Politics and political parties in Republican Turkey

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In the transition from a multinational empire to a nation-state, political life in the new Turkey experienced a radical transformation. There is still heated debate among scholars as to whether there was continuity or change in the Republic's political life. Some have argued in favor of continuity, claiming that the architects of the Republic belonged to cadres who had acquired their experience of politics after 1908. That is true, though the transitions from empire to nation-state, from monarchy to republic, from theocracy to a laicist/secular state and society, seem sufficient reasons to strengthen the claims for change, even for revolutionary change.

When war ended in total collapse in November 1918, it seemed doubtful that a viable Turkish state would emerge from the ruins. The territory left to the Ottomans by the armistice of 1918, which the nationalists then claimed as the borders of the new Turkey, was also contested by Greece and Armenian nationalists, as well as by Britain and France. Thus before there could be any political life, the Turks had to salvage a new state from the ruins of empire, and that took almost five years of war and diplomacy to achieve. During these years the Turkish elites were divided. The sultan's supporters relied on diplomacy and the goodwill of Britain for their very survival. But Britain had its own post-war agenda and did not support Istanbul's aspirations. As a result, the sultan was left with a truncated state by virtue of the terms of the Treaty of Sèvres, which he was forced to sign on 10 August 1920. The sultan justified his total surrender, declaring to his privy council that a weak existence is preferable to total annihilation.

Nationalist forces under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal refused to accept the terms of treaty and continued to fight the Greek invasion of Anatolia that had begun in May 1919. While they fought the Greek army in the west and Armenian nationalists in the east, the nationalists presented a united front. But cracks began to appear in their ranks as soon as victory was in sight. However, in August 1921, when faced with defeat, the assembly appointed Mustafa Kemal commander-in-chief and even allowed him to exercise authority over the assembly in military matters. After winning the battle of Sakarya in September, he became the dominant force in the national movement. Had the nationalists been defeated at Sakarya, leadership might well have passed to another successful general, possibly the conservative nationalist Kazım Karabekir. But for the moment, Mustafa Kemal was triumphant and the National Assembly bestowed upon him the title Gazi (warrior in the holy war or jihād).

Now that their Greek clients had lost the war, the Allies hoped to divide the nationalists by inviting both the sultan in Istanbul and the assembly in Ankara to send delegations to Lausanne to negotiate peace. But the Ankara assembly claimed that it was the only legitimate authority, Istanbul having lost any claim to legitimacy when it collaborated with the Allies. General Refet Bele, a prominent nationalist who sought to maintain the monarchy, advised the sultan to dismiss the 'phantom government' of Istanbul and recognize Ankara. But Vehâdeddin refused. In November, the assembly abolished the sultanate, claiming that the sultan's government had ceased to exist on 16 March 1920 when the Allies had occupied his capital. Thenceforth Istanbul was to be governed as a province from Ankara. Having lost all authority, Sultan Vehâdeddin fled his capital on 17 November aboard a British battleship.

Next day, the assembly, where the radical nationalists declared that sovereignty resided, elected Abûlümecit caliph.

The opposition objected to the assembly exercising such direct authority and claimed that there was no precedent for such practice. Mustafa Kemal responded to this criticism in a speech in which he argued that 'we are unique' ('Biz bize benzeriz') and had no need to copy other models of government. The opposition then attempted to disqualify Mustafa Kemal's membership of the assembly by proposing a law that required five years residence in Anatolia in order to be elected to the assembly. Mustafa Kemal pointed out that his military career had not permitted such residence anywhere, and the proposal was withdrawn. He saw the strength and determination of the opposition and decided to fight back. He announced to the press that he would form the People's Party as the vehicle to wage the political struggle. After touring Anatolia and testing the pulse of the country, Mustafa Kemal announced the party's formation in April 1923.

Meanwhile, Mustafa Kemal took measures to weaken the opposition in Istanbul. When Ankara was declared the capital of Turkey in October 1923, Istanbul was marginalised from political life. The declaration of the Republic on 29 October 1923 and Mustafa Kemal's election as its president also caught the opposition off guard as its prominent leaders - Rauf, Refet, Adnan and Ali Fuad - were out of Ankara. By proclaiming a republic, the Kemalists not only weakened the caliph's supporters who wanted the office of president to go to him, but they proclaimed their commitment to modernity and equality rather than the modernisation and patriarchal hierarchy of the old order. The Kemalists had rejected hierarchy and tradition, the foundations on which the old order had rested and which the conservative nationalists, who went on to form the Progressive Republican Party, wished to maintain.

The offensive against the opposition continued with the arrival of an independence tribunal in Istanbul to deal with dissidents. Prominent members of the opposition were arrested soon after the Istanbul press published the letter of two prominent, pro-British Indian Muslims - the Agha Khan and Ameer Ali, appealing to the government to retain the caliphate. In December 1923, the assembly passed a law that ended whatever military support there was for the opposition; officers were given the choice between their military careers and politics, and officers on active service were barred from being deputies. The opposition wanted Mustafa Kemal to leave the People's Party and become an above-party president. But he rejected both suggestions and declared that conditions in the country were not ripe for more than one party.

For some time there were rumours that the opposition was about to found a party to be called the Progressive Republican Party. The People's Party responded by adding 'Republican' to its own name, becoming the RPP. The Progressive Republican Party (PRP) was founded on 17 November and its programme was published the next day. As a gesture to the opposition, Mustafa Kemal replaced Ismet Paşa as prime minister with Ali Fethi, a figure more acceptable to the opposition. But tension between the parties continued until the outbreak of Şeyh Said rebellion among the Kurdish tribes in February 1925. The government declared martial law and Prime Minister Fethi Bey asked the opposition to dissolve their party. But General Kazım Karabekir refused, claiming there was no reason to do so. In March the assembly passed the Maintenance of Order Law (Takrir-i Sükun Kanunu) and restored the independence tribunals. For the moment all further political activity in the country was frozen. The opposition press was closed down along with those of the nascent left and in June 1925 the government finally ordered the disbandment of the PRP.

Having crushed the Kurdish rebellion and free of all opposition, the Kemalist regime was able to implement policies that destroyed the social foundations of the old order and established those of the new one. In its 1923 regulation the party spoke of exercising national sovereignty in a democratic manner and of modernising society. Now that the government was in a position to carry out reforms, Mustafa Kemal declared: 'Gentlemen . . . the Republic of Turkey cannot be a country of Sheikhs, dervishes, disciples, and followers. The most correct and truest path is the path of civilization.' During the next four years, until the Law for the Maintenance of Order was repealed in March 1929, the legal structure of the country was transformed: women were given rights they had never enjoyed in the past and religion was brought under the state's control so that it could not be manipulated for political ends by opponents of the regime.

There were protests against the reforms and the opposition was driven underground. The institutions associated with the sufi mystical orders (tariyats) may have been destroyed, but their tradition remained strong, even while it was dormant. They reasserted themselves after 1950 and have continued to play a critical political role thereafter. The Kemalists were aware of the existence of opposition and tried to defuse it by promoting a friendly opposition party in the legislature. Therefore in August 1930, Mustafa Kemal announced that Ali Fethi (Okyar), his close associate, had been permitted to found an opposition party, the Free Republican Party. However, such was the people's discontent with the regime, exhibited by popular demonstration on behalf of the new party, that the RPP felt threatened. The government resorted to fraud and vote rigging in the local elections and the Free Party protested but to no avail. Unable to obtain any satisfaction from the RPP, Fethi Bey dissolved his party and thus ended the brief experiment with multi-party politics.

The Free Party episode alarmed the ruling party by exposing the strength of conservative forces opposed to the iconoclastic reforms. But the incident in Menemen (23 December 1930), a small town in the most advanced region of western Anatolia, shook the regime to its foundations. Supporters of the old order, led by a Naqshbandi Shaykh, demanded the restoration of the caliphate

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2 Erik Zürcher, Political Opposition in the Early Turkish Republic (Leiden: Brill, 1991), pp. 42-3, citing Mustafa Kemal's speeches in Trabzon and Samsun on 18 and 29 September 1924 respectively.
3 Ibid., pp. 93ff.
and the şeriat. They even beheaded a reserve officer who had been sent to investigate. The government realised that the reforms had not taken root and had to be explained to the people with an ideology and appropriate institutions. The RPP decided to do just that.⁶

In his speech before the RPP’s Izmir congress (28 January 1931), Mustafa Kemal redefined his party. He noted that political parties could be founded for a specific and limited purpose; for example, the merchants of Izmir could found a party that would meet their own interests or farmers could form their own party. “However, our party has not been founded for such a limited purpose. On the contrary, it is a body designed to meet the interests of every class equitably without undermining those of any other.”⁷ Along with this above-class policy, the RPP also began to disband organisations outside party control. Thus the Turkish Hearths (Türk Ocakları), an independent nationalist body, was disbanded in April 1931 and soon after replaced with the party-run People’s Houses (Halkkevleri). Their goal was to spread modern culture and civilisation throughout Turkey, as well as to explain Kemalist ideology now defined by its six principles of republicanism, nationalism, populism, statism, revolutionism/reformism and laicism. The process of fusing party and state into a mono-party system was completed by 1935 at the party’s fourth congress.⁸ Though the mono-party trend was undoubtedly influenced by events in the Soviet Union, Italy and Germany in the 1920s and 1930s, Mustafa Kemal, Atatürk after 1934, supported the state’s supremacy only because it seemed more efficient than the ‘chaos’ prevailing in the democracies. The nationalist press even investigated. The government realised that the reforms had not taken root and pursued a policy of moderation. Thus at the fifth party congress in May 1939 he announced the end of the party’s control over the bureaucracy; provincial governors would no longer head local party organisations, nor would the secretary general be minister of the interior. Within the assembly a faction called the Independent Group was set up to act as the loyal opposition.⁹ In the general election of March 1939 the process of consensus building continued, and such close associates of Atatürk as Şükrü Kaya and Kılıç Ali were left out while former rivals and critics – Kazım Karabekir, Hüseyin Cahid Yalcın, Refet Bele and Ali Fuad Cebesoy – were brought into the assembly.

Politics during the war underlined the consensus upon which the RPP’s dominance had rested. Until the war the two sectors – the state and the private – had grown side by side. But the private sector expanded rapidly during the war. Economic growth and the new sense of confidence made the state’s paternalism more difficult to bear. The National Defence Law of 1940 gave the state extensive power over the economy as well as over the rights of citizens, while the Capital Tax of 1942 (Varlık Vergisi) attempted to destroy the non-Muslim bourgeoisie by impoverishing it. Both laws showed how arbitrary, unpredictable and unaccountable the state could be, even though its measures were designed to benefit the Muslim bourgeoisie. This situation could be remedied only if the state was made accountable so that the rising bourgeoisie would feel secure. But that could happen only once the war was over.

⁶ On the Menemen incident and the regime’s reaction see Kemal Üstün, Menemen olayı ve Kubyat (İstanbul: Çağdaş, 1981).
⁷ Cumhuriyet, 29 December, 1931; see also C. H. Dodd, ‘Atatürk and political parties’, in Heper and Landau (eds.), Political Parties and Democracy in Turkey.
⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ At the extraordinary congress of the RPP Atatürk was declared ‘the Party’s founder and its eternal leader’ while İnönü became its ‘permanent national chief’ (milli şef). See Kemal Karpat, Turkey’s Politics: The Transition to a Multi-party System (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 58.
¹¹ Çetin Yetkin, Türkiye’de 10'lu Parti Yüzyılı 1910-1940 (İstanbul: Alternatif Yayın Yürüyüş, 1983), pp. 178-81, İnönü’s speech of 29 May 1939.
The statist wing of the party also understood that post-war changes were under way and had to be taken into account if the party was to remain relevant. They wanted to transform Turkey by implementing land reform and creating a prosperous landholding peasantry instead of a feudal landlord class. The government saw the land reform bill as a ‘genuinely revolutionary law’. But the bourgeoisie and the landlords wanted a free-market economy, an independent landed class and integration with the West. They responded by supporting the opposition within the party.

On 7 June 1945, four dissident members of the RPP wrote a memorandum demanding political liberalisation. They proposed that the government implement fully the principle of national sovereignty as stated in the constitution and that party business be carried out in accordance with the principles of democracy. The four were Celal Bayar, a banker and close associate of Atatürk; Adnan Menderes, a prominent landowner from the Aegean region; Fuad Köprülü, a historian and professor of Turcology; and Refik Koraltan, a seasoned bureaucrat. President İnönü’s response was not immediate. But in his speech of 1 November, he hinted that he was prepared to make major adjustments to the political system and to bring it in line with the changed circumstances in the world, a reference to the victory of the democracies over fascism. The main deficiency in the Turkish system, he noted, was the lack of an opposition party and he indicated that he was now prepared to allow the formation of such a body. There were rumours in the press that Bayar and his friends were about to form such a party; these rumours were confirmed when the formation of the Democrat Party (DP) was officially announced on 7 January 1946.

Once the opposition became active, multi-party, mass politics soon replaced the politics of elites of the single-party period. The centre of political life also shifted from the cities to the provinces largely untouched by Kemalist reforms or modern secular culture. That explains the growing role of Islam in Turkey. In the 1940s, Islam was seen as a foreign element, imported by Western colonisers. But after 1945, and both the RPP and the DP facilitated the Islamic resurgence, as any party would have done, so as to compete successfully in the new political climate.

Despite some hostility to the new party in RPP circles, there was no sense of alarm at the advent of the opposition party. After all, its leaders were all Kemalists of long standing who espoused the same basic philosophy as their opponents, with only a difference in emphasis. Celal Bayar liked to use the metaphor of the two parties resembling two cooks preparing the same dish, but he said that his party had the better recipe for Turkey’s development. The RPP leadership expected the DP to behave as the Free Party and done in 1930 and the Independent Group during the war, as a token opposition that would never question the legitimacy of the government. The public therefore saw the new party as a means to deflect popular hostility against the government rather than offering a genuine alternative. The Democrats seemed to be serving that very function, as their programme hardly differed from that of the RPP. They adopted the ‘six Kemalist principles’, as required by the constitution, but declared that they would interpret them according to the needs of the times rather than dogmatically. Their main aim was to advance democracy by curbing government intervention and increasing the rights and freedoms of the individual. They emphasised populism and popular sovereignty and wanted political initiative to come from the people and not from the party. The Democrats soon became the spokesmen for private enterprise and individual initiative, which won them the support of the businessmen, the intelligentsia and the voting public.

