

Crescent Wrenched

*Turkey is America's strongest ally in the Islamic world.
Can we save it from self-destructing?*

BY WHIT MASON

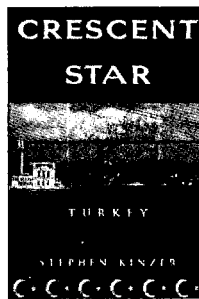
I WAS IN A CAB ON MY WAY TO DINNER in Istanbul recently when I heard the sound of cannon fire, the signal that the day's Ramadan fasting was over. Then came the call of the muezzins from minarets all over the city, and the sight of the Muslim faithful making their way to mosques. As usual, there were no angry protests against America, no loud chants of support for the Taliban, the kind you might see in other Islamic countries. Indeed, though opinion polls indicate that a majority of Turks oppose the U.S. air strikes in Afghanistan on humanitarian grounds, any American in Turkey these days is bombarded by condolences for September 11th and expressions of solidarity coming from Turks from all walks of life. My cab driver, for instance, told me that we (Turks and Americans) had to stand together against these Arab fanatics. Later, at a hip Thai restaurant where I was having dinner with an American diplomat—the place brimming with slickly dressed customers anxious to break the Ramadan fast—the young Turkish waiter took a moment to ask what we thought about the war in Afghanistan. Apparently reading our non-committal expressions to mean that our resolve needed stiffening, the young man leaned forward, looking each of us in the eye in turn. “It’s too bad some innocent people have to die,” this young Muslim pro-

nounced firmly, “but the war is absolutely necessary.” Turkey is once again showing itself to be America’s strongest, most reliable ally in the Islamic world. The Turkish government has offered to send 90 commandos to join the U.S.-led force in Afghanistan. The U.S. airbase at Incirlik, in the south of Turkey, is a vital logistics hub for operations in Afghanistan—and in Iraq, if the war turns in that direction. While other Muslim countries talk about driving Israel into the sea, Turkey conducts joint training exercises with Israeli forces. When Colin Powell visited Ankara in December, it was to coordinate with a trusted ally, not to solicit support from “the Muslim world.”

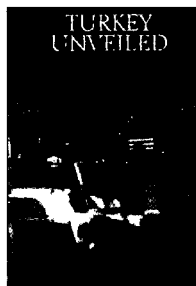
Modern Turkey has looked westward for over 80 years, ever since its founder, Kemal Ataturk, introduced the Latin script, bowler hats, ballroom dancing, and secular government. This tradition lives on. The big debate right now in Turkey is about how the country can make the changes required to join the European Union (Turkey became a candidate for membership two years ago). For decades, Turkey has been a member of NATO and a vital military ally. But the events of Sept. 11 underscore the increasing importance of Turkey as an economic and cultural ally as well. In addition to fighting terrorism directly, America must find ways of draining off some of the Islamic world’s anti-Western fury. This

will mean convincing Islamic citizens that they, too, can prosper in the modern, commercial, democratic world. In this effort, Turkey could be a beacon of hope.

But if it’s going to play that role, Turkey must first save itself. The economy, already in bad shape, went critical last



CRESCENT AND STAR:
Turkey Between Worlds
by Stephen Kinzer
Farrar Straus Giroux, \$25.00



TURKEY UNVEILED:
A History of Modern Turkey
by Hugh Pope and Nicole Pope
Overlook Press, \$16.00

WHIT MASON has reported from the Far East, Russia, the Balkans, and the Middle East and spent the past three years based in Istanbul as a fellow of the Institute of Current World Affairs.

February after Turkey's aged and prickly Prime Minister, Bulent Ecevit, had a public spat with the nation's independent-minded president, Abdul Necet Sezer. Overnight the Turkish lira lost 30% of its value and the stock market crashed. After briefly rising above \$3,000, Turks' per capita income is now back to about \$2,700. Though bread only costs about twenty cents a loaf, thousands now stand in lines for subsidized loaves. Inflation this year will be between 70 and 80 percent. With the economy hollowed out by corruption and the flight of hot money, a new \$10 billion loan from the IMF secured this summer only allows Turkey to pay the interest on its foreign debt. Anyone young and educated enough to imagine a different life is dreaming of emigrating. Older people are simply hopeless. Almost daily, Turkish papers warn of a "social meltdown."

