Challenging the Stereotypes: Turkish–American Relations in the Inter-war Era

SUHNAZ YILMAZ

Turkish–American diplomatic relations experienced a decade-long hiatus at the time of the Great War and its immediate aftermath, until the ties were eventually restored in 1927. Subsequently, the United States discovered that there had been a radical change between the Ottoman Empire which Ambassador Elkus had left in 1917, and the Turkish Republic when Ambassador Grew arrived, a decade later. This significant transformation had been expedited by the progressive, secularist and nationalist path set by Mustafa Kemal, by sweeping political, social and economic reforms. The main argument of this article is that these changes, combined with the efforts of prominent individuals, not only had a favourable impact on the course of Turkish–American relations which resulted in a rapprochement, but also significantly challenged the prevailing 'Terrible Turk' stereotype commonly held in the United States.

Although there are numerous studies on Turkish–American relations in the Cold War era, and its aftermath, during which strategic and security concerns resulted in extensive ties between the two countries,¹ there are very few penetrating studies on the formative stages of this relations-building process during the inter-war period. Moreover, the limited number of existing works which embrace the period chronologically, such as Roger Trask's The United States' Response to Turkish Nationalism and Reform (1914–1939), are based almost exclusively on American sources, and produce an Amero-centric perspective of the process.² This study intends, therefore, to contribute to scholarship in this field by making extensive use of both Turkish and American sources, including some hitherto unused archival documents. A thorough and balanced analysis of relations during the interwar period enables us to achieve a better understanding of this crucial formative phase, setting the stage for the Cold War era from the viewpoints, and historical interpretations, of both nations. Moreover, from that platform emerges a more complete understanding of Turkish–American relations in the post-Cold War period, during which the relations are no longer defined by the parameters of the bipolar power structure of the Cold War years. Within this context, this article examines the factors that helped to mitigate negative stereotypes against the Turks in the United States in the inter-war era focusing on the period starting with the re-establishment of diplomatic ties in 1927 and terminating at the beginning of the Second World War. More importantly, as both Americans and Turks are currently...
trying to redefine their relations based on the changes and the emerging interests of the post-Cold War era, a study of this nature is valuable in ascertaining a balanced historical pedigree, if not a precedent.

Before the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, due to the Ottoman Empire’s preoccupation with its struggle for survival, and the United States’ predominantly isolationist foreign policy, political relations between the two nations were limited, depending principally on economic and missionary interests. Although some important contacts were established, one of the most adverse effects in this long prelude to the future of full diplomatic relations was caused by the Ottoman massacres and deportations of the Armenians during the 1890s and again during the First World War. The haunting legacy of these tragic events, when combined with the intense negative publicity by some missionary and Armenian groups, resulted in the formation of a ‘Terrible Turk’ stereotype in the United States. These missionaries, working closely with philanthropists, had a dual legacy for Turkish–American relations. On the one hand, through their charitable and educational activities they contributed to the formation of a cultural basis for Turkish–American relations, while on the other, some of the missionaries, due to their propaganda on behalf of the Armenians, and projecting the Terrible Turk image, pressured Washington against the re-establishment of diplomatic ties. For instance, E. Guy Talbot, the regional director of Near Eastern Relief wrote in the New Armenia, ‘History has not maligned the Turk; the Turk has proved himself to be malignant. He has never confessed contrition nor made atonement for his crimes. To-day the Turk is the most sinister figure in Europe.’

As the Armenian scholar Malkesian pointed out, on the one hand, ‘The Armenian tragedy provided the most potent appeal for funds and brought the status of Armenia closer to the American heart than ever before.’ However, on the other hand, ‘The same sense of moral outrage that fuelled the abolitionist campaign, the temperance crusade, and the peace movement among New England Protestants contributed to the stereotypes of the era. For better or worse, missionary literature soon branded the Armenians as persecuted, helpless, and above all, piously Christian, while at the opposite pole cultivating the image of the ‘terrible Turk’. Hence, the impact of this negative publicity by some missionary and Armenian groups would continue to affect the image and the relations of the young Turkish Republic with the United States, even after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.

Since the USA severed diplomatic ties with Turkey during the First World War in 1917, until the Americans recognized the new Turkish Republic in 1927, relations remained limited. In this period, the deeply engraved image of the ‘Terrible Turk’ continued to cast a dark shadow on Turkish–American relations. The memoirs of a young Turkish woman, Selma Ekrem, visiting the United States in the 1920s clearly reflects the prejudices against the Turks. She observed, ‘Here in America lived a legend made of blood and thunder. The Terrible Turk ruled the minds of the Americans. A huge person with fierce black eyes and bushy eye-brows, carrying daggers covered with blood. I did not fit into the legend of the Terrible Turk and so I was not one. In fact many people were disappointed: to meet a real true Turk who turns out to be fair, meek and not very unlike an American.’ Similar prejudices were also displayed in an academic survey on cultural stereotypes conducted among one hundred Princeton students as late as 1932. When the students were given a list of
eighty-four adjectives to choose from to describe traits characterizing various nationalities, the ones they picked for the Turks were far from flattering. The top three adjectives selected to describe Turks were cruel (54 per cent), very religious (29.9 per cent), and treacherous (24.1 per cent). In fact, in the top twelve choices describing the Turks, which included other derogatory adjectives such as ignorant and physically dirty, there was not a single favourable selection.

