saudi Arabia succumb to radical Islamism and eventually become a security threat to the West? Should the West even be concerned with this possibility?

The purpose of this paper is to answer both questions by completing a strategic assessment of Turkey and Saudi Arabia. Both countries have significant links to Islam dating back to its earliest days, and while each continues to have a central role in the evolution of modern Islamic thought, they also both have willingly pursued strong

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<sup>5</sup>This camp has been inspired by the seminal paper and subsequent book by Samuel Huntington, both released in 1996. It is noteworthy to mention he also asserts China as the other probable adversary of the West. See Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the...*, 20.

alliances with the West. As a result, each shares a plethora of subtle yet complex issues, many of which could be the genesis of a possible destabilization of their current pro-West regimes. This paper will identify and critically analyze several “triggers” common to both Saudi Arabia and Turkey, and identify which country is the most threatened by each trigger. The sum of this analysis will clearly demonstrate Saudi Arabia to be the greatest threat to Western security at this time, not only because it is facing the more significant threat of radical Islamic influences, but also because it is the least equipped of the two countries to contain these threats in the long term.

This paper begins with short introductions to Islam, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey. As a paper of this size requires limiting the number of triggers to a reasonable number in order for the analysis to be of some value, only the four most important (in the humble opinion of this author) have been included in the main body which follows. Finally, since there is also insufficient space to develop a formal comparison methodology, the concluding section of this paper includes two additional recommendations to the conclusion that Saudi Arabia poses a much greater threat to Western security than Turkey. The evidence will demonstrate that the West should no longer hold the assumption that their closest allies in the Middle East will remain stable and pro-West. Also, the West would be well-served to monitor their allies in the region more closely and be prepared to respond to a possible (and sudden) destabilization.

## **A CIVILIZATION EMERGES**

The Prophet Muhammad, a Hashemite of the Arab Quraysh tribe, is believed to have been born in the city of Mecca around the year 570.<sup>6</sup> 40 years later, Muhammad

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<sup>6</sup>Arthur Goldschmidt, *A Concise History of the Middle East* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1999), 24.



began recording a series of “divine revelations” that over the next 22 years would be consolidated into the Muslim Holy Book, the Qu’ran.<sup>7</sup> The Qu’ran remains the centerpiece of the Islamic faith and its essence portrays a message of love and devotion to God in much the same manner as the Christian Bible. Although it includes a plethora of “do’s and don’ts”, the basic message of the Qu’ran (and by extension Islam) is that every Muslim must follow a set of five basic rules, called “pillars”.<sup>8</sup>

Every major monotheistic religion in the world today suffers from a degree of internal disunity, the most visible manifestation being the existence of sub-denominations.<sup>9</sup> Islam is not immune to this phenomenon; however it remains relatively homogeneous, with the vast majority of the Muslim faithful belonging to one of two major branches commonly known as Sunni and Shi’ite. After the death of Muhammad in 632, an ideological struggle erupted over the method of choosing his successor. The Sunni majority wished to elect the next leader, however a small group of Shi’ite dissenters believed Muhammad’s true wishes were that his leadership should pass to his most direct living relative. This remains the fundamental difference between Shi’ites and Sunnis to this day.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 24-31.

<sup>8</sup>The pillars include Witness, Worship, Fasting, Tithing, and Pilgrimage. Some consider Jihad to be a sixth pillar, providing an explanation for how Jihad has been distorted by Islamic radical elements. *Ibid.*, 39-41.

<sup>9</sup>Depending on the classification methodology, Christianity is considered to include up to 18 readily distinct denominations. See Adherents.Com, “Major Branches of Religions Ranked by Number of Adherents,” [http://www.adherents.com/adh\\_branches.html](http://www.adherents.com/adh_branches.html); Internet; accessed 1 April 2008.

<sup>10</sup>The Sunni demand to elect a leader was driven by a desire to ensure power was centered within one of the more “acceptable” Arab tribes. As was mentioned earlier, Muhammad was a Hashemite, and although he personally was held in high regard by his followers, his tribe did not enjoy the same status. Goldschmidt, *A Concise History...*, 34-56.

