

American Foreign Policy Council

TURKEY

QUICK FACTS

Population: 80,274,604 (est. July 2016)

Area: 783,562 sq km

Ethnic Groups: Turkish 70-75%,
Kurdish 18%, other minorities
7-12%

Religions: Muslim 99.8% (mostly Sunni), other 0.2% (mostly Christians and Jews)

Government Type: Parliamentary Republic

GDP (official exchange rate): \$717.9 billion (est. 2015)

Map and Quick Facts courtesy of the CIA World Factbook (Last updated October 2016)



OVERVIEW

Turkey has sporadically experienced Islamist terrorism since the Iranian Revolution of 1979, but the level of terrorist activity was relatively low between the 2003 Istanbul bombings, for which both al-Qaeda and the local IBDA-C claimed responsibility, and May 2013, when two car bombs exploded in the town of Reyhanlı, killing 51 and injuring 140, in an attack subsequently claimed by the so-called Islamic State. That bombing marked the beginning of a period of rapidly-escalating terrorism. The return of thousands of radicalized foreign and Turkish fighters from Syria has become a grave concern. The Turkish police estimate that there are about 3,000 people linked to ISIS in Turkey¹ and that ISIS militants control many points on Turkey's Syrian border, increasing the risk of a terrorist attack within the country.

Political Islamism has consistently gained strength since the 1980s, and, with the multiple electoral victories of the Islamist-rooted AKP (Justice and Development Party) since November 2002, has become increasingly visible at the grassroots level, as pious Turks enjoy growing representation in the political process.

The AKP's victory in the 2007 election helped solidify the party's hold on political power, and electoral victories since have given the party a virtual monopoly on the country's judiciary, as well as commanding influence over the executive and legislative branches. It has also adopted an increasingly adventurist and difficult foreign policy. Under then-Prime Minister (now-President) Recep Tayyip Erdogan's increasingly authoritarian rule, Turkey has thrown its weight behind Islamist movements in the region, including Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas, and has either ignored or facilitated the passage of radical foreign fighters into Syria.

ISLAMIST ACTIVITY

Islamist activity in Turkey generally takes place via one of the three channels: (1) through Islamist terrorist groups; (2) through the activities of charities and business organizations; and (3) through the activities of the Islamist brotherhoods—*tariqats*, (schools of Sufism) communities and lodges—where political influence leads to cronyism and, ultimately, to corruption. The government has advanced Islamist activities since the 1980s in support of state aims, but it has done so more energetically since the AKP came to power in the last decade.

Terrorist Organizations

IBDA-C

The Islamic Great Eastern Raiders (*İslami Büyükdoğu Akıncılar*, or IBDA) was founded in 1970 as a peripheral youth faction of the National Order Party (*Millî Nizam Partisi*, or MNP), which was at the time headed by Islamic fundamentalist and future prime minister Necmettin Erbakan. Under the leadership of Salih İzzet Erdiş (better known as Salih Mirzabeyoğlu), IBDA gained autonomy from the MNP, affixed “Islamic Great East” to its name, and became the first group in the history of modern Turkey to advocate armed struggle in the service of an Islamic revolution. Its ideology, notable and perhaps unique among modern Islamist groups, is a mixture of Sunni Islam, Trotskyism and Platonic idealism, with specifically Turkish sources of inspiration in the Turkish Nakşibendi order and the writings of the Turkish poet, Necip Fazıl Kısakürek (1905-1983). Kısakürek advocated a return to “pure Islamic

values” and the restoration of a universal Islamic caliphate in the Muslim world. The secular nature of Turkey, he held, was responsible for the state’s inability to ward off what he saw as Western imperialism.² IBDA supports the establishment of a “pure Islamic” state to replace the present “corrupt” Turkish regime that is cooperating with the West. It is rigidly anti-Semitic and anti-Christian.

However, the movement is not a populist one. Rather, it endorses an Islamic aristocracy through its project for a Grand Sublime State. No precise estimate of the size of its membership exists. Members organize independently, without any defined hierarchy or central authority, and both its legal and illegal actions are carried out via autonomous local “front” groups, or *cepheler*—IBDA-Cs—that cooperate with other opposition elements in Turkey when necessary.³ IBDA-C joined al-Qaeda in claiming responsibility for the November 2003 bombings in Istanbul.⁴ In April 2004, a *cepheler* assassinated a retired army colonel and his wife in Istanbul.⁵ And in the summer of 2008, a front staged an armed attack on the United States General Consulate in Istanbul, killing three police officers who had been defending it. Turkish police claimed to have dismantled several *cepheler* the following year. On October 7, 2014, the group formally pledged its support to the Islamic State.⁶

