

Secular and Islamic Politics in Turkey

The making of the Justice and
Development Party

Edited by
Ümit Cizre

Routledge Studies in Middle Eastern Politics

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Turkey is 99% Muslim, its ruling party, Justice and Development Party (JDP), comes from but denies its Islamist pedigree and has a very secular feel. However, the deeply secular regime distrusts the JDP with regard to its 'true' colours. This book tries to make sense of these paradoxical perceptions which have characterized Turkey's politics since the JDP came to power in 2002.

The key momentum for shaping the nature and trajectories of the ruling party of Turkey since 2002, the JDP, has been the 'identity' question. The JDP's commitment to transform Turkey's politics was part of its engagement to remake its own identity. The JDP's adoption of a conservative-democrat identity has rested on a new understanding of Westernization, secularism, democracy and the role and relevance of Islam in politics.

The book's central problem is to explain both the politics of change the JDP initiated and sustained in the first three years in office and the politics of retreat it has made from its reformist agenda since 2005. The book analyzes not just the catalysts for its reformist agenda of the first three years but tries to explain its reversal to an inward-looking conservative nationalist attitude. By approaching this topical debate from the conceptual stance rather than a party-centered approach, Ümit Cizre identifies that the change the JDP has initiated within Turkey's political Islam and in Turkish politics is the product of an interactive process between many levels, actors, forces and historical periods. The forces and actors covered include:

- global forces of Islam;
- the secular establishment and its popular extensions;
- the past and present Islamic actors in political and non-political spheres;
- the changing balance of forces in the region which frame the EU and the US policies toward the JDP.

Secular and Islamic Politics in Turkey is a valuable contribution to the study of globalization and 'change' in contemporary political Islam, the relationship between religion and politics, and secularism and political Islam. As such, it will be of interest to students and researchers alike in the area of Islamic politics, democratization, European Union and political Islam, and globalization.

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Introduction

The Justice and Development Party: making choices, revisions and reversals interactively

Ümit Cizre

At a point when the threat of Islamic terrorism is widely perceived as having thrown Transatlantic security at risk, a remarkable development took place in Turkey in 2002: a pragmatic-conservative and Islam-sensitive party—the Justice and Development Party, henceforth JDP—came to power by elections and “propelled Turkey into an open-ended path of European style normalization” (Belge 2004: 5) to converge with the European Union (EU) standards in almost all walks of life. Operating within the parameters of a strict secular state system and through a series of reforms in civil-military relations, the judiciary, parliamentary procedure, minority rights, national security, macroeconomic management and the public sector, the JDP government endeavored to improve political and economic life with the EU accession process in mind. While the JDP’s policies reinvigorated the political system, they also posed a strategic dilemma to the existing secular power elite. The decisive factor in setting in motion these changes was not just the ‘articulation’ of the ‘democratic reformist’ character of the ruling party with its ‘Islamist’ pedigree. In part, it was the priority the JDP placed on reducing the power of traditional centers of power, spearheaded by the military. Translated into political language, the ruling party’s plan of action seemed to move from maintaining traditional security concerns, which revolved around protecting the interests of a sanctified state as the centerpiece of Turkish politics. It was this unusual combination of the Islam-friendly character of the JDP with a ‘genuine-sounding democracy program’ which was anathema to the secular power-wielders of the Republic.

Historical dialectics between the Turkish state and Islamist platforms have relevance in this perception of the party by the secular state elite: the depiction of Islam as ‘the other’ or as the symbol of ‘non-modern orientalism’ has always constituted the essential substance of the secular state’s legitimacy itself. Against this history, seeds of a potential conflict between the establishment and the JDP were already sown from day one. The extent to which the government ‘disturbed’ “the seemingly unassailable balance of forces” (Belge 2004: 5) is evidenced by the way the latter elements organized the most relentless and polarizing secular campaign in Republican history against the JDP. The question this campaign has raised is whether the insecurity and distrust of Turkey’s secularists derive from the Turkish

Armed Forces' (TAF) genuine concerns about the Islamization policies of the ruling party rooted in an anti-secular past; or from its fears that the EU-inspired reforms would transfer political power to the elected civilians.

The government's reform packages, started in November 2002, have:

- expanded freedom of expression;
- abolished anti-terrorism provisions that authorized punishment for verbal propaganda against the unity of state;
- abolished the death penalty;
- established retrial rights for citizens whose court decisions are overturned by the European Court of Human Rights;
- allowed education and broadcasting in the Kurdish language; and
- ended the intransigence of Turkish foreign policy towards the Cyprus question.

