



## Sons of the Conquerors: The Rise of the Turkic World

**Hugh Pope**

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### Introduction

**JOANNE MYERS:** Good morning. I'm Joanne Myers, Director of Merrill House Programs. On behalf of the Carnegie Council, I would like to welcome our members and guests, and to thank you for joining us as we welcome Hugh Pope to our Books for Breakfast program.

Today he will be discussing his book, [\*Sons of the Conquerors: The Rise of the Turkic World\*](#).

Some of you may wonder who are the "Sons of the Conquerors"? Others may ask, why are we discussing this issue this morning? It is true, Turkic populations have not drawn intense Western interest or study since the time of the nineteenth century. In fact, if someone spoke to you about the Turkic people today, most of you would concretely associate them with the people living in Turkey, which, admittedly, is the most powerful and best-established Turkic nation in the world. Yet to limit our information to the citizens of this country alone would be a mistake, as Turkic populations inhabit a region much larger than just the political boundaries of Turkey.

When the Soviet Union dissolved, five new Central Asian nations emerged: Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and the Kyrgyz Republic, all of which have a Turkic majority. These relatively new nations have helped to revive the notion of a Turkic political bloc. Though these Turkic people may be among the least studied in the world, the vast amount of oil buried beneath their land combined with the potential for political instability in their own countries and the region should be a signal to us all that if we ignore this population, it will be at our own peril. In fact, as the Bush Administration discovered in the recent Iraqi war, this combined citizenry, which is 140 million strong, can no longer be taken for granted.

It would be to our advantage to have a better understanding of just who the "Sons of the Conquerors" are and what their culture and history may tell us about their descendants today. To give us this coherent framework, we have invited one of the world's foremost experts on modern Turkey, Hugh Pope, to discuss this topic.

Over the past 15 years, our guest has crisscrossed the wider Turkic world, covering over 20 countries and communities, gathering information, and assimilating many facets of this diverse and fascinating ethnic group. Just as so many of us have benefited from Hugh's reporting on his past forays and political observations from his base in Istanbul, I am confident that we will be further enriched by his perceptions of Turkic culture and politics.

For the past eight years, Hugh Pope has run the Istanbul News Bureau of *The Wall Street Journal*. He

read Persian and Arabic at Oxford, and is fluent in Turkish. He has reported for the *Los Angeles Times*, the BBC, and Reuters. He is the co-author, with Nicole Pope, of the bestselling *New York Times* Notable Book, [Turkey Unveiled](#). Please join me in giving a warm welcome to our guest, Hugh Pope.

## Remarks

**HUGH POPE:** Thank you, Joanne, for that generous introduction. The first question I should ask is, is there a Turkic world? We invented it 15 years ago, when I had no idea that it existed. Even when preparing this book, it took me about two weeks working with a cartographer in Wales to find the right framework for what should and should not be in the Turkic world.

When I went to Turkey in 1987, it was like going to the end of the universe. No one could understand why I had gone. Some people thought I was betraying Western civilization by settling in such a country. But above all, what we forget is that the Iron Curtain, which divided East and West Europe, had an extension across the Black Sea, through Caucasus and Central Asia, and between the Soviet Union and China. That Iron Curtain divided the Turkic peoples. It kept them uneducated. Their countries were not on the path of progress.

In those days, I first became aware that the people that we thought of as the Muslims of the Soviet Union spoke languages that were still closely related to the language of Turkey. We became very aware of this in 1990, with "[Black January](#)" in Azerbaijan, and suddenly the Turkish television stations were full of Azeris phoning in from houses in Baku, in a language that we could understand. It was astonishing. No one had been aware that that connection had lived on. One of the most interesting plane trips I took was the first-ever direct flight between Istanbul and Baku.

During the 1990s, there was an upsurge. It was a political invention of the United States, in a way, to say that Turkey would be a model for the Turkic states, and there was a sudden belief that political interaction would be possible. It was an understandable political reaction to try to create some anchors for those countries, which were unexpectedly set free by the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Later in the 1990s, the idea faltered as the price of oil collapsed. Much of the interest in the Caspian area had been oil-driven.