Turkish Hizbullah

Turkish Hizbullah is a Kurdish Islamic (Sunni) extremist organization founded in the 1980s by Hüseyin Velioglu, an ethnic Kurd and former student activist, in the southeastern city of Diyarbakir. The organization, which is unrelated to the Lebanese Shi’ite militia of the same name but shares its sympathy for Iran, seeks to establish an Islamic state in three distinct phases: (1) a period of propaganda and indoctrination, known as *tebliğ* (communication); (2) the consolidation of a popular base, known as *cemaat* (community); and (3) a *jihad* to overthrow the secular order and establish an Islamic state.⁷ Beginning in the mid-1990s, Turkish Hizbullah expanded its activities from killing Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) militants to conducting low-level bombings against liquor stores, bordellos, and other establishments that the organization considered *haram* (forbidden).⁸ The Turkish government initially ignored Hizbullah, even hoping that its Islamism might provide an ideological bulwark against the rival PKK’s atheistic Marxism. (Many in the Turkish press—supported by compelling individual testimonies—believe that Turkish Hizbullah was in fact formed by the so-called “Deep State,” which many in Turkey believe to be comprised of anti-democratic elements in the intelligence services, military, judiciary, and mafia, to counter the growing activity of the PKK). The movement is known for clever-assaults, kidnappings, beatings, acid attacks on women not dressed in an Islamic manner, and particularly barbaric means of assassination. Consecutive Turkish governments have accused Iran of using Hizbullah in a similar manner as Hezbollah in Lebanon.⁹

By the late 1990s, Turkish authorities acknowledged that Hizbullah had become a major threat in its own right, and moved against the group.¹⁰ Leader Huseyin Velioglu was killed in a shootout with Turkish forces at a safe house in Istanbul in January 2000. The incident touched off a series of counterterrorism operations against the group, resulting in some 2,000 detentions and the arrests of several hundred on criminal charges. Turkish Hizbullah has not conducted a major operation since it assassinated the popular Diyarbakir police chief in 2001.¹¹ In January 2010, five members of the group were freed in accordance with a new national law restricting the amount of time suspects can be held while awaiting the final verdict in their cases.¹²

Hüda-Par, the “Free Cause Party”, is a Kurdish Sunni fundamentalist political party that emerged from Turkish Hizbollah. It is reported to be sympathetic to ISIS. Following a decision to end armed struggle in 2002, sympathizers of Turkish Hizbollah founded the Solidarity with the Oppressed Association, *Mustazaflar ile Dayanışma Derneği* or *Mustazaf Der*.¹³ In 2010, Mustazaf Der held a celebration of the Prophet Muhammad’s birthday estimated to have been attended by 120,000 people. A *Diyarbakir* court then ordered the closure of Mustazaf Der on the grounds that it was a front for Hizbollah. Societies associated with Hüda-Par operate under the umbrella organization Lovers of Prophet (*Peygamber Sevdalıları* in Turkish, *Evindarên Pêyxamber* in Kurdish).¹⁴

The Caliphate State

The Caliphate State, also known as the Kaplan group and ICB-AFID, is a Turkish fundamentalist terrorist group that operates in Germany and seeks to overthrow the secular Turkish government and establish an Islamic state modeled after Iran. The group was founded by Cemalettin Kaplan, following his parting with the National Vision (*Millî Görüş*) political movement in Turkey. Its immediate purpose is to gather the Muslim masses living in Europe under an Islamic banner to reject democracy and Western culture. Its ultimate goal is to establish a federative Islamic state on Anatolian soil based on *sharia* by overthrowing the constitutional state and the secular order.

Since Cemalettin Kaplan appointed himself “the *Caliph*” in 1994, the organization has been referred to as the Caliphate State. After Kaplan’s death in 1995, his son Metin Kaplan was elected the new *Caliph*, causing divisions within the organization. Following his declaration of *jihad* against Turkey, the new self-styled *caliph*, Metin, was arrested by German authorities and served a four-year prison sentence in Germany for inciting members of his group to murder a rival Islamic leader. He was then extradited to Turkey, where he was sentenced to life in prison for treason. His followers have reportedly become even more devoted to Kaplan, who is believed to have a fortune worth millions, considering him a martyr for the cause of Allah.¹⁵ The group, organized as *Verband der Islamischen Vereine und Gemeinden e.V. (Islami Ce-*

maat ve Cemiyetler Birliği ICCB) with 1,200 members in Germany and an estimated membership of 5,000 around Europe, was outlawed by the German authorities in 2002.¹⁶ Despite the increasingly Islamist nature of Turkey, the Kaplan group has not changed its attitude toward the Turkish government. Kaplan is still in jail, serving his life sentence, and his followers view that as a grave injustice.¹⁷

The Army of Jerusalem

The Army of Jerusalem (*Kudüs Ordusu* or *Tevhid-Selam*) is an illegal organization which emerged in 1985. Using the publication of several magazines, including *Tevhid* and *Selam*, as a cover, the group often collaborated with other organizations and received its inspiration from the “Qods (Jerusalem) Force”, a paramilitary unit of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.¹⁸ In the year 2000, twenty-four members were indicted for attempting to overthrow the country’s secular regime and establish a state based upon religious law, and for their involvement in the assassinations of several pro-secular journalists and academics during the 1990s. Fifteen of them were subsequently convicted in 2002, with three receiving a death sentence.¹⁹ (The death penalty has since been abolished in Turkey).

