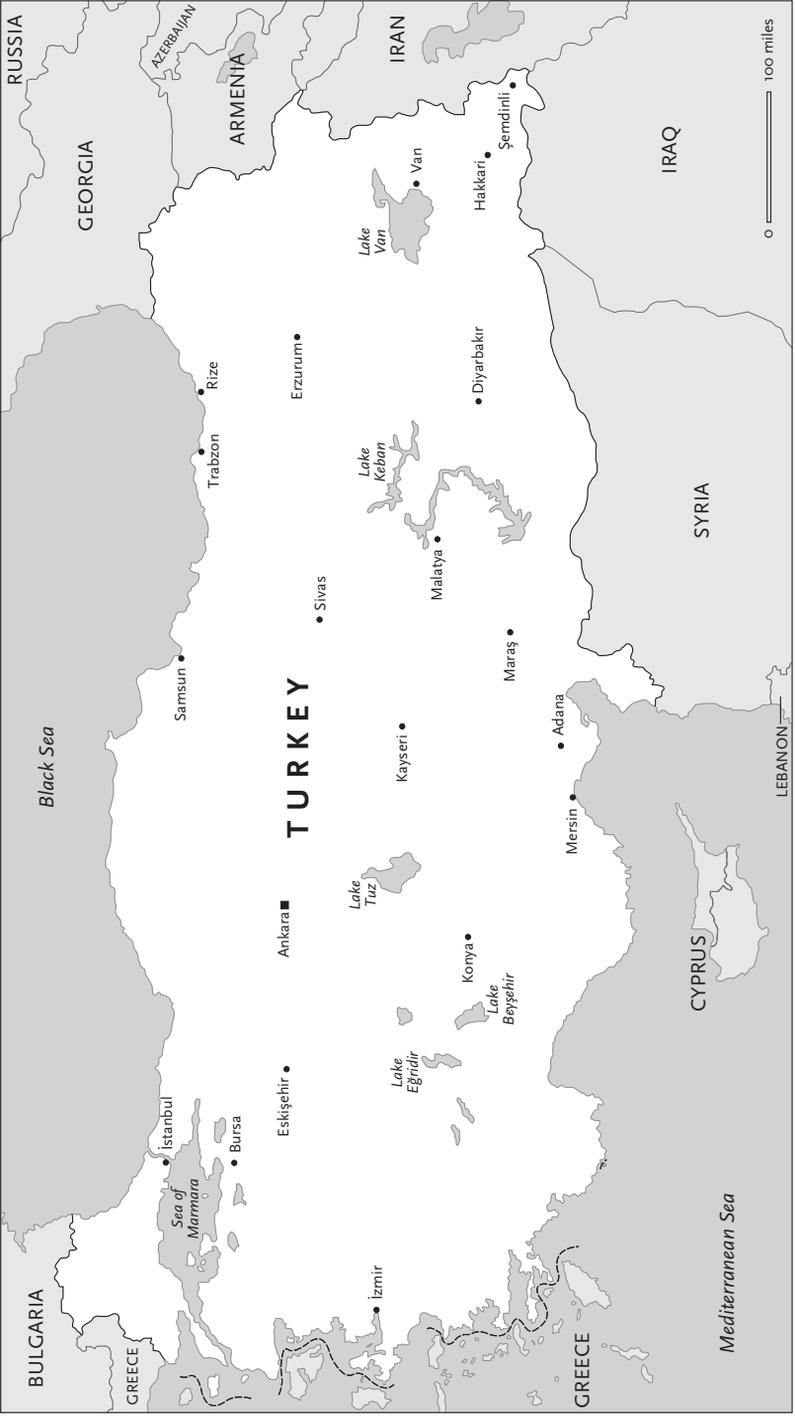


## NATO'S ISLAMISTS

*Hegemony and Americanization in Turkey*

THE TENSIONS CURRENTLY convulsing the Middle East—Western military offensive, Islamicized resistance, economic turbulence, demographic upheaval—have taken a peculiarly Americanized form in Turkey.<sup>1</sup> The secular Republic of Kemal Atatürk, NATO's longstanding bulwark in the region, is now ruled by men who pray. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP)—the latest incarnation of a once-banned Islamist movement—has a 60 per cent majority in the Assembly, or Meclis, forming the first non-coalition government in Ankara for fifteen years. Prime Minister Erdoğan is himself a possible candidate for the presidency, a seven-year appointment in the gift of the Meclis under the Republic's notoriously unrepresentative democracy. Predictably, perhaps, though elected primarily by the votes of the poor—above all, the young, informal proletariat now crowding Turkey's cities—Erdoğan's government is slashing government spending, aiming at a fiscal surplus of 6 per cent of GDP in the coming year. Though proclaiming solidarity with the Muslim world, it has dispatched Turkish troops to join the UN occupation force in Southern Lebanon, and was only restrained from sending them to Iraq by the urgent pleas of the Iraqi-Kurdish President, Jalal Talabani. Yet the AKP is widely expected to win the Autumn 2007 elections, and has largely retained its support among provincial capitalists, the pious small bourgeoisie, the newly urbanized poor, important fractions of the police and much of the liberal, left-leaning intelligentsia.

To grasp the paradoxical nature of the changes in Turkey, it is first necessary to consider the peculiar meaning that 'secularism' (*laiklik*) has had for the Kemalist state. Between 1919 and 1923, with the defeated Ottoman



Empire effectively partitioned by the Entente powers, the founding wars for the Turkish Republic waged by Kemal's troops had appealed not only to the national liberation 'dream' of fatherland and freedom, but to the Muslim duty to resist the infidel occupation. Religious homogenization was an important constituent element of national unity, with the birth of the Republic attended by the expulsion of Orthodox Greeks, as pendant to the 1915 massacres of Armenians. The question, rather, was of the relation between religion and the state. In this sense, secularization—as expanding state control over religion—was a project of the 19th-century Tanzimat reforms. In 1924, the founding Constitution of the Republic retained Islam as the state religion, even as the Caliphate, fez, religious courts and schools, et cetera, were swept away and the Latin alphabet and Western legal code introduced; the clause was removed in 1928. Secularization was formally enunciated as one of the six principles of the Kemalist Republican People's Party's programme in 1931, and finally incorporated into the Constitution in 1937.

In the official view, rehearsed by many Western scholars, the 1924–25 modernizations constitute categorical proof of the disestablishment of religion in Turkey.<sup>2</sup> With Islam removed from every official public site, this argument runs, religious sectors of the population will eventually adapt to the ruling reality and become thoroughly secularized. Others have argued, however, that the Turkish state has controlled and institutionalized Islam, rather than disestablishing it.<sup>3</sup> Thus the (non-elected) Directorate General of Religious Affairs exercises a monopoly power over the appointment of preachers and imams throughout the country, and controls the distribution of sermons. In this view there are clear continuities between the Turkish Republic and the Ottoman system, where state and religion were deeply imbricated.

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Michael Burawoy, Dylan Riley and Aynur Sadet for helping me develop the ideas in this piece.

<sup>2</sup> The Western versions include Daniel Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East*, New York 1967; and Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, New York 1961.

<sup>3</sup> See especially Simon Bromley, *Rethinking Middle East Politics: State Formation and Development*, Cambridge 1994; Metin Heper, *The State Tradition in Turkey*, Beverley, Yorkshire 1985; Nikki R. Keddie, 'Secularism and the State: Towards Clarity and Global Comparison', *NLR* 1/226, November–December 1997, pp. 300–32; and Şerif Mardin, 'Religion and Politics in Modern Turkey', in James Piscatori, ed., *Islam in the Political Process*, Cambridge 1983.