But underneath the surface, these connections continued to develop. Many Turkish businesses, based in Istanbul, are working in these former countries. In each of the Turkic states, the biggest single community of businessmen is usually one of the Turks. They are not dominant, but they are there building schools, restaurants, and hotels. They are running hotels, they are building pipelines. They are also very busy in Bulgaria, Romania, and Russia. But because the old Iron Curtain has dropped away, you suddenly feel that the last hundred years has been an aberration.

You think about the millennial history of that geographical center, that place between Asia and Europe. It was the capital of [the Eastern Roman Empire](#), then it was the capital of the Byzantine Empire, the capital of the [Ottoman Empire](#). Then the Ottoman Empire collapsed, and the [Republic of Turkey](#) appeared. There was a terrible tension in the Balkans in the 1920s and 1930s, and then the Second World War, and the Iron Curtain came down. The twentieth century was a lost century for Turkey.

Now, thanks to the opening of all those borders, the natural hinterland of Istanbul has opened up again. If you look at the departures board in Istanbul Airport now, it is completely different from 15 years ago. Rostov-on-Don, Simferopol, Kazan—all these places, which no one ever thought of going to before, are being served by Istanbul Airport. We are becoming a commercial center again.

We have actually seen two centuries of disasters for the greater Turkic world after their period of conquest. They conquered the Balkans. They went as far as Vienna. They took the whole Middle East, which they then ran for most of the last 1,000 years. Who created modern Iran? The Safavids, a Turkic dynasty. Who were the Moguls? The first Mogul emperor was a Turkic prince from Central Asia. Who were

the Mamluks? They were a Turkic people, the slave-soldiers of Egypt. The Ottomans; the Seljuks; even further, other figures who took control of Iran—for instance, [Nadir Shah](#), [Mahmud of Ghazni](#)—all these people were Turkic rulers. It is the genius of the Turks to rule.

But it didn't last forever. The Russians lived for 300 years under the "Tartar yoke," or the "Turkic yoke." They pushed out the Turks, the Tartars—these states which we call the "Golden Horde" and the "White Horde." The Christian states of the Balkans also pushed the Turks out.

They all came back to Turkey. In a way, as Christian Europeans came to America, Muslims from the Balkans, the Black Sea area, southern Russia, came to Turkey during that period when the Christian states—Russia, Britain—were taking over the Middle East.

Not only was this return devastating for the people of Turkey, but also half of the people of Kazakhstan died under the Soviet Union. Generally, you hear about the famines of Ukraine, but in Kazakhstan also the situation was terrible. [Stalin](#) was particularly vicious against the elites of the Turkic world, and the Kazakh nobility, the Kazakh clerical classes—what there was of a Kazakh elite—was completely eliminated.

That is why, if the Turkic states of today look a bit primitive, especially in their methods of governance, you must realize that they are building on nothing except what they inherited from the Soviet Union, which is a Communist Party. But their native traditions are being rebuilt, and their new histories, their new national identities are being rebuilt from what they can remember almost at the peasant level, because so much of their indigenous history was destroyed by the Soviet Union.

That has changed now. They are getting richer. Turkey and Kazakhstan are arguably more successful than their neighbors. Turkey is now negotiating for full membership in the European Union. It is the most powerful militarily, the richest, biggest economy, the most democratic state, the most secular state in the Muslim world. The Turks are different, and they give a different example to everyone else.

Kazakhstan is also doing much better than, say, Russia. Few people realize that it has attracted, in absolute terms, more foreign investment than Russia has—about \$22 billion compared to \$20 billion. Their credit rating is better than everyone else in the former Soviet Union, except for the three Baltic states.

In that sense, it is fair to speak of, as my subtitle says, *The Rise of the Turkic World*. After two terrible centuries, they are doing much better.

However, to describe this in a book was very difficult. As Joanne pointed out, twenty countries have significant Turkic communities, six with a Turkic majority. Initially, I planned to start at the easternmost point, which is the little Republic of Tuva, between Mongolia and Russia, or the Yellow Uighurs near the Great Wall of China, and then go on a long journey to a Turkic community in the Appalachian Mountains of the United States.

There is a now-respectable theory that shows that the Native Americans may have come over the Bering Strait. The latest genetic research shows that, indeed, the people on the other side of the Bering Strait in those days were Turkic, and that Native Americans do have genetic origins among Turkic populations. They share Shamanism. The Ojibwa use the word "yurt" for "tent." Cherokees use *ana ata* for "father and mother." There are other mythical connections as well.

