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**Institute of Middle East Research. Turkey: MERI Report. Middle East Research Institute Routledge Revivals. New York: Routledge, 2015.**

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**Institute of Middle East Research. *Turkey: MERI Report. Middle East Research Institute Routledge Revivals. New York: Routledge, 2015.***

The Routledge MERI report was originally published in 1985, as part of the Middle East Research Institute (MERI) Reports on the Middle East. These reports quickly established themselves as authoritative resources, containing up-to-date information on the state of affairs in the region. Whether Routledge's decision to reprint this particular book was beneficial is the main point of the following discussion.

*Turkey: MERI Report* (2015) provides a vital analysis of the political and economic issues facing Turkey at the beginning of the 1980s. Using statistical data and other relevant materials, the book attempts to explain why certain political, economic, and social events have taken place in Turkey's history. The period covered in this text, from the 1980 coup d'état through the establishment of the civilian regime under Turgut Özal in 1989, was a crucial one for and in Turkey. This period was not only affected by the political and economic uncertainties that preceded it, but the period itself also created further uncertainty, fear, and suspicion. In the text, the period of Özal's regime, which followed the coup, is somewhat over-simplistically described as a period of stability and economic liberalism and is said to have strengthened new identities (such as the Kurdish one) in Turkey.

Originally printed in 1985, the text contains a number of outdated terms (such as "USSR," for one), references to geographical borders that are no longer relevant, and some descriptions, quantities, and rates that are no longer accurate. For instance, in the years just prior to the book's printing, the Turkish population, according to the Turkish Statistical Institute, or TÜİK, "was about 46,312,000, and the number of inhabitants per square kilometer was 59 in 1982" (p. 4). However, by 2010, these numbers were already outdated. In 2010, the Turkish population was 73,722,988, and the number of persons per square kilometer was 96; by the end of 2014, the population was up to 77,695,904. Many other examples of statistics that have dramatically changed also appear in the book. For example, 55.8% of the population lived in rural areas in 1982 (p. 5), but in 2014, only 8.2% lived there. Despite containing such old data, the text correctly notes Istanbul as having historically been the most populated province in Turkey (with a 1980 population of 4,871,000 and a 2014 population of 14,377,018—though unofficial numbers list the current population as being between 18 and 20 million. Furthermore, just as in the 1980s, Istanbul remains the strongest magnet for migrants. The text also correctly notes that Turkey's population remains the youngest in relation to other countries in the EU, just as it was in the 1980s. This fact has much significance within the discussions on Turkey's candidacy for EU membership even in recent times. Some other data, while outdated, show improvement in conditions in Turkey: At the beginning of the 1980s, 65% of the total population in Turkey was literate, while today 92% is literate, and while Turkey had 1.6 million tourists visiting in 1983 (p. 110), tourism hit a record-high in 2014, when approximately 37 million tourists visited the country.

Not only are the statistics cited in the text often outdated or irrelevant, the descriptions of politics and religion are likewise irrelevant in many cases. For example, on page 6, the efforts of the founder of the Turkish republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, to deemphasize Islamic traditions are described as "quite successful." It was Atatürk who inserted secular principles into the Turkish constitution and who represented the development of Turkey as a nation favoring secular republican principles. However, in 1985, when describing Atatürk's attempts to maintain Turkey's secularism as "successful," the authors could not have predicted the 2001 rise of the socially conservative Justice and Development Party (called the AK Parti or "AKP" in Turkish), which has been described as a coalition of Islamists, conservatives, and nationalists and which brought Islamic traditions back into Turkey's discourse. In addition to the outdated assessment of Atatürk's legacy, now appearing

somewhat less enduring than it did 30 years ago, some content on foreign policy is also old. Under “foreign relations,” the authors note that “since WWII, Turkey has aligned itself rather closely with the Western bloc . . . Turkey, as part of NATO, has attempted to play the part of a good loyal ally” (p. 8). However, as Turkey’s NATO membership has recently been criticized by various opinion-makers who assert that Ankara is not doing its share in fighting the militant extremist group Islamic State (IS) and thus should be thrown out of NATO, it is both interesting and important to learn that Turkey was once considered a “loyal [NATO] ally.” The shift in perspective between the time of the book’s original publication in 1985 and its re-printing in 2015 points to the specific historical-political transition Turkey has been undergoing during the intervening thirty years.

