THE SECULAR and THE SACRED

NATION, RELIGION AND POLITICS

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LONDON • PORTLAND, OR
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INTRODUCTION

Although debates over the relationship between the secular and the sacred have a long history, the topic has gained widespread saliency in recent years, not least owing to the worldwide growth of fundamentalism, especially in the Islamic world. It is obvious that Islam plays an important political role in many Islamic countries. In some, such as Iran, Afghanistan and Sudan, Islamic radicals control the state, in others such as Egypt they represent important opposition elements; in Algeria, they are engaged in a violent struggle for power; in almost every other state with large Muslim populations, Islam has been resurgent as evidenced by debates over the role and interpretation of law and the position of women in the social order.

Turkey has not been immune from these developments even though it differs from other Muslim states because it possesses both a secular and a multi-party system. Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish Republic, was determined to create a modern, Western state and to that end he enacted his well-known reforms—the hat law, the language reform and the substitution of the Arabic alphabet and Islamic law codes and calendar by Western ones. He paid special attention to education, creating a single, unified, secular school system on the same day that the Caliphate was abolished (3 March 1924).

Since then, Turkey has continued to change. It has urbanized rapidly, grown economically at a relatively rapid rate, and established—and maintained—a multi-party system, albeit one in which the military is an influential actor. Thus, one would expect on the basis of what were, until recently, accepted theoretical perspectives on the relationship between modernization and religion, that Turkey today would be, not only nominally but in reality, a wholly secular state.

Yet this is not the case. Turkey has not been immune from the spread of Islamic values and attitudes. It has witnessed a powerful Islamic ‘revival’ as indicated by a marked upsurge in the number of religious publications of all kinds, in the number of new mosques, in the number of people making the Haj and fasting during Ramadan, and in the number of imam-Hatip (Prayer Leader and Preacher) schools. Furthermore, beginning in the 1970s an Islamic party succeeded in becoming a member of both left—and right—wing coalition governments, captured the mayorships of Istanbul, Ankara and many other major cities, and formed a coalition government in 1995 with its head, Necmettin
Erbakan, serving as Prime Minister. This government fell in 1997 as a result of great pressure from the military that subsequently forced the closure of the Welfare Party, imprisoning many of its leaders and, in January 1998, banning Mr Erbakan and five other leaders from politics for five years. The Virtue Party was promptly formed to contest the 1999 general elections.

The results surprised everyone. The interim Prime Minister, Bülent Ecevit, led his left of centre party, the DSP, to victory with 22 per cent of the vote but the Islamic party saw its percentage of the vote drop from 21 per cent to 15 per cent. The big winner, however, was the ultra nationalist National Action Party (MHP), which emerged as the second largest party, doubling its percentage of the vote to 18 per cent. The big losers were the centre-right parties, the DYP and ANAP, which fell to 12 per cent and 13 per cent respectively. These results did not allay the concerns of the secularist forces, and subsequently the Constitutional court closed the Virtue Party.

Many Turks are pleased with the recent developments for they remain greatly apprehensive about what they perceive to be a religious threat to the future of democracy in their country and support the military's actions. Indeed, the military continues to rank high in public opinion. A few surmise that Turkey could still become another Iran or Algeria and even believe that the Algerian Ambassador to Ankara was correct when he commented that he was watching a rerun of a movie that he had already seen at home. Others, however, view the future differently, arguing that in a democracy there is room for a religious party and that election results demonstrate that democratic institutions and secular values are sufficiently entrenched to ensure their future, particularly if the country continues to develop. Which of these perspectives is correct?

Turkey is an important regional power with a key strategic location. Its character and policies have important implications for developments in the Middle East, Central Asia and Europe. All these developments were followed closely not only within Turkey but in the United States, Europe and other countries as well, for Turkey, with its key strategic location, is an important geo-strategic actor. The end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union have enhanced its importance for it possesses historic cultural ties to Central Asia. Thus, it can be a force for stability and a model for a unique Islamic pattern of secular, democratic development. Its troubled relationship with the European Union, which it aspires to join, further enhances its importance as well as the significance of religious and other developments within the state including human rights, civil-military relations and the nature of civil society.

Such issues are not only relevant for policy makers but can help clarify the relationship between Islam and democracy. Have the Islamists suffered only a temporary decline? Or, are there countervailing forces that place limits on the Islamic resurgence? Does the closing of the Virtue Party violate fundamental democratic principles? Can the military continue to block the spread of Islamic political activity without endangering the emergence of a civil society and the continuation of democratic processes?

Answering questions such as these, however, is a complicated task, for each involves concepts and variables that require elaboration and discussion. Accordingly, before turning to a consideration of the Turkish scene, it is necessary to specify more precisely the general context as well as the concepts and variables that will be used in the analysis.
ISLAM AND DEMOCRACY: THEORETICAL ISSUES AND PERSPECTIVES

This topic has generated considerable discussion in recent years but the debate often has been marked by prejudice and stereotypes, which it unfortunately is necessary to address. First, although the term ‘Islamic Fundamentalism’ commonly is encountered, it possesses Christian roots and carries considerable emotional baggage that makes it offensive to many Muslims. Accordingly, I shall use ‘Islamist’ to refer to those persons and groups who advocate a greater role for Islamic values and principles in the polity; that is, those who ideologize Islam. Second, it unfortunately is necessary to emphasize that Islam, as a religion, is no more a threat to democracy, development, international peace and stability than Judaism or Christianity. Certainly many Islamists severely criticize the West and what they consider its corruptions and some engage in violent action to advance their cause but this does not mean that all Islamists are potential terrorists. Jewish and Christian religious fanatics who resort to violence also can be identified—as the massacre in Hebron and the shooting of doctors performing abortions in the United States tragically demonstrate. Nor does it mean that a ‘clash of civilizations’ is under way or that many devout Muslims do not believe in democracy.

For many, however, Islam is more than a faith, it is also an ideology that advocates a specific form of government, one based upon Islamic principles. Hence, it is important to differentiate between those who regard Islam as a faith by which to live and those who wish to gain control of the state in order to enforce its principles upon the populace. It is particularly with Islamists who are ideologically oriented that many scholars have raised questions about the compatibility of Islam and democracy.2

They argue that such factors as the lack of distinction between the secular and the sacred and the subervience of the polity to God make it difficult if not impossible to have a democratic Islamic state. Hence, no moderate Islamic ideology (one that accepts the principles of pluralism and liberalism) can emerge.

If a group believes that it is an agent of God’s will, it is morally obliged to enforce their view of what constitutes a virtuous society and polity. Since that view is based on a ‘true faith’, then issues involving the rights of minorities, who will be allowed to participate and freedom of the press and of association will inevitably arise. Moreover, it will be unwilling to relinquish power because if it does so God’s design will be frustrated.

Those who hold this view acknowledge that Islamist leaders make frequent assertions of their commitment to democratic principles and in many countries, including Turkey, they are active participants in the political process. They argue, however, that the Islamists use language and rhetoric to disarm their opponents, that their words are tailored to specific audiences. They believe that the Islamists are determined to achieve political power to establish an Islamic state but, once in power, they will no longer abide by democratic rules and principles.

Other scholars, however, criticize this view on two general grounds.3 First, they point out that such arguments overlook or at least minimize the many differences that characterize the movements encompassed within the Islamist category. These range from the FIS in Algeria to Hezbollah in Lebanon to Hamas in the West Bank and Gaza to the
Islamic Action Front in Jordan to the Hezb-i Islami in Afghanistan and to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and elsewhere to the regimes in Saudi Arabia and the Sudan. Among these, one can identify important variations in structures, goals and strategies and in their orientations towards democracy.