The establishment of formal ties, nevertheless, provided a more fertile ground for the enhancement of relations. While deep-rooted prejudices were difficult to eliminate and some of the anti-Turkish propaganda persisted, American and Turkish efforts to improve the image of Turkey in the United States characterized the inter-war era. Despite obstacles on both sides, the impact of the reforms in Turkey, combined with the efforts of prominent individuals and increased economic relations, contributed to the restoration of amiable relations after this problematic period. One of the major factors, which affected Turkish–American relations in the inter-war period, was the impact of all-encompassing reforms that took place in Turkey under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal. The dynamism of the young Turkish Republic, which strove to gain a position of respect and influence among the Western nations, presented a sharp contrast with the lethargy and trauma of the crumbling Ottoman Empire. The leaders of the Turkish republic, while aiming at extensive secularization and Westernization, also tried to shape a new national identity for the people of a truncated empire whose primary forms of identification had always been at the level of faith and locality. Consequently, they placed great emphasis on Turkish nationalism and the break with the Ottoman past, both domestically and in relations with other countries.

The changes actually started even before the establishment of the Republic with the abolition of the Sultanate on 1 November 1922. However, Mustafa Kemal had to wait until consolidating his power before he could address a more sensitive issue, which was still a major obstacle confronting his ideal of a secular state: the Caliphate. On 3 March 1924, the Grand National Assembly of Turkey passed a decree abolishing the Caliphate, disbanding the Shari'a courts, and placing the Pious Foundations (evkaf) under state control. The dual educational system, comprised of secular and religious schools, was also united under the newly established Ministry for Public Instruction. These reforms reflected Turkish leaders' desire not only to separate religion from politics, but also to go one step further by making religion subservient to the state and to exclude religion as a defining part of national identity. Moreover, with the alphabet reform of 1928, the Arabic alphabet was replaced with a modified Latin one. This reform also signified a break with the Islamic past of the Ottoman Empire, while underlining the Western orientation of the Turkish Republic. Mustafa Kemal initiated an extensive education campaign aimed at increasing literacy in a mainly illiterate peasant society. The adoption of the Latin alphabet and the ensuing language reform formed the building blocks of the new educational policy of the Republic.

The impact of the reforms was felt in all aspects of life, and went even further in 1926 with the adaptation of the Swiss civil code, the Italian penal code, and the German commercial code, as frameworks for modernization of the legal system. This transformation at the very roots of the old legal structure meant two significant changes for the Turkish republic. First, it was a crucial step in undermining the
power of the ulema. Second, it served as a milestone in accomplishing the new status and role envisioned for Turkish women. The replacement of Sharia with the new Turkish civil code had its most significant implications in the field of family and personal law. Polygamy and repudiation were abolished, while civil marriage, divorce and new inheritance laws, establishing equal rights for both men and women were introduced.

The civil rights granted to women would soon be accompanied by political ones. Turkish women gained the right to vote and to be elected at municipal level in 1931 and they acquired their full political rights through a constitutional revision in 1934. Women were encouraged to discard the veil and to adopt Western clothing, were admitted to institutions of higher learning and began to engage in numerous professions formerly restricted to men. Hence, Turkish women not only began to take their place in society on an equal legal basis, but they also started to play a more active role in shaping the future of their country through their increased political and social involvement.

The impact of the comprehensive reforms in Turkey also found their resonance in Turkish–American relations. Although there was some scepticism about the durability of the Westernizing reforms, most of the Americans who were familiar with the developments in Turkey received these radical changes with significant admiration.

American diplomats in Turkey also worked arduously to improve the relations in every field and to alter the negative image of Turkey in their own country. In addition to their efforts, the activities of Turkish diplomats in the United States (Ahmet Muhtar, and especially Ertegün), the publicity provided through some famous American visitors and the constant support of the American Friends of Turkey, also contributed to the improvement of relations and the image of Turks in the United States. Finally, although on a limited scale, there were also some attempts by the Turks themselves to project a more positive image for modern Turkey.

After the departure of Admiral Bristol, who greatly contributed to the enhancement of Turkish–American relations in their most problematic period, Joseph Grew succeeded him as the first American ambassador to Turkey following the re-establishment of diplomatic ties in 1927. Since Grew participated in the Lausanne Conference as an American observer and negotiated the Turco–American Treaty of Lausanne, he was familiar with the major issues and problems regarding improved relations. Moreover, during his ensuing post as the Undersecretary of State (1924–27) he worked persistently to secure Senate approval for the Lausanne Treaty. Consequently, Grew’s appointment to Turkey was widely covered in both the Turkish and the American press and upon his arrival he was very warmly received. The major goals of Grew during the period he served in Turkey (1927–32) were to support American legitimate interests; and, to develop and strengthen to the utmost the friendly relations between our countries.

