

## Meagher, Tom

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From: Heather Haddon [hhaddon@gmail.com]  
Sent: Monday, October 29, 2007 3:20 PM  
To: Meagher@northjersey.com  
Subject: Re: story idea

Follow Up Flag: Follow up  
Flag Status: Completed

hey tom-  
here we go. first draft. i have no idea how long it is. nor do i have english spell check here so be prepare for typos-also fueled by a turkish keyboard. the names are also CKed. ive pasted it below.  
i will be working on the photos now. my editing window is a bit slim because i have to pack and get to the airport. you might have to do some of it for me....  
thanks  
heather

ISTANBUL—On Monday, Turkey dressed itself in red.

Istanbul residents turned out in droves in their nation's color for Republic Day, a national holiday commemorating the founding of the Turkish republic 84 years ago. As in previous years, children sang patriotic songs and soldiers marched before the thousands flocking to citywide rallies.

But this year, the estimated 5 million crescent and star flags that have flown off street vender's tables have more to do with current affairs. A week ago, Kurdish separatist rebels killed 12 Turkish soldiers—one of the bloodiest acts in recent Turkish history that has the country on the brink of war.

"The situation is fragile," said Dr. Nilufer Narli, dean of sociology at Istanbul's Bahcesehir University, during a telephone interview on Monday. "Kurdish extremists found a fertile place to grow and get organized."

The conflict has captured international political attention as it has dangerous implications for Turkey's neighbor to the South — Iraq. But Turks across the world take it to heart. Kurds worry about backlash, or feel violence will do nothing to improve their minority status.

And for many Turks, war is the only natural response to a threat to their homeland .

"Our ancestors suffered to make this republic," said Eyüp Baş, a welder from İstanbul, speaking in Turkish during a Monday morning rally. "We are all born soldiers, regardless if we are at war or not."

Different civilizations have fought over Turkey for more than 2,000 years. Even after the republic was founded on Oct. 29, 1923, the Turkish people have endured decades of political instability, military coups and conflicts with foreign nations. The turmoil has led to a widespread fear about any security threat, according to Narli, the sociology professor.

"People are really traumatized about the possible loss of the republic," said Narli, who often lectures about Turkish politics in the U.S. "It makes for an ultra-nationalistic fever."

Up until the 1990s, the government banned the language and cultural expertion of its minority ethnic groups—including the millions of Turkish Kurds. Humanitarian organizations condemned the repression and forced displacement of entire Kurdish villages. But a militant organization known as PKK has become the Kurish people's most visible—and violent—face of their struggle for a better life.

The Turkish military squashed the PKK in 1999, but it began resuming attacks after the war began in Iraq . Many political analysts expect that ongoing unrest could lead Iraqi Kurds to form their own state—a possibility that incenses many Turks, and provides little hope to some Kurdish intellectuals.

"Not only are Kurds spread out all over the country, but a Kurdish state would have too many potential aggressors," said Ümit Firat, editor of a prominent Kurdish cultural magazine, during a Monday interview in Istanbul.

Anger came to a boil ten days ago, when PKK militants ambushed a military convoy in South East Turkey. Since, seas of chanting demonstrators—from veiled grandmothers and school children, to taxi drivers and motorcycle riders—have choked the streets of Istanbul.

National newspapers featured the 12 "martyrs" on their covers, and their images hung from the ceilings of the capital's vast Grand Bazaar. A patriotic frenzy has driven more flag sales in the last five days than in the previous six months, according to news accounts. "Everyone living in the Turkish republic is buying a flag," said Metin Arslan, 28, as people snapped up the red fabric from his sidewalk blanket. "Even foreigners are buying them. "

The nationwide demonstrations may be led by the very patriotic, like Baş, the wielder, who helped organize eight marches in that many days.

But on Republic Day, those carrying flags included Halil Getinöz—a 36-year-old sales manager who views the conflict through the eyes of a worried father—and Berek Aslan—a 26-year-old business administrator who splits his time between İstanbul and Cape May, New Jersey.

"It's just sad," Aslan said. "They've pushed us to do something." Next week, international leaders will gather in Turkey to discuss affairs in Iraq. They will also address whether Turkish soldiers should be able mobilize into northern Iraq—something American politicians fear could further destabilize the country. Arslan, the flag vendor, said the conflict has increased his business through record attendance at Monday's rallies. But Republic Day struck him as bittersweet. "If it wasn't for the PKK, everyone would just be smiling," said Arslan, in Turkish. "But now, they come with different emotions."