

TURKEY'S ISLAMISTS: FROM POWER-SHARING TO POLITICAL INCUMBENCY

The complex relationship between political Islam and the Turkish state – from political exclusion in the early Republican era, to power-sharing in the post-World War II multi-party era, to political incumbency in the 2000s – was crowned by AKP's landslide electoral victory in 2002. The author debunks two myths regarding this relationship: first, that Kemalism enjoyed a monopoly of political power for decades and second, that Islamists achieved victory in 2002 after being the regime's sole opposition. According to the author, Turkey's failed Middle East policy can be attributed to AKP's misconception that its Islamic counterparts would achieve power after the Arab uprisings just as they had done in Turkey in 2002.

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TURKISH POLICY
QUARTERLY

Spring 2015

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The 1995 elections in Turkey, in which the Islamist Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*) won the most votes, garnered much attention both in Turkey and abroad. Welfare Party leader Necmettin Erbakan took office as prime minister the following year, the first time in the country's history that an Islamist had occupied an executive position. Erbakan was subsequently forced out of office in the "post-modern coup" of 28 February 1997, widely interpreted as a sign that achieving power by democratic means was still impossible for Islamists. Prominent Islamists such as current President and former Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan have often declared themselves to be the victims of the February 28 coup, which they cite as an instance of the perpetual repression faced by Islamists and their political constituencies since the founding of the Republic. According to this narrative, Islamists have been excluded from political participation by the military and state bureaucracy – the age-old guardians of secularism in Turkey.

Political Islam has been regarded as the most important political force undermining the power of Turkey's military and bureaucratic elites in the post-February 28 era. After the Justice and Development Party's (AKP) 2002 electoral victory, a plethora of influential academics, journalists, and intellectuals gave their support to the AKP government, trusting that it would bring about a democratic transformation in Turkey. Thirteen years on, however, such hopes have been severely disappointed. Today, Turkey is becoming increasingly authoritarian, with many basic preconditions of democracy, such as freedom of the press and the rule of law, being swept aside.

This article will analyze two concepts in Turkish politics that have, for the most part, been accepted uncritically up until now. First, that Kemalism enjoyed a monopoly of political power since 1923 and second, that Islamists achieved victory in 2002 after being the regime's sole opposition for decades. "Kemalism," is a term derived from the surname of the founder of the Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Regarded as the predominant influence over Turkey's political system for nearly a century, Kemalism has been held solely responsible for the obstacles faced by democracy in Turkey, such as military coups and a system of military tutelage. Political scientist Jacob Torfing famously described the term "democracy" as an instance of an "empty signifier," arguing that the word is "so over-coded that it means everything and nothing."¹ By the same token, "Kemalism" has effectively become an empty signifier in discussions of Turkish politics and foreign policy, being used as a haphazard catch-all term for a wide variety of political parties and ideologies. Notably, Atatürk himself bequeathed no written text or school of thought explicating the principles of Kemalism.

¹ Jacob Torfing, *New Theories of Discourse* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), p. 301.

Moreover, starting in the mid-1960s, the party Atatürk founded, the Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* – CHP), ceased employing the term “Kemalism” to describe its own politics. Regardless of its credential as Atatürk's party, the CHP has not enjoyed single-party rule since 1950; in fact, it has spent a considerable part of the past 65 years as an opposition party. In short, the CHP – which in any case rejects the label of the “representative of Kemalism” – has not had a monopoly on power for more than half a century. Thus, it is by no means easy to identify

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the advocates of Kemalism in Turkish politics and the degree of political power that is enjoyed by this ideology. In recent years, AKP politicians have even described the Kurdish political movement as “neo-Kemalist” and the People's Democratic Party (HDP) leader Selahattin Demirtaş as the standard-bearer of “Kurdish Kemalism.”² One of the most striking demonstrations of Kemalism's status as an “empty signifier” was Erbakan's pronouncement, “If Atatürk were alive today he would undoubtedly vote for the Welfare Party (...) the things that were accomplished in Atatürk's era are in accordance with our own beliefs.”³ “Kemalism” is thus an all-purpose descriptive term to which everyone can lay claim, but which in reality is devoid of meaning.