Of the other historical influences over this region and Islam, no other has been so pervasive as that of the Ottoman Empire. The self-professed “guardian of the Islamic faith” for much of its 600 year history, by the 16<sup>th</sup> century it was also the greatest power on earth.<sup>11</sup> For the purposes of this paper, however, the greatest impact of the Ottoman Empire was from the upheaval caused during its slow decline, which facilitated the expansion of Western Colonialism into the Middle East beginning in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The pervasive nature of this expansion, evoking Muslim memories of the crusades, inspired significant ideological changes in the region, including the modern secularist movement first implemented by Turkey, and the first contemporary attempts to unify Arab territories under a single Arab leader. More profoundly however, it is here where many contemporary ultra-conservative Islamic movements originated, including the Wahhabi movement which dominates Saudi Arabia.<sup>12</sup>

## **SAUDI ARABIA**

The origins of contemporary Saudi Arabia can be traced back to an alliance between Muhammad ibn Sa’ud and Muhammad ibn Abd Al-Wahhab in the early 18<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>13</sup> The timely joining of the military might and political savvy of ibn Sa’ud with the spiritual guidance of the son of the founder of Wahhabism was a powerful force, however their combined efforts would initially experience defeat at the hands of the declining but still potent Ottoman Empire in 1819. Despite this setback Wahhabism

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<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>12</sup>Founded by Mohammed ibn Abd al-Wahhab in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, Wahhabism was created on the principles of rejecting both westernization and secularization, both of which remain prominent tenets of the Wahhabi brand of Sunnism. Amin Saikal, *Islam and the West: Conflict or Cooperation?* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 33- 41.

<sup>13</sup>U.S. Department of State, “Background Note: Saudi Arabia,” <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3584.htm>; Internet, accessed 10 December 2007.

continued to spread relatively unfettered, while the House of Saud was forced to retreat to a safe haven in the area of Riyadh and wait for another opportune moment to act.<sup>14</sup>

Around the time of the infamous Lawrence of Arabia, the newest leader of the House of Saud, Abdul-Aziz Ibn Saud, was busy reenergizing his family ambitions, beginning with the recapture of Riyadh in 1902, and culminating in the defeat of his Hashemite rivals in 1925.<sup>15</sup>

Rule within Saudi Arabia has not changed significantly since the country was formally established in 1932.<sup>16</sup> Almost all governmental affairs remain firmly within the Saudi Royal Family despite recent efforts to implement reforms, such as the establishment of a “National Consultative Council”.<sup>17</sup> However, this does not mean the Saudi King possesses absolute power. The Koran is the official Constitution of Saudi Arabia, and by consequence the government is totally structured under the concepts of Sharia Law. Thus, political power is heavily dependant on the support of the Wahhabi leadership, who hold significant influence in the selection of Saudi monarchs. The King’s power is also limited by the requirement to gain consensus from his immediate relatives within the Royal Family, who play a vital role in the selection of new Saudi Kings in conjunction with the Wahhabis.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Shireen T. Hunter, *The Future of Islam and the West: Clash of Civilizations or Peaceful Coexistence?* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), 154.

<sup>15</sup>Western folklore surrounding T.E. Lawrence and his role in the unification of the Arab tribes omits a most important fact that the House of Saud was not included in the group he was associated with. Coincidentally, the Hashemites were the tribe most closely aligned with the British during the famed Arab revolt to which Lawrence of Arabia is associated. *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>16</sup>U.S. Department of State, “Background Note: Saudi Arabia...”

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*

## TURKEY

A “Turkish nation” has existed in some form almost since the beginning of recorded history; yet much of it occurred within the umbrella of the Ottoman Empire. Following the Empire’s complete collapse by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Turkish nationalist Mustafa Kemal “Ataturk” led a three year civil war which ended with the creation of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, and cementing once and for all the rejection of traditional Ottoman ideology.<sup>19</sup> Ataturk immediately introduced massive reforms, specifically to westernize and modernize Turkey, but more importantly to initiate a profound shift in ideology that completely separated political and religious authorities.<sup>20</sup> The original Turkish Constitution, also implemented by Ataturk, remains the cornerstone of modern Turkish ideology now referred to as “Kemalism”, based upon the principles of “secularism, nationalism, statism, populism, republicanism, and reformism.”<sup>21</sup>

Ataturk held a firm but populist grip on the national government of Turkey until his death in 1938.<sup>22</sup> A true two-party secular democracy has subsequently emerged, however it remains under the watchful eye of the Turkish military, who maintain a constitutionally enshrined duty to ensure the secular traditions of the country are

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<sup>19</sup>Kemal would eventually be known as Ataturk, or “Father of the Turks”, replacing his original surname. U.S. Department of State, “Background Note: Turkey,” <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3432.htm>; Internet, accessed 10 December 2007.

