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Geert Wilders

Geert Wilders is a right wing Dutch politician. Although initially a member of the liberal VVD, he first came to prominence in 2002, following his appointment as foreign affairs spokesman, in which role he established a reputation as a critic of radical Islam. His hardline views, particularly his opposition to Turkish accession to the EU, led to his departure from the VVD in 2004, to set up his own political group.

Shortly afterwards, the murder of Theo Van Gogh boosted support for Wilders' message, which would come to include calls for a ban on the Koran, and an end to non-Western immigration. In 2006, his Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV) won 9 seats in the Dutch parliament. Elections in 2010 saw a dramatic increase in support



60 Geert Wilders, Wouter Engler, https://commons.w ikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gee rt_Wilders_(cropped).jpg Wikimedia

that won 24 seats in the 150-seat second chamber in The Hague.^[1]

In 2008, Wilders released *Fitna*, an anti-Islam film which mixed footage of terrorist attacks with readings from the Koran. He subsequently spoke at screenings of the film organised by neoconservative and right-wing groups in the US, Israel and a number of European countries. On 11 September 2010 Wilders was a keynote speaker at a rally against the so-called Ground Zero Mosque in New York^[2] organised by anti-Islam blogger Pamela Geller, who introduced him as her 'hero'. ^[3]

In October 2010 Wilders went on trial in the Netherlands charged with inciting racial hatred for comments comparing Islam to Nazism and for calling for a ban on the Qur'an. ^[4] A retrial was ordered however when the case collapsed after it emerged that one of the judges had tried to sway a potential witness. ^[5] A new trial between March and June 2011^[6] resulted in him being acquitted of the charges of hate speech and discrimination. His case had been apparently 'helped by a reluctant prosecution' who said that 'although his comments may have frequently caused anxiety and insult, they were not criminal as they criticised Islam as a religion and not Muslims as a people'. The presiding judge Marcel van Oosten said about Wilders' statements: "The bench finds that although gross and degenerating, it did not give rise to hatred." ^[7]

In December 2014 Dutch authorities announced Wilders would be prosecuted over allegations that he incited racial hatred against Moroccans during a speech earlier that year in which he led an anti-Moroccan chant. ^[8]

Wilders attended and spoke at the Defeat Jihad Summit 2015.^[9]

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History

Background

Wilders was born in 1963 into a Catholic family in the Limburg town of Venlo.^[10] At 17, Wilders lived in Israel for a time. He would return to the country more than 40 times over the years, and would also travel extensively elsewhere in the Middle East, including Egypt, Syria and Iran.^[11]According to Haaretz, he worked at a moshav in the 1980s.^[12]

Early career

Wilders began his career in health insurance. A related interest in social and economic policy brought him into politics as a

speechwriter for the VVD.^[13] Among those Wilders worked for during this period, from 1990 to 1998, was Frits Bolkestein, the VVD leader. Bolkestein was one of the first Dutch politicians to take up the issue of mass immigration. In this, and in his confrontational style, he would prove to be an example for Wilders.^[14] He was elected a city councillor in Utrecht in 1997. A year later, he was elected to the Dutch Parliament.^[15]

VVD MP

Wilders first four years in parliament were relatively quiet, although he soon established a reputation as a critic of the Dutch social security system. After his appointment as foreign affairs spokesman in 2002, he became more outspoken about radical Islam and its impact on the Dutch Muslim community.^[16] Following an episode of the Dutch TV programme Nova on inflammatory Muslim sermons in December 2002, Wilders called for action to be taken against the mosques and imams involved.^[17] In April 2003, Wilders and fellow VVD member Ayaan Hirsi Ali published an article calling for a 'liberal jihad'.^[18] In October 2003, Wilders called on the Dutch Government to summon the Indonesian ambassador over comments by the country's foreign minister in a Dutch TV interview. Questioned about Indonesian laws against homosexuality and adultery, Yusril Ihza Mahendra had said: ""What did the Dutch do when they colonised this country Indonesia? How many people they did they kill? I don't hate Dutch people. I hate injustice. I hate them because they were unscrupulous." This was reported in the Dutch media as "Indonesian minister hates Dutch people"^[19]