This is not a momentary crisis caused by a worldwide recession. Rather, like Japan's 10-year stagnation, the problem is rooted in the country's structure. The majority of the nation's banks function as slush funds for their owners. Most elected officials are as corrupt as they are inept. The nation's military, though not corrupt, continues to control things behind the scenes, despite the EU's requirement that it remove itself from politics. About the only statistics that are rising are luxury car sales to the privileged class and torture of prisoners, up 50 percent over last year, according to human-rights groups. A preliminary intelligence finding by the CIA concludes that Turkey's prospects range from bleak to dangerously unstable. If this sounds pessimistic, you should hear how bleak Turks themselves are sounding.

The biggest disaster looming over the horizon concerns Cyprus. In 1974, Turkish troops invaded the Mediterranean island republic in response to a coup founded by the military dictatorship in Athens, carving out an ethnically pure "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus" on the northern third of the island. To this day, no nation other than Turkey recognizes the entity, and its Turkish residents live in poverty. Meanwhile, the ethnic Greeks who reside on the southern two-thirds of the island (where the internationally recognized government sits) are now so prosperous that Cyprus is set to join the E.U. as early as 2003. Ecevit, the Turkish prime minister, has threatened to annex the Turkish part of Cyprus if the Greek part joins the E.U. alone. That could put Greece and Turkey on a war footing. It would certainly ruin any chance Turkey has of eventually joining the E.U. itself. And that would send a very dangerous message to the rest of the Islamic world. (In December, the Turkish Cypriot leader, Rauf Denktash, met with his Greek counterpart for the first time in four years and the two committed themselves to further negotiations to unite

the island).

Preventing Turkey from imploding should be one of the top items on the U.S.'s Middle East agenda. For now, it is not. The Bush administration, understandably, has more immediate concerns, and anyway, it's always hardest to criticize a friend.

Crescent and Star: Turkey Between Two Worlds by New York Times correspondent Stephen Kinzer reflects this dilemma of the well-intentioned friend of Turkey who wants to get it to help itself without provoking further fits of self-destructive behavior. As a Turkish reviewer remarked, it's clear Kinzer has fallen in love with Turkey. Kinzer delights in the often ironic and sometimes delicious contrasts of Turkish life, so much so, in fact, that he intersperses the book's ten main chapters with colorful vignettes he calls "mezes", the Turkish term for the plates of appetizers served at fish restaurants along with alcohol. His vignettes—about smoking waterpipes, drinking Turkey's disorienting anis drink, raki, traveling in the footsteps of conquering and defeated emperors—are the most rewarding parts of *Crescent and Star*.

The main chapters, which deal with Turkey's defining political attributes, begin with a sketch of the Ataturk's life and thought, and with the cult of personality that has developed since his death in 1938. It was Ataturk who in the wake of the Ottoman defeat in World War I first rallied the defeated Turkish troops to expel foreign invaders from Anatolia, then forged from the Turkish rump of the empire a consolidated nation-state based on French centralism, Swiss law and an embrace, at least among the elite, of all things European. From the beginning, there was a conflict between Ataturk's authoritarian methods and his goal, which was above all to wrench Turks' minds out of what he regarded as the intellectual straitjacket of Islamic tradition and free them to show the kind of dynamic creativity that had enabled European civilization to dominate the world. His greatest wish was that Turkey would be accepted as a part of Europe, a vision that has been threatened by Turkey's intransigence over Cyprus.

Kinzer quotes Ataturk: "I am leaving no sermon, no dogma, nor am I leaving as my legacy any commandment that is frozen in time or cast in stone." Unfortunately, Ataturk's heirs ignored this plea and instead enshrined a simplified version of his ideas in a 6-point catechism that it is illegal to criticize. A self-appointed priesthood comprised of army officers (known as "the pashas") and senior civil servants has interpreted the scripture they attribute to Ataturk to justify oppressing any who challenge them, from Kurdish civil-rights campaigners and Christian minorities to Muslims who mix religion and politics and intellectuals who question the orthodoxy.

Kinzer has the right instincts about the nature of Turkey's problems. He notes, for instance, the parallels between the authoritarian political culture in Turkey and that of its ideological antithesis, Iran. The chapter "Ghosts" describes Turks' refusal to acknowledge the Armenian genocide in 1915, when Ottoman troops and irregulars ethnically cleansed eastern Anatolia of Armenians after repulsing a Russian invasion that Armenians had supported. "Calls for openness, candor and full disclosure fill Turkish commanders with fear," Kinzer writes. "'You can't get them to look at this a new way,' an American intelligence agent with long experience in Turkey once told me. 'Around the time that we were having sexual-harassment scandals in our army, I was sitting around drinking raki with a few of them. They were horrified that we were letting these women soldiers tell their stories in the press and that we were disgracing and punishing our generals ... When something goes wrong you can try to fix it, but you can't ever let outsiders know there was anything wrong.'" This inability to tolerate—much less profit by—criticism pervades not just the officer class but the entire society and results in a kind of national learning disability; lacking an effective feedback mechanism, Turkey perennially fails to learn from its mistakes.