According to the European Parliament, those reforms were "courageous . . . and revolutionary" (EP 2003: 5) and signify a "strong motivation and political will" (ibid: 6) to converge with the EU's standards and practices. The sheer volume and speed of the reforms, as well as the consensus of support behind them, helped change the popular perception of the civilian government as under-achieving, unstable and corrupt. However, the 'good' reform record of the ruling party did not follow a consistent discourse and course.

There has been a bleak side to the party's performance on many levels since 2005. The government's 'regressive' record can best be seen in its loss of ability to provide a democratic reform purpose and direction, which includes robust reforms to harmonize with the 'best practices' of the EU on civil-military relations, education and public administration, and the authority of unelected state institutions, including the president, and the supreme judicial bodies. Democratizing Turkey's party system, intra-party workings, and election laws and brokering a democratic peace in the southeast were also part of the expectations from the party's reform agenda. A central question of this volume is to seek explanations to the JDP's loss of potential to transform the macro parameters of Turkey's politics that would enable the system to move toward a new era of more democracy and better opportunities.

On another level, although met with some understanding, the JDP's politics have created problems for the party faithful as well. Some regard the party's new version of Islam-friendly new politics as having moved away from its 'roots and habits' towards 'mundane vocations and expectations.'¹ However, in this circle, there is a general recognition that this represents the politics of adapting to adversity rather than a total abandonment of political changes that are expected from an Islam-friendly party.

Granted that there are strong correlations between international/regional changes and domestic developments in the aftermath of the September 11

attacks, what is the key momentum for reshaping the nature and trajectories of the evolution of the JDP government? This volume suggests that it is the 'identity' question: the commitment to transform Turkey's political landscape was also part of an engagement to transform the identity of the party. Refusing to identify the party as 'Muslim Democrat' but instead opting for a conservative-democrat identity was predicated on the model of Turkey's center-right platforms. The leadership set a profile loyal to the central values of the Republic as well as to those of Western democracy. For their part, the makers of the party aimed at broader-based support than they would have had if they had presented the party as the descendant of the National Outlook Movement (NOM). Therefore, one key objective of this volume is to analyze the catalysts, both internal and external, that have interacted to propel and encourage the JDP government to pursue a path breaking reform agenda, which simultaneously rests on a new understanding of the role and relevance of Islam, Westernization, democracy and secularism.

Unravelling the process of change that has taken place under the Islam-sympathetic JDP government unearths a subset of related questions: How was the ruling party able to cope with the historical tension with the politically active and powerful secular establishment and the military to restore some sense of well-being to a nation which seemed to have completely lost it in the previous decade? In particular, the analysis asks whether the secular establishment's position on the reform process has been shaped entirely by its suspicions about the hidden Islamic intentions of the party or by the fact that democratic reforms would weaken its own power positions and influence in Turkey's politics.

Against this background, a very broad objective of this volume is to show that neither the genesis of an Islam-friendly political party, nor the ideological orientation of the institutions of an establishment that is opposed to it, necessarily determines their subsequent patterns of action. This volume goes beyond the strong emphasis made in literature on the reproductive features and functions of political Islam. Instead, it dwells on contradictions and inconsistencies in Islamic identity and its interactive formation as the major sources of its creativity and strength. The volume also shows that circumstances inside and outside the country have created a state of affairs in which the choices available to the firmly secular establishment and pedigree-denying JDP government have been neither monolithic nor uni-dimensional. Rather, policies have shifted between confrontation, acceptance of some curtailment of one's power, establishing some points of contact, and confrontation avoidance and yet embark on 'fresh' directions and alignments.

Catalysts and Thresholds of the JDP's Democratic Reform Agenda

It is widely thought that the JDP's rise to power is a product of the structural disintegration of dominant power relations and paradigms in Turkey. In other words, the 2002 elections made clear the rejection by vast sectors of the population of the existing political framework and political inertia. In

contrast, the 2001-born JDP's focus on the accession to the EU has helped to transform the negative inertia of the 1990s into a positive discourse relevant for effective governance. The project of pulling the country towards European norms and standards of democracy shone against the abysmal failure of Turkish politics in the last decade to go beyond being an appendix to neo-liberal market reforms. This is not to deny that the JDP's 'change'/reform mandate also relied on the practical need to ease the economy, which, in February 2001, was reeling from the effects of the gravest slump it had met in the country's history.

Any appraisal of the ruling party's strategic attempts to contain, challenge, undermine or cooperate with the secular establishment needs to trace the origins to the power struggle between the two sides, especially since the last military intervention into politics in 1997. It was only ten years ago, after its historic meeting on February 28, 1997, that Turkey went through another military intervention without the military actually having to take power directly. The military-dominated National Security Council (NSC) issued a list of measures to the coalition government led by the Islamist Welfare Party to eliminate the 'creeping Islamization,' which finally led to the resignation of the government, closure of the party by the Constitutional Court and the banning of its key policymakers from active politics.