If one defines Kemalism as the reigning ideology of the Atatürk era, then strictly speaking the term cannot be applied to the period after Atatürk's death in 1938. If, on the other hand, one defines it as belonging to the era of single-party rule, then one cannot speak of post-1946 Kemalist ideology. According to historian Feroz Ahmad, the CHP acknowledged that “Islam was an important factor in Turkish politics” around this time; with the transition to a multi-party system in 1946, it began to make concessions on issues of religion.⁴ It was during these years that Hasan Saka, a prominent CHP politician, warned, “If we do not have religion classes taught at school, our party will not receive a single vote from the people in the upcoming elections.”⁵ Other signs of the changing relationship between religion and the state

2 Taha Özhan, “Kurdish Kemalism,” *Sabah*, 15 May 2015.

3 “Erbakan: ‘Çiller boşuna çırpınıyor,’” [Çiller is struggling pointlessly], *Milliyet*, 23 February 1994.

4 Feroz Ahmad, *Demokrasi Sürecinde Türkiye (1945-1980)* [The Turkish Experiment in Democracy] (İstanbul: Hil Yayın, 2007), p. 462.

5 İsmail Kara, *Türkiye'de İslamcılık Düşüncesi 3* [Islamism in Turkey 3] (İstanbul: Pınar Yayınları, 1997), p. 27.

in the post-1946 era included the CHP's creating Turkey's first faculty of theology and re-opening religious shrines to visitors. These and similar measures were undoubtedly attempts at currying favor with religious conservatives in order to fare better at the polls.

Rapprochement Between Turkey's Islamists and the State

In the post-World War II multi-party era, the Turkish government began to make tentative gestures of reconciliation to the Islamists it had kept at a distance for the previous two decades. It made no such overtures, however, to the political Left. On the contrary, it was during this period that the incumbent CHP began to view the Left as the greatest internal threat to the Turkish state. A policy of intensive repression and intimidation against the Left continued throughout the Cold War. This was an important factor in the improvement of relations between Islamists and the state. For all intents and purposes, Islamists had gone into hibernation in 1923; from 1946 onward, however, they formed an anti-communist alliance with the state, thus gaining legitimacy and prestige and learning how to operate within a competitive political environment. This post-war rapprochement depended not only on the state's making concessions in the area of religion, but also on the Islamists' recanting their earlier positions and accepting the Republican reforms.

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Soon after the founding of the Republic of Turkey, Atatürk's 1925 Hat Law (which banned the wearing of the fez and turban) and his promotion of Western-style clothing faced opposition from the prominent Islamist İskilipli Atif Hoca. Atif Hoca was put on trial in one of Turkey's newly-established Independence Tribunals, where he put up no defense. Realizing that the prevailing system of the Republic would not allow him to live in accordance with the rules of Islam, Atif Hoca chose

death, and was executed in 1926. Such an attitude stands in stark contrast to that of Islamists after 1946. Rather than a wholesale rejection of everything the Republic stood for, such Islamists chose to adapt themselves to the new political and social order, preferring to integrate themselves into the system and change it from within. By contrast, İskilipli Atif Hoca viewed Islamic values and Islamic clothing as an intrinsic part of his faith, one for which he was even willing to die. In this, he

could not be more different from a figure like Necmettin Erbakan, who invariably dressed in dapper suits and had a well-known fondness for Versace ties. Similarly, the renowned Islamist author Mehmet Akif Ersoy, who lived in the final decades of the Ottoman Empire, declined to live under the Republic, preferring to emigrate to Egypt. The transformation undergone by Turkey's Islamists since Ersoy's time can be seen in the decision by Fethullah Gülen – the eponymous leader of the prominent Gülen religious order – to live in the United States rather than a Muslim country following the February 28 coup. After 1946, rather than rejecting the Republican order, Islamists assented to reforms such as the transition from the Arabic to the Latin alphabet, the adoption of Western-style clothing, etc. Preferring not to rock the boat, they instead formed an alliance with the state based on an opposition to leftism.⁶

Thus, in 1950, Ahmet Hamdi Akseki, the head of Turkey's Directorate of Religious Affairs, redefined the relationship between religion and the state, basing it on anti-communism: "Islam absolutely rejects communism as well as every kind of ideology and practice related to it. Faith and the soul are the best weapons against communism. It is impossible for a true believer to reconcile himself to communist ideas and practices."⁷