The Republicans had transformed the country by reforming its legal and institutional structure. But most of the people had gained little, though their expectations had risen sharply. They had suffered under the wartime regime that was imposed upon them, marked by widespread corruption and the rule of the gendarme. They especially resented the policy of laicism/ secularism, and never understood how they had benefited from it. It was all very well for the RPP to claim that what was being done was ‘for the people’, but why was it being done ‘in spite of the people’, as the party’s slogan had it?

Between 1946 and 1950, the two parties acquired new identities designed to appeal to the electorate. İnönü reinvented his party by giving it a liberal face, declaring that he was no longer the ‘National Chief’ or the ‘Permanent Chairman’. He decided to hold an early general election before the DP was able to organise, but the Democrats refused to participate in any election until the laws had been democratised. The government therefore made further concessions, amended the electoral law to allow direct elections instead of a two-tier ballot through electoral colleges, granted the universities administrative autonomy and liberalised the press laws. The RPP also abolished the law proscribing associations with the purpose of propagating class distinction.
class interest and regionalism. Republican radicals wanted to make the RPP a 'class party' and win the support of peasants, workers, tenant farmers, artisans and small merchants, at the same time isolating the Democrats as the party of landlords and big business. However, the party's moderates prevailed and the RPP continued to oppose class struggle, seeking instead a balance among the classes.

Despite the reforms, the RPP failed to placate any constituency other than its traditional supporters. The Democrats exploited this popular antagonism towards government by emphasising its arbitrary character and promising to end the hated rule of the gendarmerie and the bureaucracy. They became the party of the masses by constantly attacking 'the tyranny of the state'. Voters were convinced that by bringing the Democrats to power they would free themselves of an oppressive state and improve their material lot as well. Having lost the 1946 election, the Democrats realised that they could come to power only in a fair and honest election in which the bureaucracy remained neutral. They began to prepare the ground for that by winning over the bureaucracy.

The world conjuncture – the triumph of the democracies and the free-market system, the beginning of the Cold War – seemed to favour the Democrats. But President İnönü also understood the trend and supported his party's moderate faction against the statists. On 12 July 1947 he abandoned the single-party option for Turkey and gave the opposition total freedom of action and equality with the RPP. He met the DP's challenge by adopting free-market policies and opening up Turkey's economy. He was convinced that Turkey's future was best served by market rather than state capitalism and that foreign investment on a grand scale was vital for rapid economic growth. If Turkey's future was best served by market rather than state capitalism and that foreign investment could be attracted by political stability and multi-party policies, he was willing to take that path. The lira was devalued, import regulations were eased and banks were permitted to sell their gold reserves. The result of the '7 September measures' was to begin an inflationary trend that pleased foreign investors. However, İnönü forgot that he personally symbolised the past, and voters were convinced that nothing would really change while he was at the helm. Moreover, the DP had neutralised the bureaucracy by holding the RPP, and not the state, responsible for past misdeeds. Had the bureaucracy remained hostile, the DP's electoral victory would have been uncertain. In a society dominated by the concept of an all-powerful state, the influence of the official in political life was, and still remains, overwhelming.

The May 1950 election results came as a great surprise: the voters delivered a shattering defeat to the RPP, giving the DP 53.35 per cent of the vote and 408 seats while the RPP won a respectable 38.38 per cent but only 39 parliamentary seats. Such was the verdict of the winner-take-all system used at the time. As late as 1954, İnönü described his party's defeat as the 'ingratitude' of the voter. Rarely had a ruling party given up its power at the polls.

The DP victory was a radical turning point in Turkey's political landscape: power had passed into the hands of new elites and away from the old civil-military bureaucracy. Roles were reversed as the DP became the governing party and the RPP went into opposition, creating an identity crisis difficult to adjust to. Had the political culture of Turkey matured sufficiently, İnönü, the leader of a defeated party, would have retired and allowed a new leadership appropriate to the times to emerge. But the RPP had become 'İnönü's party' and there was a fear that it would fragment if he retired. For their part, the Democrats believed that the people had given them the mandate – what they described as the national will (milletin inanisi) – to run the country according to their programme and that the opposition was duty bound to let them do so.

In power the DP leaders were faced with a dilemma: they had promised to destroy the single-party system once they assumed office. But in office they were forced to work with the institutions established by the single-party regime – the constitution, the bureaucracy, the army, in short the entire state

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15 Karpat, Turkey's Politics, p. 169.
16 İnönü's comment to Dankwart Rustow was: 'I never expected to see so much ingratitude'. Quoted in his 'Political parties in Turkey', p. 22, n.12.
structure – as well as with the RPP itself. The government wanted to work within the inherited system and to transform the country. The party’s rank and file, on the other hand, pressured the government to destroy the institutions of the old regime as rapidly as possible. İnönü was a constant reminder of the past and became a factor – the ‘Paşa factor’ – in Turkey’s political life throughout the 1950s. The Democrats feared that state institutions, especially the army, continued to be loyal to him because of the historic role he had played in the founding of the Republic. The Democrats countered this fear by leaning on their electoral victories in 1950 and 1954 and the ‘national will’, which they believed gave them the right to monopolise all state institutions with total disregard for the opposition. Such was the mono-party mentality exercised during the multi-party period.

Even before the general election of May 1954, relations between the parties deteriorated dramatically. The government declared war on the RPP, confiscating the party’s assets not indispensable for the continuation of its activities. Laws were passed to strengthen its position in the country by curbing all possible criticism; for example, a law forbade university faculties from participating in the country’s politics. Only a sense of insecurity accounts for the anti-opposition measures taken by Prime Minister Menderes. Given the government’s economic record, electoral victory in 1954 seemed assured without any repressive measures. Good harvests, foreign credit and investments in public works, especially road construction, gave an air of growing prosperity which the opposition could hardly contradict. On 2 May 1954 the voters delivered their verdict with a massive victory for the DP with 57 per cent of the vote and 504 seats, while the RPP’s share of the vote declined to 35 per cent with only 18 seats.

Adnan Menderes was transformed by the result. The transition period of 1950–4 was over; he now expected all opposition to bend to the ‘national will’. He had become ‘Menderes’s party’ and there was no one of any stature to challenge him.

Though the Democrats won the 1957 election, the turnout was lower and their vote declined to below 50 per cent, losing them their right to claim the mandate of the ‘national will’. They still enjoyed a substantial majority in parliament with 424 seats as compared to 178 Republican seats and only 4 each for the FP and RNP. The opposition became more confident, questioned the election results and called for the reform of political institutions. Meanwhile the economy stagnated with high inflation. Under Western pressure, Menderes was forced to introduce a stabilisation programme in August 1958, devaluing the Turkish lira from 2.80 to 9.025 to the US dollar.

Because of the deteriorating economic situation and rising social tensions, the country began to experience popular unrest against the government. There were student demonstrations encouraged by the opposition and troops were called in to quell them. In January 1958 there were rumours of a military conspiracy marked by the arrest of nine officers. But the government was unable to uncover a plot despite a long investigation. The government had lost control over virtually the entire state apparatus – the armed forces, the bureaucracy, the universities and the press. The July 1958 military coup and the overthrow of the monarchy in Iraq had a detrimental effect on political life in Turkey. As a result the Democrats become more truculent and began calling for measures against the opposition, accusing it of engaging in ‘subversive activities’.

Prime Minister Menderes spoke of curtailing democracy if the RPP did not desist from its negative policies, but the RPP refused to be intimidated. On
12 October 1958 the Democrats called for the creation of a ‘Fatherland Front’ in order to counter what they described as the RPP’s ‘front of malice and hostility’. The Republicans had become more confident after the 1957 election and harassed the government at every opportunity. The decision of the FP to dissolve itself and merge with the Republicans added to their confidence. Moreover, the RPP had begun to acquire a new image by focusing on the country’s concern with growing economic inequality and social justice. The party began to call for constitutional and institutional reforms, reforms they themselves had failed to carry out during their long years in power.

After Menderes survived a crash at London’s Gatwick airport in February 1959 the government began to exploit a cult of personality. The tragic crash took the lives of fourteen of his entourage who had come to resolve the crisis in Cyprus. But Menderes’s survival was portrayed as a miracle; Islam was now used more explicitly in the political struggle against the opposition. Meanwhile, early in 1959, İnönü proposed that the government hold early elections in order to calm the situation. In April, he launched a country-wide campaign whose climax was his tour of the DP’s stronghold, the Aegean region where the İnönü party was attacked and he was struck by a stone. The RPP exploited the incident and walked out of the assembly when the DP majority refused to discuss, let alone investigate, the incident.

Political life was polarised and there seemed no common ground between the parties. The RPP kept demanding an early election while DP hardliners called for the disbandment of the RPP. Any possibility of an early election was ruled out on 1 March when the government passed the 1960 budget and political calculations based on an early poll were upset; the RPP declared that ‘it was now impossible for the two parties to overcome their differences’.19

The political situation continued to deteriorate with neither side willing to compromise. On 18 April 1960 the government established a committee of Democrats to investigate whether the RPP had transgressed the legal limits of opposition. The committee was given extraordinary powers superseding those of the assembly and the courts. It recommended the suspension of all political activity for three months as well as a press blackout on its investigation. As though that was not sufficient, on 27 April the government gave the committee further powers to control the press, to issue subpoenas and even to imprison anyone who hampered the investigation.

The committee sparked off a demonstration in the capital on 19 April and law professors denounced these measures as unconstitutional. In assembly debates that followed, İsmet İnönü was suspended for twelve sessions for inciting the people to revolt and resist the law, attacking the Turkish nation and army and the integrity of the assembly.20 The opposition responded by using its youth organisation to demonstrate in Ankara and Istanbul, leading to the establishment of martial law and the closure of the universities.

By early May the situation had stabilised, largely because the demonstrations had not spread to the urban masses. But relations between the parties remained brittle and there was talk of military intervention. İnönü, hinting at the fall of Syngman Rhee in South Korea, told foreign journalists that ‘an oppressive régime can never be sure of the army’; Foreign Minister Zorlu replied that the ‘Turkish officer is fully aware that the army should not interfere in politics’.21 But plans for a coup were already at an advanced stage, and though the government seemed aware of a conspiracy it could do little to prevent it. Menderes decided to shore up his position by demonstrating that he still enjoyed popular support by going before meetings throughout the country. He addressed large crowds throughout western Turkey, returning to Ankara for the 19 May Youth Day festival.

The situation seemed to be under control until the War College cadet demonstration of 21 May. The government was flustered, and responded by declaring a state of siege in the capital. Ironically, the conspirators, fearing lest an investigation of the cadets might lead to the discovery of their plot, hastened their coup. It was scheduled to take place while Menderes was visiting Greece on 25 May. But on 24 May Menderes decided to postpone the visit and set out on another tour of Anatolia. He declared that the investigating committee had completed its work and was preparing its report. He was even going to announce an early general election for June in his Konya speech, hoping that would restore political normality. But before he could do so, the conspirators arrested him on the morning of 27 May, opening a new page in Turkey’s political life.22

Politics and political parties in Republican Turkey

Having captured political power the military junta of thirty-eight officers, calling itself the National Unity Committee (NUC), adopted the opposition’s ideas of amending the 1924 constitution and bringing Turkey’s institutions in

19 Cumhuriyet, 12 March 1960.
20 Ahmad, Experiment, p. 65.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid., pp. 147 ff.
line with the requirements of the post-war world. Professor Siddik Sami Onar, the rector of Istanbul University, was invited to write a new constitution. The junta’s decision to involve intellectuals transformed a military coup into an institutional revolution, a ‘revolution of the intellectuals’.

The Onar Commission presented its preliminary report on 28 May and legitimised the intervention, describing how the DP had corrupted political power and lost respect for the constitution, the press, the army and the university. The commission recommended creating a totally new state and social institutions before restoring political authority and legal government to civilians. Meanwhile on 12 June 1960 the NUC set up an interim government legalised by a provisional constitution allowing the NUC to rule until a new parliament had been elected.

Broadly speaking, there were two factions in the NUC: moderates and radicals. The moderates constituted the majority representing the liberal and democratic wing that wanted to restore power to the politicians – that is to say, the RPP. The radicals, mainly junior officers under Colonel Alparslan Türkeş, wanted to retain power sine die so as to carry out a more thorough institutional restructuring than that envisaged by the intellectuals. However, on 13 November the fourteen radicals were purged from the NUC, allowing the moderates to carry out their programme. On 22 February 1962 and 20/21 May 1963, frustrated junior officers and cadets led by Colonel Talat Aydemir attempted to carry out coups against the NUC. These were the last attempts at coups from below; the senior officers took counter-measures to ensure that any future military intervention was limited to the hierarchical principle.

The 1961 constitution and the new institutions such as the electoral law guaranteeing proportional representation were designed to prevent ‘majoritarian democracy’ of the type practised between 1950 and 1960. It was a radical departure from its predecessor. There was a bicameral parliament, with the lower house elected by proportional representation, and an upper house, the senate, consisting of 150 members, some elected by a straight majority while others were appointed by the president. The two chambers together constituted the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (GNAT). The assembly elected the president for a term of seven years from among its own members by a two-thirds majority. The cabinet was responsible to the assembly. An important innovation that frustrated future governments was the creation of the constitutional court, whose principal function was to review the constitutionality of legislation. It became one of the most important and controversial institutions, constantly under attack from politicians whose arbitrary acts it refused to sanction.35

The 1961 constitution guaranteed citizens the freedoms of thought, expression, association and publication, as well as other civil liberties, and promised ‘social and economic rights . . . and the freedom of work and enterprise’. The military high command was made the guardian of the new regime. Article 111 created the National Security Council (NSC) made up of ‘the Ministers provided by law, the Chief of the General Staff, and representatives of the armed forces’. Its function was to assist the cabinet ‘in the making of decisions related to national security and co-ordination’. The term ‘national security’ was so broad and all-embracing that the generals had a say in virtually every problem that came before the cabinet. In March 1962, a bill increased the powers and influence of the NSC, allowing the body to interfere in the deliberations of the cabinet. Moreover Article 110 made the chief of staff responsible to the prime minister, not the defence minister, in the exercise of his duties and powers. The armed forces had become an autonomous institution recognised as the

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The revolution changed the political architecture in other ways as well. Turkey now enjoyed a greater degree of freedom than ever before. Citizens had greater civil rights, and the universities greater autonomy, with students allowed to organise their own associations. Workers were given the right to strike as well. In such a political environment, some intellectuals and trade unionists organised the Workers’ Party of Turkey (WPT) to represent workers and peasants.

The Democrat Party became a part of history, but its political base remained a much-sought-after prize by all the neo-Democrat parties of the centre-right. Two such parties were formed in 1961 as soon as political activity was restored. They were the Justice Party (JP), led by a retired general with close ties to the junta, and the New Turkey Party (NTP), whose leader, Ekrem Alican, had opposed Menderes and formed the Freedom Party in 1958. In the general election of October 1961, these parties won 48.5 per cent of the vote between them (34.8 and 13.7 per cent respectively) compared to the 36.7 per cent won by İnönü’s RPP. The election was a tribute to the charisma of Adnan Menderes.