The military and civilian protagonists of the 1997 intervention saw the roots of the crisis in the 'irresponsible' use of Islam for partisan purposes by the political class. Therefore, since then, they have attempted to marginalize the forces of political Islam by manipulating the technical rules of the game, disciplining representative institutions, and strengthening the state-protecting and control-directed national security policies in the public. While the secular Republican forces were locked into securitizing political life, civilian energy was spent on political opportunism and the mechanics of staying in power, which involved not upsetting the status quo.

The JDP's agenda for transformation of the Turkish political system coincided with a shift in the Islamist discourse toward universal values of democracy, human rights and rule of law in many parts of the world. This reappraisal was translated in the Turkish case into coming to terms with Turkey's time-tested Westernization process. The JDP leadership promoted Turkish inclusion into the EU not just as a strategy of reordering the party's ideological priorities but also as a realistic acknowledgement of the historical roadmap of Turkey. A critical lesson the JDP drew from the failed decade of the 1990s was a discursive denial of its Islamist pedigree and adoption of a moderate and non-religious discourse in its place. To be able to realize such changes in the identity and agenda of the party was the product of a harsh learning curve. As a party of reformists splintered from the traditionalists in the Virtue Party, the successor party of the WP, the JDP came to the point of accepting that repudiating the WP legacy was not a constraint on its chances of survival, but a prerequisite for renewal. Burhanettin Duran's and Menderes Çınar's co-authored articles and Burhanettin

Duran's contribution in this volume name pragmatism as the perennial element in Turkey's political Islam, which "has grown out of the local government experiences of its leadership cadre" (Duran, p. 83) and "has been strengthened by the JDP's new discourse on conservative democracy" (Çınar and Duran, p. 32). Indeed, this pragmatism of the party replaced the 'essentialist and dogmatic' aspects of the WP's discourse, which squandered resources, opportunities and hopes that could be used to encourage the already rising Anatolian bourgeoisie with a distinct Muslim character.

Moreover, the JDP concluded from the history of the WP that, although since the 1997 intervention the establishment had tried to engineer the creation of a stable centrist government, it had failed abysmally. This was primarily because in promoting secularism, it had relied on a policy that used 'negative symbols of legitimacy' in openly undermining Islamist politics and politicians. Kenan Çayır's article in this volume suggests that this negative stigmatization and "shrinkage of opportunity spaces for the Islamic actors, however, ... led to a reflexive and self-critical attitude rather than to the strengthening of a radical stance in both the WP circles and wider Islamic groups." (Çayır, p. 72). In terms of its conceptions of democracy and modernity, the JDP is considered to be the "product of the emergence of self-critical voices in Islamic circles in the last two decades," which are distinct from the earlier "'collective Islamism' of the 1970s and 80s" (Çayır, p. 64). This is equal to a transformation from an 'Islamist' to a 'Muslim' subjectivity (*ibid.*). It would not be wrong to characterize the emerging engagement with the EU as 'reflexive modernity/action' in terms of representing a shift/transition (Beck 1994: 6) from the conventional understanding of modernization to a risk society where people are "expected to live with a broad variety of different, mutually contradictory, global and personal risks" (*ibid.*: 7). The JDP's search for a new path to modernity is an interactively achieved process of 'self-confrontation' (*ibid.*: 6), and 'self-criticism' (*ibid.*: 11) over the problems, risks and threats this new phase of modernity and its Kemalist state version would introduce.

Another global trend the JDP leadership took up was the personalization of politics. With the decline of the ideological functions of political parties, leaders with strong personalities became the main source of appeal to voters during the 1990s. In Erdogan's case, he was the leader "who went from a jail cell to leadership of his country in less than four years" (Kinzer 2004: 5). He cultivated the image of himself as a man of the people by emphasizing his poor background and addressing people directly rather than using organizational channels. Rhetorically, he stressed how the average voter had been short-changed by the populist policies of his predecessors. Thus, the JDP helped to replace politics of aloof institutions with politics of the heart.