Grew’s understanding of the strength of Turkish nationalism and his responsiveness to the reforms, as well as his method of making friendly informal requests, rather than formal demands, enabled him to achieve his goals. For instance, the Americans immediately responded to the alphabet reform, and Grew could proudly report, ‘We are the first Embassy to use the Latin characters on our automobile tags; as soon as the Gazi’s fiat went forth to the country, I promptly gave orders to
have all the Embassy tags brightly painted: 'Amerika Sefareti – 359' or whatever the number, and took particular pleasure in pointing them out to Rouschen Eshref so that the Gazi might promptly learn of it.19 In some cases, the Americans were even quicker to adapt to the reforms than their Turkish counterparts. When a representative from the American embassy presented the first customs declaration in the new letters, 'the customs official merely glanced at it and told him to take it away and come back with a Turkish translation, but on being informed that it was indeed in Turkish, he reluctantly accepted it!'20 As Grew pointed out on the two-hundredth anniversary of the birth of George Washington, he had a very favourable image of modern Turkey and its leader Atatürk. He stressed the similarities between the two leaders by saying:

Yet it is quite impossible, standing as we do on Turkish soil that has been fought for and bled for and consecrated for all time by courageous deeds and sublime patriotism of illustrious leaders not to see the analogy between the American revolution of 1775 and the Turkish Revolution of 1920, not to see the similarity between George Washington and Mustafa Kemal: not to recognize the vision, the far-sighted judgement, the unrivalled courage and patriotic devotion that each gave to the welfare and progress of a newly founded nation.21

Until he left Turkey on a new appointment as the Ambassador to Japan on 13 March 1932, he also worked diligently to project this positive image in the United States.22 Among many things the letter from his father-in-law has indicated that his efforts were paying off to a certain extent, not only at governmental level, but also in changing the perceptions of the ordinary people. He wrote, 'I was amused by the letter of the Wisconsin boy who asks you for the Ghazi's photo and signature. Why you understand of course that it is for such things that you are, where you are...23

General Charles Hitchcock Sherrill was appointed on 17 March 1932 as Grew's successor to Turkey.24 Among the major results of his approximately eight months stay in Turkey was a book on mosaics and a praising biography of Atatürk. His book, A Year's Embassy to Mustapha Kemal, which had an extremely positive portrayal of the Turkish leader, contributed to dispelling the Terrible Turk image.25 Moreover, Sherrill gave a number of speeches about Mustafa Kemal and the impressive developments in modern Turkey during leave in the United States in the autumn of 1932. After his service in Turkey, like Admiral Bristol, he continued to devote a significant amount of time and energy to inform Americans about the Turkish progress.

Ambassador Sherrill’s successor Peet Skinner was a career diplomat, who had previously served as Minister to Greece and to Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.26 During his post in Turkey (1933–36) his major emphasis was on the advancement of trade. He also contributed to the settlement of the long-lasting Turkish–American claims controversy in 1934.27 Following Skinner, John van Antwerp MacMurray assumed the post of Ambassador to Turkey on 24 January 1936. Ambassador MacMurray, who was considered one of the State Department’s prominent Far East experts, remained in Turkey until his return to Washington as Special Assistant to Secretary Hull in 1942.28 MacMurray described his service in Turkey during the inter-war era as 'singularly tranquil and uneventful' and praised the efforts of his
predecessors: 'I may be said to have held only a watching brief, in the glow of special friendliness created by Admiral Bristol as High Commissioner and of Grew as our first Ambassador to the new Turkish regime.' His major accomplishment in this period was the negotiation of a reciprocal trade agreement and the enhancement of friendly relations. With the outbreak of the Second World War, however, the uneventful days would soon be over and MacMurray would find himself tackling a number of problems caused by the war.

Another embassy official, who significantly contributed to Turkish–American relations, was Howland Shaw. Through his long service in Turkey, which started in 1921 as a member of Admiral Bristol's High Commission and continued as the First Secretary of the Embassy (1924–26), Shaw established close ties and maintained direct contacts with high-level Turkish government officials. After serving as Chief of the Division of Near Eastern Affairs for three years, he returned to Turkey as Counselor (1930–37). In this period, through 'his understanding of conditions, his alert and discriminating sense of what is significant in the political and social development of this country, and his sound political judgment,' he was of great service to the enhancement of Turkish–American relations.

In addition to the efforts of the diplomats, prominent American visitors provided an effective means for publicizing Turkey in the United States and for promoting closer ties. Among the most significant of these visitors were Russell Boardman and John Polando, who set the new non-stop transatlantic flight record by flying from New York to Istanbul in forty-nine hours. Upon their arrival at Istanbul on 27 July 1931 the aviators were enthusiastically received by the Turkish public and officials as heroes. Prime Minister İnönü decorated them with special medals of honour and Mustafa Kemal promptly received them at his summer house in Yalova. Perceiving these young aviators as a symbol of the technological progress of the West, combined with undaunted courage, the Turkish President was very excited by their arrival in Turkey.

In his speech to Boardman and Polando, Mustafa Kemal stressed the significance of their accomplishment as 'Turkey rejoices in your success as if it were her own. From the point of view of science, technique, capacity and courage, yours is an unprecedented victory of human power. Bringing continents together, you bring nations together. Heroes like you transform nations into families whose members are mutually concerned about each other's happiness and sorrow... Your flight brought the hearts of Americans and Turks nearer.'

