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Interview with Sir David Logan, British Ambassador to Ankara (1997-2001)[1]

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Q: First of all, thank you very much for spending your valuable time with us this morning. We're very honoured indeed. And we're also very fascinated about what you can tell us about this very interesting time … the times you were here, and your general observations about them.

A: You're very kind.

Q: Let me start with the first question, then. You served in the British Embassy in Ankara between 1965 and 1969, and then you came back as Ambassador between 1997 and 2001. These were very eventful periods in Turkish history. What could you tell us about your observations? First of all, during 1969, with particular reference to the diplomatic, economic, military and cultural relations between Turkey and Britain.

A: The coup against Menderes had taken place only five years before I came to Turkey. Then there were two coup attempts by Talat Aydemir, in 1963 and 64. Multi-party democracy itself was only 20 years old. However, there were great hopes of the first Demirel

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government. There was a bicameral Constitution, which contained all the right checks and balances.

Nowadays it's easy to forget that our young Turkish friends were committed to the practical realisation of. Atatürk's goals. They would go to work in the east of the country as teachers or doctors to serve there in the cause of modernisation. Nowadays, I suppose we might think of that as neo-colonialist, but not then. On the contrary, we admired the idealism of these young people.

I was the most junior member of the political section. My job was to report on Turkish politics, which I did in detail. I doubt that anyone in the Foreign Office ever read it all. Access to Parliamentarians to talk about politics was easy and informal. I used to drink endless cups of *çay* in the Senate and the National Assembly. It was quite easy to forget that the military held the ring, even though there was to be a coup as soon as 1970, just after I left.

Our relations with Turkey were dominated by the Cyprus issue. Its Constitution had broken down, and the Turkish Cypriots had been driven into enclaves. There was strong anti-Americanism in Turkey. While we were in Ankara, tensions over Cyprus broke into open warfare in 1967. Crises like this later became common in the bilateral relationship with Greece. Peace was achieved by means of an early example of shuttle diplomacy. It was undertaken by Cyrus Vance, who shuttled between Ankara, Athens and Nicosia building on a very small area of common ground which he broadened gradually, skilfully, and successfully. An anecdote about the war. We lived in a flat in *Kozlu Sokak*. It's still *Kozlu Sokak* but in those days it was a muddy track only about 150 metres from the President's palace. During the war, an anti-aircraft battery was set up in our yard and some nice young artillerymen came to man the guns. No Greek bomber ever appeared, and they had quite a dull time. Judith, my wife, used to bring them cups of tea from time to time.

So Cyprus and relations with Greece were absolutely central to our political work. As regards commercial relations, this is an era of import substitution in Turkey. Everything was manufactured in Turkey, so that bilateral commercial relations were limited. Relations with the military were as limited then as they are now.

Culturally, from the British point of view, our main interest was the ballet because Dame Ninette de Valois, who was a famous British ballerina, directed the Turkish ballet company. She was tough and demanding, but she was deeply committed to the development of ballet in Turkey and made a lasting contribution to it.

Q: Thank you very much, A bit closer now, 1997 to 2001 when you were the Ambassador and again there were a lot of things happening here.

A: 1997-2001 was late in a political period which started with President Özal, who died so young. It was a period characterised by a series of coalition governments, often led by Demirel, or by Ecevit, and often ineffective. This was partly a function of the proportional representation system which was in operation. It had advantages over the British winner-takes-all system but had its own problems. For example, parliamentary candidates were selected by the central party machine. They had no necessary connection with the constituencies to which they were assigned, and they very often neglected them. This was one of the defects which led to the eventual success of the AKP in 2001, because unlike the traditional parties the AKP was assiduous in establishing local connections. Even more importantly, the old fundamental divide between the educated elite on the one hand and the conservative religious peasantry on the other, which first became manifest at the start of the multi-party system, remained substantially unchanged. The difference was that by now the peasantry had started to benefit from improving educational, health and social security standards. Some started to be successful in business and others politically active. They wanted their concerns and interests to be taken notice of.

