



TURKEY

Quick Facts

Population: 80,845,215 (July 2017 est.)

Area: 783,562 sq km

Ethnic Groups: Turkish 70-75%, Kurdish 19%, other minorities 7-12% (2016 est.)

Government Type: Parliamentary republic

GDP (official exchange rate): \$841.2 billion (2017 est.)

Source: CIA World FactBook (Last Updated April 2018)

INTRODUCTION

While Turkey remains a nominally secular republic, political Islam has been ascendant in the country since the military coup of 1980. The consolidation of power of Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Justice and Development Party in the past 15 years, however, has led to the gradual weakening of secularism, and the promotion of political Islam in Turkish public life. Political Islam has become increasingly visible at the grassroots level, as pious Turks enjoy growing representation in the political process.

In parallel, the growing authoritarian tendencies of the Turkish government have stifled political opposition. The transformation of Turkey from a parliamentary to a presidential system of government in a 2017 referendum has ensured, for the time being, that Erdogan's political agenda faces no serious domestic challenges. Erdogan's party has solidified its hold on political power, and electoral victories since this consolidation of power have given the party a virtual monopoly on the country's judiciary, as well as commanding influence over the executive and legislative branches.

Turkey's foreign policy has also been transformed accordingly. Particularly, following the 2011 Arab uprisings, Turkey actively intervened to secure the victory of political Islam across the Middle East and North Africa, lending support especially to the Muslim Brotherhood and affiliated organizations. In the Syrian civil war, the failure of the Brotherhood as a political movement prompted Turkey to coordinate with even more radical Islamist factions in that conflict in the hope of ousting Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. However, Turkey's efforts came to naught in both Egypt and Syria, and led to growing isolation on the regional scene. Turkey's involvement in the Syrian civil war contributed to the growth of Sunni terrorist networks within the nation, as well as to the radicalization of a small but visible minority of the Turkish population.

ISLAMIST ACTIVITY

Islamist forces in Turkey generally take one of three shapes: (1) Islamic brotherhoods and offshoots from these brotherhoods; (2) formally incorporated civil society organizations and business entities; and

(3) Islamist militant and terrorist groups. The Turkish government has historically had an ambiguous relationship with Islamism: secularist tendencies seeking to limit the role of religion in state and society have coexisted with efforts to harness and control Islamism for the purposes of the state. The latter tendency grew in force since the 1980 military coup, and in particular after the AKP came to power in 2003.

Religious Orders and Communities¹

Religious brotherhoods have been the key focus of Turkish Islamic life since Ottoman times. These orders differed in terms of their focus on spiritual matters as opposed to participation in public life; several of them jostled for influence in the Ottoman bureaucracy. They were nevertheless seriously weakened in the second half of the nineteenth century, as the modernization and secularization of the Ottoman state progressed. The Kemalist revolution, furthermore, forced them underground, but also made them increasingly political. From the introduction of multi-party democracy in the 1950s, they have gradually re-emerged as powerful forces in Turkish society and politics.

While Sufi orders are known for their esoteric and mystical nature, one order diverges from this tendency: the Naqshbandi order, which stands out for its compatibility with orthodox, official Islam. Tracing its chain of spiritual transmission to the first Sunni Caliph, Abu Bakr, it is firmly rooted in the orthodox Sunni tradition and in adherence to Sharia.² The branch most influential in Turkey traces to Khalid-i-Baghdadi, a sheikh of Kurdish descent from present-day northern Iraq, who developed a new branch of the order known as Khalidiyya. This new branch built on earlier political activist practices, and added a powerful rejection of foreign rule and non-Islamic ideas. From the 1920s onward, the Khalidiyya became a leading element seeking to restore the supremacy of Sharia law in reaction to secularization reform.³ When this failed, the order grew increasingly oppositional to the Ottoman leadership.⁴

This opposition continued into the Republican era, during which the Khalidi order generated a number of lodges, as well as offshoots—communities that are not formally Naqshbandi-Khalidi, but which were created by individuals steeped in the order's tradition. Examples of formal lodges include the influential Iskender Paşa and Menzil; offshoot groupings include most prominently the Fethullah Gülen community, as well as smaller groups such as the Süleymanlılar.

