

Based on
“Think Tank with Ben Wattenberg”
<http://www.pbs.org/thinktank/transcript976.html#TOP>

**Transformation of Turkey: From Islamic Empire to Modern State
A Readers Theatre Lesson**

H-SS Content Standards:

10.10 Students analyze instances of nation-building in the contemporary world in at least two of the following regions or countries: the Middle East...

10.10.1 Understand the challenges in the regions, including their geopolitical, cultural, military, and economic significance and the international relationships in which they are involved.

10.10.2 Describe the recent history of the regions, including political divisions and systems, key leaders, religious issues, natural features, resources, and population patterns.

10.10.3 Discuss the important trends in the regions today and whether they appear to serve the cause of individual freedom and democracy.

Procedure:

Hook

In triads students discuss the following question and record their ideas for sharing out to the who class.

Can an Islamic nation be modern, democratic, based on secular law, and pro-Western and still be Muslim?

Yes Reasons to Think So	No Reasons to Thinks So
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Step 2 – Readers Theatre

Set up the front of the room as a TV studio with a world map behind the set. Place seating for the Narrator and Ben Wattenberg on one side and Aliriza and Kinzer on the other. Use stools or tables and chairs. Name placards and simulated table microphones will make the setting more realistic.

Assign the following character roles to five groups of students and have them read over the section of the script that is assigned to their group.

Narrator

Ben Wattenberg – Host PBS “Think Tank” show

Buelnt Aliriza – Senior Associate Center for Strategic & International Studies

Stephen Kinzer – Author of Crescent & Star: Turkey Between Two Worlds

(Character Group One reads)

Narrator:

Welcome to today's program. Our topic is the Transformation of Turkey from a Muslim run country to a modern secular (not bound by religious rules) state. Our host today is Ben Wattenberg.

Ben Wattenberg:

Hello, I'm Ben Wattenberg of Think Tank. Today we consider

"Can an Islamic nation be modern, democratic, secular, pro-Western--and still be Islamic?"

This is a question that may be a key to the current explosive situation of terrorism.

There is a pivotal but troubled country that might fit the bill in answering our topic question. Turkey--a nation largely created by a legendary, charismatic leader, Ataturk. It is a country that bridges East and West, North and South, Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. How is the Turkish experiment working out? Is it a model for other parts of the Muslim world?

To find out Think Tank is joined by Bulent Aliriza, senior associate at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, and director of its Turkey Project.

And Stephen Kinzer, New York Times reporter and author of the new book Crescent and Star: Turkey Between Two Worlds.

Narrator:

To put the question in context, let's first take a brief look at Turkish history.

Ben Wattenberg:

At the turn of the 19th Century, the decaying Ottoman Empire was called 'the sick man of Europe'. During the First World War, the Ottomans (who sided with the Germans and Austro-Hungarians) were defeated at every turn, with one exception. In 1915, a Turkish colonel named Mustafa Kemal won a big victory at Gallipoli against the British.

After the war, Kemal seized power, leading an insurgent group of so-called "young Turks" in a successful revolution that established a new and secular Turkey. He took the name of Atatürk, "father of the Turks."

Atatürk believed that a principle source of Turkey's backwardness was religion. He set out to secularize the 99 percent Muslim country. He eliminated the theocratic power of the Islamic caliphate (political leader considered to be a successor to Muhammad) and abolished the use of Arabic script, the language of the Koran. He extended full rights to women, including voting rights, in a society that he said would be democratic.

But by the mid-1990s modern Turkey faced challenges from within. The 1995 parliamentary elections brought to power an Islamist party, which promised reforms to allow Islam greater influence in public life. The Turkish elites, especially in the military, denounced the reforms and forced a rollback.

Today, Turkey is a strong economic and military power in Asia Minor. Some observers see Turkey as a success story in the Muslim world that will be a key ally for America and the West in the tense times ahead. Others look at Turkey and see trouble.

Narrator:

Now, let us see what the guests on today's show think is happening in Turkey today.

Ben Wattenberg:

Stephen, you have written a very fascinating book called Crescent and Star: Turkey Between Two Worlds. It's full of facts. It's full of opinion. It reads like a novel--which is a compliment--with only one difference. I couldn't figure out who's the hero and who's the villain.

Stephen Kinzer:

Turkey's a country full of contradictions and if you came away with that view from my book, I think I succeeded. I would like to stand before you and say Turkey has completed its march toward democracy and is now completely ready to be a magnet that pulls Islamic countries away from fundamentalism and says to them, "Be like us. Adopt our secular model and you can have all the successes and prosperity that we have had." Unfortunately, Turkey, in order to change the world in this way, needs to change itself. And that's why Turkey's facing a double challenge.