Arguably, however, Turkish secularization may best be seen as an ongoing struggle over the nature and development of an ‘official Islam’, characterized by the public use of religion for national cohesion. Rather than reproducing some universalist (or Ottoman) logic, the secularization project was continually remade, its (partially unintended) outcomes the result of a series of interventions by different social forces. This process has involved conflicts both within the ruling power bloc constituted by the reforms of the late Ottoman period and the early years of the Republic, and with social layers excluded from it. Since the 1930s, the dominant sectors within this bloc—the military leadership, the modernizing layers of the civil bureaucracy, an officially protected industrial bourgeoisie and a West-oriented intelligentsia—have favoured a more-or-less authoritarian exclusion of religion from the public sphere. The bloc’s subordinate sector—conservative elements of the bureaucracy and professional middle class, an export-oriented bourgeoisie, merchants, provincial notables—tended to advocate a larger space for Islam, albeit still under ‘secular’ control. This could also mobilize broader popular layers—workers, peasants, artisans, the unemployed, small provincial entrepreneurs, clerics—against the dominant sector, and often succeeded in extracting concessions from it.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, although excluded from the power equation, the religious groupings themselves, as well as numerous semi-clandestine Islamic communities, put up quite powerful forms of passive or active resistance around questions such as education.

At the same time, these struggles to define the secularization process were themselves in part determined by the peculiarities of Turkish socio-economic development. The overwhelmingly Greek and Armenian merchant bourgeoisie of the Ottoman period had been virtually liquidated through war, population exchange and massacre.<sup>5</sup> The vast majority of Turks—over 70 per cent—were peasant smallholders, scattered in innumerable relatively self-contained villages. This left the military and civil bureaucracy as the only effectively organized forces capable of undertaking the social-engineering tasks of the new nation. Inevitably they tried to ensure the import-substitute industries they created served, first

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<sup>4</sup> The Kemalist Republican People’s Party (CHP) has long been the political vehicle of the dominant, statist sector of this bloc, while the more traditionalist-religious layers have been represented by a variety of different parties since the end of single-party rule in 1950: Adnan Menderes’s Democratic Party in the 1950s, Süleyman Demirel’s Justice Party in the 1960s, Turgut Özal’s Motherland Party in the 1980s and 90s.

<sup>5</sup> See Taner Akçam, *From Empire to Republic: Turkish Nationalism and the Armenian Genocide*, New York 2004.

and foremost, the national interest. To this end, both industrialists and factory workers were offered different forms of state protection, which for the latter included social security, collective bargaining, unionization and the right to strike. The manufacturing bourgeoisie, itself protected by heavy state subsidy against both internal and external competitors, tolerated these concessions in as much as they bolstered the development of a domestic market.<sup>6</sup> But by the late 1960s an increasingly self-organized working class soon threatened to break loose from state tutelage. The Turkish Workers' Party took 15 seats in Parliament in 1965.<sup>7</sup> Large-scale metalworkers' strikes led to a split in the state-sponsored union Türk-İş, culminating in the formation of the militant Confederation of Revolutionary Worker Unions, DİSK. As the left's power grew in the 1970s, the state backed both hard-right nationalist vigilantes and Islamist groups against them. Finally, from 1980, a military *coup d'état* put paid to the militant left with three years of state terror, during which executions, torture and imprisonment effected a permanent alteration in the political landscape.

### *Radicalization of Islam*

The military take-over of 1980 would also shift the vectors between religion, class and power. During the early 1970s, Islamist politics had mainly been the resort of small provincial entrepreneurs, on the defensive against state-industrial policies, rising labour militancy and rapid Westernization.<sup>8</sup> It was the lack of response of the established business organizations and parties to the needs of small enterprises, facing extinction in an import-substitution economy, that led the ex-president of the Union of Chambers, Necmettin Erbakan, to found the Milli Order Party (MNP), in 1970.<sup>9</sup> As well as defending the economic interests of

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<sup>6</sup> Çağlar Keyder, *State and Class in Turkey: A Study in Capitalist Development*, London 1987.

<sup>7</sup> Dankwart Rustow, 'Turkish Democracy in Historical and Comparative Perspective', in Metin Heper and Ahmet Evin, eds., *Politics in the Third Turkish Republic*, Boulder, CO 1994, pp. 3–12.

<sup>8</sup> I define Islamism as an ideology that seeks to shape the state, the economy and society along Koranic lines. Islamism should thus be contrasted to more conservative understandings of the religion, which assign it a restricted and subordinate political role while stressing pious observance.

<sup>9</sup> In contemporary Turkey, the word *milli* implies both national and religious identity. Islamists utilize the ambivalence of this term to appeal to the Muslim identity of their constituency in a country where the only officially legitimate collective identity is Turkishness.

provincial businessmen and traders, the MNP also appealed to their religious feelings and their distaste for Western consumer culture. This stance won support from conservative peasant farmers and artisans, who were also attracted by Erbakan's rather sketchy programme of economic development based on communally owned private enterprise, shielded and regulated by the state. Closed down by the military in 1971, the MNP was refounded in 1972 as the Milli Salvation Party (MSP), with virtually no change in its programme.<sup>10</sup>

The MSP's most significant gain during the 1970s was increased freedom of operation for the country's İmam-Hatip schools, whose graduates would provide the main activists and leaders of the Islamist movement in the coming decades. These were officially intended to educate prospective preachers (*hatips*) and prayer leaders (*imams*). But since it was not possible for students to observe the precepts of Islam in regular public schools, they also attracted enrollment from religious families who did not necessarily want their children to become preachers or prayer leaders. In time, this generation of İmam-Hatip graduates came to occupy important public positions, constituting a religious middle class capable of competing with the secularist intelligentsia in economic, cultural and political realms. In a country where intellectuals had previously been equated with the left, the emergence of this new avowedly Muslim intelligentsia would be a significant element in the construction of Islamism as a hegemonic alternative.

The 1979 Iranian revolution came as a watershed for the Islamist movement. In the minds of many Muslims this mass upheaval, overthrowing one of the most oppressive Western-backed regimes in the region, shook the accustomed identification between Islam and obedience, and redefined Islamist politics as the revolutionary struggle of the *mustazafın*—the oppressed. This was an electrifying message for the impoverished young workers streaming towards the cities in hope of jobs. Under conditions of increasing inequality, the left was politically and ideologically absent after the 1980 military crackdown. The squatters of the neo-liberal period, who encountered the consumerist wealth of the city without being able to partake of it, could look neither to the social-revolutionary option that had mobilized earlier generations nor to the hope of joining an expanding industrial working class. In this

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<sup>10</sup> Ali Yaşar Sarıbay, *Türkiye'de Modernleşme, Din, ve Parti Politikası: Milli Selâmet Partisi Örnek Olayı*, İstanbul 1985.

environment, a militant, socially radical Islamism had much to offer. Religious responses multiplied to fill the political vacuum, while faith-based welfare substituted for the formal social security system gutted by expenditure cuts. The MSP had been closed down by the military in 1980. When parties were once again allowed to organize in 1983, Erbakan's Welfare Party embodied this transformed Islamism. The Welfare Party was also very vocal on the Kurdish question, promising to recognize the Kurdish language and culture; this won it substantial support not only in the south-east of the country but also among the huge numbers of Kurdish migrants to the central and western cities.

### *First moves in the passive revolution*

The 1980 coup was a turning point in the state's relation to Islam. Crushing the challenge from the left, the ruling bloc also initiated a highly controlled opening to religious groups. Islamic studies were introduced as part of the national school curriculum, while the emphasis on scientific theories such as evolutionism was reduced. Certain hitherto semi-clandestine religious communities were now afforded increased public visibility, under the protection of the state. In the 1982 Constitution drafted for the *junta*, the definition of 'Turkishness' included unprecedented references to Islam.<sup>11</sup> These concessions can be seen as an attempt to contain and defuse the appeal of the Iranian Revolution and of socially radical Islamism through a 'passive revolution' at home, in the classic Gramscian sense—the absorption of (possible or actual) popular demands by counter-revolutionary regimes, as a typical response to revolutions abroad. The other side of this process was the demobilization of potential revolutionary forces. Such 'revolution-restoration', as Gramsci put it in the context of post-1815 European responses to the French Revolution, kept ruling-class regimes intact, while partially satisfying the popular sectors.<sup>12</sup> During the 1980–83 military dictatorship, the Turkish regime likewise took some steps towards implementing Islamist demands, while defusing their insurgent potential. Yet while these changes were intended to consolidate rather than undermine secularization, they nevertheless opened the way to further conflict, as they increased the weight of religious sectors in a nation that defined itself as secular.

