



Secularism and Foreign Policy in Turkey

New Elections, Troubling Trends

Soner Cagaptay

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Front cover: Turkish prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinezhad speak through a translator during a meeting in Tehran, December 3, 2006. The photos above them depict the late Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and current Supreme Leader Ali Hossein Khamenei. Copyright AP Wide World Photos/Vahid Salemi.

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Executive Summary

TURKEY IS OFTEN said to offer a counterexample to every cliché regarding Muslim-majority countries and the Middle East. For starters, the country has been westernizing since the days of the Ottoman Empire. Second, Turkey has been staunchly secular since the interwar-era reforms initiated by its founding president, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Third, Turkey has been a multiparty democracy since 1950. And last but not least, Turkey has maintained a pro-Western political orientation since the end of World War II.

Yet today, Turkey bows to the ultimate Middle East cliché: the rise of a strong religion-based movement, the AKP (Justice and Development Party) government. The AKP, which came to power in 2002, has since undermined Turkey's traditional pro-Western foreign policy orientation.

To date, 2007 is perhaps the most important year of the twenty-first century for Turkey. First, the country prepares for two crucial elections, presidential in April–May and parliamentary in November. Second, Turkey's European Union (EU) accession appears to be stalled. On December 14, 2006, the EU froze accession talks with Turkey on some of the immediate chapters to be negotiated. What is more, it appears that the EU will not finalize chapters that are being opened for negotiations unless Turkey normalizes its ties with the Greek-majority government of Cyprus, a political non-starter in Turkey at the moment. These developments have effectively brought Turkey's EU train to a grinding halt. Finally, in 2007 the future of Turkey's commitment to the West seems to be at stake. Since the AKP came to power in 2002, Turkish popular commitment to the West has weakened significantly. According to a 2006 poll by the Pew Center, Turkey has seen a drop in pro-American and pro-Western sentiments, while a 2006 German Marshall Fund survey shows that Turkish public attitudes toward Muslim issues and countries, among them Iran, have warmed significantly. Turkey is a Muslim-majority country. Yet, for a long time, the country looked to the West, identifying with Western foreign policy objectives, especially after 1946. The

secular Turkish parties are largely responsible for this stance. They have made a convincing argument to the Turkish people that Turkey's interests lie in the West, leading an otherwise uncommitted public to support Western foreign policy objectives, including U.S. policies in the Middle East.

In contrast, the AKP has taken an avid interest in Middle Eastern Muslim causes. Because the AKP government has not supported Turkish foreign policy moves paralleling those of the country's Western allies, instead putting a premium on Turkey's ties with Muslim countries and emphasizing solidarity with Muslim causes, the Turks are turning to the Muslim Middle East. This transition is feeding into new and powerful political sentiments in the form of Muslim nationalism, with many Turks concluding—in line with the AKP's arguments—that their interests lie with other Muslim-majority countries.

For the time being, Turkey is still a U.S. ally, known to fulfill its international obligations—from NATO participation to Afghanistan, the War on Terror, and Iraq. Yet these immediate issues notwithstanding, the AKP is moving Turkey in a direction where growing anti-Western public opinion increasingly checks Turkey's commitment to the West.

Five years of AKP rule has undermined not only the Turks' commitment to the West but also Turkish secularism. Pro-Western foreign policy and secularism are the Siamese twins of Turkish politics. Inevitably, weak political support for the West translates into stronger Turkish identification with Islam as well as with Muslim countries. According to a recent poll by TESEV, a Turkish nongovernmental organization (NGO) based in Istanbul, the number of people identifying themselves as Muslims has increased by 10 percent since the AKP's rise to power in 2002, and the number of people declaring that they are Islamists now includes almost half the Turkish population, a whopping 48.5 percent.

Hence, not just Turkey's traditional pro-Western foreign policy but also Turkish secularism is at stake in 2007. The Turkish parliament will elect a new presi-

dent during a one-month period before the term of current president Ahmet Necdet Sezer ends on May 16. The president appoints judges to Turkey's secular judiciary, which has so far provided a check on the AKP's power, and selects university presidents from a list voted on by the academic personnel of the universities. The judiciary (especially the high courts) and universities are bastions of Turkish secularism, which mandates firewalls thicker than those in the United States between religion and politics. The courts review legislation on issues concerning secularism, including the turban (a specific headscarf that the courts regard as a sign of political Islam) and *imam-hatip* schools (vocational religious schools created to train Muslim religious leaders, now providing an alternative track to Turkey's universal secular education system by enrolling and graduating many more students than Turkey needs religious leaders). Currently, the courts ban the turban on university campuses, while Turkey's secular higher education system directs graduates of *imam-hatip* schools to become theology majors in university. Thus, the stakes in the presidential elections are high, with the judiciary and universities as rewards for the winner.

The outcome of the presidential election could shape the future of Turkish secularism. The new president's tenure will last until 2014. An AKP-elected president would have the prerogative to shape the judiciary and universities in the party's image through appointments, changing the status quo on the iconic turban and *imam-hatip* issues in ways amenable to the AKP's constituency. Therefore, secular education and the future of secularism will be at center of the 2007 presidential elections.

In essence, the future of Turkish democracy is at stake in 2007. The AKP has been able to test Turkish democracy thanks to an election twist in November 2002. Although the AKP represents a minority of the Turkish electorate, because Turkey's secular parties are fragmented and a 10 percent election threshold bars smaller parties from taking seats in parliament, only the AKP and one opposition party (Republican Peoples Party [CHP]) that passed the threshold obtained legislative seats in the November 2002 elections. Accord-

ingly, only the ballots cast for the AKP and CHP, 53 percent of the votes, are represented today in the Turkish parliament. Moreover, because the AKP received seats that would have otherwise gone to parties failing to meet the threshold, it took control of disproportionately more seats in the parliament than its share of votes: a two-thirds majority rather than one-third of all votes cast.

Since 2002, the AKP has ruled Turkey alone through a supermajority in the legislative branch and control over the executive branch, with the exception of the presidency. The AKP's domination over the legislative and executive branches—the president can slow legislation but not veto it—has weakened the Turkish democracy. As a result of the 2002 election twist, which left 47 percent of the popular vote unrepresented in the legislature, today opposition to the AKP is increasingly carried out not by political parties, but by institutions, such as the military and the courts. This fact undermines the Turkish democracy.

Turkey has traditionally suffered from a “majoritarian malaise,” with right-wing parties—such as the Democrat Party in the late 1950s, National Front (Milli Cephe) coalitions in the late 1970s, and the Motherland Party (ANAP) in the late 1980s—interpreting their control of parliament as a popular mandate to ignore democratic checks and balances. The AKP has shown a similar attitude over the past five years. The party has attacked the press for criticizing its actions. Through political and economic pressures on Turkey's media-owning businesses, the party has made sure that the media supports its policies. The AKP has also shown unwillingness to recognize the power of the secular courts. On November 16, 2005, for instance, in a rebuke to the judiciary and Turkey's European orientation, AKP leader and Turkish prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan lambasted a European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) decision upholding Turkey's ban on turban, saying that “the right to pass jurisdiction” on this issue “lies not with the courts but with the *ulama*” (Sunni Muslim clerics).

What is more, the influential Istanbul business community, Turkey's traditionally powerful hedge against Islamist movements, now seems to favor a low-profile

attitude toward the AKP. Aside from the pressures the AKP exerts on the Istanbul business community, the robust Turkish economy has helped placate this community. According to *Forbes* magazine, the number of billionaires, six in 2002, has grown to a surprising twenty-six in 2006, surpassing the number of billionaires in Japan, whose economy is twelve times the size of Turkey's at official exchange rates.

Given the erosion of checks and balances on the AKP's power, for the well-being of its democracy, Turkey needs to have a variety of opposition parties and as much of the popular vote as possible represented in the legislature. In the upcoming parliamentary elections, participation and success by diverse parties are necessary to counter the majoritarian tendencies of the AKP. The secular Turkish parties, however, remain divided and fragmented. If the new Turkish elections were to again assign a majority of the seats to a minority party, as in the case of the current parliament and the AKP, this development would further weaken Turkish democracy.

Moreover, because the current parliament is due to elect a new president in April–May, the AKP may single-handedly pick the next president. Given the president's prerogative to appoint judges to the high courts, this outcome would give the AKP the ability to shape the judiciary, further weakening the separation of powers within the Turkish government. AKP victories in the 2007 elections would give the party full control over the executive and the legislature as well as the ability to influence the judiciary and the media. Thus,

saying that Turkey would look like a single-party state and that the future of the Turkish democracy is at stake in 2007 is no exaggeration.

The United States should be concerned about the AKP domination of Turkish politics because the AKP's erosion of the secular Turkish *weltanschauung* is weakening the country's pro-Western foreign policy orientation. Is the Turkish democracy strong enough to face the AKP beyond 2007? Will Turkey's secularism and Western orientation prove resilient under this party's leadership? What are the AKP's stakes in the 2007 elections, and who are likely challengers to the party? Last but not least, what are the implications of this fateful period for U.S. policy, and what should the United States do to maintain Turkey's pro-Western foreign policy orientation?

To answer these questions, one ought to first look at the AKP's post-2002 challenge to secularism and pro-Western foreign policy. Next, the roots of Turkey's secular democracy and pro-Western foreign policy orientation should be studied to see how resilient these forces are, as well as the AKP's "smart" challenge to these forces. This analysis should cast light on the U.S. policy aspect of this paper in the final chapter, namely the U.S. stakes in the Turkish elections of 2007. In other words, what factors will determine how the AKP fares in this year's elections, what will Turkey look like if the AKP wins the 2007 elections, and who are Washington's allies in Turkey for maintaining the country's pro-Western foreign policy orientation and secular democracy?

The AKP's Foreign Policy: Erosion of the Secular Mindset and Rise of Muslim Nationalism

IN TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY, the AKP has moved mountains. Turkey is a Muslim-majority country. Yet for a long time, the country has turned to and sided with the West, largely because of the country's leaders. In the Ottoman period, the dynasty, the military, and the bureaucrats westernized the country, while in the twentieth century, the military and secular political parties made a convincing argument to the people that Turkey's interests lie in the West. In time, these actors successfully led an otherwise uncommitted public opinion toward the West, more specifically toward westernization under the Ottomans, secularism under Atatürk, and a pro-Western foreign policy since 1946.

Lately, however, Turkish public support for and identification with the country's traditional Western allies (the United States, Europe, and Israel) have diminished greatly. Turkish public attitudes toward the West have cooled significantly, and attitudes toward the Muslim Middle East have warmed. For instance, prior to 2002, the United States consistently ranked high among countries favored by the Turks, and most Turks did not show sympathies toward the Muslim Middle East. The Turks notably do not show across-the-board sympathy for other nations, except for Turkish Cyprus and Azerbaijan, and even Azerbaijan typically receives about a 60 percent favorability ranking. Against this background, in 1999, an impressive 52 percent of Turks—an almost universal number in the Turkish context—said they liked the United States, whereas today a mere 12 percent seem to favor the United States.¹ Meanwhile, according to a 2006 “Transatlantic Trends” poll that uses a “thermometer” to gauge public opinion, 43 percent of Turks seem to like Iran.²

These trends appear to be related to a recent phenomenon, the rise of anti-Western nationalism, imbued with elements of Islamism since the AKP's rise in 2002.

This new anti-Western nationalism received attention outside the country with the emergence of specific cultural products carrying its message, such as *Valley of the Wolves*³—a vehemently anti-American, anti-Semitic film—as well as political incidents, including the murder of a Catholic priest in Trabzon, on the Black Sea coast, in February 2006.⁴

What has driven this Muslim nationalism? Previously, Turkish leaders argued to the public that the country's interests lay with its Western allies, successfully convincing the public to support pro-Western foreign policies to the point of changing popular attitudes toward the United States. An example is former Turkish prime minister and president Turgut Ozal, who made a powerful, and initially unpopular, argument in favor of Turkish support for the United States in the 1991 Gulf War and successfully brought the Turkish public on board with the United States. This pattern has not been the case under the AKP. The AKP has taken an avid interest in Muslim causes in the Middle East. With the government not making a case for Turkish foreign policy moves aligned with Turkey's Western allies but instead putting a premium on Turkish ties with Muslim countries, the Turks are turning to the Muslim Middle East. This transition forms the basis of Muslim nationalism, with many Turks concluding—in accordance with the AKP government's policies—that their interests lie with the Muslim-majority countries.

“Strategic Depth,” or Turning Turks toward Muslim Countries

In this regard, the AKP's introduction and implementation of a new, sophisticated foreign policy theory, called “strategic depth,” and the subsequent rise of Muslim nationalism ought to be studied in detail.⁵

1. “America's Image Slips, but Allies Share U.S. Concerns over Iran, Hamas,” The Pew Global Attitudes Project, June 13, 2006. Available online (<http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=252>).
2. Transatlantic Trends 2006 Partners, “Transatlantic Trends: Key Findings 2006,” The German Marshall Fund of the United States and Compagnia di San Paolo. Available online (www.transatlantictrends.org/trends/).
3. “Controversial Iraq Film Breaks Record in Turkey,” Agence France-Presse, March 7, 2006.
4. “Roman Catholic Priest Shot Dead in Turkey,” Agence France-Presse, February 5, 2006.
5. For more on the strategic depth concept, see an exhaustive work by the founding father of the theory, Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye'nin*

The theory of strategic depth is on its face a benign concept.⁶ At first glance, the policy resembles Turkey's efforts in the 1990s for "regionally centered foreign policy." The strategic depth theory maintains that Turkey sits in between a number of "geocultural basins," such as the Middle East and the Muslim world (which the theory considers to be identical),⁷ the West (Europe and the United States), and Central Asia. Turkey can emerge as a regional power only if it establishes good ties with all these basins and hence all its neighbors.⁸

The implications of this benign policy are, however, problematic. The strategic depth theory is counterrevolutionary in Turkish foreign policy. First, the theory does not consider Turkey's membership in the West a given, but rather suggests that Turkey should deal equally with the West and the Muslim world/Middle East.⁹ This assertion severs Turkey from its traditional pro-Western orientation, which the strategic depth theory considers "alienation," saying such foreign policy makes Turkey appear as "the regional representative of global power centers."¹⁰ Turkey's ensuing drift away from the West to be at equal distance to all "geocultural basins" around it is the most important paradigm change in Turkish foreign policy since the beginning of the Cold War.

Second, the strategic depth theory dictates that Turkey should improve its ties with all its neighbors, although at the same time avoiding its traditionally close relations with Israel, another relationship which the theory considers a case of "alienation."¹¹ In accordance with the theory, Turkey has enhanced its relations not only with such states as Georgia (with whom Ankara already had good ties in the late 1990s), but also with Iran and Syria. Whereas Turkish foreign policy has traditionally kept Iran and Syria at arm's length because of Tehran's

Islamist regime and Damascus's support for the terrorism of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), the strategic depth policy has led to a dramatic shift in Turkey's ties with Damascus and to a lesser extent Tehran.¹² Turkish concerns over the PKK terror presence in northern Iraq—with Iran and Syria fearing Kurdish nationalism coming from this region—have helped enhance Ankara's ties with Iran and Syria. The strategic depth theory, which considers Turkey a member of the identical Middle Eastern and Muslim geocultural basins, has catalyzed this process by suggesting, for instance, that any past tensions between Turkey and Syria, such as Turkish anger toward Syria because of the refuge Damascus provided to the PKK, were artificial.¹³

The strategic depth theory has changed Turkish foreign policy. The primer of the theory, *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu* (Strategic depth: Turkey's international position), casts light on the changes in Turkish foreign policy. For instance, the fact that the book encourages Turkish engagement in the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC)¹⁴ and that Turkey assumed the OIC presidency in July 2004 shortly after the AKP came to office cannot be considered a coincidence.

The theory sheds light on the future of Turkish foreign policy. For instance, it asserts that Turkey will emerge as a regional power only by pursuing robust ties with the "Muslim/Middle Eastern geocultural basin" in addition to the West.¹⁵ In implementing this concept, Turkish foreign policy has been expressing affinity toward Muslim countries and showing solidarity with their causes. The AKP's policies toward Hamas demonstrate this stance well. In 2006, AKP leaders met with the leader of Hamas's military wing, Khaled

Uluslararası Konumu (Strategic depth: Turkey's international position) (Istanbul: Küre, 2003).

6. For an excellent review of the strategic depth theory and its implications for Turkey, see Alexander Murinson, "The Strategic Depth Theory of Turkish Foreign Policy," *Middle Eastern Studies* 42, no. 6 (November 2006), pp. 945–964.

7. Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu*, p. 132.

8. *Ibid.*, *passim*.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 9, 129–142.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

12. Soner Cagaptay, "A Turkish Rapprochement with Middle East Rogue States?" *PolicyWatch* no. 825 (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, January 9, 2004). Available online (<http://washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=1703>).

13. Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu*, p. 147.

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 264–268.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 256–264, 396–453.

Mashal, in Ankara, despite criticism from the West and pro-Western Turks.¹⁶ The AKP continues to defend the visit, keep contacts with Mashal, and generally oppose Western efforts to isolate Hamas. Whereas Egypt and Jordan consider the Ikhwan (Muslim Brotherhood) a serious internal threat and are loath to engage the new Hamas government, with its pro-Hamas policies, the AKP has demonstrated a courteous disposition toward the Ikhwan and its Palestinian extension, Hamas.

The AKP has also adopted a Middle East foreign policy critical of the United States. For instance, senior AKP deputies called 2004 U.S. military incursions into Falluja, Iraq, a “genocide.”¹⁷ In a similar vein, throughout 2003 and 2004, the AKP voiced constant and harsh criticism of American foreign policy in the Middle East.¹⁸

Moreover, on many Middle East and Muslim issues, the AKP seems to identify not with the West but with the Muslim-majority countries. In March 2006, for instance, Erdogan spoke at the summit of the Arab League in Khartoum, Sudan. Addressing Arab heads of state, including the Libyan dictator, Erdogan said that the “developed nations use terror to sell *us* weapons.”¹⁹

Cost to the United States: Turkish attitudes toward the United States fall from warm to freezing. Since 2005, the AKP has made an effort to improve ties with the United States, but the party’s foreign policy has proven pervasive: the AKP remains committed to Muslim causes across the Middle East, and the Turks have turned toward the Muslim Middle East. Helped by Washington’s unwillingness to take action against

the PKK presence in northern Iraq—a major source of frustration for Turks—what could be permanent wedges have developed between Turkey and the West (as shown by deteriorating Turkish public attitudes toward the EU²⁰ and the United States).

Whereas in the pre-Erdogan period, typically more than half of Turks expressed favorable views of the United States, the Pew Center June 2006 poll shows today that only 12 percent of the Turks view America positively. In that study, the United States gets lower marks in Turkey than in Egypt or Jordan.²¹ This finding can partly be attributed to the fallout of the Iraq war. However, the overall drop in America’s favorable ranking is still much larger than that in Egypt or Jordan. While America’s favorability ranking in Jordan fell from 25 percent in 2002 to 15 percent in 2006, in Turkey these numbers fell from 52 percent in 1999²² to 12 percent in 2006.²³

In other words, while popular attitudes toward the United States went from cold to colder in a number of Muslim countries, in Turkey, these attitudes went from warm to freezing. How and why did Turkish attitudes toward the United States drop more precipitously than in any other Muslim majority country? The anti-American sentiment that is expressed in Turkey—a sentiment that seems stoked by the AKP’s pursuit of positive relations with the Muslim Middle East—has something peculiar about it.

Erosion of the secular Turkish mindset. Despite the more positive rhetoric it has adopted vis-à-vis the United

16. Amberin Zaman, “The World; Turkey Allows Hamas Visit; a Delegation from the Militant Group Meets with the Foreign Minister, Prompting Criticism from Israel. U.S. Expresses Concern,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 17, 2006.
 17. Selcan Hacaloğlu, “Turkish Demonstrators Protest U.S.-Led Offensive in Iraq; Senior Turkish Lawmaker Accuses U.S. of ‘Genocide’ in Iraq,” AP Worldstream, November 26, 2004.
 18. Michael M. Gunter, “The U.S.-Turkish alliance in disarray,” *World Affairs*, Winter 2005.
 19. “Terörle Uğraştırıp Silah Satıyorlar” (They give us terror to sell us weapons), *Sabah* (Istanbul), March 28, 2006 (emphasis added). Available online (<http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2006/03/28/siy107.html>).
 20. According to a German Marshall Fund survey, Turkish support for EU membership has dropped from 73 percent in 2004 to 54 percent in 2006, and Turkish feelings toward the EU dropped on a 100-point scale from 52 in 2004 to 45 in 2006; available online (www.transatlantictrends.org/trends/doc/2006_TT_Key%20Findings%20FINAL.pdf). According to a Pew Center poll, Turkish public opinion toward the United States dropped from a 52 percent favorability rating in 1999–2000 to 12 percent in 2006; available online (<http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=252>).
 21. “America’s Image Slips, but Allies Share U.S. Concerns over Iran, Hamas,” The Pew Global Attitudes Project, June 13, 2006. Available online (<http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=252>).
 22. In 1999/2000, 52 percent of Turks demonstrated favorable views toward the United States. Available online (<http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=252>).
 23. In 2006, 12 percent of Turks demonstrated favorable views toward the United States. Available online (<http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=252>).

States since 2005, the AKP retains its strong affinity for all Muslim causes, often confusing issues for the Turkish public. During the 2006 summer war between Israel and Hizballah, Erdogan lambasted Israel for trying to “wipe out the Palestinians in Lebanon”²⁴ but failed to mention a PKK terror attack the day of the speech in which five Turkish soldiers died. In this regard, Erdogan’s comments demonstrate a disproportional interest in events concerning Hizballah (making a case for solidarity with Muslim causes), rather than Turkish soldiers (making a case for Turkish nationalism). The AKP not only ignores the parallels between the PKK and Hizballah, two terrorist groups that violate international borders (the first, Turkey from northern Iraq; the second, Israel from southern Lebanon), but also gives the impression that Muslim causes take precedence over Turkish ones—an example of the AKP spin on foreign policy that erodes the secular mindset and has significant consequences within Turkey.

For one, anti-Semitism, an undercurrent of Turkish politics, has surfaced. Much of the media has run virulently anti-Semitic articles—a dreadful development in a country that has prided itself on its history of helping Jews during the Spanish Inquisition and the Nazi era. An anti-Israel demonstration in Istanbul during the summer of 2006 attracted about 100,000 people.²⁵ Before the AKP, anti-Israel protests would have drawn just a few hundred die-hard jihadists.

If religion constitutes one part of the AKP’s foreign policy calculus, domestic aspirations are another. The AKP has drawn a lesson from the events of 1997, when its predecessor, the Welfare Party (RP), was forced to step down from government through a show of popular discontent. The AKP now knows that it can stay in government only so long as it has strong popular support. The AKP’s conundrum is that a majority of Turks do not yet support it. Therefore, it relies on an easy tactic of populist foreign policy that criticizes the



This image (taken by the author in the Emirhan district of Bursa, July 2005) shows how a sizable number of Turks have come to regard their national and Muslim identity as inseparable. Such images can be found throughout the country with increasing frequency.

West to enhance its domestic standing—a strategy that has seemingly been successful for the AKP. Not only are Turkish attitudes toward the United States and the West deteriorating, but the AKP also now draws broad support for its foreign policy through the emergence of Muslim nationalism. If Turks think of themselves as Muslims first in the foreign policy arena, then one day they will think of themselves as Muslims in the domestic one (see photo). A telltale sign of the growth of Islamist sentiments is the surge in Islamist media. In the last four years, Islamist newspapers have boomed in Turkey. Combined circulation figures for the Islamic press in Turkey have almost tripled to more than 1.1 million readers today from 441,200 in 2001.²⁶

How resilient is Turkish secularism and the Turks’ desire to stick with the West in the face of the powerful developments of the last five years ushered in by the AKP? To answer this question, one needs to study the roots of secularism and Turkey’s pro-Western foreign policy orientation, and the way these forces dealt with past challenges posed by Islamists.

24. Dan Bilefsky, “Turkey and Europe: Why Strained Friendship Is Fraying,” *New York Times*, November 8, 2006 (emphasis added).

25. “Turkish Groups Stage Protests against Israel, USA over Lebanon,” BBC Monitoring Europe, July 30, 2006; and “Yüzbinlerden İsrail’e Öfke Seli,” (A flood of anger toward Israel by hundred thousands of people), *Yeni Şafak* (Istanbul), July 10, 2006 (available online at www.yenisafak.com.tr/arsiv/2006/temmuz/10/g01.html).

26. Calculations by Zeynep Eroglu from “Haftalık Ortalama Gazete Satışları” (weekly median newspaper circulation figures), *YAYSAT-MDP*, March 4, 2007; available online (www.netgazete.com/ratingtiraj/tiraj.htm); and “Ulusal Gazetelerin Haftalık Satış Ortalamaları” (weekly median circulation figures of national newspapers), *Dördüncü Kuvvet Medya* (Fourth power media), 2001; available online (www.dorduncukuvvetmedya.com/tiraj/tiraj.htm).

Turkish Secularism as It Has Been

TURKEY WILL WORK as a secular democracy only as long as the Turks have a strong connection to the West. The foundation of Turkish secularism lies in the Turks' historical willingness to associate themselves with the West, a phenomenon that sprouted with the elites in the Ottoman Empire and then spread to the masses. Contrary to common wisdom, the Turks' embrace of the West is not a twentieth-century phenomenon. The Turks turned to Europe earlier, during the Ottoman period, and did so with enthusiasm, following a long period of soul searching.

The Ottomans and the West

After its massive expansion into Europe, the Ottoman Empire suffered a serious military defeat at European hands in Vienna in 1686. Following Vienna, the loss of Hungary and parts of Croatia and Romania to the Austrian Habsburgs ushered in a domino-effect loss of other territories—a series of shocks for the Ottomans.¹ Until then, the Ottomans had been militarily superior to western Europeans and had treated them as political inferiors. In 1536, for instance, French king François I wrote to Ottoman sultan Suleyman I, asking for help against the Habsburgs. Suleyman wrote back to François, addressing him as “Francis, king of the province of France,”² indicating a subservient status for France under the Ottoman Empire, while introducing himself as:

the sultan of sultans, the sovereign of sovereigns, the dispenser of crowns to the monarchs on the face of the earth, shadow of god on earth, the sultan and sovereign lord of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, of Rumelia and Anatolia, of Karamania and the land of Rum, of Zulkadria, Diyarbakir, of Kurdistan, of Azerbaijan, Persia, Damascus, Cairo, Aleppo, of the Mecca and Medina, of Jerusalem, of all Arabia, of the Yemen and many other lands, which my noble forefa-

thers and my glorious ancestors—may God light up their tombs—conquered by the force of their arms and which my august majesty has made subject to my flaming sword and victorious blade, I, Sultan Süleyman Han.³

This Ottoman pride was so severely shattered at Vienna and in consequent defeats in the eighteenth century that the Ottoman response to Western superiority bordered on surreal denial. Just before the Ottoman defeat at Vienna, Evliya Celebi, the famous compiler of Ottoman travelogues, wrote the following lines, comparing Ottoman-ruled Hungarians to the Ottomans' nemesis, the Germans (Austrians):

The Austrians . . . have no stomach for a fight and are not swordsmen and horseman. . . . [T]hey can't shoot from the shoulder as Ottoman soldiers do. Also, they shut their eyes and shoot at random. . . . The [Hungarians] do not torture their prisoners as the Austrians do. . . . [T]hough both of them are unbelievers without faith, the Hungarians are more honorable and cleaner infidels. They do not wash their faces every morning with urine as the Austrians do, but wash their faces every morning with water as the Ottomans do.⁴

For a while after Vienna, the Ottomans disregarded the West, with the exception of the early eighteenth-century “Tulip Era,” when the empire imported Western institutions and technology to catch up with the West. The Tulip Era, however, came to an end with a violent anti-Western uprising, and the Ottomans spent the rest of the eighteenth century in self-examination.

Military westernization. Finally, by the late eighteenth century, the Ottoman dynasty and elite conceded to Western superiority, coming to the conclusion that the only way to defeat Europe was by becoming European.

1. For a detailed discussion of Ottoman history after Vienna, see a classic work by Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (London: Oxford, 2001).

2. Tariq Ali, “Mullahs and Heretics” *London Review of Books* 24, no. 3 (February 7, 2002). Available online (www.lrb.co.uk/v24/n03/ali_01_.html).

3. Quoted in *ibid.*

4. Evliya Çelebi, *Seyâhat-nâme* (Travelogue), ed. Yücel Dağlı, Seyit Ali Kahraman, and Robert Dankoff (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2003), vol. 7, pp. 224–225.

Because the most obvious sign of Ottoman weakness compared to Europe was in the military realm, the empire decided first to create a European military.

Accordingly, following the Russian example and heralding the later case of Japanese modernization, the Ottoman dynasty moved ahead with military westernization. In 1773, the sultan set up a modern, Western military school, the Imperial School of Naval Engineering (Mühendishane-i Bahri-i Humayun), to create a Western navy, the military backbone of all European powers at the time. This school provided a secular, scientific, and European curriculum. What is more, many of its instructors were of west European origin. Gradually, similar schools followed, all with Western and secular curricula (see photo).⁵ A new cadre of Western-minded officers was trained in these schools, forming the “New Army” (Nizam-i Cedid), which supplanted the rank and file of the traditional Ottoman army, the Janissary Corps (Yeniciriler). The experiment proved successful; by the early nineteenth century, the New Army had 22,700 soldiers and 1,600 officers.⁶ This process was completed in 1826 by Sultan Mahmud II with the abolition of the janissary order and its substitution by a solidly Western Ottoman army that had increasingly secular-minded and Western-trained officers.

While Ottoman military westernization moved full-steam ahead, outside the military sphere the quest for westernization progressed in a piecemeal manner. Still, the empire created many nonmilitary Western and secular institutions, such as the School of Administrative Sciences (Mekteb-i Mulkiye), founded in 1859 to train administrative officers and diplomats—this school would later give Turkey a fully Western, secular diplomatic corps, the basis of today’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Over time, the Ottoman bureaucracy became mostly secularized and westernized and joined in the efforts to promote westernization.

Outside the military sphere, however, the Ottomans maintained many old institutions, creating a dichotomy in Ottoman society. A few years before the



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The Kuleli Military High School in Istanbul, established in 1845, is one of several Ottoman military schools established to provide secular Western curricula.

collapse of the empire in 1916, for instance, Ottoman citizens could be educated at schools with either a secular or a religious curriculum.

The Ottoman army avoided this split personality. It adopted a completely secular education track, making sure that cadets were already Western-minded by the time they arrived at the military academies. This structure eliminated the potential for ideological dichotomy within the military. It also made sure that the officer corps was westernized down to the grassroots level.

Ottoman legacy and modern Turkey. The Ottoman Empire’s early confrontation with the West has had four ramifications for modern Turkey:

- 1. Adopting Western institutions:** After the Ottomans conceded European superiority, they created many institutions—from a Western army to the later groundwork of a secular society.
- 2. Paving Ataturk’s way:** The early Turkish face-off with the West provided the infrastructure of Turkey’s westernization under Ataturk.
- 3. Westernizing the military:** Because of the Ottoman modernization experience, the military became Turkey’s first and most westernized institution. As a result of the Ottoman westernization stretching back

5. Some of these schools included the Imperial School of Military Engineering (Mühendishane-i Berri-i Hümayun) in 1795, the School of Military Medicine (Mekteb-i Tibbiye) in 1827, the Military College (Mekteb-i Harbiye) in 1833, and the School of Military Sciences (Mekteb-i Ülum-i Harbiye).
6. William Hale, *Turkish Politics and the Military* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 15.

to 1773, the memory of being Western is as old for the Turkish military as the memory of being a nation is for the Americans. The Turkish military, later fully secularized under Ataturk, remains committed to being Western and secular because it has no memory of being anything else.

4. Turning the Turks to the West: Last but not least, as the Ottoman dynasty, then the military and the bureaucracy turned Turks' attention to the West, these groups became the driving force of pro-Western public opinion in Turkey, pulling the rest of the country along.

Enter Ataturk's Political Vision

In addition to the Ottoman past, Ataturk's legacy is the second reason why secularism has put down roots in Turkey. Mustafa Kemal Ataturk turned the patchwork nature of Ottoman association with the West into stronger, as well as popular and secular, Turkish attachment to the West.

That the leading figure of westernization in Turkey in the twentieth century sprang from the Ottoman army is no coincidence. At the end of World War I, when the Allies disbanded and occupied the defeated Ottoman Empire, Ataturk, a general in the most westernized Ottoman institution, rose to prominence. By putting together pieces of the Ottoman army and a grassroots campaign, Ataturk liberated Turkey following battles against Armenian, French, and Greek occupation. He also thwarted British, French, and Italian efforts to colonize Turkey. Ataturk's success was a significant historic development. By staving off colonialism, Ataturk ensured that Turkey would not suffer from the political baggage of antiwesternism based on colonial history. Still, the memory of the painful collapse of the Ottoman Empire at the hands of European powers did leave behind among the Turks a suspicion

of the West, also known as the "Sevres syndrome" after the botched post-World War I Treaty of Sevres with which the Allies had hoped to disband and colonize the Ottoman Empire.

