

American Foreign Policy Council

TURKEY

QUICK FACTS

Population: 81,619,392

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: republican parliamentary democracy

GDP (official exchange rate): \$821.8 billion

Map and Quick Facts courtesy of the CIA World Factbook (Last Updated June 2014)



While Turkey has sporadically experienced Islamist terrorism since the Iranian Revolution of 1979, the level of terrorist activity has been relatively low since the 2003 Istanbul bombings for which both al-Qaeda and the local IBDA-C claimed responsibility. By contrast, 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 election victory in 2007 helped solidify the party's hold on political power, accelerating the placement of Islamists and those sympathetic to it in key posts across all three branches of the Turkish government and state bureaucracies and allowing it to use state power to help build business empires.¹ Moreover, a 2011 referendum allowed the AKP to increase its control over the judiciary, leading to the virtual monopolization of the judicial branch in addition to its control of the executive

*and legislative branches. As a result, reforms advertised as steps toward democratization have in fact only created a new kind of authoritarianism, which some have described as a police state following the government's brutal reaction toward widespread anti-government protests in June 2013.*²

The secular traditions of the Turkish Republic limit the appeal of radical Islamism in Turkish society, although religion is important to a large majority of Turks.³ Nevertheless, while the Turkish government is by and large effective in combating Islamist terrorism,⁴ the deficiencies of Turkish democracy⁵ make it possible for Islamists to exploit Islam and surreptitiously extend their reach in politics. With the rise of the AKP, Islamist brotherhoods and organizations have increasingly become the dominant political forces steering the ship of the Turkish state and working to broaden Islamism's appeal to ordinary Turks and to Turkish youth in particular.⁶

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, most important, (3) through the activities of the Islamist brotherhoods—*tariqats*, communities and lodges—where political influence leads to cronyism and, ultimately, to corruption. In recent years, however, a fourth avenue has been witnessed: the active role of the government in advancing Islamist agenda.

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.⁷ 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.

The movement is not populist but rather 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 *cephkeker*—IBDA-Cs—which cooperate with other opposition elements in Turkey when necessary.⁸ IBDA-C joined al-Qaeda in claiming responsibility for the November 2003 bombings in Istanbul.⁹ In April 2004, a front assassinated a retired army colonel and his wife in Istanbul. 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 fronts the following year.

Turkish Hizbullah is a Kurdish Islamic (Sunni) extremist organization founded in the 1980s by Hüseyin Veliöğlu, an ethnic Kurd and former student activist, in the southeastern city of Diyarbakır. The organization, which is unrelated to the Lebanese Shi’ite militia of the same name but which 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*, or “communication;” (2) the consolidation of a popular base, known as *cemaat*, or “community;” and (3) a *jihad* to overthrow the secular order and establish an Islamic state.¹⁰ 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 ¹¹ 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 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. Successive Turkish governments have accused Iran of using Hizbullah as a fifth column.

By the late 1990s, Turkish authorities acknowledged that Hizbullah had become a major threat in its own right, and moved against the group.¹² Leader Huseyin Veliöğlu 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 2001.¹³ 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.¹⁴

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 the 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 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 2002.¹⁶

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 cover, the group often collaborated with other organizations and received its inspiration from the “Qods (Jerusalem) Force” paramilitary unit of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.¹⁷ 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.¹⁸ (The death penalty has since been abolished in Turkey).

Al-Qaeda is also 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.¹⁹ According to Richard Barrett, the head of the UN’s Al Qaeda and Taliban monitoring group, there are over 100 Turkish-speaking al-Qaeda members along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border.²⁰ 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.²¹ 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)²² amongst the nine hundred thousand Syrian refugees²³ who fled to Turkey have raised concerns. The Turkish government originally promoted the group as an effective force against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, criticizing the USA for prematurely designating it as a terrorist organization.²⁴

Following bombings near the Syrian border that killed 46 people in May 2013, it was widely reported that the Turkish government no longer viewed the group favorably.²⁵ Despite statements by the Turkish government holding Syria responsible for the explosions,²⁶ many Turks in the area believe al-Nusra was involved.²⁷ But credible reports of Turkish support for the group have not ebbed. On March 21, al-Nusra reportedly crossed into Syria from Turkey and seized the Armenian coastal town of Kessab. The Armenian government called on the UN to protect Kessab, evoked the Armenian genocide, and accused Turkey of allowing jihadists cross their border to attack it. Ankara denied the accusations and condemned the charge as “confrontational political propaganda.” However, the accounts of Turkish involvement are multiply-sourced and plausible.²⁸