Import substitution was long gone. The economy had been transformed by Özal. You could buy anything you wanted, and Turkey itself competed very successfully on international markets. I had a young friend who made clothes for Marks & Spencers, Harrods and other major stores in the UK. And there many kinds of industry, including automotive, construction etc. In the 1960s, you couldn't make much money out of import substitution. And those who were rich didn't flaunt their success. But now there were rich Turks, and the differences between them and the rest were very clear.

There were tremendous advances at the leading universities, which were now of international standard. The same went for the arts and culture. There were important art galleries such as Istanbul Modern. When we were first in Turkey, it was fashionable to reject everything to do with the Ottoman past. But this had been replaced by an appreciation of Turkey's rich heritage. And there were great modern authors, such as Orhan Pamuk. There were Turkish exhibitions in London. Overall, there had been tremendous positive change, but other changes too which were not so welcome.

My time was dominated by the issue of European Union accession. The UK led the European Union in the pursuit of this cause. But not all our partners were as positive as the UK and not all politicians, either Turkish or European, were in favour either. But the reform process, which was driven by the EU accession requirements, generated much beneficial change in Turkish institutions and government practice. My friend Jack Straw, who was Foreign Secretary in 2004, always said that the start of the accession negotiations was the greatest achievement in his time as Foreign Secretary. And I certainly shared that view. I expected Turkey to become a member of the European Union by about 2014.

There were, of course, other issues. In 1965, we didn't talk much about the Kurds. These were "mountain Turks", and, shockingly, I barely knew about the issue. But, of course, in the 90s the Kurdish question and the rise of the PKK had become a serious issue both domestically and in relations with the UK.

Q: Thank you. Now, during your services as ambassador to Ankara in 1997 to 2001. There were a lot of critical breaking points, such as the postmodern coup on 28 February 1997, the arrest of Abdullah Öcalan in Nairobi, and the tension between the President, Ahmet Necdet Sezer and the Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit, which was immediately followed by the economic crisis in 2001. What are your personal observations about these events?

A: The first two of these crises were arguably part of the legacy of the fundamental political tensions between the educated secular children of Atatürk and the devout conservative peasantry who had been left behind by the revolution. As with the coup against Menderes, so with the postmodern coup against Erbakan. The Armed Forces, in their role as guardians of Atatürk's reforms, decided that these prime ministers had abused their powers. It was a reminder that the Armed Forces still held power over the politicians, and that their view of the secular state was unyielding.

I remember calling on President Sezer before he became President and when he was still Head of the Supreme Court. It was lunchtime and so all the Supreme Court judges, including their Head and also me, went to the very modest canteen and queued for our lunch. It was an admirably modest occasion, given the dignity and importance of the judges.

Sezer's appointment as President was the result of deadlock between the heirs of Menderes and the heirs of İnönü which I have described. These politicians had for years presided over short-term coalitions based on not much more than short term political expediency. And there was a background of financial mismanagement. Inflation was running

at about 80%. This led to a downturn in foreign investment and eventually to financial failure. His appointment was a surprise, and probably for him as well as everyone else. And in its way it was a welcome interlude. You probably know the story about Madeline Albright. Before Sezer became President she was in town and the Prime Minister gave a dinner for her. She noticed that she'd been placed next to a man she'd never heard of. She asked to be put next to the foreign minister, İsmail Cem. But the man whom she didn't know was the future president!

I see your third 'breaking point' the PKK, through a different optic. It's a typical, but of course very serious, example of terrorism. Typically, people resort to terrorism when they can't secure their political objectives through peaceful means. But when terrorism starts to produce results and there is some recognition of the terrorists' grievances by the government concerned, violence is usually replaced by negotiation. Then the terrorists start to lose support. It's hard to sustain terrorist activity without a sympathetic but non-violent constituency all being well, change then proceeds by means of political process rather than violence. Two good examples are Northern Ireland, where the impact of terrorism was murderous and destructive. A second is South Africa. But Turkey has never got to the stage of satisfying the basic requirements for reversion from violence to political process. And after years of violence and destruction very modest confidence building measures are needed on which to painstakingly build the beginnings of dialogue. It takes a long time. No Turkish government has ever embarked on that slow process or convinced the Kurds that their interests are better served by looking to Ankara as part of Turkey, rather than looking south and east to connections with Kurds in Iraq and elsewhere. Erdogan's ambitious initiative of 2013 - 2015 was an example of this. There was no small basis of trust on which to build. When the political risk for Erdoğan became too great, the initiative was ended. It's a tragic situation. I feel deep sorrow and sympathy all the Turks and Kurds who've lost their lives.