Al-Qaeda

Al-Qaeda remains active in Turkey. In 2003, a Turkish chapter of the Bin Laden network surfaced, possibly in collaboration with IBDA-C members, to conduct terrorist attacks against two synagogues, an HSBC bank, and the British consulate.²⁰ Richard Barrett, the head of the UN’s Al Qaeda and Taliban monitoring group, estimated in 2010 that there were over 100 Turkish-speaking al-Qaeda members along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border.²¹ Unfortunately, knowledge about al-Qaeda’s current size and capabilities within Turkey is undercut by a chronic lack of proper study. Turkish police are generally successful at thwarting al-Qaeda’s attacks, and thwarted attacks rarely receive significant media attention. Furthermore, Turkey does not seem a natural target for al-Qaeda, given that it is 99% Muslim with a government heavily influenced by Islamic ideals.²²

Since the Istanbul bombings, Turkish authorities have cracked down on members running the group’s operations in Turkey, sentencing many of them to life in prison.²³ Though no terrorist activity was noted after the 2003 bombings, the recent arrival of thousands of members of the al-Qaeda associate Jabhat al-Nusra (designated a terrorist organization by the United States since December 2012)²⁴ among the estimated 2.7 million Syrian refugees²⁵ who have fled to Turkey since the start of the Syrian civil war in 2011 have raised concerns about potential for future violence. The Turkish

government originally promoted the group as an effective force against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, criticizing the United States for prematurely designating it as a terrorist organization.²⁶

Following bombings near the Syrian border that killed 46 people in May 2013, however, it was widely reported that the Turkish government no longer viewed Nusra favorably.²⁷ Despite statements by the Turkish government holding Syria responsible for the explosions,²⁸ many Turks in the area believe al-Nusra was involved. But credible reports of Turkish support for the group have not subsided. On March 21, 2014, al-Nusra reportedly crossed into Syria from Turkey and seized the Armenian coastal town of Kassab. The Armenian government called on the UN to protect Kassab, evoked the Armenian genocide, and accused Turkey of allowing *jihadists* to cross their border. Ankara denied the accusations and condemned the charge as “confrontational political propaganda.”²⁹ However, accounts of Turkish involvement have multiple credible sources and are plausible.³⁰

Al-Qaeda’s presence in Turkey remains under-studied, and its current numbers are difficult to estimate, in part because the Turkish press does not publish the names of people arrested in connection with al-Qaeda (in compliance with Turkish law forbidding the publication of the full names of criminal suspects). Moreover, al-Qaeda operatives use code names. Many of the details of their operations are never reported.³¹

In January 2015, Turkish military documents were leaked; these accused MIT, the national intelligence service, of shipping weapons to al-Qaeda in Syria. Erdogan has insisted these deliveries were destined for Turkmens. The veracity of the account is hard to establish – as is the veracity of much reported about Turkey since the fallout between Erdogan and Gülen. Media outlets have been completely banned from reporting on the incident.³²

Recently, Al-Qaeda’s former affiliate in Syria called on opposition groups not to aid supporting the Turkey-led Euphrates Shield operation in Syria, saying they are a front for a U.S. occupation.³³

Hizb ut-Tahrir

Hizb ut-Tahrir, founded in 1953, made its way to Turkey in 1978, espousing its aim of establishing an Islamic caliphate and introducing *sharia* law. The Turkish police have frequently detained members of the organization, which was formally outlawed by a Turkish court in 2004.³⁴ The latest raid came in 2009, with authorities detaining 165 suspected Hizb ut-Tahrir members.³⁵ Though the exact size and breadth of the group’s Turkish branch is not known, documents and maps confiscated during the 2009 raids have exposed the organization’s plans to establish a caliphate spanning from Ukraine to Spain in Europe, from Kazakhstan to India in Asia, from Morocco

to Gabon and from Egypt to Mozambique in Africa, and from Madagascar to Indonesia in the Indian Ocean.³⁶ Hizb ut-Tahrir is active in Turkey, despite having been formally banned, and boasts an organizational office in the capital city of Ankara, as well as a dedicated website under the name of *Türkiye Vilayeti*, or Turkish province.³⁷

The Islamic State (ISIS)

While the Islamic State (ISIS) has not yet formally declared Turkey a battlefield, the country has become an important logistical and financial base for the organization. ISIS's strategy has been to create a division between increasingly fundamentalist Sunnis and others in society by carrying out acts of violence that increase the already-significant tensions along Turkey's sectarian, ethnic, and political fault lines. It moreover seeks to raise the price of Turkey's involvement in the anti-ISIS coalition by staging attacks on foreigners in Turkey as a way of targeting its tourism industry. For example, on January 12, 2016, an ISIS suicide bomber attacked Istanbul's historic Sultanahmet Square, killing 12 people. All of the victims killed were foreign citizens in Istanbul for tourism. In response, the Turkish Army launched tank and artillery strikes on ISIS positions in Syria and Iraq.