Grew was also very pleased by the arrival and the reception of the aviators and recorded in his diary: 'An event has occurred which has done more to consolidate the affections of Turkey for the United States than could have been accomplished by years of careful diplomacy.' He thought this event would also serve as a great opportunity for Turkey to get favourable publicity in the United States. The achievement of Boardman and Polando and their visit to Turkey were indeed well publicized in the United States. Upon their return President Hoover received them in the White House and a committee, including Ahmet Muhtar, welcomed them. In their numerous speeches around the country following their non-stop transatlantic flight, they praised Turkish hospitality and the impressive progress of modern Turkey.

Mrs Evangeline Lindbergh, mother of the aviator Charles A. Lindbergh, was among the other prominent visitors. During her stay in Turkey as a teacher at
Istanbul Woman's College, the Turkish Aviation League presented her with a medal for her son in 1928. After she returned to the United States, she made a long statement regarding the reforms in Turkey. Financier J.P. Morgan, who was a cousin of Grew, also visited Istanbul during the Ambassador's tenure. In addition to providing publicity for Turkey among business circles, J.P. Morgan made a generous contribution to the Bristol hospital. The previous year, the visit of the floating university steamship *Ryndam* to Istanbul and its cordial reception had also created positive publicity for Turkey. The six hundred students aboard returned home presenting a very different perspective than the ones propagated by the anti-Turkish circles in the United States. All of these visitors significantly contributed to providing more realistic and up-to-date views on modern Turkey, which helped to challenge the old biases.

The organization, which was most active in promoting Turkish–American friendship and in counter-acting anti-Turkish propaganda, was the 'American Friends of Turkey'. Inspired by Asa K. Jenning's idea of 'Turkish–American Clubs', which worked on projects such as orphanages, playgrounds, night schools, William H. Hoover organized a meeting in New York on 11 June 1930 during which an initiative for establishing 'the American Friends of Turkey' was taken. In 1932, Admiral Bristol's election as the president further contributed to the organization's activities and prestige. Initially, the American Friends of Turkey focused mainly on projects in Turkey, including the establishment of libraries, baby and dental clinics, playgrounds, and sports fields. The organization was also active in the field of education by translating and publishing literature in the new alphabet, by sending graduate students to the United States, and by establishing experimental kindergarten and primary schools.

The financial crisis of the 1930s, however, caused the American Friends of Turkey to limit the scope of its projects abroad and to focus on activities in the United States. Consequently, their major contribution became the publicity campaign they undertook to dispel anti-Turkish prejudices and to promote Turkish–American friendship. In evaluating the goals and accomplishments of the American Friends of Turkey, Asa Jennings wrote in 1937:

> There was a time when Turkey was greatly misunderstood in the United States. Americans, however, have now come to a fuller realization of the vast changes which have taken place in Turkey since the declaration of the Republic, in spite of the fact that the Turkish government has never engaged in any propaganda activities whatsoever in this country. We have been exerting every effort to bring about a better understanding in the United States of the accomplishments of the Turkish Republic.

Jennings had been quite accurate in his observation that the Turkish propaganda activities to improve their image in the United States had been almost non-existent. Since the Turkish leaders and people were preoccupied with rebuilding their country after the war and with keeping the momentum of the reforms, they devoted very limited time and energy to project a better image for modern Turkey abroad, which corresponded to the radical changes in their country. There was also a certain degree of continuation with the traditional Ottoman nonchalance in terms of creating a
positive image abroad. Moreover, regarding the relations with the United States, the absence of diplomatic representation until 1927, and the subsequent shortage of funds, were additional obstacles. Nevertheless, in the 30s Turks themselves also began to increase their efforts to improve their reputation in the United States.

In the period from 1927 to 1944, two Ambassadors ably represented Turkey in the United States. Ahmet Muhtar (1927–34), as the first Turkish Ambassador to the USA after the re-establishment of diplomatic ties, had to respond to intense anti-Turkish campaigns. When he retired from the Turkish Foreign Service, Mehmet Münir Ertegün (1934–44) succeeded him. Both of these diplomats worked actively to dispel the biases against the Turks. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that mainly due to concerns regarding the reaction of anti-Turkish groups and domestic politics, in this period practically all negotiations for treaties and other agreements took place in Turkey. Despite all the negative influences, however, a significant enhancement in the relations was achieved in the inter-war era.