Q: Thank you. So now let's move on to more recent affairs, such as the energy and security crisis in the Eastern Mediterranean during 2020. Your thoughts on this?

A: The Turkish response in 2020 had all the marks of the Erdoğan government. You have a grandiose approach to world affairs; nationalism and confrontation will solve all the problems, at least for the domestic constituency. That's the answer to all the perceived challenges in the Mediterranean, whether energy, political, or security related. You call it *Mavi Vatan.* But it wasn't great, was it? At one end of the Mediterranean, you had confrontation with a NATO ally, France, during the war in Libya, when they nearly started

shooting each other. You've got confrontation with Greece and Cyprus because of claims to the undersea energy reserves. You've got the opportunity of cooperation with Israel because Israel can't bring its offshore resources ashore. So why not a pipeline with Turkey, but through waters claimed by Cyprus? There were lots of problems with *Mavi Vatan*, and perhaps that's why we don't hear about it these days.

Now the situation is actually worse. Your energy supplies from Russia are at risk. So are Turkey's relations with its Western ally's relations because of Turkey's non-observance of the sanctions regime against Russia and other actions which do not befit an ally. Energy resources in the Black Sea have been discovered. But the Black Sea may well become an area of confrontation between NATO and Russia. And you have a nuclear power station being built by the Russians.

Q: Thank you. So, we've moved naturally into that region. From the Mediterranean to the Black Sea and Ukraine. How would you describe Turkey's role in the balance of the forces in the Straits should these things develop?

A: It would be unacceptable for Turkey to disregard its obligations under the Montreux Convention, whatever the pressure from Putin. But, as I said just now, the Black Sea may become a theatre of confrontation between Russia and NATO. Turkey may be confronted with the choice of behaving as a loyal alliance member, or as at present, as an ally partly in name only.

Q: I did ask if you could you expand on British policies on the Ukraine issue at the moment.

A: They're pretty simple. We want Russia to abandon its invasion, to leave Ukraine alone and make reparations for the enormous and unspeakable damage they've done to that country. There's no compromise available here, although I imagine that President Zelensky may eventually make some tactical concessions for the sake of peace.

As I've said already, I deplore Turkish failure to join in the NATO sanctions against Russia. Instead, as you know, Turkey has lent money to Russian Airlines to enable Russian tourists to reach Turkey. Russian credit cards are recognised in Turkey. Of course, I understand the importance of Russian tourists, oil and gas and the trade in agricultural products. But we're in a situation in which two countries are being destroyed and Turkish

actions risk prolonging that tragedy. And it's a tragedy which can damage all of us, including Turkey.

It's a crisis which puts Turkey in the spotlight, since one of the consequences of the Russian invasion has been the revitalization of NATO. Finland and Sweden want to join NATO. What does Turkey do in those circumstances? Can it continue to be a detached member of the Alliance? How will this affect Turkey's relations with the US and Europe?

Q: Okay. Thank you. Now we're moving from the Western part of Russia to the Eastern part, and the Caucasus. What do you have to say about the diplomatic and security policies in the Caucasus, especially the tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan?

A: When I was Under-Secretary for the region, I used to say to the Armenians that although they had conquered Karabakh, Azerbaijan was a bigger, richer country with important oil resources. In the long run Armenia would be the loser. So they should cut a deal now, while they had the advantage. They didn't do that, and they lost.

Of course, Turkey's relationship with Armenia has been difficult for many years. I draw a comparison between the way Turkey has dealt with Armenia and the way that the United States has handled. Cuba. They both made the same mistake. The American tactic was to try to bring down Castro, first by invasion and then by trying to isolate him and impose embargoes. What happened was that the Cubans rallied round their Communist leader and put up with all kinds of deprivation. The regime there remains virtually unchanged. To achieve their objectives, the Americans would have done much better to establish an open and broad relationship with Cuba. Before long, American trade and investment would have made it impossible for communism to survive. Cuba would have fallen into the American sphere of influence.

