The Power of Geography
Reading Guide for Chapter 6, Turkey

Turkey is once again the crossroads of east and west. It is led today by a President named ***Recep Tayyip Erdogan****, who is a* ***nationalist*** *– sometimes he is called a* ***neo-Ottoman****, one who wishes to restore to Turkey some of the greatness it experienced when it was the Ottoman Empire. He is also an* ***Islamist****, using religion to grow his domestic power base. This is important because since 1923 Turkey has been a country that separated religion from the state. Under its leader* ***Mustafa Kemal****, also known as* ***Ataturk****, it sought to both modernize and Westernize, imitating the path of the European powers. Now, under Erdogan, Turkey is changing its approach. It is also asserting itself as a regional power,*

"Modern Turkey seems to see the post-Cold War and post-9/11 world as a jungle full of competitors in which it is one of the lions." –Tim Marshall, p.158

Istanbul, Anatolia & the Sea of Marmara – the core of Turkey is the Sea of Marmara. Istanbul is defensible if attacked by water. The Bosporus & Dardanelles are two choke points to protect Istanbul.



Location of the Sea of Marmara within Turkey



Turkey borders eight countries.

An overview of Ottoman and Turkish history. Nomadic tribes, adopted Islam, Seljuk Empire formed in 1037, defeated the Byzantine Empire at the **Battle of Manzikert in 1071**, the rise of **Osman Ghazi** in 12th century and the birth of the Ottoman Empire, conquered **Constantinople in 1453**, conquests spread around the Mediterranean, into the Middle East, and into the Balkans of southern Europe. Attacked Vienna three times unsuccessfully, the last failed attempt in 1683.

The 20th century: Ottoman Empire was weak, known as the "Sick Man of Europe." It lost territories in the two Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913, then it joined with Germany and Austria-Hungary in World War I and lost to Britain, France, & the other allies. The sultanate was abolished, leading to the rise of **Mustafa Kemal (Ataturk)**, who slowly remade Turkey into a modern secular state, emphasizing their "Turkishness" over their ethnic divisions.