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<sup>11</sup> Taha Parla, *Türkiye'nin Siyasal Rejimi*, Istanbul 1995.

<sup>12</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, New York 1971, pp. 114–20.

At the same time, the structural reforms initiated under the dictatorship served to increase the income disparities and social dislocation to which radical Islamism appeared an answer. During the 1970s attempts to restructure the crisis-ridden developmentalist model had been stymied by the entrenched clientelistic nature of electoral politics and high levels of labour militancy.<sup>13</sup> The 1980 military coup offered a solution to this impasse, by marginalizing the one and violently repressing the other, thus rendering neo-liberal reform possible. With opposition crushed, strikes outlawed, political parties shut down and activists arrested, wage levels could be cut and fiscal austerity imposed. The reduction of agricultural subsidies intensified the crisis in the villages, accelerating the mass migration to the swiftly de-industrializing cities. Meanwhile the police force was purged of its substantial left-wing elements, and hard-line nationalists and Islamists were recruited in their place.

After 1983, Erbakan's Welfare Party became the beneficiary of these reforms; yet the Islamists themselves were divided and subject to contradictory class pressures.<sup>14</sup> The provincial entrepreneurs who had constituted the driving force of the party in the 1970s were no longer on the defensive. Expanding global markets, cheap labour and flexible production had turned the small and medium-sized export-oriented firms into emerging 'Anatolian tigers'. But the party's base included these same firms' workers. The Welfare Party's 1991 programmatic statement, 'The Just Order', reflected these contradictions. While it emphasized the virtues of private enterprise, appeals to workers' rights and social justice predominated. In a 'just' Islamic economy, workers' representatives would be assigned a crucial role, there would be full employment and wages would be universally set by the state.<sup>15</sup>

But although electorally successful—the Islamist vote rose from 8 per cent in 1987 to 16 per cent in 1991—the programme soon came under attack from the party's business wing. These entrepreneurs would need to differentiate themselves from the radical poor to gain legitimacy

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<sup>13</sup> Joel Beinin, *Workers and Peasants in the Modern Middle East*, Cambridge 2001.

<sup>14</sup> For further details, see Haldun Gülalp, 'Globalization and Political Islam: The Social Bases of Turkey's Welfare Party', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 33, no. 3, August 2001, pp. 433–48.

<sup>15</sup> Necmettin Erbakan, *Adil Ekonomik Düzen*, Ankara 1991, pp. 29, 65–66. For a critical left analysis see Ayşe Buğra, 'Political Islam in Turkey in Historical Context: Strengths and Weaknesses', in Neşecan Balkan and Sungur Savran, eds., *Politics of Permanent Crisis*, New York 2002.

with the ruling power bloc: they increased their pressure on the RP to tone down its social-justice promises, dealt savagely with strikers and declared trade unions un-Islamic. A new layer of middle-class Muslim professionals also voiced its dissatisfaction with the movement's pro-labour orientation, and were more sympathetic to pro-business policies. In 1994 the Welfare Party issued another programme proclaiming that 'The Just Order is the real pro-private sector order'. The tasks of the state were now restricted and there was little criticism of labour exploitation; it was explained that there would be no strikes or lockouts under the Islamist order, since there would be no need for them.<sup>16</sup>

### *A secularist swamp*

Yet while shifting right, the Islamists still appeared a clean alternative to the venality and incompetence of the mainstream parties during the 1990s. Çağlar Keyder has described the Turkish economy's lurch throughout the decade from one financial blow-out to another—in 1994, 1999, 2001—via a trail of bankruptcies, debt, graft, inflation and fiscal crises that required continuous credit infusions by the IMF.<sup>17</sup> Politically, the 1990s saw a series of short-lived coalition governments, with both foreign and interior policies effectively dictated by the military-led National Security Council, established by the 1982 Constitution. The mainstream parties, whether Kemalist or centre-right, proved incapable of either voicing or soothing the grievances caused by neo-liberalization; nor could they provide any coherent ideological identity to replace the (now badly compromised) secular national-developmental model.

Social inequalities were worsened by the successive governments' programmes of fiscal austerity, and by the brutalities and deprivation visited upon the Kurds. Lifted elsewhere in 1983, martial law had only intensified in the Southeast, where the war against the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) would eventually claim some 30,000 lives. The UN Security Council's establishment of the no-fly zone in Northern Iraq after 1991 inevitably raised the question of the treatment of Turkey's far larger Kurdish population. Soon after, President Özal entered into secret negotiations with the PKK, offering to relax the ban on the Kurdish language, and in 1993 the PKK announced a ceasefire. But the rapprochement damaged relations between the Motherland Party (ANAP)

<sup>16</sup> Refah Partisi, *Adil Düzen: 21 Soru/21 Cevap*, 1994, pp. 1, 23.

<sup>17</sup> Çağlar Keyder, 'The Turkish Bell-Jar', *NLR* 28, July–August 2004.

and the military. Özal lost control of his party, whose electoral support had declined steadily since 1991. After his death in 1993, ANAP slid back to the conventional position of silence on the Kurds, while maintaining its flagrantly pro-rich policies.

The new coalition government of the Social Democrat Populist Party and the centre-right True Path further deepened the neo-liberalization process with its economic reforms of April 1994. The Social Democrats did nothing to curb the extensive police intelligence, torture and prison system that had expanded after the 1980 coup. They also failed to defend the Kurdish deputies who had run on the Social Democrat ticket in order to get round the 10 per cent barrier (erected by the 1982 Constitution precisely to block the representation of Kurdish and other non-establishment parties). The Kurdish deputies were ousted from the Meclis after speaking out on their ethnic identity in 1994, and several spent the next decade in prison. The Social Democrats' passivity in this drama cost it the Kurdish vote, while its reputation for corruption at the municipal level helped destroy the credibility of the reformist left in Turkey. Yet another reason for the Social Democrats' ultimate marginalization was its shift back to the rigid secularist position of the early Republican People's Party, at a time when Islamic identity was becoming more widely asserted. This also meant that the centre left's base shifted from a working-class/middle-class coalition to one of secular professionals, bureaucratic elite and worker aristocracy. During the 1990s, the growing ranks of informal labour began to desert the centre left, while the centre right lost a part of its traditional small and medium business base. These were the classes that would turn increasingly to the Islamists.

### *Town Hall Islamism*

Despite their internal tensions, the Islamists emerged as the leading party in the 1994 municipal elections, taking over the administration of most key cities. Islamist municipalities channelled more services to poorer districts and distributed free coal, food and clothes. With this came tighter controls on bars and the consumption of alcohol, and a larger place for Islamic and traditional symbols in public.<sup>18</sup> In contrast to the majority of Turkish politicians, united across party lines by their pursuit of the spoils of privatization, the ideological impetus of the

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<sup>18</sup> Alev İnan Çınar, 'Refah Party and the City Administration of Istanbul: Liberal Islam, Localism and Hybridity', *New Perspectives on Turkey*, vol. 16, Spring 1997, pp. 23–40.

Welfare Party had enabled it to stay clean in the post-1980 environment; simply by curtailing municipal corruption, the Islamists achieved a notable improvement in the quality of urban services.

The Welfare Party emerged as the largest force in the general election of 1995 largely on the basis of its achievements in local government. After several months of resistance by the secularist establishment, Erbakan managed to form a coalition government with the True Path. Among its first acts, the Islamist-led coalition implemented the highest wage increases since 1980 and moved to limit profits on interest. In the municipalities, the Welfare Party started to organize well-publicized events to advertise its sympathy for the Palestinian struggle and for Islamic causes. Initially Erbakan signalled an intention of working towards a 'global democracy' based on the cooperation of Muslim nations under Turkish leadership.<sup>19</sup> However he soon caved in to pressure from the Turkish Army, even signing a historic military cooperation agreement with Israel.

