

The Struggles of a "Strong" State

HENRI J. BARKEY

"The process of transition to the European Union—even if success is a long way off—is likely to force Turkey to undertake significant changes that will make the state smaller, more efficient, less repressive and intrusive and, yet, genuinely stronger."

Turkey has long been regarded by social scientists working on the developing world as one of the best examples of a strong, modernizing state. The single-mindedness with which Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the state, and his successors pursued the modernization project has been the envy of many leaders in Turkey's immediate region and beyond. This drive has also helped Turkey anchor itself solidly in the West's imagination as a secular, democratic and allied Muslim state. But the recent re-emergence of Kurdish nationalism and Islamic reactionism, and the methods employed by the state to confront them, raises questions about the nature of this "strong" state. The construction of the Turkish state as a top-to-bottom enterprise ultimately resulted in an edifice that is less capable of handling major challenges. Unlike a strong state that relies on its legitimacy to cajole and co-opt its citizenry and opposition, the state in Turkey usually sought to overpower them. Kurdish and Islamic challenges to the construction of the Turkish state in the 1990s are, in many ways, a replay of earlier such confrontations and have reopened the debate on what kind of state Turkey ought to have.

In this article the rise of Kurdish nationalism and, to a lesser extent, Islamic reactionism, are used to demonstrate the weak underpinnings of the Turkish state. They have not been the only challenges faced by the Kemalist elite, but they represent the most

fundamental ones. The founders of the state and the bureaucratic-military elite that succeeded them envisaged a controlled, linear course for Turkish development. Atatürk defined the course of this development as a race to catch up with and become part of "contemporary civilization." The state had to be strong and omnipresent to succeed in this endeavor. Societal engineering, however, turned out to be more difficult than originally conceived. In fact, well before the troubles of the 1990s, the military intervened on three different occasions to bring events and errant political processes under control starting in 1960. Reliance on its military to save the day when faced with crises has made this institution a fixture of everyday political life. The Turkish General Staff, as the representative of the highest echelons of the military, has become an arbiter and, in many cases, the originator of policy decisions, which, in turn, has further undermined the natural development of state-society relations. The Turkish leadership, therefore, has opted for a state that orders its subjects around rather than penetrating society to mobilize resources in the form of taxes, information, expertise and manpower, effectively managing the bureaucracy, making alliances, subordinating vested interests, upholding its decisions and gaining the population's acceptance for proposed changes. The irony for the Turkish state lies in the fact that it is about to confront its most dramatic challenge in the form of the EU accession. The process of transition to the European Union—even if success is a long way off—is likely to force Turkey to undertake significant changes that will make the state smaller, more efficient, less repressive and intrusive and, yet, genuinely stronger.

REPRESS, BUT DO NOT PENETRATE: THE SINGLE PARTY ERA

The image of a strong and autonomous state reshaping society in its own image has long been associated with Atatürk's Turkey. Indeed, this strong state is also considered responsible for a genuine success: Modern Turkey's transformation from the hapless Ottoman Empire, the "Sick Man of Europe" as it was known to many, to the robust country knocking on the doors of Europe has been remarkable. Many authors have described how this feat was achieved by a relentless pursuit on the part of Atatürk's visionary leadership, and that of his successors. The pursuit of modernization, or Westernization, through the adoption of a series of rapid reforms was nothing less than a

"Revolution from Above."¹ The new Republican elite's passion for modernization, seen as an escape from backwardness, translated itself into a total dislike and distrust of all things associated with the *ancien régime* and the old way of life. Topping the long list of suspect establishments were religion and the religious institutions that linked the former regime with its citizenry. Of course, the culture associated with religion and religiosity—such as a dress code and a way of life—was also deemed antithetical to contemporary civilization.

After the establishment of the new Republic in 1923, the Caliphate was abolished, the *tarikats* (religious orders) banned, history was re-written to suit the needs of the new state, the Arabic alphabet discarded for a "Western" one and a new dress code was adopted. Together with the jettisoning of the multi-ethnic character of the Ottoman Empire, these changes would also help redefine the Turk, the citizen of this new nation.

Kemal and the Republican elite introduced these changes pragmatically. When it suited them—as in their confrontation with the Greeks and the Allies during the War for Independence from 1919 to 1922—they built alliances with would-be dissidents, including Kurds. When conditions changed, and the new regime in Ankara deemed it was strong enough, it jettisoned the promises made to Kurdish leaders about the multi-ethnic character of the new state.² This pragmatism extended to the vision of where the natural boundaries of the new state were to be drawn. Commenting on Woodrow Wilson's 14 points, Kemal is reported to have said, "poor Wilson, he did not understand that lines that cannot be defended by the bayonet, by force, by honor and dignity, cannot be defended by any other principle."³ Hence, Kemal settled on the existing borders of Turkey, forsaking the Mosul province which, minus present-day Alexandretta, the British had decided would be incorporated into the new state of Iraq, but could have been a natural expansion of the new Turkey.