The people in Wise, Virginia also believe themselves to be descended from Ottoman galley slaves abandoned on the American coast by [Sir Francis Drake](#).

In the end, I divided the book into six sections:

- 1) The military heritage—or the military gene—of Turkic peoples, sometimes exaggerated by the

modern Republic of Turkey. The army is always very powerful there, but they didn't invent the idea. I show how that has formed the Turkic identity.

Then I deal with the authoritarian nature of Turkic states, their love of strong leaders, the inheritance of [Ataturk](#), the mad tyranny of [Turkmenbashi](#) [Saparmyrat Ataýewiç Nyýazow] in Turkmenistan, and the new but flawed success of the ruler of Kazakhstan.

2) The lonely history of the Turkic peoples, who have always been in-between. They are between China, Russia, the Arabs, the Persians, and Europe. But they don't really have their own identity. For instance, the Arabs have language, the Jews have religion, the Persians have literature—a peg on which to hang their coat. The Turks never had anything, really, except, "We run this place." They haven't even had that for the last while. Their language was not very well-developed, and the Turks never won any prizes for anything. But now, [Orhan Pamuk](#), for instance, won the biggest European literary prize. Turkish films now win the Berlin Golden Bear. Turkish songs win the Eurovision song contest. Turkish culture is becoming more sophisticated.

This lonely history doesn't mean that it is a coherent or political bloc. But the Kazakhs and Turks do share this outsider status. Curiously enough, this group in the Appalachian Mountains also found that they bonded with Turks, because they, too, were pushed away from the mainstream of American society. As the Turks have [Midnight Express](#), which has stained their reputation for two generations, the Appalachians have [Deliverance](#).

3) The Turkic take on Islam, which is very pragmatic, a shared view of Islam that is not the same as the Arabs or the Persians. There are 140 million people, roughly, in the Turkic-speaking world and, say, 1.5 billion Muslims. This represents only 10 percent of the Muslims. It is impossible to say, "This is Islam. Therefore, this is what the Islamic world is." The Islamic world is very variegated, even within the Turkic world. But the Turkic peoples are closer to each other than to other blocs in the Islamic world.

4) Why we should be interested in the Turkic world: oil. I spent time with an oil company. The Aral Sea, the fourth biggest body of water in the world, is now half of its former size. Possibly the most impressive moment of my travels was standing on the beach of the Aral Sea. It was a sea, but there is no water. It just stretches to the horizon—nothing.

5) Human rights is a big issue for all Turkic peoples. A Venetian ambassador to the Ottoman Empire once said that Turkey is the only country to have formed its government purely on fear. That is how the Turkic peoples conquered and maintained control. You can't maintain a good regime of fear without breaking human rights. This is a common theme throughout the Turkic world. But it is not just Turkic rulers that do it. [The worst human-rights violations are currently being committed by China against the Uighur Turks of Xinjiang.](#)

6) Another chapter is entitled "The Twenty-First Century Is Ours," which former Prime Minister [Turgut Ozal](#) used to say that about Turkey. The twenty-first century will be much better for the Turkic world than the last two centuries.

There will not be a Turkic bloc, a Turkic political union of these 140 million people together. But these Turkic countries have changed immensely in the last fifteen years and they are on converging tracks, such as language. The former Soviet republics all had their language written in Cyrillic fifteen years ago. Now most have chosen different Latin scripts, because they don't want to put themselves under anyone else. They don't want any Big Brothers. They each want to be different, but they are closer than they were.

Commercial links are growing, although not yet in the [EU](#) style of lifting borders. The commercial power is

based in Istanbul, a very attractive place to do business.

There is some political convergence, some annual meetings between them. Most of the presidents of the Turkic world are illegitimate, to some degree, and thus scared of opening up any political showing.

They even share the same school of Islam. Most are [Hanafis](#), as opposed to the branch of Sunni Islam. Most favor secular governments, unlike other parts of the Islamic world.

The discussions between Turkey and the EU have been a big issue in the region, in the past year. Does Turkey really want to become a member of the European Union? Does Europe really want Turkey? I don't believe that Turkey actually wants to join the EU, nor does the EU want Turkey.