Indeed, once in office, the Welfare Party appeared to lose direction. Rather than using governmental power to fight corruption, it covered up for its coalition partner, the True Path—deeply immersed in both political and economic graft—and soon began to show signs of the same disease in its own ranks. The campaigning energies of the religious communities and organizations also now slackened, as most turned their attention to reaping the fruits of office. The Islamists seemed to be integrating themselves into the neoliberal system. Nevertheless, even the now-muted radicalism of the Welfare Party aroused the anger of the traditional ruling bloc. Erbakan talked frequently about the need to open more İmam-Hatip schools, a particular bugbear of secularist military leaders, and hosted a prime-ministerial dinner to which prominent mystic *şeyhs* were invited. Such a gathering was a first in the history of the Republic, and hardliners interpreted it as a formal recognition of religious orders that had been banned since the early Kemalist reforms.

Such were the grounds on which, in February 1997, the military once more intervened in Turkish political life, demanding that the Erbakan government restrict İmam-Hatip schools, increase obligatory secular education from five to eight years, and control religious orders. The

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<sup>19</sup> See Elizabeth Özdalga, 'Necmettin Erbakan: Democracy for the Sake of Power', in Metin Heper and Sabri Sayarı, eds., *Political Leaders and Democracy in Turkey*, New York 2002.

Welfare Party proved too divided to mount an effective resistance, and the government resigned. The generals proceeded to shut down the party, banned Erdogan from political activity and initiated another round of torture and repression, though not on the scale of the 1980s. At this stage, too, the Army undertook a thorough purging of Islamists from its ranks. Significantly, however, the police forces—notorious for their coercion and brutality—were not reorganized to anything like the same extent.

### *Global currents*

After the crisis of 1997–98, the Islamists initially regrouped as the Virtue Party, which was likewise kept under close scrutiny by the authorities. But they could now hope to gain some external backing from the European Union, which by this stage was funding extensive networks of human-rights and civil-society NGOs in Turkey; the country would be granted candidate status for accession in December 1999.<sup>20</sup> The Islamists toned down their criticism of the establishment, but they also ventured to put up a headscarved woman as a parliamentary candidate. The ban on the headscarf in government buildings was a linchpin of Turkish secularization, and though the Welfare Party had frequently hinted that it should be rescinded, it had never dared to take such a major step while in office. Now its ideologues started to reframe the veil as a matter of human rights, rather than of religious obligation, in the expectation that the EU would intervene on their behalf. In the short term, their tactics backfired. Merve Kavakçı, the headscarved deputy, had to leave the Meclis before she could be sworn in, as the secular-establishment parties forgot their old quarrels to unite in violent condemnation of the ‘intruder’.<sup>21</sup>

But although the period from 1997 until 2001 seemed one of setback for the Islamists, the conditions were building that would bring about the second stage of Turkey’s passive revolution, broadening the role of Islam within the national ideology. Domestically, although subjugated, the Islamists retained widespread support, while the economy plunged deeper into debt as successive secular coalitions accelerated the neoliberal reforms that had been partially interrupted under the short-lived Welfare government. The crash of 2001 saw a devaluation of about 50 per cent, and open disarray among the country’s political leaders.

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<sup>20</sup> For more details of EU involvement in Turkey see Keyder, ‘The Turkish Bell-Jar’, p. 78.

<sup>21</sup> See Müge Göçek, ‘To veil or not to veil: the contested location of gender in contemporary Turkey’, *Interventions*, vol. 1, no. 4 (1999), pp. 521–35.

Internationally, more far-reaching reconfigurations were underway. Islamism in Turkey had arisen in the global context of the 1980s and early 90s, when international forms of Muslim solidarity, in part fostered by militantly Islamist regimes, had raised hopes of constructing an independent Islamic pole on the world stage. By the second half of the 1990s, however, it was becoming clear that the Islamist regimes in Iran and Afghanistan were corrupt, inefficient or coercive, while international Islamic banks and credit institutions were plagued by scandal. Faced with state repression, Islamist resistance movements in Algeria, Egypt and elsewhere alienated their supporters by resorting to indiscriminate violence. 'Actually existing' Islamist radicalism was becoming broadly discredited. This disillusion with religious militancy in the Muslim world was given powerful impetus by Washington's change of line. Having been willing to arm the crudest Islamist groups against Communism during the Cold War, and to back such murderous confessional states as General Zia's Pakistan, the US had started to distinguish between fundamentalist and 'moderate' Islam. The latter referred to religious movements that cooperated with Western hegemony, while oppositional forms were now redefined as terrorists.

In Turkey, the global disillusionment with radical Islamism manifested itself in the turn to the European Union. With no sustained support coming from the Muslim world, religious activists now thought that only the EU, with its discourse of human rights and democracy, could save them from the elitism and repression of the secularist Republic. But following the US, and with an eye to policing their own growing Muslim populations, West European elites were quite happy to turn a blind eye to state authoritarianism as long as it targeted 'fundamentalists'. Thus the Welfare Party's initial approach to Europe bore little fruit. The Islamists would have to demonstrate to the West's satisfaction that they had abandoned all radical claims and become good Muslim 'moderates'.

### *The AKP breakaway*

This changing balance of forces was a crucial determinant in the Islamists' shift towards a thorough-going Americanization. The term is used here to mean not only political support for Washington and the global capitalist order, but a much broader allegiance to American economic, social and religious models. If the first two of these have always been dear to the establishment elite in Turkey, the Islamists'

breakthrough would lie in naturalizing a new version of all three of them among much broader layers.

After the crisis of 1997, when it became clear that larger concessions were necessary to win the toleration of the ruling elite, a new generation of Islamists began to challenge Erbakan's leadership. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, this generational conflict had been expressed as a clash between ardent young radicals and a more conservative mainstream. After 1997, the former radicals were quick to adopt a free-market, 'moderate Muslim' position. Prominent among them were R. Tayyip Erdoğan, Abdullah Gül and Bülent Arınç, all of them differentiated from the old guard by their professionalism, media savvy and attentiveness to the pro-business agenda. Erdoğan, though his family was from the city of Rize in the Black Sea region, was born in Istanbul in 1957 and raised in the run-down neighbourhood of Kasımpaşa, where he attended an İmam-Hatip school. A university graduate and soccer player, he has honed his charisma during years of grass-roots work as an activist and organizer. Gül is from Kayseri, a Central Anatolian city closely integrated with global markets. Born in 1950, he received a PhD from an Istanbul university in 1983, and studied in England. He was an economist at the Islamic Development Bank until 1991, when he became a full-time politician. Arınç, a lawyer, was born in 1948 in Bursa, a conservative city in the industrial Marmara region, and has been politically active since his youth. Arınç still retains links with his old Islamist party, while Gül serves as a bridge between the Islamists and international business, Turkey's ruling elite and the liberal intelligentsia. This new generation of political entrepreneurs was far more receptive to cooperation with the West.

Thus a new alignment emerged from the seeming impasse of 1997. It had become clear that the ideological and class differences among the Islamists were too sharp to be contained within a single party. There were insoluble tensions between the liberalizing business wing and the more conservative and working-class sectors. The authoritarian structure of the party did not allow aspiring young activists to have a say in decision-making. In 2001 the rebels established their own organization, the Justice and Development Party (AKP), having failed to take over the existing structures at a major party congress. Erdoğan and the other AKP leaders moved quickly to reassure the military and media establishments that religion would not be used for political purposes and that the AKP would not challenge the headscarf ban. They were also vociferously

pro-European. They made frequent trips to the United States, holding meetings whose agendas have remained private. Gül helpfully explained to an American audience that the AKP were ‘the WASPs of Turkey’. It was clear that the new leadership was trying to reclaim the territory of the centre-right in Turkish politics—in effect, to reconstitute an updated version of that alliance of provincial businessmen, religious intellectuals and state elite at which the subordinate fraction of the ruling power bloc had traditionally aimed, but which had become impossible with the rise of a radical Islamism. Now, this alliance could also offer to strengthen the hand of the neo-liberal and export-oriented sectors of Turkish capital. Large numbers of centre-right politicians, intellectuals and supporters soon swelled its ranks.