In political terms, it is hard to overstate the role of the Iskender Paşa lodge. Its leader from 1958 until his death in 1980, Mehmet Zahid Kotku, became the informal leader of Turkish political Islam. Kotku adapted to the new environment of democratic politics, in which he pushed an anti-colonial agenda intent on unshackling Turkey from foreign “economic slavery.” Kotku's followers successfully ensconced themselves in a number of state agencies, most notably the State Planning Organization, where they began to exert influence both on policy and on personnel appointments.⁵ As Turkish scholar Birol Yeşilada has noted, the Naqshbandis “always emphasized the need to conquer the state from within by aligning themselves with powerful sources of capital and political actors.”⁶ This influenced the strategy of many religious communities in the decades to come.

Kotku formally approved the creation of the first major Islamist political party in 1969, Necmettin Erbakan's National Order Party. One contemporary source explains that, “the country has fallen into the hands of freemasons imitating the West ... for the government to fall into the hands of its true representatives within the boundaries of laws, forming a political party is an inevitable historical duty for us. Be part of this enterprise and lead it.”⁷ Kotku's followers in the Iskenderpaşa lodge have reached unprecedented positions in Turkey. Besides Erbakan, Turgut Özal became Prime Minister and President of Turkey, as did Recep Tayyip Erdogan. In addition, over a dozen followers reached ministerial positions—suggesting an enormous influence for a small religious lodge.

Yet, in a sense, the lodge's involvement in politics led to its effective demise. Erbakan's political ambition appears to have been the main culprit.⁸ In 1978, two years before Kotku's death, Korkut Özal - future President Turgut Özal's brother and a senior lodge member - , led a quiet rebellion against Erbakan.

While he claimed to have received Kotku's blessing, the move nevertheless failed.⁹ After Kotku's death, his son-in-law Esad Coşan took over, and, for all practical purposes, severed the link between his lodge and Erbakan's politics. Following the 1997 military intervention, Coşan left Turkey for Australia, where he died. The religious influence of the Iskenderpaşa lodge is no longer an important factor, yet it formed a generation of Turkish Islamist politicians, making an outsize imprint on Turkish politics.

The Menzil lodge, based in Adıyaman, is a branch of the Khalidiyya that has risen to prominence in recent decades. The lodge is very large, having branched out to Turkey's major cities. It grew to prominence in the aftermath of the 1990 military coup, partly because of its support for the state and its proximity to Turkish nationalist groups, including the late founder of the National Unity Party, Muhsin Yazıcıoğlu. In the AKP government, Energy Minister Taner Yıldız and Health Minister Recep Akdağ are known for their allegiance to Menzil. The lodge controls a business association, TÜMSIAD, which boasts 15,000 members, and whose leader, Hasan Sert, is an AKP member of parliament.

The Nurcu movement is often termed a religious brotherhood, but rejects that notion: it terms itself a school of exegesis. Its founder was the preacher Said-i Nursi, who hailed from Erzurum in Kurdish-dominated eastern Turkey. Nursi was strongly influenced by Naqshbandi-Khalidi sheikhs: he studied in Naqshbandi schools, and was formally initiated into the order. Nurcu communities—including the Gülen groups, in turn an offshoot from the Nurcu—all share the common characteristic of seeking to raise new generations trained simultaneously in religious education and modern science.

During the 1960s, Nursi's followers spread all over Turkey, where they set up circles to study his *Risale-i Nur*, a multi-volume exegesis in which Nursi expounded on the meaning of the Quran. After his death, Nursi's movement split over methods for teaching his work. There are a dozen influential Nurcu groups today, the largest and most important of which is the Gülen group. Nursi's teaching urged his followers to remain aloof from politics; most Nurcu groups did so until the creation of the AKP. Yet, they indirectly tended to provide electoral support for center-right parties, and importantly, not the Islamists under Erbakan.

The Gülen movement is an offshoot from the Nurcu community. Over the years, it established its own place—not only by its sheer size, but by emphasizing Gülen's role as spiritual leader over that of Nursi.¹⁰ Gülen, who began his activities in Izmir in the 1960s, refers to the movement as the Hizmet movement, literally meaning "service," a term taken from Nursi's concept of *Hizmet-i imaniye ve Kur'aniye*, or service to the faith and Quran.