After a public trial that was designed to humiliate him and destroy his prestige, Menderes and two ministers, Fatin Rüştü Zorlu (foreign affairs) and Hasan Polatkan (finance), had been hanged in September 1961. But he continued to exercise his authority from beyond the grave, and the election was also a vote of censure against the military regime which had ousted him. As there was no question of permitting a neo-DP coalition to form the government — that would have invited another intervention by the army — President Cemal Gürsel asked İsmet İnönü to do so.

The first coalition (10 November 1961 — 30 May 1962) was a partnership between the RPP and a reluctant JP. It lasted barely six months because of constant threats and prodding from the Armed Forces Union. The second coalition was formed with great difficulty on 25 June, and only after much bullying by the generals. It survived until December 1963. All the parties in the assembly except the JP provided ministers: that is to say the RPP the NTP and the Republican Peasants’ Nation Party, plus independents. But the RPP’s partners performed so badly in the local and municipal elections of November 1963 that they withdrew from the coalition, concluding that collaborating with İsmet İnönü was the kiss of death. After these elections, the JP became the most popular party in the country.

İnönü formed his last cabinet with independents on 25 December 1963, coinciding with the crisis over Cyprus and the threat of war with Greece. No longer commanding a majority in the assembly, İnönü survived and received a vote of confidence on 3 January 1964 because some members of the opposition parties supported the government in the crisis. But throughout 1964, the opposition gave no quarter to the government, despite the country’s preoccupation with Cyprus. The cabinet could have been brought down at any time. But JP’s leader, Süleyman Demirel, waited for the opportune moment after his own position was more secure both in the party and with the generals. By the beginning of 1965 he was ready to assume control and decided to use the budget debate on 12 February as the occasion to force İnönü’s resignation.

The fourth coalition was JP rule by proxy. It was led by Suat Hayri Urgüpülü, an independent senator elected on the JP list, and included other independents as well as ministers from the parties of the right. This government’s principal task was to lead the country to the general election later in the year and restore political stability. The voters were tired of weak, ineffective governments. In the 1965 general election they therefore voted for the nearest option they had to the populist DP: Süleyman Demirel’s JP.

The JP had been formed on 11 February 1961 with the blessing of the army. It is no coincidence that its leader, Ragıp Gümüşpala, was a retired general who had commanded the Third Army in May 1960. He was appointed chief of the general staff on 3 June and retired in August to emerge as the leader of the principal neo-Democrat party six months later. Gümüşpala was the army’s insurance against DP revanchisme and the ex-Democrats’ insurance against military pressure. His death on 5 June 1964 brought the party face to face with the crisis of leadership. All the factions put forward their candidates: the hard-line ex-Democrats nominated Said Bilgiç; those who wanted to appease the army proposed a retired air force general, Tekin Anburun, who had also been Celal Bayar’s aide-de-camp; the conservatives supported a law professor, Ali Fuad Bagiş; and the middle-of-the-road moderates put forward Demirel, a relatively unknown engineer whose patron had been Adnan Menderes. Because he was the least controversial candidate, the party chose Demirel as its leader.

Süleyman Demirel epitomised the new Turkish politician who rose to the top because the junta had purged the top layer of leadership from politics. That was perhaps either the most destructive or the most constructive aspect (depending on one’s political perspective) of the military intervention. An artificial political vacuum was created which sucked in people who would otherwise have remained outside politics. Demirel had been an engineer in the state’s Department of Water Works and it is doubtful if he would have entered politics but for the extraordinary circumstances of the 1960s.
Within the party Demirel was seen as a technocrat ideally suited to deal with the modern world and who, in sharp contrast to Menderes, understood the workings of a complex economy. Since he lacked a political base in Isparta, his place of birth, he was considered politically weak and therefore unlikely to dominate the party. Moreover, his modest village–small-town background, which he exploited with skill, made Demirel appealing to the 'ordinary Turk', especially the ambitious rural migrant who had settled in the shantytowns of the major cities and who could identify with Demirel as a 'self-made man'. Though he was not an exceptional orator, his idiom and the way he spoke made him a 'man of the people' while leaders like İnönü, and even the socialist Mehmed Ali Aybar, the leader of the WPT, clearly belonged to the old military–bureaucratic elite.  

Politics in the 1960s contrasted sharply with those of the previous decade. Turkey had been thoroughly politicised after 1960 and the new freedoms provided by the constitution permitted ideological politics for the first time. There was now a left-wing presence in the country, especially in the universities. Students had organised their own political associations, some affiliated to the WTP. Political literature, especially translations of left-wing writings from the West, was readily available. The isolation of Turkey came to an end and the country became more aware of the world around it. The right, alarmed by this awakening, abandoned its complacency and began to mobilise its own forces in support of what was described as 'the struggle against communism'. These political trends coincided with the country's disenchantment with the United States. Throughout the 1950s Menderes had remained totally loyal to Washington and had supported US Cold War policy without question. On seizing power, the junta immediately reaffirmed Turkey's commitments to her Western allies. During the Cuban missile crisis of October 1962, Prime Minister İnönü promised to stand by Washington even if that meant facing a Soviet attack and nuclear annihilation, as it very nearly did. But during that crisis Turkey learned that she was little more than a bargaining counter in the negotiations between the superpowers and that her ally did not take her interests into account during the negotiations. Public opinion became convinced that Turkey's interests were negotiable and that she was no longer a 'strategic asset' for Washington. The Cyprus crisis of 1961/4 in which Washington seemed to side with Athens - especially the Johnson letter of June 1964 - inflamed public opinion against America. There were anti-American demonstrations which continued on and off until the military takeover of 12 March 1971.  

Turkish public opinion had become so outraged by the events on the island and was so convinced of the righteousness of the Turkish cause that there was overwhelming support for military intervention. That is why the shock was so great when the country learned of President Johnson's letter of 5 June to Prime Minister İnönü forbidding intervention. Though the full text of the letter became public knowledge only much later, its contents were leaked to the press almost immediately. It seemed to confirm the claims of the nationalists who, since the Cuban missile crisis, had charged that Turkey was a pawn of the West, which had had no intentions of coming to her defence if ever the need arose. The Johnson letter gave rise to virulent anti-Americanism and a clamour from nationalists and the left for a 'non-aligned Turkey'. Even the government was shaken by Johnson's bluntness and its own impotence.

Anti-Americanism became more than an issue of foreign policy; it polarised the country into two camps, which have been rather crudely defined as the pro-American right and the anti-American left. In fact, those who made up the anti-American camp included neo-Kemalist nationalists of all political stripes as well as leftists, and the two often overlapped. Such people came to see Turkey's predicament in terms of dependence on and exploitation by the capitalist West whose leader was the United States. The history of Turkey's war of liberation was reinterpreted and presented as a struggle against imperialism with the Kemalists bent on establishing an independent, non-aligned state while their opponents were willing to accept foreign tutelage.

A similar analysis was applied to post-war Turkey, and the rulers were criticised for lacking the determination to preserve the country's true independence. Both the RPP and the DP were found guilty: the former for accepting the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan and the latter for leading Turkey into NATO and the Baghdad Pact. However, there was no excuse for continuing these policies now that they had been exposed by recent events as being futile.

For the first time, such criticism came from outside the bureaucratic establishment and the major parties. It came mainly from the intelligentsia, especially groups of students who formed 'ideas clubs' (fikir kulüpleri) in the universities where they discussed the problems confronting their underdeveloped society or, in their words, a society which had been 'left underdeveloped' by

24 Ibid., pp. 55–103; and Ahmad, Experiment, pp. 112–36.

imperialism. These clubs were the first serious attempt to create a civil society in a country where bureaucratic control had smothered all initiative. Some of their members joined the WPT, which provided a political platform for their views. Even the RPP was influenced by these radical trends and was forced to respond by describing itself as ‘left-of-centre’ in order to remain politically relevant.

The right was alarmed by the appeal of this new radical nationalism which it denounced as communist. Since the neo-Kemalists had succeeded in making nationalism one of the tenets of their ideology, the right, which hitherto had monopolised nationalism, was forced to use Islam as a counterforce. New right-wing organisations such as the Association to Combat Communism were formed as early as 1962 and presented ‘Islam as the antidote to communism’. This political manipulation of Islam continued to increase throughout the 1960s, especially after Saudi money became influential through the organisation known as the Union of the World of Islam or the Rabitat-ul Alem-ul Islam. But religion also became significant politically when the economic policies of import substitution marginalised an entire sector of society, parts of which, as we shall see, sought a remedy in Islamist politics.26

Demirel, whose Justice Party won the 1965 election with a majority sufficiently large to form the government, had to cope with all the new forces released by the 27 May regime. Because he spent a year in America as an Eisenhower fellow and was employed by a US multinational corporation operating in Turkey, Demirel became the symbol of modern capitalism and the link with the United States. He was therefore attacked from all sides: by the left and the neo-Kemalists, as well as the religious right, which denounced him as a Freemason, allegedly like most big businessmen and industrialists in Turkey. Demirel recognised the dilemma of these people, but he offered them no help, only advice. ‘In our country’, he told their delegation, ‘there are a million and a half tradesmen and artisans; that means about five or six million people. Self-sufficient, experienced, knowledgeable, and skilled people are a force in the democratic order. Today’s small tradesman may be tomorrow’s factory owner.’ But in order to rise above their predicament they were told to organise and pool their resources. However, few were either able or willing to do that; many went bankrupt.

During these years, Turkey’s workers became more militant and politicised by the events of the 1960s, especially by the propaganda of the WPT. Consequently, in 1967 a group of unions broke away from the pro-government confederation, Türk-İş, and formed the radical confederation DISK (the Confederation of Revolutionary Workers’ Unions). The former, founded on the American model, concentrated on economic demands and discouraged political affiliation. The latter, following Europe’s example, claimed that economic demands could be won only through political action. It therefore supported the WPT. The split resulted in defections and the weakening of Türk-İş which, despite claims to the contrary, was unofficially affiliated to the JP. The government and the employers’ unions were alarmed. They saw that they were losing control of the workers’ movement and decided to regain control before it was too late.

Demirel may have controlled the situation better had his own party remained united. But that was not the case, not because of any failing on his part, but because of the consequences of economic policies with which he was identified. He wanted to be the architect of a modern capitalist state and society, willing to bury old, outmoded structures in order to achieve this goal. He told the assembly: ‘The path of the modern Turkish state will be totally different from the methods of nineteenth-century capitalism.’ And so it was. Large-scale modern capitalist enterprises, which in some areas had the character of a monopoly, soon became dominant throughout Anatolia. A small group of capitalists, some of whom were soon to be listed among the Fortune 500 companies, took advantage of the new economic policies. But the small independent tradesmen, merchants and artisans who were scattered throughout the country failed to survive the competition.

Those who represented this traditional lower-middle class in the JP began to criticise Demirel for falling into the hands of vested interests and serving them rather than the people. They adopted Islamist rhetoric and denounced him as a Freemason, allegedly like most big businessmen and industrialists in Turkey. Demirel recognised the dilemma of these people, but he offered them no help, only advice. ‘In our country’, he told their delegation, ‘there are a small group of capitalists, some of whom were soon to be listed among the Fortune 500 companies, took advantage of the new economic policies. But the small independent tradesmen, merchants and artisans who were scattered throughout the country failed to survive the competition.

Politics and political parties in Republican Turkey

If these people failed to heed Demirel’s advice, they did begin to organise politically, supporting those who opposed Demirel and his policies. In May 1968, Professor Necmettin Erbakan, soon to found the Islamist National Order Party (NOP), attacked the government’s economic policies which he said had made Turkey into ‘an open market for Europe and America’. A year later, with the support of the delegates from Anatolia, Erbakan defeated Demirel’s

candidate in the election for the presidency of the Union of Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

The JP won the general election in October 1969 but its share of the vote was reduced by 6.4 per cent. Encouraged by these results, Erbakan formed his own party in January 1970. Later in the year, in December, another faction broke away from the JP and formed the Democratic Party. Meanwhile, Colonel Türkeş, who had seized control of the Republican People’s Nation Party in 1965, renamed it the Nationalist Action Party (NAP) in February 1969. His aim was to attract the same lower-middle-class vote by creating a militant, ultranationalist, neo-fascist party that claimed to be equally opposed to monopoly capitalism and communism. The RPP had also split soon after it adopted the left-of-centre programme in 1965. Its right wing broke away in protest and under Professor Turhan Feyzioğlu’s leadership formed the Reliance Party, later the Republican Reliance Party. This fragmented right became the major factor of political instability of the 1970s.

Rising political tensions, societal changes and events around the world coalesced in the late 1960s and early 1970s to produce an explosive situation. Industrial expansion with a high rate of growth created ever-rising expectations that proved impossible to meet. High inflation restricted consumption to an affluent minority; the labour force grew but never in proportion to the demand for jobs so that unemployment was always rising, though mitigated by emigration to Europe to fuel its ‘economic miracle’. At the same time workers became more militant and joined unions in increasing numbers. As in most Third World countries, Turkey’s population not only increased rapidly, but the percentage of those under thirty assumed alarming proportions. The education system, already inadequate, failed to meet the needs of a growing student body while the economy failed to provide jobs to thousands of new graduates each year. Schools and institutions of higher education (universities, teachers’ training colleges and schools of theology) doubled their enrolment in the 1960s and became recruiting grounds for fringe political groups of the left and right.

Murat Belge, a left-wing activist in the 1960s and an ideologue of the left, wrote that in ‘the prevailing hothouse atmosphere of Turkish student politics, the dramatic events of 1968 – the Tet offensive in February, the French student rising in May, and the invasion of Czechoslovakia in August – had an even greater impact than in most countries’. These events coincided with the amendment of the electoral law on 1 March abolishing the ‘national remainder system’. This provision of the electoral law had allowed the Workers’ Party to win fourteen seats in the 1965 assembly and play an oppositional role of historic importance totally out of proportion to its size. That is why the government wanted to amend the law and remove the WPT from the political scene.

Under the amended law, the WPT would have secured only three seats for the same number of votes; in the 1969 election it won only two. Commenting on the new law, The Economist (9 March 1968) drew the obvious conclusion: ‘Since the Turkish Communist party is banned, the Labour [i.e. Workers’] party is indeed the only legal home for extreme left-wingers. Subversion thrives in political frustration, and whether the Labour party is subversive now, it is much more likely to be tempted in that direction if its parliamentary outlet is largely stopped up.’