Ambassador Ertegün has not only served Turkish–American relations extensively during his lifetime, but even after his death. The dispatch of the battleship *Missouri* to Istanbul in 1946, carrying the remains of the late Ertegün who had died in Washington during the war, was intended as a vivid symbol of the growing American support for Turkey in an increasingly hostile environment. The choice of the *Missouri*, where the Japanese officials signed the papers of unconditional surrender at the end of the Second World War II, and the timing of the trip coinciding with the Soviet–Iranian negotiations regarding the Soviet withdrawal from Iran, indicated that the visit of the *Missouri* to Turkey was more than a mere gesture of courtesy. Thus, the American leaders were sending a signal to the Soviet Union, as well as to Turkey, of their growing interest in the Middle East and of their new tougher stance towards Soviet expansionism. This signal was very favourably received in Turkey and the Turkish reaction to the arrival of the *Missouri* on 5 April 1946 was euphoric. The trip and the visit of the *Missouri* were covered extensively in the Turkish press. Articles praising the late Ambassador Ertegün and reflecting the excitement over the arrival of the *Missouri* were cover page news for almost a week. Even the Leanders Tower (*Kız Kulesi*) was decorated with a ‘Welcome Missouri’ sign and the Turkish tobacco monopoly (*Tekel*) produced 30,000 packages of commemorative cigarettes named ‘Missouri’ to be distributed as gifts among the American visitors. Unlike high-level diplomatic meetings, where important promises and decisions are made by leading statesman behind closed doors, the impact of the *Missouri’s* visit was immediately felt by the public. Although the high level American visitors did not confirm openly that their mission was more than a courtesy call, to the man in the street it represented a tangible proof that Turkey did not stand alone. It is worth noting that when Ahmet Muhtar arrived in the United States in 1927, he had been confronted by anti-Turkish demonstrations and even death threats. This striking difference, between 1927 and 1946, was not only due to differences in conjuncture, but was also a good indicator of how much had been accomplished in the meantime.

In addition to the efforts of Turkish diplomats, Halide Edib [Advar], a leading figure of the Turkish war of independence, significantly contributed to publicizing the improvements in Turkey through her publications and speeches in the United States. For instance, in August 1928, she directed a conference at the
Massachusetts Institute of Politics, participants of which included the representatives from American missionary and educational institutions in Turkey. The consensus of opinion at the open conference, attended by about two hundred experts in foreign affairs, was summarized as such, 'Modern Turkey is a miracle of governmental rejuvenation, and stands for peace and progress rather than as a threat to the rest of the world, like the old Turkish Empire.'

Besides these individual efforts for improving the image of Turkey in the United States, the Turkish government also took some initiatives to prevent adverse publicity. One of these attempts was the Turkish objection to the filming of Franz Werfel's novel, The Forty Days of Musa Dagh, about the Armenian massacres, and following pressure from the Turkish government, and the State Department, the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Company agreed not to produce the film. Articles maligning Atatürk, such as that published in the magazine Ken titled 'Atatürk, Hoodlum as Hero' also received a strong reaction from the Turks. In this case, upon the protests of the Turkish Ambassador Erteğün, President Roosevelt instructed the Attorney-General to consider prosecuting the magazine. In appreciation of Roosevelt's personal attention to the matter, Atatürk requested that no legal action be taken.

In response to the anti-Turkish statements in the American press, Grew also urged the Turkish government to initiate a public relations campaign in the United States. Even Mustafa Kemal himself joined the efforts by agreeing to star in a 'talkie' about Turkey at his model farm outside Ankara. In the movie Ambassador Grew lauded the achievements of the Turkish republic and its leader, while the President extolled democracy and called for strengthening Turkish–American friendship and for placing the world on 'the path of peace and tranquility.' Mustafa Kemal's adopted daughter Afet Hanum, who was one of the leading suffragettes of Turkey, also accompanied the President. In her brief message, she expressed her admiration for American women for acquiring their political rights. She stated, 'I appreciate and congratulate the American women, because they have fully won their political rights. The Turkish women are not satisfied with the rights they have at present; but I am sure the full right to elect and to be elected as Deputies to the Grand National Assembly will be secured.' Her presence in the movie and her remarks were a clear reflection of the changing role of women in Turkish society.

In the inter-war period, increased economic relations between Turkey and the United States also contributed to the enhancement of relations and Turkey's image. Despite the adverse effects of the Great Depression and the prevalence of protectionist policies both in the United States and in Turkey, commerce formed a main pillar of relations. Within this context, the signing of the Commercial Treaty of 1929 was a milestone, since it provided a formal framework for trade for the first time since the breaking of diplomatic ties. The United States policy of political non-involvement made it an ideal economic partner for Turkey, which was still quite suspicious towards the European powers. Hence, the Turks sought technical aid from the United States on a number of issues ranging from agriculture to education and welcomed American investments.

The work of American technical experts significantly contributed to Turkish economic development in the inter-war era. American technical assistance was provided by private persons or teams at the request of the Turkish government. The
Department of State and other departments helped with the recruitment of these specialists, thus indirectly guiding technical assistance. The major fields in which the Turkish government sought advice from American experts were general economic development, education, cotton culture, public health, and mineral prospecting. One of the highest priorities for Mustafa Kemal was to create an extensive public education system, which would equip the mainly illiterate and ignorant masses with the basic tools for modernization. Education was also seen as a crucial tool for projecting the Turkish nationalist ideology and as the essential means that would enable Turkey to join the league of 'progressive nations'. Consequently, the Turkish government invited a number of experts on education from Britain, Germany, France, and the United States. John Dewey, from Teachers College, Columbia University, was among the most prominent of these experts. Upon his arrival in Turkey in 1924, Dewey extensively studied and made recommendations regarding the Turkish educational system. Another important American educator, who served in Turkey for many years working on kindergarten and primary education, was Dr Beryl Parker. Both of these educators left their mark in the newly developing Turkish educational system and were the forerunners of the wave of technical experts of the 1930s.