The Kemalist modernization effort, similar to the preceding

¹ Ellen Kay Trimberger, *Revolution from Above: Military Bureaucrats and Development in Egypt, Peru, Turkey, and Japan* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1977).

² For a detailed description of Kemal's dealings with the Kurds during the War for Independence and the Consolidation of the new Republic, see Andrew Mango, "Atatürk and the Kurds," *Middle Eastern Studies* 35, no. 4 (October 1999) pp. 1-25.

³ Quoted in Hugh Poulton, *Top Hat, Grey Wolf and Crescent* (London: Hurst and Company, 1997) p. 93.

Ottoman attempts, was elite, state driven and quite alien as far as the rural population of the new state was concerned. Religion, a more central element of the Ottoman legitimization process, had been discarded by the new elite. Şerif Mardin points out that Islam "established bridges between social groups because it functioned as a common language shared by the upper and lower classes."⁴ This contributed to a break in communication between the bureaucratic center and the rest of the population. Coming on the heels of war and war-related economic dislocations, the population went along with the changes with some resignation. The reforms, including those attempted by the modernizing elites of the Ottoman Empire, "touched a relatively small part of Ottoman and Turkish society in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Outside the privileged domain of the political elite stood large numbers of people whose visions and voices were rarely acknowledged during the initial years of the Republic."⁵

The modern Turkish state emerged, therefore, in a kind of no man's land of state-society interaction. The new state had not inherited a strong civil society; on the contrary, the Ottoman Empire had discouraged autonomous civilian activity. Moreover, the wars, which were followed by population exchanges, rid the country of the bulk of the minority population that had been active in trade and commerce. The economic liberalism of the new regime did not last long as the deteriorating world economic conditions at the end of the 1920s pushed the Kemalist regime to adopt rigid state-directed industrialization policies. This indirectly undermined the development of independent new societal forces. With no opposition from economic interests, there remained few sources of dissent to the new regime, especially in urban areas where it mattered. But the changes imposed by Ankara had not been without cost and, as Mardin argues, the provincial population of Anatolia was "unhinged" by "the transformation from a setting in which Islam had occupied a central place to a secular 'laïc' society."⁶ The regime, whether it was cognizant or

⁴ Şerif Mardin, "Projects as Methodology: Some Thoughts on Modern Turkish Social Science," in Sibel Bozdoğan and Reşat Kasaba, eds., *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Modern Turkey* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997) p. 71.

⁵ Reşat Kasaba, "Kemalist Certainties and Modern Ambiguities," in Bozdoğan and Kasaba, p. 30.

⁶ Şerif Mardin, *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey* (Albany: State University of New York, 1989) p. 153.

not of this shock to rural society, suspected and expected resistance from "reactionary" elements, which it was ready to crush.

Hence, the new regime brooked little opposition or dissent. Even when it tolerated a modicum of dissension in the Parliament (as in 1924), with the creation of an opposition party and the appointment of a liberal prime minister, the experiment, in the eyes of the elite, turned sour. Such concessions were interpreted as a weakening of the regime. In fact, when some of Kemal's former comrades-in-arms established an opposition party in 1924, the immediate response from Kemal's confidant and would-be successor, İsmet İnönü, was to attempt to impose martial law; he was, however, rebuffed by his own party and forced to resign.⁷ Facing the potential dissolution of his party through defections to the opposition, Atatürk decided to appoint a liberal-minded prime minister. Not long after the new government's rise to power, the 1925 Sheikh Said Rebellion—the first of the serious Kurdish rebellions—began, confirming the worst fears of Republican leadership. The rebellion provided the hard-liners with an excuse to reassert control; İnönü returned to power, and a series of draconian laws were promulgated to deal with opposition from all types of groups, not just from the Kurds under Sheikh Said's leadership.⁸ The regime redefined the Sheikh Said Rebellion as a reactionary—and not a Kurdish—act of sedition designed to bring back the Caliphate. By calling for the creation of a separate Kurdish state and opposing the secularist reforms of the Kemalist regime, such as the abolishment of the Caliphate, the rebellion interlaced both Kurdish nationalism and religious reactionary elements. Kurds, accustomed to the Ottoman Empire's construction of a society where Muslims, irrespective of their ethnic origin, were considered equal and first class citizens, felt betrayed by the increasingly Turkish character of the new Kemalist state. They resented the efforts at forcibly assimilating them into a Turkish identity at the expense of their own language, identity

⁷ Mete Tunçay, *T.C.'nde Tek-Parti Yönetiminin Kurulması (1923-1931)* (İstanbul: Cem Yayınevi, 1981) p. 105. Kemal himself was in favor of the stronger measures proposed by İnönü arguing that religious groups were creating the conditions for a counter-revolution.