The same year, newly-elected Prime Minister Adnan Menderes similarly proclaimed that "leftism" was more dangerous than "racism": "We view leftism as the agent of powers which are working to the detriment and harm of this nation today. We can never accept such an idea or sentiment."⁸ Grateful for these displays of goodwill by the state, Islamists throughout the Cold War period declared themselves the Left's sworn enemies. Islamist elites such as Necip Fazıl Kısakürek and Sezai Karakoç took a leading role in mobilizing the masses against the Left.⁹ In 1948, Kısakürek urged the state to support "religious and spiritual tendencies" in the fight against communism; in 1956, he proclaimed the enemies of Adnan Menderes to be "the enemies of Islam and ultimately of God."¹⁰ Karakoç, for his part, claimed that the Koran described rightists as the "community of God" and leftists as the "community of Satan."¹¹

"The coup of 12 September 1980 was instrumental in paving the way for the ascendancy of political Islam."

6 Murat Yılmaz, "Darbeler ve İslamcılık,"[Coup d'états and Islamism] in *İslamcılık* [Islamism] (İstanbul: İletişim, 2005), p. 632.

7 Ahmad (1997), p. 464.

8 *Adnan Menderes'in Konuşmaları* [Adnan Menderes's Speeches] Vol. 2 (Ankara: Demokratlar Kulübü Yayınları, 1991), p. 8.

9 While Necip Fazıl Kısakürek's lasting influence over Turkey's Islamists is well-known, the equally important figure of Sezai Karakoç is often ignored. The poem which Erdoğan recited during his presidential campaign, *Sürgün Ülkeden Başkentler Başkentine* [From the Land of Exile to the Capital of Capitals] is by Karakoç himself.

10 Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, *Hadiselerin Muhasebesi 1* [An Account of Events 1] (İstanbul: Büyük Doğu, 2010), p. 198; Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, *Başmakalelerim 2* [My Editorials] (İstanbul: Büyük Doğu, 2008), p. 20.

11 Sezai Karakoç, *Diriliş Neslinin Amentüsü* [The Creed of the Reborn Generation] (İstanbul: Diriliş Yayınları, 1979), p. 13.

“Until the end of the Cold War, the Islamists’ rise to power occurred not despite the state’s efforts but with state support”

It is worth pointing out that the Nation Party (*Millet Partisi*), a 1950s Islamist party that enjoyed open support from Kısakürek and other Islamists, was shut down in 1954 as a result of its religious activities. The ruling Democrat Party (*Demokrat Parti – DP*) made overtures to the Islamists, while also taking steps to prevent political Islam from becoming a rival to its own power. These close ties between Islamists and the Turkish state remained on slippery footing throughout the Cold War. Kısakürek, for example, supported Menderes, from whom he received considerable financial assistance (as he openly acknowledged); nonetheless, he was imprisoned under the DP. As for Necmettin Erbakan, though he was seen as an antidote to leftism in Turkey, his party was still shut down following the 1971 coup. Erbakan fled to Switzerland, but soon afterwards was granted permission to return to Turkey and found another party.

Islamists and the State: Cold War Pragmatism

Democracy was unable to take very deep root in Turkey during the Cold War era, which saw frequent political interruptions in the form of military coups. To survive in such a climate, therefore, required pragmatism and adaptability. During a period when politics was dominated at times by Turkey’s military-bureaucratic elites and at times by right-wing leaders such as Menderes and Demirel, Islamists came to internalize the principle of “might makes right.” Rather than challenge those in power, they chose to cooperate with them. Prior to the 1960 coup, for instance, Kısakürek had wholeheartedly supported Menderes; afterwards, he performed an about-face, declaring that the DP was in a state of “spiritual and moral decay,” and even describing Menderes as “stupendously unwise.”¹²

Starting in the second half of the 20th century, the US began a policy of supporting political Islam in the Middle East, in order to counter the Soviets’ influence as well as the rising tide of Arab nationalism inspired by Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser. The US followed a similar, albeit far more indirect, policy in Turkey, too. Around this time, the works of prominent Islamists like Sayyid Qutb, Hassan al-Banna, and Abul Ala Maududi began to be translated into Turkish. The publishing house that led the way in publishing such translations, Hilal Yayınları, had been founded by Salih Özcan, who was elected as a member of parliament for Erbakan’s National Salvation Party (*Milli Selamet Partisi – MSP*) in 1977. Özcan was also a founding member of the World Muslim League (WML, *Rabita al-Alam al-Islami*),

¹² Kısakürek, (2008), pp. 161-4.

established in 1962 under the leadership of Saudi Arabia. Özcan took a leading role in promoting Saudi investment in Turkey.¹³ In the 1960s, Turkey's national intelligence service also began supporting Islamist publications – which it viewed as a counterweight to the country's growing leftist movements – by assisting with their translation into Turkish.