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 in Turkey. The Turkish police have often detained members of the organization, which was formally outlawed by a Turkish court in 2004.²⁹ The latest raid came in 2009 with the authorities detaining 165 suspected Hizb ut-Tahrir members.³⁰ 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.³¹ 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.³²

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 IHH (The Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief), which organized the May 2010 humanitarian aid flotilla to the Gaza Strip that resulted in a raid by Israeli forces, leaving nine dead, is not considered a terrorist group. The group operates as a humanitarian relief organization and has close ties to Turkey’s ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP).³³ Formed to provide aid to Bosnian Muslims in the mid-1990s,³⁴ it has held “Special Consultative Status” with the United Nations Economic and Social Council since 2004.³⁵ However, French counterterrorism magistrate Jean-Louis Bruguière has accused the group of helping *mujahideen* to infiltrate the Balkans in the mid-1990s, and alleges that the IHH is affiliated with al-Qaeda.³⁶ 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.³⁷ 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.³⁸

Another internationally active relief organization is the KYM (The “Kimse Yok Mu” Association). Originally founded in 2002 the HYM has since grown into a huge organization operating internationally with the ability to raise large sums of funds like the IHH. Having become heavily involved in the 2004 tsunami in Indonesia, the KYM joined Red Crescent (Kızılay), Turkey’s state relief organization, and the IHH in aggressively raising funds for Somalia starting in 2010 and 2011.³⁹ 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 prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The 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).⁴⁰

Established in 1990, MÜSIAD (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).⁴¹ 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.⁴² 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.⁴³

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*, i.e., 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 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 whole political spectrum after the September 2010 Constitutional Referendum was approved by the Turkish voters.⁴⁴

The most deeply-rooted *tariqat*, originating in Middle Asia centuries ago, the Nakşibendis in Turkey are comprised of the Suleyman, Iskenderpaşa, Erenköy, İsmailağa, Işıklılar, Menzilci and Haznevi groups (communities and lodges) among others.⁴⁵ 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 Süleymanci have dominated the state-controlled Directorate of Religious Affairs since the 1940s.⁴⁶

The İsmailağa lodge has focused on spreading its influence among poor voters,⁴⁷ while the Erenköy and Iskenderpaşa lodges have appealed to middle- to upper-class voters. Turkish political leaders including Islamist leader Necmettin Erbakan, prime ministers Turgut Özal and Tayyip Erdoğan—have all been a part of or close to the Iskenderpaşa community.^{48, 49}

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 Kurdi (also known as Said-i Nursi), who, in a 1922 letter to President Atatürk demanded that the new republic base itself on Islamic principles.⁵⁰ 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 has schools not only in all regions of Turkey, but also internationally from Africa to the Far East Asia,⁵¹ including the United States. In addition to schools, the movement includes the Journalists and Writers Foundation, various businesses including the Turkish Federation of Businessmen and Industrialists (TUSKON), and media outlets such as *Samanyolu TV*, *Aksiyon Weekly*, *Zaman* and its English-language edition, *Today's Zaman*. 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.⁵² Concerns over the political agenda of the group have been raised by U.S. government officials as well.⁵³

The Gülenists supported the AKP (Justice and Development Party) closely 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 Prime Minister Erdoğan and the *cemaat* began to surface after the Israeli raid on the Turkish-flagged flotilla in 2010.⁵⁴ 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 Hakan Fidan, a trusted Erdoğan advisor, don suspicion of colluding with the Kurdish PKK.⁵⁵ The action was perceived by Erdoğan 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, journalists, writers, academicians, top soccer club executives and Kurdish leaders in the highly publicized

Ergenekon, Sledgehammer, KCK and match-fixing cases.⁵⁶ The Special Authority Courts have since been abolished by the Turkish parliament⁵⁷ after Erdoğan called them “the state within the state” and said they were going too far.⁵⁸

To stop the *cemaat's* infiltration into the state bureaucracies, the prime minister has begun removing Gülenists from positions in the police, judiciary and education system. During a visit to the U.S. by President Erdogan in May 2013, deputy prime minister Bulent Arinc, known to be close to Gülen, relayed a message to the patriarch at his home in northeastern Pennsylvania. The response reportedly was not positive.⁵⁹

