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THE INTERVIEW SERIES
Politics

TALKING HEADS —*Global*

Preface

From the presidents of Turkey and Colombia to the leader of the Israeli Labor party, Monocle interviews five political leaders from some of the world's most volatile regions.



OI Abdullah Gul *President Turkey*

Preface

Bordering Iran, Iraq, Syria and the European Union, Turkey has been taking advantage of its geography to play an increasingly vital diplomatic role. But judging when to back rebellions and when to talk to autocrats is not always easy to get right.

WRITER
Steve Bloomfield

PHOTOGRAPHER
Erbil Balta

Never have Turkey's ambitions to have "zero problems" in its neighbourhood looked so bleak. Israel's refusal to apologise for killing nine Turkish citizens on the Gaza-bound flotilla in 2009 has destroyed a burgeoning diplomatic relationship between the region's two truest democracies. The uprising in Syria has brought instability to Turkey's long, southern border and undermined the government's attempts to portray itself as an influential peacemaker (Turkey's energetic foreign minister, Ahmet Davutoglu, paid 49 visits to Damascus in the past four years). Now, there is trouble on another border, following the attack by Iraq-based Kurdish rebels that killed 24 Turkish soldiers in October.

Yet Turkey's president Abdullah Gul believes he still has reasons to be optimistic. Sat by the window in his grand office at the presidential palace, an obligatory portrait of Ataturk behind his desk, Gul reflects on a turbulent nine months in the Arab world which – he claims – has increased Turkey's influence and enhanced its position as a "source of inspiration for the countries of the Middle East".

The Arab Spring has been a finely balanced juggling act for Turkey. Its sympathies – and its long-term ambitions – lie with the protesters but the realities of short-term realpolitik have forced Gul and Davutoglu to talk softly. It's one thing for those in Washington, London or

Paris to call for Bashar al-Assad's resignation, it's another for those who share a border to do the same.

But as the dictators have fallen and the effects of unrest have begun to be felt on Turkey's own doorstep, Gul has become more outspoken. In a warning not just to Bashar but to recalcitrant leaders throughout the Middle East and the Arab world, Gul makes his boldest statement since the uprisings began, aligning himself once and for all with the rebellions and opposition movements from Damascus to the Gulf. "There cannot be any more countries that are not democratic around the Mediterranean," he says. "It is not possible anymore to continue with closed regimes."

His government's attempts to persuade the Syrian regime to embrace reform have, he accepts, fallen on deaf ears. Instead, his attention has turned to the future: hosting and facilitating Syria's disparate opposition movement while also preparing for the possibility of a disorderly end to the Assad regime. The creation of a "buffer zone" inside Syria has been mooted privately in Ankara and Gul does little to deny plans are under discussion. "We have our measures, precautions, in place," he says.

The time for diplomatic solutions to the problems across Turkey's borders appears to have gone, and not just with Syria. Gul is more explicit when discussing Iraq. Turkish forces, both in the army and air force, have already entered Iraq following the PKK attack and they are likely to stay for some time. "So long as the Iraqi armed forces are not in a position to take necessary measures we would not refrain from taking some action."

Whether the Iraqi government is entirely happy to host Turkish forces, Gul does not say. "The Iraqi armed forces are not strong enough," he states baldly.

The more belligerent tone continues when the subject of Israel is raised. The two countries were working well together until 2008 – Turkey believed it had all but brokered a deal on the Golan Heights between Israel and Syria – but the Israeli invasion of Gaza and, crucially, the flotilla attack, has turned the clock back.

Behind the scenes attempts have been

The middle man *President Gul's CV*

1950 Born in Kayseri, central Anatolia

1971 Graduates in economics from Istanbul University

1983 Receives a PhD from Istanbul University

1991 Elected to parliament

2001 Becomes a founder member of the Justice and Development Party (AKP)

2002 Serves a short term as a stop-gap prime minister after AKP leader Recep Tayyip Erdogan is barred from elections

2003 Becomes Turkey's foreign minister, responsible for steering the country's EU membership talks

2007 Becomes the first politician with an Islamist background to be elected president of Turkey

made between Gul and Israel's president, Shimon Peres, to mend the rift. Gul is adamant though that nothing short of a full apology will be acceptable. "We cannot just turn a blind eye to what has happened, or just leave it to time for things to change," he says. It has been noted in Ankara that Israel felt able to apologise swiftly when the Israeli Defence Force killed five Egyptian soldiers in September.