I will give you a taste of what it was like to have lunch with Mustafa Koc, who is now running the biggest company in Turkey, and probably the biggest company in this geography as well. They have \$20 billion of sales per year, and are taking over markets in Europe.

Europe had just decided to open talks with Turkey. We asked him how he saw the future of Turkey, whether he saw Turkey in Europe, and whether he saw huge future growth in Europe. He said, "Oh, no. Of course, we must be present, because we think there are a number of companies able to work in this geography, in Europe, and we want to be one of them. But we don't expect much profit from it. We just want market share."

We asked, "Where do you think you will make profits?" And he answered, "Russia and the Middle East", which geographically and historically are the areas that have been effectively covered from Istanbul.

"Anyway," he said, "this Europe of 30 countries, what kind of Europe will it be? They will all be squabbling. They won't get anywhere."

I thought, Turkey has just gone through all this trouble to become a negotiating member and said, "You seem rather pleased about that," to which he responded, "Yes, divide and conquer."

I would be pleased to take any questions.

### Questions and Answers

**QUESTION:** Would you comment on how you see the political future of Kazakhstan, a former part of the Soviet Empire. Will what happened in Ukraine have any spillover effect in Kazakhstan, which is a one-man operation now?

**HUGH POPE:** No, I don't think so. [Nazarbayev](#) is still in charge of his country. What has been happening has been presented to Americans as revolutions—the [Cedar Revolution](#) in Lebanon and the [Rose Revolution](#) in Georgia. What happened in Georgia was that [Shevardnadze](#) had run out of energy. He was unable to rule. His regime collapsed, and his former lieutenants took over. You get the people on the streets, and then we dress it up as revolution. [The Soros Foundation](#) people were agitating. But the most important thing is, you have to have lieutenants who would betray you and take over your country.

Ukraine, again [\[the Orange Revolution\]](#), was a regime that had spent a long time degrading.

And as for the [Akayev](#) regime in Kyrgyzistan [\[the Tulip Revolution\]](#)—the people that took over walked though an open door.

Kazakhstan is not like that. The man is still in charge. Yes, it is undemocratic. But he has money. He has the will to rule. He has a good cabinet. The man runs a tight ship.

**QUESTION:** Why are the Turks so adamant about the Kurds? If they have a coherence that is Turkic,

why are they so averse to a Kurdistan, an independent country?

**HUGH POPE:** Some Turks in Istanbul will say, "Let's dump the Kurds. This is too much." But currently that is not the situation in Turkey. Turkey is a much better place than it was five years ago, in the sense that the Kurds are not being completely scorned as before. They captured [Öcalan](#), thanks to U.S. help. They got on top of the insurgency.

The Kurds want to be part of Europe, because Europe will guarantee their rights within Turkey. Turkey can no longer do what it wants to the Kurds. Why the Turks are very much against an independent Kurdistan in Iraq is that they, rightly, fear—because the Turkish Kurds are watching what's happening in Iraq—that an American protectorate of Kurdistan will give a new platform to those who are advocating an independent Kurdistan within Turkey.

Again, it comes down to the question of land. Who will run this territory? It's an unpleasant, messy ethnic problem. Can you imagine what would happen if there was a real independent Kurdistan, how it would rip the country apart? We saw a guerilla insurgency, but then you would see very nasty scenes there.

The other reason that the Turkish government opposes an independent Kurdistan in northern Iraq is that the whole example of ethnic mini-states in the Middle East is not felt to be in their national interest. They feel that, as a trading partner, it is better to have whole countries.

Everything is in limbo in the Middle East until the Iraq mess is cleared up.

An independent Kurdistan can only survive as an American protectorate. The Kurds, militarily, cannot hold those cities against either Turkey or—say a Shia state arises on the rubble of Iraq. The first thing they will do is drive their tanks into Kirkuk, Arbil, and Dahuk [all within or claimed by the [Kurdish Autonomous Region](#)]. It is unsustainable, unless America is willing to stay and defend them.

**QUESTION:** In Central Asia, there are separate Turkic states, some of which have been holding elections and some having regime change. You presented the Turkic model as having the military leader on top, who then can become president.