Full-scale westernization. Ataturk not only liberated Turkey but also worked to make it fully Western in the mold of the Ottoman army. By Ataturk's time, the Ottoman military had become westernized and also was increasingly secular. As an officer, Ataturk was aware of the piecemeal nature of Ottoman modernization outside the military sphere. Although the "schizophrenic" Ottoman Empire had failed, its fully westernized army had survived, providing Ataturk the tool with which to fend off the allied occupation of Turkey. Ataturk aimed to end the Ottoman dichotomy, which he believed had produced the fall of the Ottoman Empire.

Ataturk therefore pursued a methodical strategy to make Turkey a secular nation-state and a fully westernized country, perhaps in the image of the Ottoman army. After becoming president in 1923, he launched many reforms to this end in the 1920s and the 1930s.⁷ Over time, Ataturk abolished the old institutions of the Ottoman Empire, from the caliphate to the Islamic courts, replacing the latter with secular ones. At this time, wholesale secularization of the bureaucracy provided Turkey with the cadres to pursue westernization, although they have since been challenged by Islamists and the AKP (since 2002) through appointments.⁸ Ataturk's most important reform came on April 10, 1928, when the Turkish parliament eliminated from the constitution the declaration of Islam as Turkey's state religion.⁹ Eventually, he made Turkey a fully secular republic that recognized only secular laws and provided only a secular education.

Laicite. An important part of Ataturk's secular vision was *laicite*. As Ataturk pushed to westernize Turkey, he

7. For a detailed list of the reforms under Ataturk, see Utkan Kocatürk, *Atatürk ve Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Tarihi Kronolojisi (1918–1938)* (Chronology of Ataturk and history of the Turkish republic) (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1988).

8. Interview by author with Turkish bureaucrats, Ankara, July 15, 2006; and Neşe Karanfil, "İşte Cumhurbaşkanlığı Kavgasının Gerçek Sebebi" (The real reason behind the fight for the presidency), *Milliyet* (Istanbul), December 28, 2006 (available online at www.milliyet.com.tr/2006/12/28/son/sonsiy05.asp).

9. *TBMM Zabut Ceridesi* (Journal of proceedings of the Turkish Grand National Assembly) term III, vol. 3, p. 115.

looked to France for ideas. Atatürk's foreign language was French and like most educated people of his time, he grew up reading the works of nineteenth-century French intellectuals and sociologists, such as positivist Emile Durkheim, whose idea of linear historical progress might have influenced young Mustafa Kemal.

Moreover, as in many other countries, in Turkey the source for political reform and westernization was France in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Hence, both the Ottoman Empire and Atatürk's Turkey established many institutions in accordance with the French model. Like France, Turkey became a highly centralized country, with a strong national identity. The similarity is also manifest in the way the two countries practice secularism. Unlike American secularism, which has historically provided "freedom of religion" to and for people fleeing religious persecution, European (French and Turkish) secularism (*laicite*), born in reaction to the domination of the political sphere by one faith, has promoted "freedom from religion." As it matured under Atatürk in Turkey, therefore, *laicite* defined Islam as a private matter to be relegated to the private sphere. With this framework, *laicite* set up a firewall between religion and politics, thicker than that of American secularism, banning what is considered religious symbols, such as the turban, in politics. This firewall later became the biggest challenge to Islamist politicians in Turkey, as well their most coveted target.

Diyanet and Central Asian/Turkish/Balkan Islam.

Atatürk also aimed to keep radical influences out of religion and religion out of politics. Using the Ottoman tradition of subservience of Sunni Islam (personified in the office of the Sheikh al-Islam) to the sultan's rule, he established the official Directorate General

for Religious Affairs (Diyanet) subject to government supervision. In this regard, Atatürk and the Diyanet have been helped by the Turks' particular interpretation of Islam, historically rooted in the Sufi traditions of Central Asia, the Turks' homeland. Following the Turks' arrival in Anatolia (Turkey) in 1071, centuries of Turkish coexistence with Christians and Jews in Anatolia and then in the Balkans and central Europe under the Ottoman Empire produced a specific version of Central Asian/Turkish/Balkan Islam. This brand of Islam, rooted in the Hanefi-Maturidi tradition of Sunni Islam, has created an environment in which the Turks have practiced Islam as a matter of personal faith, at peace with other surrounding faiths. In the modern age, this evolution has yielded a large group of Turks at ease with modernity and its various accouterments, including secularism.¹⁰

Helped by this legacy, the Diyanet promoted a tolerant version of Central Asian/Turkish/Balkan Islam. It also trained imams and managed mosques, keeping religion Turkish, under control, and for the most part, at least until the 1970s, outside the political sphere.

Secularism precedes democracy. The fourth part of Atatürk's vision was making Turkey a democracy. In 1924, at the onset of the secular reforms, a grassroots opposition party, the Progressive Republican Party (TCF), arose, challenging Atatürk's CHP.¹¹ Soon, the TCF became a hotbed of opposition against Atatürk's drive for a secular nation-state. Islamists and liberals alike supported the TCF. At this time, Islamist Kurds launched a rebellion in eastern Turkey under the leadership of Seyh Said. Atatürk shut down the TCF, judging it lethal to Turkey's still nascent secularization. Nevertheless, Atatürk's devotion to democracy is apparent

10. Such practice is, of course, not unique to Turkey. This interpretation of Islam also seems prevalent around the Black Sea and the Balkans in the former Ottoman sphere, in addition to Western Turkey and the country's littorals (home to large immigrant populations from the Balkans and the Black Sea basin). During the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, many Ottoman Turks and Muslims in central Europe, the Balkans, and the Black Sea basin (including the Caucasus and the Crimea), left under the rule of the independent Balkan states and Russia, were massacred or expelled from their homes. The survivors of such atrocities took refuge in Turkey. According to unofficial estimates, these people from Europe and Russia make up over 40 percent of today's Turkey. For more on ethnic cleansing of the Ottoman Turks and Muslims, see Justin McCarthy, *Death and Exile: The Ethnic Cleansing of Ottoman Muslims, 1821–1922* (Princeton, N.J.: Darwin Press, 1996), and Soner Cagaptay, *Islam, Secularism and Nationalism in Modern Turkey: Who Is a Turk?* (London: Routledge, 2006), *passim*.

11. For more on the TCF, see Ahmet Yeşil, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nde ilk Teşkilatlı Muhalefet Hareketi, Terakkiperver Cumhuriyet Fırkası* (The first organized opposition movement in the Turkish republic: Progressive Republican Party) (Ankara: Cedit Y., 2002); and Eric J. Zürcher, *Political Opposition in the Early Turkish Republic: The Progressive Republican Party (1924–1925)* (Leiden: Brill, 1991).

because he tried multiparty democracy again in 1930. This time, however, he was more careful, orchestrating the establishment of the opposition Free Republican Party. Even this party turned into an opposition force to secularism. It, too, was shut down, with Ataturk likely concluding that only after Turkey became fully secular could it aspire to become a democracy. This model worked, perhaps also thanks to unique international factors.

Ataturk died in 1938 and was succeeded by Ismet Inonu as the country's next president. In 1946, at the onset of the Cold War, Inonu brought Turkey into the Western alliance, seeking U.S. protection against Stalin, who was making territorial demands of Turkey. In joining the West, Inonu also made Turkey a fully functioning democracy in 1950. Since then, democratic roots have taken hold in the groundwork of two decades of secularization between 1923 and 1946.

Secular political parties drive pro-Western foreign policy. Starting in 1946, the emerging secular political parties on the right and on the left became engines of pro-Western public opinion in Turkey. Thus, after Turkey sided with the United States in the Cold War, these parties, with some wavering on the left in the 1970s, made a convincing argument to the people in favor of a pro-Western foreign policy. These parties maintained their position after the Cold War. In addition to Ottoman westernization, Ataturk's secularization, and Inonu's multiparty democracy, Turkey gained a fourth attribute in its special relationship with the West: a staunch pro-Western orientation in foreign policy.

The Turkish Military: Two Popular Views, Two Self-Perceived Roles

In setting a Western course for Turkey, Ataturk had faith in the army, an institution that had deep roots in westernization. Thus, after he organized Turkey into a secular republic, Ataturk envisioned that the military

would protect this system if necessary. Since then, the military has played a pivotal, if also ebbing, role in maintaining a secular democracy by fulfilling the following two functions.

Guardian of secularism. The Turkish military is legally assigned the task of preserving Turkey's secular constitution. As written into the Turkish laws in 1961, article 35 of the Internal Service Law of the military says that the Turkish Armed Forces is responsible for "guarding and defending the Turkish republic as defined by the constitution."¹²

The military has thrice acted on this legal obligation. In 1960 and 1980, it carried out coups, preventing what it considered constitutional abuse by a majoritarian government in 1960, and ending near civil war in 1980 between communist and nationalist militias and terror groups. In 1971, short of a coup, the military intervened in politics and demanded the resignation of a government unable to check rising domestic violence.

Quasi political party. Regardless of its legal authority, why does the Turkish military feel comfortable intervening in politics? Turkish opinion polls consistently show the military as the most respected institution in the country. In 2002, for instance, a Pew Center Poll concluded that the military is the institution most liked by the Turks, ahead of the government, the parliament, the media, and the mosque.¹³

Where does the military get its popularity? In the first place, under Ataturk, the military liberated Turkey from what seemed like an invincible occupation. Hence, regardless of their political beliefs, all Turks, even the Islamists, recognize the military as a national savior.

A second factor that enhances the military's domestic standing is that it conscripts across Turkey's social classes, ethnic groups, and regions. In this regard, the

12. *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri İç Hizmet Kanunu* (Turkish Armed Forces internal service law), Nr, 211, January 4, 1961. Available online (www.hukuki.net/kanun/211.14.text.asp).

13. The Pew Global Attitudes Project, "What the World Thinks in 2002: How Global Publics View: Their Lives, Their Countries, The World, America" (Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2002), p. 36. Available online (<http://pewglobal.org/reports/pdf/165.pdf>).

military provides rare upward mobility. As a social mixer and democratizing institution providing merit-based career tracks for many people in the poor Turkish hinterland, the military earns respect among common Turks.

Third, many Turks respect the military because they view it as a noncorrupt institution, unlike the political classes whom they regard as being ultra corrupt.

Building its identity on these perceptions, to use an analogy, the Turkish military thinks and acts like a “political party,” one with its own vision of a secular Turkey. The military positions itself as a grand arbiter to safeguard the secular constitution. Yet it also thrives on public support. It cares about being popular as well as respected. It would do only what is popularly supported about secularism and, to this end, works to promote its vision of a secular Turkey. When it intervenes in politics, the military seeks popular support. This was the case in the run-up to the 1980 coup against regime crisis and terror, as well as in the 1990s, against the RP.

Yes to “political housecleaning.” Popular trust in the military and the military’s involvement in politics have, however, created “political atrophy” in the Turkish political system. Secular parties and the larger population often choose the easy option of turning to the military for “political housecleaning.” In this regard, the middle classes, especially, take comfort in the military as a secular firewall against Islamism. One aspect of this attitude is that the prospect of having of an Islamist party in power, as when the RP joined a coalition government in 1996, does not create an immediate sense of panic or result in flight of capital.

No to military-backed candidates. Perhaps as a result of a desire to check this atrophy, the Turks have developed a cynical attitude to military-backed candidates. Although the people support the military’s role in political housecleaning, in the aftermath of such housecleaning, they shy away from voting for parties that appear to be the military’s candidates. For instance,

after the 1980 coup, the military-backed Nationalist Democracy Party, led by a retired general, came last in the elections, and Turgut Ozal’s ANAP, the party regarded to be least favored by the military, won the elections. These developments point at a political bias by the Turkish public against candidates favored by the military as well as a tilt toward those considered the military’s underdog.

Despite the puzzling political attitudes toward it, the Turkish military feels comfortable intervening on behalf of secularism as long as it senses it has popular backing for such a policy. This confidence can be best seen in the way the military dealt with the RP in the 1990s.

Islamist Challenge to Secularism: The Rise and Fall of the Welfare Party

Although secularism is embedded in Turkish society, it has faced a formidable challenge from the Islamists in the 1990s. Turkey’s Islamist opposition dates back to the National Order Party (MNP) of the 1960s and the reincarnation of that party in the form of the National Salvation Party (MSP) of the 1970s. These parties and their subsequent reincarnations are identical; they were set up by the same people, including Necmettin Erbakan, MNP and MSP leader and the doyen of Islamist politics in Turkey. During the 1970s, the MSP served as a home school for Turkey’s current ruling cadres, including the AKP leader and Turkish prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who entered and rose in politics in Akincilar, the MSP’s youth wing.

In the 1970s, the MSP was a relatively small party, receiving, for instance, 11 percent of the vote in the 1973 elections.¹⁴ Nevertheless, the party created significant public noise by espousing anti-American and anti-Semitic rhetoric. The MSP also openly called for the establishment of rule by Islamic law (*sharia*) to reverse Ataturk’s reforms. In fact, an MSP demonstration in Konya, central Turkey, in which party members unfurled banners demanding *sharia*, triggered the coup of 1980.

14. Results available online (www.belgenet.net/ayrinti.php?yil_id=7).

After 1980, a seesaw relationship ensued between the military and the Islamists, with the MSP (as well as other parties) shut down following the coup. When Turkey switched to democratic rule in 1983, the party staged a comeback in 1984 as the RP. For a long time, the RP remained a relatively small party, as the MSP had been in the 1970s. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, however, the RP caught the winds of fortune, turning into a larger party.¹⁵

In the 1994 local elections, the party received 18 percent of the vote, capturing mayoral positions of major Turkish cities, including Istanbul and Ankara—with Erdogan emerging as Istanbul’s mayor.¹⁶ In an even bigger victory, in December 1995, the RP received 21 percent of the vote, surfacing as the largest party in Turkey.¹⁷ Accordingly, the RP achieved the largest delegation in the Turkish parliament, though failing to get a majority of the seats in the legislature.

The secular parties initially kept the RP out of government by building coalitions among themselves. Soon, however, the secular coalition collapsed, and in June 1996, RP came to power in a coalition government with center-right True Path Party (DYP).

The February 28 process. The RP-DYP government turned controversial when RP leader Erbakan launched his previously mentioned MSP-rooted Islamist agenda of the 1970s, announcing, among other things, that he would create an Islamic M-8,¹⁸ a gathering of Muslim countries to balance the G-8.

Meanwhile, RP’s policies, laced with demands for implementing *sharia*, such as banning of alcohol in RP-run city municipal restaurants,¹⁹ and suggestions for separate public transportation systems for men and women, for instance in Konya (Erbakan’s base city), led to a strong domestic backlash. Street demonstrations by secular unions, political parties, and NGOs ensued. Public criticism of the RP government by “Istanbul,” influential business lobbies, NGOs, and the media, culminated in an anti-RP front. “Istanbul” threw its support behind “Ankara,” that is, secular parties, military, and unions. In this regard, the military acted as a grand arbiter, supporting policies against the RP. For instance, a Turkish civil society campaign, titled “One Minute of Darkness for Eternal Light,” in which people protested the RP by turning their lights off for one minute at 8 p.m. every day, got a boost when the Turkish Chief of Staff’s offices joined in.²⁰

The military took a public stance against the RP. On February 28, 1997, in what is known as the “February 28 Process,” the Turkish National Security Council, which included the military, presented the RP government with a memorandum about unconstitutional, Islamist acts under RP rule.²¹ Faced with mounting domestic discontent and street demonstrations in which millions of people took part, the RP stepped down from government in June 1997.

Why did the RP choose not to fight, ignoring, for instance, the example of violence by the Algerian Islamic Salvation Front (Front Islamique du Salut, or

15. For these dynamics that helped the RP to electoral success, which are today helping the AKP, see the sections “Demise of the Left” and “Varos Power Base” in the chapter titled “Successful Islamist Challenge to Secular Parties: Enter the AKP.”

16. “Turkey Shaken by Islamic Party’s Wins,” *Financial Times* (London), March 30, 1994. For the 1994 election results, see Sonay Bayramoğlu, *Seçim Sonuçları Değerlendirmesi 1994 Yılı Raporu* (Analysis of election results, report for 1994), YerelNet; available online (www.yerelnet.org.tr/secimler/secim_analizleri1994.php).