Despite this important insight, "Ghosts" is, unfortunately, also replete with the sort of banal didacticism that mars much of the book. Regarding Turkey's years of terror at the hands of rightist and leftist gangs, for instance, Kinzer says merely: "It is still unclear how Turkey descended into such violent upheaval during the late 1970s."

By contrast, the definitive journalistic account of Turkey, *Turkey Unveiled* by Hugh and Nicole Pope, devotes 16 densely informative pages to the question, concluding that the combination of the Cyprus conflict and the economic impact of the 1973 Arab-Israeli war never gave Turkey much of a chance. The end of the decade was eerily reminiscent of the situation today: amid the first rumblings of revolution in Iran, Jimmy Carter decided to shore up this wobbling ally by softening his criticism, arranging for Turkey's debt to be rescheduled, and signing a new bilateral defense treaty. (A few months after these improved ties, the military staged a coup that kept it in power for three years and allows it to continue dominating Turkish politics today.) Though their book is historical, the Popes' style is so much more informative that they manage to say as much about the last couple of years in Turkey in a postscript to a new, updated edition as Kinzer says in his entire book. Little surprise that Kinzer's affectionate account is already being translated into Turkish while the Popes' harder-hitting book, first published in 1997, remains out of reach

to any but the English-speaking elite.

Kinzer correctly notes that if Turkey got its own house in order, it could show the entire Muslim world how to reconcile its Islamic culture and authoritarian heritage with real democracy. In actuality though, Turkey is isolated. Its only friend in the region is Israel. Devout Muslims see Turkey as both an apostate state and yet another example of the fact that might makes right and proof that the U.S., self-styled champion of freedom, will prop up any regime that supports its policies.

For their part, Turks remember that if the western powers had had their way in 1919, they would now be confined to a barren bit of central Anatolia with all the choicest parts of the country divided among their triumphant enemies. Not surprisingly, this history leaves them deeply skeptical of foreigners' advice on how to manage their country. American diplomats are very aware of this prickliness.

There is also the fear that if the generals relax their grip, Turkey will be engulfed by a religiously driven revolution like the one that consumed Iran in 1979. Indeed, if elections were held today, the biggest vote-getter would probably be the Islamist Justice and Development party. Yet Justice and Development is a far cry from the fundamentalist parties that have wracked other countries in the region. Its most "Islamist" political priority would be to lift the ban on women wearing the traditional Muslim headscarf in public service and universities. By all indications, the party is about as Islamic as the Christian Democrats of Europe are Christian.

The Clinton administration's approach to Turkey was to remain relatively quiet about its failings while appealing to its better angels. The cornerstone of Clinton's policy was its successful promotion of Turkey's candidacy to the E.U., which provided unprecedented incentives for Turkey to redress its perennial shortcomings.

Since the terrorist attacks on the U.S., the Bush administration has been even less critical than usual of Turkish failures in terms of human rights, freedom of expression, and corruption. Their reticence is understandable: If you were running the NSC, would you take the chance of screwing up a dozen other important U.S. goals for which Turkish support is helpful—from Iraq to Afghanistan—in order to pressure the Turkish General Staff to address issues that appear to be domestic or at most regional?

The problem is that seemingly local issues eat away at Turkey's social fabric and dramatically undermine its value as an ally. As Turkey's most loyal ally and the world's sole superpower, no country can do as much as the U.S. to persuade Turkey to confront the painful changes it needs to make. That's what friends are for. ●

Political Booknotes

Little League Insights

By Michael Crowley

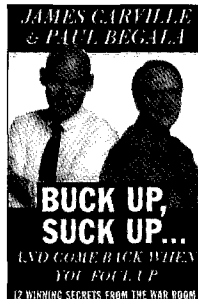
IN THEIR STRANGE NEW BOOK, veteran Democratic campaign strategists James Carville and Paul

Begala implore their readers to never stop taking risks. "Success breeds risk-aversion," they note, smiling brightly upon those "people who experiment and dare greatly—and sometimes fail greatly." Original members of the Clinton "War Room," Carville and Begala themselves know success well; the business of politics has brought them fame, wealth, and the enduring status that comes from having

whispered into a president's ear. Now that Bill Clinton is a private citizen and they are looking for new directions, perhaps they thought a zany self-help book would be just the sort of risky experiment they so admire. Unfortunately, they have failed—but not even greatly. What they have produced feels like little more than an excuse for the pair to sound off about politics, sports, movies, their lives—you name it. In other words, it's just the sort of book successful people produce when they've grown self-satisfied, complacent, and risk-averse.