⁸ The measures imposed included the declaration of martial law and the creation of special Independence Courts, which summarily tried and sentenced opponents, restrictions on the press, including the arrest of a number of journalists. For further details, see Tunçay, pp. 126-49.

and culture.⁹ It is therefore not surprising that the first revolt would encompass religion with ethnic themes. The rebellion was, in effect, a consequence of the unhinging of Anatolian society.

While the regime forcefully suppressed the Sheikh Said Rebellion and executed many of its leaders and participants, the harsh reaction also signaled an unmistakable turn by the regime toward authoritarianism. The elite gave further impetus to the regime's secularizing policies and began to construct a new national ideology to legitimize and rein in centrifugal forces. Hence, the new nationalist ideology was unlike the Ottoman Empire's formulation, which had relied upon its more encompassing Islamic theme. It was, according to Çağlar Keyder, defensive in nature "where[by] the state could demarcate the boundaries of the nation" and "the nation was supposed to express a homogeneity deriving from ethnic unity, and this unity would be expressed in a single voice."¹⁰ It relied heavily on the centralization of decisionmaking, and no detail, no matter how small, escaped Ankara's interest and attention. However, despite its centralizing impulses, the regime's ability to achieve social control was limited. As a poor state, it lacked requisite resources and organizational means. Also, having done away with the Ottoman Empire's symbolic methods of co-optation, the regime's interaction with the population was limited. In the Kurdish provinces, the regime established a form of direct rule, through the appointment of inspectors accountable only to the leader, not Parliament.

Moreover, the regime, which was anchored around the Republican People's Party, chose not to organize itself politically in these provinces, preferring instead to rely solely on administrative rule.¹¹ The difficulties the state leaders had in establishing control also had to do with what Joel Migdal has described as the weblike nature of third world societies, which consists of "co-mingled, multiple sets of beliefs and memories."¹²

⁹ For a discussion of the emergence of Turkish nationalist thinking and its impact on the Kurds, see Kemal Kirişçi and Gareth Winrow, *The Kurdish Question and Turkey* (London and Portland: Frank Cass, 1997) pp. 94-112.

¹⁰ Çağlar Keyder, "Whither the Project of Modernity? Turkey in the 1990s," in Bozdoğan and Kasaba, p. 42.

¹¹ Hamit Bozarslan, *La Question Kurde: Etats et Minorités au Moyen Orient* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 1997) p. 83.

¹² Joel S. Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988) p. 37.

In Turkey, this meant that the population retreated, whenever it could, into these pre-existing and familiar social organizations, which ranged from tribal and ethnic to religious and other groups. The resulting Turkish nationalism is "an extreme example of a situation in which the masses remained silent partners and the modernizing elite did not attempt to accommodate popular resentment."¹³ In sum, from the 1920s through the 1940s, the state chose to repress rather than penetrate society in order to seek support and legitimization.

Still, there were to be other Kurdish revolts, most notably in Agri in 1930 and Dersim (Tunceli) in 1937. Unlike in 1925, the Turkish state attempted to keep incidents of suppression out of the public eye, presumably out of fear that any discussion of Kurdish identity would contradict the homogenous quality of the new nation. In effect, the word Kurd disappeared from the lexicon and the Kurdish language was banned, names of Kurdish villages and towns were changed into Turkish names and parents were denied the right to give Kurdish names to their children. While some Kurds did assimilate and became Turkish, many others refused or lived beyond the state's reach. Even if the state refused to acknowledge the existence of the Kurds, the issue would not die.

After Atatürk's death in 1938, the regime deteriorated. As Bernard Lewis argues, "in the hands of lesser men than himself, his authoritarian and paternalist mode of government degenerated into something nearer to dictatorship as the word is commonly understood."¹⁴ His successor, İnönü, sought to build the regime's legitimacy on a strict interpretation of Kemalism, devoid of the founder's pragmatism and vision. Politics was relegated to the confines of the single party, which gave the bureaucratic-military elite-dominated state an almost "sacred" status. Commensurately, with the deepening of the regime's authoritarianism, it appeared as if Kurdish and Islamic activism was on the wane. This was mainly due to the rise of two parallel societies. The Kemalist regime may not have succeeded in obliterating the Islamists or making Turks out of Kurds, but it was successful in creating an urban, state-dependent and guided and secular society; an intelligentsia;

¹³ Keyder, p. 43.

¹⁴ Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961) pp. 297-8.

a civil servant class; as well as an equally state-nurtured business elite. As far as this new urban society was concerned, Islam and the Kurds were phenomena of a distant past. The countryside, feeling the brunt of the repression, kept quiet. While the state apparatus remained vigilant, the absence of overt manifestations of Islamic and Kurdish activism obviated the need to develop political strategies to deal with them. The logic of modernization assumed that these currents would ultimately disappear into the new secular and urban society being created.