Ben Wattenberg:

So here's this novel with a riddle at the end of it. How does it turn out in your judgment? Suppose we were sitting here twenty-five years from now, what's the end of Stephen's non-fiction novel?

Bulent Aliriza:

Well, as a historian I know that this story doesn't have an end. It's an ongoing process of organization that began in 1923, but actually predates the creation of the Turkish Republic.

The Islamic world is far from looking for guidance from Turkey. The experience of each Islamic state, the extent to which it has modernized itself, and the extent to which it has achieved a degree of synthesis with the dominant Western culture is different. Beyond that, Turkey itself is grappling with many, many problems. And having turned its back on the Islamic world in 1923 under the leadership of Atatürk, it is far from the perfect model.

Break

As a class, summarize the big ideas from the speakers. Open the discussion of why the future of Turkey is critical to today's world.

Students who were at the front of the room take their seats and Group Two comes forward.

(Character Group Two reads)

Ben Wattenberg:

How is Turkey doing economically today?

Bulent Aliriza:

Very badly. And that's the other part of it that doesn't quite fit. The Turkish economic situation is bad because of the mismanagement of the country by successive Turkish governments that have spent way beyond their means. Turkey has failed to complete the integration into the free-market economy.

Ben Wattenberg:

What is the per capita gross national product, roughly speaking?

Bulent Aliriza:

Around \$6,000 according to the US Department of State.

Ben Wattenberg:

Which is much lower than the Western countries but substantially higher than your poorer countries of that area, except for the oil countries.

Bulent Aliriza:

Exactly, and the fact is that's actually been going down in the past years because of the international economic collapse.

Narrator:

If Turkey's role is not as an economic leader in the Middle East, does it have another leadership role to play?

Stephen Kinzer:

I would argue that despite all the economic problems, Turkey does have a big role to play right now. And I think it's about to step onto the world stage in a way that it never has before. It's certainly true that "Islamic world" is a kind of a misleading concept because that world is so diverse. But Turkey has long ties in Central Asia. The Turks just came to today's Turkey peninsula from Central Asia only about a thousand years ago. Their ethnic ties there are very strong.

As recently as the 1920s and 1930s, the Afghan king was corresponding with Atatürk and telling him, “We’ve seen the idea that you have for building a modern secular democracy after overthrowing European imperialists. We want to imitate that.”

Narrator:

Does this mean that Turkey’s secular model will be the democratic model in the Middle East?

Ben Wattenberg:

Do Islam and democracy even go together? Algeria, an Arab Muslim country in North Africa, had free elections a few years back. And the fundamentalists won on a platform that they would not have any more elections.

Stephen Kinzer:

This is not going to happen in Turkey, though. The fundamentalist vote in Turkey is 10 percent at the most. There is a general agreement in Turkey, for all of its problems and for all the debate that’s going on in Turkey, that the secular idea is the way to go.

Bulent Aliriza:

Turkey is a Western country in a sense that it is a member of the premiere Western security system, which is NATO. It was admitted in 1952. At the same time it is an Islamic country, because the majority of its people, as you said at the outset, are Muslims. There have been constant strains between the two roles that Turkey has been obliged to play throughout this period.

To expect Turkey to play both roles, to appeal to both sides is asking quite a lot.

Break

As a class, summarize the big ideas from the speakers. Discuss these key ideas and present other questions and issues from the class.

Students who were at the front of the room take their seats and Group Three comes forward.

(Character Group Three reads)

Ben Wattenberg:

Tell me again the two roles.

Bulent Aliriza:

Well, it is the one Islamic country inside NATO, and at the same time, because the majority of its people are Muslims, it is an Islamic state. Not in the sense that it governs

itself according to the Shari'ah or Muslim law, but in the sense that the majority of its citizens are Muslims.

Now, Turkey consciously turned its back on the Islamic world in 1923, when Atatürk moved away from the caliphate, which was religious leadership, and from the Shari'ah which is religious law. Atatürk basically said there's one civilization, Western civilization, and Turks have to join it.

Narrator:

How does this relate to Turkey's roles in the Middle East?

Bulent Aliriza:

From 1923, right up to the moment, Turkey felt obliged to turn towards the Islamic world of the Middle East in order to justify its strategic importance to NATO. Some western leaders believed that Turkey's ability to play a role outside its nation would actually enhance the West's strategic position in the area. Other European leaders, and there were many skeptical members of NATO, did not want Turkey to be included because it wasn't part of the Judeo-Christian civilization.