Buck Up, Suck Up... is less a book of "secrets," which might excite political junkies and insiders, than one of some fairly elementary rules of thumb for politics and life. These are fleshed out by a sloppy Cajun gumbo of anecdotes, observations, and short portraits of such famous winners as Teddy Roosevelt, Muhammed Ali, and Bill Clinton. The prose sounds as if it had been dictated at a Ramada Inn lounge, and the jokes are terrible ("The War Room was designed for action. No, not that kind of action. Stop snickering.") The 12 secrets

the subtitle (including "Kiss Ass," "Kick Ass," and "Work Your Ass Off") amount to nothing more than basic principles like hard work and clear communication, with a special emphasis on playing rough and tough. "The bottom line," they write, "is that if you're faster, smarter and more aggressive than the other guy (or gal), you're going to win more often than not." Who knew?



BUCK UP, SUCK UP... AND
COME BACK WHEN YOU
FOUL UP

by James Carville and Paul Begala
Simon&Schuster, \$23.00

There are a handful of insights sprinkled through this book, however, especially on the specific turf of campaign strategy. For instance, Carville and Begala argue that campaigns must always be predisposed towards bold action, warning against what Jesse Jackson once called "the paralysis of analysis." During the 1992 Clinton campaign, they would fire off ideas at 7:30 a.m. meetings in the

War Room and vow to implement them "absent some compelling reason not" by 9 a.m. "And a compelling reason is not, 'It might not work.' No shit, it might not work. Let's make it work."

They also warn of how campaigns fail when they become hung up on micro-details, like how to answer the phones or what sort of yard signs to use. Many candidates, they note, spend all their time on these diversions and never think about how average voters are perceiving them. (Al Gore is tweaked here for caring too much about the design of his campaign logo.) "Too much of the energy of a campaign ... goes into the small questions, the 'how' questions. Not nearly enough goes into the big, existential questions like 'What are we doing?' 'Why are we doing it,'" they write. "Our experience has been that those simple questions are the hardest to answer and the easiest to avoid ... If you as a leader lose sight of your strategic objective for even a single moment, you will be astonished by how quickly everyone under you begins to focus on the most inane, irrelevant, goofy crap imaginable." Gore isn't mentioned in this passage, but his

tortured campaign again comes to mind.

The book's other saving grace lies in the few fresh and colorful campaign anecdotes it offers. For instance, there's the tale of how Carville encouraged Lloyd Doggett, a 1984 Texas Senate candidate who was derided by a more experienced rival as a "little leaguer," to embrace the term and reinvent himself as "Little League Lloyd." Soon Doggett, outfitted with baseball bat and cap, was holding press events at ballparks around the state to rail against arrogant Washington insiders. He won the primary. There's also a fascinating account of the near-implosion of a Carville/Begala client, Georgia Democrat Zell Miller, in his 1990 campaign for governor. Miller admitted to the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* that he'd told a significant lie in a debate. But after a brutal headline ("Miller: I Lied") appeared in the first, midnight press run of the paper, the story was gone from morning editions. "To this day we don't know exactly why the paper saved Miller's butt," Carville and Begala write. It's stories like this that offer a respite from the rest of the book's stale insights and wearying goofiness. But they're too few and far between to save it.

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Of Corset Matters

By Christina Larson

THIRD-WAVE FEMINISTS WAV- ing copies of Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth* once proclaimed that men had hatched an ominous conspiracy to trick women into pursuing an impossible beauty ideal rather than real social progress. In *The Corset: A Cultural History*, Valerie Steele lays waste to that doctrine by documenting the extent to which women, not men, have historically policed the ideals of femininity, often in spite of the objections of bewildered men.

No Victoria's Secret bimbo, Steele is serious about her subject. In her hands, the history of fashion is treated as a study of the intersection of beauty ideals with new technologies that enable them. Chief curator at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York, Steele teamed up with cardiologist Dr. Lynn Kutsche to investigate the havoc wreaked by