THE RETURN OF POLITICS? THE MULTI-PARTY ERA

Although the state had waged a relentless struggle against the twin challenges of Islam and Kurdish ethnicity since its founding, it was unable to quell these forces forever. The changing character of the world order after the Second World War created new demands on the Turkish state. Soviet expansionist aims and Moscow's claims on some of Turkey's Eastern provinces forced Ankara to side with the victorious Western nations and open up its political system in 1946 to show that it too was part of the emerging liberal order. For the first time in modern Turkey's history there were competitive elections. In these, the newly formed Democrat Party—a less authoritarian and economically more liberal formation—challenged the ruling party. But unfortunately for the challengers, its leader, İnönü, was not quite ready to give up power, and his party rigged the results of the 1946 elections. In 1950, however, the Democrats could no longer be stopped as they swept the elections and thus ended one-party rule.

The Democrats' rise to power led to two conflicting consequences. First, because they were much less wedded to the Kemalist conception of the state, they successfully appealed to those most aggrieved by one-party rule and the conservative rural areas. As a result, the Democrats represented the first chance at a possible rejoining the rural dissident elements with the rest of society. During the election campaign, they promised to ease some of the draconian secularist policies of their predecessors. To woo the Kurds, they pledged to reduce the "cultural restrictions"¹⁵ in the eastern provinces and recruited prominent Kurdish families exiled during two-party rule to run on their party lists in their

¹⁵ Cem Eroğul, *Demokrat Parti: Tarihi ve İdeolojisi* (Ankara: İmge Kitabevi, 1990) p. 49.

regions of origin.¹⁶ As a result, during the Democrat Party era from 1950 to 1960, many Kurds and Islamists made their peace with the idea of a modernizing state. Some Islamic groups, in the name of the "sacred state," became willing participants in the anti-communist struggles of the Cold War era.¹⁷ The more liberal economic policies of the early years of the Democrat Party rule led to the embourgeoisement of society, which also attracted Kurdish businessmen. These developments, however, encouraged previously excluded groups to reengage in politics, and organize and mobilize supporters. Hence, with greater incorporation and co-optation also came a revival of ethnic and religious consciousness and activism.

The Democrats were not counter-revolutionaries; they were a breakaway faction of Atatürk's Republican People's Party, and as such were cognizant of the limits to which they could go. Just like any political party, they had figured out how to maximize their votes by harnessing the population's resentments. When their policies failed, they were willing to employ the repressive state apparatus they had inherited. But, this time the target was the young, urban and educated elites as their rallies and demonstrations were suppressed, sometimes violently. For all of the transformations, Turkey during the 1950s was still divided between rural and urban sectors, and these two parts of society co-existed peacefully with little conflict.

The limited changes brought about by the Democrats proved to be too difficult for the bureaucratic-military elites, who had empowered themselves with safeguarding the interest and role of the state. For these elites, the Democrats' agenda was nothing short of a counter-revolution, and the military was willing to use violence to stop it. The Democrats' perceived abuse of the powers of the state provided the military with the pretext it needed to overthrow them in 1960. This coup opened a Pandora's box, even though the soldiers were quick to relinquish power to civilians. But before returning to their barracks in 1961, they banned the Democrat Party and had three of its leaders executed. They also replaced the 1924 constitution with one more "progressive" and

¹⁶ Atila Hun, *Doğu ve Güneydoğu Bölgelelerinde Çok Partili Sisteme Geçişten Günümüze Gelişmeler* (Ankara: Yeniröğüş Matbaası, 1995) p. 15.

¹⁷ Umut Cizre Sakallıoğlu, "Kurdish Nationalism from an Islamist Perspective: The Discourses of Turkish Islamist Writers," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 18, no. 1 (April 1998) pp. 77-78.

better suited for the times.

The early 1960s marked a turning point in Turkey's political development, and created two contradictory tensions within the country. As the Democrat Party's rule enabled a democratization of politics, it opened new areas of contestation and ingrained pluralist politics into people's consciousness. In sum, the population had taken to multi-party politics. In addition, the 1961 constitution further deepened the process of democratization because, as devised by the military, it was friendly to urban interests and liberal in its interpretation of freedom of speech and association. However, the 1960 coup also left a major imprint on state and society. Despite its liberal stance on freedom of speech, the 1961 constitution envisaged an important, if not dominant, role for the state in guiding both the public and private sectors along the path of industrialization. The officers sought to create institutions—such as the National Security Council (NSC)—to validate their role. More importantly, they created an expectation within society that the military not only had a political role, but would intervene when deemed necessary. Within a few years of the first coup in 1961, there were two other similar but unsuccessful attempts to overthrow the government.