Second, even if a particular group of Islamists who are hostile to democracy gain control of the state, political realities will temper the Islamists’ policies. In the modern world, effective governance has become the major determinant of legitimacy and any Islamist government will have to meet the practical expectations of the society if they are to remain in power. Accordingly, they will have to temper their orientation and reach accommodations with other powerful forces in society including the military and the business community, unless they have the ability to impose a harsh authoritarian regime and are willing to sacrifice economic growth, as has occurred in Afghanistan and the Sudan. On the other hand, the Iranian case seems to demonstrate the validity of this argument.

Such differences highlight the importance of conceptual distinctions and the need to examine the assumptions that underlie these perspectives. History does matter and one must consider how it has shaped ideology and its relationship with political behaviour and between the state and its elites and the civil society, the character of the political culture and the role of education therein, and the nature of democracy.

Democracy is obviously the place to begin because it is subject to multiple interpretations and applications, although in the West there is a tendency to overlook the degree to which it remains controversial and contested. Still, there is general agreement that a democratic system must incorporate at least three elements: genuine competition for political power, widespread participation in leadership selection, and the existence of the necessary associated freedoms. However, the actual practice of democracy often differs from these criteria. The rights of minorities are often ignored and the level of public involvement and control is often minimal.

This situation, which is often the norm, has led many scholars to make distinctions among democracies. Often they are divided into those that approximate the above norms —‘institutionalized’ or ‘strong’ democracies and ‘delegative’ or ‘thin’ democracies with personalized leadership and little public impact on major decisions. Whether a democracy is ‘strong’ or ‘thin’ is determined by several factors—the nature of the state and of the civil society, the political culture, the role of the military and the character of the democratic transition. In considering the Turkish case, we shall keep this fundamental distinction in mind.

States can also be categorized in various ways. One of the most common is whether they are ‘strong’ or ‘weak’ in terms of their relation to the civil society. A widespread consensus exists in the scholarly literature that Turkey inherited a strong state tradition from the Ottoman Empire. Essentially a patrimonial state, the Sultan and/or the ruling elites were not constrained (as in the West) by powerful aristocrats or an economically rooted middle class. They possessed the autonomy to define and pursue policies that they believed to be in the state’s interest. That tradition profoundly influenced political developments after the creation of the Republic. Atatürk and his successor, smet Inonu, forged a state elite that possessed the power to act much like its Ottoman predecessors.
The nature of the democratic transition fundamentally altered this pattern. The decision by the state elite to democratize after World War II led to the emergence of a political elite with its own culture and perspectives that soon brought it into conflict with the state elite, whose social base shrank steadily until it came to comprise only the military plus some intellectuals and bureaucrats.  

This development was influenced by the existing political culture—the attitudes, beliefs and values of elites and the mass towards political activities, structures and processes. Although the concept can and has been abused, it nevertheless, if used sensitively by making appropriate distinctions (such as between state and other elites and the general populace), provides a useful tool for understanding political life in any society. For a democratic system to thrive, the political culture must promote ‘civility’—the acceptance of diverse views, the legitimacy of opposition and the peaceful settlement of disputes. In the case of Islam, this variable often has been used to explain what is perceived to be a lack of tolerance towards opposition and pluralism and patterns of authoritarianism.

Political culture not only influences political behaviour, it is also shaped by the actions of political actors and structures, especially the state and its elites and the educational system that socializes individuals into an acceptance of particular beliefs and values. Educational policies were a major consideration of Atatürk and the state elites and the question of how the educational system should deal with Islam has aroused heated debate and controversy. Hence, in the sections that follow, I shall discuss the role of education as well as attitudes regarding Islam and democracy.

The power of the state is clearly related to the strength of the civil society. The concept of civil society has gained great currency in recent years because of its perceived role in democratization, especially in regard to the former communist states of Eastern Europe. However, this too is a concept subject to many interpretations and even debates about its utility generally and for the Middle East specifically. Yet there is widespread agreement on the close and positive link between civil society and democracy. As one scholar has pointed out, ‘the existence of civil society is central to democracy’. Accordingly, I shall simply define it as the ‘space’ between the individual and the state—the area where organizations and groups of all types, representing all classes, freely organize to articulate their interests and claims against the state apparatus. I shall not differentiate, as is sometimes done, between ‘economic society’, ‘political society’ and ‘civil society’.

The effective functioning of civil society depends on two key factors. First, the state must permit the existence of such a space; though, here again, the reality is that states tend to try to limit it and to control the activities therein. Second, the political culture must be supportive; it must promote ‘civility’. As is obvious from the above discussion of the relationship between Islam and democracy, many analysts argue that Muslim states do not share this norm because of such factors as the nature of Islam, the absence of a ‘reformation’, and the lack of legal recognition for corporate bodies. They also believe that the political culture in Muslim states inhibits the development of a civil society because politics is viewed as a ‘zero-sum’ game.

Clearly, all the concepts discussed above—democracy, political culture, the state and civil society are intrinsically linked and in the sections that follow, I shall apply them to
the Turkish case to determine whether the Turkish experience provides any insights into
the validity of the conflicting positions outlined earlier. Specifically, I shall discuss:

1. the relationship between the state and Islam,
2. the character of civil society, and
3. the political culture and the functioning of democratic processes in order to assess
the consequences and implications of the Islamic revival.

THE STATE, ISLAM AND POLITICAL PARTIES

Atatürk was determined to establish a Turkish state possessing all the attributes of a
European one and a populace that culturally would be Westernized. Accordingly, he
moved vigorously through a series of dramatic reforms, and the establishment of a single
party (CHP), to build a strong state with committed elites. He also sought to develop
educational institutions that would socialize the mass of the populace into values and
orientations that were radically different from those taught by traditional Islam. This does
not mean, however, that he was anti-Islam, as so many have since charged. He wished to
eliminate the Islam of the state, with its official hierarchy and ideology, and to replace it with
a modern Islam that was solely a personal faith.¹⁴

Doing so, however, was no easy matter, for there were two kinds of Islam in Turkey—
the Islam of the state and a ‘parallel’ or unofficial Islam that consisted of religious orders,
convents and sects. Both of these, in his view, were reactionary forces but he followed
different policies towards each. He moved quickly to eliminate the latter whereas he
adopted a policy in regard to the former that suggested that he wished to create a new,
modern, official Islam.

A ‘modern’ Islam could help further Atatürk’s goals in several ways. It could serve as an
element of collective identity against enemies, internal and external, an ideological tool to
help enhance legitimacy, and a means of decreasing the influence of centres and groups
that, operating outside the purview of the state, produced their own religious ideologies.

But it may well be that Atatürk, committed to producing and diffusing his ideology and
values, was following a different strategy. Being a pragmatist, he recognized the strong
feelings that the overwhelming majority of the population retained for Islam and its
opposition to secularization (as evidenced by the Sheikh Said revolt of 1925 and the
Menemem incident in 1930) and understood the need to proceed cautiously in this area.

In any event, by the time of his death in 1939, Atatürk had eliminated Islam from
public life but the ‘parallel’ Islam continued to thrive within the society. The state elites
(the intellectuals, the bureaucracy and the military) possessed a positivist, secular
orientation, but the majority of the population continued to view Islam as they had always
done, as the centre of their lives, as a source of self-identity and as a code of conduct.¹⁵

Atatürk’s successor, İnönü, decided, after World War II, that the time had come
to establish a multi-party system. This decision, it must be stressed, was not the result of
the growing power of civil society; rather, it was a function of the new international
environment and the ideological commitment of the state elites. It also involved a
miscalculation of the ability of opposition parties to organize. Thus democracy, in a real
sense, was imposed by the state elites upon the society.

The most important of the new parties, the Democrat Party (DP), realizing how
greatly the mass of the society resented the secularization policies that had been followed
until now, began to emphasize the issue. For the next two years the press, parties and
Parliament debated whether there should be greater religious freedom, including religious
instruction in the schools.

