

## RELIGION & POLITICS IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

This Strategic Research Initiative concentrates on the interaction between religion and politics that has always served as a crucial determinant in the evolution of state and society in Turkey and the Black Sea region across time. Political ways of mobilising for, maintaining and contesting leadership and authority have often been expressed and transmitted through the use of religion. This theme has at times also been merged with discussions on tradition and modernity as well as change and continuity regarding the development of state and society. In the Turkish context, this has not just influenced the evolution of the domestic environment and political systems but has also had an impact on its international standing and behaviour. Likewise, the balance between church, state and society has also accompanied processes of state formation and nation building for other countries around the Black Sea, including during the Soviet and post-Soviet period.

### **Understanding British/Ottoman relations at the twilight of the Ottoman empire, 1880–1922**

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Diplomatic relations between the Ottoman empire and the various European powers during the latter phases of the 19th century and early 20th century have been described as ‘symbiotic’. This is especially true for British-Ottoman relations during that period. From the British courting the Ottoman empire as an ally against their traditional foe the Russian empire in the ‘great game’, to the occupation of Egypt in the 1880s and after, the British empire had complex and, at times, contradictory relations with the Ottoman empire. Given the importance of the role the Middle East plays in the current geo-political environment, and Britain’s imperial legacy in the eastern Mediterranean and Middle East, understanding British diplomatic relations with the Ottoman empire is paramount in understanding the collapse of the Ottoman empire and the creation of the modern Middle East. Focusing on British-Ottoman relations from Gladstone’s second government (1880–1885), at the height of Victorian Britain, through the First World War to the ultimate collapse of the Ottoman empire and birth of modern Turkey in 1922, this research project seeks to create a better and more nuanced understanding of British-Ottoman relations.

The project covers specific events in British-Ottoman relations and the major personalities who helped shape British policy concerning the Ottoman empire during this period. While there has been some research on British-Ottoman diplomacy in this period, such as Joseph Heller’s *British Policy Towards the Ottoman Empire, 1908–1914* (1983),

typically such works only explore British-Ottoman relations in terms of political strategy and war aims, often ignoring the Ottoman perspective. However, our research will go beyond this by considering (and often comparing) the cultural aspects of diplomacy from the British and the Ottoman perspectives to illustrate the social and cultural forces at work inside British-Ottoman diplomacy.

This approach has several benefits which set it apart from existing previous work on the topic because it will allow us to focus on specific cultural themes which affected British-Ottoman relations. For instance, a major theme throughout the research project will be an evaluation of the extent to which British-Ottoman relations were prejudiced by orientalism and the British fear of pan-Islamism and political Islam. From the Ottoman perspective, this approach will allow us to explore the mounting fears of nationalism, anxiety regarding Ottoman international standing in Europe, the stress of balancing traditional and modern cultural influences, and increasing fear of Russian expansionism.

By exploring such themes, our research aims to answer key questions surrounding British-Ottoman diplomacy. It will address the role Britain played in the collapse of the Ottoman empire and the creation of modern Turkey and the modern Middle East, and consider whether British-Ottoman relations were doomed because of the expanse of British imperial interests in Cyprus, Egypt and elsewhere in the Mediterranean. In addition, the research aims to demonstrate how these forces affected major historical individuals such as Enver Bey Paşa, Winston Churchill, Lloyd George, Atatürk and others. Another outcome of the research will be to raise awareness of the Ottoman empire’s role as a governing force in the Middle East and how, after its collapse, the Middle East became increasingly complex and chaotic.

This research project, which is generously sponsored by the British Institute at Ankara, brings together a host of academic scholars with expertise in British diplomatic history, Ottoman diplomatic history and Middle Eastern history. Making extensive use of the Ottoman archives in Ankara, our aim is to fund each of the scholars associated with the project to travel to Turkey and undertake research regarding their particular aspect of the research programme. Moreover, our findings will be published as a co-edited collection with I.B. Tauris, which has already contracted the project, and we plan to produce a further journal article. These publications will help raise the profile of British-Ottoman diplomatic relations, as well as the Ottoman archive and the British Institute at Ankara, while facilitating the creation of an international research network. To that end, the final phase of the research project anticipates an international conference which will help foster closer links between Turkey and Britain, and lead to academic collaboration and knowledge exchange on an international stage.

Though in its nascent stage, the research project has already signed on leading academics such as Professor Chris Wrigley (Nottingham), Dr Peter Caterall (Westminster), Professor John Young (Nottingham), Dr Neil Fleming (Worcester), Dr John Fisher (Western England), Dr Gaynor Johnson (Salford) and Dr Andrew Holt (Nottingham).

Our initial meetings with our scholars and publishers have lead us to the conclusion that this research programme will make a valuable contribution to the literature surrounding British-Ottoman relations, and diplomatic history as a whole, while also helping to develop a greater understanding of the creation of the modern Middle East.



“Who says ‘Sick Man’ now?”

Sir John Tenniel, *Punch* 1897

## The social rootedness of Turkey’s Islamist party spectrum

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Turkey has had a tradition of multi-party democracy going back almost 65 years since the government introduced elections after World War II. However, due to the central prominence of the state in Turkey’s political tradition, the country’s party system remained weakly established within society. This was compounded by frequent military interventions in political life, in particular the three coups of 1960, 1970 and 1980, which time and time again reshuffled the cards of the party system. This brief article is based on broader research which is trying to map out the social rootedness and presence of Turkey’s party system since the 1980 military coup. Social rootedness as a concept examines the extent to which political parties manage to penetrate society and establish themselves as acknowledged organisations. The particular focus of this article will look at the social rootedness of Turkey’s Islamist party spectrum since the 1980 military coup.

Political party systems reflect the interactive totality of all parties that exist within a particular body politic. Therefore, the shape of the party system is an important determinant in the relationship between society and the state. Giovanni Sartori described it as ‘the traffic rules that plug the society into the state’ (1976: 41). Studies classifying party systems have traditionally focused on characteristics like the ideological space separating parties within the left/right spectrum or the number of parties within a system. A newer approach developed by Scott Mainwaring and Timothy Scully concentrates on the degree of institutional strength that party systems possess. Institutionalisation in this sense means that there is a certain amount of stability in party competition and that the rules governing the electoral process have been internalised. Weakly institutionalised party systems in which parties disappear from one election to the next and have very weak social connections to their electorates are held to obstruct further democratic development, especially in developing countries.

The degree of parties’ rootedness in society shows how strongly they exist in the political imagination of the public. In Western Europe, mass parties like those of the Christian democrats or social democrats established close social and cultural bonds between themselves and their specific constituencies. They created grassroots structures, like youth groups, trade unions and recreational organisations, in order to address the different socio-economic needs of their main constituent groups. This helped to anchor the public to the party system and to the broader political process. It also gave parties a veritable social existence within their constituencies. However, when traditions of socially-rooted parties do not exist, voters feel more indifferent towards political life in general and parties find it more difficult to fulfill their function as the tools of popular representation that allow society to participate and engage in a country’s political life.