17. “Islamic Party Win Worsens Turkey’s East vs. West Woes,” *Christian Science Monitor*, December 25, 1995; “24 Aralık 1995 Genel Seçimleri Partilerin Aldıkları Oylar ve Oranları” (Votes and percentages of votes won by parties in the December 24, 1995 general elections), BBC Türkçe (available online at www.bbc.co.uk/turkish/241295.shtml). For the 1995 election results, see Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Milletvekili Genel Seçimleri: 1995 Yılı Genel Seçimlerinde Partilerin Aldıkları Oylar ve Oranları* (Turkish republic parliamentary general elections: votes and percentages of votes won by parties in the 1995 general elections); available online (www.tbmm.gov.tr/develop/owa/secimler.secimdeki_partiler?p_secim_yili=1995).

18. Robin Wright, “Turkey: to Save Its Democracy, Turkey May Destroy It,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 15, 1997.

19. William D. Montalbano, “Slim Party Profits from Discontent; By Opposing Corruption, Turkey’s Welfare Party Is Emerging as a Serious Contender for National Power,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 22, 1994.

20. Yalman Onaran, “Dark Days: Turks Turn off the Lights in Protests against Government,” Associated Press, February 19, 1997; and Nicole Pope, “Crisis between Secular Army and Pro-Islamic Regime Feared,” *Irish Times*, March 1, 1997.

21. For an English translation of the memorandum (*Turkish National Security Council Decision* no. 406) as well as a review of the February 28 process and its aftermath, see Niyazi Gunay, “Implementing the ‘February 28’ Recommendations: A Scorecard,” *Research Notes* no. 10 (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, May 2001).

FIS) in the early 1990s?²² Even though Erbakan had earlier suggested violence, saying that the question is whether “the RP will come to power with blood or without blood,”²³ the RP was aware of the powerful military as a potential adversary and thus did not choose the violent option.²⁴ In addition, secular Turkish public opinion, much eroded since the AKP’s rise to power, dissuaded the RP from taking a violent path against a majority Turkish view.

The Alevis

One important component of Turkey’s secular block not eroded by the AKP is the Alevis.²⁵ Yet the Alevis are also among the least-studied aspects of Turkey. Accordingly, their devotion to secularism ought to be understood.

The Alevis are originally from a triangular zone of central-north Anatolia,²⁶ an area stretching from Eskişehir in the northwest, to Erzurum in the northeast, and Kahramanmaraş in the south. In addition, smaller Alevi communities (called Cepnis, Tahtacis, Turkmens, or Yoruks) are spread on the mountain ranges along the Aegean and Mediterranean littorals, from Canakkale in northwestern Turkey to Gaziantep in southern Turkey.²⁷ Depending on one’s relationship to Islam, in Turkey the Alevis are described as Sunni Muslims,²⁸ Shiite Muslims,²⁹ non-Muslims,³⁰ or even as heretics (by fundamentalist Muslims).³¹ In reality, the Alevis are a distinct community whose interpretation of Islam, while showing similarities to both Sunni and Shiite Islam, is unorthodox enough to be considered neither Sunni nor Shiite.³²

22. In December 1991, the FIS won a victory in the Algerian elections. In January 1992, the Algerian military intervened and annulled the elections, preventing the FIS from taking office. Jill Smolowe, “A Prelude to Civil War? To Turn Back the Fundamentalist Ride, Algeria’s Army Derails Legislative Elections and Sets Up a Tense Standoff,” *Time Magazine*, January 27, 1992. The FIS responded violently to these steps by launching a campaign of insurgency and terrorism. The ensuing fighting caused more than 60,000 casualties, with the FIS carrying out gruesome killings, such as “slitting its secular opponents’ throats and tossing children off of balconies.” Victoria Brittain, “Islamist Bombers Terrorise Algeria,” *Guardian* (London), January 23, 1997; John Daniszewski, “Up to 200 Killed in Algeria’s Latest Slaughter,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 24, 1997.
23. Daily Digest of the Turkish Directorate General for the Press and Media, April 13, 1994. Available online (www.byegm.gov.tr/YAYINLARIMIZ/AyiniTarihi/1994/nisan1994.htm).
24. Interview by author with Turkish military official, Ankara, August 1997.
25. The Alevis should not be confused with the Alawites in Syria, who are known as Nusayris in Turkey. Although the Turkish Alevis and the Arab Alawites have similar-sounding names because of their shared reverence for Ali, they differ in history and theology. The Alawites are an Arabic-speaking community centered in Syria and practice a version of Islam with likely connections to Ismailism, as well as having an esoteric reading of the Koran. Alawites also seem to regard Ali as the purpose of life and the divine knowledge of the prophet Muhammad. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alawite>. The Alawite faith stands in stark contrast to the Alevis’ version of “simplified” Islam discussed in this section. For more on the differences between the Alevis and the Alawites, see the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees report, “Turkey: The Alevi Faith, Principles, Beliefs, Rituals and Practices (1995–2005).” Available online (www.unhcr.org/home/RSDCOI/42df61b320.html). For more on the Alawites, see Martin Kramer, “Syria’s Alawis and Shi’ism,” in *Shi’ism, Resistance, and Revolution*, ed. Martin Kramer (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1987), pp. 237–254. Available online (www.geocities.com/martinkramerorg/Alawis.htm).
26. See map, p. 14, for a rough distribution of Alevis in Turkey.
27. Outside Turkey, beliefs similar to Alevism have historically existed in western Iran (as the Ahl-i Hak) and northern Iraq (among the Shabek Kurds). For more on Ahl-i Hak and Shabeks, see Martin van Bruinessen, “The Kurds and Islam,” Working Paper no. 13, Islamic Area Studies Project, Tokyo, 1999. Revised version available online (www.let.uu.nl/~martin.vanbruinessen/personal/publications/Kurds_and_Islam.htm). Because of Turkish migration to western Europe, Alevi communities now exist in various European countries, especially Germany, which has a large Turkish community. For case studies on the Alevis in Europe, see Ron Geaves, “Religion and Ethnicity: Community Formation in the British Alevi Community,” *Numen* 50, no. 1 (January 2003), pp. 52–70; and David Shankland, “Integration, Mobility and Faith among a Turkish Islamic Community in Berlin,” Economic and Social Research Council, January 1, 2003 (available online at www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/ViewAwardPage.aspx?AwardId=1728).
28. “Turkey: Court Ruling Shows Authorities Refusal to See Alevism as a Religious Community,” *Religioscope*, February 18, 2002. Available online (www.religioscope.com/info/notes/2002_023_alevis.htm).
29. *Diyanet Aylık*, “Din Anlayışında Farklılaşmalar Ve Türkiye’de Alevilik-Bektaşilik Üzerine” (On the differences in the interpretation of religion and the Alevi-Bektasis in Turkey), (Sayı: 147). Available online (www.diyamet.gov.tr/turkish/default.asp).
30. Martin van Bruinessen, “Kurds, Turks and the Alevi revival,” *Middle East Reports* no. 200 (Summer 1996), pp. 7–10. Extended version available online (www.let.uu.nl/~Martin.vanBruinessen/personal/publications/Alevi_revival.htm#_ftn1).
31. Benjamin Harvey, “Muslim Group Outcast in Turkey’s Islamic Community,” Associated Press, January 6, 2007.
32. The Alevis are often confused with Shiites. In fact, after the Islamic Revolution, Iran tried in vain to proselytize Shiite Islam among the Alevis but failed. İsmail Pehlivan, *Akşam* (Istanbul), November 1, 2006. The Alevis are, however, not Shiites, even though they share with the latter some strong historical attitudes, such as veneration of Ali. Alevism derives much inspiration from both Sunni and Shiite Islam, yet it can be considered neither Sunni nor Shiite. For analytical purposes, the relationship between Alevism, on the one hand, and Sunni and Shiite Islam, on the other, can be viewed as similar to the relationship between the Mormon faith and Christianity. Just as Mormonism is rooted in Christianity, Alevism is connected to Sunni and Shiite Islam; yet just as mainstream Christians do not see Mormonism as mainstream Christianity, Alevism is not seen as analogous to orthodox forms of Shiite or Sunni Islam. Finally, while Mormonism sees itself as Christianity rooted in America, Alevism sees itself as Islam rooted in Anatolia.

The exact number of Alevis in Turkey is difficult to verify because official statistics do not count ethnicity or religion. The polls that do deal with these subjects seem imperfect: because historically the Alevis have suffered persecution, many of them shy away from self-identifying in polls. Some Alevi individuals and organizations, such as the Cem Foundation (Cem Vakfi), an Alevi NGO, claim that Alevis are nearly a third of Turkey's Muslim population, more than 20 million people,³³ while others place this figure even higher at 25 million.³⁴ The U.S. State Department reports an "estimated fifteen to twenty million" Alevis in Turkey,³⁵ comprising 20 to 28 percent of the Turkish population.

These figures may, however, be overstated. A recent poll that used three indirect questions about Alevi iconography in homes, instead of directly asking whether the informant is an Alevi, concluded that the Alevis constitute 10.4 percent of the Turkish population.³⁶ Although the number of nonpracticing Alevis³⁷ who would have responded negatively to the practice-related questions might pull this figure higher, it seems possible to estimate that the Alevis constitute between 10 and 15 percent of the Turkish population. Given this number, together with secular Sunni Muslims, the Alevis can be said to constitute an important component of Turkey's secular block.

The roots of the Alevis' support for secularism lie in their history, specifically the following points:

- The emergence of Alevism as a Turkish faith in Anatolia
- The political freedoms provided to them by Atatürk

Turkish Islam in Anatolia. Alevism emerged as a specifically Turkish interpretation of Islam in medieval Turkey. The Turks' original homeland is northern Eurasia, where they practiced shamanism, a religion that fuses nature with worship. During the early medieval period, Chinese pressure pushed the Turks westward, first into Uzbekistan and then into Iran in the eighth century. At that time, the Turks came into contact with the Islamic Umayyad and later Abbasid empires that ruled those areas. Over time, many Turkish tribes became the soldiers of the caliphate in Baghdad. These contacts ushered in a process of gradual Islamization of the Turks. Slowly, over a period of 200 years, the Turks became Muslims mostly through contact with the Persians, who, at the time, belonged to Sunni Islam.

In the eleventh century, the Iranian-based Turkish Seljuk Empire captured Anatolia from the Byzantine Empire. The ensuing Seljuk state in Turkey was multiethnic and multireligious, with Jewish and Christian (Greek and Armenian) populations who enjoyed religious tolerance. At this time, Turkish Sufi movements born in Central Asia grew in the Anatolian cities, promoting liberal forms of Islam. Not surprisingly, the Sufis and medieval Turkish humanists, such as the Mevlevi (Whirling Dervishes), the Bektasis, and Yunus Emre, who emphasized faith at the expense of practice in Islam, were accepting of the Anatolian Christians. In this tolerant environment of Seljuk Anatolia, a synthesis of Islam and Christianity created an open, urban form of Islam that borrowed much from Christianity, including a fundamental Sufi concept, the veneration of saints.³⁸

This uniquely Turkish form of urban Islam was enhanced by the arrival of a new wave of Turks from Central Asia in the early thirteenth century. These

33. Cem Vakfi, "The Position of Alevite Communities in Modern Turkey," June 2005 (available online at www.cemvakfi.org/ingilizce.asp?KID=17); and Benjamin Harvey, "Alevis Push for Turkish Tolerance," *Washington Times*, January 10, 2007 (available online at www.washtimes.com/functions/print.php?StoryID=20070109-111943-2773r).

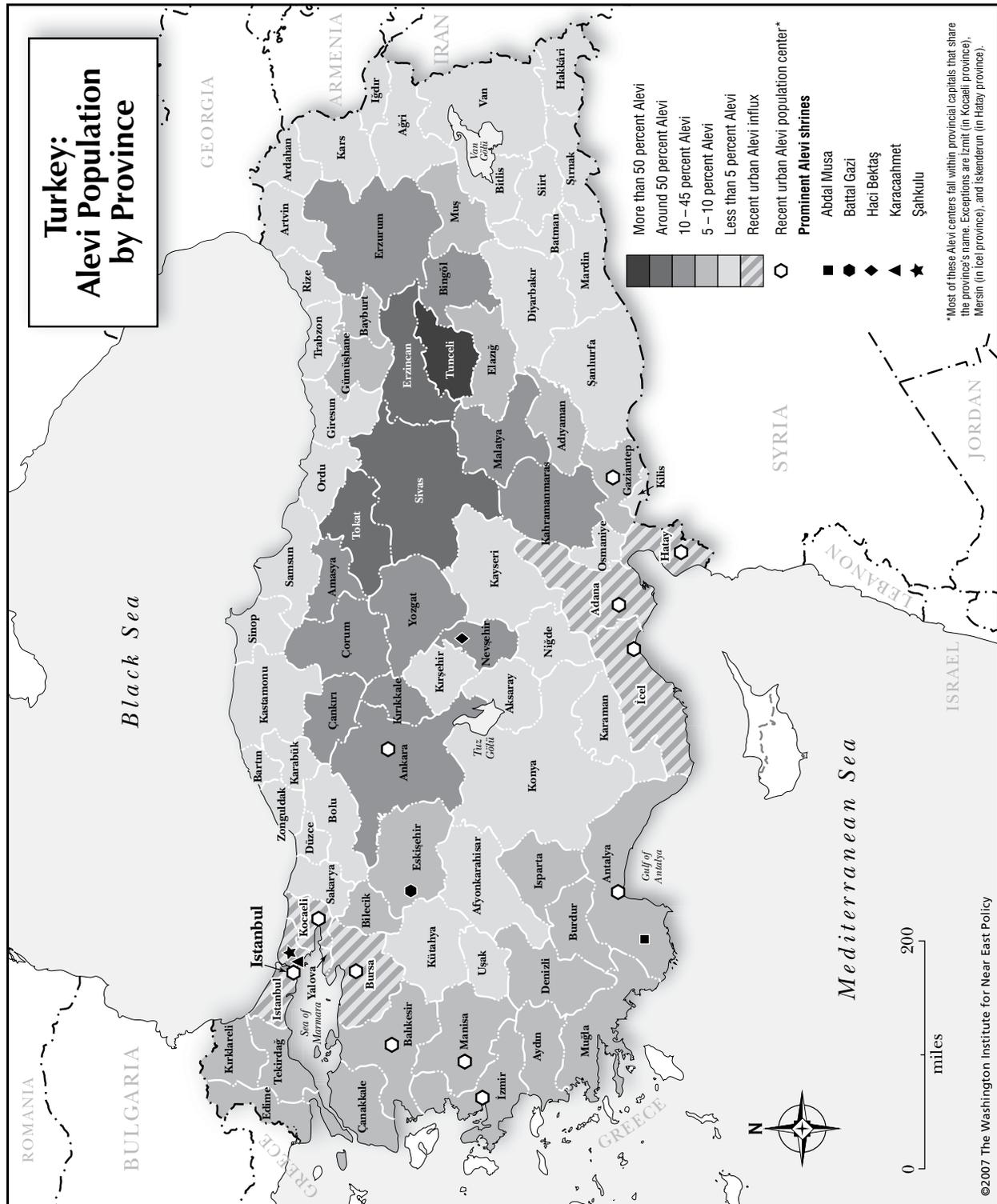
34. "Alevi Delegation's Call on Opposition Party Leaders Reported," *Milliyet* (Istanbul), October 18, 2000; and "Alevis Call on the Turkish Government to Recognize and Respect Their Faith," *Sabah* (Istanbul), November 9, 2003.

35. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, *Turkey: International Religious Freedom Report 2006* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, 2006). Available online (www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2006/71413.htm).

36. Ali Çarkoğlu and Ersin Kalaycıoğlu, *Türkiye'de Siyasetin Yeni Yüzü* (New face of politics in Turkey) (Istanbul: Açık Toplum Enstitüsü, 2006), p. 42.

37. For secularization and the disappearance of religious practice among the Alevis, see "The Alevis Today," later in this chapter.

38. This form of Turkish Islam would later spread into the Balkans, where it continues to be practiced today.



Turkish tribes, fleeing the Mongols, were shamanist, as had been the earlier waves of Turkish tribes before they left their homeland. The previous waves of Turks, however, had been gradually filtered through Iran as well as urbanized and Islamized by the Persians. This slow process had given these Turks plenty of time to adjust to their new faith, switching from the free tribal spirit of shamanism to the stricter mores and values of Islam. In contrast, the thirteenth-century Turkish tribes were catapulted into Anatolia almost overnight. They had only a few years to acculturate to Islam, a process for which the previous wave of Turks had had centuries.