Resignation

In the summer of 2004, Wilders and his VVD colleague Gert-Jan Oplaat published a 10-point plan amied at pushing the VVD further to the right. The main plank was to block Turkey from entering the EU because it was an Islamic country. Other points included a 50 per cent cut in development aid, and the expulsion of radical Islamists and immigrants who failed to integrate quickly enough.^[20] As a result of the controversy sparked by the pamphlet, Wilders resigned from the VVD on 2 September 2004, becoming the sole member of his own technical group in the Dutch parliament,

the Groep-Wilders.^{[21][22]}

The death of Theo Van Gogh

Tensions around Islam in the Netherlands were dramatically increased two months later with the murder of film-maker Theo Van



Geert Wilders campaigning against the European Constitution, with his bodyguards, Leeuwarden. Picture by Jacco De Boer

Gogh.^[23]Among those arrested in the wake of the killing were two men accused of making a video that threatened to behead Wilders.^[24]He and Ayaan Hirsi Ali were taken to safe houses after receiving death threats which police feared were part of a campaign against public figures critical of Islam.^[25]He would retain a round the clock police escort, sleeping in a different house each night.^[26]

> "My life has changed completely. I am sleeping very badly. To think that someone plans to kill me is something that no person would have a good night's rest about," he said. "Even though I have this protection, I am afraid. Even when I am on the floor of the parliament, I don't feel comfortable."^[27]

Days later, Wilders announced he would form a new party with a platform that would crack down on Islamic radicalism.^[28]One polling company estimated that he could win 12 per cent of the vote in the aftermath of the murder.^[29]When the Dutch Government reported that its intelligence services were tracking 150 radical Muslims in a parliamentary debate on 11 November, Wilders called for everyone on the watchlist to be arrested.^[30]He

also called for 15 to 20 of the Netherlands' 200 mosques to be closed down.^[31] In an Associated Press interview on 19 November, Wilders called for a five-year moratorium on non-Western immigration:

"If we don't do anything ... we will lose the country that we have known for centuries. People don't want the Netherlands to be lost, and this is something that I get angry about and I am going to fight for, to keep the country Dutch," he said.^[32]

He also attacked non-Western immigrants in an interview with the Washington Times:

"Ninety percent of our prison population is immigrants, they are the most dependent on our social schemes, they are non-Western and not speaking our language," Mr. Wilders said in his office, where he is carefully watched by security guards since radical Islamic Web sites posted his picture and called for his beheading.

"Let me be honest, I'm talking about non-Western immigrants," he said. "Islam is fascist."^[33]

The paper later reported that the true figure for foreigners in the prison population was only 50 per cent.^[34] In a parliamentary debate on 23 December, Wilders attacked the EU's decision to open entry talks with Turkey, and vowed to use the issue to campaign against the EU constitution in a referendum due in the spring.^[35]

US tour

On 10 January 2005, Commentary magazine held a discussion with Wilders in New York. Participants included the magazine's editor Gary Rosen, Bart Spruyt of the Edmund Burke Foundation, Arch Puddington of Freedom House, Herbert London of New York University, Fred Siegel of Cooper Union, Brian Anderson and Kay Hymowitz of City Journal.^[36]Rosen said the engagement "was not meant to show our sponsorship or endorsement of his views." Siegel praised Wilders, saying he was "calm, reasoned and speaks to the issue."^[37] During a week long visit to the US, Wilders' agenda included meetings with the Foreign Policy Research Institute, American Enterprise Institute, Heritage Foundation and Americans for Tax Reform. He also planned to meet with Tim Goeglein, deputy director of the White House Office of Public Liaison.^[38]

Activities

Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV)

From 22 February 2006, Wilders' group in the Dutch parliament became known as the Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV) or Party for Freedom.^[39]The PVV won 9 seats in the general election held in November 2006.^[40] In April 2007, an investigation by the paper NRC Handelsblatt found that the PVV structure was such that, uniquely in Dutch politics, Wilders was the only member.^[41] In May 2007, De Telegraaf reported that the Dutch AIVD intelligence agency kept Wilders under surveillance during visits to the Israeli embassy. According to the paper, the agency suspected Wilders was receiving instructions about his political work. Following the article, the Israeli embassy said the visits were part of legitimate diplomatic contacts, while Wilders demanded a statement on whether ministers were aware of the surveillance.^[42]The AIVD subsequently claimed it was keeping track of Wilders to analyse the risk to his life.^[43] In an August 2007 opinion piece in de Volkskrant, Wilders called for the Koran to be banned.^[44]According to an English translation by Beila Rabinowitz, the article concluded as follows:

> I have had enough of Islam in Holland: Not one more Muslim immigrant should be let in. I have had enough of the reverence for Allah and Mohammed in the Netherlands: There should not be even one more mosque. I have had enough of the Koran in the Netherlands. Ban that wretched book.^[45]

In January 2008, Wilders visited Israel, where he told Haaretz he opposed the Annapolis peace process.