Surprisingly, perhaps, the secular centre-right intelligentsia played a forceful role in the constitution of this new alliance. Turkey’s major establishment daily *Hürriyet* supported the formation of the AKP as an antidote to the Islamists and the shrinking political centre. Both columnists and editorials like to emphasize the fact that the new party called itself ‘conservative democrat’ rather than ‘Muslim democrat’; the latter option had been discussed around 1999–2000, but dropped after high-level consultations. *Hürriyet*, along with like-minded media, worked systematically to legitimize not only Erdoğan and the AKP but also what came to be their trademark: ‘conservative democracy’.

Even more interesting was the support from the liberal and democratic socialist intelligentsia for the AKP. The liberals reasoned that, in contrast to the proximity of the established parties to the state bureaucracy, the AKP stood out as an exception with roots in a civil society movement. Moreover, it had shaken off the authoritarian aspects of that movement, and its understanding of Islam no longer constituted a threat to individual liberties. As a result, the AKP was the only political agent that could integrate Turkey into a liberalizing and democratizing world, and above all lead it into the EU. This view was voiced not only by liberal newspapers such as *Radikal*, but also by social scientists at Turkey’s elite universities, where it had become common sense to see the former Islamists as the expression of civil society against the authoritarian state. While the democratic socialists by no means shared in this euphoria, their journals nevertheless presented the AKP as the party most capable of carrying forward democratization and integration to the European Union, and in

any event far preferable to the hard-line nationalism which might prove the only alternative.

Meanwhile, Erdoğan's working-class background, militant roots and plain-talking populist flair retained the support of the many millions who saw in him someone who spoke their language and understood their problems. The AKP also benefited from strong support in the Kurdish regions. In sum, all major classes could see something for themselves in the AKP; this was, in the classical sense, a potentially hegemonic capitalist project. In the general election of November 2002 the AKP won 34 per cent of the vote; the Republican People's Party was the only other electoral force to clear the 10 per cent hurdle, leaving the AKP with 60 per cent of Meclis seats.

### *First tests*

The new AKP government's first test came just three months later, on Iraq. Successive polls had indicated that 90–95 per cent of Turkish citizens were against the American invasion of their next-door neighbour, and opposed still more strongly Turkey's playing any role in such a conflict. Most of the AKP membership had the same positions. However, the leaders of the party and their parliamentary supporters insisted that Turkey needed to go along with American demands, or risk losing its 'most strategic ally'. The Meclis voted on Turkey's involvement in the war on Iraq in three steps. First, in February 2003, a majority of AKP deputies authorized the government to allow the US to 'modernize' its military bases in the country. A second vote, to allow American troops to use Turkish bases for the invasion of Iraq, was to follow in March. Gül, the second man of the party, convinced the Cabinet to vote unanimously in favour. But in the absence of Erdoğan, who would only enter Parliament on March 10th, nearly half the AKP deputies joined the opposition (RPP) to vote down the motion.<sup>22</sup> The third vote was carried out in Erdoğan's authoritarian presence: a crushing majority of AKP deputies now voted in favour of sending troops to Iraq. In the event, the White

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<sup>22</sup> Erdoğan was banned from standing in the 2002 elections under a sentence handed down during the repression of 1998, for having read an (allegedly) Islamist poem to a public meeting. For all the trumpeted European opposition to the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq, this brief flare of resistance in the Meclis made Turkey the only state to have refused a material request. France opened its air space to the USAF-RAF bombers, and Germany put its field hospitals at Bush's disposal.

House blocked Turkey from becoming a part of the occupation force, due to objections from Kurdish members of the interim Iraqi government and, according to some, the Bush Administration's resentment at the March vote.

More lastingly, the votes demonstrated that the AKP could prevail against the will of 90 per cent of Turkish citizens on a matter of international war. The legacy of decades of Islamist activism had been appropriated to support an Anglo-American military invasion in the Muslim world. Most striking of all has been the reception of the AKP's pro-imperialist foreign policy among its working-class base. Here, via such populist Islamist newspapers as *Vakit*, it is repeated even at coffee-shop level that Erdoğan is playing a long, deep game; that these concessions to the Americans may have to be made for now, to strengthen 'our' position, but that the leader knows what he is doing. To maintain this degree of conviction among such numbers, in face of such evidence, is hegemony indeed. One litmus test for the consolidation of a passive revolution is its capacity for demobilization. Since most of the religious population now believed that their party was in power, the Friday prayers—usually occasions of protest during anti-Muslim wars—were largely silent.<sup>23</sup> While there were anti-war protests after 2003, these were mainly supported by the remnants of the left. Among Islamist groups, only Erbakan's Felicity Party, the Islamist rump left after the AKP's split, some human-rights organizations (Mazlum-Der and Özgür-Der), and a few radical grouplets carried out relatively feeble protests. The AKP government had succeeded in pacifying the religious masses, mobilized by the Islamist movement before 2002.

Domestically, the new 'conservative democrats' have worked closely with the IMF to cut public spending—aiming at a 6 per cent surplus, as noted above—and privatize both public enterprises and natural resources. The AKP is undertaking an extensive privatization of public forests—justified by the claim that it will only sell off tracts that have 'lost their qualities' as forests. Real-estate speculators have known how to interpret the message: there were 829 fires in the first seven months of 2003 which scorched 1,755 hectares of forest, qualifying them as fit for privatization. Like other IMF-led governments, the AKP also aims to control wages,

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<sup>23</sup> The 'caricature demonstrations' in February 2006 are an exception to this. However, it is worth noting that these protests had no national political aim, or even a palpable target, unlike the Islamist demonstrations of the 1990s.

curtail unions and limit strikes.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, while real wages keep shrinking, unemployment rising and the numbers living below the poverty line increasing, the Gini coefficient of inequality has decreased slightly, possibly due to an amelioration in the informal labour sector and some means-tested benefits for the poorest layers. This is another reason for the AKP's continuing popularity among these classes.

### *Transformations*

More generally, what differentiates the AKP from Turkey's other neo-liberal parties is its capacity to transform attitudes towards the marketization of the economy at a molecular level. Although previous Islamist programmes had already shifted away from social egalitarianism, this still mattered to the movement's supporters. That resistance to neo-liberalism has now been removed, and there is a broader acceptance of 'market realities' among the popular sectors. One reason for the change is that, for the first time in Turkish history, practising Muslims are spearheading the liberalization of the economy; it is their religious lifestyle that wins them mass consent. The AKP is nevertheless a decidedly secular party, if secularism is understood as the separation of the religious from the political and economic spheres, rather than the purging of religion from public life.<sup>25</sup> While AKP leaders are to be seen attending mosques, they also emphasize that politics and economics have their own self-regulating logics, which should be shielded from religious influence. This stance, too, is grudgingly accepted by the AKP's working-class supporters, who have come to suppose that, if even these pious Muslims have to take such steps when they come to power, then secularism and a pro-Washington foreign policy must somehow be embedded in the logic of the modern state.

Another reason why the AKP could sink roots in the popular classes is its approach to the question of geography. Gramsci once noted that the Italian left, like the bourgeoisie, believed that the South was the reason why Italy was backward: southerners were lazy and criminal by nature.<sup>26</sup> This is more or less how the dominant bloc and the left intelligentsia in

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<sup>24</sup> The AKP government has twice banned a major strike on the grounds that it threatened national security.

<sup>25</sup> For this specific definition, see José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, Chicago 1994.

<sup>26</sup> The Socialist Party even circulated 'scientific' texts that proved this inferiority. Gramsci, *Selections from Political Writings, 1921–1926*, New York 1978, pp. 441–62.