As Americans, we are hoping for democracy, with the model of civic organizations and the rule of law and opportunities for minorities to be represented. What are the prospects of opening up many of the Central Asian states to democracy?

**HUGH POPE:** A nice dream. You can't build democracy without populations that are ready for it. Kazakhstan is beginning to have a middle class. Uzbekistan, no, not really. Turkey has a growing middle class. Turkey is changing immensely, but it has taken fifty years to move from the one-party state of Ataturk's time to what is now, a fairly democratic, albeit flawed, system. By "democratic," I mean open, transparent, representative of the people, a taxation regime that makes the government responsive to the people's desires, and a relatively free media.

You can't wave a wand over the countries and make them democratic. The Kyrgyz Republic was arguably the most democratic of them. But it was more a factor of its smallness and irrelevance. There was nothing much at stake, so they were able to carry on with a fairly relaxed mode of government—so relaxed that the government toppled.

Another factor holding back democracy in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan is their methods of raising revenue. In Kazakhstan, like Iran, like Saudi Arabia, the government gets its money from controlling all natural-resources revenue. In Uzbekistan, a third to a half of the revenue is from controlling the cotton crop. If you don't need your people, you can just rule them. As long as you have your security forces paid for, you hand out subsidies. You toss bones out of the palace window, but you don't need the people.

In Turkey, the government must borrow money every month from the Istanbul bankers, rather like, in the Ottoman Empire, [the Galata bankers](#). They need to retain the confidence of the Turkish bourgeoisie. That means it's a very different state, which has allowed Turkey to become more democratic. It will be years before that develops further east.

**QUESTION:** I enjoyed your presentation, and I learned quite a bit, which is a sign that in Turkey the identity with the Turkic peoples is not as coherent as you suggest. Yet when a previous questioner talked about the coherence among the Turkic people, you seemed to agree. Turkey is a territorial state with a Turkic population. You said that the concept "Turkic world" was something that was imposed from outside. At the end of your studies, to what extent did you find the concept a reality, from the perspective of the peoples of these countries?

If I were to characterize that part of the world, the relationship between Turkey and the Turkic republics and other Turkic communities would be similar to Spain and the states of Latin America today, rather than a Hispanic world.

**HUGH POPE:** You're right. Most people in Turkey view the Turkic world as dragging them backwards in their dream of reaching the riches of Europe and access to European markets. There is a consciousness in Turkey of the Central Asian heritage, since all schools teach Turks that they come from Central Asia. As such, less than 2 percent of Turkish trade is with the Turkic world.

If you look at it from Azerbaijan, their third-biggest trading partner is Turkey. If you look at projects being done in Kazakhstan, who is running the biggest hotel in Almaty? Who is building the pipelines? Who is running the biggest superstore in Almaty? Who is the leading actor in the fastest-growing sectors? They are generally run by Turks.

Yes, the idea of a Turkic world, as a political way of looking at things, is new and invented. But it won't be the first political idea that was invented and then slowly gained ground.

The idea of being Turkish is debated. For instance, when I asked [President of Kazakhstan] Nursultan Nazarbayev, sitting in his \$18 million Boeing, "Who are you," the first thing he said was, "I am a Turk," which surprised me.

I said, "What do you mean by that?"

He said, "I don't mean anything to do with Turkey. Those people in Turkey are half-breeds. They are the descendants, mixed with the people who are already there. We conquered them. They intermarried, and they formed Turkey. We are the pure Turks."

Many people think that the word "Turk" was invented by Ataturk to create a nation, which is true. It wasn't popular initially, but gained traction.

But the word "Turk" to describe the Turkic nation is more than 1,000 years old; 1,500 years ago was the first time that leaders of people that we think of today as Turkic used the word "Turk" to describe themselves. The first compendium of Turkish languages by [Mahmud Kashgari](#) [from Kashgar in Xinjiang, China], written in 1070, is utterly nationalistic about being Turkish. [Babur](#), the leader of the [Indian]Mogul Empire, says, "My people are Turkish. They speak Turkish." The [Chaghatai](#), the great poets of medieval Central Asia, called their language Turkish.