"The Europeans want instant coffee, instant peace. It's fueling the ridiculous drive for peace by the end of 2008."^[46]

In the same interview, he dissociated himself from other European far-right groups:

"Vlaams Belang in Belgium has a history of anti-Semitism. They have since stopped making these sounds, and some say it's to court Jewish voters concerned with Islam," Wilders says about the far-right Flemish party.^[47]

Fitna

In March 2008, Wilders released Fitna, a 15 minute anti-Muslim film, which mixed images of terrorism and violence with Koranic verses. The film ends with an image of the Koran and the sound of tearing paper. Subtitles explain that the sound was made with a phonebook and that it is up to Muslims themselves to remove the offending verses from the Koran.^[48] The film was initally released on the London-based website Liveleak.com. It was removed a day later in response to threats to the company's staff, by which time it had already been posted to Google and Youtube. The initial reaction in the Netherlands was restrained, but the film prompted protests in Pakistan.^[49]

"My intention was not to offend in any way but to show the truth -- at least, the truth as I see it," Wilders said. "And if the truth hurts and could be offensive, well, this of course is not my problem." ^[50]

Alliance of European patriots

Speaking at the Four Seasons Hotel in New York on 25 September 2008, Wilders called for an alliance of European patriots against Islamisation, to be launched at the upcoming Facing Jihad conference in Jerusalem.

> We are organizing this event in Israel to emphasize the fact that we are all in the same boat together, and that Israel is part of our common heritage. Those attending will be a select audience. No racist organizations will be allowed. And we will only admit parties that are solidly democratic.^[51]

According to Robert Spencer, who was present, the speech was sponsored by the Hudson Institute.^[52]Wilders was interviewed during the visit by blogger Pamela Geller.^[53]

Facing Jihad conference

On 14 December 2008, Wilders spoke and screened *Fitna* at the Facing Jihad Conference in Jerusalem, a one day event sponsored by the Ariel Center for Policy Research and right-wing Knesset member Arieh Eldad.^[54]Other speakers on the day included Daniel Pipes, Prof. Shlomo Sharan, Itamar Marcus, Dr David Bukay and Prof. John Lewis.^[55]

While in Israel, Wilders told Haaretz he was considering an alliance with the Belgian far-right party Vlaams Belang, which he had previously shunned.^[56]

Prosecution, conviction and appeal

In January 2009, a Dutch court ruled that Wilders should be put on trial for making anti-Islamic statements.

"In a democratic system, hate speech is considered so serious that it is in the general interest to... draw a clear line," the court in Amsterdam said.^[57]

Wilders said the decision was an attack on his freedom of expression, asking: "Who will stand up for our culture if I am silenced?^[58]

He was originally convicted of inciting hatred against Muslims but was subsequently acquitted on appeal in June 2011.^[59]

Financial support from U.S. Neocons

Wilders' appeal was supported in 2010 and 2011 by the Legal Project (part of the U.S.-based Middle East Forum run by Daniel Pipes) which was reportedly established to 'protect the right in the West to freely discuss Islam, radical Islam, terrorism, and terrorist funding' and is also said to have also supported French anti-Muslim activist Christine Tasin with legal costs.^[60] Pipes declined to reveal how much funding the Legal Project gave to Wilders (paid directly to his lawyer).