So with Turkey and Armenia. The border is closed, and Turkey has no relations with Armenia. Russia has supported Armenia, and Turkey Azerbaijan. Instead, Turkey should have developed an open relationship with Armenia and encouraged Turkish trade and investment there, drawing Armenia into the orbit of Turkey and the West.

Now, as I foresaw in the 90s, Azerbaijan has regained Karabagh. Russia has invaded Ukraine. The Armenia/Turkey relationship remains unchanged. Armenia has tried to make some kind of balance between its dependence on Russia on the one hand and its desire to develop its ties with the West on the other. Armenia abstained on the recent UN resolution on

the Russian invasion, which must have been politically difficult to do. But as the war in Ukraine continues, Russia is likely to demand greater support from Armenia. Russia might try to use Armenia to find ways of bypassing NATO's sanctions. On the other hand, Armenia may be made subject to the Western sanctions that have been imposed on Russia.

Q: Now about Northern Iraq, Northern Syria and the Kurdish issue.

A: Of course the British were partly responsible for the Sykes-Picot agreement. The Sykes-Picot borders were artificial. I used to think that the dreadful recent wars in Iraq, Northern Iraq and Syria would lead to the breakup of these artificial states and that there would be a reversion to tribal, ethnic, religious, and warlord-based mini states. But it hasn't happened. The Sykes-Picot borders remain in place. An important reason for this lies in the interests of major powers and the rivalry between them. I have in mind Russia, the United States, Iran and Turkey. A breakup of these regional artificial states would make those interests very difficult to manage. And then, of course, there's ISIS. You asked about UK strategy. The UK is a major trading nation. As such, it has an enduring and overriding interest in regional security and stability, because that facilitates trade and investment. So, it too favours the maintenance of the regional status quo. But of course, it also has its own distinctive interests and objectives with Russia, the United States, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Turkey.

And then of course there's the Kurdish question which we've already discussed. So these factors can affect the way that the UK pursues its fundamental interest in regional stability. That's not a very precise answer, but I think it reflects the complex realities of the region. I should add, though, that the perceived Turkish interest, which requires Turkish arms and men to be stationed in Northern Syria, is a drain on Turkish material resources and human capital. It also inhibits development in Southeast Turkey. A settlement would bring great benefits, and not just for Turkey. And of course, it's also relevant to the question of refugees and migrants, which is already a controversial issue in the run up your forthcoming elections. The migrants can't simply be returned to their countries of origin by then.

Q: Exactly. Yes. Again, with UK being out of Brexit, do you think that official British recognition of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus could solve. Could it serve to solve this issue in any way?

A: Maybe in its role as a guarantor of the long-disregarded Cyprus Constitution. I have vivid memories of those years' in1960s when relations between Greece and Turkey were very

tense and Cyprus was a key issue. I remember leaving the embassy for lunch one day. As I was going out, the receptionist said, “David, I’ve got a call from someone. I think you had better take it.” I picked up the phone and a voice said “This is the Commander of the British base at Akrotiri. There are Turkish fighters in my airspace. If you can't get them out of there in ten minutes, I'll shoot them down.” I said, “You can’t do that. It’s lunchtime!”. I couldn’t quite visualise calling someone at the Foreign Ministry and saying that their aircraft were going to be shot down. They would be having lunch, too!

As regards your question about the British contribution to achieving a settlement, there are of course many British residents in Cyprus and investment there. But Brexit has simply reduced and weakened the UK’s influence in Cyprus. I very much regret the failure over many years to secure a Cyprus settlement. Many opportunities have been lost and many, including the European Union, share responsibility for that. For some forty years, the UK devoted more effort than anyone else to the search for a solution; in particular through the tireless efforts of Lord Hannay, He was regarded by both the Turks and the Greeks as being biased against them. So he must have been doing something right!

Q: Okay then. Right, thank you. Our last question now, which is a kind of personal one. In their valedictory despatches, your predecessors such as Sir Alexander Knox Helm, Sir James Bowker, and Sir Roderick Sarell wrote about their personal observations regarding Turkey and the Turks. What would your observations be on a personal level from your time spent here?