I agree that Turkey can indeed play that role within its immediate neighborhood but certainly not in the whole region.

Ben Wattenberg:

Stephen, we've begun our history lesson here. Let's start with Atatürk.

Stephen Kinzer:

Atatürk was really one of the most successful revolutionaries of the 20th century. He emerged at a time when other ideologies were coming out of the European cauldron-- Bolshevism, Fascism, Nazism--which all have disappeared from history's stage, leaving legacies of untold pain. The Atatürk revolution is still very much alive, and his audacious idea was that a Muslim country didn't need to be embraced by the traditions of Arab civilization, that there were plenty of different directions for an Islamic nation. And that one of them could lead it toward what he called "universal civilization," by which he meant the European post-Enlightenment idea. And that idea of what an Islamic society can be remains the goal of Turkey.

Ben Wattenberg:

Tell us something of the symbolic fights that Atatürk engendered that continue today. I had no idea of the head scarves, the fez, the western alphabet, that sort of thing. What is that all about?

Stephen Kinzer:

Atatürk decided that religion was what was holding Turkey back, and he wanted to break his society away from the clutches of religious power. However, as that ideology is interpreted today, in Turkey it's considered very suspicious when a woman wears a head scarf. A military officer who prays is likely to be cashiered from the Army. Expressions of religious devotion are considered very suspect. Even the imams in the mosques are supposed to read, in most cases, sermons that are prepared by a central religious directorate in Ankara.

This has led many Turks to turn to their state and ask, "Why can't we feel ourselves full members of the Turkish society and still practice a level of religious devotion as we would be able to practice in, for example, the United States?"

And the Turkish State is wrestling with this problem. How do you crush fundamentalism? Do you do it by stamping out every sign of religious belief? Or do you do it by trying to embrace peaceful religious believers, give them a place in your society and not make them choose between their role as citizens of Turkey and believers in the Islamic faith?

Ben Wattenberg:

Do you have the somewhat bizarre situation that the Islamists in Turkey--they are the ones who are pro-religious freedom--whereas in the rest of the Islamic world, they are the ones, in theory at least, who are against religious freedom and regard all "infidels" as infidels?

Break

As a class, summarize the big ideas from the speakers. Facilitate discussion of the ideas shared by the readers.

Students who were at the front of the room take their seats and Group Four comes forward.

(Character Group Four reads)

Bulent Aliriza:

One of the paradoxes that we need to look at is that Islamists and the military in Turkey are arguing that they support modern ideas. Islamists support the liberal idea of the human right of religious expression. The Islamists emerged as the first party based on that idea after the 1995 elections, and then headed the coalition that came into power in 1996. However, they were basically pushed out of power by the military. And the military effectively pushed them out by making the point successfully, through the media and through the debate that this coalition was a threat to freedom.

Narrator:

You mean, they didn't want anything too pro-fundamentalist.

Bulent Aliriza:

Exactly. Now, fundamentalism may be in the eye of the beholder, like terrorism. But the problem within Turkey, as well as within the wider Islamic world, is how do you divide personal devotion, within Islam, and political Islam.

Narrator:

With all the violence in the last few years, is it surprising that moderate political leaders are afraid to compromise?

Ben Wattenberg:

Many in the West, including our last two presidents, have strongly stated that Islam is a peaceful religion and that the Islamist terrorists are aberrational... "the evil ones."

Narrator:

What does history show?

Bulent Aliriza:

Well, if you look at the history of Ottoman rule in the Balkans, they did not proselytize to the point of destroying the various Christian churches. These Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Jews, and protestant believers actually played a role in defining the nation-states that emerged out of the carcass of the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman system rested on a recognition of a certain amount of religious freedom. It was supported through taxation of the non-Muslims in the Ottoman system. This taxation system reinforced the existence, survival, and, to a great extent, the prosperity of the various Christian peoples that actually lived in the Ottoman Empire.

Ben Wattenberg:

So Atatürk was able to accommodate Islam, provided it was not the basis of statehood.

Stephen Kinzer:

Ataturk's idea was that individuals could be free to guide their own personal lives and private morality by religious principles. But religious principles would have nothing to do with guiding the state.

Bulent Aliriza:

No, I think he went further than that, frankly. He was not personally religious himself and if he could he would have eradicated the kind of open devotion to Islam within Turkey's borders.

Narrator:

You mean, not tolerated, or not kept subservient, but just wiped it off the face of the earth?