Though the DP was defeated at the polls in 1946, the debate over religion continued.
Those in favour of religious education argued that such courses would help build morality
and serve as a bulwark against a very real threat—the Soviet Union and its ideology.
Those opposed contended that it was essential to protect Atatürk’s principles. Prime
Minister Recep Peker argued that using Islam against communism is like using one deadly
poison to cure another. Nevertheless, the majority of the CHP leaders concluded that, in
light of the real threat that the DP posed to the CHP government in the forthcoming
elections, the time had come to confront the social realities. Since religious feelings
remained strong, especially in the countryside where a large number of unofficial schools
were teaching obscurantist ideas, it was decided, in 1949, that the state should establish
programmes for religious education.

This move did not help the Republican People’s Party (CHP), founded by Atatürk, and
its defeat in 1950 changed the situation dramatically, for the new DP government was
willing to make significant religious concessions. Its policies fell into two categories. The
first were designed to lessen the controls that Atatürk had placed over religion—the call
to prayer could once again be chanted in Arabic, religious sermons could be broadcast,
and mosque construction and repairs were supported. The second involved education,
where religious instruction once again became part of the curricula in schools of various
kinds.

These measures were widely criticized, especially since many sects that had been forced
underground began to come out into the open, the most notorious being the Ticani which
publicized its opinion of Atatürk by destroying his statues. The DP’s willingness to accede
to demands for greater official recognition of Islam in order to retain popular support,
especially after 1954 when its popularity suffered owing to economic difficulties,
generated criticism as well as debates in Turkey and abroad, of whether a religious revival
was under way. Its concessions, however, were never designed to destroy secularism and
it prosecuted Ticani and others who exceeded certain limits.

The importance of these policies lay not only in their substance—a dual system of
education was being recreated that would have a negative impact on modernization—but
because PM Menderes was creating a new political reality - the political elite began to
differentiate itself from the state elites and enter into conflict with them. Increasingly
alienated by his populist approach to governance and the absence of coherent economic
policies, the state elites, who retained a veto power, felt that the wellbeing of the state
was in jeopardy.

The result was a military coup in 1960 that tried to purge the political system of its
former political leadership and enacted a new constitution. Democratic processes were
restored soon after, but the military’s efforts produced little fundamental change. The
parties continued to be based on patronage and had little concern for rational policy-making. All governments, especially those led by the Justice Party (AP), the successor to the DP, essentially followed the same policies and viewed themselves as furthering democracy and the state elites as obstructionists. This attitude led to growing and ongoing tension between the state and the political leadership that fed upon itself. These feelings were further exacerbated by the politicians’ efforts to gain control of the state apparatus by politicizing the bureaucracy. The result was another crisis in 1971 that the military (which regarded itself as the guardian of the state) resolved through a ‘coup by communiqué’, and the establishment of a new technocratic government.

In regard to religion, all governments recognized the popular appeal of Islam and generally did not interpret laicism rigidly. In essence a kind of moderate consensus emerged about the relationship between the state and religion, that secularism did not mean hostility to religion and was compatible with Islam as long as the latter was restricted to the moral dimension and did not intrude into political and legal matters.

This consensus was shaken in the 1970s as Islamic forces expanded and also became active in politics. The 1970s were a period of weak coalition governments that proved unable to control a growing anarchy. Essentially the patterns of the 1950s and 1960s re-emerged regarding the organization and orientations of the political parties. This environment proved highly beneficial to those seeking to promote an Islamic ideology and the National Salvation Party (MSP), a new explicitly Islamic party, began to thrive. Although a small minority party, it often held the balance of power between the two main parties, the JP and the CHP and was able to extract a high price for its participation in first, a left of centre government (thus gaining considerable legitimacy) and subsequently a conservative one. Thus, the decade was marked by a ‘dramatic escalation of the role of Islam in the state…(that) definitely represented something new’.

For this and other reasons, the polity became increasingly polarized. A new, violence-prone, right-wing party, the nationalist, secular National Action Party (MHP), founded by Alparslan Türkeş, one of the leaders of the 1960 revolution, engaged in violent struggles with leftists for control of universities and other institutions. As the political situation became ever more marked by assassinations and violent clashes, the military finally intervened once again in 1980. This time it enacted a major restructuring of the Turkish political scene. As part of this effort it prepared a new constitution which was formally approved by a national referendum in 1982. The document reaffirmed the principles of freedom of conscience and religion but it also stipulates that courses in ‘religious culture and morality’ would be compulsory in primary and secondary schools (Article 24).

At first glance there seems to be a glaring contradiction between ideology and practice, since this decision was taken by a military regime committed to preserving and strengthening the Atatürk principles, especially that of laicism. A closer examination, however, suggests that this was not the case, that it reflected a continuation of policy whereby the state tried to control Islam and harness it to its own goals. The control dimension is evident in the charge that heretofore all the parties had exploited religion for political purposes, the attempt to suppress various illegal brotherhoods and certain religious publications, its choice of the phrase ‘religious culture and morality’, and the placing of the Ministry of Education in charge of all religious education, which it promptly expanded.
The underlying motive for the military’s actions was essentially the same as that which had influenced previous regimes—the state needed an accommodation with the religious forces and the military wished to enhance the regime’s legitimacy. Islam could serve as an integrative force and as a source of morality and ethical behaviour that would insulate the populace, especially the youth, against alien ideologies (now including Khomeinism) and prevent a recurrence of the anarchy of the 1970s, strengthen official Islam against the teachings of the sects, and assist the state in its efforts to find allies and markets in the Middle East.\(^\text{22}\)

When the military decided to restore democratic processes in 1983, the political scene was transformed as a new centre-right party founded by Turgut \(\text{zal}\), the Motherland Party (ANAP), won a large victory and re-election in 1987. \(\text{zal}\) represented a new type of political leader. He was committed to the free market and to rational economic policymaking, to a non-ideological approach to politics, to an efficient and effective bureaucracy, and to meaningful party platforms. Above all he hoped to unite disparate elements through a ‘Turk-Islam synthesis’ and his party incorporated liberals, conservatives, nationalists and Islamists who eventually came to constitute two conflicting groups, one headed by Mesut Yılmaz, the secular nationalists, the other the ‘nationalist-Islamic’.

During his tenure, Turkish foreign policy continued to incline towards the Islamic world, and Islamic banks were introduced for the first time.\(^\text{24}\)

\(\text{zal}\)’s vision, however, could not be maintained, especially when former politicians were permitted to resume their activities and the veteran politician Suleyman Demirel was able to build the True Path Party (DYP), essentially a continuation of the AP (itself the former DP), which he had headed, into a powerful political force that successfully challenged \(\text{zal}\)’s ANAP for power. Hence, \(\text{zal}\) felt compelled to abandon fiscal rigor, stoking the flames of inflation, which led to his defeat in 1991. Former patterns of patronage and clientelism were also restored, reaching a peak in the mid 1990s. When Mr Demirel gained the Presidency in 1993, Mesut Yılmaz emerged as leader of the DYP.\(^\text{25}\)

The party that identified itself exclusively with Islam, the Welfare Party (RP), the successor to Necmettin Erbakan’s National Salvation Party that had been banned in 1980, contested its first election in 1984, winning 4.4 per cent of the vote. Its share rose to 7.1 per cent in 1987, 9.8 per cent in 1989, 17 per cent in the general election of October 1991, 19 per cent in the municipal election of March 1994, which gained it the mayorships of Istanbul, Ankara and 26 other cities and 21 per cent (the largest share) in the 1996 election. The two centre-right parties, ANAP and the DYP won 20 per cent and 19 per cent of the vote respectively (as compared to 24 per cent and 27 per cent in 1991) and the two centre-left parties, the DSP and the CHP, 15 per cent and 11 per cent (11 per cent and 21 per cent in 1991).\(^\text{26}\)