The WPT itself did not become subversive, though some of its supporters did. Convinced that the parliamentary road had been closed off to the left, some came to believe that the only way to power was via a military coup in partnership with sympathetic officers. The left became divided among those who continued to support the WPT and those who supported the ‘National Democratic Revolution’ – that is to say, an alliance with radical military officers. Others were convinced that the answer to Turkey’s problems was to be found in Maoism of perhaps the Indian, Naxalite variety, or the Latin American guerrilla strategy.

Meanwhile, the government, having wounded the left with the election law, decided to destroy DİSK’s political unionism by passing a law favouring the pro-government Türk-İş. The amended law, wrote Professor İşkı, an expert on the Turkish union movement, ‘prohibited the existence of unions unless they represented at least one third of those working in a particular workplace. Most important, however, was the explicit and public admission by government spokesmen that the amendment was going to be used to wipe DİSK out of existence.’

The workers responded to this law by staging a vast and largely spontaneous demonstration on 15/16 June 1970 and succeeded in totally paralysing the entire Istanbul-Marmara region. This was the last straw for the regime, which described the demonstration as ‘the dress rehearsal for revolution’. Observers noted the government’s inability to maintain law and order with the institutions of the Second Republic and predicted another period of domestic unrest.


and, with İnönü's backing, was expected to win over the RPP. Erim failed was appointed prime minister. He was supported by the right-wing parties technocrats and on 19 March Professor Nihat Erim, a conservative Republican, youth organisation of the Nationalist Action Party, were given free rein to act as vigilantes against their ideological rivals.

By the beginning of March, Demirel had been overwhelmed by the rapidly deteriorating situation which he no longer controlled. A meeting of his party's assembly group on 8 March showed that he no longer enjoyed its confidence and the generals learned of this immediately from their confidants in the JP. Two days later, they met and decided that Demirel would have to go since he no longer enjoyed the full support of his own party. Therefore on 12 March, the generals acting on behalf of the Turkish armed forces presented a memorandum to President Sunay and the chairmen of the two chambers. They demanded the formation of a strong, credible government capable of implementing reforms envisaged by the constitution. They threatened to take power if the government refused to resign, leaving Demirel with no alternative. His resignation cleared the way for the anti-democratic measures he had often called for but had been unable to take because of the guarantees provided by the 1961 constitution.

Social democracy and political terror, 1971–80

The generals gave priority 'to the restoration of law and order', and that meant the elimination of the political left and all its organisations such as the Workers' Party, the Federation of the Revolutionary Youth of Turkey or the Dev-Genç youth movement, the ideas clubs in the universities, branches of the Union of Teachers and DISK. At the same time, the so-called Idealist Hearths, the youth organisation of the Nationalist Action Party, were given free rein to act as vigilantes against their ideological rivals.

The junta replaced Demirel's government with an 'above-party' cabinet of technocrats and on 19 March Professor Nihat Erim, a conservative Republican, was appointed prime minister. He was supported by the right-wing parties and, with İnönü's backing, was expected to win over the RPP. Erim failed to carry out the reform programme envisaged by the junta, partly because of the fresh outbreak of terrorist violence carried out by left-wing extremists driven underground when the political left was proscribed. Martial law was declared in April in eleven provinces, including the south-east where Kurdish separatists were active. As a result political life ground to a halt and on 3 May all strikes and lockouts were declared illegal.

For the next two years, repression became the order of the day. The constitution, blamed by the right for all of Turkey's problems, was amended without public discussion so that the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the 1961 constitution were removed. The generals had concluded that the liberal constitution was a luxury for Turkey, a developing society. After the liberal constitution had been amended, there was talk of reform. But the right was opposed to economic reforms and Demirel therefore created a crisis by withdrawing JP ministers from the cabinet. The crisis was resolved on Demirel's terms but eleven reformist ministers, convinced that reform was dead, resigned and forced Erim to follow suit.

The second Erim cabinet (11 December 1971–17 April 1972) was also a failure. Without Demirel's support Erim could do little, and Demirel was biding his time in order to regain power at the next election. Erim therefore resigned and was succeeded by Ferit Melen, who continued to give priority to law and order rather than reform and the fundamental problems of economy and society remained untouched. But as 1973 approached, the mood in the country began to change with the promise of elections. In May 1972 Bülent Ecevit had succeeded in capturing the RPP's leadership from İsmet İnönü and began to steer the party towards social democracy. He also abandoned İnönü's policy of collaborating with the generals; instead, he and Demirel agreed not to elect General Faruk Gürler president when General Cevdet Sunay's term expired in 1973. On 6 April retired admiral Fahri Korutürk, a compromise candidate, was elected president. When Melen resigned on 7 April, Korutürk appointed Naim Talu, a conservative spokesman for big business, as prime minister. Reform was now a dead letter and it was left to the post-election government to carry it out.

Turkey began to prepare for election. The right seemed firmly under Demirel's control, though it was still fragmented thanks to the formation of such small parties as the Reliance Party, the National Action Party and the National Salvation Party (NSP), formed after the closure of the Order Party in 1971. The left, heavily bruised after March 1971, began to coalesce around the new, social democratic RPP. Social democracy became so dominant after the October 1973 election that the generals were forced to intervene.

29 Ibid., p. 325.
even more forcefully in September 1980. The RPP had won with 33.3 per cent of the vote and 185 seats, but it still lacked the 226 necessary for a parliamentary majority. Ecevit was forced to form a coalition with a party of the right.

When Ecevit was asked to form the government, Turkey’s establishment wanted to see an RPP-JP coalition, with Demirel restraining Ecevit’s radicalism. But Demirel refused to join any coalition, knowing that the new government would face the odium of having to take unpopular economic measures in order to deal with a worsening economic crisis, partly the result of a downturn in the world economy. Ecevit was forced to turn to Necmettin Erbakan, the Islamist populist leader. After much haggling, the RPP–NSP coalition, formed in January 1974, was based not on any shared programme but on pure political opportunism. It was therefore fragile and not destined to last. It ended on 18 September when Ecevit resigned. Having become a charismatic leader following his decision to intervene in Cyprus after the Greek Cypriot coup against President Makarios, he was convinced that he would win an early election and come to power on his own.

He miscalculated badly because the parties of the right, fearing an Ecevit landslide, refused to permit an early election. Instead, they agreed to form a coalition under Demirel that came to be known as the ‘Nationalist Front’, the ‘Rightist Front against the Left’. The cabinet, announced on 31 March 1975, was made up of four parties – Justice, Salvation, Reliance and the Nationalist Action Party – supported from the outside by Democratic Party defectors acting as independents. The Action Party was able to have two of its three deputies in the cabinet, thereby legitimising its neo-fascist ideology. The parties of the right used the coalition to colonise the state by placing their supporters in various ministries. The pro-Front media popularised the slogan ‘Demirel in Parliament, Türkeş in the Street’ and the party’s militants, known as the Grey Wolves, began to play an even more active role in the violence so that political terrorism became a regular feature of Turkish life. Political violence plagued Turkey throughout the 1970s, provoking military intervention in 1980. Its immediate aim was to undermine Ecevit’s social democratic movement as an electoral factor.

The attack on RPP meetings did not have the desired effect of intimidating the party’s supporters. When the senate elections were held in October 1975, Ecevit’s share of the vote increased from 35.4 to 43.9 per cent. Demirel’s also increased, from 30.8 to 40.8 per cent, while that of the small parties declined. It seemed as though the country, tired of squabbling coalitions, was returning to a two-party system.

The voters responded neither to the Islamist propaganda of the Salvationists nor to the exploitation by the neo-fascists of the communist threat. They voted with parties with programmes: the RPP’s promise to create a capitalist Turkey ‘with a human face’, and Demirel’s ‘Great Turkey’ of which all Turks would be proud.

Ironically the election results guaranteed the continuation of the Nationalist Front coalition until the general election for which all parties began to prepare in earnest via their control over the state structure. Violence increased throughout 1976 and 1977 with the government unable to check it. The liberal press spoke openly of the threat of fascism. Prime Minister Demirel decided that the only way to extricate himself from the Nationalist Front was to hold an early general election. On 5 April 1977 the JP and the RPP voted together to hold the election on 5 June.

The tempo and intensity of political violence increased sharply with the announcement of elections. It reached its climax on May Day 1977 when a huge rally was organised in Istanbul as a show of strength against what it described as ‘the rising tide of fascism’. The right succeeded in turning the rally into a massacre. If their aim was to intimidate voters it failed miserably, for when the election was held the following month the turnout had increased from 68.8 per cent in 1973 to 72.2 per cent and though the RPP won 213 seats it failed to win the 226 necessary to form the government on its own.

Ecevit formed a minority government, the first in Turkish history, but he failed to win a vote of confidence on 3 July. Demirel then formed the ‘Second Nationalist Front’ government on 21 July. In this coalition the JP had thirteen portfolios, the Islamists eight and the neo-fascists five, exposing how dependent the JP had become on the extreme right. However, this coalition did not survive the local elections of December 1977. On 31 December, Demirel failed to win the vote of confidence when twelve JP deputies who had resigned voted against the government because of the ongoing violence and oppression against the Kurds in the south-east.

Ecevit was able to form a cabinet with the support of defectors from the JP and the old RPP, all acting as independents. He knew that such men would never permit him to implement his programme, and all he promised to do was to ‘restore peace and unity’ in the country. But he failed to accomplish
even that and political terrorism took a sinister turn when the right began a campaign of assassination, culminating on 1 February 1979 with the murder of Abdi İpekçi, the editor of Milliyet, a liberal daily. Ecevit was forced to declare martial law in thirteen provinces on 25 December 1978 when the terrorists began targeting the Alevi community, an offshoot of the Shia sect. Even the limited martial law failed to curb the violence, and support for Ecevit began to erode. When partial senate and by-elections were held on 14 October 1979, the voters punished Ecevit: his vote declined to 29 per cent, that of the JP rose to 46.83 per cent, while the NSP and the NAP made no gains.

Ecevit resigned on 16 October and Demirel formed a minority government on 12 November. Another Nationalist Front cabinet was totally unacceptable though Demirel continued to depend on support of the right. The right had accomplished its aim of destroying social democracy just as the political left had been destroyed after 1971. Demirel won a vote of confidence on 25 November, although his government could not provide the political stability the region required after the political turmoil caused by the revolution in Iran and the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. Moreover, the onset of globalisation also required a government that was not amenable to populist electoral politics. Both required a military intervention that reorganised the entire political structure of Turkey to provide such a government. That is precisely what the military intervention of 12 September 1980 set out to do.

Political and economic restructuring after 1980

After dismissing the Demirel government, the generals set themselves up as the executive and legislative branch by establishing the National Security Council (NSC), made up of General Kenan Evren, who was chief of staff, and the chiefs of the army, navy, air force and gendarmerie. They governed, though some power was delegated to a technocratic cabinet led by retired admiral Bülent Ulusu until civilian rule was restored after the elections of November 1983. Meanwhile martial law was established and the generals set about restoring 'law and order'. All political life came to a standstill as the political parties were closed down and former politicians banned from participating in politics. Before some semblance of political life was restored, Turkey's institutions - the constitution, the electoral law, the universities - were radically amended so as to depoliticise the country.

When political parties were restored in 1983, only 'new politicians' were allowed to form them. Party leaders were carefully vetted, and were disqualified if they seemed a threat to the new regime. All members of the 1980 parliament were disqualified from political activity for five years and all party leaders for ten. Thus when elections were held only three parties participated. The centre-right had coalesced around Turgut Özal's Motherland Party, known by its Turkish acronym ANAP, and retired general Turgut Sunalp's Nationalist Democracy Party (NDP), while the centre-left was represented by the Populist Party led by Necdet Calp, a retired bureaucrat whose only qualification was that he had been İsmet İnönü's secretary. Though banned, former politicians such as Süleyman Demirel, Bülent Ecevit, Necmettin Erbakan and Alpaslan Türkeş continued to cast a long shadow on political life.

The election of November 1983 brought Özal's ANAP to power with 45.15 per cent of the vote, with the Populist Party receiving 30.46 per cent and the NDP 23.37 per cent. Özal claimed that his party represented all the ideological tendencies - from left to right - that had existed before 1980. He was a technocrat who had led the economy in Demirel's last cabinet and continued to do so under the generals. He had asked for five years of 'social peace' with no political disruptions, and that is what the regime provided. He was given a free hand 'to correct the country's economic problems' as he saw fit. That meant bringing down inflation by freeing prices, cutting back on consumption by holding down wages, increasing exports, and signing agreements with foreign creditors to postpone debt repayments that amounted to about eighteen billion dollars.

In Turkey, parties tend to assume the character of the leader rather than remain parties of ideas or programmes. Thus the RPP became İnönü's party, the DP Menderes's party, the JP Demirel's party and the Islamist parties Erbakan's parties. ANAP was Özal's party right from the start, and his cabinets reflected his absolute control over the body; there was never a question of inner-party democracy. This remained true even after he became president in 1989 and formally left the party's leadership.

By early 1986 the banned leaders - Demirel, Ecevit, Erbakan and Türkeş - had emerged on the political scene behind proxy parties. But these men had to wait until the referendum of 6 September 1987 before their political rights were restored. The way was open for an early election set for 29 November, with Özal calculating that the less time the opposition had to organise the better for his party. ANAP won the election but with a

reduced majority of 36.29 per cent, with the Social Democrats (SHP), led by İsmet İnönü’s son, Erdal İnönü, coming second with 24.81 per cent, and Demirel’s True Path Party (TPP) coming in third with 19.15 per cent. Four smaller parties failed to clear the 10 per cent hurdle introduced by the new electoral law and therefore won no seats. The left vote was now divided between the SHP and Ecevit’s Democratic Left Party (DLP), which won 8.53 per cent.

ANAP’s position continued to decline, and the local election of 26 March 1989 proved to be disastrous; within five years the party’s vote had declined from 45 to 22 per cent. Özal knew that he would lose his majority by the time the next general election was held in 1992, ending his political career. He therefore decided that he would have the assembly elect him president when General Evren’s term ended in 1989. The party, divided between Islamists of the ‘Holy Alliance’ and nationalists, saw Özal’s departure as an opportunity to seize control. Turgut Özal was elected Turkey’s eighth president on 31 October and assumed office on 9 November 1989.