And then there is the other border: the one Turkey shares with the EU. Meetings on Turkey's eventual accession to the bloc still take place, but there is a sense of going through the motions. Germany and France, under their present leaders, will not consider Turkey's membership. Gul is delicate, reminding the world that "Turkey has quite a number of strong friends in Europe. But then," he adds with some understatement, "there are also some who are perhaps hesitant about Turkey."

As Gul likes to remind visitors, Turkey is a country with a "very strong past". With his monogrammed shirts, confident manner and determined sense of Turkey's place in the world, Gul firmly believes it can have a strong future too. "This region is very thirsty for peace, for democracy and peaceful coexistence," he says. "I believe we can see a region emerge which would match those ambitions." And Turkey, he insists, will be leading the way. — (M)

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In the past, governments and security structures have had the upper hand. Today they feel challenged

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02

Hassan bin Talal *Crown Prince Jordan*

Preface

Released from the labyrinthine power games that accompany the ruling job in Middle East states, Prince Hassan of Jordan has found the opportunity to voice his vision of an engaged, harmonious and inclusive regional future

WRITER

Adam LeBor

PHOTOGRAPHER

Jork Weismann

As regent to the late King Hussein, Prince Hassan bin Talal was for decades the second most powerful man in Jordan. Despite being a scion of the ruling elite, he is now an outspoken and influential critic of Arab governments' failures to modernise, liberalise and grant their citizens human rights.

Prince Hassan's family has ruled Jordan since the foundation of the country in 1921. They enjoy wide support, even though about one third of Jordan's population is of Palestinian origin. But for how long? The Arab Spring quickly reached Jordan and regular demonstrations take place in the capital Amman.

Opposition movements are legal in Jordan but the country is far from democratic. King Abdullah retains the right to appoint the prime minister, ministers and other senior public figures. The US State Department, human rights and civil society groups have expressed strong concern at the lack of public freedoms, censorship and the use of torture in prisons. MONOCLE met Prince Hassan in Budapest, where he lectured on citizenship and the Arab Spring at the Central European University.

Monocle: *The Arab Spring is remaking the Middle East. Is this a pivotal moment?*

Prince Hassan: This is a period of crisis and opportunity. The revolution in

Tunisia has played out into elections. But in Yemen, you have a very painful revolution in slow motion. The question is, could this lead to regional cohesion and developments such as an Arab parliament and Arab financial institutions? There is not yet any coordination.

M: *You said that the Arab world has become a 'no-think zone'. What did you mean?*

PH: The point is to think for yourself. You don't have to keep responding to exhortations from outside.

M: *So what should happen next?*

PH: We need a social charter, based on the Arab Thought Forum, that includes a bill of rights, such as the right to life and the proscription of discrimination, and the implementation of the international conventions that we have signed and not adhered to.

M: *What can Arab states learn from Israel?*

PH: The tenacity of purpose. In terms of Israel's strategy of promoting and understanding their own position in the world, that is something the Arab world should have learnt many years ago.

M: *Was Nato right to intervene in Libya?*

PH: A moment came when the *casus belli* was very clear on humanitarian grounds. There was no other option.

M: *How concerned are you about Libya?*

PH: The big question is when will the countries of the region be invited to stand on their own two feet in terms of securing their own security interests?

M: *What would you like to see in Syria?*

PH: I would like to see the bloodshed stop, and not spill into full-scale civil war.

M: *Should President Assad resign?*

PH: That is not for me to say, but it would be preferable if it happened from within. If it is forced from outside, you will have a whole establishment, as happened in Iraq, excluded from public life.

M: *The governments of three republics have collapsed – in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya – but the monarchies, such as in Jordan and*

Power behind the throne *Prince Hassan's CV*

1947 Born in Amman, Jordan

1965 Invested as Crown Prince of Jordan's ruling Hashemite monarchy, he served as the closest adviser and confidant to his brother, King Hussein

1994 Prince Hassan was instrumental behind the scenes in the negotiations that led to the signing of the Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty

1999 Despite widespread expectations that Prince Hassan would succeed King Hussein on his death, in his last days the Jordanian monarch replaced him with his son, Abdullah

2011 Deprived of the throne, Prince Hassan has re-invented himself as a global advocate for dialogue and co-existence between faiths, drawing on his time at Oxford University, where he studied Biblical Hebrew

Saudi Arabia, have survived. Why is that?

PH: The republics are, in theory, socialist and progressive, but it seems to me that the socialist experiments – apart from Algeria which has oil resources – have not necessarily achieved [much].