A religious conservative, democratic, reformist and pro-European identity gave the party two windows of opportunity: first, in the wake of the disenchantment that characterized the 1990s, the flagship project of EU

accession introduced a ‘point of contact’ with the Kemalist Republican ideal of building a new Turkey on the model of the West almost from the ‘bottom-up.’ On the other hand, although abandoning explicitly Islamist politics, by characterizing itself as ‘conservative,’ the JDP left its ideological transformation usefully ambiguous: “the departure of the JDP from its National Outlook Movement heritage does not necessarily mean that it cuts its ties with the Islamic movement in Turkey” (Duran, p. 85). By keeping “some affinity with the Islamist ontology,” (ibid, p. 85) the party can reassure its religious and Islamist constituency if need be. To look at it from a different perspective, it is also possible to claim that while the Islamic roots of the JDP enabled it to evoke conservative themes of continuity and therefore certainty in Turkish politics, such as an almost metaphysical respect for the state and the importance of the role of Islam in party identity and policies, the project of integration with Europe endeared the party to sectors of the population waiting for genuine change.

In his contribution to the volume, Ahmet Yıldız develops the thesis that ‘conservative democracy’ definitely pulls the party to the center-right of Turkish politics of the Democrat Party (1945–60), Justice Party (1961–80) and Motherland Party (1981–) genre (Yıldız, p. 42). However, the ideological discourse of the party still carries the vestiges of the NOM, although it is updated and revised under the current perspective of Muslim democrats (Yıldız, p. 45). Aydın and Dalmis in their article provide empirical evidence for the existence of two dynamics operating in opposite directions in the ongoing identity making process of the party. Although the JDP follows the model of the modernist Motherland Party of the 1980s rather than its Islamist predecessors, the dominance of those groups who belonged to the National Outlook Movement in the past seem to steer the party in a more conservative direction (Aydın and Dalmis, p. 221). Regarding this issue, Ahmet Yıldız’s interesting conclusion about the nature of change in the party’s identity is that “this dual habitus of the JDP is an indication of the fact that Turkey’s center-right, with its religious, liberal and conservative components, has found itself a new watercourse. This has contributed significantly to the marginalization of traditional religious movements and groupings of National Order Movement and other center-right parties” (Yıldız, p. 42).

The JDP’s adoption of a new discourse was based on the interactivity of multiple actors, forces and historical periods. Kenan Çayır’s article in this volume highlights this fact by referring to the Islamic actors rethinking, revisiting and reassessing their position regarding fundamental issues and practices in interaction with secular and modernist groups, which are not just confined to political but to non-political spheres in the context of the last 30 years of Turkey (Çayır, p. 64). Furthermore, in trying to understand the JDP government’s shifting positions and policies on the political role of the Turkish military, Ümit Cizre considers it essential to factor in organized interests and popular sentiments as well as the strategic environment in the aftermath of September 11, in terms of the impact of changing regional

and international power balances (Cizre, pp. 144–45). In the latter group of variables, the most significant of all is the changing logic that frames the EU's policies with regard to Turkish entry and the USA's policy towards Turkey within the context of post-9/11 strategic priorities and the Iraq war (*ibid.*).

The JDP's transformative politics of the first three years would not have been possible if the JDP's and Turkey's international salience had not undergone a fundamental change from 'where' Turkey is located to 'what' Turkey's identity is.² During the Cold War, Turkey's importance for the West was measured by its location as a 'front' country against the communist threat. That necessitated an assessment of its military strength. However, after September 11, its political identity as a Muslim and democratic country respectful of human rights and the rule of law increased its security value for the West. Turkey seemed to be the living example that the Islamic world and European democracies do not have to be in conflict but can form relationships on the bases of cooperation, shared understanding and tolerance. That the Turkish regime seems to combine both of these worlds provided some help to the Euro-Atlantic alliance in exerting some influence in the region.

From the security interests of the Western alliance, the regime's identity now included three elements: first, its secular character; second, its strong military power³ as the strategic means to counter the Islamic threat; and third, the Islamic credentials of the party in power. The endearing character of the JDP government as perceived by the transatlantic partnership and the JDP's single-minded dedication to the EU become relevant at this point. In the prevailing moral sensibility that characterized international politics after 9/11, none of the components of this picture was considered incompatible—i.e., no tension was foreseen between a strong military and democracy. Thus, the JDP government did not have to try hard to ingratiate itself with the West; the strategic change in the region did that for the ruling party.