Özal’s presidency (1989–93) was marked by political instability. Led by Yıldırım Akbulut, a colourless prime minister and without Özal’s controlling hand, factions began to struggle for leadership, further weakening the party. There was talk of military intervention because the government was unable to deal with a growing Kurdish insurgency, political assassination, ‘Islamic fundamentalism’, and economic problems. The Gulf crisis of 2 August 1990 distracted the country’s attention from domestic issues and strengthened Özal’s position. But the effect was only temporary. A survey taken in March 1991 showed that support for ANAP had slipped in Istanbul from 22 to 18 per cent. The fortunes of the social democrats had also declined and only Demirel’s TPP had made some gains. The election in June of the young, ‘modern’ Meşut Yılmaz – he was only forty-three – as ANAP’s leader, and the defeat for the nationalist–religious groups, promised to improve the party’s standing in the country. He decided to hold the general election in 1991 rather than 1992 when the economic situation would be even worse. Therefore the assembly voted to go to the polls on 20 October.

The elections vindicated Yılmaz’s decision, and ANAP came second behind Demirel’s TPP. The real losers were the divided social democrats. The Social Democratic Populist Party (SHP), the most popular party in 1989, had slumped to third place with 20.8 per cent of the vote and eighty-eight seats while Ecevit’s Democratic Left Party won 10.8 per cent of the vote and seven seats. Erbakan’s Welfare Party entered the assembly with sixty-two seats, reflecting the growing political importance of Turkey’s Muslim middle class.

There were no significant ideological differences between the two centre-right parties – ANAP and TPP – but they refused to merge and form a strong government. Vested interests prevailed and Yılmaz preferred to go into opposition rather than accept Demirel’s leadership. Instead, despite ideological differences, Demirel formed a coalition with the Erdal İnönü’s social democrats, the kind of non-ideological coalition the country had sought throughout the 1970s. The government had 266 assembly seats and 48 per cent of the popular vote. In theory, it was a strong government capable of carrying out the reforms necessary to enter the global market.

Turgut Özal died suddenly on 17 April 1993, and was succeeded in May as president by Süleyman Demirel. He gave up the party’s leadership to Tansu Çiller (1946–), a relatively young and inexperienced politician, with a doctorate in economics and close links with the business community. The American-educated Çiller was expected to give a modern image to the party. She continued the coalition with the social democrats whose position with the voters eroded as they gave support to right-wing policies detrimental to the common man. The Welfare Party – the reincarnation of the Islamist NSP – took advantage and strengthened its position with the electorate.

During the 1990s, the Kurdish insurrection, which began in 1984, became more serious and moderate Kurdish politicians formed political parties in order to put their case in the assembly. One such party, the People’s Labour Party, was banned by the constitutional court in August 1993, and so was its successor, the People’s Democracy Party (HADEP), formed in May 1994. It too ran into problems. Meanwhile, the fortunes of the TPP declined rapidly under Çiller’s leadership and the Welfare Party won the general election in December 1995 with 21.38 per cent of the vote and 158 seats.

None of the parties had won sufficient seats to form the government, and attempts to form coalitions led nowhere. The secular parties refused to join a Welfare-led coalition while the leaders of TPP and ANAP – Çiller and Yılmaz – refused to serve under each other’s leadership. In March 1996, Yılmaz and Çiller finally agreed to form a coalition, with a rotating premiership, which was
supported by Ecevit’s Democratic Left Party. Refah’s Erbakan undermined this coalition, threatening to expose Çiller’s alleged corruption by launching a parliamentary investigation. Such a coalition was too unstable to have a long life, and tensions within the cabinet forced Mesut Yılmaz to resign on 6 June. There was no choice but to ask Erbakan to form the next cabinet, the first to be led by an Islamist.

Erbakan’s blackmail paid off, and Tansu Çiller agreed to form a coalition with the Islamists providing he froze the investigation against her. Erbakan, ever the opportunist, agreed and a ‘Welfarepath coalition’ with Erbakan as prime minister was announced on 29 June 1996. In the wake of such unprincipled political behaviour, a survey revealed that people had lost confidence in politicians as well as other state institutions, and only confidence in the military had increased.

Despite his cautious approach as prime minister, Erbakan was constantly criticised in the secular media. The generals who dominated the NSC humiliated him by further expanding Turkey’s military cooperation with Israel. Moreover, his efforts to appease the secular elites alienated his own grassroots supporters, who expected the kind of aggressive Islamist policy he had always spoken of before coming to power. But Welfare’s leadership had become moderate and centrist because of the gains made by the Anatolian bourgeoisie, the so-called ‘Anatolian tigers’, since the 1980s. The Islamist bourgeoisie wanted to share in the benefits of globalisation, and these were forthcoming only if their party was in power. The rank and file, on the other hand, having suffered economic hardship, continued to voice radical demands.

In February 1997, things came to a head when a Welfare Party mayor organised a ‘Jerusalem Day’ demonstration and called for the liberation of the city from Israel. It was a demonstration reminiscent of the Menemen incident of 1930, and the secular forces, particularly the armed forces, were appalled that such an event could be staged so near the capital. The army responded by sending tanks through the Sincan township, arresting the mayor, declaring persona non grata, and launching an investigation against the Welfare Party. Moreover, on 28 February the generals, describing political Islam as more dangerous than Kurdish nationalism, forced Erbakan to accept a twenty-point programme designed to undermine the influence of political Islam. Its supporters were to be purged from the state apparatus along with schools for prayer leaders and preachers, the expansion of which the generals had legislated after September 1980 in order to counter the influence of ‘leftist ideologies’.

In August a law was passed extending secular education from five to eight years with the aim of weakening the hold of political Islam on Turkey’s lower- and lower-middle-class youth.

Premier Erbakan’s position became untenable, and he resigned on 18 June 1997. He hoped that the coalition would survive if President Demirel appointed Tansu Çiller prime minister. But Demirel appointed ANAP’s Mesut Yılmaz, and the courts launched an investigation against the Welfare Party. The leaders, realising that their party would be dissolved, responded by forming another party – the Virtue Party (VP, Fazilet Partisi) in December 1997 with Recai Kutan as its leader. Each time the Islamist party was dissolved, its successor claimed to be more moderate and less Islamist. By May, Recai Kutan had abandoned the hardline Islamist rhetoric of Erbakan and no longer spoke of leaving NATO or of introducing Islamic banking. He also went to Ankara to pay his respects to Atatürk, a demonstration that the Islamists were willing to join the mainstream of political life.

Nevertheless, the constitutional court dissolved the Virtue Party in June 2001, describing it as a hotbed of fundamentalism, especially for its role in promoting the headscarf in its campaign against the secular state. In July, Islamists formed Saadet or Felicity Party (FP), while in August the reformist and ‘modern’ wing of the Virtue Party formed the Justice and Development Party or JDP which they claimed was secular. Its leader was Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the former mayor of Istanbul, who had been imprisoned for inciting religious hatred and the violation of secularism. He soon became the most popular leader, and polls showed that his party would win the next election.

The Yılmaz-led coalition with the Democratic Left Party and the Democrat Turkey Party, founded by anti-Çiller dissidents, lasted until November 1998. Yılmaz was brought down by an opposition censure motion that charged him with corruption and links with the ‘mafia’. Ecevit, a rare politician with a clean record, formed a coalition with independents on 11 January 1999. His task was to lead Turkey to elections to be held on 25 April 1999. The capture of Abdullah Öcalan, the leader of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party, the

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PKK, on 15 February heightened the nationalist mood of the country, virtually guaranteeing a nationalist landslide in the coming election.

Ecevit, who had virtually abandoned social democracy, had reinvented himself as an ardent nationalist while the Action Party had no problem flaunting its extreme nationalism. The election result was described as a political earthquake. The nationalists (DLP and NAP) had eclipsed the liberals (ANAP, TPP) because voters were tired of the corruption and bickering of Yılmaz and Çiller. The Islamist vote had also declined from 19 in 1995 to 15.94 per cent in 1999, but the party was still a force to be reckoned with, as municipal election results showed. HADEP, the pro-Kurdish party, had failed at the national level but it controlled cities in south-east Anatolia. The RPP, on the other had, seemed to offer nothing to the voter and failed to enter parliament.36

Bülent Ecevit formed a coalition with ANAP and the NAP. His principal task was to manage a stagnant economy, and the coalition partners promised to work together and provide sorely needed political stability, thereby winning the support of the business community led by the Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association of Turkey (TÜSİAD, Türkiye Sanayiciler ve İş Adamları Derneği). But the devastating earthquakes of 17 August and 12 November 1999 marginalised plans to reform the economy, forcing the parties to pull together in the crisis. However, they could not agree to amend the constitution and allow Süleyman Demirel a second term when his presidency expired on 5 May 2000. They agreed to elect Ahmet Nöcet Sezer as Turkey's tenth president. He was president of the constitutional court, an independent-minded liberal secularist who promised to supervise the reform agenda required to meet the 'Copenhagen criteria' for Turkey's entry into the EU. These criteria included economic reform, restoration of human rights and the protection of minorities (Kurds, Alevi and non-Muslims), as well as bringing the military under civil control. The EU's demands divided the coalition and slowed down the reform programme.

In 2001 a new crisis rocked the coalition, which had been the most stable of parliament; HADEP also failed to clear the 10 per cent threshold. See Ali Çarkoğlu,

36 The DSP share of the vote rose 10 per cent from 14 per cent in 1995 to 23.33 per cent; NAP'srose over 100 per cent from 8.18 to 17.07 per cent; the Virtue Party's vote fell from 19 to 15.94 per cent; ANAP fell 4 per cent to 14.12, DYP fell 8 per cent from 19 to 11.11 per cent; the CHP with 9.02 failed to clear the barrage. For the first time, the CHP found itself out of parliament; HADEP also failed to clear the 10 per cent threshold. See Ali Çarkoğlu, 'The Geography of the April 1999 Turkish Elections', Turkish Studies 1, 1 (Spring 2000).

collapsed, creating financial and economic turmoil. The country's financial situation was already weak, and Ecevit's words merely triggered a storm that was about to break.37

Economic instability inevitably led to political instability. There were rumours that the coalition would be replaced by an interim government that would lead the country to fresh elections. On 16 July, Ecevit issued the warning that rumours were undermining confidence in the coalition and its ability to carry out the IMF programme. President Bush's 'war on terror', following the 11 September attacks in New York and Washington, enhanced Turkey's strategic position, ensuring urgent US loans for the recovery programme. But Washington required that Turkey have a stable government as well.

The ideologically divided coalition failed to carry out many of the reforms required by the EU, such as the abolition of the death penalty, giving certain rights to the Kurdish population, or bringing the armed forces under civilian control. It was a question of votes and the NAP feared it would lose its constituency (the lower middle class of Anatolia) if it supported such reforms. Ecevit's sudden illness on 4 May 2002 raised the question of his resignation, but he refused to make way for a new leader. Had Ecevit resigned the coalition could have carried on under a new DLP leader such as Ismail Cem. As it was, however, the coalition was paralysed; the three parties knew that an early election might mean that they would not even clear the 10 per cent hurdle and be left out of the next parliament. Polls showed that the Justice and Development Party was considered the favourite in an early election.

On 7 July 2002, the NAP's leader, Devlet Bahçeli, finally called for an early election to be held on 3 November, bringing the political crisis to a head. Next day the deputy prime minister, Hüsamettin Özkan, and three others from the DLP resigned. When Foreign Minister Ismail Cem resigned from the cabinet and the party, there were rumours that he would form a new political party with Kemal Derviş and Hüsamettin Özkan that would govern Turkey with the support of centre-right parties (ANAP and the TPP). But Ecevit refused to resign, and announced on 16 August that he would lead the country to early elections.

İsmail Cem's New Turkey Party was formed on 22 July. Kemal Derviş, the most significant member of the troika, failed to join. When he resigned in August, he joined the RPP after failing to bring about a union of the centre-left

37 See Sefa Kaplan, Kemal Derviş: Bir 'kurtarıcı' öyküsü (Istanbul: Metis, 2001). Kemal Derviş gives his own account, in Kemal Derviş, Krizden çıkış, ve çağdaş sosyal demokrasi (Istanbul: Doğan, 2006). He describes the period from 25 February 2001, when he received a phone call from Ecevit, to 23 August, when he joined the RPP.
that included elements of the centre-right. He wanted to create a political movement he called ‘contemporary social democracy’, capable of coming to power on its own at the next election and forming a strong government that could carry out the reforms necessary to end the political and economic crises that had plagued Turkey throughout the 1990s. When he failed to form such a movement, Derviş joined the RPP led by Deniz Baykal. His membership of the RPP and his support in the media improved the party’s standing among voters. Surveys showed that Baykal was receiving only about 6 per cent of the vote while the JDP was in the 20 per cent range. Baykal had failed to enter parliament in 1999 and it was doubtful that he would do so in 2002. By early September the polls showed that the RPP had moved up from 6.9 to 14.3 per cent thanks to the ‘Kemal Derviş factor’. Meanwhile, the JDP’s vote had risen to almost 25 per cent. Confronted with this reality, on 18 September TÜSİAD’s chair Tuncay Özilhan stated his preference for an RPP–JDP coalition, especially if Kemal Derviş was in charge of the economy. That was the hope of the bourgeoisie: that the election of 3 November 2002 would produce a two-party coalition so that the RPP could control the ‘extremist, Islamist’ tendencies of its JDP partners.

The election results on 4 November produced a surprise. Justice and Development emerged as the winner with over 34 per cent of the votes and 363 seats, more that the number required to form the government. The RPP had won 19 per cent of the votes and had 180 seats, becoming the only opposition. All the other parties had failed to clear the 10 per cent barrier and therefore had no representation in a parliament in which 37 per cent of the voters were not represented. The voters were totally disenchanted with the old leaders and parties, and Erdoğan was seen as a new leader. Though he had cut his teeth in Erbakan’s Welfare Party he had broken away and had not joined its successor. He also had the common touch: he lacked a modern, professional education and knew no foreign language, but had succeeded in becoming a dollar millionaire while mayor of Istanbul. He was seen as a role model.

Though the JDP had its roots in political Islam, most of its leaders had moved to the centre and declared their party to be secular, democratic and conservative, Muslim democrats, rather like the Christian democrats in Europe. Surveys showed that the party’s support was 51 per cent rural and 49 per cent urban, and largely male. Housewives (17 per cent) tended to vote JDP while urban working women tended not to. The Felicity Party, formed on 21 July 2001, was the successor to former parties of political Islam, and the electorate humiliated it by giving it only 2.5 per cent of the vote. The JDP represented the counter-elite that had emerged in Anatolia, and the press described the 2002 election as ‘the Anatolian revolution’.