M: *In Jordan, King Abdullah says he will now consult parliament on the appointment of ministers.*

PH: About time too.

M: *You are calling for substantial change by Arab governments. Why should they listen?*

PH: In the past, governments and security structures had the upper hand. Today they all feel challenged by this popular manifestation of a call for change.

M: *You said that the ministries of defence and interior have too much power in Arab regimes and it is time to close the fingernail factory. Why?*

PH: We have all been hypocritical – rendition was clearly a situation where people were sent back to countries which could brutalise them. What kind of hell were we committing our own citizens to?

M: *On a personal note, were you disappointed that you did not succeed to the monarchy in 1999?*

PH: I feel quite liberated – I would not be sitting here talking to you. — (M)

03
Juan Manuel Santos
*President
Colombia***Preface**

Colombia's president has to face old problems – poverty, terrorism, drug cartels – but he's also looking at new challenges and patching up regional feuds.

WRITER

Anastasia Moloney

PHOTOGRAPHER

Piers Calvert

Juan Manuel Santos clearly remembers the day nine years ago when mortar shells launched by rebels rained down on the presidential palace as the then Colombian president was being sworn into office. “I was the finance minister then, and the mortars landed 40 metres from where I was standing,” he says, matter-of-factly.

Colombia has changed a lot since then, and for the better, the 60-year-old president is keen to emphasise. A waning guerrilla insurgency has led to record foreign investment and the country's tourism, oil and mining sectors are in the midst of a bonanza.

“It's a country where a lot of things are happening, a lot of hopefully – and thank God – positive things,” says Santos, sitting in a leather armchair in the presidential office in downtown Bogotá. Perhaps the most significant change under Santos is the shift away from a US-centric foreign policy to Colombia's repositioning as an important player in Latin America.

“Colombia for decades has had a foreign policy where we were on the defensive because we were a country with lots of problems – now that we have been resolving these problems, we think we can play a proactive role on many fronts,” says Santos, a former newspaper editor. He counts the Mexican president, Felipe Calderón, as a “personal friend” and speaks “quite often” to his counterpart in

Brazil, Dilma Rousseff. “We have been saying to everybody in the region that if we work together we'll be much more relevant in world affairs,” he says, adding that Colombia is doing its bit to promote regional unity as head of the Union of South American Nations (Unasur).

Part of working together has involved patching up relations with Colombia's longtime foe, Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez. “Mr Chávez and I have learnt to work together on those issues that unite us and respect our differences,” says Santos, reflecting his trademark pragmatism. Santos also wants Colombia to flex its diplomatic muscles in new waters. Since taking office in August 2010, Santos has visited Japan and South Korea, and has welcomed Chinese delegations to Bogotá. Minutes before our interview, he was on the phone with Turkey's president. “If we work together with a country like Turkey, the synergy there is enormous,” he says.

A former defence minister during the previous government of Álvaro Uribe, Santos oversaw some of the most crushing blows against Colombia's largest rebel group, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Farc). Now as president, he wants to be known as a social crusader. “I dream of a legacy that in some history book they will say the Santos administration left Colombia in peace, with less inequality, fewer poor people and more employment and I'll go to my tombstone very happy,” he says. The centrepiece of his social reform is returning some two million hectares of stolen land to around three million people, many of whom were driven from their homes by armed groups.

But he admits there are serious obstacles ahead, not least armed groups fighting to control cocaine smuggling routes. “The other fear I have is that it's a problem of expectations. We will give land back to the peasants but this is a process that will take at least 10 years. There are lots of people who think they will have their land back tomorrow,” says Santos.

“Quite frankly we don't know how much it's going to cost,” he adds, a surprising admission from a former British and US-trained economist who surrounds himself with technocrats.

The reformer
Juan Manuel Santos's CV

1951 Born in Bogotá

1970 Studies at London School of Economics and Harvard University

1981 Begins working at *El Tiempo* newspaper; later becomes columnist and deputy director. His family were majority shareholders in the newspaper and Santos's father served as editor for 50 years

1991 Becomes Colombia's foreign trade minister under President César Gaviria

2000 As finance minister he is credited with reviving the country's flagging economy

2002 Backs Álvaro Uribe for the presidency

2006 As defence minister plays a key role in cracking down on FARC

2010 Elected president of Colombia

The Santos family is one of the most powerful dynasties in Colombia but the president lacks the populist touch and charisma his predecessor had. Still, that hasn't dampened Santos's popularity, with approval ratings of around 70 per cent.