ISIS seeks to radicalize the Islamist youth who have become alienated from their communities and encourage them to radical action.³⁸ The Ankara polling firm Metropoll has found that an overwhelming majority of Turkey's population, 93.6%, do not sympathize with ISIS, but that some 1.3% does.³⁹ Turkey's population is nearly 79 million, meaning that there are roughly a million potential ISIS recruits in the country.⁴⁰ The most fertile recruiting grounds have been the poorest areas in Turkey's Kurdish southeast, where unemployment is roughly six times higher than elsewhere in the country.⁴¹

The Dokumacılar (Weavers) is a branch of ISIS that specifically targets the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) that fought against ISIS during the Syrian Civil War. Estimates of the group's Turkish membership range from 60 to 400.⁴² It was linked to both the 2015 Diyarbakır rally bombings that killed 4 people and the 2015 Suruç bombing, which killed 32. The group allegedly participated in the unsuccessful fight against YPG forces during the May-July 2015 offensive by Kurdish People's Protection Units and the Free Syrian Army against the town of Tell Abyad in Syria.⁴³

The government's relationship to ISIS militants is the subject of much controversy. Ankara has armed and trained opposition fighters, hosted Syrian dissidents, and backed radical groups like Ahrar al-Sham, which works with Jabhat al-Nusra, Syria's al-Qaeda franchise.⁴⁴ In the past year, Turkey has become far tougher on foreign fighters attempting to travel to Syria via Turkey. But it is unclear how much of the now-extensive radical infrastructure ISIS has implanted in Turkey has been uprooted.⁴⁵ Turkey has launched a broad crackdown on militants streaming across its terri-

tory. It has deployed undercover surveillance teams at major airports and transit hubs, built new barriers across porous sections of the country's border with Syria, and given its spy service expanded powers to monitor communications between new arrivals in Turkey and suspected Islamic State facilitators waiting to greet them in Syria. It has likewise deepened cooperation with the CIA and other U.S. spy agencies. The CIA and its Turkish counterpart, known as the MIT, operate a supposedly secret coordination center close to the Syrian border.⁴⁶

In March 2016, the *Washington Post* reported that Turkey had deported nearly 3,200 people suspected of foreign-fighter-related activities since the war in Syria began in 2011. 3,000 more people await deportation in "returnee centers". But even these numbers are but a small percentage of the total estimated 35,000 fighters who have traveled to Syria since 2011, with 6,600 of them coming from Western countries. The vast majority of these fighters have entered Syria through Turkey.⁴⁷ Cengiz Candar, a Turkish journalist, maintains that Turkey's intelligence service, MIT, helped "midwife" the Islamic State, as well as other *jihadi* groups.⁴⁸ Allegations of Turkish collaboration have ranged from military cooperation and weapons transfers to logistical support, financial assistance, and the provision of medical services.⁴⁹ It is also alleged that Turkey turned a blind eye to ISIS attacks against Kobani.⁵⁰

CNN Turk has reported that Istanbul neighborhoods such as Duzce and Adapazari have become ISIS gathering spots.⁵¹ Training videos allegedly shot in Turkey have been posted on the Turkish ISIS propaganda website takvahaber.net. *CNN Turk* further alleges that Turkish security forces could have stopped these developments if they had wanted to.⁵²

One reason the Turkish government may not be actively targeting ISIS is that most of ISIS operations in Turkey target political opposition parties and the Kurds. Opposition CHP leader Kemal Kiliçdaroğlu claimed on October 14, 2014 that ISIS offices in Istanbul and Gaziantep were used to recruit fighters.⁵³ On June 5, 2015, two bombs exploded at an electoral rally in Diyarbakır held by the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP). Four HDP supporters were killed and over 100 were injured as a result. ISIS was suspected, as were the Dokumacılar. Subsequently, on October 20, 2015, a massive suicide bombing in Ankara killed 109 people. The responsibility for this attack is not yet clear, but the government has pointed to ISIS as the responsible party. Evidence has come to light that Ankara's anti-terror department received intelligence of these attacks before the bombings, including the names of the bombers, but did not inform its superiors or the unit responsible for protecting the rally. Furthermore, Ankara police advised its agents to protect themselves against a potential suicide attack during the October 10th rally, but had not organized any measures to protect the rally attendees.⁵⁴ The attack had a major impact on Turkish voters, and swung their votes in favor of AKP in the November 1st election.⁵⁵

ISIS has also targeted Turkey's cultural sites. In March 2014, ISIS fighters surrounded the tomb of Suleyman Shah, the grandfather of Osman I, who was the founder of the Ottoman Empire, thus preventing the 38 soldiers guarding it from leaving. The Tomb was located in Syria. In February of 2015, Turkey launched an incursion, complete with hundreds of ground troops, tanks, and drones, to recover Suleyman Shah's remains and rescue the 38 soldiers.⁵⁶

ISIS attempts to use the threat of terrorism to negotiate with the Turkish government. In September 2013, ISIS threatened Turkey with a series of suicide attacks in Istanbul and Ankara unless Turkey reopened its Syrian border crossings at Bab al-Hawa and Bab al-Salameh. Later, it was revealed that the hostages were exchanged for a ransom and for 180 ISIS militants who had been apprehended or were undergoing medical treatment in Turkey.⁵⁷

Turkey used tanks and artillery to strike ISIS after the January bombing in Istanbul's Sultanahmet Square, and has shelled ISIS positions in response to ISIS cross-border shelling.⁵⁸ Turkey also now permits the United States and other coalition countries to base aircrafts out of the Incirlik and Diyarbakir air bases in southern Turkey for strikes on ISIS.⁵⁹

Charities/Organizations

In their efforts to better organize and expand their reach, Turkish Islamists have expanded their activity from terrorist groups to NGOs. Nearly every *tariqat*, lodge, or brotherhood has formed its own organization, be it charity or business.

The Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief (IHH), which organized the May 2010 humanitarian aid flotilla to the Gaza Strip that resulted in a raid by Israeli forces that left nine dead, is not considered a terrorist group by Turkey. The group operates as a humanitarian relief organization and has close ties to Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP).⁶⁰ Formed to provide aid to Bosnian Muslims in the mid-1990s,⁶¹ it has held "Special Consultative Status" with the United Nations Economic and Social Council since 2004.⁶² However, French counterterrorism magistrate Jean-Louis Bruguière has accused the group of helping *mujahedeen* to infiltrate the Balkans in the mid-1990s, and alleges that the IHH is affiliated with al-Qaeda.⁶³ For its part, the Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, an Israeli NGO with close ties to the country's military, does not dispute the IHH's legitimate philanthropic activities, but says that the organization is an overt supporter of Hamas and has helped provide weapons and funds for Hamas and other Islamic terrorist groups in the Middle East.⁶⁴ IHH continues to undertake broad humanitarian activities in emergency-stricken areas around the globe with an emphasis on those countries with a Muslim population while using these activities as a cover for relations with global *jihadist* networks.⁶⁵ It has been particularly active in Syria.

Another internationally active relief organization is the Kimse Yok Mu association (KYM). Originally founded in 2002, the KYM has since grown into a huge organization operating internationally with the ability to raise large sums of funds, similar to the IHH. Having become heavily involved in the 2004 tsunami in Indonesia, KYM joined Red Crescent (*Kızılay*), Turkey's state relief organization, and the IHH in aggressively raising funds for Somalia starting in 2010 and 2011.⁶⁶ The organization has close ties to the Gülen movement, an Islamist organization that has become a powerful actor within the Turkish state and which is now in an open war with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. KYM seeks to extend influence via charitable activities that complement the activities of the movement's global network of schools and business initiatives undertaken by the Turkish Federation of Businessmen and Industrialists (TUSKON).⁶⁷ In the wake of the attempted putsch on July 15, 2016, President Erdoğan has been strongly pressing countries around the world to crack down on Gülenist organizations such as Kimse Yok Mu.⁶⁸

Established in 1990, MÜSİAD (the Independent Industrialists and Businessmen's Association) appears to have originally been formed as a more religious counterpoint to the country's predominant business group, the Turkish Industry and Business Association (TUSIAD).⁶⁹ The group does not appear to engage in illegal activity, but operates to extend the reach of Islamist capital—what is called *yeşil sermaye* (green money) in Turkey. Green money is basically money from wealthy Islamist businessmen and Middle Eastern countries that, through careful investment, is funneled into legitimate businesses that end up serving as an engine for Islamist parties.⁷⁰ MUSIAD and TUSKON differ in the nature of their members, with MUSIAD's members coming from AKP's National Vision arm while those close to Gülen's *cemaat* are organized under TUSKON.⁷¹

Brotherhoods

One cannot present an accurate picture of Turkey without highlighting the social activities and political influence of Islamist brotherhoods—namely, the *tariqats*, the *cemaats*, the *tekkes*, and their varying extensions. The problem with the brotherhoods does not lie in their political involvement, however corrupt it may be, but rather in the unconditionally submissive tribal nature of the group to a *sheik*, or a *hoca*, and how the members bow to the wishes of a single gang leader.

While numerous *tariqats* exist, three groups in particular—the Kadiris, the Nakşibendis and the Nurcus—founded the *Milli Nizam Partisi* (National Order Party) in 1970, and then the *Milli Selamet Partisi* (National Salvation Party) a couple of years later. In doing so, they sowed the seeds for the modern political Islamist movement in Turkey. The Nakşibendis and the Nurcus have increasingly become the

dominant forces in Turkey in the last decade, leading to total monopolization of the entire political spectrum after the September 2010 Constitutional Referendum was approved by Turkish voters.⁷²

The Nakşibendis is the most deeply-rooted *tariqat*, originating in Central Asia centuries ago, and, in Turkey, is comprised of the Süleyman, İskenderpaşa, Erenköy, İsmailağa, Işıklılar, Menzilci and Haznevi groups (communities and lodges) among others.⁷³ The Nakşibendis have a long track record of supporting conservative parties on the right, including Islamist parties like Refah and its modern iteration, the AKP. The Süleymancı have dominated the state-controlled Directorate of Religious Affairs since the 1940s.⁷⁴

The İsmailağa lodge has focused on spreading its influence among poor voters,⁷⁵ while the Erenköy and İskenderpaşa lodges have appealed to middle- to upper-class voters. Numerous Turkish political leaders—including Islamist leader Necmettin Erbakan, prime ministers Turgut Özal and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan—have all been a part of or close to the İskenderpaşa community.^{76,77}

The role of the Süleymancı was primarily the provision of Quranic education and keeping mosques open after the banning of religious education in 1925. After Quranic courses were again permitted in 1947, students from the movement spread across Turkey. Today, the movement is one of the most broadly organized in Turkey and Europe, especially in Germany where it controls several hundred mosques and Quranic schools. The group is notable in that a large portion of its members never supported the AKP.⁷⁸

While they differ from one another in interpretation, the Nakşibendi groups are the foundation upon which Turkish political Islam was built. Their worldview is now the dominant political force in Turkey. The ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the government can accurately be described as a coalition of religious orders.