However, the TAF obviously considered the JDP's accession to power as confirmation of its belief that Islamic reactionism is a substantial security threat to the regime. The factors that enhance the ruling party's bridge-model value in the eyes of the West could not offer much solace to the Turkish secular establishment. On the contrary, it has caused a further rift between the military establishment and the president of the Republic and the JDP government (Hill and Taspinar 2006: 90). While the JDP's value as a model lies in the fact that it "combines secularism within a Muslim social and cultural environment to offer a good example for other countries in the region," (EC 2004: 11) the military high command, for instance, has rejected the inclusion of any reference to Turkey's 'Islamic' character in any portrayal of Turkey as bridging West and East or nominating the region as a 'model.' Central to the establishment's view is the unequivocal rejection of juxtaposing Islam and secularism.⁴ President Sezer, on the other hand, is

also reported to have expressed on several occasions his disdain about the use of Turkey as a model for ‘moderate Islam.’⁵ Instead, he has reiterated the establishment’s position that if the international community is determined to show Turkey as an example for the region to follow, she can only be an example by its secular and—automatically linked—democratic features (Turkishpress 2005).

Ironically, although Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the prime minister, subscribes fully to the bridge metaphor, he agrees with the military leaders’ conviction on the meaninglessness of the emphasis on ‘moderate’ Islam. For him, any division between radical and moderate wings within Islam is redundant as Islam is unitarian in nature. He therefore affirms the necessity for secularism in order to ensure the state’s neutrality between Muslims and non-Muslims (Milliyet 2004b). It is precisely this understanding of secularism which underlines the prime minister’s pro-EU rhetoric.

This volume underlines the point that although the JDP meant different things to the international community and the regime at different times, in general, it has benefited from the global reshaping of the world after the Cold War and 9/11. It has made a momentous policy score by receiving the green light from the EU in December 2004 to start accession talks. Moreover, in the new strategic environment, international sympathy and support for the Islam-friendly government on the basis that it serves as a geopolitical ‘Muslim democratic model’ in the region has undermined the ability of the forces of the status quo, especially that of the high command to challenge the government. Most of all, the JDP’s commitment to the EU by taking over the TAF’s ‘vanguard’ role—of propelling change in a Western direction—has caused embarrassment for the TAF. As the EU membership was supposed to be the intended endpoint of the Republic’s mission of generating sufficient modernization to eliminate the Islamist threat, the party’s appropriation of the military’s vanguard mission has also produced moderation on the part of the high command on the EU issue, despite the initial resistance.

Limits to the Transformative Politics of the JDP

The secular establishment’s strategy toward the JDP’s agenda of a change of identity-cum-reform is shaped entirely by its suspicions about the party’s hidden Islamic intentions. Perceiving the JDP as ‘reformist/Western in form, Islamist in content,’ the modern/secular elements’ belief in the ‘hidden agenda’ of the JDP is based on what Ahmet Yıldız calls a form of wishful thinking that “National Outlook cannot change” because “it must not change, otherwise we will lose the present position that favours our vested interests” (Yıldız, p. 5). Both Kenan Çayır and Ahmet Yıldız agree that this is an ‘essentialist’ position, which is also reproduced by the founding leader of the National Outlook, Necmettin Erbakan, and other critics of the party within the NOM movement. These critics can only secure their political

objectives when the JDP's power and vestiges are eradicated from Turkey's political landscape. Although defeated in the parliament with the government's approval, introduction of adultery as a crime in the new Turkish Penal Code in 2004 and the granting of licenses to sell alcoholic beverages to the municipal and city-county councils in the same year have been cited as evidence of the government's Islamist-motivated public policies. Equally important have been the ruling party's retreats from taking steps to remove the ban on headscarves in universities and allowing the graduates of religious schools to enter into university entrance exams.

The establishment's position on the hidden agenda is non-negotiable. If the JDP captures an electorally and morally strong position in the eyes of the public as a legitimate and accepted part of politics, in all likelihood, it will exacerbate the tensions between the guardians of the military and itself and cause an intervention of some modality. Winning in this sense will mean losing the political power the party strives for absolutely.

An important strand of criticism shared within the JDP-critical secular sectors is its doling out of benefits to supporters as business contracts or jobs in return for loyalty. But this is an endemic feature of Turkey's politics common to all political formations stemming from the insecurities of the civilian political system. Faced with a strong model of military guardianship, the political class constantly considers the trade-offs between democratization strategies that would damage the existing political role of the military and the political risks of a military intervention in any modality. It is more than likely that the civilian political class will not choose reforms that will terminate the conditions of military prominence in politics. The result is that the doling out of benefits is part of the system of paying and receiving political payoffs from the rent-seeking networks as a short, rather than long-term activity. The political class, therefore, finds it more worthwhile to guard itself against the military's interventionist potential by building up a power base for itself while in power. Menderes Cinar's article in this volume characterizes the JDP's scramble for power as "community-creating and personalizing politics" (Çinar, p. 126) and explains the dynamics behind this push as being the need to enlarge domains of control and influence, especially after the fading out of the flagship project of the EU.