The two centre-right parties proved unable to agree on a lasting formula because of personal rivalries between the two leaders. Then ANAP, headed by Tansu Çiller, who had served as Prime Minister between 1993 and 1995, and who was facing indictment on corruption charges, entered into a coalition with the RP (thus gaining immunity from prosecution), and the RP’s leader, Necmettin Erbakan, became the first Islamic Prime Minister in the country’s history. Ironically, Çiller had portrayed herself as a strict
secularist and had successfully lobbied the European Parliament in December 1996 to implement a customs union in order to strengthen the secularist forces in the country. 27

The RP moved vigorously to enact its economic and social programme, labelled the ‘Just Order’. The RP had committed itself to an anti-monopoly, non-interest-based economy with a tax on production rather than income. This programme was denounced by the business community and by economists for its detachment from the realities of Turkey’s economic situation. Most important, the military (which more than ever viewed itself as the protector of the state) began to fear that the RP (or at least important elements within it) was pursuing policies that would enable it to establish an Islamic state at some point in time and it took measures to block such an outcome. 28 I shall return to the role of the military in Turkish politics below.

Here, however, it is necessary to note that its role in the campaign to bring the government down was initiated on several fronts. In the legislature, motions of censure were tabled and efforts made to encourage defections from Çiller’s DYP. Eight thousand women demonstrated (February 1997) to protest the government’s policies. And the military made its displeasure increasingly obvious. In February, the National Security Council decided to increase compulsory education from five to eight years, a step that was opposed by the RP because of its implications for the mam-Hatip schools that enrolled students at the middle-school level. It also urged the government to fire extremists and to ban radical TV religious programmes. Mr Erbakan procrastinated. On 28 April 1997, the National Security Council urged Mr Erbakan to abandon policies that promoted the Islamization of Turkish society, especially in the educational sector. It demanded action on its educational programme. When these suggestions were ignored, the military increased its pressure and in June, the General Staff held a number of meetings with judges and prosecutors, academics, labour, business and Turkish and foreign journalists in which it accused the government of ‘crimes against the constitution’ and declared a boycott of 1,000 Islamic businesses. Finally, Mr Erbakan agreed to resign in favour of his coalition partner, Ms Çiller, hoping that early elections would return him to power with a larger vote. President Demirel, however, in accordance with precedent, chose to ask Mr Yılmaz, the leader of ANAP (the second largest party with 129 seats as compared to 116 for Ms Çiller’s DYP), to form a new government. Because of defections, particularly from Ms Çiller’s DYP, Mr Yılmaz was able to obtain a vote of confidence. 29 The government lasted until 25 November 1998; an interim government was formed with Mr B lent Ecevit, the leader of the left of centre DSP, as its head and new elections were scheduled for 18 April 1999. As noted earlier, the outcome was a major surprise, witnessing the decline of the Islamic party and the rise of the chauvinistic MHP.

This historical overview serves to highlight the degree to which the state and its political elites have shaped the role of Islam. It is clearly erroneous to view the state and its elites or the political leadership as hostile to Islam or the state’s response as concessions to a growing power that forced itself upon the state. On the contrary, despite a commitment to secularist principles, the state and all political parties sought to use it for their own purposes. Ironically, by doing so they encouraged developments that they later came to regret, for they spurred the growth of Islamic activities of which they disapproved.
One can, however, make an important distinction between the single and multi-party eras. Until the emergence of the multi-party system, the state elites sought to control Islamic forces and to keep them out of public life. With the introduction of democratic processes, this changed so that while the principle of control was maintained, various kinds of Islamic involvement in politics were permitted. One scholar has aptly described this situation as follows:

Without changing its basic secularist stance, the Turkish state adopted a double discourse: on the one hand, establishing rigid segregation between Islam and the public political realm; on the other, accommodating and incorporating Islamic politics into the system in various ways.  

Hence, every government—left-wing, right-wing, military and civilian—has been confronted with pressures to make concessions in the religious area and all did so, albeit for different reasons.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND ISLAM

To understand this accommodation between the state, the political parties and the Islamists, it is necessary to consider the nature of the civil society and the changes that it underwent in this period. Three dimensions are especially noteworthy:

1. the nature of the political parties,
2. the basis of Islam’s appeal and its organizational implications, including the structure and character of the religious groups, and
3. the emergence of new economic relationships and groups after 1980.

As noted earlier, Turkey could best be characterized as a strong state that dominates the civil society. Even though new groups emerged as the society modernized, these were essentially coopted by the state and its elites. Nor did the coming of democracy change this pattern, though now it was the political parties organized around patronage that continued to limit the space available for new organizations to gain autonomy and function as independent actors.

All parties share certain characteristics. They are essentially leader-dominated organizations committed to obtaining patronage and are structured along patron-client lines with loyalty an important value. The goal is to secure political office and to use it as a base from which to reward one’s followers. They ‘tend not to follow the usual pattern of representing long-established interest groups with clearly defined constituencies and local organizations’. Hence, party programmes have little significance, rational policy-making is subordinated to personal needs, and electoral politics revolve around leaders and personalities. The successful politician tends to be rich, well connected, persuasive, a skilled bargainer and focused on his or her own advancement with little concern for policy; ministers are chosen on the basis of loyalty and the strength of their client networks and are dominated by the Prime Minister. This situation has not changed
fundamentally over time, so that the political dynamics and the relationship between state and society have remained remarkably stable even though Turkish society has been transformed over the years. Hence, Turkey clearly fits the model of ‘thin’ democracy discussed earlier.

Turkey has achieved a high level of industrialization and its rates of population increase and of urbanization are extremely high. In less than 30 years, for example, the population of Istanbul climbed from 600,000 to over 6 million. A good part of this migration is housed in large shanty towns that are now decades old and are to be found on the outskirts of every major city. Nor can one ignore the large migration of Turks to Western Europe where they constitute sizable minorities in several countries, notably Germany. And improved communication and transportation permitted traditional preachers and teachers to extend their influence greatly. These developments began under Atatürk but accelerated significantly after World War II, and especially in the 1970s and after.

These changes did not transform state-society relations but, rather than enhancing secularism as theory predicted, strengthened the power of religious orders, sects and brotherhoods and of informal Islam generally. This phenomenon might have been anticipated if theorists had been more sensitive to the importance of traditional relationships and especially the functions that Islam has always served in the periphery.

One such function, traditionally met by religion, is to provide a moral code. However, the development model followed since the days of Atatürk did not produce results that were consonant with Islamic expectations for it has led to a widening of the elite-mass gap and to economic difficulties. The failure to promote ‘social justice’ led to widespread disillusionment that caused people to turn to Islam. Disenchantment with Western models and institutions have helped spur the Islamic revival in many countries.

Islam’s other functions, especially as performed through sects, were also important factors. Having traditionally provided their members, in return for veneration of the leader and acceptance of his teachings, with a wide range of tangible rewards ranging from education to welfare, as well as less tangible benefits such as a sense of meaning and purpose, the religious groups were uniquely positioned to meet the need for such services as physical and psychic dislocations became widespread. Islamic tendencies grew not only in scope, as the periphery was increasingly penetrated, but geographically as well, because the improvements in transportation and communication facilitated their ability to reach new audiences which were to be found in urban as well as rural areas since the cities now included large numbers of ‘urban peasants’, migrants from rural areas and small towns. And the demand for support and solace from religious groups expanded still further as a wave of Turks migrated to Europe, where they faced not only similar problems to their compatriots in Istanbul or Ankara but also the added difficulty of having to function in an alien culture.

