INSINCERE TURKEY

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Arab culture values and nurses long memory. While for Western countries the First World War is ancient history, for Arabs the Crusades are a relatively recent invasion—so is the brutal 500-year Turkish occupation of Arab countries. Arabs remember their martyrs who were slain by the Turks during WWI and in the decades prior to that war. It's for these reasons that few Arab states have had warm relations with the Republic of Turkey since the early '20s. That Turkey was among the first countries to recognize Israel, and provided that country with essential foods in the late '40s is another reason why most Arab states have maintained correct—rather than warm—relations with Ankara. This feeling is shared by Arab people whether they live in monarchies, military dictatorships or socialist republics.

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Many Arabs also feel insulted by Turkey's decision to replace the Arabic alphabet with Latin letters.

The switch, by Ataturk, is particularly galling to Arabs because to this day Turkey and Turks boast that they had dispensed with the "primitive" Arabic alphabet and adopted the "progressive" Latin alphabet. In the same breath Turks also claim that they had banned the Arab fez because the headgear was a symbol of Arab "backwardness." It's no secret that Ataturk's decision was intended to symbolize Turkey veering its gaze toward the West and disassociate itself from the Arabs and the East. The culmination of this aspiration is the decades' long Turkish effort to join the European Union. Now, after playing the rejected lover to Europe, Turkey is turning its glance toward the Middle East. Arabs, of course, know about Turkey's failed tango with Europe. Any Arab with integrity would refuse to be Turkey's second-choice suitor.

Arabs—a proud people despite their many collective failures in the 20th century—believe that three non-Arab Middle Eastern states want to dominate the region. Turkey is one of the trio which includes Iran and Israel. When Arabs have fought Israel and Iran to make sure those two countries fail in their imperial designs, there's no reason why they would tolerate domination by Turkey—a country whose cruel yoke they bore for half a millennium.

The 22 Arab states have a population of 355 million. Turkey has a population of 75 million. Egypt, with 82 million people, has a bigger population than Turkey. When 15 million Kurds—who have no love for Turkey—are discounted from that country's population Turkey becomes a madly ambitious frog which wants to swallow the cow.

The choice of the "cow" descriptive is not accidental. Turkey considers the Arab countries fat cows ready to be milked. As well, to this day many Turks refer to Arabs as "hayvan" (animal) or "esshek" (ass).

Soon after the termination of WWI, Sharif Hussein of Mecca (the leader of the Arab Revolt) and later his son, Emir Abdullah of Transjordan, tried to become leaders of the Arab world. They failed, just as Egypt's President Gamal Abdel Nasser did in the '50s and the '60s. Arab states and people refuse to have a single leader representing them from the Atlantic to the Gulf. Why would they accept the leadership of a foreign and untrustworthy Turkey when they have refused single leadership by one of their own? Not just foreign leader but an irascible, double-talking braggart called Erdogan.

Well-informed, sophisticated Arabs also know that Turkey still nurtures its racist Turanic Empire dream--one Turkic state from the Bosporus to Bhutan and the Chinese border. This imperial and exclusivist dream is a nightmare for any thinking Arab.

Erdogan, Davutoglu and Gul ("The Three Tenors") are marketing Turkey as a progressive force and country which would help Arab achieve democracy, tolerance, equality… Yet one look at the Middle Eastern headlines reveals that Turkey continues to kill Kurds and mistreat millions of Turks, in

addition to millions of Alevis, Armenians, Assyrians, Greeks, Jews, and Zazas. Even Turks—hounded by various unjust laws—are far from being free people.

Arabs have yet another reason to suspect Turkey's goodwill. A glaring characteristic of Turkey's (Ottoman and current) strategy and policies in the past two centuries has been what North Americas Native Nations call "talking with a forked tongue." Double speak, in other words. Turkey says one thing and does another. Threatened by European powers, Ottoman Turkey promised reforms and a democratic constitution in the 19th century. Instead, the empire's minorities were persecuted and many of them slain or deported to create a homogenous Turkish country. Ataturk's "modern" Turkey continued the dishonest policy… became friends with the Soviet Union then became an ally of USSR's foes. Pretending to be a democracy, modern Turkey has been a dictatorship for most of its recent history. It remained neutral during WWII but declared war on Germany a few months before the defeat of that country. It was friendly with Israel while pretending to be a Moslem country sympathetic to Moslem interests. These days Turkey is "friendly" with the West while remaining friendly with Iran—the West's enemy. Erdogan's foreign minister—Ahmet Davutlogul—pontificates about Turkey's foreign policy of "zero problems with neighbors" while at the same time preaching neo-Ottomanism—a policy which by its very definition—would be unfriendly to the Arabs.

It's the height of hubris for a state like Turkey to imagine that it can become Big Brother to a people who have contributed a thousand times more to human civilization than the violent loudmouths of Ankara.

Finally, a country where "Armenian" is considered a swear word, a word politicians deploy to destroy the career of a rival can't call itself a country which others should consider a sincere, tolerant, progressive or admirable.