The JDP relied on what may be described as the support of ‘moderate’ Muslims, the majority of whom (43 per cent) opposed the implementation of the şeriat. Some of its vote (27 per cent) came from the Felicity Party base, who voted for the JDP mainly because other parties had failed to deal with the economic crisis, marked by unemployment and rising prices. They reasoned that Erdoğan, having successfully run ‘greater Istanbul’, would be able to do the same with Turkey.39

Having served a prison sentence for making a divisive political speech, Erdoğan became prime minister in March 2003 only after a constitutional amendment permitted him to be elected to parliament. Under his leadership the party strengthened its position, increasing its vote in the local elections of March 2004 from 34 to 43 per cent while that of the RPP declined from 19 to 15 per cent. The Republican opposition offered no alternative programme while the governing party passed ‘reform packets’ to meet EU demands. Such was the progress in passing reforms that on 17 December 2004 the EU accepted Turkey’s membership conditionally on further reforms being implemented, and announced that accession talks could begin on 3 October 2005.

The liberal press saw the talks as the beginning of a long journey that would create a ‘new Europe and a new Turkey’. But there was also a nationalist backlash resulting from all the barriers that some European countries were raising in Turkey’s path, constantly making new demands for Turkey to meet. Thus Baykal’s RPP, like other opposition parties, was becoming nationalist and conservative rather than retaining its social democratic identity. The JDP was also affected by its own policies, which alienated its radical Islamist wing, disenchanted by the fact that the party had failed to legalise the headscarf in public spaces such as the universities, or open up more employment opportunities for the graduates of religious schools. On the other hand, secular forces in Turkey feared that Erdoğan had a secret agenda to Islamise society by colonising the state by means of packing the bureaucracy with his party’s supporters, a fear heightened by Erdoğan’s defence of a partial ban on alcohol sales in December 2005.

38 It seemed that the voters had humiliated and eliminated the former party leaders Bülent Ecevit, Devlet Bahçeli, Necmettin Erbakan, Mesut Yılmaz and Tansu Çiller. Even the newly founded Young Party of the business tycoon Cem Uzan won only 7.2 per cent of the vote. Professional advertisers had run his campaign and given the voters musical concerts and free food, as well as much publicity in the Uzan-owned media.

By 2006 the major political issue was the succession to President Ahmed Necdet Sezer, a militant secularist, whose term expired in May 2007. Secular Turkey was alarmed when it realised that Prime Minister Erdoğan was determined that his party should elect the president while it had the necessary majority in parliament to do so. The opposition therefore called for an early general election hoping that the JDP, whose popularity was thought to be declining, would not have the necessary votes in the new parliament to elect its nominee as president. It would therefore have to settle for a compromise candidate and elect an above-party president. But Erdoğan stated categorically: ‘Don’t expect early elections.’ On 10 April 2007, President Sezer, presiding over his last NSC meeting, warned his audience that religious fundamentalism had reached alarming proportions and Turkey’s only guarantee against this threat was its secular order, hinting that a military intervention was still on the cards if the governing party persisted in electing an ‘Islamist’ president. However, Erdoğan was faced with opposition from the radical ‘Islamist’ wing in his own party. Led by Bülent Arınç, the speaker of the house, they demanded that a committed ‘Islamist’ be nominated, failing which Arınç would put himself forward, thus dividing the party. Erdoğan compromised and chose Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül, a founding member of the JDP and respected by the secularists as a moderate Islamist.

The Republican opposition in parliament objected that the president could not be elected without a two-thirds quorum in the chamber, and they took their objection to the constitutional court. The court agreed, and annulled the first round of voting on 1 May 2007. When, five days later, parliament again failed to elect Abdullah Gül, his candidacy was withdrawn and the scene was set for an early general election, to be held on Sunday 22 July. The parties began to negotiate mergers so as to present the electorate with a robust and united front against the JDP. The ‘centre-left’ RPP and the Democratic Left Party (DSP) failed to agree on the terms of a merger, though the DSP agreed to fight the election alongside the RPP. The centre-right parties – the True Path and the Motherland Party – tried to reinvent themselves by calling themselves the Democrat Party, hoping that the magic of the name would bring them the necessary 10 per cent of the vote to get into parliament. However ANAP withdrew from the negotiations and the party decided not to contest the election, thereby virtually disappearing from political life. Erdoğan tried to appeal to the centre-right voters by purging his party’s electoral list of radical ‘Islamists’ so as to present a moderate face. The Nationalist Action Party decided to strengthen its ultra-nationalist image by including in its electoral list Tuğrul Türkeş, the son of Alparslan Türkeş, the party’s founder. Meanwhile there were massive demonstrations in Ankara, Istanbul and Izmir against the JDP and in support of a secular Turkey.

The result of the general election of 22 July 2007 confounded most predictions. The JDP performed far better than expected, winning 45.5 per cent of the vote and 341 parliamentary seats, while the RPP won 21 per cent and 112 seats, and the Nationalist Action Party won 15 per cent and 71 seats. Independents unofficially representing the DSP, which would not have cleared the 10 per cent barrier, won 23 of the 26 independent seats and were therefore able to articulate Kurdish grievances in the next parliament.

The 2007 election is considered one of the most important elections of the multi-party period. It highlighted the bankruptcy of the traditional centre-right parties – the DYP and ANAP – with the failure of the newly created Democrat Party to enter parliament. Some therefore see the JDP, despite its Islamist roots, as the new representative of the centre-right. The RPP’s poor performance under its current leadership forced it to find a new leader who would take the party from ultra-nationalism back to the kind of social democracy that made it so successful in the 1970s. The ultra-nationalist NAP emerged as the party of the extreme right, having doubled its share of the vote since the November 2002 election. The 2007 election was undoubtedly one of the most important elections of the multi-party period, marking the bankruptcy of the centre-right. Following the elections, Erdoğan again chose Abdullah Gül as the AKP’s candidate for the presidency, and he was duly elected the eleventh president of the Republic on 28 August 2007. At the time this chapter was written (October 2007) the AKP controlled three principal levers of power – the executive, the legislature and the presidency. It remained to be seen whether the party would use its powers to pursue policy to maintain the secular character of society or try to impose traditional–‘religious’ values on Turkey.
CHAPTER 1

The History of Constitution-Making in Turkey

The First Steps Toward Constitutional Government

As indicated above, the beginnings of constitutionalism in the Ottoman Empire can be traced back to the nineteenth century. The first constitutional document of dubious legal value was the Deed of Alliance (Sened-i İttifak) signed in 1808 between the representatives of local notables (âyan) and those of the central government. In the document the notables affirmed their loyalty to the central government in exchange for recognition of their traditional privileges. The document also stipulated that the Chief Minister would be responsible for the state affairs. Although the interpretations comparing the Deed of Alliance with the Magna Carta are highly exaggerated, it can still be considered as the first step towards the notions of limited government and the rule of law. However, the Deed remained unimplemented, and was quickly superseded by the authoritarian modernization of Sultan Mahmud II.

The second step towards constitutional government was the two edicts of the Reform period (notably, the Edict of Tanzimat of 1839, and that of Islahat of 1856). Legally, these documents were no more than a unilateral declaration and recognition by the Sultan of certain basic human rights for his subjects, including security of life, honor and property, the abolition of tax farming (iltizam), fair and public trial of persons accused of crimes, and the equality of all Ottoman subjects irrespective of religion. No effective legal mechanism was established to ensure the enforcement of such provisions, which remained only morally binding upon the Sultan. Yet, one should not minimize the significance of the Reform rescripts in the constitutional development of the Ottoman Empire. They signified the first important break with the autocratic and absolutist political traditions of the Empire, and they paved the way for a still more important step, the promulgation of the first Ottoman Constitution in 1876.
The Constitution of 1876

The Ottoman Constitution of 1876, promulgated by Sultan Abdülhamit II, acting under the pressure of a small group of reformist bureaucrats, was prepared not by a representative constituent assembly, but by a special committee appointed by the Sultan. The committee was composed of a total of 28 members, including two members of the military establishment, 16 civilian bureaucrats (of whom three were Christians), and 10 religious scholars (ulema). In the committee, the reformers headed by the Prime Minister Mithat Paşa were in a minority. Therefore, the final text reflected a compromise between the reformers and the conservatives supported by the Sultan.

The Constitution of 1876 provided, for the first time, some constitutional mechanisms to check the absolute powers of the Sultan. The most important novelty of the Constitution was the creation of a legislative assembly at least partially elected by the people. The Ottoman legislature, called the “General Assembly” (Meclis-i Ummi) was composed of two chambers: the Senate (Heyet-i Ayan) and the Chamber of Deputies (Heyet-i Mebusan). The members of the Senate were to be appointed for life by the Sultan, while the deputies were to be elected by the people through indirect (two-stage) elections in which only property owners were allowed to vote. The General Assembly was granted certain powers to enact laws and to exercise control over the executive. On both accounts, however, the ultimate authority still rested with the Sultan, who thus remained the cornerstone of the constitutional system. On the other hand, the Sultan could not unilaterally enact laws or amend the Constitution. Thus, some degree of balance was established between the two political organs. In addition, the Constitution had recognized the independence of the judiciary and enumerated certain basic rights and freedoms.

The Constitution of 1876 fell far short of establishing a parliamentary monarchy, in which the substance of political power rested with parliament, and the monarch’s role is restricted essentially to ceremonial and symbolic matters. Nevertheless, even this limited experience in constitutional government proved too much for Abdülhamid II, who prorogued the Chamber of Deputies indefinitely in 1878 and returned to absolutist rule for thirty years. The influence of Western liberalism, however, continued and expanded under his
authoritarian rule. Increasing numbers of students, intellectuals, bureaucrats and army officers joined the opposition commonly named the “Young Turks.” Eventually, the rebellion of some military units in Macedonia forced the Sultan to restore the Constitution in 1908.

The November–December 1908 elections for the Chamber of Deputies gave the Young Turks, organized under the name of Society of Union and Progress, a clear majority in the Chamber. It was this Parliament that substantially amended the Constitution after the suppression of the reactionary uprising of 13 April 1909 and the dethronement of Abdülhamit II. The amendments substantially enlarged the powers of the legislature and restricted those of the Sultan. Thus, the political accountability of the Council of Ministers before the Chamber of Deputies was explicitly stipulated, and the Sultan’s absolute veto power over the legislation enacted by Parliament was transformed into a relative veto power which could be overridden by a two-thirds majority. The Sultan’s power to dissolve the Chamber of Deputies was restricted and made subject to the approval of the Senate. Furthermore, some new public liberties, such as the freedom of assembly and association, secrecy of communications, etc., were introduced into the Constitution. Thus, a constitutional system finally came into being, more or less similar to the parliamentary monarchies of Western Europe. However, this liberal era, called the “Second Constitutionalist Period,” did not last long and was quickly transformed into the dictatorship of the dominant Union and Progress Party. With the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War I, the Ottoman government collapsed, in fact, if not in theory, while the İstanbul government maintained a shaky existence during the Armistice years (1918–1922) under the control of the occupying armies of the Allies. A new governmental structure was developed in Anatolia by the nationalists resisting the occupation.

The Constitution of 1921

This era of “National Liberation” is a most interesting period in Turkey’s constitutional history and is full of constitutional innovations. Following the arrest and deportation by the Allied occupation forces of many deputies with nationalist sympathies and the consequent prorogation of the chamber of Deputies in Istanbul on 18 March 1920, Mustafa Kemal (later, Atatürk; at the time the leader of
the nationalist resistance forces in Anatolia) called for the election of a new assembly “with extraordinary powers” to convene in Ankara. This body, called the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (GNAT), was different from the Ottoman Parliament in that it held both legislative and executive powers. It was, in a real sense, a constituent and revolutionary assembly, not bound by the Ottoman Constitution.

The Grand National Assembly enacted a constitution in 1921.³ This was a short (it contained only 23 articles) but very important document. For the first time, it proclaimed the principle of national sovereignty calling itself the “only and true representative of the nation.” Legislative and executive powers were vested in the Assembly, as they had been since the opening of the Assembly on 23 April 1920. Thus, the constitutional system was a textbook example of the assembly government model, where the Assembly could instruct or change the ministers at will, while the Council of Ministers had no power to dissolve the Assembly. The Constitution did not create an office of presidency for the fear that this would put an end to the alliance between the republicans and the monarchists. This was, undoubtedly, a republican form of government, since neither the principle of national sovereignty nor an all-powerful Assembly could, in fact, be reconciled with a monarchical system. However, for tactical political reasons, the Assembly did not officially abolish the sultanate until after the final victory over the invading Greek armies. The sultanate was abolished on 30 October 1922, and the Republic was officially proclaimed about a year later, on 29 October 1923.

**The Constitution of 1924**

The Turkish Republic clearly needed a new constitution. The Constitution of 1921 was not meant to be a constitution in the full sense of the word; rather, it was a short document dealing only with the most urgent constitutional problems of the moment. The new Constitution was adopted by the Grand National Assembly elected in 1923. The Assembly was not a constituent assembly, but an ordinary legislature. However, it adopted a quorum of two-thirds majority for its constitutional votes. The 1923 elections were strongly controlled and dominated by the RPP, newly organized by Mustafa Kemal and his supporters. None of the deputies who had opposed Kemal during the first legislative session of the Assembly (1920–1923) had been re-
elected. Thus, the new legislature was almost completely dominated by Kemalists, although a single-party system had not yet been consolidated when it debated the new Constitution. Therefore, the constitutional debates took place in an atmosphere of relative freedom, even though the Assembly by no means represented all of the major forces in society.

The Constitution of 1924 retained many of the basic principles of the 1921 Constitution, notably the principle of national sovereignty. The Grand National Assembly was considered, as it was under the 1921 Constitution, “the sole representative of the nation, on whose behalf it exercises the rights of sovereignty” (Art. 4). Theoretically, both legislative and executive powers were concentrated in the Assembly (Art. 5), but the Assembly was to exercise its executive authority through the President of the Republic elected by it and a Council of Ministers appointed by the President (Art. 7). The Assembly could at any time supervise and dismiss the Council of Ministers, while the Council had no power to dissolve the assembly to hold new elections.

In classical constitutional theory, this was an “assembly government” based on the unity or concentration of the legislative and executive powers, rather than a parliamentary government where such powers are, to some extent, separated from each other. In practice, however, the theoretical supremacy of the assembly is often transformed into the domination of the executive body, since normally the executive is composed of party or faction leaders, while the legislature includes a numerically larger, but politically much weaker, group of backbenchers. This was also the case in Turkey. Both in the single-party (1925–1946) and multi-party (1946–1960) years, the authoritarian leadership of the chief executives and strong party discipline reduced the Assembly to a clearly secondary role.