The Turkish state's policy of alternately tolerating and supporting the growth of Islamist publications and activities in the 1960s was inseparably linked to the Cold War-era realities of the day. Saudi-led support for Islamic movements influenced the US' own policies in the region, and NATO member Turkey was no exception. Indeed, in 1969 CHP Secretary-General Bülent Ecevit drew attention to covert US and Saudi support for Islamism in Turkey, memorably stating, “These people [Turkish Islamists] pretend to be loyal to the *ummah* of Islam. In actual fact they are loyal to the *ummah* of Aramco.”¹⁴ Ecevit's reference to the Saudi-American oil company Aramco was intended to draw attention to US and Saudi support for Islamists in Turkey, who were seen as an antidote to the Turkish Left. In other words, Ecevit viewed the rise of these movements as part of a broader US and Saudi project for the Middle East.

On 16 February 1969, a group of leftists protesting the presence of the US Sixth Fleet in Turkey were attacked by a group of nationalists and Islamists united in their opposition to communism. Two people died in the attack, known as “Bloody Sunday,” which foreshadowed the rising tide of societal violence in Turkey throughout the 1970s; one of its main instigators was an Islamist named Mehmet Şevki Eygi. Around the same time, Eygi – along with Özcan and Deputy Chairman of the Presidency of Religious Affairs Yaşar Tunagür – took part in a convention organized by the WML in Mecca, where he gave talks on the subject of “taking steps to build a *Sharia* state.”¹⁵ Another sign of the alliance between Islamism and the Turkish state can be seen in the center-right Justice Party's (*Adalet Partisi* – AP) slogan *Ortanın Sağındayız Allahın Yolundayız* (We are the Right of Center, We are on the Path of God), devised in response to CHP's campaign known as *Ortanın Solu* (The Left of Center).¹⁶ Nonetheless, Islamists parted ways with the center-right towards the end of the 1960s.

In 1970, in a significant milestone in the history of political Islam in Turkey, Erbakan founded the National Order Party (*Milli Nizam Partisi* – MNP), the short-lived

13 Hasan Köni, “Saudi Influence on Islamic Institutions in Turkey Beginning in the 1970s,” *The Middle East Journal*, Vol. 66, No. 1 (2012), pp. 97-110.

14 “Ecevit Kayseri İçin Konuştu,” [Ecevit Spoke for Kayseri] *Milliyet*, 11 June 1969.

15 Ümit Gürtuna, “Şeriatçı Akımın Gelişmesi Planlanıyor,” [The Fundamentalist Movement is Planned to Grow] *Cumhuriyet*, 1 May 1969.

16 Refik Erduran, “Sırayla,” [By Turns] *Milliyet*, 3 October 1965.

predecessor to his MSP established two years later. Henceforth, Islamists would no longer support parties of the center-right like the DP or, later, the AP, but would instead participate in politics by establishing their own party. Clearly, there was no longer any validity to Kısakürek's earlier pronouncement, "We cannot even speak of Islam and the Islamic cause; we have wrapped it in the snow-white headscarf of our deceased grandmother and hidden it among the rafters."¹⁷

Erbakan's MSP made considerable gains in the 1973 elections, receiving 11.8 percent of the vote and becoming a key party in the formation of a coalition government in Parliament. Between 1973 and 1980, the MSP formed coalition governments first with the CHP, and later with parties of the right such as the Nationalist Action Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi* – MHP) and the AP. The coalitions formed with the MHP and the AP were known as "Nationalist Front governments." With Erbakan as deputy prime minister, highly important ministries such as the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the Ministry of Industry and Commerce came under Islamist control, as did a variety of state institutions.

