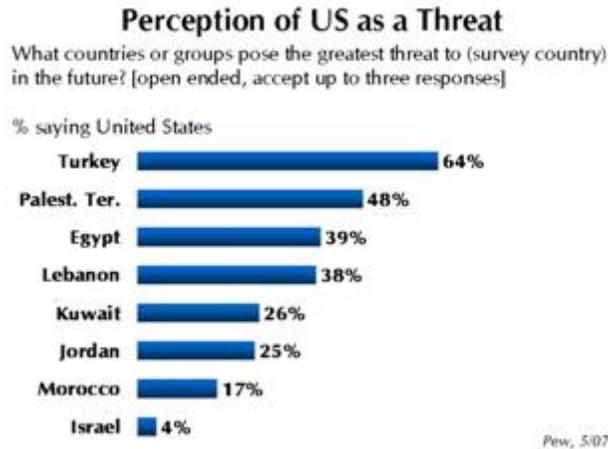


Why Turks Feel Threatened by the US

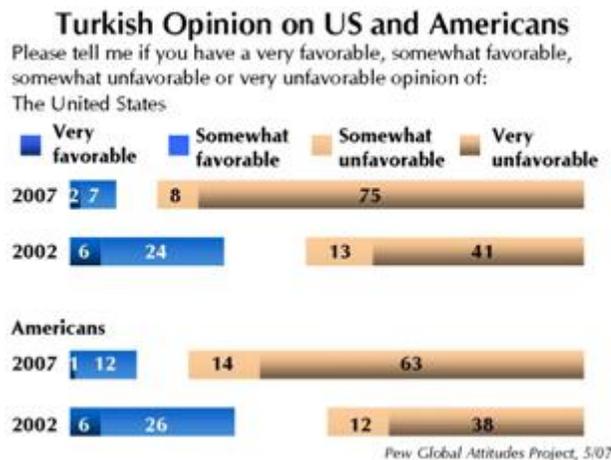
September 5, 2007

Which Middle Eastern public has the largest percentage of people naming the United States as the country that poses the greatest threat? The answer, according to the most recent [Pew Global Attitudes Project](#) survey, is Turkey, a NATO ally and a country that is generally touted as the type of secular, multi-party democracy the United States should foster in the Middle East.



Nearly two-thirds (64%) of Turkish respondents name the United States, which guarantees Turkish security as a NATO ally and has urged the EU to accept Turkish membership, as the country that poses the greatest threat to Turkey in the future, Pew found. Among the Middle Eastern publics asked the open-ended question by Pew, only in Turkey did a majority name the United States.

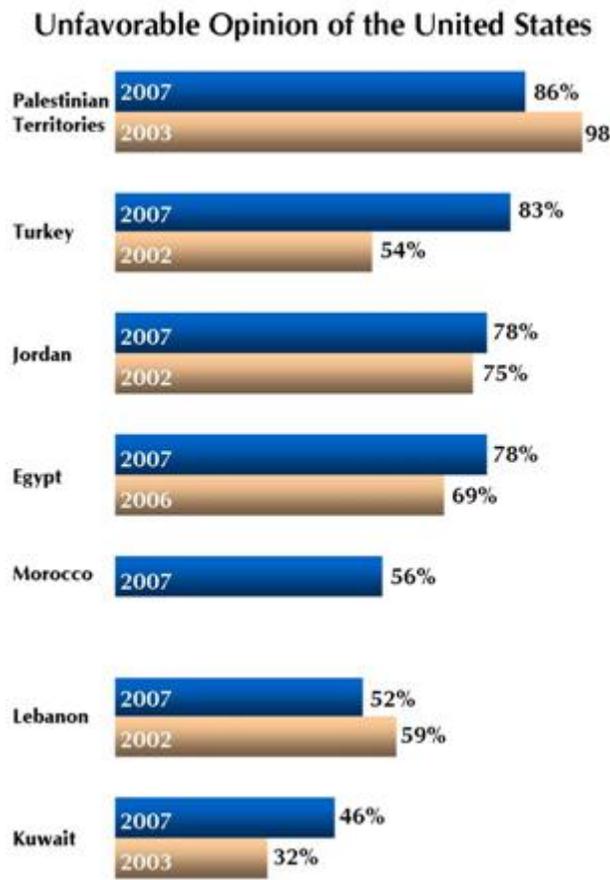
Turkey is also the Middle Eastern country where public opinion toward the United States has slipped furthest in recent years. Fewer than one in 10 Turks (9%) have a positive view of the United States, a drop of 21 points from the already low level in Pew's 2002 survey. More than four out of five (83%) say their attitude is unfavorable, including 75 percent who feel very unfavorably.