In the Assembly debates on the Constitution, most deputies were intent on jealously preserving the dominant position of the Assembly. It is highly interesting that even at the height of Atatürk’s prestige, the Assembly rejected a proposal to give the President of the Republic the power to dissolve the Assembly. Resat Bey’s (the deputy from Saruhan) words in this regard reflect the mood of the Assembly: “Supposing that God is the President of the Republic and the Angels are the Ministers, we cannot grant the power of dissolution.” Other points of controversy concerned the term of the presidency, the presi-
dent’s veto power over legislation, and the position of the command-
er-in-chief. On all three issues, the proposals of the Constitutional Committee were modified or rejected in favor of the Assembly.

The Constitutional Committee had foreseen a seven-year term for the president and a four-year term for the Assembly; the Assembly adopted a four-year term for both, with the possibility of re-election for the president. The Constitutional Committee had proposed a presidential veto over the laws adopted by the Assembly which could be overridden only by a two-thirds majority; the Assembly modified it into a simple request for a reconsideration of the bill which could be overridden by an ordinary majority. Finally, the Committee had proposed that the president should be the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, which most deputies considered a direct assault on the principle of national sovereignty. At the end, the article ultimately adopted stated that “the supreme command of the armed forces is vested in the Grand National Assembly and is represented by the President of the Republic. In time of peace the command of all armed forces is entrusted by special law to the Chief of the General Staff, and in time of war is given to the person appointed by the President of the Republic upon the proposal of the Council of Ministers.”

The Constitution of 1924 was undoubtedly a democratic constitution in spirit. It gave no hint of the emerging authoritarian single-party system. However, this was a “majoritarian” or “Rousseauist” conception of democracy, rather than a liberal or pluralistic democracy based on an intricate system of checks and balances. The majoritarian concept of democracy holds that sovereignty is the “general will” of the nation (which, in practice, has to be interpreted as the majority’s will), and it is, as such, absolute, indivisible and infallible. Within a representative system, this means that the legislature represents the true will of the nation. Hence, limiting the powers of the legislature would be tantamount to restricting the national will, which would, in turn, limit the sovereignty of the nation. Furthermore, such limitations would be neither necessary nor useful, since under the Rousseauist concept of democracy the general will is always right.

Needless to say, modern democratic theory no longer depends on such metaphysical concepts as the general will. Nevertheless, Rousseauist ideas had a lasting impact on French democratic thought, through which they influenced the thinking of the Turkish revolutionaries. Nor should one lose sight of the fact that the Constitution of 1924
was the culmination of a long struggle against the sultans. It is not surprising, therefore, that the only perceived threat to national interests was that which could come from the sultans; once this threat was removed, the revolutionaries thought, there would be no need to protect the nation against its own true representatives. Evidently, the framers of the Constitution of 1924 were not sufficiently aware that the tyranny of a majority was just as possible, and as dangerous, as a personal tyranny.

This rather simplistic view of democracy was present in many aspects of the Constitution: its creation of an all-powerful Assembly; its somewhat emotional distrust of the executive; its insufficient safeguards for the independence of the judiciary; and its failure to institute formal restraints on the legislative power, notably the lack of a judicial mechanism for reviewing the constitutionality of laws. Although the Constitution declared and enumerated the basic rights of Turkish citizens, it often stated that such rights would be enjoyed only “within the limits stipulated by law.” Hence, the Assembly was constitutionally empowered to restrict basic rights, almost at will.

Lack of constitutional checks and balances did not pose a major problem during the single-party years (1925–1946), since a single-party system itself implies a heavy concentration of governmental authority. Furthermore, it can reasonably be argued that the modernizing reforms of the Kemalist era could hardly have been carried out by a political system in which such authority was divided and dispersed. But, with the transition to a multi-party system in 1946, the problems of the Constitution became obvious. The unrestrained nature of the legislative power, coupled with an electoral system which produced lopsided majorities in the legislature, made it tempting for the leaders of the majority party to use their vast powers to suppress, or at least harass, the opposition. Thus, in the late 1950s, tension increased greatly between the governing Democrats and the opposition Republicans. Some overly authoritarian measures taken by the government in the spring of 1960 created widespread unrest in the country. Finally, on 27 May 1960, units of the Turkish armed forces overthrew the Menderes government.
The Constitution of 1961

The military committee (the National Unity Committee, NUC) that took over power was intent on a return to civilian rule, once a new and democratic constitution was adopted. At first, the Committee charged a group of law professors with the preparation of a constitutional draft. The Commission under the chairmanship of Professor Siddik Sami Onar of Istanbul University produced, after many months of hard work, a curious draft with many dissenting opinions. The draft seriously deviated from the principle of universal suffrage by proposing to create a second chamber (Senate of the Republic) which would be partly cooptative and partly elected by voters with at least a middle school education. The draft also proposed to establish a large number of autonomous administrative agencies, thus severely restricting the powers of the executive. As the draft was received with a great deal of doubt and disappointment by the general public, the National Unity Committee decided to convene a Constituent Assembly to prepare the new constitution. A law (No.157) adopted by the NUC on 13 December 1960 established a bicameral Constituent Assembly, of which one chamber was the NUC itself. Nor was the other chamber (House of Representatives) directly elected. At that time, political circumstances were not considered suitable for convening an elected Constituent Assembly. The Democrat Party (DP) was dissolved by a court order and no new parties had yet been formed to organize its former supporters.

Thus, the NUC decided to establish a partly indirectly elected and partly cooptative House of Representatives. Under Laws No.157 and 158, the House of Representatives was composed of the following members: (1) ten members selected by the Head of the State (General Cemal Gursel); (2) eighteen members selected by the NUC; (3) members of the Council of Ministers; (4) 75 members indirectly elected from provinces in which only one delegate from each village, neighborhood headmen and primary school headmasters in sub-province centers, members of the executive committees of professional organizations, and members of the executive committees of political parties had the right to vote; (5) representatives of the two existing political parties, the RPP, and the Republican Peasant Nation Party (RPNP); the former was given 49, and the latter 25 seats; (6) 79 members chosen by professional organizations and certain associations (bar associa-
tions, representatives of the press, veteran associations, artisans’ and traders’ associations, youth representatives, trade unions, chambers of commerce and industry, teachers’ associations, agricultural organizations, representatives of universities and the judiciary).7

This mode of selection understandably gave the RPP an almost complete domination over the House of Representatives, in which the overthrown DP supporters were not represented at all. To make this even more certain, Article 2 of Law No. 157 had excluded all those who had supported “the unconstitutional and anti-human rights policies by their activities, publications, and behavior until the Revolution of 27 May” from membership in the House of Representatives. Consequently, the Constitutional draft prepared by the House closely conformed to the constitutional theses of the RPP. Over its years as the opposition, between 1950 and 1960, the RPP, troubled by the illiberal majoritarian policies of the DP government, had developed a preference for a more liberal and pluralistic democracy based on a system of checks and balances, including constitutional review and strong guarantees for the independence of the judiciary. The demand for the establishment of a constitutional court was expressed in the 1957 election platform of the RPP and its Declaration of First Objectives issued on 14 January 1959.8

The strong RPP majority in the House of Representatives had no difficulty in translating these objectives into the Constitution. Provisions concerning the Constitutional Court, a second chamber (Senate of the Republic), independence of the judiciary, and more effective guarantees for the fundamental rights and liberties were adopted without much debate, although there were differences of opinion about their modalities. The Constituent Assembly, also entrusted with the task of preparing new electoral laws, opted for a proportional representation system for the National Assembly and a majoritarian system for the Senate of the Republic. More controversial points concerned the principles of nationalism and social state. On both accounts, there were significant differences of opinion between the more conservative and the more liberal-leftist wings of the RPP. In the draft prepared by the Constitutional Committee of the House, Article 2 on the characteristics of the Republic read that “the Republic of Turkey is democratic and secular; it is based on human rights and liberties, work and social justice.” The more conservative members objected to this formulation on the grounds that reference to
work and social justice could be suggestive of a socialist state. Finally, an agreement was reached on the term “social state.” The principle of nationalism gave rise to a more heated controversy. Many members were in favor of preserving the word “nationalist” as it existed in the 1924 Constitution. Faced with these criticisms, the Constitutional Committee proposed a compromise solution of inserting the term “national state” rather than nationalist. The Committee’s proposal was adopted by 103 votes against 65. The NUC, in its turn, also favored the insertion of the term “nationalist,” but it was rejected by a close vote (108 against 84 with 12 abstentions) by the House of Representatives. The final text of Article 2 read as follows: “The Republic of Turkey is a national, democratic, secular, and social state governed by the rule of law and based on human rights and the fundamental principles stated in the Preamble.”

The Constituent Assembly was dominated largely by the state elites (the military, the bureaucracy, and university professors) and the RPP, the principal spokesperson of those elites. Consequently, the 1961 Constitution, adopted by the Assembly and ratified by a majority (61.7%) of the popular vote on 9 July 1961 reflected the basic political values and interests of the state elites. Thus, on the one hand, the Constitution greatly expanded civil liberties and granted extensive social rights for citizens; on the other hand, it reflected a distrust of politicians and elective assemblies by creating an effective system of checks and balances to limit the power of those elected organs. These checks included the introduction of judicial review of the constitutionality of laws; strengthening the administrative courts, with review powers over all executive agencies; full independence for the judiciary; creation of a second chamber of the legislative Assembly; improved job security for civil servants, especially judges; and granting substantial administrative autonomy to certain public agencies, such as the universities and the Radio and Television Corporation. It was hoped that the power of the elected assemblies would be effectively balanced by judicial and other bureaucratic agencies and that the newly expanded civil liberties and social rights would ensure the gradual development of a genuinely pluralistic and democratic society.

With regard to the regulation of socioeconomic issues, the majority in the Constituent Assembly interpreted the old Kemalist notion of etatism in a more leftist and ideological way. Consequently, many
programmatic and ideological statements were incorporated into the constitution. Thus, the state was entrusted with economic, social, and cultural planning; land reform; health care and housing; social security organizations; helping to assure full employment; and similar tasks. The state was also empowered to force private enterprises to act “in accordance with the requirements of national economy and with social objectives” (Article 40).

Neither the circumstances of its creation nor its substance allowed the 1961 Constitution to be accepted by a large majority of Turkish society. Former Democrats, in part because they had been totally excluded from the constitution-making process, voted against it in the constitutional referendum on 9 July 1961. The Justice Party (JP), which came to power in 1965 as the established heir of the banned DP, was ambivalent toward the constitution. The JP was careful to operate within the limits of the Constitution, but criticized those aspects that, in its view, gave bureaucratic and judicial agencies excessive powers. JP leaders often expressed the view that the Constitution created an “ungovernable” political system, and they demanded a stronger executive. They were uncomfortable with the extensive social rights recognized by the constitution, as well as its other left-leaning provisions.

The views of Celal Bayar, deposed president of the Republic under the DP regime, were both more systematic and extreme than those of the JP. Bayar argued that the 1924 Constitution was more in accordance with the Kemalist notion of unconditional sovereignty because it concentrated all power in the Grand National Assembly as the sole representative of the Turkish nation. The 1961 Constitution introduced new partners—the army and intellectuals—into the forum of national sovereignty. Thus, it reflected a distrust of elected assemblies and represented a return to the Ottoman notion of a tripartite (palace, army and religious scholars) government.¹⁰ No doubt, such negative views of the 1961 Constitution were also motivated in part by the fact that the DP–JP had been the “natural” majority party in the 1950s and 1960s and was therefore resentful of bureaucratic limitations on the power of elected assemblies.
The tension between state elites and the JP as the principal representative of political elites tended to decrease in the late 1960s. The JP government treated the military with much greater care and respect than the DP government had. The National Security Council (NSC), an advisory body created by the 1961 Constitution and composed of some ministers and the highest commanders of the armed forces, gave the military a legitimate voice in the formulation of national security policies. The Grand National Assembly’s choice of former military commanders as president of the Republic (General Gürsel in 1961 and General Cevdet Sunay in 1966) also reassured most officers. Finally, salaries and other benefits for officers improved greatly in the 1960s.

Although a strong radical faction within the armed forces was still unhappy with the JP government and its basically conservative policies, that group’s conspiratorial activities failed to gain the support of the top military leadership. The radical officers, frustrated by the successive JP electoral victories, aimed to establish a longer-term military regime to carry out radical social reforms; in fact, the military memorandum of 12 March 1971 that forced the JP government to resign was a last-minute move by top military commanders to forestall a radical coup. In the days following, most radical officers were summarily retired or dismissed, thereby strengthening the position of the more conservative military leaders. The so-called 12 March regime did not go as far as dissolving the parliament and assuming power directly. Instead, it urged the formation of an above-party, or technocratic, government under veteran RPP politician Nihat Erim.

The policies of the non-party government, with strong behind-the-scenes support from the military, were more in line with the JP’s conservative philosophy. This fact is also evident in the extensive 1971 and 1973 constitutional amendments, which incorporated most of the JP’s positions into the constitution. The amendments can be grouped into three categories: (1) curtailing certain civil liberties in conjunction with restrictions of the review power of the courts; (2) strengthening the executive, particularly by allowing the legislature to grant it law-making powers; and (3) increasing the institutional autonomy of the military by excluding it from review by civilian administrative courts and the Court of Account.
With the possible exception of the last item, the amendments were in accordance with the JP’s constitutional thesis, and JP and other conservative deputies readily voted in favor. To obtain the two-thirds majority required for constitutional change, pressure was apparently exerted on the RPP leadership and its deputies. The threat of dissolution of the parliament, expressed clearly in the 12 March memorandum, and the highly repressive atmosphere produced by a regime of martial-law also weakened and discouraged the opposition. Thus, once again constitutional change was accomplished by highly dissident methods, with no process of genuine negotiation and compromise among political parties. One side imposed its favored solutions on the other, taking advantage of the threat of force by the military.

The 1982 Constitution

The making of the 1982 Constitution was another missed opportunity to create political institutions with broad consensus. Although the NSC (composed of the five highest-ranking generals in the Turkish armed forces) that took over the government on 12 September 1980 made it clear that it intended eventually to return power to democratically elected civilian authorities, it made it equally clear that it did not intend to return to the status quo. Rather, the Council intended a major restructuring of Turkish democracy to prevent a recurrence of the political polarization, violence, and deadlock that had afflicted the country in the late 1970s.

This restructuring was done by a Constituent Assembly created by the NSC. As in the case of the 1960–1961 Constituent Assembly, the structure was bicameral, one chamber of which was the NSC itself. However, important differences were found between this Constituent Assembly and its predecessor. In the present case, the civilian chamber (the Consultative Assembly) was even less representative than the House of Representatives of the 1960–1961 period. Whereas the latter included representatives of the two opposition parties and various other institutions, all members of the former were appointed by the NSC. Furthermore, no political party members were eligible to become members of the Consultative Assembly. Consequently, the state elites had even more weight in the Consultative Assembly than they had in the House of Representatives.
Second, the Consultative Assembly had much less power vis-à-vis the NSC than the House of Representatives had enjoyed vis-à-vis the NUC. In the latter case, the two chambers had roughly equal powers regarding the adoption of the constitution and other laws; in the former, the NSC kept the final say. In other words, the NSC had the absolute power to amend or reject the constitutional draft prepared by the Consultative Assembly, with no machinery envisaged to resolve the differences between the two chambers.