In addition to the contributions of technical experts, a number of well-known American companies established large-scale operations in Turkey in the inter-war period. Oil and tobacco companies were among the most active and in particular The Standard Oil Company, and to a lesser extent, the Vacuum Oil Company and the Texas Company, which were interested in obtaining oil concessions. However, mainly due to the lack of significant oil deposits none of these projects materialized. In addition to Standard Oil, big tobacco companies such as R.J. Reynolds, American Tobacco, and Liggett and Meyers, also had significant property holdings in Turkey, especially around Izmir.

One major project which caused excitement in Turkey was initiated by the Ford Motor Company. In 1929, the Grand National Assembly of Turkey granted Ford a concession to establish an assembly plant in a free zone in Istanbul. Accordingly, all the automobile parts brought into this zone would be exempt from customs duties, but completely assembled automobiles would not be permitted for importation into Turkey. By January 1930, the first Turkish Fords were already out. Turkey's first auto plant produced eight cars a day for domestic use and for export to the Balkans and the Middle East. The plant also provided attractive employment opportunities. Of five thousand people who applied for jobs approximately five hundred were accepted. When Muammer Hanım from Kasimpasa applied for a driver's licence to become a cab driver, her initiative was a good indicator of not only the variety of new jobs created, but also the growing economic and social role of women encouraged by the reforms. The companies, which conducted significant trade or which had major investments in Turkey, such as Standard Oil and Ford, also tried to promote a more positive image for Turkey in the United States.

Finally, the general principles shaping Turkish and American foreign policy, and the developments in the international sphere, had their impact on Turkish–American relations. Turkey was, a newly established republic, still recovering from the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire and the devastation of the First World War I. The Turkish leaders wanted to focus mainly on domestic reforms and economic
recovery, which necessitated peaceful relations with other countries. Moreover, unlike the revisionist powers of the inter-war era such as Germany, the leaders of modern Turkey avoided irredentist adventures. They were aware of their limitations and they tried to establish a new ‘Turkish identity’ within the territorial limits determined by the Treaty of Lausanne. As the British Ambassador, Lorraine, pointed out, ‘Turkey has not a second empire to lose, nor has she today any wish to create one... in developing her still extensive territory... she has enough to keep her busy for a century.’\(^6\) The Turkish leaders were quite pragmatic and realistic in determining their priorities and in evaluating their capabilities and limitations. Consequently, they envisioned a peaceful trajectory for the young Turkish Republic focusing on modernization and economic development. In cases where they wished to revise a post-war settlement, e.g. the status of the Straits and the Sanjak of Alexandretta (Hatay), they resorted to a combination of good timing and prudent diplomacy to achieve their goals. Turkey’s peaceful approach, instead of taking unilateral action, received a favourable response from the international community, including the United States, and in most cases provided the desired results for Turkey as well as projecting a positive image for the Turks.

In the inter-war era, when the United States was promoting conciliation and arbitration treaties and outlawing war through a multinational pact, Turkish foreign policy emphasizing diplomatic means of revising the post-war settlement, was congruent with American interests. In this period, American foreign policy was also shaped by a strong isolationist sentiment. Consequently, in its relations with Turkey, the United States only became engaged in international issues having a direct impact on its interests. Moreover, American policy makers focused on specific issues instead of being involved in general political settlements. For instance, in the Hatay (Alexandretta) dispute, the preservation of the status and the contracts of American archaeologists working in this area played a more important role in Turkish–American relations, than the developments concerning the status of the Sanjak itself. Once the United States made sure that its rights would be protected, it supported the Turkish efforts regarding specific revisions to the Lausanne settlement through diplomatic methods.

The period starting with the re-establishment of diplomatic relations between Turkey and the United States in 1927, and lasting until the Second World War, was crucial, since it formed an important stage in the development of relations that would lead the nations from being strangers to allies. This frequently overlooked and understudied period was essential in building a solid base for the Turkish–American alliance, which would flourish in the aftermath of Second World War due to strategic reasons. The cultural, economic, and political relations in the period 1927–39 contributed significantly to the improvement of Turkish–American relations, which were at their lowest ebb following the First World War, and so, by the late 1930s, at a time when another major war was brewing in Europe, Turkey and the United States had much closer relations than a decade before. This rapprochement would be crucial for providing the fertile ground for Turkish–American collaboration during the Second World War and the establishment of their alliance in its aftermath.

In conclusion, the inter-war era was marked by American and Turkish efforts to challenge the Terrible Turk stereotype in the USA and to enhance their relations.
Although deep-rooted prejudices were difficult to eliminate, and traces of the old biases and anti-Turkish propaganda remained, this period constitutes a crucial milestone in forming a more favourable image of Turkey as a modern and progressive nation. Despite obstacles both in Turkey and the United States, the impact of reforms in Turkey and the diligent efforts of prominent diplomats and individuals, combined with increased economic ties and the peaceful orientation of Turkish foreign policy, contributed to the enhancement of relations and helped to mitigate the Terrible Turk image in the United States.

Notes
An earlier version of this article was presented at the Annual Mica–Ertugrul Conference, Princeton University in April, 2003. Research for parts of the article based on the private papers of Ambassador Grew at the Houghton Library, Harvard University, was made possible by the Kog University–Harvard Grant and a grant from the American Research Institute in Turkey.