Despite the book’s less than contemporary content, the work successfully refutes a few assumptions regarding Turkey and sharpens some lost perspectives on the country—though the reader must draw these conclusions himself, as the authors, having published the text in 1985, could not have predicted the need to draw such conclusions explicitly. These assumptions primarily involve the mistaken notions (1) that Turkey’s affiliation with Islamic states weakens or precludes Turkey’s desire to foster authentic affiliations with Western states and (2) that Turkey’s affiliation with the East—and with Islamic entities in particular—is a recent phenomenon. The rise of the AK Party in the first decade of the twenty first century has led many contemporary scholars to point out the “new, dangerous” Turkish political tendency to favor the East and other Islamic countries (*i.e.*, over the West and other secular or non-Islamic states). In other words, Turkey is currently seen as a country that has lost its legitimacy by becoming less and less Western. To Western eyes, this assumption appears to be substantiated by Turkey’s having taken important steps over the last few years to develop and diversify its relations with the Arab world, both on a bilateral and multilateral basis. And while, within this framework, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs established consultation mechanisms with a number of Arab countries, the inclination to create a true “balance” between West and East has not, to the satisfaction of Western observers, been sufficiently evident. However, according to the authors, the ostensible “abandonment” of

Turkey’s westward orientation derives not from an alignment with Eastern states over Western ones but from Turkey’s aspiration to pursue more independent policies that serve its economic and political interests in the region, an aspiration that Turkey maintains to this day. Indeed, as evidence that Turkey’s ties with Eastern states are not “new” (or necessarily inherently “dangerous”) the authors point out that Turkey has historically attempted to balance its ties to both East and West. The text provides as an example, on the one hand, Turkey’s courting of Arab countries in the 1960s in connection with the “Cyprus crisis”—involving the Turkish invasion of the island in 1974 and its subsequent occupation of the island’s northern region, the self-declared Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus—and, on the other hand, the approaches of former Prime Minister Özal (1983-1989), who later served as president (1989-1993), in which ties with Islamic states were considered complementary to relationships with Europe. In this way, the text reminds the reader that Turkey has long struggled with balancing its secular political orientation (*i.e.*, its “Western character”) with its religious traditions. The founding of the AK Party government—although it may represent a clear up-tick in this struggle—did not initiate it. As early as 1984, the Minister of Education attempted to appease a particular Islamic constituency’s demand for increased adherence to more conservative practices by instating a decree requiring more modest dress for girls in the annual gymnastic performance memorializing Atatürk’s start of the struggle for Independence. This decree created some opposition and serves as an example in the text of the ongoing discourse regarding Turkey’s commitment to its secular ideals (which were enshrined in the 1983 constitution) and its Islamic traditions

In addition to providing some historical lens through which to view Turkey's past political history, the book contributes to the contemporary discussions on Turkey's political mechanisms and structures by revealing similarities between the past and the present. The intentions of the current Turkish president and former Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to create a stronger presidential system very much reflect the description (p. 21) in the text of the intentions of earlier Turkish leadership to build a civilian regime with the power to implement constitutional amendments and move Turkey toward global involvement and membership in the European Union. Another point made in the text that sheds light on contemporary Turkey is the relationship between the military and the state. As this book was written right after the 1980 coup d'état, the delicate relationship between both institutions is discussed widely. The authors themselves claim that disengagement of the armed forces from the political scene "is a theme that runs deep through modern Turkish history" (p. 57). During modern AK Party rule, despite the party's conservative stance, the relationship between state and military continues to be navigated, and the Turkish army continues to undergo a process of "civilianization." Finally, the contemporary discussion of Turkish immigrants abroad—specifically, in Germany, where they are referred to as *gastarbeiter*, or "foreign guests" and where there is much controversy surrounding the purportedly "recent" and, to many Germans, unwelcome influx of Turkish migrants—appears in the book as a reminder that Turkish migration is not a recent phenomenon. In 1982, the estimated number of Turks working abroad varied from between 979,000 and 1,064,000. More than half worked in Germany, where the *Wirtschaftswunder*—the rapid reconstruction of and development of the German and Austrian economies—took place in the 1960s and 1970s.

Overall, this book gives an accurate and objective analysis of Turkey. All the various parts of the work, (including the data provided and the historical-political background presented) are well connected, permitting the reader to reach sound conclusions based on the information given. Yet, the text is nonetheless quite apparently anachronistic. Having been published thirty years ago, the text must be read as a bit of a "history lesson," as opposed to a true discussion of contemporary Turkey. Furthermore, it is hard to follow some data, as the specific year is not always mentioned, making it difficult for the reader to locate the general period to which the data refers. Sometimes, the chronological order is disturbed, as years go backwards, and events and information become repetitive (e.g., p. 65). Finally, the text contains some other minor shortcomings. For instance, a thorn in this reader's side is a lack of the use of terms in Turkish, such as party names and the names of Turkish organizations/institutions, which are sometimes written using their English abbreviations. (The Higher Education Council is abbreviated YOC though the original term in Turkish is abbreviated YÖK. Even the names of politicians are not written in Turkish.)

On the whole, despite its shortcomings, the reprinting of this text provides a relevant resource for current readers. It both raises and helps to answer the central question, namely, have things changed in Turkey? Has Turkey maintained its old conflicts or has it, at least in some spheres, succeeded in resolving its conflicts? This book serves both as a historical piece describing Turkey as it was in the 1980s and as mandatory reading for comprehending contemporary Turkey. This book should be compulsory reading for anyone who researches Turkey, regardless of the time period. This book will be highly useful for any reader who seeks specific data regarding late twentieth century Turkish history but also those who would like to better understand Turkey's position in global relations in current times.