

Soner Çağaptay. *The Rise of Turkey: The Twenty-First Century's First Muslim Power.* Dulles: Potomac Books, 2014. xvi + 168 pp. \$25.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-61234-650-2.



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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air University)

Turkey's growing political and economic influence inside and outside its Middle Eastern neighborhood has spawned a cottage industry in books aimed at explaining Turkey, in all its contradictions and complexities, to a popular audience. With *The Rise of Turkey*, Soner Çağaptay enters this crowded field with a volume that distinguishes itself from similar offerings in two respects. First, Çağaptay goes beyond documenting Turkey's rise and the accompanying international implications to offer a series of specific policy prescriptions for Turkey and its relationship with the West. These steps, he argues, will ensure Turkey's continued domestic and international stability. Second, Çağaptay is an influential voice in Turkish-American relations whose analysis seems likely to find an audience on both sides of the Atlantic. Çağaptay is both a columnist for the Turkish daily *Hürriyet*'s English version as well as a fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. In the latter capacity, Çağaptay appears to have gained a following in Washington, if glowing

book jacket blurbs from John McCain, Joe Lieberman, and Dennis Ross are anything to go on.

The Rise of Turkey is a slim and accessible volume, only 152 pages without notes. The book is written in an appealing, clear style, and the author peppers each chapter with cocktail party-ready anecdotes and statistics. Çağaptay's academic training is as a historian but he wisely resists the urge to begin *The Rise of Turkey* by burying the general reader in an avalanche of background information on Turkey's past and present. Instead, he inserts the necessary context in each of his thematically organized chapters. Thus, for example, chapter 6 ("The Other Turkey") goes into the history of immigration to the late Ottoman Empire and its relationship to the emergence of a secular elite, while a concise overview of the thorny relationship between the Turkish military and democracy can be found in chapter 3 ("The Military Gets on Board"). Structurally, *The Rise of Turkey* has elements of a travelogue, as Çağaptay takes the reader in most chapters to a different Turkish city representing that chapter's theme,

ranging from Anatolian Tigers like Kayseri and Gaziantep, to staunchly secular İzmir and heavily Kurdish Diyarbakır.

The central argument unifying each chapter is that Turkey is a Muslim power with a “Western overlay.” That is to say, Turkish nationalism is inextricably intertwined with Islam and as a result its religious identity cannot be jettisoned in favor of a wholly European orientation, the traditional aspiration of the country’s secular elite. Nevertheless, Çağaptay does not favor a turn away from the West because it is precisely Turkey’s close ties with the West that give it such influence as a broker in the Middle East. And, not insignificantly for Çağaptay, good relations between Turkey and the West, particularly progress in Turkey’s interminable accession process to the EU, serve to encourage Turkey’s liberalization. Of particular concern for Çağaptay is the enshrinement of greater protection for religious and ethnic minorities—Kurds, Alevis, Christians, and Jews—in Turkey’s constitutional system. He argues this development is necessary for the country’s domestic stability and continued prosperity but might require a nudge from Western allies. Çağaptay argues that the ruling AKP government has recognized Turkey’s unique position vis-à-vis the Muslim world and the West and has fostered stronger ties with Washington in particular as of late. This recent development—what Çağaptay calls the “double pivot”—has gone unnoticed by many Turkey watchers, fixated as they have been on Turkey’s initial pivot away from the West and Europe toward its Middle Eastern neighborhood in the early years of AKP rule (the much-ballyhooed policy of “neo-Ottomanism”).

Çağaptay’s contention that Turkey is and will remain a Muslim power should be familiar to readers of his first book, the similarly slim and ambitious *Islam, Secularism, and Nationalism in Modern Turkey* (2006). In that work, as in *The Rise of Turkey*, he argues that the Ottoman Muslim *millet* (confessional community abiding by its