Bulent Aliriza:

As he defined Turkey, the modern Turkey, was different from Arabs, different from the other Muslim peoples. He took important steps that would take Turkey away from the kind of state where Islam was such an integral part of life, as it had been in the Ottoman Empire. For example, the Koran was translated into Turkish. Pilgrimage was very much discouraged and, quite frankly, it was not an easy time for someone to be personally devout in Turkey if they wanted to rise within the new Kemalist establishment.

Stephen Kinzer:

I think Atatürk finally realized something that is a historical truth that has been proven by every human civilization that has ever lived, which is that people seek answers to great questions in their existence. And to find the answers to those questions they look to religion. And no state that has ever posited itself against religion has ever emerged as victorious from that confrontation.

Ben Wattenberg:

The greatest modern example of that, of course, is the Soviet Union. After the Soviets were in power for seventy years, leaders were convinced that they had eliminated Russian-ness and the Orthodox Church. And as soon as the regime fell, people felt they were Russians again and part of the Orthodox Church again.

Break

As a class, summarize the big ideas from the speakers. Facilitate discussion of the ideas shared by the readers.

Students who were at the front of the room take their seats and Group Five comes forward.

(Character Group Five reads)

Narrator:

Let's think about Turkey and democracy for a minute. If someone tried to graph the line of democratic values in Turkey over the last seventy years or so since the Atatürk revolution, is that an ascendant line? Is it moving ever more toward Western democratic values?

Stephen Kinzer:

I think it is. Turkey is getting steadily more democratic each decade, but I think the real question is, where are we when the line ends? How close are we to the ideal of democracy? What many Turks are now saying is, "It's not enough for us to be making this step-by-step progress. What is wrong with us that we can't enjoy the freedoms that Estonians, Uruguayans, and Taiwanese enjoy? Why can we not as civilians determine the direction of our state?"

Ben Wattenberg:

If Turkey went ever further in that direction, would it be a model for places like Pakistan, for example, which is the other pivotal, or a pivotal, player?

Bulent Aliriza:

Well, the acid test is the Turkish application to the European Union, because there are certain criteria, Copenhagen criteria, that Turkey needs to fulfill in order to demonstrate to the Europeans that it is indeed a live candidate, an appropriate member for the European Union. It also has to fulfill criteria, which relate to its economic performance.

So before it becomes a model for these countries, it really needs to regularize and cement its relationship with the West and primarily the European Union, which the U.S. has been encouraging. And the signs there are not good.

Ben Wattenberg:

So all the nations of the European Union have to pass a certain democratic threshold. France barely made it, but that's the idea.

Stephen Kinzer:

The reason why it's so important that Turkey move ahead to meet these European criteria is not just because it would be great for Turkey to be in the European Union, or that it would be great for the European Union to have Turkey, both of which are true. The reason why Turkey needs to embrace these criteria is that they are simply a more specific version of what Atatürk wanted for Turkey. They are what most Turks want. So it's not something they're doing for the outside world. It's something that is responding to the desire of their own population.

Ben Wattenberg:

And if that happened, that could change the course of Islamic history, and as we now see it, global history.

Stephen Kinzer:

The good news is, yes. The bad news is that it's not going to happen anytime soon.

Bulent Aliriza:

If Turkey, the European Union and, the U.S., as the leader of the Western alliance, can actually strengthen the triangular relationship between them then we're talking about a real model. Then Turkey as a full member of, not just of NATO of the EU, would indeed be a model for the Islamic world.

It would also mean that the Judeo-Christian civilization, the Western community of nations, has indeed admitted a nation in spite of the fact that the majority of its population are Muslims and are personally devout, even if the country itself is not Islamic.

It would demonstrate to the entire Islamic world that there is indeed a synthesis possible between East and West.

Narrator:

On that hopeful note, we need to close this discussion. Thank you for your wise and learned comments Mr. Wallenberg, Mr. Kinzer and Dr. Aliriza. We will be watching the news closely to see if your predictions become reality. Signing off from PBS Television Network...



Assessment:

As a class, debrief the ideas presented by the characters in the Readers Theatre and record them on the board. As an assessment, students write a three-paragraph position response to the following question, using what they learned from the Readers Theatre.

Turkey is the key U.S. ally in building peace between the Muslim world and the Judeo-Christian West in the 21st century.

Enrichment:

Show segments of the video Mustafa Kemal Atatürk at Google Video <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=6199483909852762253&ei=B9SS4fiK4v2qwOQk4Rw&q=Ataturk&hl=en&view=3&client=firefox-a#> (beginning at 62.30. Evaluate Atatürk's actions according to democratic criteria.