With the ensuing culture shock, the shamanistic Turks in Anatolia found the liberal Sufi version of Islam closer to their taste than orthodox Islam. They also chose to preserve parts of their shamanistic culture, such as dance and music in worship and mixed-gender prayers. The cross-pollination of Sufi Islam and shamanism produced a specific version of rural Turkish Islam, initially called *Kizilbas* (a term that later became pejorative and remains so to this day despite efforts by some Alevis to beautify it) and later named Alevism. This Turkish form of Islam avoided some aspects of Sunni Islam, such as the separation of men and women in prayer. The Alevis' unorthodox take on mainstream Islam also meant that religious service was not held in a mosque. Rather, such worship took place in a *cemevi* (house of gathering) or any place available when the Alevis faced persecution. Worship was run not by an imam but by a *dede* (elder). Prayers were conducted in Turkish rather than Arabic, which renders the Alevis the only Muslims able to pray in the vernacular. Dancing and wine drinking, rooted in shamanism, and oratory celebrations also became common in the Alevi faith.³⁹ In the open nature of medieval Turkish Anatolia, Alevism became a popular form of Islam across the countryside, supplementing that of the urban Sufis. In this regard, a fair amount of mixing took place between the Sufis and Alevis. For instance, the Bektasis gradually became a Sufi order influenced by

Alevism, while Alevis incorporated elements of Bektasism, such as veneration of saints.⁴⁰

As the Anatolian Seljuks gave way to the Ottoman Empire, and the Ottomans expanded into the Balkans, the Sufis, Bektasis, and Alevis moved into Europe, forming today's Alevi/Bektasi communities in the Balkans, such as the Alevi Turks in Bulgaria and Greece, as well as the Bektasis in Albania, who constitute about a quarter of that country's population. During their expansion into Europe, the Ottomans made the Bektasis the official religious order of the janissaries, the elite corps of the imperial army. This development succeeded in co-opting the Balkan Christians, attracting many of them into the Ottoman army by making it easy for them to become Muslims yet avoid the orthodox practice of Islam if they wished.

Ottoman persecution. In the late fifteenth century, however, the Alevis found themselves caught in a battle for power between the Ottoman state, whose Muslim population was predominantly Sunni, and Safavid Iran, which became an officially Shiite state in 1502 under the reign of Shah Ismail I. The most divisive historical issue between the Sunnis and the Shiites is the question of the succession following the death of the Muslim prophet Muhammad. Whereas the Shiites asserted that Muhammad's state should be run by his son-in-law Ali, the Sunnis rejected this point. Gradually, some Shiites became entrenched in their devotion to Ali. In the early sixteenth century, Shiite Iran sent emissaries into Anatolia, spreading the idea of veneration of Ali in an effort to gain political muscle vis-à-vis the Sunni Ottoman state. The Alevis were attracted by this policy because they were already at home with the idea of veneration of saints and prominent figures of Islam, including Ali. Despite their respect for Ali and the affinity they may have felt to Turkic-run Iran, however, the Alevis did not convert to Shiism, largely because for the unorthodox Alevis, Shiism, an ortho-

39. David Zeidan, "The Alevi of Anatolia," *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 3, no.4 (December 1999).

40. Although Alevism seems unique, similar admixtures of Islam and local faiths have occurred across the Muslim world, such as the Indonesian blending of Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Hence, what is unique about Alevism is not the fact of admixture, but the kind of admixture that took place in medieval Turkey.

dox form of Islam, was akin to the Sunnism, which they avoided.

Nevertheless, the Ottoman sultans, wary of Iranian expansion into eastern Turkey, saw the Alevis' devotion to Ali as a sign of Shiite heresy—a fifth-column action for Persia. The Ottoman response to this perceived threat was massive persecution of the Alevis. Especially under the rule of Sultan Selim I (Yavuz) in the early sixteenth century, many Alevis were killed. Others were expelled to Iran or fled there for safety (where they merged with Turkic Shiite Azeris). Subsequently, the Ottoman sultans secured eastern Turkey.⁴¹ The Alevis survived far from the Iranian border, in the refuge of the high mountains of inner Anatolia. Fearing persecution, the Alevis spent the ensuing centuries in rural mountain hamlets⁴² where they could hide their religious practices and try to pass as Sunni Muslims when necessary to avoid maltreatment.

When the Ottoman sultans obliterated the janissaries in 1826, replacing the corps with the new Western army, they also banned Bektasism, closely associated with the janissaries. Like the Alevis, the Bektasis were forced to go underground. Gradually, the experience of persecution and survival in disguise brought the Alevis and Bektasis closer to each other than before, and some Bektasis started to self-identify as the urban branch of Alevism. The two groups, however, remained on the margins of the Ottoman society until Ataturk, whose vision for a secular republic included the emancipation of the Alevis and Bektasis.

Roots of Alevi support for secularism under Ataturk. Secularization and elimination of Islam as a state religion under Ataturk drastically altered the situation of the Alevis and the Bektasis. Almost overnight, these people went from persecuted “heretics” to first-

class citizens of the republic. Eventually, many Alevis moved from the mountain hamlets where they had lived since the 1500s to the cities. This process, coupled with mass secular education, enabled the Alevis to move into Turkish society and up its ladders. Especially significant in this period, thousands of Alevis, including many women educated as early as the 1930s, became schoolteachers in Turkey's secular education system, spreading the idea of a secular republic.

Liberation and a taste of equality under Ataturk meant that the Alevis built up a strong devotion to Ataturk and his legacy. Today, in many Alevi homes, especially in the countryside, pictures of Ataturk hang next to pictures of Ali (from whom the Alevis get their name), an iconic statement showing the elevated status of the founder of modern Turkey among the Alevis.

The Alevis showed loyalty not only to Ataturk but also to his party, the CHP. Starting in the 1960s, the Alevis threw their support heavily behind leftist as well as communist movements and political parties with which they identified as a historically persecuted group. When the CHP moved to the left in the 1960s, the Alevis supported this process. In the 1970s, the Alevis played a significant role in setting up socialist and communist unions, political parties, militias, and even terrorist groups.

As a result of their identification with communism and secularism, the Alevis became the targets of Islamists, as well as of Turkish nationalist parties that promoted an anti-Russian, hence anticommunist, ideology during the Cold War. In the chaotic years of intra-militia violence in the 1970s, the Alevis were targeted by these groups. During one such event in 1978, in Kahramanmaraş, militia and sympathizers of Islamist and nationalist parties killed more than 100 Alevis, wounding more than 1,000 others.⁴³ Violent

41. With all the Alevis out of eastern Turkey and with the region's Sunni Kurdish community intact, eastern Turkey hence became de-Turkified and assumed a Kurdish majority. Ironically, the Ottoman policies broke up Turkish geographic continuity from Central Asia into the Mediterranean. To this day, as a result of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Ottoman policies, eastern Anatolia remains predominantly Kurdish.

42. As Turkish Alevis took refuge in the high mountains of central-east Anatolia, they formed Kurdish- and Zaza-speaking Alevi communities in east-central Turkish provinces, such as Erzincan, Erzurum, Kahramanmaraş, Malatya, and Tunceli. To this day, however, these Alevis, who use Turkish in their liturgy, remain outside the body of the larger Kurdish community because of sectarian differences: an overwhelming majority of the Kurds belong to the orthodox Shafi school of Sunni Islam under whose strict religious theory the Alevis (Kurdish, Zaza, and Turkish speakers alike) are viewed as outside the body of Islam.

43. “105 Die in Moslem Clashes,” *World News Digest*, December 31, 1978.

clashes in Corum, Sivas, and Malatya in the late 1970s led to similar pogroms in which Alevi neighborhoods were attacked and businesses burned.⁴⁴

The Alevis today. The Alevis’ political tendencies have changed somewhat since the 1970s. With the collapse of communism, many have moved away from that ideology. Some have even shown support for center-right political parties, such as the ANAP. Today, the CHP still attracts many Alevis, although more among rural populations. Meanwhile, some Alevis seem to support a Turkish nationalist party, the Nationalist Action Party (MHP).

Despite fluctuating political affiliations, the Alevis have remained steadfast in their devotion to a secular Turkey, resisting Islamism. In fact, among all the pillars supporting secularism in Turkey, the Alevis together with the military may be the only ones not weakened by the Islamist challenge or the AKP. In this regard, the Alevis continue to have a persistent exclusivist self-perception regarding Islam and Islamist politics. According to a recent poll conducted by the Middle East Technical University (METU) in Ankara, for instance, while only 12.1 percent of the Alevis saw themselves as “exclusively Muslims,” 32 percent identified as “both Alevi and Muslim,” 34.5 percent as “only Alevi,” and 6.3 percent as “Bektasi” or “Kizilbas.” Moreover, a large number of Alevis now seem entirely secular or irreligious. In the METU poll, 14.6 percent (more than those who self-identified as “only Muslims”) said they were “atheist” (see figure 1).

Meanwhile, the Islamists and the Alevis seem to have trouble coming together.⁴⁵ Accordingly, the Alevis have been markedly absent from Turkey’s Islamist and religion-based parties. Not a single Alevi deputy

Figure 1. Alevi Self-Identification

| | |
|--|-------|
| Muslim only | 12.1% |
| Muslim and Alevi | 32.0% |
| Alevi only (including Bektasi and Kizilbas) | 40.8% |
| Atheist* | 15.1% |

Source: Kamil Fırat, “Kentleşen Alevilik” (Urbanizing Alevism), quoted in *Milliyet*, July 5, 2005. Available online (www.milliyet.com.tr/2005/07/05/guncel/gun01.html).

*Includes Alevis who responded “human being” (0.5%).

exists among the more than 350 deputies of the governing AKP in the Turkish parliament,⁴⁶ despite the fact that the Alevis constitute over 10 percent of the Turkish population.

Today, a large number of Alevis live in Istanbul, Ankara, and other major cities where they have migrated since Atatürk. Intensive migration from cities in east-central Turkey following the pogroms of the 1970s has diminished the ratio of Alevis in towns such as Sivas, Kahramanmaraş, and Malatya. Nevertheless, large numbers of Alevis still live in the rural areas of these provinces as well as across north-central, central, and east-central Turkey, although Tunceli is the only Turkish province where the Alevis constitute a significant majority (over 60 percent) of the population.⁴⁷

As with the rest of Turkish society, the 1980s witnessed the emergence of a large middle class among the Alevis. Over time, the Alevis have integrated into Turkish society, and intermarriages between Alevis and Sunni Turks have become common. Still, during a 1993 Alevi cultural festival in Sivas, organized partly by Alevis and partly by left-wing groups, Sunni fundamentalists set fire to the hotel where the delegates were

44. “High Death Toll in Turkey,” *Washington Post*, July 8, 1980; and Emel Anil, “AM Cycle,” Associated Press, December 25, 1978.

45. The AKP has, in general, failed to approach the Alevis, leading to controversies. Recently, an Alevi family petitioning to exempt its daughter from mandatory religion classes took its case to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). In July 2006, the ECHR ruled in favor of the Alevi family, saying that such a class violated Article 9 of the European Charter on Human Rights regarding freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. The court ruling prompted defensive statements from AKP education minister Hüseyin Çelik, who said that “an Alevi citizen . . . does not have the luxury to exempt himself from religion classes.” Quoted in “AİHM’deki Kritik Duruşma 3 Ekim’de” (The critical trial in the ECHR is on September 3), *Milliyet* (Istanbul), September 7, 2006. Available online (<http://www.milliyet.com.tr/2006/07/06/siyaset/asiy.html>).

46. Sedat Ergin, “AKP ve Aleviler” (The AKP and the Alevis), *Hürriyet* (Istanbul), November 9, 2004.

47. See map for a rough distribution of the Alevi population in Turkey.

staying, burning alive thirty-five people under the eyes of police and security forces, who later came under heavy criticism for their failure to act.⁴⁸ The incident served as a warning to the Alevis that at least a residual dislike for them remains in parts of Turkey.

Partly in reaction to the Sivas incident, a revivalist movement emerged in the 1990s among urban Alevis. The movement culminated in the establishment of a number of Alevi NGOs.⁴⁹ The revivalist efforts have, however, been met with limited success. Given massive secularization among the Alevis since Ataturk and the drift away from theology under the influence of leftist movements since the 1960s, the Alevi religious traditions, kept and taught orally to avoid persecution, are now for the most part forgotten and, in some cases, entirely lost. Moreover, while older generations see Alevism as a matter of faith, younger people call it a philosophy, leading a very large number of young Alevis not to identify as Muslims. According to the previously mentioned METU poll, among people born after 1965, 30.1 percent consider themselves “atheist,” and a mere 2.4 percent as “Muslims.” Among the same group, 37.3 percent see themselves as “Alevis,” 21.7 percent as “both Alevi and Muslim,” and 8.4 percent as “Kizilbas” or “Bektasi” (see figure 2). Moreover, compared to older Alevis (i.e., those born before 1965), younger Alevis (i.e., those born after 1965) are more than seven times less likely to identify as “Muslim.” More important, the younger Alevis are more than eleven times more likely to identify as “Atheist” compared to the older Alevis. Secularization seems to be the future of Alevism in Turkey.

The Alevis represent the bedrock of Turkey’s secular block. In fact, it is often said anecdotally that in the

Figure 2. Generational Difference in Alevi Self-Identification

| CATEGORY OF SELF-IDENTIFICATION | BORN 1964 OR EARLIER | BORN 1965 OR LATER |
|---|----------------------|--------------------|
| Muslim only | 17.2% | 2.4% |
| Muslim and Alevi | 41.4% | 21.7% |
| Alevi only (including Bektasi and Kizilbas) | 37.9% | 45.7% |
| Atheist* | 3.5% | 30.1% |

Source: Kamil Fırat, “Kentleşen Alevilik” (Urbanizing Alevism), quoted in *Milliyet*, July 5, 2005. Available online (www.milliyet.com.tr/2005/07/05/guncel/gun01.html).

*Includes Alevis who responded “human being” (0.9%).

unlikely event of an Islamist revolution in Turkey, the Alevis would fight this takeover en masse. If they lost the battle, assuming that the Alevis constitute 10 to 15 percent of the Turkish population, Greece (and the EU) would be inundated with about 10 million refugees.

The EU and the Courts

Even though some Europeans may not necessarily be aware of this fact, the EU has become the latest component buttressing Turkey’s Western orientation and secularism. Since the EU declared in December 1999 that it would offer Turkey membership if Ankara satisfied its accession rules,⁵⁰ Turkey has done much toward fulfilling these criteria, such as eliminating the military domination over the Turkish National Security Council.⁵¹ In this regard, the EU has become one of the safeguards of Turkey’s secular democracy.

48. “Fears of New, Wider Violence in Rushdie Unrest Town,” *Agence France-Presse*, July 5, 1993.

49. Some of these organizations include centrist, middle-class Cem Vakfi (see www.cemvakfi.org); Pir Sultan Abdal Derneği (Association of Pir Sultan Abdal), a leftist association named after the sixteenth-century Alevi saint Pir Sultan Abdal (see www.pirsultan.net); Karacaahmet Sultan Derneği (Association of Karacaahmet Sultan), named after Karacaahmet, a Bektasi/Alevi saint buried in Istanbul (see www.karacaahmet.com); and Hacı Bektaş Veli Dernekleri (Associations of Hacı Bektaş Veli), named after the founder of the Bektasi order (see www.hacibektasderneği.org). For a newspaper article on the political affiliations of the Alevi NGOs, see İsmail Pehlivan, “Kentleşen Alevilik” (Urbanizing Alevism), *Akşam* (Istanbul), November 1, 2006. Available online (www.aksam.com.tr/haber.asp?a=57220,11). In addition, an organization aiming to be an umbrella structure, Alevi Bektaş Federasyonu (Alevi Bektasi Federation; see www.alevifederasyonu.com), came into existence, while in Europe, the Turkish Alevis have organized in the umbrella Avrupa Alevi Birlikleri Federasyonu (Federation of Union of European Alevis; see www.alevi.com).

50. For the text of the EU decision, see (http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/archives/pdf/key_documents/1999/turkey_en.pdf).

51. Dexter Filkins, “Turkey: Parliament Backs Reforms,” *New York Times*, June 20, 2003; Karl Vick, “E.U. Bid Keeps Turkey on Path of Reform,” *Washington Post*, October 5, 2005 (available online at www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/10/04/AR2005100401745.html); Soner Cagaptay,

In January 1998, following the fall of the RP government, Turkey's Constitutional Court (Anayasa Mahkemesi), equivalent to the U.S. Supreme Court, banned the RP for violating the country's secular constitution. As mentioned before, the RP did not opt then for a violent insurrection. Instead, the party took its case in May 1998 to the ECHR in Strasbourg.⁵² In addition to the party's awareness that it would have only limited support for an insurrection, other reasons explain why the RP chose the European option, testifying to the EU's importance as a failsafe of Turkey's secular democracy.