The military's institutionalized role in politics set the tone for the rest of the century: it not only defined state-society interaction, but it hampered the development of institutions needed to mediate conflict between the two. Increasingly, the political scene became fractured into many uncooperative groups. The military also found that banning a party did not mean its elimination: the Democrat Party came back under a different name, the Justice Party, which decisively won the 1965 elections. Turkey, like many other countries, succumbed to the tumultuous politics of the 1960s, which were characterized by student activism. This provided a vehicle for the politicization of large numbers of Kurds and, coupled with the violence associated with this activism, served to engender thoughts of another intervention by some in the officer corps. A group of junior generals, along with a coterie of intellectuals disappointed with the "lack of progressivism" in the Justice Party government of Süleyman Demirel, hatched plans to overthrow it. Unnerved by these plans, the hierarchy of the armed forces decided to act and forced the resignation of the government in March 1971. The officers once again tinkered with the constitution, introducing amendments designed to curb the

freedoms extended by their predecessors. The 1971 coup represented the transformation of the military from a "progressive" actor to a conservative one more concerned with the preservation of the regime and its Kemalist tenets. Ironically, this change was, in part, a reaction to the forces they had been unleashed with their coup in 1960; the liberalism of the 1961 constitution provided for the expansion of freedom of speech and, indirectly, resulted in the proliferation of political groupings, some of which were extremist in nature.

However, the student movements of the 1960s and 1970s were the first manifestation of another change: the mixing of urban and rural Turkey in the metropolitan cities of Istanbul, Izmir and Ankara. The universities, concentrated mainly in the two metropolitan centers of Istanbul and Ankara, had been drawing students from all over the country. This development was buttressed by an import-substituting industrialization drive, which was also attracting workers from the rural periphery to the western cities of Istanbul and Izmir. It was in the universities that many students of Kurdish origin, some of whom had become thoroughly "Turkish," discovered their Kurdishness.¹⁸ In fact, the origins of the Kurdish Workers' Party's, the PKK, can be traced back to the Ankara University days of its leader, Abdullah Öcalan.

Just as the Kurds were becoming politicized, so were the Islamists. The 1970s saw the rise of Necmettin Erbakan and his Islamist parties. Erbakan sought the support of the Naqshibendi Sufi order before forming his first party, the National Order Party, which was quickly closed down by the Constitutional Court. Erbakan appealed to discontented, Anatolian-based business organizations unable to compete with their state-supported Istanbul counterparts. Noteworthy was not just the quick path to success of Erbakan's party, the National Salvation Party, but also the role of the previously banned Sufi orders, who in essence proclaimed "the renewal of faith in Islam in order to overcome the spiritual and political conquest of the West and of Western materialist culture, defined as self-indulgence, hedonism, consumerism, and greed for wealth and power."¹⁹ Banned in 1925,

¹⁸ Martin van Bruinessen, "Shifting National and Ethnic Identities: The Kurds in Turkey and the European Diaspora," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 18, no. 1 (April 1998) pp. 40-41.

¹⁹ Sencer Ayata, "Patronage, Party, and State: The Politicization of Islam in Turkey," *Middle East Journal*, 50, no. 1 (Winter 1996) p. 49.

the *tarikats* disappeared into the subconscious of the believing adherent, not as a political force, which most of them eschewed for fear of government repression, but as loose and informal bodies that provided advice and help—including financial assistance—to those in need. By the end of the 1970s, the Kurds and Islamists, which the early Kemalists had vowed to dispense with, had made a comeback.

THE MILITARY AGAIN: THE 1980 COUP

As the 1970s drew to a close, it seemed as if political institutions had become irrelevant. Parliament was completely stalemated, and governments consisted of tenuous coalitions that brought the most unlikely partners together. Moreover, violence in the streets and in universities went unabated with parts of some cities declared "liberated zones," where the forces of law and order did not and could not venture. The police, as well as other critical public institutions, were hopelessly divided along ideological lines. An economic crisis added to the woes of the country.

Military officers intervened again on 12 September 1980. This coup was different than previous interventions as it was an attempt by the military to shore up the defenses of what it perceived to be a weakened state under assault by Leftists, Islamists and Kurds by returning to the ideological precepts of the Kemalist era. In an interview a year before the coup, Bülent Ulusu, commander of the naval forces and one of the coup's architects, reported that when the army went on maneuvers in the Kurdish Southeast, it was met with chants and slogans calling for its expulsion from the region. "The East is boiling," he said, "the communists and the Kurds are in complete cooperation there."²⁰ Trying to bring back a semblance of order, the generals not only replaced the previous constitution with a new restrictive one, but they engaged in a wide-scale attempt to eliminate opponents, be they politicians, students or worker activists. Politically, Turkey had come full circle since the days of the early Republic. Once again, a new leadership decided to institute top-to-bottom changes. The new 1982 constitution was an attempt by the generals to reengineer society: strict limits on individual

²⁰Ölünç Arcaçyürek, *Müdahalenin Ayak Sesleri, 1978-1979* (Istanbul: Bilgi Yayınevi, 1985) p. 272. This interview, conducted on 6 September 1979, did not see the light of day until Arcaçyürek published his book.

rights were codified into law and a "two-party political system" was created. The officers enhanced the role of the National Security Council. While the new NSC's decisions remained advisory in nature, the government was now required to give priority to the body's recommendations. Moreover, the scope of the NSC's interest became unbounded: anything that could potentially undermine the unity of the state could come under its purview. By reinvigorating Kemalism, they also sought to find a solution to the ideological divisions tearing the country apart.