Turkey have looked at Central Anatolia, the Black Sea region and (especially) the East. The inhabitants of these parts of the country carry their accents and other markers of regional status like a stigma, one that blocks upward mobility in cosmopolitan venues. The Westernized elite continues to see these regions and their emigrants as uncivilized and backward, the true causes of Turkey's slow and problematic modernization. Many in Europe share this view, and point to these people as the reason why Turkey should not be allowed into the EU. Much of the Turkish left has historically reproduced these stereotypes, explaining away its failures by the ignorance and reaction of the provinces.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the Islamists won these regions not only by glorifying conservative values—in the way the centre-right has always done in Turkey—but by integrating the ex-provincial masses in the expanding urban centres, transforming the cities themselves in the process. The AKP appropriated the strategies of their Islamist forerunners in their approach to the rural immigrants and the provinces. But they also worked more consistently for the integration of Central Anatolian capitalists into world markets, a process under way since the 1980s. Consequently, both groups see the AKP as their natural leaders against Western Turkish elitism, and are therefore more willing to forgive any particular government policy.

### *Eastern advance and retreat*

How has the multi-class coalition mobilized under AKP hegemony stood the test of time? Kurdish support had been an important component of the 2002 majority. The AKP had initially taken a more ambivalent position on the Kurds than its predecessors in the RP. Erdoğan referred vaguely to the equal worth of all God's creatures during the 2002 election campaign, but there was no programmatic commitment to realizing such equality. In office, however, and under pressure to conform to norms of democratization for EU entry, the AKP implemented historic, if still very modest, measures: allowing Kurdish-language TV programmes to be broadcast (within certain time limits), and permitting private Kurdish-language classes, although these were still banned from state schools. In August 2005, Erdoğan declared for the first time that there was a 'Kurdish question', a phrase that is anathema to the national-secular establishment, as it implies a bigger problem than terrorism and poverty. All these steps were warmly welcomed by the liberal and demo-

cratic socialist intelligentsias, which had been quite suspicious about the Welfare Party's positive attitude toward the Kurds. This had been seen as threatening to stir up the disgruntled masses with religion, in contrast to the pro-EU liberalism of the AKP.

By 2006, as we shall see, these issues had been substantially recast by the increasing salience of the Kurdish statelet in northern Iraq and through the slowdown in EU negotiations. But it should also be stated that the Kurdish question cannot simply be reduced to a question of democracy. While EU convergence criteria hold many promises for the Kurds politically, the same cannot be said for their socio-economic situation. The reforms dictated from Brussels are not intended to heal the imbalances that marketization creates, but to produce an environment in which it can proceed more safely. Rural Kurds have been among the hardest hit by the economic reforms, and the fifteen years of military campaigns and guerrilla war did much to destroy their traditional means of livelihood, stock-breeding, forcing them to migrate to eastern or western cities. Diyarbakır, Istanbul, Adana and Mersin are now filled with poor Kurdish families, whose children contribute to a subsistence-level income by begging, polishing shoes or petty crime. These activities exacerbate the tension between the Kurds and the Turks.

There is also a more structural problem: while the state did not spend much on Kurdish regions in its national-developmental phase, there has been even less investment since the liberalization of the 1980s. The transition to a free-market economy was bad news for regions that were already at a disadvantage: capitalists had little incentive for investing, and the risk factor in the Kurdish zone only compounded their reservations. Although other pockets in Anatolia have also suffered, the major geographical losers from economic liberalization have been the Kurdish-populated east and south-east. A flow of EU-backed cultural funding has been largely cosmetic. With the aggravation of their economic conditions, the Kurds are starting to lose their cautious optimism vis-à-vis the AKP.

### *Democratization?*

The appeal of the AKP to liberals and intellectuals in 2002 rested primarily on its pro-democratic, pro-European stance. Yet on democratization, the party has never demonstrated more than a pro forma commitment. Erdoğan is well-known for his authoritarian tendencies, and as the

can-do mayor of Istanbul between 1994 and 1998 he ruled with an iron fist.<sup>27</sup> At its founding congress, the AKP leadership had pledged itself to a regime of internal party democracy, but initial moves in this direction were soon overturned. In 2003, the AKP's Board of Founders annulled internal elections to the Central Committee and invested the party president, Erdoğan, with sole authority to appoint or dismiss members of the Central Committee. These authoritarian moves had their counterparts in the relation of the party to the people. While Erdoğan's government legislated a series of democratic reforms at the instigation of the EU, it has also disregarded the most basic norms of representivity and accountability with regard to its electorate—most blatantly, of course, over Iraq. Rather than taking popular grievances seriously, Erdoğan will publicly scold anybody who talks to him about hunger, unemployment or housing problems. At party rallies he has told the poor to pull themselves together and do something for themselves, instead of expecting the government to do it for them.<sup>28</sup>

A further test of democratization—and another stumbling block for EU entry—is the official approach to the Armenian massacres of 1915. The military elite has always denied any responsibility for these killings, and it is a criminal offence to say they constituted genocide. In 2005, with expectations of democratization rising, an international group of scholars attempted to organize a conference at which the genocide thesis could be openly debated. The AKP Interior Minister Cemil Çiçek reacted by saying that the conference organizers were 'stabbing the nation in the back'. The scholars first called the meeting off, then moved it to a different university. While holding such a gathering would probably have been harder, if not impossible, under any previous government, the incident was a stark reminder of the nationalist-authoritarian tendency within the AKP, of which Çiçek is a leading figure.

As well as democratization, an important question for the AKP's new liberal-democratic supporters is whether the government will make any strong moves towards further Islamization. So far, they have had no real cause for concern. The AKP did try to lift the military's 1997 restrictions on graduates from the İmam-Hatip schools entering secular universities,

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<sup>27</sup> Mehmet Metiner, 'Dünden Bugüne Tayyip Erdoğan', *Radikal İki*, 6 July 2003.

<sup>28</sup> Blaming the poor for their poverty is another dimension of the AKP's Americanization, and its break from both traditional Islam, which sees poverty as fate, and Islamism, which blames the secular-capitalist system for the condition of the poor.

channeling them instead into theology faculties. The military had also enforced statutory eight-year attendance at non-religious schools. There had been waves of protest from pious Muslims at the time, but enrollment at İmam-Hatip schools had dropped considerably in the following years. This was a serious blow to the Islamist movement, as most of its activists were the product of these schools. The AKP's draft bill to permit İmam-Hatip students to attend the universities was greeted with outrage by sections of the secularist establishment, who claimed it revealed the party's hidden Islamist agenda. The military insinuated that it was a threat to the secular Republic, and it was vetoed by President Ahmet Necdet Sezer (an appointee of the previous Meclis, in 2000). Establishment journalists and commentators who had supported the AKP in 2002 announced that this was crossing the line, although few actually broke with the government.

Such reactions were, to say the least, exaggerated. The AKP had no agenda of Islamicizing the whole education system. It was only striving to retain what was an important resource for any religiously oriented project—as the Catholic Church, for example, has long understood. The main point is that the AKP's brand of Americanism does not negate all things Muslim; schools with religious curricula flourish within the American system. At stake, rather, are negotiations over the new boundaries for religion in the Turkish public sphere. Other changes, such as the downplaying of evolutionary theory in textbooks and the increasing number of religious programmes on TV, are similar symptoms of the ways in which these boundaries are becoming defined by a framework closer to American conservatism than to Islamist demands.

Most crucially, the Erdoğan government has given the clearest signals that Islamism will play no part in its foreign policy. It has aimed to play a leading role in the Bush Administration's self-styled Greater Middle East Initiative. AKP leaders and their media relays have marketed this project to their religious base as an opportunity for Turkey to have a greater say in the region; one that combines closer relations with Islamic countries with the chance to reap broader economic and political benefits from the assertion of US control. The AKP launches 'Islamic' foreign-policy salvos, but an attentive reading reveals that these are usually voicing Washington's demands in Muslim phraseology. The AKP's approach to HAMAS, after its victory in the 2005 Palestinian Authority elections, was designed to convey the West's message—'Disarm!'—rather than

to signal militant Islamist solidarity. When HAMAS representatives visited Ankara, the US ambassador promptly issued a statement of support for AKP policies in Iraq, which appeased establishment worries about American reactions to the Palestinians' visit. Gül has become a travelling emissary in the region, going to Tehran in June 2006 to deliver the West's latest demands on the nuclear issue. The visit pleased both the Islamic states, who were happy to see Turkey overcome its secularist prejudices and value its neighbours, and the Western powers, who could get their messages conveyed to the mullahs by their co-religionists rather than their 'enemies'. Similarly, Gül has pressed Damascus to exert a moderating influence on Hezbollah in Lebanon. One result of this foreign policy has been greatly improved relations between the party and the more liberal wing of the military under Hilmi Özkök, Chief of Staff until 2006.