First, having functioned in a democracy for decades and facing a domestic population with a predilection for using courts to resolve disputes, the RP had to choose the European option. Ataturk's legacy of a secular constitution, democratic and free elections, and the rule of law hindered the RP (and its later reincarnations) from pursuing a nondemocratic route in Ankara or Strasbourg.

A second reason for the RP's restraint was the party's belief that Europe would lend its cause a sympathetic ear. Yet events did not unfold the way RP hoped. Soon after the party was banned, its cadres relaunched their party under a new name as the Virtue Party (FP).⁵³ The FP entered the elections of April 1999 with a more moderate rhetoric than the RP, yet received only 15.4 percent of the popular vote.⁵⁴ Then, in July 2002, shocking the

RP cadres, the ECHR approved Turkey's ban on the RP, saying that this action was justified and did not violate the European Charter of Human Rights, the yardstick of ECHR decisions.⁵⁵

If the EU and European courts constitute one failsafe of Turkish democracy and secularism, Turkey's secular courts constitute another. Among those courts, the most prominent ones are the Constitutional Court; the Court of Appeals (Yargitay); and especially the Council of State (Danistay), a body which reviews all administrative actions, including turban and *imam-hatip* issues.

Given the role of the courts in challenging the Islamists, while the RP was taking its case to the ECHR, in May 1999, the Constitutional Court brought a case against the FP, saying that, like the RP, it violated Turkey's secular constitution. In June 2001, the court shut down the FP.⁵⁶

At that point, Turkey's Islamists had learned a lesson: the country's secular courts would not allow them to challenge secularism outright, and the EU and ECHR would be of no help. In their 2001 decision upholding Turkey's banning of the RP, the ECHR judges wrote: "We willingly accept the government's argument concerning the vital importance of secularism in Turkish society... to have an essentially Muslim population and adhere to principles of liberal democracy."⁵⁷

"European Union Reforms Diminish the Role of the Turkish Military: Ankara Knocking on Brussels' Door," *PolicyWatch* no. 781 (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, August 12, 2003) (available online at <http://washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=1659>); and Soner Cagaptay, "Turkey's Quest to Join the European Union: Implications for American Policy," *PolicyWatch* no. 648 (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, August 14, 2002) (available online at <http://washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=1526>).

52. "Turkey's Dissolved Refah Party to Seek European Rights Court Relief," Agence France-Presse, January 27, 1998.

53. "FP!" *Hürriyet* (Istanbul), February 24, 1998. Available online (<http://hursiv.hurriyet.com.tr/goster/haber.aspx?id=-7639>).

54. M. Hakan Yavuz, "The Politics of Fear: The Rise of the Nationalist Action Party (MHP) in Turkey," *Middle East Journal* 56, no. 2 (Spring 2002).

55. Therese Jauffret, "European Rights Court Backs Turkey over Islamist Party Ban," Agence France-Presse, July 31, 2001. For a text of the ECHR decision, see *Refah Partisi, Erbakan, Kazan and Tekdal v. Turkey* (nos. 41340/98 and 41342-4/98), Judgment in the Case of *Refah Partisi (The Welfare Party) Erbakan, Kazan and Tekdal v. Turkey*, July 31, 2001, European Court of Human Rights; available online (<http://cmiskp.echr.coe.int/tkp197/view.asp?it em=17&portal=hbkm&action=html&highlight=Turkey&sessionid=10216774&skin=hudoc-pr-en>).

56. "Fazilet Partisi Kapatıldı" (The Virtue Party has been shut down), *Hürriyet* (Istanbul), June 21, 2001. Available online (<http://arsiv.hurriyetim.com.tr/hur/turk/01/06/22/turkiye/61tur.htm>).

57. Quoted in Therese Jauffret, "European Rights Court Backs Turkey over Islamist Party Ban."

Successful Islamist Challenge to Secular Parties: Enter the AKP

ALTHOUGH THE RP failed in challenging Turkish secular democracy, its successor, the AKP, would fare better. Turkish Islamists discovered in the 1990s that they cannot use democracy to attack democracy and that even if they come to power, they will not be allowed to change the secular nature of the regime. As a result, the FP moderated its rhetoric in comparison with the RP, and when even the latter party was shut down, the Islamists changed more. Erdogan moderated his rhetoric further and reincarnated his movement as the Felicity Party (SP). At this time, however, a large group broke with him, taking away much of the RP party machinery and setting up the AKP in August 2001.¹ In a short amount of time, the AKP won 34 percent of the vote in the November 2002 elections.² The following factors shed light on the AKP's electoral success.

Change in Rhetoric

The AKP's adoption of a political message categorically respectful of democracy, EU accession, and secularism³ helped bring the party electoral success beyond that of the RP or the FP and the SP. In this regard, the AKP's evolution seems to be caused perhaps more by the systemic pressures of Turkish politics than any natural proclivity to moderate. Through the experience of the 1990s, the AKP leadership realized that the limitations of the country's political structure—namely, the Turks' secular mindset, Turkey's secular military, and courts—and the EU's support for Turkish secularism make staying in power impossible at this time if the party implements an Islamist agenda. The ensuing evolution in the AKP's message brought the AKP voters who had never cast their vote for an Islamist party. In

the left-wing Aegean city of Izmir, for instance, whereas the RP had traditionally never received more than 5 percent of the vote, the AKP received 17 percent support in the 2002 elections.⁴

Fresh Faces to Market a New Message

The fact remains that not only the AKP but also the FP and SP changed their rhetoric from the RP line. Nevertheless, whereas the FP and SP failed in their efforts to convince the public, the AKP persuaded at least some Turks that it is not an Islamist party. In this regard, the AKP's success lies in its leadership composed of new faces, such as current prime minister Erdogan, foreign minister Abdullah Gul, and speaker of the parliament Bulent Arinc. Unlike Erdogan, who had developed a "brand" calling for *sharia* since the 1970s, these new names were better positioned to convince the Turks that they were not after an Islamist agenda.

The Ak Label

The AKP's fortunes were strengthened by an economic meltdown in 2001 when the Turkish economy shrank by an historic 9.5 percent.⁵ News of massive corruption in secular political parties as the cause of the economic meltdown became widely circulated thanks to Turkey's vigorous press.⁶ The AKP was able to position itself not only as non-Islamist but also as a clean party (pointedly, the acronym of the party's name in Turkish is *Ak Parti*, with the word *ak* denoting abstract whiteness and moral cleanliness in Turkish), attracting many non-Islamist voters to switch to the AKP.

1. "Adalet ve Kalkınma, 39. Parti" (Justice and Development, the 39th party), *Hürriyet* (Istanbul), August 14, 2001. Available online (<http://hursiv.hurriyet.com.tr/goster/haber.aspx?id=10011>).
2. BelgeNet, 2002 *Yılı Genel Seçim Sonuçları* (2002 general election results). Available online (www.belgenet.net/ayrinti.php?yil_id=14).
3. See *AK Parti Programı* (AKP manifesto), August 14, 2001. Available online (www.akparti.org.tr/program.asp?dizin=0&changisi=0), p. 6.
4. BelgeNET, 2002 *Yılı Genel Seçim Sonuçları* (2002 general election results). Available online (www.belgenet.net/ayrinti.php?yil_id=14&il_id=935).
5. Martin Wolf, "Turkey Must Not Take Its Turnaround for Granted," *Financial Times* (London), October 20, 2004.
6. "An End to Bribes? Turks Pin Hopes on New Government to Wipe Out Corruption," Associated Press Worldstream, November 13, 2002.

Demise of the Turkish Left

The AKP flourished in the polls also because, like its predecessor RP, it was able to fill the void in the cities left from the demise of the Turkish left in the early 1990s. When Soviet communism collapsed, in Turkey, as in the rest of the world, left-wing ideologies lost their appeal. In most European countries, the left reinvented itself as the “new left”; in Turkey, such a transformation failed to take root, and the Turkish left was unable to maintain its appeal.

The AKP, and the RP before that, filled at least part of the vacuum in the working-class neighborhoods of big cities. The RP and AKP maintained their socially conservative agenda while adopting left-wing clientalist economics. The AKP has excelled in using this strategy. Since coming to power in 2002, using the existing RP political machinery, the AKP has injected massive funds into the working- and lower-middle-class boroughs (known as *varos* in Turkish) of Istanbul and other large cities. The AKP also uses vote-buying techniques, handing out goodie bags to the poor and maintaining its voter base after electoral victories through clientalist distribution mechanisms. In 2006, for instance, AKP-held Istanbul and Ankara city governments distributed “goodie packages” to more than 248,000 families in Istanbul and 60,000 families in Ankara.⁷

These techniques have brought the AKP popularity the Islamists had never before seen. Whereas the MSP, and until the mid-1990s the RP, had had limited public appeal, attracting mostly small-town peo-

ple and artisans, the AKP, following in the footsteps of the late RP, gained most of the working-class districts of the large cities.

Varos Power Base

In this regard, the AKP made its biggest gains among recent immigrants to the *varos*, a group that now forms Turkey’s demographic plurality. Turkey went through a massive transformation in the 1980s and the 1990s, experiencing large-scale industrialization and urbanization that culminated in a jump in the urban population from 41.81 percent in 1975 to 64.9 percent in 2000.⁸ The population bulge led to a new demographic majority in the cities. This “urbo-rural” group with arriviste economic tendencies and socially conservative values is neither fully rooted enough in the cities to be considered urban nor with strong enough ties to the countryside to be categorized as rural.

Accordingly, the *varos* majority is not attracted to any of the established secular political parties that have traditionally catered to either urban or rural populations. Here the AKP’s RP-era experience in the *varos*, its clientalist enrichment networks, and socially conservative politics came in handy. Today, the AKP garners strong support in the *varos*, with its “urbo-rural” leaders attractive to this population, among them Prime Minister Erdogan, posing the biggest challenge yet to Turkey’s secularism as well as the country’s historic attachment to the West.

7. Author interview with Turkish politician, Ankara, March 7, 2007.

8. Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu, “City and village population, 1927–2000,” Ankara. Available online (www.tuik.gov.tr/PreIstatistikTablo.do?istab_id=193).

From Foreign to Domestic Policy: Implications for the United States

WHEREAS THE RP FAILED in challenging Turkish secularism, the AKP has flourished, ruling the country since 2002. As noted, in a rare overlap in 2007, Turkey faces two elections: presidential in April–May and parliamentary in November. Thus, 2007 is a crucial year in which Turkey’s chief executive positions (president and prime minister) as well as the entire legislative body are up for grabs among the AKP and secular Turkish parties. This constellation of events could not be more fateful for Turkey and for the United States given the following aspects of the AKP’s successful and smart challenge to Turkish secularism and Turkey’s traditional pro-Western foreign policy.

Eroding the Secular Mindset

The AKP’s most successful challenge to Turkish secularism has been its erosion of the secular mindset that brought the RP down in 1997. As mentioned earlier, the Turkish military positions itself as a grand arbiter to safeguard the secular constitution. Yet it also cares about being popular as well as respected. The military would do only what is popularly supported about secularism, and such support is weakening. In this regard, the AKP’s foreign policy has moved mountains. The party not only has turned the Turks toward Muslim countries and issues but also has created a public more sympathetic to its political message. With more Turks thinking of themselves as Muslims first in the foreign policy arena, more Turks are now thinking of themselves as Muslims in the domestic one.

Pro-Western orientation and secularism are Turkish Siamese twins. Inevitably, weak political support for the West translates into Turkish identification with Islam. According to a recent TESEV poll, the number of people identifying as Muslims has increased by 10 percent since the AKP’s rise to power in 2002, and the number of people self-identifying as Islamists is now

nearly half of the Turkish population, 48.5 percent.¹ The transformation of Turkish self-perception erodes not only its pro-Western orientation but also its secular identity, because the latter is intrinsically connected to the former.

Turkish secularism works thanks to the military, the courts, and Atatürk, but not because of them. The bulwark of secularism in Turkey has been the existence of a majority favoring the country’s Western orientation and a secular Turkey. However, the rise of Muslim nationalism is challenging the Turkish public’s stance by chipping away at the secular mindset as well as by eroding popular support for and identification with the West.

The Malaysian model. The AKP strategy demonstrates that, once in government, religion-based parties can induce change in a myriad of ways in Muslim-majority countries. By relying on a foreign policy that erodes the Turks’ sense of a secular national identity, the AKP has infused Turkish society with a strong sense of Muslim nationalism. Whether this transformation continues after the 2007 elections will also depend on if secular, Western-minded Turkish political elites, long fragmented and unable to provide a captivating political message, successfully challenge the AKP, especially the party’s domination over grassroots networks and its financial and charismatic appeal in the *varos*. If not, a second AKP government might well move Turkey further toward becoming a different country, one that is free-market and capitalist but does not necessarily identify with the West, in the mold of Malaysia.

The Pakistani alternative. If and when a majority of Turks stop identifying with the West, seeing themselves instead as Muslims first, as in Pakistan—opinion polls show that among all Muslim-majority countries,

1. Ali Çarkoğlu and Binnaz Toprak, *Değişen Türkiye’de Din Toplum ve Siyaset* (Religion, society, and politics in changing Turkey) (Istanbul: TESEV, 2006), p. 29. Available online (www.tesev.org.tr/etkinlik/Final%20Rapordin_toplum.pdf).

79 percent of Pakistanis see themselves as Muslims first²—what would Turkey look like? The country would perhaps be able to maintain its Western orientation “unnaturally,” through institutional intervention either by the military or by the courts, both undesirable scenarios.

Some people worried by the rise of Muslim nationalism under the AKP might see a new form of nationalism (*ulusalcilik*) as an even bigger concern. Yet, the fact is that *ulusalcilik* is a product of the AKP years in power. Ironically, even though the AKP and the *ulusalcilik* movement despise each other at the domestic level, the ideological gap between the two movements on foreign policy seems minimal. *Ulusalcilik* is a breed of nationalism whose leitmotiv is anti-Westernism, unlike traditional Kemalist Turkish nationalism (*milliyetçilik*). For instance, whereas traditional Turkish nationalists would see the U.S. presence in Iraq as an unwanted conflict between two countries next door, *ulusalcilik* supporters hate the U.S. presence in Iraq as much as the Muslim nationalists do. In fact, the *ulusalcilik*-style foreign policy view seems akin to that of the AKP, differing only in semantics: while the AKP talks about “Muslims” when criticizing the United States in Iraq, the *ulusalcilik* movement talks about the “Turks” in doing so, although still taking issue with U.S. occupation of a Muslim country.

What appears ascendant in the AKP’s Turkey is nationalism blended with Islam—in other words, anti-Western Islamism, a potent ideology whether as Muslim nationalism or in the garb of the *ulusalcilik* movement.

Nevertheless, the AKP differentiates itself from the *ulusalcilik* movement in Western capitals. Even though the AKP lambastes the West domestically, pushing anti-Western attitudes at home, when overseas, it maintains close ties with Western governments.

Turkey’s pro-Western foreign policy orientation under the AKP: No more a given. Along these lines, since 2005, the AKP has adopted a more positive rheto-

ric toward Washington. Hoping to weather the election year with Washington’s backing, the AKP has also toned down its criticism of U.S. policies in the Middle East. Despite domestic opposition, the AKP leadership fully supported sending Turkish peacekeepers to Lebanon in preparation for Erdogan’s visit to Washington on October 2, 2006.³ Thus, when parliament authorized a motion on the peacekeeping issue, only six AKP deputies defected—an interesting fact, suggesting that had the AKP shown similar resolve, it could have secured the approval of a March 1, 2003, motion to support the Iraq war, which failed when the party leadership asked the AKP deputies to vote as they wished and ninety-nine AKP deputies defected.

Even if the AKP’s attitude toward Washington has become more positive, the party is unlikely to deliver tangible support to Washington on crucial Middle East issues. After years of harsh AKP criticism of the United States, Turkish public opinion is now vehemently anti-American, and more Turks identify with Islamist issues than before. In this regard, the AKP’s current strategy of criticizing the West at home while maintaining close ties with Western governments only exacerbates the problem. Persistent anti-Western public opinion, as well as the negative precedent set by the failed 2003 Iraq war vote, will hinder the AKP from providing concrete support for U.S. policies in the Middle East, such as Iran’s denuclearization. Ironically for the AKP, anti-Western sentiments, largely a product of its government of the last five years, will lessen the effectiveness of the party’s turn to the United States.