The Nur *cemaat* emerged sometime in the first quarter of the 20th Century (no exact date can be found anywhere, including the movement's own websites) as a Sunni movement based on the teachings of its founder—a Muslim Kurd named Said-i Kürdi (also known as Said-i Nursi), who, in a 1922 letter to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, demanded that the new republic base itself on Islamic principles.⁷⁹ The group was often subjected to pressure by successive Turkish governments until Nursi's death in 1960. Thereafter, the movement has split into different groups, the most active of which is the Fethullah Gülen *cemaat*, which until recently had schools in all regions of Turkey, and still has schools internationally, from Africa to Far East Asia,⁸⁰ including the United States. In addition to schools, the movement included the Journalists and Writers Foundation, various businesses including TUSKON, and media outlets such as *Samanyolu TV*, *Aksiyon Weekly*, *Zaman*, and its English-language edition, *Today's Zaman* – all of which have now been shut down. According to a detailed 2009 study,

the movement seeks to fundamentally transform Turkish society via its extensive network of media, bureaucratic, academic, and economic connections.⁸¹ U.S. government officials have raised concerns over the political agenda of the group as well.⁸²

The Gülenists supported the AKP heartily during its first two terms in office, in particular lending critical support to Prime Minister Erdoğan by helping him to imprison their mutual enemies. However, tensions between Erdoğan and the *cemaat* began to surface after the Israeli raid on the Turkish-flagged flotilla in 2010.⁸³ Those tensions erupted into open hostility on February 7, 2012, when a prosecutor of the “Specially Authorized Judiciary,” known to be controlled by the Gülenists, summoned to its office several high-ranking government officials, including the head of national intelligence Hakan Fidan, a trusted Erdoğan advisor, on suspicion of colluding with the Kurdish PKK.⁸⁴ Erdoğan perceived the action as an attempt to arrest the Turkish Prime Minister in the same manner the Special Authority Courts had arrested generals of the Turkish Armed Forces.⁸⁵ The Special Authority Courts have since been abolished by the Turkish parliament⁸⁶ after Erdoğan called them “the state within the state” and said they were going too far.⁸⁷ To stop the *cemaat*’s infiltration into the state bureaucracies, the Prime Minister began removing Gülenists from positions in the police, judicial, and education systems.

In May 2013, the allegedly Gülenist governor of Istanbul directed a brutal police response against a small environmental protest in Taksim Park. That incident snowballed into nationwide anti-government protests. Widely known as the Gezi protests, the protests took place in 79 out of 81 provinces in Turkey from May 2013 to late June 2013.⁸⁸ Erdoğan’s embrace of the exaggerated police brutality can be seen as confirmation of the existence of a chess game between the two forces competing for power, uniting only when confronted by a common adversary, which was the way the protesters were perceived.

Erdoğan next moved to shut down the *dershanes*, schools that serve as the *cemaats*’ main recruiting tools. The Gülenists correctly perceived this as an existential threat, and retaliated in a similar manner. On December 17, 2013, prosecutors believed to be associated with the Gülen movement launched a massive corruption probe into government officials, with wiretaps leaked daily that appeared to incriminate the prime minister and everyone around him in malfeasance, skullduggery, and theft. The probe was widely understood to be a form of retaliation by the Gülenists, who are well represented within the police and judiciary.

Erdoğan countered by ferreting out his opponents and stifling journalists, firing or reassigning thousands of police officers, consolidating his control of the judiciary, and shutting down social media sites to plug the leaks. He made it clear that he meant to conduct a full-scale purge of the Gülen movement. This campaign has now kicked

into high gear, following the attempted coup attempt of July 2016, which the Turkish government has claimed was carried out in part by a Gülenist faction within the country's military.

ISLAMISM AND SOCIETY

Turkey's population of nearly 79 million is 99.8 percent Muslim, of whom some 70-85 percent are Sunni, primarily of the *Hanafi* school, although the *Shafi'i* school is also represented. Some 15-25 percent of Turks are Alevis—a heterodox Islamic group with no established doctrine. The remainder include Bektaşî, Câferî, and Alawite Muslims, who comprise about four percent of the population, with the remainder mostly Christians and Jews.⁸⁹ During the time of the Ottoman Empire, religious communities were allowed to govern themselves under their own system (*millet*)—*sharia* for Muslims, Canon Law for Christians and *Halakha* for Jews. In the *millet* system, people were defined by their religious affiliations, rather than their ethnic origins. The head of a *millet*—most often a religious hierarch, such as the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Constantinople—reported directly to the Ottoman Sultan.⁹⁰

After the demise of the Ottoman Empire following the First World War, the Republic of Turkey was founded upon the ideals of modernism and secularism.⁹¹ The founders of the modern republic considered the separation of religion and politics an essential step to adopting Western values and secularism, and as a mandatory condition for its success as a Muslim nation.⁹² The new regime therefore abolished the Ottoman sultanate in 1922 and the caliphate in 1924, replacing laws based on *sharia* with European legal codes.⁹³ Additionally, they switched from the Arabic alphabet to the Latin and from the Islamic calendar to the Gregorian while restricting public attire associated with atavistic Ottoman and religious affiliations (outlawing the fez and discouraging women from wearing the veil).