Once again, the military's best-laid plans were thwarted when Turgut Özal, a maverick technocrat-turned-politician, won a majority of the seats in the first post-coup election in 1983. He spearheaded a shift from an inward-directed economic policy to an export-based, outward strategy. This transformed Turkey in a way which the military was not prepared. The opening of the Turkish economy enabled the country to grow at rapidly, dramatically increase its exports and also achieve greater international competitiveness. This transformation allowed regions such as central Anatolia, which had previously lagged behind, to enjoy greater prosperity. The new Anatolian bourgeoisie was culturally conservative and pious; it had been the backbone of the Islamist parties in the 1970s. With its new-found wealth, it became much more visible and able to fund its own organizations, newspapers, companies and even financial institutions. In the cities, displaced Kurds from the Southeast, Alevis from their secluded villages and this pious new middle class, co-mingled with the traditional middle classes. The two Turkish societies—the urban, sophisticated and secular one and its more conservative, pious and anti-establishment counterpart—had to share political and economic space. No one was more emblematic of this phenomenon than the prime minister himself. Özal, a member of the Naqshbandi order and one-time candidate from the Islamist National Salvation Party, was uniquely capable of bridging the secular and Islamic divide. He was as comfortable with Western leaders as in a mosque.

As for the Kurds, the military regime's draconian policies in the Southeast provided fertile ground for the emergence of radical and violent groups such as the PKK. In the 1970s, the Southeast had been in turmoil, but primarily for economic

reasons.²¹ By implementing cultural policies reminiscent of the 1930s, such as an explicit ban on the use of the Kurdish language (a ban that was not repealed until 1991) and harsh law and order measures on an already aggrieved population, the military helped further exacerbate the situation and increase its politicization. The coup also created an unanticipated backlash: it forced many Kurds to seek exile in Europe, where their political activism mobilized hitherto apolitical Turkish *gastarbeiter* ("guestworkers") of Kurdish origin. This created a formidable reserve source of manpower and money for the PKK-led insurgency in the Southeast, which lasted some 16 years and caused tens of thousands of casualties.

RESPONDING TO CRISES IN THE 1990s

There is no question that the political establishment was taken by surprise at the vehemence and extent of the PKK-led Kurdish unrest in the late 1980s and early 1990s. By 1991, the PKK operated at will in the Southeast and commanded the loyalty of many. After a slow start, a major military effort was mounted to defeat the insurgency. Large numbers of the regular military and the gendarmerie were mobilized and sent to the region, while the state also recreated many of the institutions of the 1920s ranging from special police teams to village guards and special courts, which were designed to extinguish the rebellions at that time. Violence in the Southeast was met with violence targeting not just the PKK, but civilians as well. Because so many Kurds had migrated over the years, the effort to contain Kurdish activism assumed national proportions affecting everyone from intellectuals and journalists to businessmen and shopkeepers. The cost in human terms was exorbitant. Though exact figures vary, large swaths of territory in the Southeast were depopulated. This gave rise to a veritable crisis for cities in the immediate region, such as Diyarbakir, and others on the southern coast of Anatolia or metropolitan centers. In these places, many of the refugees sought to rebuild their shattered lives.

Conditions have changed substantially since the 1920s and 1930s. The opportunities for political mobilization have made the Kurdish question more than a simple issue of an insurrection. It is a broader movement with political roots. The international

²¹ Bozarslan, pp. 178-79.

environment has also changed significantly. Ethnic problems and human rights concerns have attracted greater visibility in the wake of the Cold War. The Gulf War and Saddam Hussein's relentless persecution of Iraqi Kurds have made them known in many world capitals, thus giving the Turkish case an international dimension. In addition, cracks began to appear within the Turkish establishment in the 1990s. As Nicole Watts argues, some political leaders were willing to give legal Kurdish parties a chance.²² Soon after the Gulf War, Özal himself had begun to move away from the policy of confrontation and repression to one of accommodation, going as far as pushing the PKK to declare a cease-fire in 1993.²³ Özal was an exception and he had come to consider alternatives only when he realized that reliance on the military alone to resolve the Kurdish issue would not work. But, Özal notwithstanding, one aspect of Turkey had yet to change—namely, Turkish civil society. It still was too weak and easily cowed by the state.