The Gülen movement stands out by its focus on education, developing a network of schools that particularly attracted children of conservative families who sought a culturally conservative education.

In the early 1990s, the collapse of the Soviet Union provided an opportunity to export this model to the newly independent Turkic-speaking states. From there on, the movement developed a global presence, with its epicenter in the Poconos mountains in Pennsylvania, where Gülen resides since moving into self-imposed exile in 1998. At its peak, the movement ran an astounding 1,200 schools in 140 countries.¹¹ Before its fallout with Erdoğan in 2013, the movement controlled substantial financial institutions, a large business association, TUSKON, Turkey's largest-circulation newspaper, *Zaman*, and a number of charitable organizations.

Compared to most religious communities in Turkey, the Gülen movement stands out by abstaining from the anti-western attitudes that dominate in Turkey's Islamic milieu. Because Gülen is a resident of the United States since moving there following the 1997 military intervention, the movement is effectively run from his compound in the Poconos Mountains in Pennsylvania. Perhaps, as a result of this, the movement is generally pro-American and eschews the anti-Israeli rhetoric of the Islamist groups of Turkey. Thus, the Gülen movement diverges considerably from its roots in the Naqshbandi-Khalidi movement. While the Gülen movement stayed away from electoral politics, it focused on increasing its presence in the state bureaucracy in ways that were fully clear only in the aftermath of the July 2016 failed military coup. The

movement's considerable success in this regard initially made it Erdoğan's main partner, but subsequently his most powerful enemy.

Similar to the Nurcu movement, the Süleymancı movement has its roots in the Naqshbandi order, but is not technically a lodge of its own. Its founder, Süleyman Hilmi Tunahan, received religious education in the Naqshbandi-Khalidi order. After the suppression of religious schools following the Keamlist revolution, Tunahan developed a network for teaching the Quran in small groups. The movement then spread when Quranic classes were once again allowed in 1947. It is present not only in Turkey, but particularly in Europe, having set up several hundred mosques and Quranic schools in Germany.

Tunahan died in 1959, but his son-in-law, Kemal Kaçar, took over leadership of the movement. The Süleymancı tended to support Süleyman Demirel's Justice Party, and Kaçar served in parliament for the party for many years. However, the movement was divided when Kaçar died in 2000, as a struggle for leadership broke out between two of Tunahan's grandsons. The two wings ended up supporting different political parties: one faction leader, Mehmet Denizolgun, became a founding member of the AKP, while his brother Ahmet shifted political affiliations. He first joined Erbakan's Welfare Party, then switched allegiance to the Motherland Party (ANAP). In 2007, he ran on the ill-fated Democrat Party ticket, but in 2011 and 2015, he supported the nationalist MHP.¹²

Charities/Organizations

In their efforts to better organize and expand their reach, Turkish Islamists have expanded their activity from orders and brotherhoods to NGOs and business groups. Nearly every lodge or religious community has formed affiliated formal organizations.

The most well-known of these may be 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.¹³ The IHH is not considered a terrorist group by Turkey. The group operates as a humanitarian relief organization, and has close ties both to the unreformed Islamist Felicity (Saadet) Party and to the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP).¹⁴ Formed to provide aid to Bosnian Muslims in the mid-1990s,¹⁵ it has held "Special Consultative Status" with the United Nations Economic and Social Council since 2004.¹⁶ 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.¹⁷ 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.¹⁸ IHH continues to undertake broad humanitarian activities in emergency-stricken areas around the globe, placing a larger emphasis on countries with a Muslim population while appearing to use these activities as a cover for relations with global jihadist networks.¹⁹ It has been particularly active in Syria.