The issue that has dogged Colombian presidents is how to deal with one of the world's longest running insurgencies – the Farc. Santos is no exception.

Since 1964, the leftist guerrilla group has been trying to topple the Colombian government. Nowadays, the drug-trade-fuelled Farc is politically isolated, and its support among Colombians is virtually non-existent. In November, Colombia's armed forces dealt the biggest blow to the guerrillas in decades, killing the group's top commander Alfsono Cano, seen as Santos's biggest triumph against the Farc. This has renewed debate about whether the government should negotiate with the 8,000-strong rebels.

“I hope so,” says Santos, when asked if he envisages peace talks during his administration. “But I'm not going to sit down with them unless they show clear signs that they want to reach an agreement. Otherwise I'll continue the military pressure, which has been very effective.”

Colombian pundits are speculating whether the popular president will stand for re-election. “I've had no time so far to think about it,” says Santos. — (M)





PHOTOGRAPHER: MARC SHOUL

04
Guy Scott
*Vice-president
Zambia*

You would not want to live in the same street as the most powerful white politician in Africa. In the run-up Zambia’s elections at the end of September, Guy Scott grew tired of white neighbours telling him he was wasting his time. Now that he’s vice-president, he gets a buzz out of shattering the tranquility of his leafy Lusaka suburb.

“I do not like blue lights. But when my motorcade turns into my area, I get the driver to turn them on and send the motorbikes ahead to clear everyone off the street,” he says gleefully.

A newspaperman’s son, 67-year-old Scott is not your textbook white southern African. At 16, he helped print flyers for the man who has since spent 31 years running neighbouring Zimbabwe, President Robert Mugabe. At 28, as an economist-turned-farmer, Scott introduced new edible crops to Zambia. “But the celery was a mistake – no-one would eat it.”

A decade later, Scott had become fascinated by artificial intelligence and was running a

robotics laboratory at Oxford University. “That was my mid-life crisis. It made me a believer in phenomenology – that the only way to understand anything is through beauty.” And for the past 20 years he has been “the honky who can get on with Michael” – Michael “King Cobra” Sata, now the fifth president of the former British colony.

Heavily dependent on its large copper reserves and the Chinese custom they bring, Zambia needs new ideas for feeding its population of 13 million people. After independence in 1964, the country had 27 years of harsh rule under President Kenneth Kaunda, who did eventually relent to calls for multi-party elections. The 20 years following 1991 – under the Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) – were ultimately blighted by corruption. But the MMD had three presidents, fostering the idea of peaceful transition.

“The MMD’s legacy was jobless growth: 80 per cent unemployment and an elite with their fingers in the pie. Then it was left to the donors to put money back into the system by giving cash transfers to the people who needed them. We do not want to continue like that,” says Scott. — ADS



PHOTOGRAPHER: URIEL SINAI

05
Shelly Yechimovich
*Labor party leader
Israel*

Shelly Yechimovich joined the Labor party in 2006, after a prominent career as a journalist. Her meteoric ascent inside Labor peaked in September, when she was elected to lead the party after defeating in primaries her former political patron as well as a retired army general.

Monocle: *Just 15 years ago, Labor under Yitzhak Rabin held more than a third of parliament, and now it has less than 10 per cent. What happened?*

SY: One of the biggest mistakes of the party along the years was its complete focus on Israel’s relationship with its neighbours. The Israeli left was so busy trying to make the two-state solution come true that it neglected its duties vis-à-vis its own electorate.

M: *How would you fix Labor?*

SY: I’d like to bring social-democratic values back to the forefront of Israeli political discourse. I believe that free markets should be balanced

with a strong state that regulates the markets and provides education, health and welfare. Israel is a small country under existential threat, therefore it needs high levels of internal cohesion and solidarity. It cannot afford to have the biggest gap between rich and poor among the OECD countries, as is the case today.

M: *How will the Arab Spring influence Israel?*

SY: We are in the midst of a process and it is hard to foretell where and how it will end. If you had asked me six months ago if I would be in favour of negotiating a peace agreement with Syria, I would have said absolutely yes. It isn’t any longer the case.

M: *Israelis feel misunderstood in the international arena. How would you convey their message better?*

SY: Israel is judged more stringently in the international public opinion than other countries. Many people in the West don’t fully grasp how small Israel is and how close to the border are its biggest metropolises. It’s an experience which is alien to most people outside of Israel. I hope that once Labor is back in power and we have a peace negotiation breakthrough, Israel will enjoy better understanding. — AS