Without institutions capable of maintaining the momentum established by Özal, the state returned to a policy of confrontation after his death in 1993. The leadership of Prime Minister Tansu Çiller, Özal's successor from 1993 to 1995, was characterized by a substantial increase in exclusion and repression. The state refused to engage in a dialogue with any members of the Kurdish community and made a point of marginalizing not only its radical members, but also legal, Kurdish-based political parties as well as moderates. The Democracy Party was closed down and its parliamentarians were sent to prison. There was an increase in the number of disappearances and extra-judicial killings of those thought to be sympathetic to the Kurdish cause. Recent revelations in the Turkish press have linked many of the mystery killings in the Southeast to the shadowy underground organization Hizbullah, which is reputed to have had ties to the state. Other reports suggested that some attacks attributed to the PKK were committed by security services, and that a large amount of weaponry imported surreptitiously by local officials ended up in the hands of state-linked militiamen and individuals.²⁴ In effect,

²² Nicole Watts, "Allies and Enemies: Pro-Kurdish Parties in Turkish Politics, 1990-94," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 31, no. 4 (November 1999) pp. 631-56.

²³ For more details on Özal's efforts during that time, see Henri J. Barkey and Graham E. Fuller, *Turkey's Kurdish Question* (Baltimore, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998).

²⁴ For instance see Namik Durukhan, "Emniyeti Suistimal!" *Milliyet*, 24 February 2000.

the Kurdish conflict demonstrated the ease with which the state embraced unconventional methods, eschewing its own laws. When recently asked about these transgressions, former President Süleyman Demirel justified such actions, stating that "(when) conditions warrant it, the state can operate outside its routine."²⁵

Unquestionably, the state's strategy began to yield results even before Abdullah Öcalan fled from Syria, was captured and returned to stand trial in Turkey in 1999 and the insurgency had been contained. Today, with Öcalan's capture and his call for both an end to the armed struggle and for a political solution to the Kurdish question, the insurgency is arguably over, at least in the short term. But the call for political engagement may create a new set of problems for Ankara. While the state has successfully deployed its repressive apparatus to combat political and military threats, it does not have the same ability to confront a cause which, in the last decade, has achieved certain legitimacy in the eyes of many, including the international community. The best example of this phenomenon is the February 2000 decision to arrest three elected mayors belonging to the pro-Kurdish party, HADEP, including the most prominent one, Feridun Çelik of Diyarbakir. Within days of their arrest they were dismissed from their positions. Although they were eventually released a few days later under intense US and EU pressure, the state tried to delegitimize what it perceived was a political offensive by HADEP and, in particular, its mayors.²⁶

The Kurdish problem is compounded by the state's perceived threat from Islamists who, under the banner of the Welfare Party and in the personality of Erbakan as prime minister, came to power in 1996 as part of a coalition government with the center-right True Path Party of Çiller.²⁷ The Islamist and Kurdish questions are somewhat linked today as they were at the beginning of the Republic. When the Welfare Party emerged with over 22 percent of the vote as the single largest party in Parliament from the 1995 elections it is, in part, because of Kurdish support. Kurds have tended to vote for Islamists because the Kurds tend to be

²⁵ *Hürriyet*, 13 February 2000.

²⁶ Among the foremost complaints leveled at these mayors in the press was the attention they were getting from high-ranking foreign dignitaries, including EU foreign ministers.

²⁷ The Welfare Party is the direct successor of the National Salvation Party of the 1970s, which was banned after the 1980 military coup. By contrast, the True Path Party is the successor to the Justice Party, banned in 1980.

more pious than the rest of society and/or because they tend to vote for parties furthest away from the Kemalist mainstream. In the 1995 elections, the Kurdish vote in the Southeast went for HADEP, while in the western urban centers, the mostly Kurdish shantytowns voted overwhelmingly for the Welfare Party.

The rise of the Welfare Party to power in 1996 created a political crisis in Turkey. The military and the secularist establishment had given only their reluctant approval to the formation of the Welfare-True Path coalition government. The military, again through the NSC, decided to intervene to save the regime from the Islamist threat. Unlike previous instances, there was no direct government overthrow. Instead, the military chose to engage in an "education" campaign, whereby prosecutors, judges, academics, journalists, businessmen and others were summoned to the Turkish General Staff headquarters for briefings on the dangers of political Islam and on the incumbent coalition government of Prime Minister Erbakan and his partner Çiller. This followed a meeting of the NSC on 28 February 1997, where the government was forced to sign a list of 18 demands designed to reduce the influence of political Islam. Dubbed the February 28th process, the military—with the help of secular political forces it had mobilized during the "education" campaign—eventually forced the Welfare-led government to resign. Subsequently, the Welfare Party, the largest single party in parliament, was closed down. Its successor party, the Virtue Party, has since been under relentless state pressure, leading the chief of the General Staff to state that the "February 28th process would last as long as necessary, ten, one hundred and even a thousand years."²⁸ In effect, political change in Turkey was accomplished with the overt involvement of the armed forces, which had deemed the country's civilian leadership incapable of coping with the challenges posed by non-traditional forces.