We in the West have constantly belittled Turkey, because it failed to thrive in the last two centuries. But that doesn't mean that the historical legitimacy of the Turkic idea doesn't exist or cannot be re-created, as these countries become rich and successful. They are not world leaders. Unfortunately, they are second-league countries, but they seem to be rising to the top of it.

**QUESTION:** As the wife of a Western diplomat who served in Europe mainly, I had some unusual

experiences. At my first official dinner in Germany, where my husband was the Canadian ambassador, the host was someone very close to [Chancellor Kohl](#). I was on his left. On his right was a lady whom I assumed to be the wife of someone very senior in the Kohl government. Since I was introduced as the wife of the Canadian ambassador, people assumed that I was a Canadian. It did not occur to anyone that I was Turkish.

This lady started talking about then-President Turgut Ozal. She said, "The president of Turkey is talking about uniting the Turkic peoples from the Balkans to the Chinese Wall. They are talking about creating the Ottoman Empire again. We have to do our utmost not to allow this to happen."

I was stunned. I asked the gentleman to my left, "Who is this lady?" He said, "She is the speaker of the Parliament." This is the impression I have of what Europeans think of the Turks and of Turkey. I don't think they will ever accept Turkey into the EU.

**HUGH POPE:** I agree—at least not this European Union. Everyone forgets that Turkey and the EU have been discussing the parameters of the Turkish integration into Europe for fifty years. They decided in December 2004 to continue for another ten years. It suits them to stay in this relationship.

I was friends with the Dutch ambassador, who is in charge of the negotiating process. I know quite a few Turkish officials, who also say, "We don't want to join the EU as it is. What we want is the process. We want to use European pressure to improve Turkey, make Turkey more competitive with Europe." A progressive, Western-educated constituency within Turkey is using the EU process to convince conservatives that they have to change their ways to make Turkey stronger, more open and a more decent place to live.

There's another group that realizes that, to have any influence in Europe, you need leverage. Because Turkey got some concessions from Europe, dating back from the days when it was a NATO guardian of the southeastern flank, they can use these levers to morally blackmail Europe.

The Europeans, on the other hand, need leverage on Turkey, because they are scared of Turkey. Many of the drugs and illegal immigrants coming into Europe come through Turkey. This leverage can only come with a negotiating process.

They are locked in a wrestling match. Neither side actually wants the other—unless Britain gets its dream of destroying the European political process and it becomes a trading bloc again. That's why Britain supported Turkey's membership in the EU so much, to make it a politically meaningless group.

Turkey does not react the same way to events as most European countries. Say the Salman Rushdie business happened again today. You can imagine all the European foreign ministers getting up and saying, "Oh, no, this is a scandal." But the Turkish foreign minister would not be able to join them.

**QUESTION:** The president of Turkey recently visited Israel. How will Turkey balance the relationship with Syria, and the Arab world, and the relationship with Israel? How do the people in Istanbul see that relationship?

**HUGH POPE:** Currently, there is a great anti-foreign sentiment in Turkey. It is mainly anti-American, but it applies to all foreigners, which is surprising, considering the European process that has just started. This is largely because of a perception of what is happening in Iraq and the occupied territories in Israel.

The prime minister will talk about Israel being a terrorist state. But when they reveal their true feelings about Israel, they get into trouble in Washington, and the American Embassy in Ankara immediately comes on top of them like a ton of bricks. Plus, the Turks have come to rely on the Jewish and Israeli lobby in Washington.

They have been told, "You will go and be nice to Israel," but it's not from their hearts. It's a power reality.

On the other hand, they're very prejudiced about Arabs, partly because of the back-stabbing that they perceived at the end of the Ottoman Empire, and partly because it's a racial prejudice. From that perspective, the more educated people, especially, rather admire Israel, in some ways. But that's not the majority.

**QUESTION:** There is a competition in the Islamic world, and also in the world of ideas and religion. A dynamically growing Turkish economy will come into contact with Saudi pressure on the religious community, with the spread of [Wahhabism](#) throughout the Islamic world. The Saudis have spent billions of dollars to develop that kind of consciousness.

How would Turkey, in its dynamic economy, confront the Saudis' quest for influence throughout the Islamic world and their radical Islamic perspective?