1. Among these important studies on Turkish–American relations during the Cold War era are, Oral Sander's Türk–Amerikan İlişkileri, 1947–1964 (Ankara: Ankara Universities: SBE Yayıncılık, 1979) assessing the period from the Truman Doctrine (1947) to the first Cyprus crisis (1964); Bruce Kuniholm's landmark work tracing the factors that gave way to the Cold War, Origins of the Cold War in the Near East: Great Power Conflict and Diplomacy in Iran, Turkey and Greece (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980); George McGhee's The US–Turkish–NATO Middle East Connection: How the Truman Doctrine and Turkey's NATO Entry Contained the Soviets (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990) focusing on the strategic significance of Turkish–American relations during the Cold War; George Harris' Troubled Alliance: Turkish–American Problems in Historical Perspective (1945–1971) (Washington: American Enterprise Institute, 1972) examining the problematic foreign policy issues (for example the Cyprus question) shaping the relations among the two countries. Fahir Armanoğlu also presents a comprehensive selection of documents pertaining to Turkish–American relations in Belgelerle Türk–Amerikan Münasebetleri (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basmevi, 1991).

2. Roger Trask, The United States Response to Turkish Nationalism and Reform, 1914–1939 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971). In his comprehensive study, Trask presents a detailed account of various aspects of Turkish–American relations. However, as reflected in the title he focuses on the 'US response' and the only Turkish primary source that he uses is Djemal Pasha, Memoirs of a Turkish Statesman, 1913–1919 (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1922); Justin McCarthy, Missionaries and American Image of the Turks', in Mustafa Aydin and Çağri Erhan (eds.), Turkish–American Relations: Past, Present, and Future (London: Routledge, 2004), pp.26-48 examines how some of the missionaries contributed to the formation of stereotypes concerning the Turks.


6. When the United States declared war against Germany in April 1917, this situation inevitably led to the Turkish note of April 20, 1917 announcing the rupture of diplomatic relations between the Ottoman Empire and the United States. Since the Ottoman Empire was an ally of Germany, normally the next step would have been mutual declarations of war. However, since this path was undesirable for both sides, they refrained from taking it. Ahmet Nesin (Ottoman Minister of Foreign Affairs) to Elburs, April 20, 1917, Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1913–1917, Vol.10 (Washington, 1931), pp.224-225.
Turkish–American Relations in the Inter-war Era


7. An additional cause of the bias was the scant information, which was also often wrong or pejorative, provided on the Ottoman Empire and Turkey in the textbooks. In his article, 'The American Image of the Turks', Justin McCarthy refers to a study conducted by Heath Lowry, Avigdor Levy, and himself on such misleading coverage of the Turks in textbooks. McCarthy stresses 'Students themselves cannot be blamed for knowing next to nothing about the real history or the current status of the Turks. Their text books give them little information, and all too often what is said of Turks has been pejorative ... the standard of material on the Turks has proved to be deplorably ahistorical.' Justin McCarthy, 'The American Image of Turks' (Tarih, Vol.2 1992), p.59.


10. Since the independence movement itself had a strong religious undertone (especially in its earlier phases) and one-fifth of the first Grand National Assembly belonged to the ulama or brotherhoods, this was by no means an easy task. For a detailed account of the abolishment of the Caliphate and the Sultanate and secularizing reforms, see Niyazi Berkes, Development of Secularism in Turkey (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1964), pp.446–60.


12. For instance, Atatürk's adopted-daughter, Sabiha Gökçen, became the first female pilot in Turkey.


14. For favourable accounts of the impact of the reforms in Turkey, see Charles Sherrill, A Years Embassy to Mustafa Kemal (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934); Ernst Jackh, The Rising Crescent: Turkey Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1944).


16. For newspaper articles on Grew's appointment to Turkey (both in Turkish and in the American press), see 'Turks will Welcome Grew's Appointment' New York Times, May 20, 1927; 'Le Nouvel Ambassadeur d'Amérique', Le Millitr (Istanbul), 21 Sept. 1927; 'Yeni Amerikan Sefiri Dün Şehrime Geldi ve Hariciye Vekilimiz Taraflandı Kabul Oluunu' Hakimiyeti-i Milliye, 23 Sept. 1927; 'Grew Received by Kemal' NYT, 14 Oct. 1927; 'America at Angora' NYT, 15 Oct. 1927.


18. For example, on how Grew dealt with a number of problems concerning the American schools in Turkey, see Grew, The Turbulent Era, Vol.II, pp.754–95.


20. Ibid.


24. Charles Sherrill's Letters of Credence, 14 May 1932, TFMA, Protocol, D.1, no.1. Sherrill's appointment to Turkey was a political one made upon the insistence of prominent New York
Republican leaders. He was a lawyer and a businessman. His only prior diplomatic experience was as Minister to Argentina (1909–11).

25. The State Department, however, was apprehensive about the political implications of such a biography. Consequently, Sherrill had to wait until his retirement from the Foreign Service to publish the book.


29. MacMurray (Conn.) to Roger R. Trask, 8 Sept. 1958, quoted in Trask, American Response to Turkish Nationalism and Reform, p.78.