New transportation and communication channels have furthered the internationalization of these groups in other ways as well. The Iranian revolution and the activities of the Muslim Brothers have resonated among Turks. More concretely, links have been established to such states as Saudi Arabia, Iran and Kuwait; these have supplemented, to a significant degree, the resources that various groups receive from their members and have sponsored some of their activities.
The growth of education also fuelled the rise of ‘parallel’ Islam. The new schools provided a new channel of mobility and generated widespread new expectations and aspirations that often could not be satisfied. Despite the explosive expansion of the regular schools, many rural inhabitants did not possess the necessary economic or psychic resources to acquire an advanced modern education. Furthermore, many recognized the importance of acquiring new skills and knowledge but wished to do so within an Islamic context. Hence, the ‘secondary elite’ in the provinces (whose members were often affiliated with and supported by various sects) promoted and financed the growth of the Imam Hatip schools.  

They did so by forming associations that raised the funds for the construction and equipment of the schools. Overall, it has been estimated that these associations contribute 87 per cent of these costs, the state only 13 per cent; this figure is somewhat misleading, however, because the teachers and administrators are all on the state’s payroll and if such support were withdrawn, the system would not be viable. Nor are their activities limited to these schools, many religious associations are also reaching out to the students enrolled in the regular schools by sponsoring dormitories and kitchens. These organizations have had an explosive growth; by the late 1960s, their number had grown from 1,500 in 1950 to more than 10,000 and has increased many-fold since then. As a result, two ever-growing groups of students from traditional backgrounds acquired a modern education. Some did so in the regular schools, many more through the Imam Hatip schools that, by the end of the 1980s, had graduated over 150,000 students.

Given the popularity of these schools and the political power of the pious Turks who supported them, no party was willing to oppose their rapid expansion, with important consequences for the growth of fundamentalism, for these graduates have had a profound impact upon intellectual and political life in Turkey and provide a rich pool for the Islamic movements. Many have gone on to become activists in one form or another, as writers, publishers, editors and teachers, while many more constitute the audience for the numerous books and journals, supporters of the foundations and members of sects and organizations. Overall, there are over 50 journals and newspapers with a circulation estimated at a million. Total readership is obviously much higher. And the Islamists have their own TV channels.

The growth in Islamic activities during these years can be seen in the following data: in 1979, the state published two million copies of 30 religious works; in 1982, 5.7 million copies of 53 such works. The number of students in Quranic schools more than doubled from about 70,000 in 1980 to over 155,000 in 1989. The number of mosques increased from about 55,000 in 1984 to about 65,000 five years later and the number of persons making the pilgrimage increased nine-fold in a decade, from about 11,000 in 1979 to 92,000 in 1988.

These schools also contributed to the emergence of a new intellectual elite, the ‘Muslim Intellectuals’. Familiar with Western literature and scholarship, they handle Western concepts and ideas in their works that bring an Islamic perspective to bear upon contemporary ideological and cultural issues. They are a heterogeneous group with many different viewpoints who do have, however, one common bond, 'the Muslim intellectual is sensitive to any attempt to justify Islamic principles from a Western perspective. This,
he argues, was the basic mistake of Islamist thinkers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Furthermore, such well-known figures as Ali Bulac, Rasim Deniz, Ren and Smetzel share another characteristic—they wish to establish an Islamic order but 'their worldviews can hardly be reconciled with that of an Islamic state'.

These personages have greatly influenced the flow of ideas and concepts in Turkey, for their views are widely disseminated even by the secular media. They frequently are interviewed and participate in numerous debates, discussions and programmes. As a result, dialogues over the place and role of Islam in Turkish life have been taking place between individuals and groups who heretofore never interacted, especially in the universities, which now contain large numbers of students who are sympathetic to the arguments being made by the Muslim intellectuals.

Thus a whole range of new religious associations began to emerge which supplemented the existing brotherhoods and sects. Although Islamic sects and groups have prospered greatly in recent years, it is important to stress that they represent many different approaches to Islam and its role in the modern world. There are many sects and groups—the Suleymani, the Muslim Brothers, the Kardiri, the Nakşibendi, the Nurcu and the Bektası—and there are important ideological and other differences among them. Some are democratic, others reactionary, some apolitical, others call for action, some emphasize tradition, others scripture, some have a positive attitude towards Western technology and institutions, others reject both, still others accept selected technologies. Moreover, the position of particular groups is not fixed, and important changes can and do occur. The Nurcu, one of the most important of the radical groups and once quite reactionary, for example, now respect science, are open to new ideas and support Republican values.

The basic division, however, is between such 'neo-traditionalist' Islamic groups as the Nakşibendi and the Nurcu, who regard Islam as a faith and are oriented towards promoting Islam and the Islamic way of life in a peaceful and gradual manner and the 'radicals', who politicize Islam and use it as an ideology that calls for organizing the state and all institutions within it along religious lines. In order to do so they attempt to infiltrate the bureaucracy, the armed forces and the security apparatus and are active within the Welfare Party.

These differences are reflected in their political behaviour. The 'neo-traditionalist' groups tend to be apolitical or to support the established parties, especially the DYP and its predecessors and ANAP. And many deputies are members of religious orders. Tal was known to have links to the Nakşibendi. These groups, however, are themselves sometimes fragmented so that each faction supports different political parties. Some Nurcus, for example, have supported Mr Demirel's parties consistently, others, ANAP, still others, the RP.

The economic sphere has also witnessed major changes, for by the late 1970s the economy had reached a crisis point and it had become obvious that major structural reforms were essential. Accordingly, the traditional import substitution strategy that legitimized government intervention at all levels of the economy was abandoned in favour of a more open export orientation. The private sector had accepted this pattern in return for significant economic benefits that were provided by the state.
Now, radical changes began to sweep through the economy as market forces were unleashed, not always with favourable results as the country’s recent economic crises demonstrate. This pattern accelerated throughout the 1980s as Mr Turgut Zal, the architect of the new policy, emerged victorious in the 1983 elections and was re-elected in 1987. In terms of the civil society, business now increasingly became an independent and autonomous actor. Concomitantly, the number of voluntary organizations of all sorts increased tremendously. Between 1980 and 1995 in Istanbul alone, their number grew by more than 150 per cent, from 5,101 to 12,424, and there are signs that this growth is accelerating.52

Although this is obviously a promising development, the relationship between the state and such organizations continues to be influenced by the strong state tradition. The state and many political leaders remain wary of such organizations and are, at best, uneasy about the emergence of an effective civil society. In March 1997, for example, TUSIAD, the leading business organization, published a report analysing the state of democracy in Turkey and proposing various reforms. These included reorganizing the political parties, abolishing the National Security Council, placing the military under tighter civilian control, repealing laws that restrict public debate and granting language autonomy to the Kurds. Perhaps not surprisingly, these suggestions were promptly denounced by the political elites and the military.53 The legal profession encountered similar problems,

the relationship turned out to be a struggle of the bar associations aiming to maximize their power to influence state policies in line with their interests and values and an effort on the part of the state to maintain its autonomy and to minimize interference in its affairs.54

Given the prevalence of such attitudes, the emergence of an effective civil society will be no simple matter.