own laws) was the only viable source of group identity for an independent Turkey at a time when “Turk” was a mildly pejorative term generally only applied to Anatolian peasants. Thus, even in the secular republic founded by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, Muslim identity, if not Muslim religious practice, constituted the core of Turkey’s nascent national identity. This relationship between Islam and Turkishness, Çağaptay contends, led to second-class status for religious minorities who could never truly be Turks according to this definition. Even more vexing was the contradiction posed by the country’s Kurdish population. Kurds were Muslims living in Turkey, and therefore officially Turks, by the post-independence definition of Turks as former members of the Muslim *millet* resident within the republic’s borders. Kurdish rejection of this national label thus called the entire Turkish national project into question. The expression of a separate Kurdish identity, let alone devolution of powers to the Kurdish regions of the country or Kurdish national independence, was repressed accordingly. With his argument that Turkey is and will remain a fundamentally Muslim country which is nevertheless obligated to preserve the rights of non-Muslims, Alevis, and Kurds, Çağaptay splits the difference between the maximalist secularist Kemalist and Islamist AKP camps. He furthermore aligns himself with a generation of Turkish scholars who came of age intellectually in the 1990s, when the rise of political Islamism in Turkish politics overthrew old Kemalist certainties about Turkey’s inevitable progression toward ever-greater secularization and modernization. As such, Çağaptay identifies neither with the AKP nor its secular critics, arguing instead that secularists must recognize the legitimacy of the AKP’s Islamic roots as a source of policy while also cautioning the AKP against authoritarian overreach or further alienation of non-Muslim and non-Turkish minorities.

As is perhaps inevitable when writing a book on a country as dynamic as Turkey, many of Çağaptay’s proposals have been outpaced by

events subsequent to the volume's publication. The slowing of the Turkish economy, the potential weakening of the AKP's political stranglehold over the country after this year's elections, and Turkey's much more precarious international situation as it begins to intervene militarily in northern Iraq and Syria all have likely changed the calculus behind some of Çağaptay's recommendations. However, his core argument—that Turkey needs to maintain its Muslim identity while cultivating closer ties with the West and expanding minority rights domestically—remains unaffected. One area where recent developments have certainly affected Çağaptay's analysis is the split between the AKP and Cemaat, the religious movement inspired by Islamic preacher Fethullah Gülen. The relationship between the AKP and supporters of Gülen fractured as a result of the 2013 Gezi Park protests and subsequent corruption allegations against high-ranking AKP officials, including then-prime minister and current president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Çağaptay makes much of the economic and educational influence of Turkey even outside the former domains of the Ottoman Empire, as far afield as Africa and Central Asia. That influence is a function of ties fostered by hundreds of Gülen-affiliated schools around the globe and by the movement's highly entrepreneurial adherents. After the split between Gülen and the AKP, the Turkish government has gone as far as to request that African governments close Gülen schools in their countries, thereby potentially depriving itself of a source of soft power outside its traditional sphere of influence. Nevertheless, even if the global scope of Turkey's role as an emerging Muslim power is diminished as a consequence of the AKP-Gülen split, Çağaptay's analysis of the country's position in the Middle East and its relationship with the West remains keen.

Though *The Rise of Turkey* is a perceptive and engaging introduction to the country's past and future, it is not without its flaws. As an introductory text, it is particularly disappointing that either

Çağaptay or the publisher opted not to include a bibliography with suggestions for further reading. Even in so short a book, there are some issues with repetition of figures (e.g. the same statistics on Turkey's literacy rate pop up twice in close succession). At times, Çağaptay goes overboard enumerating figures which would have worked better if presented as a table. For example, the reader is subjected to several pages of tedious recitation of election results in socioeconomically distinct neighborhoods in Istanbul, Ankara, and Bursa. Lastly, and most substantially, the book's title and individual chapter titles do make some promises on which they do not deliver. Thus, the reader might expect *The Rise of Turkey* to delve more deeply into what has precipitated Turkey's rise. Çağaptay attributes it mostly to privatizing economic reforms in the 1980s but a more substantial exploration of the underpinnings of Turkey's rapid economic growth seems wanting. Similarly, the book's final chapter, entitled "Lessons for America," has few to offer, devoted as it is to the religious and citizenship reforms Çağaptay contends should be enshrined in an updated Turkish constitution.

With that said, Çağaptay's overall message to his audience is still clear: Turkey's rise as a Muslim power is an opportunity for the West rather than a threat, but it is one which will require America and Europe to more actively engage with Turkey rather than expect its lock-step agreement with regional political and economic policies, as might have been the case in the past. Nonspecialist readers of *The Rise of Turkey* will gain a greater understanding of an emerging power and the domestic pitfalls which might hamper its emergence as a stable economic and political force in the region.

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