The AKP’s attachment to the West seems conjectural and cannot be taken for granted. For instance, although the party came to power with a strong pro-EU agenda, the AKP’s drive for EU accession fizzled out in 2005.⁴ After Turkey got a green light from the EU in December 2004 to start accession talks (that is, when the EU option became a reality), the AKP lost its enthusiasm for the accession issue. The AKP took six

2. “Islamic Extremism: Common Concern for Muslim and Western Publics,” Pew Center Report, July 14, 2005. Available online (<http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?PageID=813>).

3. “Turkish Parliament OKs Lebanon Deployment,” Agence France-Presse, September 5, 2006.

4. Vincent Boland, “Turkey Drags Feet over Preparations for Joining EU,” *Financial Times* (London), March 5, 2005.

months to appoint a chief negotiator to deal with the EU.⁵ Along the same lines, the AKP started criticizing *laicite*,⁶ for which it had voiced support in 2002.

Averting February 28. In addition to eroding the secular Turkish mindset through its foreign policy moves, a second aspect of the AKP's smart challenge to Turkish secularism has been averting another February 28—as in 1996–1997, when secular political parties, military in Ankara, as well as the NGOs, businesses, and media in Istanbul successfully united to force the Islamist RP government to step down. In this regard, the AKP has managed its relationship with the media through political and economic pressures on media-owning businesses,⁷ successfully evading a powerful check. If the AKP has drawn the lesson from February 28, 1997, that it needs strong popular support to avert another February 28—a target that the AKP seems to be achieving through an anti-Western foreign policy—a second lesson is that the party cannot afford to lose the media. The AKP has therefore carefully managed its relationship with the large Istanbul-based media companies—over three-quarters of the Turkish media is owned by three large businesses⁸—avoiding a February 28–style campaign from the secular media, as well as attacking the media for criticizing the party.⁹

The AKP vs. Opposition by Institutions

Thanks to its previously mentioned domination over the Turkish parliament, the AKP has exercised unchecked executive and legislative power, with media support. This development has led to a weakness in the Turkish democracy. Unlike the 1990s, when secular

parties and the media exercised checks and balances over the Islamist parties, today, in the unfortunate absence of such checks and balances, the military and the courts have emerged as the chief counterbalances to the AKP's executive acts.¹⁰

On September 1, 2006, Gen. Yasar Buyukanit became Turkey's new chief of staff. Compared with his predecessor, Gen. Hilmi Ozkok, who came into office about the same time as the AKP government in 2002, General Buyukanit is a more vocal personality on many issues, including secularism. General Buyukanit's term marks a new, crucial era in military-civilian relations in Turkey. In this regard, there are several key issues that bear watching.

Secular education. One of Ataturk's early fundamental reforms was the creation of a secular universal education system in 1924.¹¹ The resulting system is arguably the most important achievement of Kemalism. Underfunded and unable to meet the challenge of massive migration to the cities since the 1980s, however, it has fallen into great disrepair. Still, secular education has provided generations of Turks with secular thought, while Islamist education, widespread in other predominantly Muslim countries, has been unable to gain dominance in Turkey. Today, the AKP seems to be challenging the secular education system by seeking revisions to it through the *imam-hatip* schools and urban issues.

The *imam-hatip* schools. Turkey's educational philosophy is European, directing students toward choosing between an academic track and a vocational track at the high school level. Students on an academic track

5. Michael Kuser, "Minister Chosen to Plan Turkey's Route to EU: Ali Babacan," *Financial Times* (London), May 25, 2005.

6. "Arinç, Cumhurbaşkanı Seçimi Tartışmalarını Eleştirdi" (Arinç has criticized the presidential election debates), *Hürriyet* (Istanbul), April 23, 2006 (available online at <http://hursiv.hurriyet.com.tr/goster/haber.aspx?id=4302003>); and "Arinç'in 23 Nisan Günü Yaptığı Konuşmanın Tam Metni" (full text of Arinç's April 23, 2006, speech), *Yeni Şafak* (Istanbul), April 23, 2006 (available online at www.yenisafak.com.tr/dosya/arinc_tbmm_23042006.html).

7. Author's interviews with Turkish journalists in Istanbul (March 5, 2007) and Ankara (March 8, 2007).

8. Interview by author with Turkish journalist, Ankara, March 6, 2007; interview by author with Turkish journalist, Istanbul, March 5, 2007.

9. "Erdoğan: Medya Unakıtan'a İftira Atıyor," (Erdoğan: The media is spreading blasphemy about Unakıtan), *Hürriyet* (Istanbul), March 1, 2006. Available online (<http://hursiv.hurriyet.com.tr/goster/haber.aspx?id=4006060>).

10. Soner Cagaptay, "Rising Tensions between Turkey's AKP and the Courts," *PolicyWatch* no. 1109 (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, May 30, 2006). Available online (www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=2474).

11. For a text of this law, known as "Tevhidi Tedrisat Kanunu" (Law for unity of education), see (www.turkcebilgi.com/Tevhidi%20Tedrisat%20Kanunu).

at regular high schools (*lise*) continue on to universities, whereas students on the vocational track get preferential treatment if they go on to university majors in their technical, professional field.

The *imam-hatip* schools (IHS) were established in the 1950s as vocational schools to train *imams* (clerics) and *hatips* (preachers). Later, however, beyond providing vocational training, the IHS emerged as an alternative, religious track to secular education. The schools enrolled and graduated many more students than the *imams* and *hatips* Turkey needed, and many IHS graduates started entering nontheology majors at universities, such as law and public administration. Starting at the early age of sixth grade, the IHS became a means of bypassing a secular high school education. The IHS proliferated, especially under conservative governments, including the RP government in 1996 when 107 IHS were opened,¹² as well as the ANAP and DYP governments. By 1997, 187,803 students studied at these schools.¹³ By the mid-1990s, the schools had become so widespread that in the 1997 conflict between RP/Islamists and the secular block/military, they constituted a hot-button issue. After much wrangling and pressure from the military, the government passed new laws,¹⁴ raising entry level to IHS from sixth grade to ninth. The new laws also ensured that as had been intended originally, the IHS graduates would be more directed—through a system of points channeling vocational high school graduates to vocational majors in universities—to enter universities as theology majors.¹⁵

This barrier stymied the growth of IHS, and the number of students at these schools dropped to 64,534 in 2002.¹⁶ However, since the rise of the AKP government, the number of IHS students has started to

increase (see figure 3, next page). In 2005, 108,064 youths studied at the IHS.¹⁷ The AKP has created loopholes allowing IHS students to transfer to academic high schools before graduation so they receive preferential treatment in going on to nontheology majors in universities.¹⁸ The students and graduates of IHS, among them Erdogan, are striving to bring these schools the same recognition as secular, academic high schools. The expectation that the IHS graduates will get preferential treatment in entering nontheology majors seems to have also played a role in increasing the number of IHS students since 2002. The entry of the IHS graduates to university departments other than theological fields—in other words, changing the original mandate of *imam-hatip* schools—is not a technical matter but a fierce internal debate about universal secular education, a pillar of Turkish secularism.

The turban. Just like the IHS issue, the turban question is also essentially about education. Conservative Muslim women in Turkey have always covered their heads as a sign of modesty. Yet these women chose a variety of styles, including east and south European or Russian-looking handkerchiefs, known as *esarp*, worn by urban women; a more conservative late-Ottoman-era version of that cover called *basortusu*; and a gauze cloth, *yazma/yemeni*, worn by rural women. According to polls, in 2006, less than half (48 percent) of Turkish women used these forms of head covering.¹⁹ The turban, however, is a specific headgear that first appeared in Turkey in the early 1980s, following the trend in other predominantly Muslim countries. The turban exposes no hair, and unlike the *yazma/yemeni*, *basortusu*, or *esarp*, even covers parts of the face in a tight-fitting form while extending over the shoulders

12. Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi, *Genel Kurul Tutanakları* (Turkish General National Assembly general session discussion minutes), December 14, 1999. Available online (www.tbmm.gov.tr/develop/owa/tutanak_g_birlesim_baslangic?PAGE1=1&PAGE2=1&p4=2345&p5=B).

13. Ibid.

14. Christopher de Bellaigue, “Turkey: Into the Abyss?” *Washington Quarterly* (Summer 1998).

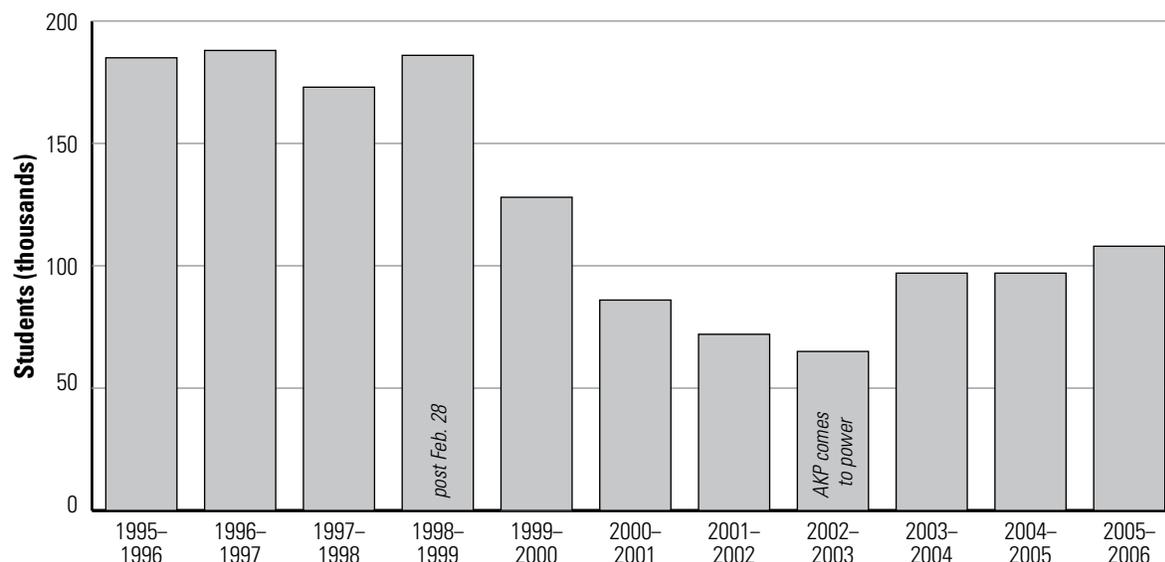
15. “İmam-Hatipler Yeniden Meslek Okulu Oluyor” (The imam-hatips are becoming vocational schools again), *Hürriyet* (Istanbul), September 20, 1998.

16. Ministry of National Education, *Ortaöğretim Tabloları: 2002–2003* (Charts of middle education: 2002–2003) (Ankara: Turkish Ministry of National Education, 2005).

17. Ministry of National Education, *Education Statistics of Turkey 2005–2006* (Ankara: Turkish Ministry of National Education, 2006). Available online (http://sgb.meb.gov.tr/daireler/istatistik/TURKIYE_EGITIM_ISTATISTIKLERI_2005_2006.pdf).

18. “İmam-Hatipliye Nakil Yolu Açıldı” (Imam-Hatip students can now transfer out), *Radikal* (Istanbul), January 19, 2007.

19. Ali Çarkoğlu and Binnaz Toprak, *Değişen Türkiye’de Din Toplum ve Siyaset*, p. 58.

Figure 3. Students at Imam-Hatip Schools, 1995–2005

Sources: Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi, *Genel Kurul Tutanağı* (TGNA General Session Discussion Minutes), December 14, 1999 (available online at www.tbmm.gov.tr/develop/owa/tutanak_g_birlesim_baslangic?PAGE1=1&PAGE2=1&p4=2345&p5=B); Turkish Ministry of National Education, *Education Statistics of Turkey 2005–2006* (Ankara: Turkish Ministry of National Education, April 21, 2006); Turkish Ministry of National Education, *Ortaöğretim Tabloları: 2004–2005* (Secondary Education TablesL 2004–2005) (Ankara: Turkish Ministry of National Education, 2005), p. 119; “Darbe Okulların Hızını Kesmedi” (The coup didn’t slow down the schools), *CNN Türk*, May 28, 2004; “Imam-Hatip Diriliyor” (The imam-hatips come alive), *Radikal*, October 15, 2003.

(see photo illustrating this style, next page). Despite efforts to promote it, the turban never became a mass phenomenon (see figure 4)—to this day; only a minority of Turkish women wears the turban.²⁰ Nevertheless, the turban spread in the 1990s, especially among younger women for whom it became a symbol of Islamism and virtuous living.

As mentioned earlier, the courts have ruled against the turban, saying that it violates Turkey’s secular constitution.²¹ In due course, the Turkish Higher Board of Education, a high education council of university rectors, a secular bastion, banned the turban on university campuses. This ban has created a controversy on

campuses; students who wear the turban see the ban as discrimination. These students took their case to the ECHR, which, to the students’ dismay, stood with the Turkish courts, upholding the Turkish courts’ verdict.²²

The turban issue remains unresolved today. The AKP’s core voters demand that the party pass legislation—the AKP leaders second these demands²³—allowing the turban on university campuses, while the secular parties and groups oppose it as a political symbol. Meanwhile, because of secular pressures since 1997, the number of women who wear the turban has dropped. Today, 11 percent of Turkish women wear the turban, while in 1999, 16 percent did so.²⁴

20. Ali Çarkoğlu and Binnaz Toprak, *Değişen Türkiye’de Din Toplum ve Siyaset*, p. 58.

21. Tim Kelsey, “Young Turks Defend Headscarf,” *The Independent* (London), March 11, 1989.

22. Vincent Boland and Nikki Tait, “Turkish Student Loses Legal Battle over Islamic Headscarf,” *Financial Times* (London), November 11, 2005. For the ECHR decision, see *Case of Leyla Şahin v. Turkey* (Application no. 44774/98), Judgment, November 10, 2005, European Court of Human Rights, Strasbourg, France. Available online (<http://cmiskp.echr.coe.int/tkp197/view.asp?item=78&portal=hbk&action=html&highlight=turban%20%7C%20turkey%20%7C%20Leyla%20%7C%20Sahin&sessionid=10354599&skin=hudoc-en>).

23. “Arınç: Eşime Başını Aç Diyene Hesabını Sorarım” (Arınç: I will strongly confront anyone who says my wife should uncover her head), *Hürriyet* (Istanbul), December 1, 2006. Available online (<http://hurarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/goster/haber.aspx?id=5537607>).

24. Ali Çarkoğlu and Binnaz Toprak, *Değişen Türkiye’de Din Toplum ve Siyaset*, p. 58.

Figure 4. Turkish Women and Head-Covering Practices

| | |
|---|-------|
| Women who do not cover | 36.5% |
| Women who cover with <i>esarp/basorusu/yemeni/yazma</i> | 48.8% |
| Women who cover with turban | 11.4% |

Source: Türkiye Ekonomik ve Sosyal Etüdler Vakfı, *Değişen Türkiye’de Din, Toplum Ve Siyaset* (Religion, society, and politics in a changing Turkey) (Istanbul: Türkiye Ekonomik ve Sosyal Etüdler Vakfı, December 2006), p. 58.

The *imam-hatip* schools and turban issues are the most acrimonious topics of Turkish domestic politics. Any AKP moves to tilt the status quo on these issues, especially on the more iconic turban issue, will likely face strong discontent and resistance by the high courts and the military, perhaps even precipitating political tensions. An AKP-elected president could use his executive prerogatives to favor AKP policy on these issues. First, he would select university rectors who could overturn the turban ban on campuses and allow IHS graduates into nontheology majors. Second, the next president will appoint the high court judges who would review the constitutionality of any changes on the turban and *imam-hatip* schools issues. Hence, the presidential elections, and even more important, the subsequent acts of the new president, might mark the beginning of a new era in Turkish politics as well as Turkish secularism.