30. Turkish–American Treaty of Commerce, 1 April 1939, TFMA, Department of Trade, box. 3, a.13.3.

31. MacMurray to Carr (Assistant Secretary of State), 19 June 1936, MacMurray MSS, Box. 153.

32. Boardman and Polando’s visit to Turkey, 27 July–11 Aug. 1931, Grew MSS, v.54; Grew, The Turkish Decade, pp.888-99. Grew was very excited about the arrival of the Transatlantic Flyers and a whole volume in his private papers is devoted to newspaper clippings concerning this topic. There are also numerous photos (including those with Mustafa Kemal).

33. For coverage in the American and Turkish press, see ‘Boardman plane safe in Istanbul breaking world’s distance record’ NYT, 13 July 1931; ‘Hava Kahramanları’ Cumhuriyet, 31 July 1931; ‘La magnifique performance du Cape-Cod’ Akcham, 31 July 1931; ‘Une journée historique’, La République, 2 Aug. 1931.


40. J.P. Morgan and party arrive at Istanbul to visit his cousin Grew’ NYT, 8 Apr. 1928; Diary, 8 April 1928, Grew MSS, Vol.42.

41. Roger Trask, American Response to Turkish Nationalism and Reform, pp.86–7.

42. William H. Hoover was the head of the Hoover Vacuum Cleaner Company at the time. Among the participants of this meeting were Asa Jennings, Mary Mills Patrick (former president of Istanbul Woman’s College), Albert W. Staub (from the Near East Colleges Association), John H. Finley (the associate editor of the New York Times).

43. For detailed information on the origins and activities of the American Friends of Turkey, see the 23-page pamphlet, American Friends of Turkey (New York: American Friends of Turkey, Inc.,1931), in Bristol MSS, Box.96.

44. The meetings of the American Friends of Turkey organized for the ninth and tenth anniversaries of the establishment of the Turkish Republic were especially significant.

45. Report of the Executive Vice-President, American Friends of Turkey, 26 May 1937, p.4, Bristol MSS, Box. 96.


47. Ahmet Emin Yalman, ‘Celikten bir Bara Elçisi’, Vatan, 4 April 1946; Yalman, ‘Hoş Geldin Ey Müzir Erteğin’, Vatan, 5 April 1946; ‘Missouri’nin Yarattığı Hayaçan’, Vatan, 6 April 1946; for the Turkish Press coverage on the visit of the Missouri, see Ayn Türki, April, pp.52–71.

48. These commemorative cigarettes, which would probably have been a politically incorrect token of gratitude today, were very popular at that time. After the departure of the American battlefield, the
Turkish–American Relations in the Inter-war Era 237

Missouri cigarettes were made available for sale to the public. 'Missouri Limanınıza', Vatan, 5 April 1946.

49. 'Hewitt'n Beyanatı', Vatan, 6 April 1946. Giving evasive answers to the questions regarding the political significance of the visit, Admiral Hewitt stated that 'the underlying reason for the Missouri's visit to Turkey is to symbolize the friendship among the two countries and to make gesture of international courtesy.'

50. See Halide Edib [Adıvar], Turkey Faces the West: A Turkish View of Recent Changes and Their Origin (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1930); Grew to Kellogg, 10 Aug. 1928, DS 867.0/02001.

51. 'New Turkey Lauded at Williamstown' NYT, 3 Aug. 1928.


53. 'Attatürk, Hoodlum as Hero' Ken, Apr. 1938; Roger Trask, p.91.

54. 'Kemal Becomes Democrat for a Day; Takes Orders from Movie Directors' Christian Science Monitor, 8 Jan. 1931.


56. For an excellent account of étatiste policies and Turkish diplomacy in the inter-war era, see Dislike Barls, Etatism and Diplomacy in Turkey: Economic and Foreign Policy Strategies in an Uncertain World, 1929–1939 (Leiden: Brill, 1998), pp.3–110.


58. For a detailed account of how the Turkish leaders emphasized mandatory primary education as a means of communicating the policies and the ideals of the young Turkish Republic to its citizens, see Jessica Tregiis, 'The Role of Primary Education in Nation-State-Building: The Case of the Early Turkish Republic (1923–38)' (PhD Thesis, Princeton University, 1998), passim.


60. Trask, American Response to Turkish Nationalism and Reform, p.137.


64. 'Constantinople Ford Assembly Plant' Levant Trade Review, XVII (February, 1929), pp.43–7.

65. Grew MSS, Am 1687, vol.50, 1930. 'First Motor Cars Produced by Turks' Herald, 26 Jan. 1930; 'First Turkish Fords Out', New York World, 28 Jan. 1930. Ford's contract with the Turkish government required the company have at least 60 per cent Turkish employees within the first two years of operations, and 75 per cent within six years. This was an efficient way for the Turkish government to create employment opportunities as well as generating revenue. In the meantime, Ford Company benefited from the cheap labour in Turkey. For a first hand account of Ford company's activities and investments in Turkey also see the memoirs of prominent Turkish businessman, Vehbi Koc, Hayat Hikayem (Istanbul: Apa Ofset Basmevi, 1973), pp.55–8.