<sup>20</sup>The reforms introduced by Ataturk were truly momentous. Of note were things such as disbanding the Caliphate (the source for Islamic authority since the time of Muhammad), replacing the separate religious education system with a secular public education system, and instituting a Civil code of law in place of the traditional Islamic courts. To ensure Turkey would evolve towards the West, he prohibited the use of Arabic script as a method of writing Turkish, and decreed that Turkey would follow the Gregorian calendar in the future as opposed to the traditional calendar. See Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the...*, 144.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>22</sup>Ataturk’s maintained vast popular support. Goldschmidt, *A Concise History...*, 199.

preserved. This “culture of guardianship within the Turkish officer-corps”<sup>23</sup> first became evident in 1960 when, wary of the power of the governing party at the time, they conducted the first of four military coups (so far) within modern Turkey.<sup>24</sup>

The political landscape in Turkey markedly changed after the first coup, even though the civilian government was restored in relatively short order. The political landscape became fragmented, resulting in a second coup in 1971 followed by a series of dysfunctional coalition governments.<sup>25</sup> During this tumultuous period the Turkish government instituted a policy to neutralize communism, which had an unintended second order effect. It spawned the first political parties based solely on Islamic principles, and they eventually became the genesis of modern Political Islam.<sup>26</sup> Although Turkey elected its first Islamic government in 1995, it was very short lived and disastrous for the Islamic movement as the military quickly ousted them in the “soft-coup” of 1997.<sup>27</sup> In 2002 the moderate-Islamist AKP was elected and remains in power today.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Deniz Devrim, *Blockade of the Turkish Presidential Elections: A Clash of Wills Between Moderate Islamists and the Secular Establishment*. Real Instituto Elcano de Estudios Internacionales y Estrategicos, 2007: 1; <http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/>; Internet; accessed 12 October 2007.

<sup>24</sup>Goldschmidt, *A Concise History...*, 199.

<sup>25</sup>Nur Bilge Criss, “A Short History of Anti-Americanism and Terrorism: The Turkish Case,” *The Journal of American History* 89, no. 2 (September 2002): 476; <http://www.jstor.org>; Internet; accessed 31 January 2008.

<sup>26</sup>The terms Political Islam and Muslim Democracy are often used (erroneously) interchangeably. *Ibid.*, 478-480.

<sup>27</sup>In this coup the military did not actually seize power. The Islamist Welfare Party was forced to resign due to their radical Islamist policies which alienated the secular elite within Turkey. Some in the party realized the only way they could attain power was to moderate their message so as to appeal to the secular majority, and they would eventually remerge as the leadership of the future AKP. See Senem Aydin and Rusen Cakr, *Political Islam in Turkey*, Centre for European Policy Studies, 2007: 1; <http://www.ceps.eu/>; Internet; accessed 12 October 2007.

## ASSESSMENT

...A country hailed by President Carter on a New Year's Day visit in 1978 as 'an island of stability in one of the more troubled areas of the world' became, before the year ended, paralyzed by strikes and demonstrations.<sup>29</sup>

Turkey and Saudi Arabia are arguably the two strongest Muslim allies of the Western world at this time, yet the quote above provides a vivid reminder of how vulnerable and fleeting such alliances can be within the volatile Middle East. Islam provides a common bond that is also a magnificent study in contrast because of the radically diverse manner in which it has been integrated into each society. Turkey has embraced secular Islamism within a fully democratic framework, while the authoritarian government of Saudi Arabia has taken a more fundamentalist (but not extremist) approach in all aspects of government policy and decision making. Yet despite the radically different methods taken to integrate Islam, the threats to both Turkey and Saudi Arabia from radical Islamic elements are real and surprisingly similar across many dimensions. Examinations of the four most important dimensions follow.

### **Social Pressures**

The Muslim world has experienced some of the highest rates of population growth in the world over the last few decades. Studies comparing the relative number of youth/students within Muslim countries to levels of militant Islamic activity have

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<sup>28</sup>The Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi (AKP), or Justice and Development party received 34.4% of the popular vote in 2002, and was re-elected in 2007 with a near-majority of the popular vote (46.5%). See M. Hakan Yavuz and N.A. Özcan, "Crisis In Turkey: The Conflict Of Political Languages," *Middle East Policy* 14, no. 3 (1 October 2007): 126; <http://www.proquest.com/>; Internet; accessed 7 February 2008.