Another internationally active relief organization is the Kimse Yok Mu foundation (KYM). Originally founded in 2002, 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 2011.²⁰ The organization has close ties to the Gülen movement. 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).²¹ In the wake of the attempted putsch on July 15, 2016, President Erdogan closed down KYM by decree and strongly pressed countries around the world to crack down on Gülenist organizations such as Kimse Yok Mu.²²

Established in 1990, MÜSİAD (the Independent Industrialists and Businessmen's Association) appears

to have originally been formed as a more religious counterpart to the country's predominant business group, the Turkish Industry and Business Association (TUSIAD).²³ The group's main function appears to be to extend the reach of Islamist capital—what is called yeşil sermaye (green money) in Turkey. Green money is 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.²⁴ MUSIAD and TUSKON differ in the nature of their members, with MUSIAD's members coming from AKP's Milli Görüş tradition, while those close to Gülen's cemaat were organized under TUSKON until that organization was also closed down following the coup.²⁵

Terrorist Organizations

The Islamic Great Eastern Raiders (İslami Büyük Doğu Akıncılar, or IBDA) was founded in 1970 as a peripheral youth faction of Erbakan's National Salvation Party (Millî Selamet Partisi, or MNP). This group, known for short as Akıncılar, saw a splinter group develop under the leadership of Salih Mirzabeyoğlu, known as IBDA-C, the "C" standing for "cephe" or "front." It 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.²⁶ Kısakürek's "Büyük Doğu" or "Great Orient" was an important current within the broader Milli Görüş tradition, and exerted strong influence on leaders such as Abdullah Gül and Tayyip Erdoğan. The *Great Orient* tradition 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, and endorses a form of government led by an "exalted" and authoritarian leader, a Başyüce.

IBDA-C adheres to this ideology, but differs from the mainstream "Grand Orient" currents by its use of violence, including terrorism, to achieve its goals—something that has made the group marginal in political terms. 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 cephe—IBDA-Cs—that cooperate with other opposition elements in Turkey when necessary.²⁷ IBDA-C joined al-Qaeda in claiming responsibility for the November 2003 bombings in Istanbul.²⁸ 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 cephe the following year. On October 7, 2014, the group formally pledged its support to the Islamic State.²⁹

Turkish Hizbullah is a Kurdish Sunni extremist organization founded in the 1980s by Hüseyin Velioglu, an ethnic Kurd and former student activist, in the southeastern city of Diyarbakır. The organization, which is unrelated to the Lebanese Shiite 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.³⁰ It is vehemently hostile to the Marxist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Beginning in the mid-1990s, Turkish Hizbullah expanded its activities from killing PKK militants to conducting low-level bombings against liquor stores and other establishments that the organization considered haram (forbidden).³¹ Turkish Hizbullah is known for cleaver-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.³²

The Turkish government initially ignored Hizbullah, even hoping that its Islamism might provide an ideological bulwark against the rival PKK's atheistic Marxism. Supported by compelling individual testimonies, many believe that Turkish Hizbullah was in fact formed by the so-called "Deep State," an informal cohort of anti-democratic elements in the intelligence services, military, judiciary, and mafia. By the late 1990s, Turkish authorities acknowledged that Hizbullah had become a major threat in its own right, and moved against the group.³³ Leader Huseyin Velioğlu 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 Diyarbakır police chief in 2001.³⁴ 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.³⁵

Hüda-Par, the "Free Cause Party," is a Kurdish Sunni radical party that emerged from Turkish Hizbullah. It is reported to be sympathetic to ISIS. Following a decision to end its armed struggle in 2002, sympathizers of Turkish Hizbullah founded the Solidarity with the Oppressed Association, *Mustazaflar ile Dayanışma Derneği* or *Mustazaf Der*.³⁶ In 2010, *Mustazaf Der* held a celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday estimated to have been attended by 120,000 people. A Diyarbakır court then ordered the closure of *Mustazaf Der* on the grounds that it was a front for Hizbullah. Societies associated with *Hüda-Par* operate under the umbrella organization *Lovers of Prophet (Peygamber Sevdalıları* in Turkish, *Evindarên Pêyxamber* in Kurdish).³⁷

The Caliphate State, also known as the Kaplan group and ICB-AFID, is a 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 *Millî Görüş* 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 "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 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.³⁸ The group, organized as *Verband der Islamischen Vereine und Gemeinden e.V.* (*Islami Cemaat 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 2002.³⁹ Despite the increasingly Islamist nature of Turkey, the Kaplan group has not changed its attitude toward the Turkish government. Kaplan was released from jail in November 2016, pending a retrial that had yet to take place a year later.⁴⁰

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.⁴¹ In 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.⁴² (The death penalty has since been abolished in Turkey).