That's one of the highest negative percentages among the eight Middle Eastern countries surveyed by Pew in 2007, second only to the Palestinian public with 86 percent unfavorable.

But unlike the Palestinians (whose attitudes toward the United States worsened after the 2003 invasion but have improved slightly since then), Turks have remained as negative as they were in March 2003 (84%). Moreover, not only do most Turks view the United States unfavorably, more than three out of four (77%) also look on Americans that way.

The deterioration of the United States' image in Turkey has coincided with the increasing power of the Islamist-leaning Justice and Development Party (AKP). With the parliamentary election of Abdullah Gul as president, the AKP has won control of a post that wields important veto powers and considerable prestige, as the position once held by Kemal Ataturk, the secular Turkish republic's founding father.



But [Dr. Emre Erdogan](#), a political scientist and partner of Infakto Research Workshop, a major polling firm based in Istanbul, says Turkish views of the United States have deteriorated largely because of security concerns, not religious ones.

"This sudden and rapid decrease in positive attitudes towards the US is an outcome of the invasion [of Iraq]," Erdogan said, adding that polls in Turkey show that the public thinks that the invasion has "led to increasing terrorist threats toward Turkey."

"Turkish public opinion perceives the US as the worst enemy of Turkey as a result of the intensifying terrorist activities of the PKK," he said, using the acronym for the Kurdistan Workers' Party, which has been fighting for autonomy in southeast Turkey since 1984.

According to Erdogan, Turks believe that separatist guerrillas operating out of bases in Iraq's northern mountains have grown stronger since the fall of Saddam Hussein and Turkish media frequently air evidence of alleged US collaboration with the PKK.

Some 80 Turkish soldiers have been killed in rebel attacks so far this year and the Turkish government has threatened to launch cross border raids into Iraq to root them out if the US and Iraqi armies fail to do so.

"Consequently, this intolerance and antipathy towards the PKK become converted to the perception of the US as the major enemy of the country," Erdogan said. "Before the invasion of Iraq, the worst enemy of the country was stated as Greece or Armenia, which are eternal enemies of Turkey, rather than the US."

A June 2007 poll by the [International Republican Institute](#) found that a third of Turks (30%) blame "foreign governments trying to divide our country" for the problems in the Southeast, up from 24 percent in 2006. Foreign interference is the most widely chosen of the seven "reasons for the problems in the Southeast" offered. Though economic explanations are also widely cited (26 percent choose economic underdevelopment and 11 percent lack of government investment), these responses have together declined by 13 points over the past year.

A 2005 poll by Infakto found that 71 percent of Turkish respondents agreed with the argument that "the West has helped separatist groups in Turkey--such as the Kurdish PKK--gain strength." Sixty-six percent think that "Western countries want to divide and break Turkey like they divided and broke the Ottoman Empire in the past."

The declining support among Turks for the EU and NATO is consistent with such convictions. The ratio of Turks who see membership in the EU as a "good thing" fell from 73 percent in 2004 to 54 percent in 2006, according to the [German Marshall Fund](#). And the numbers saying NATO is essential for Turkey's security fell from a bare majority in 2004 (53%) to 44 percent in 2006, though this remains the largest percentage of respondents.

These attitudes seem to be reflected in Turkey's growing opposition to American counter-terrorism policies. A majority of Turks (58%) already said that they opposed "the US-led efforts to fight terrorism," in Pew's 2002 survey. That jumped to 79 percent in 2007.

Not only do Turks express more negative opinion about Western political entities, they also express such feelings about Western values. The Pew survey found that Turkish respondents register more unfavorable attitudes toward American democracy, business, and culture--even about its science and technology:

- 81 percent of Turks say they "dislike American ideas about democracy," up 31 points since 2002.
- 83 percent dislike "American ways of doing business," up 24 points.
- 68 percent dislike "American music, movies and television," up 22 points.
- 51 percent say they do not admire the United States for its "technological and scientific advances," up 27 points since 2002 when a majority of 67 percent did admire such achievements.

Erdogan says that until recently even Turks who disliked the US government tended to appreciate Americans and their culture. Now he sees an "emerging antipathy towards the Americans and the US life style."

"Our previous research [indicated] that the climate of Turkish public opinion was 'anti-Bushism' rather than 'anti-Americanism,' " he said. "Nevertheless, recent findings indicate a change of the climate towards anti-Americanism."