This was followed two months later by brutal police behavior directed by the governor of Istanbul – also believed to be a Gülenist - against a small environmental protest in Taksim park which snowballed into nationwide anti-government protests. Widely known as the *Gezi* protests, they reached 79 of 81 Turkish cities from May 2013 to late June 2013.⁶⁰ 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 *cemaat's* main recruiting tools. The Gülenists correctly perceived this as an existential threat, and retaliated in a like 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 appear to incriminate the prime minister and everyone around him in a three-ring circus of malfeasance, skullduggery and theft. The probe was widely and for good reason 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 has made it clear that he means to conduct a full-scale purge of the Gülen movement: In his victory speech, following the March 30 municipal elections, he threatened to hunt them “in their lairs.” “Those who managed could flee,” he said. “More can flee tomorrow.” Key Gülenists have been detained for questioning, and the Turkish government has withdrawn completely its support for Gülenist businesses and support overseas.

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 Alevi—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.⁶¹ During the reign 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.⁶²

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.⁶³ 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.⁶⁴ The new regime therefore abolished the Ottoman sultanate in 1922 and the caliphate in 1924, replacing laws based on *sharia* with European legal codes.⁶⁵ 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 abolishment of *Şeyhülislam*, the superior authority in the matters of Islam, and the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Pious Foundations,⁶⁶ Islam was still preserved as the state religion by the Constitution of 1924.⁶⁷ 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.⁶⁸ Hence, the transformation from a tribal entity to a national entity—from an *umma* to a modern nation-state—was initiated.

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

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.⁶⁹

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 2005,⁷⁰ 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 via funds from abroad as well as 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 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.⁷¹

Turkish society in general does not appear as susceptible to radical Islamism as that of other Muslim nations or the Muslim communities in Europe. When it comes to religious conservatism, 42 percent of Turks consider themselves irreligious or slightly religious, 37% are somewhat religious while just half that number, 21 percent, identify themselves as very religious or extremely religious (with only 1.6 percent falling into the latter category).⁷² However, Islamist groups in the form of “Islamic holdings” have been known to prey on religious communities in Anatolian Turkey and the reli-

gious Turkish population in Germany, borrowing directly from lenders without using any financial intermediaries and accumulating large sums of capital.⁷³ The support for Islamist terror groups by the 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.⁷⁴

Over the years, the formally secular nature of the Turkish state has led to constraints on political participation as well. Article 2 of the Turkish Constitution, which codifies that “The Republic of Turkey is a democratic, secular and social state governed by the rule of law,”⁷⁵ 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 other reasons.⁷⁶

Turkey’s transition to a multi-party system and the evolution of the Turkish democracy has been marked by friction between the competing pulls of modernization and traditional societal mores. 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.⁷⁷ 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 *Süleymançıs* 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 2010 Report on International Religious Freedom notes that the Turkish state “provided training for Sunni Muslim clerics” while “religious communities outside the Sunni Muslim mainstream have not found a suitable system to train leadership inside the country within the current legal framework.”⁷⁸ The report goes on to detail that “Alevi children received the same compulsory religious

education as all Muslim students, and many Alevis alleged discrimination in the government's failure to include any of their doctrines or beliefs in religious instruction classes in public schools."⁷⁹

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 Islamists 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 instrumentalize Islam and integrate it into the secular institutions of the Republic. Under the banner of the motto "Mosque, Family, Barracks!" a new era for 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 legitimization for the Kemalist State.⁸⁰

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 the Turkish society. The 2010 Constitutional Referendum weakened separation of powers that existed in the Turkish political system, essentially giving the governing party the power to control all three branches of the government.⁸¹ Nearly all state institutions have been inundated with AKP cadres and the opposition has been silenced due to the majority control of the parliament. 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 resolutions were approved.

Moreover, media freedom is now being threatened in Turkey.⁸² Turkey leads the world in the number of imprisoned journalists⁸³ and has dropped from 99th in 2002 to 154th in 2013 (out of 179 nations) in the World Press Freedom Index rankings.⁸⁴ With the exception of a few small channels and newspapers, most media outlets provide unconditional support for the government. Those who do not abide by the rules either wind up in jail or see their careers ended.⁸⁵

ENDNOTES

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