The Decline of the Center-Right and Islamists' Road to Ascendancy

The coup of 12 September 1980 was instrumental in paving the way for the ascendancy of political Islam. It did so both directly, by ensconcing the "Turkish-Islamic synthesis" as Turkey's underlying state ideology, and indirectly, by crushing the country's leftist opposition, with the result that Islamists came to represent the sole political outlet for the grievances of many low-income members of society.

Since the middle of the 20th century, Islamists have harped on the idea of their own "oppression and victimhood." Erdoğan and other Islamists often like to quote a phrase from Kısakürek's poem *Sakarya Türküsü* (*Sakarya Ballad*): "You're a stranger in your own country, a pariah in your homeland." Such sentiments, however, fail to reflect the reality of Islamists' experiences over an entire half-century. In 1983, in the first elections to take place following the 1980 coup, the Turkish military vetoed participation by the Social Democracy Party (*Sosyal Demokrasi Partisi* or SODEP), led by Erdal İnönü (the son of one of the founders of the Republic, İsmet İnönü). However, the generals gave their approval to the Motherland Party (*Anavatan Partisi* – ANAP) of Turgut Özal, who had run for Parliament as the MSP's candidate from İzmir in the 1977 elections, and whose brother Korkut Özal had served as Minister of the Interior and Minister of Agriculture under the MSP. Özal claimed that the ANAP had united four different camps in Turkish politics: the nationalists, conservatives, liberals, and social democrats. Nonetheless, upon

¹⁷ Kısakürek (2008), p. 9.

closer examination the party proves to have been predominantly made up of nationalists and Islamists.

The ANAP was essentially a 1980s continuation of the Nationalist Front governments that had been created by the AP, MSP, and MHP in the preceding decade; its few liberals and social democrats were mere window-dressing. Turkey's center-right parties – starting with the DP in the 1950s, and later the AP and ANAP – were based on nationalist and conservative values rather than liberal ones. “Liberalism” as such did not exist among the Turkish right; it also lacked a societal base of support. This was the main reason that the center-right made overtures to the Islamists and, over time, became intertwined with the Islamists politically.

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The decline of the center-right eventually resulted in victory for the AKP in the 2002 elections, after which it formed a single-party government. The AKP's rise to power owed much to the fact that Islamists had been coalition partners in various Turkish governments starting in the 1970s and were represented in the ANAP in the 1980s, thus gaining a valuable opportunity to become better organized politically. In addition, in the 1994 and 1999 local elections, the Islamists benefited from the fragmentation of the right, winning races in many municipalities (including Istanbul and Ankara) and thereby acquiring ample budgets for their own use. Going into the 2002 elections, all right-wing parties except for the AKP were suffering from serious image problems in the eyes of the electorate. The ANAP and MHP were held responsible for the 2001 economic crisis – the largest in the history of the Republic; the True Path Party (*Doğru Yol Partisi* – DYP) suffered continuing fallout from scandals dating back to the 1990s. None of these three right-wing parties was able to meet the 10 percent threshold for parliamentary representation. As a result, the AKP won 66 percent of the seats in Parliament with 34 percent of the vote.

Both within Turkey and abroad, the AKP's victory was seen as a significant advance for the establishment of democracy in Turkey based on EU standards: the abolishment of Turkey's system of military tutelage, the proliferation of individual freedoms, and the strengthening of the rule of law in politics. Accordingly, the AKP

won the support of many individuals from different social classes. Many in the US and the EU, in particular, dubbed Turkey a “model country” to be emulated by other democratizing nations in the Middle East. Indeed, in 2004, then-US Secretary of State Colin Powell described Turkey as an “Islamic Republic,” proposing it as a model for Iraq.¹⁸ As demonstrated in this article, two key predictions about Turkey are unrealistic when examined from a historical perspective and have ultimately proved mistaken. The first was that the AKP would make Turkey’s political system more democratic; the second was that the AKP would serve as a model of a democratically-elected government for other Islamist parties in the Middle East.