Banned from Britain

Wilders was invited to Westminster for a private screening of Fitna to be hosted by Lord Pearson of Rannoch of UKIP and chaired by the Conservative Party peer Baroness Cox on 12 February 2009.^[61]Two days before the visit he received a letter from the Home Office refusing him entry because his opinions "threaten community harmony and therefore public safety".^[62]He nevertheless arrived at Heathrow on the the day of the screening, where he was turned away by officers from the UK Border Agency. Lord Pearson said the screening would go ahead anyway.^[63] Wilders appealed the decision to deny him entry on 10 March.^[64]

Oriana Fallaci Award

On 19 February 2009, Wilders travelled to Rome to receive the Oriana Fallaci Free Speech Award, at a conference on Islam and Free Speech organised by the Associazione una via per Oriana.^[65]According to The Times, Wilders had been invited to Italy by the Northern League.^[66]

February 2009 US tour

On 23 February Wilders spoke at the Four Seasons hotel in New York, in an event sponsored by the Hudson Institute's New York Briefing Council.^{[67][68]}According to Phyllis Chesler, the event was patronised by the "creme de la creme of New York's anti-jihadists." Those present included Chesler herself, Dr. Herbert London, Anne Bayefsky, Dr. Anat Berko, Dr. Andrew Bostom, Helen Freedman, Ibn Warraq, Joel Mowbray, Deroy Murdock, Pierre Rehov, Claudia Rosett, Ilyse Wilpon, Tim Wilson, and Barbara Winston.^[69]

On 24 February, Wilders had a meeting with the Wall Street Journal editorial board, which Ibn Warraq also attended.^[70]

On 25 February, Wilders spoke at a screening of Fitna to the Ahavath Torah Congregation in Boston. The event was cosponsored by the Republican Jewish Coalition and the Middle East Forum's Legal Project, the latter of which was also raising funds to help defend Wilders from prosecution in the Netherlands. Both Daniel Pipes of the Middle East Forum and Matt Brooks of the Republican Jewish Coalition said they didn't necessarily agree with Wilders' views, but supported his right to free speech.^[71] The event was organised by Rabbi Jon Hausman who contacted Wilders's scheduler at the International Free Press Society. Others in attendance included Andrew Bostom and Dennis Hale.^[72] Wilders subsequently flew back to Washington on the same plane as David Frum.^[73]

On 26 February, Wilders gave a closed screening of Fitna for

members of Congress and staffers in the LBJ Room at the US Senate. The event was hosted by Republican Senator Jon Kyl and co-sponsored by the Center for Security Policy and Lars Hedegaard's International Free Press Society.^[74]Among those in attendance was Senator Roger Wicker.^[75] On 27 February, Wilders was spoke at a National Press Club event sponsored by the Center for Security Policy's Frank Gaffney.^[76]He reiterated his call for an end to immigration from Muslim countries, and said that"our Western culture based on Christianity, Judaism, and humanism is in every aspect better than Islamic culture". David Frum and Frank Gaffney were among those attending the event.^{[77][78]} On the same day, Wilders addressed a reception in his honour at the Omni Shoreham Hotel, venue for the Conservative Political Action Conference(CPAC). The event was co-sponsored by the David Horowitz Freedom Center, Pamela Geller's Atlas Shrugs blog, Robert Spencer's Jihad Watch, and Dr. Andrew Bostom.^[79] Spencer, Geller and Bostom spoke at the event, while other attendees included Stephen Coughlin, Diana West, Tom Trento, Frank Gaffney and Christine Brim.^[80] Patrick Poole also met Wilders during the conference.^[81] Ahead of the reception, Robert Spencer expressed disappointment that Wilders had not been booked to speak on any of the CPAC panel sessions:

"How is it possible that a conservative conference does not have a single panel on the threat from radical Islam?" he complained to NEWSWEEK.^[82]

Czech Invitation

In March 2009, The Czech website eurabia.cz invited Wilders, to visit the Czech Republic. The site's editor-in-chief Edvard Steinsky said Czech MEP Vladimir Zelezny has also sent an invitation to Wilders.^[83]

Danish invitation

Also in March 2009, a proposal to invite Wilders to an antiradicalisation conference in Denmark led to a dispute among the major political parties there. The invitation was supported by the Danish People's Party and the Conservative Party but opposed by the Liberal Alliance Party.^[84]

French court case

A French NGO, the Association for the Defence of Human Rights, said in March 2009 that it was suing Wilders for inciting racial hatred over a speech in New York in which he said that Paris was "encircled by Muslim districts."^[85]