### *Challenges*

Yet for all its successes in retaining the support of the 2002 coalition, the AKP faces a number of difficulties ahead which, if severe enough, might pose challenges to its hegemony over certain sectors. Among the most dangerous is the economy. During its first three years in office the Erdoğan government benefited from the post-2001 recovery, following the dramatic devaluation of that year. Growth, built on heavy borrowing, sustained consent for the economic reforms even among those worst hit by fiscal austerity. But the Turkish economy is highly exposed. A widening current-account deficit requires constant capital inflows, and the privatization programme that the AKP is undertaking to attract these is bedevilled by legal problems, graft and the run-down state of public utilities and infrastructure. As Turkey has opened to global markets, the traditionally strong textile and clothing industries, the basis for Central Anatolian growth in the 1980s, have lost out to countries with cheap labour, primarily China. Turkish capital investment is now mainly directed towards finance, tourism, and construction—all highly dependent on the vicissitudes of the global economy. A shake-out of world stock markets would have a very serious effect.

In May–June 2006, Turkey experienced its first serious financial shock under the AKP. There was a sudden outflow of short-term capital after the US Federal Reserve raised interest rates. The lira plummeted, and inflation rose sharply with more expensive imports. Weak sectors of

the economy—textiles, clothing, agriculture—were hard hit, as interest rates, rents and food prices continued to climb after the financial crisis subsided, and the lira continued to tremble with every mild fluctuation on the global scene. In July 2006 the AKP faced the first mass protest over its economic policies: 80,000 hazelnut producers in the Black Sea region blocked the Samsun highway to protest the government cuts in agricultural subsidies that had left the growers' co-operative unable to purchase their crop. They targeted Erdoğan's close advisor Cuneys Zapsu, chairman of the exporters' association that stands to gain most from low prices. In all probability, these workers had been AKP voters. In late August, public officials' unions threatened major strikes to counter falling real wages. With economic tensions growing, opinion polls suggest that the right-wing Nationalist Action Party has been regaining ground. In the last year, nationalist gangs have attempted more than a dozen lynchings of Kurdish immigrants living in western Turkish cities, and stoned AKP members after a nationalist rally. One result is that it is becoming harder to sell Turkey as an 'emerging market' success story to foreign investors.

A second problem that the AKP confronts is the faltering accession talks with the EU. The Republic of Cyprus's overwhelming rejection of the Annan Plan in its April 2004 referendum scotched the West's 'solution' for the island, and confronted Turkey with the necessity of recognizing the ROC, initially in the form of extending its 1995 Customs Union agreement with the EU to include the latest members, Cyprus among them. In July 2005 Erdoğan signed the protocols, while announcing loudly that this did not amount to a recognition of the Cypriot government. By the EU deadline of December 2006, Turkey had not opened its ports and harbours to Cyprus. Accession talks were partially suspended, and Brussels extended its inspections of Turkey's 'progress' over a still longer time-span. It also complained of Ankara's foot-dragging over the requested amendments to the Turkish penal code's Article 301, which criminalizes critics of the state. It is no longer so easy for the AKP to offer accession to the EU as a highway to a better future.

### *Opponents*

Amid these uncertainties, the AKP still possesses the advantage that all political alternatives to its rule are totally discredited. Yet it has opponents, whose hands may be strengthened if the AKP government loses

its lustre in worsening economic times. The most significant of these include hard-line factions within the state, the growing nationalist backlash and radical Islamism. Among official circles, including the nationalist wings of the judiciary and the military, there are still many who watch the AKP with suspicion and would like to see it toppled. Deniz Baykal, the leader of the Republican People's Party and the political representative of these circles, has frequently implied the need for military and street action against the AKP. Elements of the deep state have given this more concrete form.

In 2005, several people were killed in a series of bomb blasts in the Kurdish town of Şemdinli in Hakkari, one of the poorest places in Turkey. Official sources attributed the explosions to the PKK and the increasing tension in the southeast since the end of the ceasefire in 2004. But in November 2005 one of the bombers was caught red-handed. Passers-by had seen him leave a case in front of a bookstore. He then waited around to watch the ensuing explosion, in which a man was killed. The angry onlookers surrounded the bomber, who panicked and shouted, 'Stop, I'm a police officer!' He was only saved from lynching by the security forces. The suspicion that clandestine elements of the state were behind the other Şemdinli bombings—a suspicion voiced even by the establishment press—was virtually confirmed when the Army's Second-in-Command, Yaşar Büyükanıt, coolly remarked of the bomber: 'I know him; he is a good boy.'

In response to this, and in line with Erdoğan's promise that all responsible parties would be punished, a local public prosecutor in Van began an investigation which implicated Büyükanıt in organizing paramilitary activities in the southeast. The prosecutor came under attack from the establishment media, which claimed—without evidence—that he had connections with a clandestine religious community, and that the accusations against Büyükanıt were a part of a conspiracy to denigrate the military because of its struggle against 'fundamentalism'. The insinuation was that the AKP was behind this scheme. The prosecutor was disbarred for preparing a 'faulty indictment', and soon anybody attempting to investigate the Şemdinli affair became suspect. Ultimately, two low-ranking officers were sentenced, and further legal proceedings were deemed futile. The AKP, which had initially backed the prosecutor, fell silent—another disappointment for its liberal supporters. In August

2006, after months of speculation as to who would be Özkök's successor as Chief of Staff, the AKP appointed Büyükanıt to the post.

Further evidence emerged of a deep-state campaign against the AKP's Islamist supporters following the assassination of the head of the Danıştay, a high administrative court, in May 2006. Some months before the Danıştay had blocked the promotion of a nursery schoolteacher on the grounds that, though of course unveiled during working hours, she covered her head for the journey home. This was seen as an extreme reactionary measure even by the establishment media, and provoked an indignant response from the popular Islamist press, with *Vakit* publishing photographs of the Danıştay decision-makers on its front page. The assassination of the Danıştay's top judge, apparently by a young Islamist lawyer, ignited a storm of secular outrage, and there were large demonstrations, led by top members of the judiciary, protesting against the Islamists and the AKP. A few days later, however, the conservative and pro-AKP daily *Zaman* revealed connections between the assassin and a group of retired army officers, who were members of an emerging network of paramilitary, hard-line nationalist organizations. These officers also apparently had links with the state: police had found secret official files in their homes. Their plan was to discredit and perhaps bring down the AKP government.

Initially demoralized, the establishment press soon hit back by denouncing all this as an Islamist confection: the 'secret files' had been manufactured by conservative religious elements in the police, and handed to *Zaman*. Put together with the attempts by the 'religious' prosecutor to implicate Büyükanıt in the Şemdinli bombings, this new conspiracy demonstrated rather that the tentacles of Islamism ran deep into the farthest reaches of the state. Neither the secularists nor the Islamists could provide conclusive evidence for their claims. But the drama revealed the depth of the hitherto covert conflict between the military and the police. The concentration of hard-line secular nationalists in the Army, and of religious conservatives in the ranks of the police, threatens low-level conspiratorial wars within the security forces as well as against the civilian population. Amnesty International has reported a decrease in state torture under the AKP; but the Şemdinli and Danıştay affairs raise the question of whether the forces of coercion have not resorted to more intricate methods of control and intimidation than 'simple' torture and repression.