With the abolition of the caliphate, Islam no longer constituted the basis for the Turkish legal system. However, vestiges remained: despite the abolition of *Şeyhülislam*, the superior authority in the matters of Islam, and the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Pious Foundations,⁹⁴ Islam was still preserved as the state religion by the Constitution of 1924.⁹⁵ Meanwhile, the Directorate for Religious Affairs, *Diyanet*, was established to oversee the organization and administration of religious affairs. The Unification of Instruction, *Tevhid-i Tedrisat*, brought all educational establishments under the control of the state.⁹⁶ Hence, the transformation from a imperial-religious entity to a national entity—from an *ummah* to a modern nation-state—was initiated.

Since the start of multi-party democracy in 1946 and the ensuing victory of the *Demokrat Parti* (the Democratic Party) four years later, the Islamist groups consisting of Sufi brotherhoods—*tariqats*, communities and lodges—and have managed to take advantage of the pandering of political parties in competition for votes. Due to these

tactics, brotherhoods have increasingly become powerful players in Turkish politics, often exploiting the deficiencies of the nation's young democratic system. Islamist terrorism has also become a factor since the 1980s, gaining momentum after the 1990s.

The emergence of political Islam in Turkey was connected to the emergence of political Islam elsewhere in the Muslim world, particularly the rise of the Egyptian Ikhwan al-Muslimeen, the Muslim Brotherhood. Numerous scholars have noted the influence of key Brotherhood ideologists on former Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan and the Milli Görüş movement.⁹⁷ While the Ikhwan is in principle opposed to Sufi orders, this does not appear to apply to the Naqshbandi-Khalidi order, which has deep Sunni roots.

In today's Turkey, indigenous Islamist groups imitate the strategies of foreign Islamists. Political sociologists and commentators have long warned of this phenomenon. For example, in a 1999 letter to then-Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit, political scientist Gürbüz Evren warned about the importation of ideas and strategy from the Muslim Brotherhood:

The political Islamist segment is currently trying to establish the Egypt-originated "Muslim Brotherhood" model in Turkey. This model aims to create an "alternative society within a society." According to the model, the fundamental needs of the poverty-stricken masses and the low-income segments are designated. Then, hospitals and medical centers that provide free medical services are established, scholarships are increasingly provided for students, religious educational institutions are disseminated, the number of soup kitchens and charities that hand out clothes and financial aid are increased. On days like wedding days, holidays and child births, people are paid visits to make them feel they are not alone and are given gifts. In short, a society comprised of people who are made to believe that their problems can be solved not by the current order, but via the religion of Islam that embraces them... a society comprised of people who are dressed differently with totally different lifestyles... a society comprised of people who will eventually toil to influence and pressure the rest of the society will be created.⁹⁸

Evren had even warned that a new party based on this model was most likely to be founded out of a cadre of the Islamist *Refah Partisi* (Welfare Party) and *Fazilet Partisi* (Virtue Party). As predicted, the AKP—which contains former members of both Refah and Fazilet—was founded on August 14, 2001, and went on to win the country's November 2002 parliamentary elections.

Grassroots Islamism in Turkey is also strengthened by the infusion of "green money" from other Middle Eastern states. These vast financial flows, estimated by government officials and Turkish economists at between \$6 billion and \$12 billion from 2002 to 2005,⁹⁹ have given both imported and domestic interpretations of Islamism considerable voice in Turkish society. Moreover, terrorist groups active in Turkey appear to be financed not only through domestic methods (including donations, theft,

extortion, and other illicit activity), but also through funds from abroad that contribute to the cost of training and logistics. The amount and origin of such funding is not fully known, but is understood to be substantial. For example, documents recovered in the January 2000 raid against Turkish Hizbullah in Istanbul helped to expose the significant financial and logistical support Iran has provided the group. Since such raids by the security forces often disrupt group activity, foreign support serves as a much-needed lifeline in terms of sanctuary, training, arms, ammunition, food and clothing.¹⁰⁰

Turkish society in general does not appear as susceptible to radical Islamism as that of other Muslim nations or the Muslim communities in Europe. Traditionally, Turks have tended toward relatively liberal schools of thought in Islam, such as the *Hanafi* school of jurisprudence, which grants considerable flexibility to the interpretation of religious law. Arab and Kurdish Islam, however, have tended toward the *Hanbali* and *Shafi'i* schools of thought, based on the Ashari tradition, which are much stricter.