The JDP's U-turn from the politics of change/reform coincided with mounting criticism from the EU about the weakened resolve of the government to go ahead with the reforms it had started. For instance, while the European Commission's 2005 Enlargement Strategy Paper of November 2005 quite explicitly puts up a list of reforms still to be implemented, the EU's Common Position Paper issued after the Turkey-EU Partnership Council meeting in June 2006, maintains that progress has been made but the pace of change has slowed in Turkey in the last year. Therefore, the Strategy Paper recommends significant further efforts regarding the implementation of reforms in human rights; civil-military relations; security

affairs; fundamental freedoms; torture and ill-treatment; non-violent expression of opinion; freedom of religion; cultural rights; protection of minorities; domestic violence and honor killings; and the normalization of relations between Turkey and EU members, including the Greek Cypriot government.⁶

Increasing reluctance in EU circles to go ahead with the accession talks planned to start on October 3, 2005 has produced an inward-looking conservative nationalist quagmire. However, there is also the fact that as the democratic restraints, which the struggle for the EU process exerted, were weakened, the conservative-nationalist instincts of the JDP seemed to reawaken. This is a clear manifestation of a malaise that afflicts Turkey's political parties—any forward movement toward fuller and better democratic order is cut short and they stray toward far right political positions. Essentially, this is a product of the huge discrepancy between a state-loving and society-controlling political tradition which pervades the minds and memories of political actors, and establishing Western-style democracy not just in procedural norms of democracy but internalizing them as habits and responsibilities. The JDP's articulation of democratic reforms ran counter to its penchant for traditional right-wing politics, which conceives power as basically 'unaccountable,' legitimized solely by elections. Moreover, the JDP shares with the conservative right-wing streak the partiality to the absolute authority of the leadership; distaste for politics of differences and disregard for fundamental freedoms and minority rights.

The ruling party's convergence with the language of a fetishized state and nation combined with the continuing primacy of state rather than human 'security' considerations regarding the Kurdish question have opened up a space for conservative nationalist reactions. The JDP government's backslide into an undemocratic position to limit the freedom of expression was extremely unsettling for the liberal democrats. The party's new stance was manifested in the amendments to the Anti-Terror Law and Article 301 of the Penal Law, which threatened freedom of expression and alienated Turkey's liberal and pro-EU sectors, the business world, civil society, intellectuals and the media. The Semdinli Incident, in Duran's words, "constituted the strictest litmus test for the JDP's new politics regarding political/societal transformation and for the Kurdish question. This incident turned into a political crisis that the JDP failed to manage within the confines of its commitment to democratization" (Duran, p. 99). The JDP government missed the chance to prevent the politicization of the judiciary and allayed public suspicions that the Semdinli incident was a covert underground operation of the 'deep state' to prevent a peaceful political settlement in the region. Instead, it preached to both liberal democratic sectors and an Islam-sympathizing constituency "politics of patience" or a "strategy of patience for change" (Duran, p. 95).

Collision of or Collusion between the Secular Establishment and the JDP?

The government's democracy packages, which were part of Turkey's commitment to align its public policy and practices with the EU's 'good practices,' necessarily placed it on a collision course with the traditional power centers. The courts have been at the forefront of the secular campaign to expose the JDP's Islamic aspirations, warn the public about the possible consequences and adopt an exclusionary conception of 'identity,' sharpening up the existing political polarization. More significantly, the secular camp has successfully undermined the JDP government's ability to provide a 'respectable political discourse' in the eyes of many sizeable sectors. The chapter in this book on the JDP and the military's interaction since 2002 makes the point rather emphatically that the TAF retains a significant degree of influence in politics and has strong civilian allies to protect the officers' vision of democracy, which rests on countering any 'internal threats' to the regime. Despite the progress made to align Turkey's laws with the EU⁷ and despite the fact that accession negotiations were opened on October 3, 2005, both the 2005 and 2006 Progress Reports published by the EU Commission continue to note that the political influence of Turkey's military exceeds that of the armed forces in European member states:

since 2002, Turkey has made good progress in reforming CMRS ... but the armed forces continue to exercise significant political influence ... and Turkey should work towards greater accountability and transparency in the conduct of security affairs in line with member states' 'best practices'

(EC 2005)

The latest Annual Report of November 8, 2006 notes that:

overall, limited progress has been made in aligning civil-military relations with EU practices ... the civilian authorities should fully exercise their supervisory functions in particular as regards the formulation of the national security strategy and its implementation, including with regard to relations with neighbouring countries

(EC 2006: 8)

A unique set of conditions, however, had converged to override the existing role of the military through the landmark democracy package of August 2003. The package was designed to bring Turkey in line with the EU criteria and included major constitutional amendments designed to curb the powers of the NSC, considered to be Turkey's "parallel government" (Lowry 2000:

48), and convert it into an advisory body. At that time, broad support in Turkey for EU membership restricted the ability of the military officers to oppose a significant reduction of their power. However, it became clear that once the EU-driven democracy agenda had faltered, the military could pursue other options through its well-developed institutional channels to sustain its political influence and continue the imperatives of guarding the secular republic. Cizre's contribution to this volume shows that the JDP's initial success in drawing the NSC away from an executive role in politics was closely connected with the existence of a sufficient margin of comfort that the civilian authority derived from its reform performance.