With the assassination of Hrant Dink these issues were sharply posed again. The editor of the bilingual Turkish-Armenian newspaper *Agos*, Dink was a conciliatory figure who emphasized democratization and Turkish-Armenian dialogue rather than focusing on the genocide debate. Despite this caution, he was charged several times with ‘denigrating Turkishness’; one of around fifty intellectuals to be indicted under Article 301 in Erdoğan’s Turkey. Unlike most of the others, Dink was convicted in 2005 and given a suspended sentence. He had also been frequently threatened by nationalist paramilitary organizations. On 19 January 2007 Dink was shot in the head outside his newspaper office by an unemployed youth from Trabzon. The killer was arrested, but within a few days investigators revealed that not only had a police informant been involved in organizing the crime, but that high-level members of the police apparatus had known about the planned assassination beforehand. No sooner were these details disclosed than the investigation came to an abrupt halt. Emboldened by the popular anger at Dink’s killing—100,000 had marched in his funeral procession—several civil and political organizations began to campaign for the forces behind the murder to be fully unmasked. Yet, as of early March 2007, things remained at a standstill. In the already strained atmosphere before the April presidential elections, Dink’s assassination has heightened tensions and demonstrated the AKP’s powerlessness to act against this continuing campaign of coercion and terror.

### *Islamist quiescence?*

A second locus of potential opposition to the Erdoğan government is radical Islamism—voiced by those left behind by the AKP’s Americanization. Local AKP activists have tried to reassure their more militant Islamist brethren by circulating ‘hidden transcripts’ arguing that they still believe in the same principles, but longer-term methods are now required. Some AKP leaders—such as Bülent Arınç, who led the Meclis vote against the Iraq war in March 2003—remain in touch with the traditional Islamist Felicity Party. Others demonstrate their commitment by praying in public places. On the whole, as noted above, radical Islamists have been loath to criticize the government. There were large-scale protests against the Danish caricatures of the Prophet—especially in the east and south-east, hinting at a radical Islamic reorganization in the region—but these were a safely non-political distraction.

A major test for the Islamists was the dispatch of Turkish troops to join the UN force in Lebanon in October 2006. As with Iraq, a majority of the population was strongly opposed to the Israeli invasion and the IDF destruction of south Beirut. The terms of deployment of the UN force under Resolution 1701—to help disarm the region ‘south of the Litani River’—seemed clearly intended to finish the job of downgrading Hezbollah that Israel had failed to do. Characteristically, the AKP attempted both to act with its main military partners, the US and Israel, and to convince its base that it was on the side of the ‘oppressed’. In July 2006, Erdoğan’s condemnation of Israeli ‘excesses’ at the Organization of the Islamic Conference in Kuala Lumpur was warmly received in the Muslim world, although it differed little from the G8 Summit’s formula of ‘disproportionate response’.

Following the passage of Resolution 1701, both Erdoğan and Gül urged the need for Turkish troops to ‘come to the aid’ of the suffering Lebanese people. AKP leaders have invoked the Ottoman Empire traditions of ‘the nation’s ancestors’: Turkey must not remain aloof from the problems of its neighbours and ignore the Middle East, as it had done for the past eighty years. Or, repeated in the language of Americanization: Turkey had to intervene in the region to become a global player. There was also a war of disinformation: Islamist media in favour of sending troops reported that Hezbollah had actually invited Turkey to Lebanon. This seems highly unlikely, given the formal military agreement between Israel and Turkey signed by Erbakan in 1996. Although the scale of this military partnership is secret, it is known to involve joint training exercises, shared intelligence, assistance in counter-insurgency operations and modernization of equipment—that is, Turkish purchases from Israeli arms manufacturers. The AKP, of course, has taken no steps to annul it.

Yet Islamist protests against the dispatch of Turkish troops to Lebanon were muted, if somewhat bigger in the east of the country. Ironically, it was the more concerted opposition to the deployment from the Republican People’s Party and the nationalist right that helped to rally AKP deputies’ support. At the end of August 2006, the rigidly secularist President Sezer—anathema to the religious conservatives—declared that, rather than send troops to Lebanon, Turkey should be dealing with its domestic problems, implying the resurgent PKK in the south-east. This was sufficient to convince the AKP parliamentarians that the enemies of ‘conservative democracy’ were united in trying to prevent

the government from sending troops. The Cabinet convened immediately after the President's statement and agreed to the deployment; a decision ratified by 340 to 192 in an emergency session of the Meclis on September 5th, despite opinion polls which showed that some 80 per cent of the public was against the measure. The decision was also welcomed, of course, by the EU, the Western media and pro-Western liberals in Turkey; some European commentators even saw it as a good reason to speed up EU accession talks.

### *A hardening stand*

A third potential basis of opposition to the AKP lies in the rising nationalist sentiment in Turkey, which has been demanding a tougher position against the Kurdish rebels, more controls on markets and more cautious relations with the West. Support for the EU has decreased markedly over the past year. The emergence of a potential Kurdish statelet in northern Iraq has alarmed Turkish nationalists who think that this might be a first step towards a greater Kurdistan, which would inevitably lead to the dismemberment of the country. This has led to the establishment of several racist and ethnic segregationist groups in the last years. These groups, some of them armed and led by retired officers, are becoming popular especially in western regions with large Kurdish migrant populations. Equally, the potential Kurdish statelet has emboldened Kurdish nationalists. In 2004 the PKK ended the ceasefire it had maintained since the arrest of its leader Abdullah Öcalan in 1999, citing the AKP government's refusal to grant a total amnesty. But by taking up arms, the guerrilla have inevitably provoked both a security clampdown and a nationalist backlash. The PKK declared another cease-fire at the end of September 2006, which again fell on deaf ears.

Whereas two years ago the Erdoğan government—admittedly, at EU urging—emphasized the need to acknowledge Kurdish identity, it is now obsessed with arresting the leaders of the PKK. In terms all too familiar from the 1990s, it has dismissed a mass demonstration in the east as 'terrorism', and brushed off criticisms of the security forces for having killed ten civilians. In June 2006, the AKP introduced amendments to the anti-terror legislation that seriously curtailed existing civil rights. Suspects under arrest will no longer have access to lawyers for the first 24 hours of their detention, increasing the likelihood of torture. It is now a criminal act to publish statements by illegal organizations, or even to sympathize

with their views. This could hurt the Islamists and sections of the left, but will most probably be used against supporters of Kurdish organizations. The AKP seems likely to ride the nationalist tide by shifting in a more authoritarian direction, especially where the Kurds are concerned.

At the same time—such are the contradictions of client-state nationalism—many establishment figures have argued that Turkey has to make itself ever-more indispensable to the Americans in order to persuade Washington to set limits on the emergence of any form of Kurdistan. This was one of the arguments used by secular-nationalist journalists, policy advisors and intellectuals in favour of joining the UN occupation force in Lebanon—that this was the only way to get the US to crack down on the PKK bases in northern Iraq. Given their current plight in Iraq the Americans are in no position to antagonize the Kurds, but they have appointed a retired American general as a facilitator to soothe Turkish fears and negotiate between Ankara and the Kurds. Ironically, the logic of a growing Turkish nationalism thus leads to intensifying Americanization, even as it demonstrates the AKP's incapacity to implement this latest twist on its own.

Internally, then, the Turkish ruling bloc has reasserted its hegemony through the passive revolution of the past decades: integrating and demobilizing the provincial bourgeoisie and religious communities, while maintaining its control. The new-formed AKP, less than two years old when it won its first overall majority, has been the main agent of this 'revolution-restoration'. Its leaders had absorbed aspects of the radical Islamist revolt of the 1980s, to which they added big business, the Pentagon and a keen understanding of New World religiosity. Is the model exportable? In 2006, Hamas announced that it would take the AKP as its exemplar when it moved into the offices of the Palestinian Authority.<sup>29</sup> But the AKP's current hegemony, as we have seen, rests on a very specific conjuncture of mobile class forces, state structures and cultural traditions. However eager other Muslim leaders in the Middle East may be to follow Erdoğan's example, it remains to be seen whether Turkey's brand of Islamized Americanization can be easily reduplicated elsewhere.

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<sup>29</sup> 'Ankara Warns Hamas: Renounce Violence and Negotiate', *Zaman*, 17 February 2006; 'Hükümet Kurarken AKP'yi Örnek Aldık', *Tempo*, 23 March 2006.