CONCLUSION

The weakness of political and civil society institutions in Turkey has led to the resurgence of Kurdish and Islamist movements and the reliance on institutions such as the military to suppress them. As Beriker-Atiyas argues, "it is evident that politics in general has

²⁸ Sedat Ergin, "Ordu-Hükümet İlişkilerinde 28 Şubat," *Hürriyet*, 7 September 1999.

been reduced to a game of capturing public resources and then distributing them through legal and illegal means. There is an almost complete absence of meaningful debate among the political elite... [p]olicy debates are subverted, manipulated and transformed into an instrument for debasing and condemning opponents."²⁹ This poverty of Turkish politics has not been helpful in articulating alternative solutions and visions to the country's problems. Instead, it has strengthened the tendency to suppress problems rather than resolve them.

Turkish civil society will not remain weak forever. As Turkey becomes wealthier, societal pluralism is likely to increase leading to calls for reform. Concurrently, the resources available to individuals and groups willing to use them to challenge the state will also increase. Already, one manifestation of this phenomenon can be seen in the emergence of the Fethullah Gülen movement. Politics aside, this moderate Islamist movement very successfully relied on the contributions of its followers to build schools in Turkey and elsewhere and to operate large media enterprises. Such movements are likely to gather steam and this is precisely why the NSC has been vigilant in monitoring the activities of the likes of Gülen.³⁰ This is also relevant to the Kurdish question. Kurdish groups have received money and resources from both their diaspora and domestic communities and have constructed alliances with different international groups and organizations. In sum, the state that did not tolerate dissension is likely to face a growing, and far more complex, set of demands and challenges from Kurds, Islamists and other groups which feel they have not received fair treatment in the Turkish system.

The accession process triggered by the European Union's December 1999 decision to name Turkey as a candidate for membership in the European Union will strain the country's domestic balances. By imposing sanctions on Austria following its inclusion of the xenophobic politician Jörg Haider's party's inclusion into government, the EU demonstrated that it is willing to interfere in the domestic affairs of a constituent member. It is

²⁹ Nimet Beriker-Atiyas, "The Kurdish Conflict in Turkey: Issues, Parties and Prospects," *Security Dialogue*, 28, no. 4 (1997) p. 449.

³⁰ For an analysis of the Fethullah Gülen movement, see Hakan Yavuz, "Towards an Islamic Liberalism? The Nurcu Movement and Fethullah Gülen in Turkey," *Middle East Journal*, 53, no. 4 (Autumn 1999) pp. 584-605.

reasonable to expect that the same organization could respond in a similar fashion, if not with heightened sensitivity, to the behavior of a would-be member state. The Europeans have made it clear that the price of Turkey's admission into their club is the full implementation of the Copenhagen criteria.³¹ The severe restrictions on the freedom of expression and the role, and even the very existence of the NSC are clear violations of these criteria. The pressure to reform institutions, especially the 1982 military constitution and the role of the National Security Council, will increase with time. Moreover, the EU accession process will create a wedge between the state and some of its allies in society, especially some business organizations, which will push for reform at a faster pace than what the civilian-military bureaucratic elite is prepared to accept. Having stymied the debate on issues such as the Kurdish question, the state does not have the benefit of a class of politicians and intellectuals capable of providing dispassionate analysis. It is still intent on seeking a top-to-bottom "solution" in the form of a NSC edict.³² But this is unlikely to work.

The process of European accession will, albeit slowly, provide Turkish civil society with a stronger voice and give it more self-confidence in its dealings with the state. The strengthening of civil society will also lead to a stronger and more capable Turkish state by forcing it to divest itself from issues it has proven ill-equipped to handle. The Turkish state can learn from its European counterparts the contradictory lessons of globalization. While globalization has given rise to greater regionalism and a general decentralization of state functions as regions and localities insist on making decisions autonomously and more efficiently, the state is becoming more efficient, better managed and more accountable as it sheds some of its powers. The challenge for the Turkish state and Turkish society now, is to adapt to the changes that are taking place in Europe and learn that strength and legitimacy does not come from controlling individuals, but rather from becoming more responsive and accountable to them. ♦

³¹ The Copenhagen Criteria refer to a set of requirements all would-be countries have to adhere to before beginning accession negotiations with the European Union. They include certain economic criteria as well as political ones regarding freedom of speech, democracy, adherence to human rights and the death penalty.

³² Şükrü Elekdağ, "Güneydoğu'ya "master" plan mi?" *Milliyet*, 21 February 2000. A former diplomat, Elekdağ has become one of the lone "dispassionate" voices and has lamented the fact that government and civilians have been unable to tackle this problem head on.