When surveyed in 2007, 42 percent of Turks reported that they consider themselves unreligious or slightly religious, 37 percent are somewhat religious, and 21 percent identify themselves as very religious or extremely religious (with only 1.6 percent falling into the latter category).¹⁰¹ Subsequent polls, such as the 2013 Eurobarometer, showed that the number of self-reported atheists had doubled.¹⁰²

However, Islamist groups in the form of “Islamic holdings” have been known to prey on religious communities in Anatolian Turkey and the religious Turkish population in Germany, borrowing directly from lenders without using any financial intermediaries and accumulating large sums of capital.¹⁰³ The support for Islamist terror groups by Turkish society, on the other hand, has been negligible and is restricted to the extreme minority.

ISLAMISM AND THE STATE

Since the founding of the Turkish Republic, the Turkish state has made an effort to separate Islam from Islamism. In its attempt to erect a tradition of “state Islam,” the government has regulated religious affairs via the *Diyanet* (the Directorate of Religious Affairs established in 1924). The *Diyanet*, directly tied to the office of the Prime Minister, coordinates the building of mosques, trains and appoints *imams*, and determines the topics for weekly Friday sermons by *imams*. Thus, in contrast with other regional states (where governments finance, certify, and supervise mosques but underground radical mosques, Koranic schools, and *imams* successfully compete with government establishments more or less unchecked), state Islam in Turkey has enjoyed a near-monopoly on legitimate expression of the Muslim faith.¹⁰⁴

Over the years, the formally secular nature of the Turkish state has led to constraints on political participation. Article 2 of the Turkish Constitution, which states, “The Republic of Turkey is a democratic, secular and social state governed by the rule of law,”¹⁰⁵ has served as the basis for the closure of four political parties—the *Millet Partisi* (the Nation Party), *Milli Nizam Partisi*, *Refah Partisi* and *Fazilet Partisi*—each of which was charged with violating the secular nature of the Republic. Twenty-two other parties have been banned for various reasons.¹⁰⁶

Turkey’s transition to a multi-party system and the evolution of Turkish democracy has been marked by friction between the competing pulls of modernization and traditional societal norms. Successful collective political action by tribal leaders, in combination with the appeasement policies of political leaders, has given tribal entities a disproportionate voice in Turkish politics, allowing the more traditional minority to dominate the country’s political scene.¹⁰⁷ As a result, even the *Diyanet*, established to control the religious exploitation common in an earlier age, has ended up being dominated by one of the Islamist bodies it was intended to control, namely the Süleymanîs of the Nakşibendi *tariqat*. The outcome has been the further “Sunni-ization” of Turkey over the years, despite the supposed neutrality of the state toward all religions and their branches.

The U.S. State Department’s 2015 Report on International Religious Freedom notes that the Turkish government will not recognize Alevi Muslims’ places of worship, despite the High Court of Appeals’ ruling that it must, and forces Alevi children to be educated via Sunni Islamic instruction. Furthermore, Turkey persecutes individuals who “openly disrespect” Islamic beliefs. However, many convictions in such cases result in suspended sentences or are overturned.¹⁰⁸ The government funds the construction of Sunni mosques, while restricting other groups’ ability to build houses of worship. Furthermore, non-Sunni Muslims face physical violence and threats. Unknown gunmen have fired at Alevi leaders on three separate occasions, and various places of worship have been vandalized.¹⁰⁹

While the Turkish military has been involved in several interventions (commonly termed as “coups”) over the years, only one—the 1997 warning from the country’s National Security Council that led to the resignation of Necmettin Erbakan’s ruling Islamist coalition—was related to a violation of secularism. Indeed, it was the military coup of 1980 that resulted in the emergence of Islamism as a significant political movement. The left had gained much ground in Turkey; religion was viewed as the natural antidote. Moreover, nationalists had become increasingly radical against the rise of socialist forces. Thus the military espoused a new doctrine of the State, the “Turkish-Islamic Synthesis,” the goal of which was to nationalize Islam, Islamize Turkish national identity, and subdue socialist temptations.

The generals who orchestrated the coup sought to use Islam and integrate it into the secular institutions of the Republic. Under the banner of the motto “Mosque, Family, Barracks!” a new era for the Turkish Islamic movements was born. The coup brought with it the expansion of state-run religious services, the introduction of religious education as a compulsory subject in public schools, and the use of the state agency for religious affairs as a tool to promote national solidarity and integration. Sunni Islam became the new source of legitimacy for the Kemalist State.¹¹⁰

The behavior of the governing AKP since grabbing 49.9% of the vote in June 2011 has proven political scientist Gürbüz Evren’s Muslim Brotherhood model to be valid and exposed new approaches of imposing Islamism on Turkish society. The 2010 Constitutional Referendum weakened the separation of powers that previously existed in the Turkish political system, essentially giving the governing party the power to control all three branches of the government.¹¹¹ Nearly all state institutions have been inundated with AKP cadres; any opposition is largely insignificant and has been silenced. In the years since the 2011 elections, not a single resolution out of the 216 attempts by the three opposition parties were accepted, while all 50 of the AKP’s resolutions were approved.

The media has long been under threat in Turkey.¹¹² Turkey leads the world in the number of imprisoned journalists¹¹³ and has dropped from 99th in 2002 to 154th in 2013 (out of 179 nations) in the World Press Freedom Index rankings.¹¹⁴ With the exception of a few small channels and newspapers, most media outlets support the government. Those who do not abide by the rules may wind up in jail or see their careers ended.¹¹⁵

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