The JDP's military policy has also backslidden from its earlier discourse, which combined a search for a consensus with the military while proactively extending civilian oversight over it. Since 2005, it has reverted to a policy of pure and simple confrontation avoidance in a power balance which greatly favored the military sector. The important point Cizre makes is that in the new balance of power between the civilians and military,

the latter no longer passively exercises political power solely by taking advantage of legal and mental biases built into the political system. In the second phase, the armed forces are on the offensive, counterbalancing their partial loss of political influence by actively creating new instruments which can be used to perform the same functions

(Cizre, p. 147)

It is fair to deduce from its acquiescent strategy that the JDP attaches a higher premium to avoiding a possible threat of a coup from the military than on establishing democratic civil-military relations, which is a fundamental part of the post-Cold War concept of democratic governance of a society in general and of security agencies in particular.

This reversal of policy by the JDP raises the question of whether the 2003 democratic alterations in the civil-military equation were motivated more by the mechanical preconditions for further alignment with the EU than a democratic discourse that originated from the party itself. Indeed, the party leadership tends to challenge the military's political prerogatives more because it undermines electoral democracy than from its concern to establish a system of democratic governance over the military. In the meantime, senior officers regard the increased political autonomy of the TAF as being in defense of secularism not in defense of a political stand. Indeed, while this book was being completed, on April 27, 2007, within hours of the failure of the presidential candidate Abdullah Gül to win enough votes in the first round of ballots in the parliament, the Turkish General Staff posted a memorandum on its website warning the government of what they considered to be an 'above-politics' or 'unpolitical' rather than antipolitical way: "[T]he TAF maintains its firm determination to carry out its legally specified duties" to protect the secular republic and that "it should not be forgotten

that the TAF is a side in this debate and a staunch defender of secularism.” The Internet memorandum hinted that the general staff might act against the government if Abdullah Gül—the Foreign Minister and the JDP’s presidential candidate—was kept as the presidential candidate. As the Constitutional Court also annulled the first round of presidential voting, the prime minister called for early elections on July 22 to resolve the crisis. This midnight statement was historic in the sense of being the first explicitly worded warning to a democratically elected government in Turkey after the country had already been ‘officially connected’ to the EU as a potential member.

In the light of Turkey’s impressive record for implementing change and ongoing enthusiasm for Europeanization, is it safe to suggest that future politics will probably evolve in favor of changing the existing bias for a ‘more security less democracy’ formula? The April 2007 memorandum made clear that no amount of external pressure can lead to democratic reforms if the constitutionally elected civilian power-holder, the JDP, does not have the ‘political will’ to sustain the process. The ruling party’s lack of strength can be explained by a number of causes: given the fact that the power balance favors the secular elite, the counter elite, the JDP, is not entrusted to take decisions on key issues; and/or external conditions produce unintended/ perverse consequences which create negative incentives for the JDP to reinforce its new identity and complete a risky project, which could bolster its chances of survival in the long-term.

Notes

- 1 This criticism is expressed by a renowned Islamic intellectual, Ali Bulac, and Kenan Camur in a revived website (went off the web in 1996 having published two Islamic journals called *Bilgi and Hikmet*). ‘AKP’ye Demir Yumruk,’ February 10, 2006.
- 2 Gunter Verheugen, the former EU Commissioner responsible for enlargement, coined this critical phrase about the changing strategic importance of Turkey: He said that before 9/11, the fundamental question was ‘where’ Turkey was located; after that date the question turned into ‘what’ Turkey was in terms of her identity. Quoted in Yetkin (2004).
- 3 Turkey is a long time NATO member and a major US ally; it sits astride Europe, the Balkans, the Middle East and the Transcaucusus and apports twice as much of its national income to its defense budget than any of the other NATO members.
- 4 For instance, General İlker Basbug, the then Deputy Chief of the General Staff, rejected the Islamic-democratic model on the grounds that the secular character of the Republic and a moderate Islam are incompatible. See *Milliyet* (2004a).
- 5 The Turkish president openly referred to Turkey as a ‘secular’ model in his talks with the US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice during her state visit to Turkey. See *Milliyet* (2005).
- 6 The EU Common Position Paper’s online address is: www.turkishpress.com/news.asp?id=128408
- 7 Through two major constitutional reforms made in 2001 and 2004 and eight legislative packages passed between February 2002 and July 2004, three areas of

structural reform as required by the EU have been dealt with. The exception is the position of the chief of general staff (he is still responsible to the prime minister rather than the defence minister).