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The milieu from which the AKP emerged – that of political Islam and of Erbakan’s movement known as the National Vision (*Milli Görüş*) – was not an outsider to the Turkish political system following 1950. It was itself a proponent, and an integral part, of that system, with all its attendant flaws: authoritarianism and a belief that “might makes right.” Until the end of the Cold War, the Islamists’ rise to power occurred not despite the state’s efforts but

with state support. Following the break-up of the Soviet Union, however, this began to change, as Turkey’s Islamists and the Turkish state no longer found common cause in a struggle against the Left. Moreover, in the 1990s, the Turkish state faced a series of political crises such as the Kurdish question, in addition to economic woes fueled in part by corruption. As a result, Islamists ceased to be sharers in power and became the center of political power themselves.

The fight between Turkey’s Islamists and the Turkish state began in earnest after 1996 (when Erbakan became prime minister), continued through the February 28 coup and its aftermath, and only truly ended with the 2008 AKP closure case, in which five of the Constitutional Court’s 11 judges voted to close down the party, just one short of the six votes required. The court nonetheless ruled that the AKP “had become a center for anti-secular activities” and reduced the party’s share of state funding by 50 percent. By that point in time, the AKP had grown so powerful that even Turkey’s formidable military-bureaucratic apparatus did not dare to shut down the party.

¹⁸ Interview with Secretary of State Colin Powell with Maybrit Illner of German ZDF Television on 1 April 2004, http://germany.usembassy.gov/germany/policy/powell_berlinmitte.html

At present, the AKP appears to have won its fight with Turkey's system of military-bureaucratic tutelage. Nonetheless, the increasingly authoritarian ruling party faces serious problems. Despite Erdoğan's 2003 boast of having "removed the mantle of the National Vision," he and his party still possess the Machiavellian mentality characteristic of that movement.¹⁹

AKP's Failed Middle East Policy and its Islamic Counterparts

Four years after the Arab Uprisings – in which many Islamist parties got their first taste of democratic elections – it is clear just how naïve it was to expect that the AKP would serve as a counter-model to radical Islam in the Middle East. The AKP differs from its Islamist counterparts in Egypt, Syria, and Tunisia in one crucial respect. Islamist parties in those countries have had little experience of even being allowed to run in elections, let alone forming coalition governments and having government ministers emerge from their ranks.²⁰ Indeed, the socialist, Arab nationalist regimes in Cold War-era Syria and Egypt saw political Islam, rather than leftism, as a threat needing to be suppressed. In Egypt, the Brotherhood was banned from forming a party for a long time; in Syria, the Brotherhood carried out an armed uprising during the early 1980s, and was almost completely annihilated by the Hafez al-Assad regime. In Turkey, by contrast, the Islamists have had their own party and have been represented in Parliament since the 1970s, enjoying a measure of power at both the local and the national level.

As stated at the outset of this article, there are two twin myths concerning political Islam in Turkey: first, that a Kemalist regime enjoyed unchallenged authority in Turkey for many decades from 1923 until the 1990s and, second, that Islamists were that regime's sole opponent during the same period, only achieving victory in 2002. Unfortunately, these myths have informed Islamists' own view of the Arab Uprisings and are ultimately the main reason why Turkey's Middle Eastern policy has been a miserable failure. Right from the start of the Arab Uprisings, the AKP fell prey to the misconception that Islamists would attain power throughout the Middle East, just as they had in Turkey in 2002. The AKP, which has described the CHP as "Turkey's Baath Party," has similarly viewed the Assad regime in Syria and the Mubarak regime in Egypt as forms of "Arab Kemalism."²¹ However, such parallels clearly fall flat considering that the CHP has not enjoyed single-party rule since 1950.

19 Güngör Mengi, Milli Görüş Sınavı [National Vision Test], *Vatan*, 30 May 2003, <http://www.gazetevatan.com/gungor-mengi-10008-yazar-yazisi-milli-gorus-sinavi/>

20 Although Islamist parties ran in elections in Syria in the 1950s, they were hardly very successful politically.

21 "CHP Türkiye'nin Baas Partisidir," [The CHP is the Baath Party of Turkey] *Habertürk*, 8 September 2011, <http://www.haberturk.com/gundem/haber/667401-chp-turkiyenin-baas-partisidir>

The claim that Kemalism was the dominant ideology among Turkey's military and civil bureaucracy – that it exercised absolute power through a system of “military-bureaucratic tutelage” – does not square with the realities of Turkish politics. After 1960, there were indeed left-leaning groups described as “Kemalist” within the army and the state bureaucracy; however, these groups never constituted a majority and saw their numbers diminish over time. They were expelled from the army in significant numbers following the coup of 12 March 1971 and from the bureaucracy following the coup of 12 September 1980.