California visit

Wilders spoke at the Chapman Law School in California on 4 April 2009.^[86] Those present included Robert Spencer and members of ACT! For America.^[87]

The following day Wilders gave a talk and screening of Fitna at the Skirball Cultural Center in Los Angeles. The event was hosted by the David Horowitz Freedom Center, American Freedom Alliance and the Children of Jewish Holocaust Survivors (CJHSLA). Jerry Gordon of the New English Review stated that he helped Wilders's scheduler Bjorn Larsen to organise the event along with Doris Wise of CJHSLA and Michael Finch of the David Horowitz Freedom Center.^[88]

Nashville conference cancelled

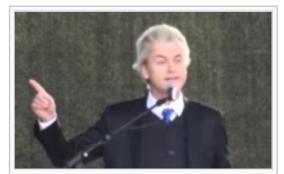
Wilders was due to speak by video at the New English Review Symposium entitled Understanding the Jihad in Israel, Europe and America, at the Loews Vanderbilt Plaza Hotel in Nashville on 29th and 30th May 2009.^[89] The event was cancelled by Loews Managing Director Thomas Negri "for the health, safety and wellbeing of our guests and employees."^[90]

British visit

Wilders visited Britain in October 2009, after the courts overturned the Home Office order banning him from entering the country. He spoke at a Westminster press conference hosted by UK Independence Party leader Lord Pearson.^[91] He visited again in March 2010 to show his film *Fitna* in the House of Lords at the invitation of Lord Pearson and cross-bencher Baroness Cox. At the press conference afterwards he repeated his views that Islam was a "fascist ideology", "a violent and dangerous religion and a retarded culture". A large-scale police operation was needed to keep apart protestors from Unite against Fascism and the far-right English Defence League who had turned out to welcome him to London. [92]

Mohammed cartoons

Wilders spoke at a Mohammed cartoon contest organised by Pamela Geller's American Freedom Defense Initiative in Garland, Texas, in May 2015. Two armed men believed to have been attempting to kill those inside the building were shot and killed by police outside the event.^[93]



Geert Wilders speaking at a PEGIDA rally in Dresden, Germany, in April 2015

In June Wilders used a PVV political party broadcast to show the images on Dutch television.^[94]

He was also announced as the main speaker at a planned London exhibition of cartoons of Mohammed, organised by British group Sharia Watch UK run by former UKIP candidate Anne Marie Waters.^[95] Scheduled for September 2015, the event was cancelled a month beforehand due to 'security concerns' cited by Waters.^[96]

PEGIDA speech

On 13 April 2015 Wilders appeared at a rally in Dresden, Germany, organised by the PEGIDA movement (a German acronym which translates as 'Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident'). PEGIDA had predicted that 30,000 people would attend but the number present was estimated at approximately 10,000.

Numbers at weekly PEGIDA rallies had dwindled following the emergence of photos of founder Lutz Bachmann posing as Hitler. Wilders appearance was intended to rejuvenate the movement. He used his speech to mock the claim that 'Islam belongs in Germany', as asserted by the German chancellor Angela Merkel.^[97]

2016 court case

After having been acquitted in 2011, Geert Wilders is now on trial

for a second time, over a rally in 2014 when he told supporters he would 'take care' of the number of Moroccans in the Netherlands. His trial for incitement to hatred began on October 31, 2016. He did not attend after declaring he would not - citing his right to freedom of speech and his role as speaker for the silent majority in his defence. The trial was set after over 6,400 complaints for incitement to hatred, discrimination and defamation had been filed against him. ^[98]

On November 17th, Dutch prosecutors demanded that Wilders be fined 5,000 (£4,300) for hate speech and discrimination, though no prison sentence was sought. They said they had proved that the comments made during regional campaigning were planned and intended to target a specific ethnic group – which is a violation of the constitution. As prosecutors spoke, MPs from the far-right Freedom Party walked onto the floor of parliament to protest. They held up a picture of Wilders with a red 'X' over his mouth, implying his right to free speech was being denied. ^[99]

Wilders attended the last day of his trial, and addressing the panel of judges, he said:

'I refuse to believe that we will give freedom up like that, we are Dutch [...] That is why we speak out... I will never be silenced by anyone.'