Secularism vs. radical Islam. Perhaps in anticipation of such developments, on August 30 and October 2, 2006, General Buyukanit named “reactionaryism,” Turkish shorthand for Islamist fundamentalism, as the biggest threat facing Turkey.²⁵ Buyukanit added that the military has a constitutional duty to combat



Protesters demonstrate against a ban on head scarves outside Istanbul University, February 24, 1998. Most of the women are wearing the turban style popularized by Islamist movements in other countries.

fundamentalism. Although the AKP had itself kicked off the secularism debate, in April 2006 speaker of the parliament and AKP deputy Bulent Arinc said Turkey needed to redefine secularism.²⁶ Prime Minister Erdogan dismissed Buyukanit’s comments as attempts at “creating an artificial agenda.”²⁷

Another issue of disagreement between the secular institutions and the AKP has been Hamas. For instance, General Buyukanit has criticized the AKP’s contacts with Hamas, including the AKP’s act of inviting Hamas to Ankara, calling Hamas “a terrorist organization.”²⁸

PKK. The AKP and the military also differ on the PKK issue. On October 1, 2006, the PKK declared a unilateral ceasefire to shield itself from an anticipated Turkish campaign to root out its bases in northern Iraq. On October 2, 2006, Erdogan gave at least partial backing to this move, saying he expected that “if the terrorist organization keeps its word, no operation will be undertaken [by the Turkish military] without reason.”²⁹ Gen. Ilker Basbug, commander of the Turkish Land Forces, dismissed Erdogan and the PKK, assert-

25. “General Buyukanit Answers Erdogan: Yes, Reactionary Threat Exists,” *Hürriyet* (Istanbul), October 3, 2006. Available online (<http://hurarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/goster/haber.aspx?id=5192783&tarih=2006-10-03>).
 26. “Arinç’in 23 Nisan Günü Yaptığı Konuşmanın Tam Metni” (the full text of Arinç’s April 23 speech), *Yeni Şafak* (Istanbul), April 23, 2006. Available online (www.yenisafak.com.tr/dosya/arinc_tamm_23042006.html).
 27. Ertuğrul Özkök, “Gerginliği Artırmayın’ Dedim” (I said “do not increase tensions”), *Hürriyet* (Istanbul), October 1, 2006. Available online (<http://hurarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/goster/haber.aspx?id=51793698&tarih=2006-10-01>).
 28. Burak Bekdil and Ümit Enginsoy, “Probe against Turk General Signals Tensions,” *Defense News*, March 20, 2006.
 29. “Turkish Premier Plays Down Tough Army Line on Kurds,” *Agence France-Presse*, October 16, 2006.

ing that the struggle against the PKK would “continue until they are destroyed at the root.”³⁰

The AKP vs. Political Opposition

Tensions between the AKP, on the one hand, and the courts and military, on the other,³¹ as well as the assassination by an Islamist gunman of a judge at the Danistay (Turkish Council of State), an important high court that reviews all administrative acts on the turban and IHS,³² suggest Turkish politics are entering a difficult period in 2007. What factors might encourage opposition by actors other than the military and the courts, such as the political parties and media, challenging the AKP’s electoral success in the 2007 elections? Alternatively, what factors might help the AKP’s odds in this process?

The PKK’s impact on domestic politics. The AKP has not been successful in combating the PKK; in July 2006 alone, twenty-three Turks were killed as a result of terror attacks,³³ and the PKK continues to inflict daily casualties,³⁴ even though the group is supposed to be observing a self-declared ceasefire. At this stage, a consensus of Turkish opinion sees action against the PKK presence in northern Iraq as crucial. Most Turks know someone killed by the PKK, and terror angers them tremendously.

Washington has recently appointed a special coordinator to combat the PKK jointly with Turkey. Action against the PKK by Turkey and the United States seems more likely in 2007 than any other time since the beginning of the Iraq war. Such action could take place in the spring as snow melts on the high mountains of northern Iraq, where the PKK is based, allowing the military to carry out operations. Turkey has traditionally acted against the PKK in northern Iraq in early spring. Should the AKP take exclusive credit, to

the detriment of the Turkish military, for major strikes against the PKK, it will certainly gain much popularity, elect the next Turkish president—Erdogan has said that the president will be an AKP member of the parliament³⁵—and even win the ensuing parliamentary elections.

Corruption and Turkish politics. This issue is the biggest wild card of the 2007 elections. So far no major corruption cases involving the AKP have appeared in the media, but stories of massive corruption, an endemic factor of Turkish politics, could shatter the AKP’s popularity. The party would lose the vote-grabbing *ak* label, appearing as just another political party in the Turkish political landscape and losing a good deal of its “clean because Islamist” and “clean even if Islamist” appeals.

Crime: New force of domestic politics. Turkey has long enjoyed a reputation as a safe country with almost no street crime. However, a variety of factors in the last five years have caused a significant jump in street crime as well as car theft, violent crime, and robbery in the large cities. Even though Turkish crime numbers are still low compared to Western countries, the fact that the country has gone from very safe to occasionally unsafe in only a few years has been shocking to the Turkish public, creating social discontent. Any party that best portrays itself as a “crime buster” will boost its popularity in the large cities.

Why the Turkish Democracy Needs a Challenger to the AKP

While the AKP has dominated the legislature and single-handedly ruled Turkey since 2002, Turkish democracy has been weakened. As a result of the 2002 elections, which cut most of the opposition parties out

30. “Turkish Ground Forces Commander Rules Out ‘Concessions’ to Rebel Kurds,” BBC Monitoring Europe, September 17, 2006.

31. Soner Cagaptay, “Rising Tensions between Turkey’s AKP and the Courts,” *PolicyWatch* no. 1109.

32. “Turkey Risk: Alert—a Killing Troubles the Country,” *The Economist Global Agenda*, May 24, 2006.

33. Calculation by Daniel Fink from *Turkish Press Scanner (July 1–July 31)*, ed. Tülay Kavalcıoğlu, Ankara.

34. “Four Killed in Clashes in Turkey’s Southeast,” Reuters, March 9, 2007. Available online (www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/L09258895.htm).

35. Nazif İflazoğlu, “Meclis’ten bir AKP’li Cumhurbaşkanı Olacak” (The president will be an AKP member from the Turkish Grand National Assembly), *Radikal* (Istanbul), January 18, 2007. Available online (www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/article.php?newsid=58727).

of the legislature, a good part of the opposition to the AKP is now carried out not by political parties but by institutions, such as the military. At this stage, therefore, Turkey needs a variety of opposition parties and as much of the popular vote as possible to be represented in the legislature.

Given the “majoritarian malaise” of the Turkish right, a new parliament providing a majority of the seats to a minority party, as in the case of the current parliament and the AKP, would further weaken the Turkish democracy. And if the AKP were to pick the country’s next president, achieving the prerogative to shape the judiciary, such a scenario would further the demise of separation of powers in the Turkish democracy. Meanwhile, the AKP’s continued erosion of Turkey’s secular mindset will weaken secularism and Turkey’s pro-Western orientation, albeit accomplished through the trappings of democracy. Even if the secular Turkish parties are fragmented, a parliament with more secular parties and better representing the popular will would be a way out of this conundrum. Such a scenario appears to be a sine qua non for the well-being of Turkish democracy. To achieve this result, secular, nationalist Turkish parties—such as the ANAP, CHP, DYP, MHP, Democratic Left Party, and Youth Party—need to provide a viable and attractive alternative to the AKP. Even if these parties fail to surpass the AKP, statistically speaking, the AKP would not hold a majority of the seats or be able to form a government by itself in a four-party parliament, while in a three-party parliament, the AKP’s ability to garner a majority of the seats would depend on how well the second and the third parties perform in the elections.³⁶

Who will challenge the AKP? In the approaching elections, any party that hopes to successfully challenge the AKP will need to keep four essential characteristics in mind:

1. Varos-based politics: Just as the *varos*, Turkey’s demographic plurality, has delivered the AKP to

power, it is also where the challenger to the AKP ought to be rising. Political parties that have ruled Turkey since 1946 have either had urban-based leadership appealing to urban voters, as in the case of ANAP or CHP, or rural leadership appealing to rural voters, as in the case of DYP. Today, neither the historically urban population nor the dwindling rural population constitutes Turkey’s majority. The AKP’s success lies in the fact that it is the only party with large *varos* leadership and appeal. If the secular parties provided similar leadership and appeal, they might be better poised to challenge the AKP. Hence, the AKP’s alternative, whether conservative, nationalist, or leftist in its ideology, is going to be a *varos*-based party, with charismatic leadership as well as some kind of an arriviste message appealing to the *varos* voters.

2. Existing party, charismatic leadership combination: Traditionally, in Turkish elections, existing parties under charismatic leadership have performed better than both newly formed parties with charismatic leadership and existing parties lacking charismatic leadership. If the existing secular political parties provided charismatic leadership, with their well-oiled political machines, these parties would likely find themselves in a stronger electoral position.

3. Turkish nationalism: Should the AKP not deliver concrete security to the Turks on the PKK issue, the likely beneficiary of this phenomenon would be nationalist parties that would surge in the polls as an alternative to the AKP’s perceived failure. From Washington’s perspective, the parties following traditional Kemalist *milliyetçilik* would be successful contenders for this position because they would also promote Turkey’s traditional pro-Western foreign policy orientation and turn away from Muslim nationalism.

4. Civilian garb in politics: A successful challenger to the AKP would also have to overcome the “political atrophy” of Turkish democracy, providing an attrac-

36. Interview by author with Turkish opinion poll expert, Istanbul, March 10, 2007.

tive *and* civilian alternative to the AKP. Such a party would mobilize the Turkish population at large if it can balance a tough political act, proving that it is not the military's candidate while drawing support from nationalist sentiments.

The future of secularism and the future of Turkey's pro-Western foreign policy orientation hinge on the winners of the 2007 elections. In this regard, so long as a viable political alternative to the AKP is not in the making, the military might act as a quasi political party, looking for and bolstering public support in favor of secularism.

Istanbul versus Ankara? In its efforts to counter the AKP, the secular courts, parties and the military face a major complicating factor in the lack of unity between "Istanbul" and "Ankara" on tactics. Unlike February 28, when "Istanbul" (academia, NGOs, and the influential business community and its media arms) and "Ankara" (military, high courts, and secular opposition parties) were united in tactical opposition to Islamists, this time Istanbul and Ankara do not yet seem united on tactics with respect to the AKP.

While Ankara publicly opposes AKP domination of Turkish politics, Istanbul has not yet taken a public stance, although it seems to share at least some of Ankara's sentiments. On March 1, 2007, for instance, the influential Istanbul-based business lobby TUSIAD announced that Turkey would be better off with Erdogan remaining as prime minister—in other words, suggesting that Erdogan not go for the presidency.³⁷ As mentioned before, the Turkish economy has been robust since 2002, adding 20 billionaires to the ranks of the country's business elite, traditionally centered around Istanbul. Hence, Istanbul, which wants to avoid political tensions that could result in economic problems, has thus far shied away from coordination with Ankara as on February 28. In other words, Istanbul wants to avoid political tensions as a way of deterring the AKP from electing the president single-handedly because that scenario would result in economic ten-

sions. In the same vein, Istanbul does not seem to prefer Erdogan as president because that scenario, too, might result in economic tensions. However, if the current fractious environment between Ankara and the AKP results in an economic downturn, or if an AKP-elected president were to implement controversial domestic policies, such as on the turban issue, causing political and economic tensions, then Istanbul's desire to avoid a showdown with the AKP would diminish. In fact, if and when Istanbul and Ankara pull their strength together, a very difficult period will begin for the AKP.

America's Allies in Turkey

The internal dynamics of Turkish politics notwithstanding, the United States should take an active interest in the changes that have occurred in Turkey since 2002. With the rise of anti-Western Islamism in the garb of Turkish nationalism, Turkey's relations with the West and the United States are now more politically charged than they have been since the Ottoman traveler Evliya Celebi wrote his diary in the late seventeenth century. Because the foundation of Turkish secularism lies in the Turks' historical willingness to associate themselves with the West, Turkey will work as a secular democracy only as long as the Turks have a strong connection to the West. Alternatively, because secularism and pro-Western foreign policy are Turkish Siamese twins, Turkey will remain pro-Western only as long as it has a secular majority.

Given these circumstances, and with Turkey facing a crucial election year, who are America's allies in the country? America's allies are all those Turks who share with the United States basic values, such as democracy and secularism, and support the country's Western orientation. In terms of party politics, America's allies could be viewed as those Turkish parties that support the country's pro-Western foreign policy orientation and secularism.

By this token, Islamists are not America's allies. The same can be said of "moderate Islamists." Not only in Turkey but also in other Muslim-majority countries, the

37. "Presidential Election Reveals Gov't-Military Row," *Today's Zaman*, March 3, 2007. Available online (www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/detaylar.do?load=detay&link=1043870).

term “moderate Islamist” is offensive to all Muslims, and any attempt to forge alliances based on the term is abortive from the perspective of successful public diplomacy.

Islamists find the “moderate” appellation derogatory because it implies that they are practicing a diluted, “Islam-lite” version of their faith. Secular Muslims, too, find the term “moderate Islamist” offensive because it signals that the West is looking for allies among the Islamists rather than supporting true liberals and democrats. Secular Turks also believe that the “moderate Islam” rhetoric dilutes Turkey’s *laicite*, leading it toward American-style secularism. *Laicite* grew out of Turkish and European historical experience of dealing with religion, and it works in Turkey, if sometimes in a messy way, whereas American-style secularism would likely not survive in Turkey where it has no historical roots. However Washington qualifies Islamists, if it acknowledges them as partners, parties who believe in liberal democracy will see this step as a sign that Washington has allied itself with the Islamists. In 2002, that occurred when a powerful perception emerged in Turkey that the up-and-coming AKP, hosted in Washington, was America’s partner.³⁸ At that time, secular groups, including the military and the secular parties, pulled away from Washington, and bridges with some of these secular parties have not yet been fully rebuilt since 2002.

What Can the United States Do?

Since the Cold War, Turkey’s relationship with the United States has been the chief anchor tying Turkey to the West. Until the AKP’s rise in 2002, when asked to identify which country in the West they saw as an ally, the Turks picked the United States first and did so in numbers far above any other country in the West.³⁹ In fact, the United States single-handedly tied Turkey to the West. For this reason, today the United States faces multiple risks in Turkey:

- The significant cooling of Turkish attitudes toward the United States signifies danger, not only as a sign of weakening bilateral ties but also as an indication

that the main anchor holding Turkey to the West is coming unmoored. The risk facing Turkish secularism—that is, the weakening of the secular Turkish mindset—is the same risk facing the U.S.-Turkish relationship. When the Turks start to identify as Muslims first, any Turkish foreign policy commitments to the United States in the Middle East theater, such as rejecting Iran’s nuclear ambitions, will become increasingly difficult to deliver.

- In addition to undermining Turkey’s pro-Western foreign policy orientation, a second risk is that the 2007 elections will usher in the weakening of Turkish democracy through the rise of what looks like a single-party state—a bad scenario under any party. At this juncture, not only would Turkish democracy be weakened, but it would be weakened within the context of increasingly anti-Western public opinion.

Given the risks the United States faces in Turkey, there are multiple courses of action open to Washington:

- First, in light of the rise of Muslim nationalism and the gravitation of the Turks toward Muslim-majority countries as products of the AKP government since 2005, Washington should be aware that the Turks and their foreign policy will inevitably move further away from the West should the AKP tighten its grip on Turkish politics.
- Next, the U.S. government should make secularism, which is a linchpin of Turkey’s pro-Western foreign policy orientation, a key part of its discourse on Turkish politics.
- As it strives to turn the Turks back to the West, the United States should consider action against the PKK presence in northern Iraq. Such action, coupled with leadership in Ankara that takes ownership of the U.S.-Turkish relationship, would con-

38. Paul Richter, “Still Courting Turkey, Bush Meets with a Top Politician,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 11, 2002.

39. Ali Çarkoğlu and Binnaz Toprak, *Değişen Türkiye’de Din Toplum ve Siyaset*, p. 95.

vince the Turks that the United States is a committed friend of Turkey.

- Washington should also promote Turkey's EU accession process, which serves as a virtual anchor that ties Turkey to the West.
- Finally, Washington should communicate better with nationalist, center-right, center-left, and liberal secular political parties and groups that would turn the Turks back to the West and promote pro-Western foreign policy. In this regard, U.S.-government-funded democracy-promotion institutions as well as the U.S. Congress should establish strong ties with the secular parties and groups in Turkey. If the secular parties were to perform better in 2007 than they did in 2002, the result would produce

a Turkish parliament with three or more political parties, as well as better democratic checks and balances than in 2002. Statistically speaking, in a three-party parliament, the AKP's ability to garner a majority of the seats would depend on how well the second and the third parties perform in the elections; in a four-party parliament, the AKP would not hold a majority of the seats or be able to form government by itself. Such a scenario would effectively mitigate the challenges to Turkey's pro-Western foreign policy, secularism, and democracy discussed throughout this work.

In the absence of such measures, Turkey faces the risk of losing its secular majority. Without this secular majority, Turkey would neither sustain a secular democracy nor pursue a pro-Western foreign policy.

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