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The Baath regime in Syria, by contrast, has been the sole party in power since the 1960s, while the regimes of Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak in Egypt, as well as those of Bourguiba and then Ben Ali in Tunisia, had a monopoly on power from the 1950s onward. In Turkey, the AKP’s landslide 2002 electoral victory crowned what was already a 30-year history of political participation and power-sharing by Turkey’s Islamists, one dating back to the 1973 elections. During that period, Islamists had held bureaucratic posts in the Ministries of Education and Internal Affairs – among others – and in most local administrations. By contrast, in the immediate aftermath of the Arab Uprisings, Islamists in the Middle East were still highly inexperienced, lacking any representation in the state or the bureaucracy. At present, far from enjoying political power, Islamist parties from Tunisia to Syria are struggling for their very survival.

At the start of the 2011 Arab Uprisings, however, both the AKP in Turkey and Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Islamist groups throughout the Middle East had a far more optimistic outlook. Erdoğan and then-Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu believed that the region would see the creation of an “*Ikhwan* belt” stretching from Tunisia to Turkey, with Turkey as its leader.²² The electoral victory of Ennahda in Tunisia later that year, the election of Mohamed Morsi as president of Egypt in 2012, and the weakening of the Assad regime in Syria, were encouraging signs for the AKP. The AKP’s party congress in September 2012 was attended by Morsi, Rashid al-Ghannushi, Khaled Mashal, and other prominent Middle Eastern Islamists, effectively becoming an advertisement campaign promoting Erdoğan

²² For a detailed analysis of Davutoğlu’s Pan-Islamist vision; Behlül Özkan, “Turkey, Davutoglu and the Idea of Pan-Islamism,” *Survival*, Vol. 56, No. 4 (2014): pp. 119-140.

as the leader of the Islamic world. However, these unrealistic hopes were soon dashed by subsequent events.

One of the main reasons for the failure of the Arab Uprisings was that Saudi Arabia and other Gulf monarchies (such as Kuwait and the UAE), which had supported Islamist movements since the 1960s, saw the democratically elected Islamist parties of the post-2011 era as threats to their own regimes. The Gulf states, which had armed the opposition in Syria and Libya (inevitably setting those two nations on the course of civil war) were also the main supporters of the 2013 coup in Egypt.

Another significant factor has been Davutoğlu's tendency to treat his own country as a "global power," despite its being classed by scholars working on Turkey's foreign policy as a "mid-level country." The AKP declared that it would "establish a new order" in the Middle East in 2011, unaware that Turkey lacked the necessary economic, cultural, and military resources for the leadership position it coveted. Now, in 2015, the AKP is in a serious crisis. At present, Turkey has no ambassadors in Yemen, Libya, Israel, Egypt, or Syria. It is currently grappling with the economic and social problems caused by hosting two million Syrian refugees; meanwhile, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) is practically in power just across the border. Erdoğan and Davutoğlu's aspirations have not only been a foreign policy failure, but have given rise to major national security problems for Turkey.

Conclusion

In an interview in the early 1990s, Erdoğan, then-Istanbul Regional Chair of the Welfare Party, stated, "In our view, democracy is merely a tool. Whatever system you wish to obtain, [democracy] is a tool used to choose such arrangements."²³ Now, after 13 years in power, Turkey's Islamists are performing a wholesale eradication of democratic values – which they had never taken to heart, but merely adopted as a pragmatic measure. The AKP's main loyalties are to its own business cronies (especially in the media, construction, and mining sectors); in its eyes, the silencing of every kind of political and social opposition is entirely legitimate. Islamists in Turkey, who emerged out of their country's post-1950 system of military-bureaucratic tutelage, came to power in the 1990s promising to change this system. There is no sign of the "Just Order" promised by Erbakan or the "Justice and Development" promised by Erdoğan. In the end, the Islamists have merely become the new status quo. As Turkey approaches its crucially important June 2015 elections, there are worrying signs of economic and political crisis in store for the country.

23 Metin Sever and Cem Dizdar (eds.), 2. *Cumhuriyet Tartışmaları* [Second Republic Discussions] (Ankara: Başak Yayınları, 1993), p. 419.