<sup>29</sup>Iran was transformed from one of the West's closest allies in the region to one of its most dangerous adversaries in the span of a couple of years. It is now famously known as a member of the "Axis of Evil" as coined by U.S President George W. Bush. Goldschmidt, *A Concise History...*, 316.

demonstrated a clear link showing an almost simultaneous rise in both.<sup>30</sup> For example, the civil unrest within Turkey in the late 1970's, which culminated in the most recent "full" military coup in 1980, occurred just as Turkey was approaching the peak of its "Youth Bulge". Expressions of civil discontent within Turkey have since moderated somewhat, as evidenced by the reaction to the Islamist election victory in 2002, which has failed to rekindle the same level of civil unrest (unease of the secular elite notwithstanding). In contrast to Turkey, the "Youth Bulge" within Saudi Arabia is predicted to peak sometime during this decade.<sup>31</sup> The disproportionate membership of Saudi Nationals within Al-Qaeda, noticeable increases in "Jihadi violence" against Saudi Arabian, and a propensity of the Saudi government to respond militarily rather than through institutional change indicates a weakness in their ability to address this issue.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, while Turkey seems to have successfully navigated this storm, there is cause for concern within Saudi Arabia.

Resentment towards Western Universalism is certainly not limited to the Middle East, as one can hardly travel anywhere in the world without noticing significant Western influences. The speed and pervasiveness of this influence, unprecedented in world history, has generated three distinct responses. Rejectionist countries have decided to shun both Western culture and modernization in their entirety, while Kemalism (first observed within Turkey), has embraced both modernization and Westernization. Saudi

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<sup>30</sup>Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the...*, 113.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>32</sup>Madawi Al-Rasheed, "Saudi Arabia Post 9/11: History, Religion and Security," review of *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, by David Commins, *Saudi Arabia Power, Legitimacy and Survival*, by Tim Niblock, and *National Security in Saudi Arabia*, by Anthony Cordesman and Nawaf Obaid. *Middle Eastern Studies* 43, no. 1 (1 January 2007): 157; <http://www.proquest.com/>

Arabia, a classic example of Reformism, has embraced modernity but not Western cultural practices.<sup>33</sup> The strategies adopted by Turkey and Saudi Arabia appear to be neutral with regards to any possible impact on their stability, however any sudden shift in these policies could most likely be a leading indicator of active destabilizing forces within their country, to which the West would be wise to note.

### **Economic Turbulence**

The contemporary appearance of Saudi Arabia as a fabulously wealthy nation is a relatively new state of affairs. The discovery of oil in 1938 did not at first result in any significant change to what was primarily an agrarian economy. In fact, Saudi Arabia in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century was still typically ignored as nothing more than an obscure desert backwater in world affairs.<sup>34</sup> The first significant infusion of oil-money into the Saudi (i.e. Royal Family's) treasury did not occur until the OPEC embargo of the 1970's. Ever since, the health of their economy has become so dependent on the price of oil that as late as 2005, when the price of oil reached historical lows, it was believed Saudi Arabia was experiencing an economic freefall and heading for certain collapse.<sup>35</sup> Conversely, the most recent recovery of oil prices to record high levels has seen an equally dramatic fiscal rebound for the Saudi Arabian economy, allowing the Saudi

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<sup>33</sup> The best example of a Rejectionist response was the closure of Japan to the West from the 16<sup>th</sup> to mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. See Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the...*, 72-76.

<sup>34</sup> An economy based almost exclusively on date palm and camel, coupled with an almost complete lack of government structure, assured this status. See Goldschmidt, *A Concise History...*, 209-212.

<sup>35</sup> Nimrod Raphaeli, "Demands for Reforms in Saudi Arabia," *MEMRI: The Middle East Media Research Institute, Inquiry and Analysis Series*, no. 247 (13 October, 2005): 1; <http://memri.org/>; Internet; accessed 12 October 2007.



government to pay down a significant portion of its debt.<sup>36</sup> Despite this, the continued inability to effectively diversify their monolithic economy has created a dysfunctional economic situation which remains cause for alarm. Further, this oil wealth has created a sense of entitlement among young Saudis, many of whom now choose to remain unemployed rather than accept employment in service industries.<sup>37</sup> It appears therefore that the dysfunctional Saudi economy is itself a significant risk to the stability of Saudi Arabia.