The weaknesses of the state apparatus and the obstacles that inhibit the emergence of a strong civil society became particularly evident in the aftermath of the disastrous earthquake that struck the western part of the country in August 2000. Corruption had permitted poor construction and misappropriation of funds and resources by Red Crescent officials, the civilian and military responses were poorly planned, uncoordinated and inadequate, and government officials showed little empathy for the victims. One analyst concluded that ‘these problems plunged the state into a crisis of legitimacy, as the image of an all powerful, if not all-benevolent, state was shattered’.55 Of equal significance, however, was the state’s response to the ways in which the civil society responded to the disaster. Many organizations (and individuals) rushed to assist the victims, even forming a Civil Coordination Centre. Early hopes that good would come out of the disaster proved illusory. The organizations ranged from Kemalist to Islamist, from political to apolitical, from state affiliated to opponents. As a result, the early cooperation soon evaporated into rivalry and conflict. This outcome was facilitated by the state’s actions that moved to limit and hinder the activities of various groups (especially the Islamic ones) through various harassing techniques (in which the military played a part). As a result, the hope that these groups could unite around a common vision and programme that would lead to a new
kind of civil society proved illusory. Nevertheless, one should not underestimate the
degree to which civil society continues to expand or the pressures that exist for change. In
1999, for example, the President of TÜSİAD, the leading business organization,
reiterated its call for political and economic reforms.

POLITICAL CULTURE AND ISLAM

Although the changing nature of the political system may have eroded the dominance of
the state somewhat and made it more difficult for the state to control the civil society and
related religious activities, Turkey's institutions are secular. The state retains
responsibility for key sectors, notably education and law, that were once the purview of
the religious establishment and important sources of its power. And although religious
education is now widespread within the secular schools, the goal continues to be to create
and maintain a new political culture by socializing students into an acceptance of Islam as
an integral part of Atatürk's ideology, on being a good Turkish citizen within a
democratic, secular state.

Socialization occurs both informally through teaching methods and interactions and
formally through the curriculum. Although many efforts have been made to modernize
the former, it is generally accepted that traditional authoritarian patterns remain the norm.
The impact of such practices upon political culture remains unclear. Somewhat more data
is available concerning the latter because we possess extensive knowledge of course
organization and curricula at all levels as well as analyses of the textbooks that are used in
various courses.

These studies indicate that the texts used for religious instruction have always stressed
secular values. The texts prepared in 1948–49, while the secular ideology was clearly
dominant, surprisingly remained in use until 1983, despite the great changes that
occurred during those decades. In 1956, I examined the primary school texts and found
that they emphasized nationalism and morality. A good Muslim, for example, was
honourable, reliable and respectful of the rights of others and a loyal citizen. The works
used at the higher levels have a similar orientation; they too teach the basic tenets of the faith
and emphasize individual responsibilities and obligations, especially towards the state, in
such areas as military service and tax paying. Furthermore, Islam is depicted as a religion
that esteems science and technology. The orientation of these works has been well
summarized:

The objective followed by this education is not so much to form good Muslims as to
shape, on the basis of a reshaped Islam, good citizens, veritable patriots and zealous
workers as capable of adapting themselves in their private lives as in their social life
to the evolution of the modern world.

The orientation of the new works published by the military regime in 1983 (significantly
entitled 'Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge') was similar to that of their predecessors,
though they emphasized Atatürk and his ideology far more explicitly and in greater detail
than before. Atatürk is depicted as an advocate of genuine Islam whose policies are
consonant with Islamic teachings. One middle-school text, for example, stresses, in addition to the usual utilitarian view, that Islam endorses liberty of conscience and laicism. At the lyceum level, the orientation is similar, although significant attention is devoted to other religions that are generally depicted as less worthy than Islam.\(^6\) The same message is promulgated (though according to critics in a heavy-handed and ineffectual manner) in related courses—their texts used in middle schools for the history of Turkish revolution and Kemalism and the lyceum sociology course, for example, both stress secularism and Atatürk’s acceptance of Islam.\(^6\)

What of the students who study in the religious schools? Some have argued that there too the emphasis is upon socialization into the official ideology.\(^6\) Others, however, fear that students are socialized into conservative Islamic attitudes. Unfortunately, it is difficult to draw specific conclusions because little research has been carried out in this area, though some data on student backgrounds and their attitudes are available. Although as many as 75 per cent may be of rural origin,\(^6\) most students do not come, as one might expect, from the least developed parts of the country. Nor do they come from the most developed provinces where the large cities are located. Rather, they come from areas that have been modernizing rapidly. They tend to be the sons of farmers, merchants and craftsmen and chose to enrol in these schools because they and their parents approved of the mix of religious and modern subjects. Less is known about their values and orientations. Though they do not appear to be reactionaries, they do hold conservative views concerning women and family relationships (only 8 per cent believed that women can travel alone, 25 per cent that they should be educated). Their favourite courses included, besides Arabic and the Koran, mathematics, physics and literature. Islamic law, Islamic theology, biology and philosophy all were disliked. They did tend, however, to view the world in terms of oppositions.\(^6\)

It is also worth noting that only a small percentage enter the religious professions for which they were trained; an overwhelming majority seek to continue their education, primarily in non-religious areas. Only 10 per cent select a religious faculty, 43 per cent seek admission to law, public administration or international studies, 15 per cent such fields as medicine and engineering. In short, their graduates seek to enter every academic sector and many succeed in gaining admission to the faculty of their choice.\(^6\) The consequences of this development are not clear. They may not be Islamic revolutionaries, but many lean that they are infiltrating the state in order to change its cultural basis to reflect more adequately Islamic values and concerns.\(^6\)

The military certainly shared this view, for one of its key demands, as noted above, involved the reorganization of these schools so that they would admit only older students. Hence, educational issues were largely responsible for the crisis, for Mr Erbakan refused to bow to demands that the religious school system be modified so that students could enrol in these schools only after they had been socialized in nationalist values through middle school. This, and other educational reforms, such as requiring five years of schooling rather than two for enrolment in Koran courses, were subsequently enacted by Mr Yılmaz’s government, despite Islamist opposition.\(^6\)

The military’s faith in education is justified by the available data which shows that the schools and other socializing institutions have effectively promoted a strong commitment
to nationalist values. As early as the 1960s, 50 per cent of a textile factory workforce identified themselves as Turks', 38 per cent as 'Muslims'; a rural survey also found nationalism to rank higher than religion. Three decades later, in 1994, 70 per cent identified themselves as Turks', 21 per cent as 'Muslim Turks', 4 per cent as 'Muslims'. In 1969, a study of migrant workers showed only a weak relationship between religiosity and theocracy. About 20 years later, only 7 per cent of the respondents in a national survey wished to see an Islamic state based on Islamic law. Such values as popular rule and the tolerance of opposition and minorities, and the multi-party system and its institutions are all widely accepted.

Recent surveys corroborate these findings. One concluded that Turks are religious (fasting and praying) but they are also tolerant of other beliefs and deeply committed to secularism. For example, 75 per cent thought that, in direct contrast to the official position, women should be allowed to wear Muslim headscarves even in government offices but 66 per cent were not offended by miniskirts and almost 80 per cent approved of Atatürk's republican principles. Such data are strengthened by a poll of young Turks that concluded that there was a pronounced discrepancy between religious values and religious faith and practices. This finding strongly suggested that religion occupied 'a specific place within the framework of a secularized world view'. Indeed, it has been argued that young people (and women), especially in urban areas, are a major social force that will block the continuing growth of the Islamists. Nor can one overlook the influential Shiite (Alevi) minority, about 20 per cent of the population.

Anthropological studies in small communities also suggest that republican values have been widely disseminated and accepted. Islam and politics generally are viewed as being part of one ideology—a fundamentalist nationalism. Or, at the very least, republican values coexist uneasily with Islamic moral teachings. Hence, though each may be represented by different elites and have its own rituals, important accommodations have been achieved between them.

In short, there seems to be considerable evidence of a commitment to democracy and to the secular state. Politics and religion are regarded as constituting more or less separate spheres and secular considerations should prevail when selecting someone for high office. Overall, the role of Islam in Turkish political life has been aptly described thus: 'Religion in Turkey appears to be an underlying dimension of membership in the political community, it has a moderate role in political ideology, and finally, it is a source of values which affect political goal-setting and behavior in society.' However, those values (e.g. equality, authoritarianism) cannot be identified with certainty.