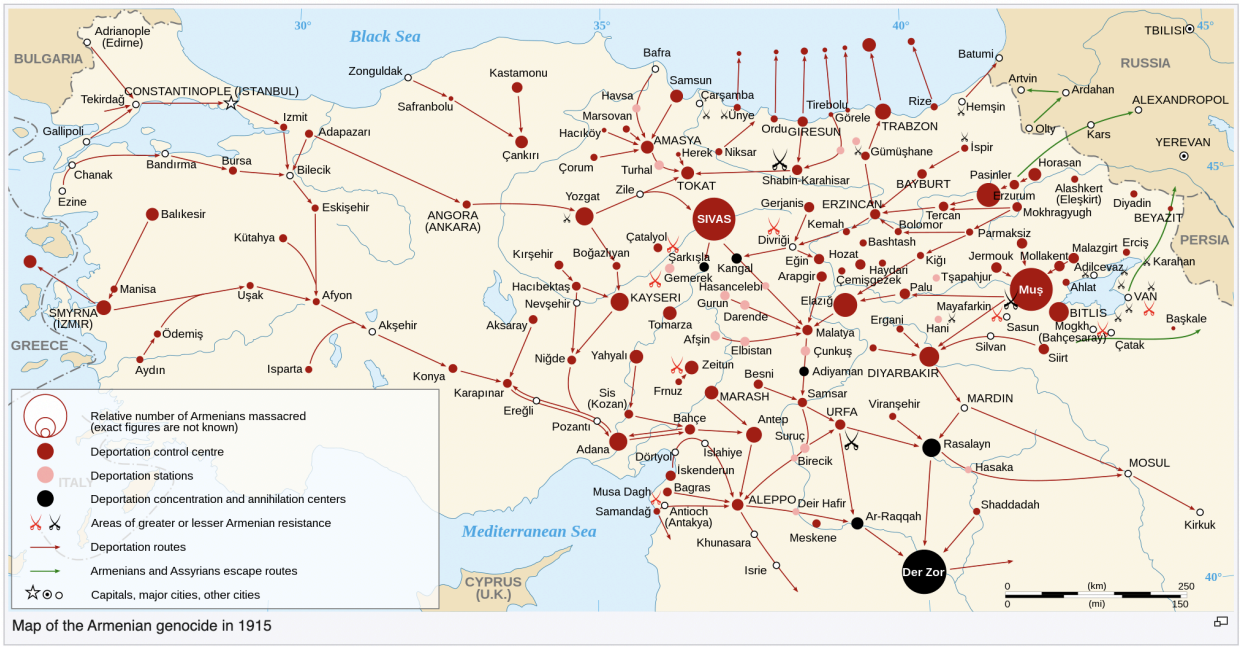


Mustafa Kemal Ataturk & Ataturk



A 2017 political banner featuring *Recep Tayyip Erdogan (R)*

The Armenian Genocide of 1915-1923 -- a million Armenians died at the hands of the Turks. Turkey continues to deny it was a genocide.



Map of the Armenian genocide in 1915

Turkey was now made up of only Anatolia and Marmaria – the area around the Sea of Marmara.

After World War II Turkey aligned with the West and joined NATO. Turkey was strategically important for NATO to fend off Soviet expansion.

The end of the Cold War ended the "bipolar world" (USA vs USSR) and in the past 30 years the world has become a multi-polar world, with many regional powers asserting their influence. Turkey was one of them.

The rise of **Recep Tayyip Erdogan**, a **nationalist** and **Islamist**, using religion to grow his domestic power base. He wants Turkey to be a stand-alone power playing all the sides.

How Erdogan uses religion, Sunni Islam, differently than Ataturk's approach to follow a secular path.

Neo-Ottomanism – Turkey's destiny to emerge as a global superpower as the West declines. **Erdogan** tread carefully to avoid conflicts in the years after 9/11, but since 2010 he has alienated many neighboring states. Israel, Saudi Arabia, Egypt all watch Turkey warily.

Erdogan has close ties to the **Muslim Brotherhood**, a "transnational Sunni Islamist movement that operates via a cell structure as it seeks to create a sharia-led global caliphate." Other Muslim states like Egypt and Saudi Arabia dislike and suppress the Brotherhood.

The Arab Spring was a wave of pro-democracy protests and uprisings that took place in the Middle East and North Africa beginning in 2010 and 2011, challenging some of the region's entrenched authoritarian regimes. The wave began when protests in Tunisia and Egypt toppled their regimes in quick succession, inspiring similar attempts in other Arab countries. The protest movement in many countries met violent crackdowns by their countries' security forces.



Protesters gather in Tahrir Square on February 1, 2011. | Peter Macdiarmid/Getty Image

An Arab Spring protest in Cairo's Tahrir Square



A Muslim Brotherhood rally in Turkey with a banner of Erdogan

In Syria a brutal civil war broke out that has continued in 2022 among repressive government, pro-democratic forces, ISIS, Kurdish military forces, and aided at various times by Turkish, Russian, American, Iraqi, Iranian support. It is a bloody mess.

Erdogan supported Islamist elements fighting **Bashar al-Assad's Syrian** government. Egypt opposes Islamists and, by extension, Turkey.

2016 a military coup attempt against Erdogan was crushed harshly by Erdogan.

Mavi Vatan – "the Blue Homeland" – "encompasses a world view in which Turkey will dominate the Black Sea, Aegean Sea, and the eastern Mediterranean. This idea alarms other neighboring states, especially Greece, and has made the region "one of the world's most complicated chessboards."





Turkey seems to be alienating everyone. They have no interest in allowing the Kurds, who number 15 million in 4 different states, to develop an independent state, as millions of Kurds live in southeast Anatolia.

Turkey as asserting its rights to control the waters of the Tigris and Euphrates – a "water war" remains ever present, as downriver states like Iraq and Syria depend on those rivers as well.

In 2020 Erdogan restored the Hagia Sophia to a mosque. Controversial Built in 537 by the Byzantines as a Christian Church, it became a mosque when the Ottomans conquered Constantinople, then Ataturk made it a museum in 1934. This is part of Erdogan's Islamist approach.



Turkey's place as a NATO ally is now a question. He has dismantled the foundations of Ataturk's secular democracy and imposed an authoritarian system with an Islamist tinge. It is less trusted and more isolated, and Turkey "lives in a tough neighborhood." It is militarizing as it refocuses away from the west and more toward the south and east.