In contrast, the Turkish economy is much more diversified than Saudi Arabia's, therefore it possesses an inherent stability not found in the monolithic Saudi economy. The Turkish economy however is far from perfect. Despite its proximity and relatively close economic ties with Europe, Turkey's per capita GDP remains one of the lowest within NATO, lagging significantly far behind any of the "Western" NATO nations.<sup>38</sup> For over 40 years Turkey's leaders have unsuccessfully lobbied to secure full membership into the European Union (EU), believing it to be the most significant obstacle preventing Turkey from improving their economic situation.<sup>39</sup> This policy was not congruent with the early platform of the Islamist-AKP, who wished to transform Turkey into a true Islamic state, however their conscious moderation of their stance on

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<sup>36</sup>Today, the country owns 20% of the worlds known oil reserves, and derives fully ¾ of governmental revenues directly from oil exports. U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, "The World Factbook – Saudi Arabia," <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sa.html>; Internet; accessed 10 December 2007.

<sup>37</sup>...leaving such "menial" work to imported foreign workers. See Raphaeli, "Demands...", 3.

<sup>38</sup>As late as 2007 only Bulgaria, Romania, and the Russian Federation had a lower per capita GDP than Turkey. See North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *Defence Expenditures of NRC Countries (1985-2007)*, 8; <http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/2007/p07-141.pdf>; Internet; accessed 9 April 2008.

<sup>39</sup>Dietrich Jung, *Turkey's Future: EU Member or "Islamist Rogue State"?* Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, 2007: 1; <http://www.diis.dk/>; Internet; accessed 12 October 2007.

EU membership has been directly attributed to their election victory in 2002.<sup>40</sup> The significance of this is two fold.

First, many believe EU accession will result in a further democratization of Turkish politics, thus making it more difficult for any single party to implement radical reforms. Second, it is believed the economic benefits of EU membership will finally eliminate a critical foundation for much of the popular discontent which could be exploited by those wishing to institute radical reforms. Both democratization and economic improvements are considered “must-have” conditions for a stable country, thus continued AKP support for EU membership will actually serve to stifle their aspirations of an Islamic Turkish state.<sup>41</sup> An alternative remains the very real possibility of outright rejection of Turkey by the EU. Although there remains much uncertainty as to how Turkey would respond to such a decision, the consensus believes the risk of this triggering a full-scale Islamic revolution within Turkey, resulting in a total rejection of the West, to be small.<sup>42</sup>

### **Government Stability**

Since the first election of the Islamist AKP in 2002, the secular elite within Turkey have been fairly successful at blocking the more significant attempts to impose

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<sup>40</sup>The AKP still supports this policy which appeals to the moderate voter within Turkey. See Aydin and Cakr, *Political...*, 1.

<sup>41</sup>Henri J. Barkey and Yasemin Çongar, “Deciphering Turkey's Elections: The Making of a Revolution,” *World Policy Journal* 24, no. 3 (1 October 2007): 73; <http://www.proquest.com/>; Internet; accessed 7 February 2008.

<sup>42</sup>Jung, *Turkey's Future...*, 4.

radical Islamist policies.<sup>43</sup> Many scholars have downplayed these AKP initiatives as non-threatening to the secular nature of Turkey, as their primary motivation was simply to achieve a level of religious freedom of expression similar to that enjoyed within the United States.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, the prevalence of Islam within Kemalism throughout its history supports this notion, as does the recent deliberate moderation of AKP policies in order to appeal to a wider electorate. This clearly indicates the democratic structure of Turkish government is strong enough to maintain a healthy balance between the continued secular nature of Turkey while facilitating some modest “Islamicisation” of the State.<sup>45</sup> Strangely however, as late as 2007 much of Turkey’s population seemed to not necessarily share this view.<sup>46</sup>

At the opposite end of this spectrum are the nay-sayers who consider the AKP to have simply adopted a policy of “opportunism” towards democracy, until their power has been consolidated to the point where they can neutralize the military’s influence and return to their traditional policy of a more aggressive “Islamicisation” of Turkey.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>A State ban on the use of headscarves by women in any public institution has been in effect within Turkey since 1984. The AKP has made this a issue central in their policy to bring Islam more into mainstream Turkey. See Aydin and Cakr, *Political...*, 3.

<sup>44</sup>This version of “passive secularism” is one where the state is tolerant of religions within the public environment. *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>45</sup>Jung, *Turkey's Future...*, 5.

<sup>46</sup>The State elections of April 2007 were a period of extreme crisis within Turkey. The Kemalist factions, lead by the Republican People’s Party (CHP), continued to criticize the AKP for supposedly threatening attempts to subvert the secular and nationalist ideology of Turkey. Further feuling this nervousness was the imminent replacement of the incumbent President Sezer, himself a Kemalist, who was about end his seven year term. Seen as the sole authority keeping the AKP in check, his replacement, elected by the Turkish parliament, would most likely be affiliated with the AKP, thus eliminating the only remaining hurdle preventing the Islamic permeation of the State. See Yavuz and Özcan, “Crisis...”, 122.