ISLAMISTS, THE MILITARY AND POLITICS

How can one reconcile such findings with the appeal of the Islamic party? To answer this question it is appropriate to consider the structure, composition and appeal of this party in more detail. Earlier, I discussed the reasons for the growing Islamic feelings within Turkey. Such sentiments, however, do not necessarily translate into political support for the Islamists because, as I have emphasized, there are numerous religious groups with
varying orientations that have traditionally supported other parties such as ANAP and the DYP.

The appeal of the party can be attributed to several factors. First, it is a very well organized and well-financed party that has waged effective campaigns. It carefully tracks voters, provides transportation and takes care of all the administrative details necessary for electoral success. Second, it has been able to mobilize the numerous Islamic organizations that have emerged in recent years (business, labour, youth, women and media) in order to help disseminate its message. Third, that message emphasizes its moderation, its integrity and honesty. These themes resonated well with an electorate that was greatly discontented with the functioning of the political system and its corruption and the performance of the other parties, their divisions and weaknesses. Fourth, disillusionment with the West has grown over its policies in such areas as Bosnia, Kosovo and rejecting Azerbaijan, the withholding of military equipment by the United States and, especially, with the Europeans for their reluctance to accept Turkey as a member of the European Union. The Islamist media has feasted on such events that impact most upon the disadvantaged. Fifth, economic conditions have deteriorated and there is a growing disparity between rich and poor. The party has focused its attention on those who have not benefited from the rapid changes that have swept and continue to sweep through Turkish society. Finally, it has also won widespread support in the Kurdish areas as a protest against the other parties' support of military policies and because it seems to offer the hope of reconciliation through Islam. The appeal of political Islam, in other words, is based, as would be expected from the above discussion of the political culture, largely on instrumental rather than ideological considerations.

The available empirical evidence supports this view. A 1994 survey revealed that only one-third of its vote was religiously motivated. Another analysis suggested that 40 per cent of the vote was based on religious issues and 60 per cent represented a protest vote. Furthermore, half of the 40 per cent were identified as moderates, thus classifying only 20 per cent of its support from radical Muslims. This was extrapolated to mean that perhaps 5 per cent of the population could be considered as militants. Further buttressing such findings are the result of a study of party preferences that concluded that '75 per cent of the Turkish voters have moderate ideological tendencies' and that this tendency has remained constant over time. The results of the 1999 election which saw such a dramatic switch away from the Islamists towards nationalism suggests, however, that pragmatism may lead not to moderation but to chauvinism, though it must be noted that the MHP sought to distance itself from its violent past and to portray itself as a moderate conservative party.

The Islamists have always sought to present a moderate image but there are many different elements within their ranks—Islamic radicals, moderates and even practical businessmen—and there is no consensus on policy although one can point to many radical statements. The Mayor of Istanbul, for example, stated that he would not attempt to impose Islamic dress codes upon women or segregate urban transport. Similarly, the Mayor of Kayseri described the 'Just Order' which deplored the 'order of slavery' imposed by 'Zionism and western imperialism' and called for 'disinfectants' to destroy the 'microbes' of capitalism as 'sheer nonsense'. Moreover, moderate elements made
concessions to the militants in many ways. But, when in power, Mr Erbakan toned down his anti-Western, anti-Israel and anti-NATO stance and did not implement various policies that he had previously advocated, accepting, for example, close defence ties with Israel. Hence, analysts differed in their views of the balance of power between the 'young Islamic progressives' and the radical elements. Some argued that moderation was a mask to gain power, still others that the conflict between the moderate and radical elements within its ranks could end either with a split or with the radicals gaining control.

The military drew its own conclusions as to a likely outcome and, as noted earlier, took strong action to weaken the Islamists. It had been concerned about the threat to the Kemalist ideology for some time. As early as 1986, General Kenan Evren, the President, expressed concern about reactionary tendencies in higher education and it soon became clear that the military was following developments closely, although it did not openly express its concern until the Welfare Party’s victory in the 1994 municipal elections and, following the party’s victory in the 1995 general election, initiated a more active stance that culminated in the decision in early 1997 to demonstrate that it was willing to use force to limit the spread of fundamentalism. It thus achieved its goal of removing Mr Erbakan from office without intervening militarily.

Subsequently it continued to work behind the scenes to weaken the Islamists and their appeal, using the legal system to do so. The public prosecutor sought to ban the party on the grounds of extremism. He cited speeches made by Mr Erbakan, over the years, in which he talked of a ‘jihad’ and his refusal to accede to demands made by the National Security Council concerning religious education. The RP leaders denied these charges and argued that a party that is committed to democratic principles and to peaceful change cannot be banned. The Constitutional Court sided with the prosecutor, closing the party, banning Mr Erbakan from politics and sentencing Mr Tayyip Erdo an, the popular mayor of Istanbul, and a contender for the party leadership, to 10 months in jail.

This was a familiar experience for Mr Erbakan, whose parties had been banned twice before, and a new successor organization, the Virtue Party, was quickly formed. This party, however, suffered from several weaknesses. First, the splits among the Islamists soon led to a leadership struggle and a dispute over policy as Mr Erbakan strove to maintain control from behind the scenes. He fought vigorously to get the party to support a group of deputies who sought to postpone the election because they had not been named to party lists and thus would not be reelected. He did so because, in order to return to open political life, he had to build a coalition to repeal Article 312 of the penal law. Although he eventually prevailed over the ‘young Islamists’, the struggle weakened the party, making it seem as personality and power driven as the others. They also enabled the military, that made it plain that it wanted the elections to be held as scheduled, to maintain its pressure. The public prosecutor promptly filed charges against the new party on the grounds that it was obviously just the outlawed Welfare Party under a new name.

In June 2001, this party too was banned and two of its deputies were expelled from the legislature, although another 100 (the party had 102 out of 580 seats) were permitted to stay in office.

Although the court's decision was handed down well after the election, the legal manoeuvring strengthened a widespread perception that the Islamists were unable to
govern effectively. The Party’s official leader, Recai Kutan, held little appeal and had a
difficult legacy to overcome. Many voters blamed the Islamists for their inept
performance when in power since their policies led to an educational reform that limited
religious schooling as well as political instability and turmoil.

Only one leader emerged unscathed from the events of recent years—B lent Ecevit,
the interim Prime Minister. Having been out of power for years, he has not been tainted
by the scandals that have affected other political leaders. Furthermore, he was
remembered for his strong stand on Cyprus, and the capture of the PKK leader, Abdullah
Calan, enhanced his prestige and popularity. The subsequent terrorist attacks further
focused attention on the Kurdish issue and inflamed nationalist feelings. He also possessed
a strong base on the left (the rival leftist CHP, led by Deniz Baykal, is quite weak and did
poorly in the election).

Accordingly, his victory was no surprise but the election results raise at least two
important points that deserve consideration. First, it would be naive to dismiss the power
and appeal of the Islamists. Despite the severe handicaps under which they laboured, they
still managed to gain 15 per cent of the vote. Second, the appeal of the MHP can be
attributed to a rising nationalism as well as a high degree of disillusionment with the major
centrist parties and the functioning of the political system. One can easily view the votes
for the VP, MHP and HADEP (a pro-Kurdish party) as signs of alienation with the existing
political parties, and if one does so, about 35 per cent of the voters expressed their
dissatisfaction with the system. This is obviously not a healthy situation. Furthermore,
although the future of the Islamic movement’s political activities remain unclear owing to
its factionalism, one cannot rule out the possibility that a charismatic leader could emerge
to lead a new Islamic resurgence.