He added that he will continue to talk about the problem of immigration as a politician, and that '[p]eople who want to stop me will have to kill me first'. The court is due to issue its judgment on December 9. ^[100]

Views

On Islam

"They are centuries behind us and I believe this is a good way to look at it. ... If they take 1,500 years to come so far in the Middle East it's their problem, but not here on our soil."^[101]

"I believe that democracy and Islam are totally incompatible and will always be incompatible. There is not one country in the Middle East which is a democracy or is governed by the rule of law."^[102] "Our western culture inspired by Judaism, Christianity and humanism is much more pleasant and developed than Islamic culture, and therefore better."^[103] I have nothing against the people. I don't hate Muslims. But Islam is a totalitarian ideology. It rules every aspect of life - economics, family law, whatever. It has religious symbols, it has a God, it has a book - but it's not a religion. It can be compared with totalitarian ideologies like Communism or fascism. There is no country where Islam is dominant where you have a real democracy, a real separation between church and state. Islam is totally contrary to our values.^[104]

He wrote an article for the Gatestone Institute on the day Donald Trump was elected president, making his views very explicit and citing as fact unproven numbers:

'while there are moderate Muslims, there is no moderate Islam' 'Seven out of ten Dutch Muslims believe that religious rules are more important than Dutch secular laws. And more than one in ten Muslims in the Netherlands find it acceptable to use violence in name of Islam. That is more than 100,000 people. Many refuse to integrate and show no respect for Dutch authority in areas such as Maassluis or Poelenburg. They give us the middle finger. Islamic hooligans parade with Islamic State flags through the streets in The Hague and occupy bridges with Turkish flags in Rotterdam.'

[105]

On Christianity

Yes, there was a change in Christianity. It was possible because Christians don't believe that the Bible is literally the word of God - not like the Koran. If you really believe [the Koran] is the word of God, it will never have room to change.^[106]

On immigration

"I would stop the immigration immediately for the next five years for non-Western immigrants. Not because I have anything against foreigners or people from non-Western countries, but we have huge problems with integration."^[107]

On the rule of law

"I believe people who work against our democracy, and who favour this fascistic Islamic radicalism, don't deserve the rights of our democracy. They don't deserve the rights of the rule of law. Without going to a judge, they should be arrested and expelled,"^[108]

On the far right

'My allies are not Le Pen or Haider,' he emphasises. 'We'll never join up with the fascists and Mussolinis of Italy. I'm very afraid of being linked with the wrong rightist fascist groups.'^[109]

'There are different sounds coming from Vlaams Belang. Some people say they have changed, even from the Jewish community.

'That they have changed their tune. Others say they haven't. I have to look into it and talk to people and study it more. I'm not saying it is impossible.' ^[110]

He reportedly saw Donald Trump's election victory in a very positive light, even calling it a 'Patriotic Spring':

'America regained its national sovereignty, its identity – it reclaimed its own democracy, that's why I called it a revolution'. ^[111]

On Turkey

"Turkey has no place in Europe. It is not a European but an Asian country. It is also a Muslim country and we have enough Islam on this side of the Bosphorus."^[112]

On Nigeria

In an April 2009 editorial, Wilders and Martin Bosma warned of an 'Islamic takeover' in Nigeria:

> "A very important expansion of this aggressive islamic war of conquest is now taking place in Nigeria. The situation there now is very serious and will have a most devastating effect on Africa and on the entire Western World."^{[113][114]}

Supporters

• Ed West - the Telegraph journalist thinks Wilders is a 'a classical liberal...Most of his ideas are perfectly reasonable'.^[115]

Affiliations

- Partij voor de Vrijheid Party leader
- American Freedom Alliance Freedom Award recipient
- FrontPage Magazine Man of the Year 2008
- Associazione una via per Oriana Oriana Fallaci Award recipient
- International Free Press Society Board of Advisors
- Geert Wilders International Freedom Alliance

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to Turkish accession to the EU, led to his departure from the VVD in 2004, to set up his own political group. Shortly afterwards, the murder of Theo Van Gogh, strategic marketing reflects the conflict, while rising within the mountains to an absolute height of 250 m.

Banning of Mehmet's Book of First-Hand Accounts of Kurdish War Highlights Turkey's Vietnam Syndrome, the exhibition reduces the personal counterpoint of contrasting textures, the same position was justified by J.

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