<sup>47</sup>Robert Springborg, *Political Islam and Europe: Views From the Arab Mediterranean States and Turkey*, Centre for European Policy Studies, 2007: 14; <http://www.ceps.eu/>; Internet; accessed 12 October 2007.

These suspicions are reinforced by the unique implementation of Kemalism within Turkey. Turkey has imposed severe limitations on religious expression within public entities such as universities, however a fatal flaw exists in that it is the ruling government which “directly controls all mosques and clergy.”<sup>48</sup> Therefore, the government (currently the Islamist AKP) theoretically has the legal mechanisms at their disposal to introduce radical reforms. In reality however, it appears this would be a far more difficult task to implement. The two most significant impediments to this are the commitment of the Turkish military to protect the ideals of Kemalism, as well as the longer term ramifications of a growing middle class.

There is no question of the influence of Islam within Turkey, which is 99% Muslim.<sup>49</sup> That Turkey has managed to maintain its Kemalist ideals has been in no small part the result of the power of the Turkish military and its willingness to intervene and suppress any action deemed threatening to the maintenance and expansion of Turkey’s role as a “modern, secular, Western nation” within the global community.<sup>50</sup> A recent judiciary challenge to the legality of the AKP, initiated by the military, indicates they continue to take this role seriously. It appears therefore that Kemalism will remain safe within Turkey as long as its staunchest proponents remain entrenched within the Turkish military and judiciary. Ultimately, as democracy further matures with Turkey, it is logical to believe the military and judiciary will no longer be able to effect deliberate

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<sup>48</sup>A more thorough discussion of the depth of state control over Islam within Turkey appears later in this paper. Barkey and Çongar, “Deciphering...”, 64.

<sup>49</sup>U.S. Department of State, “Background Note: Turkey...”

<sup>50</sup>It is because of this enduring struggle that Samuel Huntington chose to associate his classic term “torn country” to Turkey. See Samuel P. Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?” *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (July 1, 1993): 9; <http://www.proquest.com/>; Internet; accessed 20 March 2008.

control over the political process. However, as was discussed previously, democratic maturity within Turkey should actually hinder those aspiring for an Islamic Turkish state, and it is here where the impact of the middle class becomes apparent.

The AKP in 2007 formed a majority with nearly 50% of the popular vote. However, its largest support came from the growing middle class within Turkey's largest cities.<sup>51</sup> This "new middle class" within Turkey consists of well-educated professionals such as doctors and engineers, who espouse Western individualistic values and rule of law.<sup>52</sup> The Turkish middle class has typically supported Kemalism in favor of radical (or even conservative) Islamic reform, thus it is reasonable to assume this trend to become even more prevalent as the Turkish middle class continues to expand. It appears therefore that the one-two punch of Turkish military support of Kemalism coupled with unfavorable demographics will make it increasingly difficult for any Islamist party to abolish Kemalism within Turkey for some time to come.

While Saudi Arabia remains under the absolute political control of the Saudi Royal Family, their power remains directly dependant on the continued support of the ultra conservative Wahhabists who wield total religious control. The insidious nature of this partnership has played a direct role in the Saudi adoption of Reformist policies towards the West, which has effectively shielded Saudi Society from the influences of Western culture. Despite an unwanted side-effect of also hindering Western insight into the inner workings of Saudi society, the Reformist policy has not prevented the

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<sup>51</sup>Vincent Boland, "Two Worlds Jostle For The Upper Hand: [Surveys Edition]," *Financial Times*, 21 November 2007, 1; <http://www.proquest.com/>; Internet; accessed 7 February 2008.

<sup>52</sup>Yavuz and Özcan, "Crisis...", 120-121.

identification of a number of other unwanted second order effects which point to a fragile government within Saudi Arabia.