Even in the absence of such a development the military continues its hard line against
Islam. Fethulla G len, the leader of an Islamic brotherhood that operates an extensive
network of schools in Turkey, Central Asia and elsewhere, was indicted in 1999 ‘For
planning to establish a theocratic dictatorship’ even though Prime Minister B lent Ecevit,
a staunch secularist, has praised him for his charitable works. Eric Rouleau, a former
French ambassador to Turkey, explains the military’s stance as follows, ‘[the] pashas...tend to be suspicious of any Muslim activist who is not under state control’, and adds to
that, ‘what exasperates the supporters of the status quo is that (the Islamic party) has
made itself the champion of democratizations and human rights, thereby implicitly
challenging the political power of the army’.

CONCLUSION

This analysis reveals the extent to which Islam has always been and remains an important
element of Turkish identity. But the nature of its role in society has changed dramatically
over time as a result of the secularizing reforms of Atatürk and the great changes which
have swept over the country since then. Islam has been disestablished though, as has always
been the case, and the state continues to control ‘official’ Islam. Now, however, the
challenge is being posed by radical Islamists who have moved from the periphery to the
centre.
One reason for the growth of Islam is that the state always sought to control Islam and to use it to promote its agenda, as did all political leaders. But at the same time it was challenged by demands from the periphery, demands that were furthered by newly empowered Islamic groups of all kinds and by a changing international environment. Thus, since 1946, every political party (and the military too), in an effort to utilize Islam to advance specific goals, has been willing to make various concessions. However, important differences in terms of motivation (some have been more driven by short-term electoral considerations or by ideology than others) and scope of policy can be identified.

These concessions did much to promote democratic processes. They permitted the integration of peripheral groups into the polity, led to the dilution of the elite-mass gap, and facilitated the promotion of a democratic secular political culture. At the same time, they created an environment wherein Islamist ideologues could thrive and facilitated efforts to control the growth of civil society.

Turkey’s experience is proof that in the modern world secularism does not happen by accident or because of inevitable historical trends. Nor is it an inevitable concomitant of modernization; on the contrary, modernization, because of its strains and dislocations, may well lead people to religion and to assaults on secular values. Secularism is the result of a deliberate political choice, a choice that, if effectively implemented, can lead to the creation of a new political culture which will support a state which espouses such values. And it thrives only if institutions are established that can meet the social, political and economic needs of the populace. If this does not happen, then people will naturally turn to the religious and other organizations that can do so.

For Turkey, the decision to modernize within a secular, democratic framework has yielded precisely this result. On the one hand, it has resulted in the growth of Islamic activities. On the other, barriers have been erected that block the creation of an Islamic state. The Islamist groups have achieved much of their agenda, especially in regard to education and matters of faith, but Turkey today is a complex society upon which it will be difficult to impose an Islamic state that destroys democratic secular values.

There is one fundamental reason for this proposition. Islam can serve as an ideological rallying force only if the state institutions prove ineffective in meeting popular expectations. In the eyes of many, Turkey now stands at a turning point and its leaders confront difficult choices. In the introduction, I identified three major elements that shaped the democratic pattern and the role of Islam therein - the nature of the state, the civil society and the political culture. Further development in each of these, especially the first two, is required, for, as noted above, Islam, like any religion, meets many human needs, needs that become especially acute in times of rapid socioeconomic change. These can be roughly divided into two categories: (1) issues of meaning and morality and (2) issues of economic and social wellbeing. If the appeal of radical Islam is to be stanch or decreased, these needs must be met by the state. This is not to suggest that the state can provide a meaning to life; clearly, that lies in the domain of religion. But the state and its agents can set a moral tone and act in ethical ways. Corruption can be eliminated, social justice promoted, so that the populace will feel that they are living in a state that pursues justice and equity for all its citizens. It also can be a state that is able to devise and implement socioeconomic policies that meet people’s expectations. What is required are
reforms that will lead to the creation of new patterns of political activity and of a new kind of state, one that is smaller, stronger and imbued with an ideology of service rather than control. 88

This means that Turkey must confront many difficult issues including widespread corruption, political stagnation, political liberalization, the role of the military and whether it is wiser to continue to try to exclude, isolate and control the Islamists and their organizations or whether a policy of engagement is more compatible with democratic standards. Repression will not eliminate Islamic feelings and tendencies. Nor will it solve ethnic issues; the problem of the Kurds remains to be dealt with even though the PKK has been defeated. And the Cyprus issue requires solution, for the stalemate not only represents a drain on scarce resources but, what is more important, damages one of Turkey’s primary foreign policy objectives—European Union membership.

Whether the needed reforms can be implemented is not at all clear though the success of the Islamists has caused much soul searching among the secular elites. Before the financial crises that have gripped the country, one could identify some signs that suggested that at least a beginning was being made. Now, however, the economic situation with its resurgence of inflation, the sharp drop in the value of the currency, and the rise in unemployment does not create the kind of environment that would facilitate attempts to create the kind of state that can accommodate new local and national power centres and nurture the establishment of a dynamic civil society.

Under these circumstances, it is obviously difficult to draw definite conclusions about the future of Islam in Turkey, for the situation remains in flux. It is not premature, however, to suggest that its history provides empirical verification for several important points. First, Islam, including its radical variants, is ever changing, for it responds to changing circumstances. Second, its political role is influenced profoundly by the nature of the state and its institutions; the more solidly established the institutions, the more democratic the political culture, the more legitimate the state, the smaller the risk of violent conflicts involving Islam. In other words, the Turkish experience provides powerful support for those who believe that democracy is the most effective antidote to radical Islam and that Islam and democracy are not incompatible. It is precisely because Turkey has travelled further along the road to democracy than most other Islamic states that it is not likely to undergo dramatic revolutionary change in the future. But, if its democratic future is to be assured, then the secular elites must take the necessary actions to travel still further along that road.

NOTES

1 This chapter is an expanded and updated version of an earlier work published as ‘Religion and Democracy: The Turkish Case’, in C.Balim-Harding and C.Imber (eds), The Balance of Truth (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 2000).

6. Metin Heper has pioneered the study of the role of the state in Turkey and has in various works utilized this perspective to provide important insights into Turkey’s political development. See, for example, his *The State Tradition in Turkey* (Walkington, UK: The Eothen Press, 1985), ‘Center and Periphery in the Ottoman Empire’, *International Political Science Review*. 1 (1980); and ‘State and Society in Turkish Political Experience’, in M. Heper and A. Evin (eds), *State, Democracy and the Military: Turkey in the 1980’s* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1988), chap. 1.


18. For a detailed analysis of the nature of the political parties and their relationship to the state, see Metin Heper and Fuat Keyman, ‘Political Patronage and the State in Turkey’, paper presented to the XVIIth World Congress of the International Political Science Association, Seoul, Korea, 1997.


24. Ibid., pp. 18, 20–1.


34. Ibid., pp. 122–3.


41. Salt, ‘Nationalism and Muslim Sentiment’, p. 18.


46. See the analyses of Dumont cited above.

47. See Ayata, Traditional Sufi Orders’, pp. 52–61.


52. A. Yucekok, I. Turan and M. Alkan, Civil Societal Organizations in Istanbul (Istanbul: The Economic and Social History Foundation of Turkey, 1996).


56. Ibid., pp. 5–6.


63. Jacob, L’Enseignement, p. 320.

64. B. Aksoy, ‘Islamic Education in Turkey’, in Tapper, Islam in Modern Turkey, pp. 147 ff.

65. Baloğlu, Türkçeye Eğitim p. 137.

66. Bilici, ‘Sociabilit’, p. 49; Mardin, ‘Culture’.


70. Social Research Centre, Turkish Youth. 98 (Ankara: Konrad Adenauer Foundation, 1999), P, 52.


75. Andrew Mango, Testing Time in Turkey’.


77. The Economist. 8 June 1996, p. 6.


86. Ibid.

87. Ibid., pp. 112–13.