**HUGH POPE:** Saudi Arabia is spending money on spreading Wahhabism, but it's not falling on fertile ground. The growth of Islamic fundamentalism is a different discussion. But there is a countervailing force of Turkish commercial power. Mavi jeans, one of the premier jeans manufacturers of Turkey, now has forty outlets in Saudi Arabia. Mavi jeans are very skintight. It's a different model, but it's certainly not the only Turkish product that is spreading all over the Middle Eastern geography. Turkish cars, Turkish-made fridges and air conditioners are all some of the fastest-growing products on sale in the Middle East.

Turkey's reputation as being a colonial oppressor is dissolving, mainly as a political result of the reconciliation with Syria in 1999. The Kurdish rebel leader used to live in Damascus. America allowed Turkey to capture him. Since then, Syria has turned to Turkey in an extraordinary manner, as if Turkey can somehow protect Syria from Israel and America, which, of course, it can't. There is a honeymoon between Turkey and Syria now.

That is very important for the Arab world. Syria always used to stand up in Arab League meetings and list all the black things about Turkey that they could find, and refused to allow any normal relationship between Arab states and Turkey.

Syria has changed. Turkey has changed. The last two foreign ministers of Turkey have both spoken fluent Arabic. They are no longer perceived by the Arab states as being infidels. When an Arab would ask a Turk, "What do you think of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk?" that was a coded question for, "Are you secular or Muslim?" If you said you liked Ataturk, you were viewed as an infidel, and if you said you didn't like him, it would be assumed that you were a fellow Muslim against the West. Turkey was something in between. They would be uncomfortable with this question.

The Arab view of Turkey has changed, as a result of the Syrians, the commercial situation, and a more pro-Muslim sense of the government in Turkey. They're not fundamentalists, they're not Islamists, but they are not secularists either. We call them moderate Muslims because we don't know what else to call them.

There is another factor. The Arab world is lost. Since Wahhabism came up, since Iraq, they don't know where to turn. Because Europe is taking Turkey seriously, they think "Oh, the Turks must have discovered something."

Al Jazeera and other Arab TV stations now have very good correspondents in Turkey, who are generally former students in Turkish universities, speak fluent Turkish, and can explain Turkey in Arab terms on TV.

So whereas in the old days there was a complete ignorance of each other, they now know each other. Turkey is able to influence Arab countries. Perhaps the most vivid example of that is Palestine. In Nablus one day, I was walking down the street, in the old bazaar, before it was destroyed. The Palestinians will blame the Turks for everything: "if it wasn't for the Turks, then this wouldn't have happened." I came

across a shop that was decked out in Turkish flags. You never saw this in the Arab world before. I went in and asked, "What do you like about Turkey?" He said, "This is to show that I've got good jeans here."

**QUESTION:** Would you comment about Islamic fundamentalism? Some would argue that, from an American vantage point, it's the most pressing issue of the next 20 years—not so much what is happening today, but for the, arguably, 10, 15, 20 percent chance that half-a-million people are killed with some kind of weapon of mass destruction.

Do the Turks care about Islamic fundamentalism, in the way the West perceives it? One of the big questions in the United States is, why is there no moderate Islamist trying to influence the Islamic world over the next fifty years? The Turks would be someone to do that. Yet we see very little leadership in that area.

**HUGH POPE:** The current Turkish government fills that slot. They would like to be seen as a government that has a proper, normal relationship with the West - observant, pious Muslims. [Tayyip Erdogan](#) of Turkey is an extremely arrogant and self-important man, and he believes that his party is an example to the developing world of how wonderful a political party can be. He sincerely believes that he is a world leader. He is trying to project moderate Islam. I'm not sure he would call himself a moderate Muslim. But that is what it amounts to.

We tend to forget that Islamic fundamentalism is very often a political response, not a religious response. It is a direct response to policies, things that happen to people. They don't know where else to turn. It's a reaction, as much as an ideology that is imposed on people. The place where I encountered the most virulent Islamic feelings was among the Uighur Turks of China. The reason is that they were totally oppressed, and they felt desperate. Many of their people had been killed or tortured. The only way they could react was by attaching themselves to an Islamic identity. You could go into many places in the Middle East and extend that analogy.

But don't forget the politics of religion.

**JOANNE MYERS:** I thank you very much for opening the window a little wider on the Turkic world.

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