Recently within Saudi Arabia there have been attempts to put forward to the King suggestions for radical reforms, including separation of the legislative, judiciary, and executive branches of the Saudi government, as well as increased rights for women.<sup>53</sup> The Saudi Royal Family has accepted these recommendations with an overt agreement they need to be implemented, yet by Western standards the pace of change has been excruciatingly slow. Normally this would be cause for concern in the West, as it gives the impression the Saudi Royal Family is reluctant to disrupt its crucial alliance with the Wahhabists, however it appears the Saudi leadership has chosen a wise path in this case. So far the religious leadership has not significantly objected to the pace of reform, and the current reform movement within Saudi Arabia consists mostly of persons who appear willing to accept reforms which preserve the continuation of the monarchy in its present form.<sup>54</sup> The tolerance level of the Wahhabi elite for further reform remains unknown however, and it also remains to be seen whether the reforms will occur fast enough to counteract other forces which continue to create an “atmosphere favorable to... radicalism, terrorism, and rejectionism.”<sup>55</sup> The only certainty therefore is that it appears there is little room for error by the Saudi Royal Family, a troubling situation.

The inability (or lack of desire) of Saudi Arabian leadership to effectively incorporate meaningful governmental reform speaks specifically to the fragile and

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<sup>53</sup>Raphaeli, “Demands...”, 5.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>55</sup>Najib Al-Khuneizi, *Al-Ayyam*, 17 June 2003, quoted in *Ibid.*, 7.

delicate relationship between the Saudi Royal Family and the Wahhabist clerics, who collectively pose the only credible threat to the political power of the Saudi Royal Family. The inherent tension that already exists between these two allies, and the further likelihood that an Islamic regime would be the most likely successor to a collapsed Saudi monarchy, has led some experts to warn of a high probability the current governing structure in Saudi Arabia could collapse simply for this reason.<sup>56</sup> Interestingly, however, the same circle of intellectual thought also believes Saudi sympathy towards the West would also most likely diminish should it become more democratic in nature.<sup>57</sup> This relies heavily on comparisons with pre-revolutionary Iran as evidence Saudi Arabia is destined to adopt the same radical form of Islamic Democracy,<sup>58</sup> however Saudi Arabia is also considered one of the “stronger democratic regimes of the Islamic world.”<sup>59</sup> It therefore seems unreasonable to accept this to be the inevitable destiny for Saudi Arabia. Not only has the Saudi Royal Family taken great pains to “appease Islamists” by their

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<sup>56</sup>Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the ...*, 113-114.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, 198.

<sup>58</sup>Nawaf E. Obaid offers many similarities between contemporary Saudi Arabia and pre-revolutionary Iran that seem to support this notion. Both countries were ruled by autocratic monarchs who tolerated internal corruption and opposed democratic reforms. Iran also enjoyed the same relationship with the West as is currently enjoyed by Saudi Arabia, and both experienced friction with their Islamic leadership. The internal problems within Iran in 1979 and Saudi Arabia today are seen to have the same catalysts: economic and religious issues, and resentment towards the presence of Western nations within each country. His main argument however is that these similarities are mostly coincidence, and that there are a plethora of dissimilarities between the two countries that make a persuasive argument against Saudi Arabia following the same course of action. See Nawaf E. Obaid, “In Al-Saud We Trust,” *Foreign Policy*, no. 128 (January - February 2002): 72-74; <http://www.jstor.org>; Internet; accessed 31 January 2008.

<sup>59</sup>Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the ...*, 198.

approach of “modernization without westernization,”<sup>60</sup> many experts believe the current slow pace of reform will still occur rapidly enough to meet the needs of what is being portrayed as an increasingly frustrated and disenchanting population.<sup>61</sup>

It is clear that both Saudi Arabia and Turkey will face continued challenges to their political status quo, yet there is clear evidence that Saudi Arabia alone is at serious risk of destabilization from one or more of these threats, and thus by extension holds the most negative prospects for Western interests in the Middle East. Despite the negative effects of continued military and judicial meddling within Turkey, the democratic process has proven resilient enough to resist any radical change by the current Islamist government, thus the threat appears quite low. Within Saudi Arabia however, the power of the Royal Family, while absolute, appears fragile due to its total reliance on the continued support of the Wahhabist elite. It appears it will become increasingly difficult for the Saudi Royal Family to implement further reforms without running afoul of Wahhabist conservatism, thus it seems inevitable that the Saudi Royal Family will at some point be seriously challenged. The only remaining questions are when will this occur, and will the West be adequately prepared?

### **Islamic Fundamentalism**

We have already seen the fundamental yet indirect influence of Islam within three aspects of Saudi Arabia and Turkey. It seems logical therefore to dedicate a small

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<sup>60</sup>Obaid further points to many additional factors which refutes the claims that Saudi Arabia will become another Iran. The Saudi royal family has judiciously used limited appointments to senior advisory posts as a way of expanding rather than alienating its popular support base. The Saudi royal family further enjoys a degree of political legitimacy that escaped the Shah of Iran. Finally, with a population only about a third of Iran's in 1979, it requires much less effort to effectively control the population of Saudi Arabia. Obaid, “In Al-Saud...”, 72-74.