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.⁴³ 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.⁴⁴ 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 its government is heavily influenced by Islamic ideals.⁴⁵

Since the Istanbul bombings, Turkish authorities cracked down on members running the group's operations in Turkey, sentencing many of them to life in prison.⁴⁶ 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)⁴⁷ among the estimated 2.7 million Syrian refugees⁴⁸ 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 promoted the Nusra Front as an effective force against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, criticizing the United States for prematurely designating it as a terrorist organization.⁴⁹ Significant American pressure forced Turkey to distance itself publicly from al-Nusra.

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 al-Nusra favorably.⁵⁰ Despite statements by the Turkish government holding Syria responsible for the explosions,⁵¹ many Turks in the area believe al-Nusra was involved. Despite these events, credible reports of Turkish support for the group have not subsided. In March, 2014, al-Nusra crossed into Syria from Turkey and seized the ethnic Armenian coastal town of Kessab. Despite official denials, accounts of Turkish involvement have multiple credible sources and are plausible.⁵² The Syrian government retook control of Kessab three months later.

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.⁵³

In January 2015, leaked Turkish military documents indicated that the Turkish national intelligence service (MIT) was shipping weapons to al-Qaeda in Syria. Erdogan insisted these deliveries were destined for Syrian Turkmen groups. 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 officially banned from reporting on the incident.⁵⁴

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 2004.⁵⁵ The latest raid came in 2009, with authorities detaining 165 suspected Hizb ut-Tahrir members.⁵⁶ 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 across large portions of the globe.⁵⁷ 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.⁵⁸ From 2013 to 2016, the organization held yearly meetings and demonstrations in support of the reinstatement of the Caliphate, without encountering government intervention. In March 2017, however, its attempt to hold a conference in support of the Caliphate was denied, and Hizb ut-Tahrir leaders were briefly detained. However, they were released within several days, in contrast to secularist and Kurdish activists that have lingered in jails for months to years.⁵⁹

For several years, Turkey was an important logistical and financial base for the Islamic State. However, as the groups began targeting interests in Turkey, the government gradually altered its laissez-faire attitude to one of greater efforts to limit the group's presence in the country. The basic logic behind Turkey's approach to ISIS has been that it is a lesser danger to Turkey than either the Kurdish forces in Syria, or the Assad regime. ISIS's strategy, on the other hand, was first to lay low in Turkey; but when the group was unable to operate unhindered in the country, it began to seek to create a division between increasingly extremist 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 tourists. 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.⁶⁰ 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.⁶¹ Turkey's population is nearly 79 million, meaning that there are roughly a million potential ISIS sympathizers in the country.⁶² 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.⁶³

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 400.⁶⁴ It was linked to both the 2015 Diyarbakır rally bombings that killed 4 people and the 2015 Suroç bombing, which killed 32.

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.⁶⁵ Cengiz Candar, a Turkish journalist, maintains that Turkey's intelligence service, MIT, helped "midwife" the Islamic State, as well as other jihadi groups.⁶⁶

However, in 2015, Turkey gradually become far tougher on foreign fighters attempting to travel to Syria via Turkey. Turkey has launched a broad crackdown on militants streaming across its territory. 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 intelligence 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. agencies. The CIA and MIT operate a supposedly secret coordination center close to the Syrian border.⁶⁷ Still, it is unclear how much of the now-extensive radical infrastructure ISIS has implanted in Turkey has been uprooted.⁶⁸

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. An additional 3,000 were awaiting 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.⁶⁹

One reason the Turkish government may have been slow to target ISIS is that most of ISIS's operations in Turkey have targeted political opposition parties and Kurdish activists. 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 government 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.⁷⁰ The attack had a major impact on Turkish voters, and swung their votes in favor of AKP in the November 1st election.⁷¹