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Part I

Historical evolution and the interactive making of the Justice and Development Party

1 The specific evolution of contemporary Political Islam in Turkey and its ‘difference’

Menderes Çınar and Burhanettin Duran

Introduction

Islamist movements are almost exclusively seen as anti-modern, anti-democratic and mostly violent political movements based primarily on the portrayal of Islam as an essentially dysfunctional religion for both modernity and democracy (Çınar 2002). Although there is a growing literature that challenges the essentialist portrayals and that emphasizes the secular determinants of Islamist politics, the atrocities of the September 11 terrorist attacks seem to have reinforced the tendency in Western public mind to associate Islamism with anti-Westernism and terrorism. This chapter provides an alternative view to the essentialist and monolithic understanding of Islamism with particular reference to Turkish Islamism.

The authors of this chapter, first, reject viewing Islam as ontologically different from other religions and refrain from reductionist explanations of the political and economic advancement of the West and the backwardness of the Islamic East in terms of differences between Christianity and Islam. Secondly, the authors of this chapter reject transhistorical definitions of Islam and share with Aziz Al-Azmeh (1993: 1) the opinion that “there are as many Islams as there are situations that sustain it.” Islamism as an ideology or a political discourse is derived from a particular reading of Islam. The process of reading the Islamic text and tradition has been a constant but changing one, especially in the face of the needs of the time. As a corollary, third, the authors assume that particular understandings of Islam(ism) are determined by an *interactive relationship* between Islamist movements and their social and political environments. Islamist movements in this respect are inevitably shaped and transformed by the cultural factors, economic structures and political institutions in which they operate. Islamic political thought provides enough material for both authoritarian closures and democratic openings, depending on the nature of the specific political culture, socio-economic factors and attitudes of both the Islamist and non-Islamist political elite. How Islamism and the secular forces interact will be determined by “the deliberate and calculated choices of the leaders, by the configuration of regional political

forces and by international influences” (Monshipouri 1997: 65–66). Hence, it is certain that “attention to historical specificity and to the nuances of difference and similarity among and within Islamist movements is essential to a useful understanding of these phenomena.” (Beinin and Stork 1997: 22; see also Ayoob 2005).

Moreover, the authors emphasize

the heterogeneity of interests and discourses within the Islamist movement, regardless of the commonality of the references, i.e. Islamic principles and sources. Political expressions of Islamist demands are contingent and socially and culturally constructed through processes of interaction that are closely tied to all Islamist organizations
(Duran and Yıldırım 2005: 228)

An analysis of Islamism, therefore, has to pay attention to the fact that Islamist movements are shaped by the interaction not only between Islamists and secularists but also among Islamists themselves. In this way, we do not present Islamic movements as “homogeneous and coherent social units” by “overlooking variations over time in religious perceptions, practice and institutions among different segments of the population within a given society and between different Muslim countries” (Bayat 2005: 891). Finally, Islamism is defined in this chapter by a rather loose criterion simply for the reason that the borders of Islamism are not merely confined to a movement which has a political project/ideology for capturing political power. Rather, conscious epistemological and ontological reference to ‘Islam’ for shaping or directing a state, a society, and an individual, directly or indirectly, is regarded as the essential feature of our conceptualization of Islamism.

Different Trajectories of Islamism

Over time, Islamism has continued to define itself with reference to the West. Historically, the awakening of the contemporary Muslim world started in the nineteenth century as an attempt to rebuild the great civilization of Islam in the face of increasing Western-cum-Christian dominance and colonialism. Criticizing the then prevailing practice of Islam as degenerated, the early Islamists shared the conviction that a return to the pristine or true Islam was essential for the revitalization of Islamic civilization and for reassuming the ‘righteous’ position of supremacy *vis-à-vis* the West. In their minds, the West had developed by borrowing from Islam, while the Muslims’ abandoning of it has resulted in their apparent inferiority. In this way, the Islamists emphasized the merits of Islam. Moreover, in defending Islam as a civilization, the Islamists borrowed from Western categories. Hence, parallels and similarities were found between, for example, the Islamic principle of *shura* and democracy.