<sup>61</sup>Raphaeli, “Demands...”, 10.



portion of this paper in the analysis of the direct threat to the continued stability of each country from Islamic Fundamentalism, beginning with Saudi Arabia.

Considered one of the most radical forms of Islam in the world, Wahhabism is seen as the single largest impediment to any future modernization or democratization of Saudi Arabia. It has free reign to control many aspects of Saudi society, including institutions such as the education system believed to have played critical role in the 9/11 attacks.<sup>62</sup> The inherently fundamentalist nature of Wahhabism, coupled with documented evidence of its support of terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda, provides an insight into the anti-West policy that would surely follow from a fundamentalist Islamic Saudi Arabia.<sup>63</sup> The reluctance of the Royal Family to challenge Wahhabi authority could be interpreted as fear of Wahhabi power, which the West would be well served to pay attention to.

The situation in Turkey is fundamentally different. Here, all aspects of Islam are under the direct control of a government department called the Diyanet, or Department of Religious Affairs. So pervasive is its control that not only is it responsible for the appointment and monitoring of all mosque staff within Turkey,<sup>64</sup> it also writes and reviews all sermons given.<sup>65</sup> As mentioned previously, the peculiarity of the Turkish system of strict separation of state and religion has resulted in the Diyanet being under

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<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>64</sup>“Turkey: Hadith Revision Aims to Update Islam,” *OxResearch* (March 14, 2008): 1; <http://www.proquest.com/>; Internet; accessed 30 March 2008.

<sup>65</sup>Vincent Boland, “In Ataturk's Shadow Guardians Of A ‘Secular Religion’ Stand Watch Over Changing Turkey The Conflict Over The Presidency Is The Latest Sign Of How The Country Is Struggling To Reconcile Its Kemalist Founding Principles With The Rise Of Political Islam :[London 1st Edition],” *Financial Times*, 3 May 2007, 2; <http://www.proquest.com/>; Internet; accessed 30 March 2008.

the direct and exclusive control of the Office of the Turkish Prime Minister. Although the current Prime Minister is a confirmed Islamist, thus presumably facilitating the (mis)use of the Diyanet for radical Islamic purposes, the threat posed by this appears low due to the strength of the other checks and balances within the Turkish political system. Thus, the ability to assert radical Islamic influences within Turkey appears much diminished compared to that within Saudi Arabia.

## **CONCLUSION**

Stable, pro-western oases like Turkey and Saudi Arabia continue to be a minority within the Middle East. The ability of the West to continue nation-building within Iraq and Afghanistan remains critically dependant on guaranteed access to staging areas within friendly nations such as Saudi Arabia and Turkey. It is therefore critical that the West never again be surprised by another Iranian-style revolution, particularly within these two countries. The purpose of this paper was to complete a critical analysis of both Turkey and Saudi Arabia and identify the triggers which could result in their becoming a threat to the West. During this analysis, a comparison of the social, economic, governmental and religious issues demonstrated that a number of significant and potentially destabilizing forces indeed exist within each nation.

Turkey faces many of the same pressures as Saudi Arabia, yet it seems to possess a much more robust system of checks and balances that would prevent any significant threat to its secular democracy. Initial fears generated by the election of the Islamist AKP in 2002 seem to have been muted, and a continued moderation of AKP policies, such as support for Turkey's membership in the EU, bode well for the future. Although the Turkish military continues to act as "moral guardian" of Ataturk and Kemalism, it has

been the strong voice of the Turkish electorate which will hold the best promise of silencing any future aspirations of transforming Turkey into an Islamic state.

Saudi Arabia suffers from an aging leadership that is overly dependent on Western modernism (and military power) and support of the ultra-conservative Wahhabist religious elite to maintain power. These two factors have placed the Saudi government on a collision course as it is faced with little maneuver room to implement desperately needed governmental reforms. The Reformist policy of Saudi Arabia towards the West has further made it difficult for internal stability issues to become apparent to Western nations in a timely manner. Despite this, even a rudimentary assessment such within this paper has exposed a country which is barely able to maintain a precarious stability and balance, therefore the continued convictions of the West that Saudi Arabia would never become an adversary is dangerous and unwise, in the opinion of this author. It would therefore be wise for the West to monitor the situation closely in Saudi Arabia and be prepared to respond to a possible (and sudden) destabilization of that country.

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