ISIS has attempted 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.⁷²

Turkey used tanks and artillery to strike ISIS after the January bombing in Istanbul's Sultanahmet Square, and shelled ISIS positions in response to ISIS cross-border shelling.⁷³ Turkey now permits the United States and other coalition countries to base aircrafts out of the Incirlik and Diyarbakır air bases in southern Turkey for strikes on ISIS.⁷⁴

On August 24, 2016, Turkey launched a military operation in northern Syria, called Operation Euphrates Shield. Ankara claimed that the main objectives of the campaign were to maintain border security, confront ISIS, and deny the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), as well as its Syrian affiliates, a fait accompli to create autonomous zones on Turkey's border. The U.S.-led anti-ISIL coalition initially backed the operation, but changed its stance when Ankara decided to push deeper into Al-Bab. Ankara criticized the West for its lack of support, and instead conducted joint air operations with Russia over Al-Bab, with considerable success.⁷⁵ Backed by Turkish air, armour, and artillery support, Free Syrian Army forces announced the capture of the city, a major stronghold of the Islamic State, on February 24. Turkey continued to secure a "de-escalation zone" in northern Syria in the fall of 2017, with Russian acquiescence. In October 2017, Turkish police detained 143 people, mostly foreign national, in a raid to root out ISIS cells in the country.⁷⁶

ISLAMISM AND SOCIETY

Turkey's population of nearly 80 million is over 99 percent of Muslim heritage. About 80 percent are Sunni, primarily of the Hanafi school, although the Shafi'i school is also represented primarily among Turkey's Kurds. Some 15-20 percent of Turks are Alevi—an indigenous religious tradition nominally belonging to Shia Islam, but with strong syncretistic elements drawing on Christian and neo-Platonic traditions. The Bektaşî order is strongly wedded to Alevi beliefs.⁷⁷ In addition, 2-3 million adhere to the twelver Jafari Shia practiced in Iran—chiefly among Azerbaijani Turks in eastern Turkey—while several hundred thousand Nusairi exist in southern Turkey, near the Syrian border.

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.⁷⁸ 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.⁷⁹ 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.⁸⁰ The new regime therefore abolished the Ottoman sultanate in 1922 and the caliphate in 1924, replacing laws based on sharia with European legal codes.⁸¹ Additionally, they switched from the Arabic alphabet to the Latin and from the Islamic calendar to the Gregorian while restricting public attire associated with 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,⁸² Islam was still preserved as the state religion by the Constitution of 1924, but this clause was abolished in 1928.⁸³ 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.⁸⁴ Hence, the transformation from an 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, Islamic groups have managed to take advantage of the pandering of political parties in competition for votes. In part because they are capable of delivering considerable block votes to political parties, these orders and communities have increasingly become powerful players in Turkish politics, exploiting the deficiencies of the nation's young democratic system.

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.⁸⁵ 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 Bülent Ecevit, political scientist Gürbüz Evren warned about the importation of ideas and strategy from the Muslim Brotherhood, and 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.⁸⁶

Grassroots Islamism in Turkey is also strengthened by the infusion of “green money” from Middle Eastern states. These vast financial flows, estimated by government officials and Turkish economists to be worth billions on a yearly basis,⁸⁷ have given both imported and domestic interpretations of Islamism considerable voice in Turkish society. Moreover, extremist 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.⁸⁸

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 and Maturidi tradition, which grant 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).⁸⁹ Subsequent polls, such as the 2013 Eurobarometer, showed that the number of self-reported atheists had doubled.⁹⁰

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.⁹¹ 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.⁹²

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,”⁹³ has served as the basis for the closure of four political parties—the Milli Nizam Partisi, Milli Selamet 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.⁹⁴

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.⁹⁵ 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 Nakşibendi order. 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.

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. In fact, it was the military coup of 1980 that boosted the emergence of Islamism as a significant political movement. The left had gained much ground in Turkey; the state viewed religion as the natural antidote to combat leftist influences. 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. Under the watchful eye of the supposedly secularist generals, Sunni Islam became the new source of legitimacy for the Kemalist State.⁹⁶

The behavior of the governing AKP since grabbing 49.9% of the vote in June 2011 has 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.⁹⁷ 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 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.⁹⁸ The government funds the construction of Sunni mosques, while restricting other groups' ability to build houses of worship.

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