A: It’s worth telling a story about Knox Helm. After the revolution and Ankara became the capital of the new Republic, the British Embassy in Istanbul was saying, “Must we really move to move to Ankara? Won’t Ataturk make Istanbul the capital again?” So they rented a train at Ankara station as a temporary solution. Knox Helm, the junior second secretary, was sent to live in the train. He noticed one day that Atatürk was building his modest Presidential residence on a hill outside Ankara as it then was. He thought, well, if that's where the President's going to live, we’d better have our Embassy up there, too. So, he bought the land now occupied by the Embassy. He reported to the Ambassador in Istanbul that he’d bought a bit of land for the Ankara Embassy close to the President's palace. And the reply from the Ambassador was, well, if he, Knox Helm, wanted a bit of barren hillside in the middle of Anatolia, he could have it; but the British Government wasn't going to buy it from him. Eventually, of course, the Government changed its mind and bought it from him (but for the same price that Knox Helm had paid for it!)

As you know from your study of British documents, this was an era when British ambassadors had a habit of commenting, sometimes disparagingly, on the habits and characteristics of the people of the country to which they were accredited. The main criterion seemed to be the extent to which the country in question resembled the United Kingdom. The Turks were probably low down the list because they didn't play cricket!

I think, incidentally that the Turks ought to play rugby if not cricket. They are tough people, good at wrestling, which rugby often resembles. Rugby is one of the most popular sports in little Georgia. Even though the Georgians only started to play seriously in the 1990s, they now compete successfully in the European Nations League. The Turks could do at least as well!

Those two predecessors of mine commented on Turkish hospitality, and it's indeed wonderful. I used to hitchhike around Turkey when I was a language student, and I found I could hardly pay for a meal wherever I went, or sometimes even for accommodation for the night. I once was on a train from Eskişehir to Afyon; I started talking to a man in the compartment opposite me who said he lived in a village about forty kilometres short of Afyon. He invited me to stay the night. So we got out at his village and I spent the night at his house. The village had a *kaplıca*, as many do in that area. So we went to the hamam. Afterwards I said "I must go on to Afyon. When is the next train?" And he said, "It's the same time next week, won't you stay till then?" I said, "I really ought to be getting on". He said, "Well, in that case, you'll have to walk". I started off and eventually I was overtaken by a peasant who was taking his produce by horse cart to the market in Afyon. We slept that night under his cart and reached Afyon the next day. It says so much about how life has changed. Taking his produce to market was a major endeavour, whereas now, in a truck, you cover the distance in half an hour. But my night in the village was a wonderful example of Turkish hospitality. It remains a wonderful tradition. Nowadays Turks from the major cities have hospitable friends all over the country. But they didn't in 1965 because going outside Istanbul was an adventure for urban Turks. They tended to wear hiking equipment, with boots and rucksacks. So I may been a greater beneficiary of countrywide hospitality than they were!

I'd to conclude with an expression of respect and regard for Turkey's rich cultural, spiritual and racial mix and heritage. Besides Turkish, the languages spoken include Laz, Hemşinli, Armenian, Greek, Arabic, Kurdish and more. I wish that the government did not regard this as a threat. On the contrary, it's a priceless asset.

My wife and I met in Istanbul, and we were married there. Our daughter was born in Ankara. She too was married in Istanbul, simply because she loves Turkey. Our son studied Turkish and Osmanlıca at Oxford University. He has lived in Izmir. We have as many Turkish friends as British. And we return to Turkey every year.

Amanda: Thank you very much indeed. It's been a really wonderful hour listening. It has been a great pleasure.

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Biography of Sir David Logan

Sir David Logan was British Ambassador to Turkey from 1997-2001 and also served at the British Embassy there between 1965-69. For most of his career, he specialised in east-west relations and in defence policy. He served as Deputy Chief of Mission at the Embassies in Moscow (1989-92) and Washington (1995-97). In London, his appointments included Assistant Under Secretary of State for Central and Eastern European Affairs (1992-94), and subsequently for Defence Policy (1994-95). He was a Senior Associate Member of St Anthony's College, Oxford in 1988-89. Since retirement from the FCO, he has been Director of the Centre for Studies in Security and Diplomacy at Birmingham University, a Senior Fellow of the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, and Chair of the British Institute at Ankara. He has also been director of British, Russian and Turkish companies. He lectures on defence policy at Birmingham University, where he holds an Honorary Doctorate.