

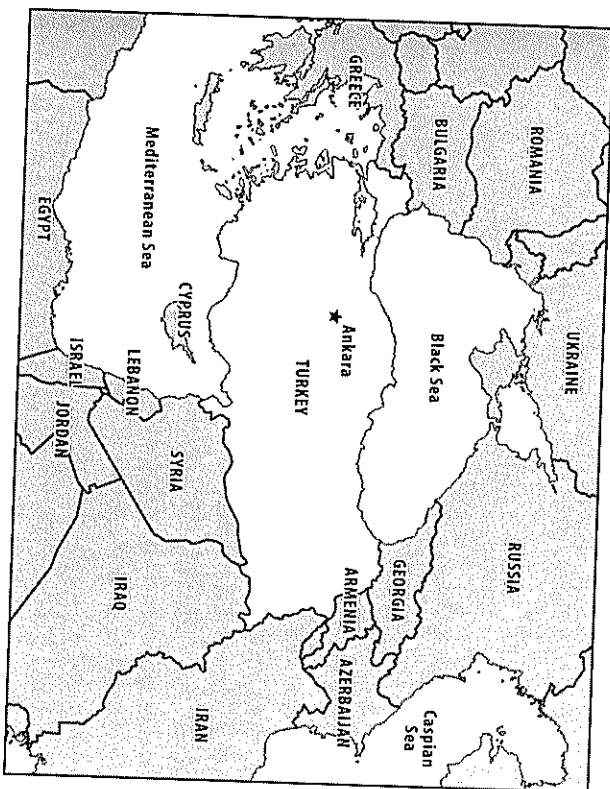
Because of its interests in the Persian Gulf and Iraq, Iranian goals run counter to those of the United States. That means Iran must divert resources to protect itself against the possibility of American attack at a time when its economy needs to develop very rapidly in order to carry it into the first rank regionally. The bottom line is that Iran irritates the United States. Sufficiently alarmed, the United States could devastate Iran. Iran is simply not ready for regional power status. It is constantly forced to dissipate its power prematurely. Attempting to become a major regional power while the world's greatest power is focused on your every move is, to say the least, difficult.

There is also the question of geography: Iran is on the margins of the region. Afghanistan is to the east, and there is little to be gained there. In any expansion of influence to the north, Iran would collide with the Russians. Iraq is a possible direction in which to move, but it can also become both a morass and a focal point for Arab and American countermeasures. It is not easy to increase Iranian regional power. Any move will cost more than it is worth.

Egypt is the largest country in the Arab world and has been its traditional leader. Under Gamal Abdel Nasser, it made a major play to become the leader of the Arab world. The Arab world, however, was deeply fragmented, and Egypt managed to antagonize key players like Saudi Arabia. After the Camp David accords with Israel in 1978, Egypt stopped trying to expand its power. It had failed anyway. Given its economy, and its relative isolation and insularity, it is hard to see Egypt becoming a regional power within any meaningful time frame. It is more likely to fall into someone else's sphere of influence, whether Turkish, American, or Russian, which has been its fate for several centuries.

Turkey is a very different case. It is not only a major modern economy, but it is by far the largest economy in the region—much larger than Iran, and perhaps the only modern economy in the entire Muslim world. Most important, it is strategically located between Europe, the Middle East, and Russia.

Turkey is not isolated and tied down; it has multiple directions in which it can move. And, most important, it does not represent a challenge to American interests and is therefore not constantly confronted with an American threat. This means it does not have to devote resources to blocking the



Turkey in 2008

United States. With its economy surging, it will likely soon reemerge in its old role, as the dominant force in the region.

It must be remembered that until World War I, Turkey was the seat of a major empire (see map, page 82). Shorn of its empire, Turkey became a secular state governing a Muslim population. It was, until 1918, the most powerful Muslim country in the world. And, at its height in the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, the Turkish empire was far reaching and extremely powerful.

By the sixteenth century, Turkey was the dominant Mediterranean power, controlling not only North Africa and the Levant but also southeastern Europe, the Caucasus, and the Arabian Peninsula.

Turkey is an internally complex society, with a secular regime protected by a military charged constitutionally with that role and a growing Islamist movement. It is far from certain what sort of internal government it might end up having. But when we look at the wreckage of the Islamic world after