Third, whereas the 1961 constitutional referendum took place in a reasonably free atmosphere and those who opposed the constitution (particularly the JP) were able to make public their views, the 1982 referendum followed a one-sided campaign conducted by General Kenan Evren, the head of state and chair of the NSC. A NSC decree prohibited the expression of any views intended to influence voters’ decisions and banned criticism of the transitional articles of the constitution or of speeches Evren made in his pro-constitution campaign.

Finally, the 1982 constitutional referendum was combined with the election of the president of the Republic. A “yes” vote for the Constitution was also an endorsement of the presidency of Evren (the sole candidate) for a seven-year period. Furthermore, the NSC members implied that in case of a rejection of the draft, the NSC regime would continue indefinitely. Under these circumstances, the Constitution was approved on 7 November 1982 by 91.37 percent of voters in a referendum of highly dubious democratic legitimacy.

The 1982 Constitution—again reflecting the values and interests of state elites—was even less trusting than its predecessor of the “national will,” elected assemblies, political parties, politicians, and all other civil society institutions such as trade unions, professional organizations, and voluntary associations. Trade unions were weakened, and the freedom of association was severely restricted. No cooperation was allowed between political parties on the one hand and unions, professional organizations, foundations, associations, and cooperative societies on the other. If the 1982 Constitution somewhat curbed the review powers of the judiciary and the autonomy of universities, this was not intended to strengthen elected assemblies and responsible governments at the expense of bureaucratic agencies. Rather, the intent was to create a strong presidency, which the makers of the 1982 Constitution (almost all of whom were military officers and civilian bureaucrats) assumed would be controlled by the
military. Indeed, Kenan Evren, the leader of the 1980 coup, served as president until November 1989.

A major difference between the making of the 1961 and 1982 Constitutions is that in the latter case the military no longer trusted civilian bureaucratic agencies, which it perceived as highly fragmented, infiltrated by political parties, and vulnerable to radical political ideas. Therefore, the President of the Republic was given important substantive powers in appointing high-court judges and university administrators, the two areas the military considered particularly sensitive. In short, the 1982 Constitution was designed to maintain the military as the ultimate guardian and arbiter of the political system through a strengthened presidency and the NSC.

This emphasis on strengthening the presidency led to different interpretations of the system of government created by the 1982 Constitution. Some observers perceived it as a presidential or semi-presidential system. Another view held that the Constitution provided two alternative models of government. If the system functioned normally (i.e., without a crisis) it would be closer to a parliamentary government in which the prime minister, not the President of the Republic, would predominate; this is precisely what happened under the premiership of Turgut Özal (1983–1989). If, on the other hand, the party system failed to avoid or resolve crises, then “the substitute power” of the president (or of the state apparatus as personified by the president) would grow, and the system would become closer to presidential. According to a third view, the logic of the 1982 Constitution dictated a parliamentary system, even though the president was more powerful than most heads of state in parliamentary systems. Therefore, the system could be called, borrowing a French term, “parlementarism atténué” or weakened parliamentarianism.

The history of constitution-making in Turkey described here suggests that none of the three republican constitutions was made by a broadly representative Constituent Assembly through a process of negotiations, bargaining, and compromise. In all three cases, as well as in the extensive constitutional revisions in 1971 and 1973, the influence of state elites was predominant in constitution-making, and the role of civil society institutions was correspondingly limited. Therefore, all three Constitutions had weak political legitimacy, and judging by the frequency of military interventions in politics, none produced a fully consolidated democratic regime.
It is generally argued that the basic philosophy of the 1982 Constitution was to protect the state and its authority against its citizens rather than protecting individuals against the encroachments of the state authority. This can be most clearly seen in the original Preamble of the Constitution that refers to the Turkish State as “sublime” (yüce) and “sacred” (kutsal) (both adjectives were deleted in the 1995 constitutional amendment). This statist philosophy can also be observed in articles on fundamental rights and liberties. Even though the Constitution recognized most of the fundamental rights and liberties commonly found in liberal democratic constitutions, it regulated them in such a manner that restrictions became the rule rather than the exception. Such rights and liberties could be restricted in a cumulative way both by Article 13 that stipulated the general grounds for restriction applicable to all rights and liberties and the specific grounds in their related articles.

A second general feature of the Constitution was its tutelary character. As was pointed out above, the military founders had very little trust in civilian political elites and the elected branches of government. Therefore, the Constitution established a number of tutelary institutions designed to check the powers of the elected agencies and to narrow down the space for civilian politics. Foremost among such institutions was the Presidency of the Republic alluded to above. Another one was the strengthened National Security Council. The original text of the Constitution gave the military members a majority in the Council and stipulated that the decisions of the Council should be given priority consideration by the Council of Ministers, thereby, rendering such decisions binding if not in theory, at least in practice. A third tutelary institution was the Council of Higher Education (YÖK) that was designed to put universities in order and under strict discipline. The President of the Republic was given the power to appoint the president and some members of the YÖK and the university rectors. Finally, the President of the Republic was given broad discretionary powers with regard to the judiciary, such as appointing the judges of the Constitutional Court (three of them directly, and eight of them from among candidates nominated by the other high courts and the YÖK), one-fourth of the members of the Council of State (the highest administrative court), the members of the Supreme Council of Judges and Public Prosecutors (from among three candidates nominated by high courts) and the Chief Public Pros-
executor of the Court of Cassation (Yargıtay) and his deputy from among five candidates nominated by the Court of Cassation. Thus, the judiciary was conceived of as another tutelary institution designed to protect the values of the state elites against the actions of elected governments.

Finally, the military obtained important powers, privileges and immunities as a price for relinquishing power to elected civilian institutions (exit guaranties as they are commonly called). In addition to the National Security Council mentioned above, the military was exempted from the review of the Court of Accounts (Sayıștay), the High Board of Supervision (Yüksek Denetleme Kurulu), and the decisions of the Supreme Military Council (Yüksek Askeri Şûra) regarding high-level military appointments, promotions, and expulsions from the military were closed to judicial review. The laws and law-amending ordinances (decrees) passed by the National Security Council regime (1980–1983) were exempted from the review of constitutionality by the Constitutional Court. Furthermore, the Law on the General Secretariat of the National Security Council provided that the Secretary General shall be a high-level military person and endowed the Secretariat with broad executive powers.  

It is no wonder that the 1982 Constitution met with severe criticisms almost from its inception. In the following years, most political parties and the leading civil society institutions such as the Union of Turkish Bar Association (TBB), the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey (TOBB), and the Association of Turkish Businessmen and Industrialists (TÜSİAD) proposed entirely new constitutional drafts or at least radical changes in the Constitution. Consequently, starting from 1987, the Constitution has undergone 15 amendments. The general direction of these amendments was to improve liberal-democratic standards, although some of them dealt with rather trivial matters, as will be explained in the following chapters. Despite these positive changes, it is generally agreed that it was not possible to completely liquidate the illiberal and tutelary spirit of the 1982 Constitution. In the summer of 2007 constitutional debates took a new turn when the governing JDP initiated a process for the making of an entirely new constitution. This process will be analyzed in depth in Chapter 6.

Looked at from a broader political perspective, Turkish constitutionalism faces three major challenges in the foreseeable future,
namely the rise of political Islam and of Kurdish nationalism, and the continuing influence of the military over civilian politics. The rise of political Islam reached the proportions of a major challenge in the mid-1990s when the Islamist Welfare Party (WP) emerged from the 1995 parliamentary elections as the largest party with 21.4 percent of the vote. The policies of the coalition government between the WP and the center-right True Path Party (TPP) soon led to an extreme polarization in the country and serious frictions with the strongly secularist military establishment. The crisis came to an end by the so-called “28 February Process,” during which the military, supported by the opposition parties and major civil society organizations, resorted to not-so-subtle means to force the WP–TPP government to resign. Shortly thereafter, the WP was closed down by the Constitutional Court on account of its anti-secularist activities. Its successor, the Virtue Party (VP), met the same fate. Although the WP prudently refrained from challenging the basic premises of democracy and maintained that elections were the only route to political power, it was difficult to reconcile its Islamist discourse and its apparent desire to gradually Islamize the society with the strong secularist commitment of the state establishment and of the current Constitution.

The JDP formed after the closure of the VP took a much more moderate course compared to its predecessors. The JDP’s statute and program endorse secularism and contain no hint of an Islamist agenda. Although respectful of religious beliefs and practices, it strongly rejects the use of state power in order to transform (i.e., to Islamize) the society. It refuses to be called a “Muslim democratic” party and prefers instead the label of “conservative democrat.” Both the policies of the JDP government between November 2002 and now, and the analysis of its voters base in the 2002 and 2007 parliamentary elections suggest that the JDP is closer to the dominant center-right tradition in Turkey (represented in the past by the DP, JP, Motherland Party and TPP) than to the predecessor Islamist parties (WP and VP). It remains a fact, however, that a certain section of the Turkish public is highly suspicious of the JDP and believes that it has a hidden agenda to transform Turkey into a sharia-based Islamic state. Thus, as a recent public opinion survey shows, while only 8.9 percent of the population are in favor of a sharia-based government, 22.1 percent think that secularism is in danger and a majority (50.2%) even believe that the JDP intends to introduce an Islamic way of life (not
to be confused with a *sharia*-based government). To make things even more complicated, those who think that secularism is under threat belong disproportionately to the wealthier and better educated segments of the society.\(^{19}\) Thus, it appears that Turkish society is highly polarized over the secular–religious cleavage. Under such circumstances it seems difficult to introduce even minor constitutional amendments concerning the relationship between the state and religion. Such attempts will be immediately branded by the secularist camp as a betrayal of Atatürk’s secularist legacy.\(^{20}\)

A second, even more serious, challenge is posed by the rise of Kurdish nationalism. Kurds represent the only large linguistic minority group in Turkey (an estimated 10–15 percent of the population).\(^{21}\) Although Kurdish speakers constitute a majority in many eastern and southeastern provinces, a large part of them live in other regions of the country and are fairly well integrated into Turkish society. Since the late 1970s a separatist terrorist organization, the Kurdish Workers’ Party (PKK) has emerged in the southeastern region. The PKK, however, has the support of only a minority of Kurds even in that region. This is most clearly observed in the 2007 elections when the JDP emerged as the largest party in eastern and southeastern regions.

Kurdish demands vary between relatively modest ones such as the recognition of their separate cultural identity and the cultural rights associated with it, to the other extreme of regional autonomy, federation, and even secession from Turkey. Since the late 1980s, Kurdish nationalism has been represented by a number of successive ethnic parties, each of which was closed down by the Constitutional Court on account of activities against the territorial and national integrity of the country. At the moment, this trend is represented in the parliament by the Democratic Society Party (DSP), which also faces a prohibition case before the Constitutional Court. To meet the maximalist demands of the PKK and of the Kurdish nationalist parties (with barely hidden sympathy for that organization) is altogether impossible within the present constitutional structure of Turkey, and it is most unlikely that they will ever be met in the future. The question is whether more modest constitutional reforms such as more extensive cultural rights and greater administrative decentralization will satisfy a majority of Kurdish speakers and thus politically isolate the more extremist elements. The constitutional issues raised by the challenges
of political Islam and Kurdish nationalism will be analyzed in greater depth in Chapter 6.

The third obstacle to democratic consolidation is the continuing influence of the military over civilian politics. The constitutional amendments of 2001 and the following reforms have eliminated some of their constitutional privileges, as will be spelled out below. These reforms do not reflect, however, a parallel decrease in the *de facto* political weight of the military. The significant role of the military in Turkish politics is due partly to historico-political factors, and partly to the two challenges discussed above. As regards the former, the military played a very significant role in the founding of the Republic and have since then been the staunchest defenders of the Kemalist legacy, most importantly his principles of a united, secular, nation-state. This historical role gave the military a strong sense of mission of protecting the Kemalist principles and the national interest against, if necessary, “unprincipled, corrupt, power-hungry, and particularistic politicians.” This sense of mission led the military to three interventions (1960, 1971, and 1980; four, if we count the 28 February 1997 process as a military intervention) in the last 47 years, and on each of those occasions they obtained new constitutional privileges and immunities and increased their political influence. With regard to the latter factor, it can be argued that the military’s continuing political influence is closely related to the two challenges mentioned above. Clearly, the demands both of political Islamists and of Kurdish nationalists run counter to their cherished values of a united, secular nation-state; and, unless these two challenges somehow subside, the tutelary role of the military is likely to continue. Constitutional and legal reforms concerning civil-military relations will be discussed in the following chapters.
Notes


16 These amendments are as follows in chronological order:

2. Law No. 3913, 8 July 1993.
5. Law No. 4446, 13 August 1999.
12. Law No. 5551, 13 October 2006.


TURKEY

A Modern History

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12 · The Transition to Democracy, 1945–50

Within a few years of the end of the Second World War, Turkey's political system, economic policies and foreign relations all underwent a fundamental change. In this chapter I will examine the factors behind the change and the way in which it came about.

Socio-economic pressure for change

By the end of the Second World War, Ismet Pasha İnönü’s government had become deeply unpopular, even hated, by the large majority of the Turkish population for a variety of reasons. In analysing this discontent, one should make a distinction between the mass of the population (the peasants and industrial workers) and the segments of the coalition on which the Kemalist regime had been built (the officers and bureaucrats, the Muslim traders in the towns and the landowners in the countryside).

The regime had never been popular with the masses. The small farmers in the countryside, who at the time still made up about 80 per cent of the total population had not seen any great improvement in their standard of living, in health, education or communications. If we take something like electrification as a measure of modernization, we note that as late as 1953 the total number of villages that had been linked up to the electric grid was ten, or 0.025 per cent of Turkey's 40,000 villages. While total production of electricity had grown tenfold between 1923 and 1943, it was still a phenomenon of city life, since Turkey had a grand total of nine miles of power lines in the latter year. Of the total energy capacity of 107,000 kilowatts available in 1945, 83,000 kilowatts went to Istanbul, Ankara and İzmir. And even so, the trolleybuses in Ankara had to stop when the lights went on.

On the other hand, the one characteristic of the modern state with which the villagers had become familiar during the 25 years of Kemalist rule was the central state's effective control over the countryside. The gendarme and tax collector became more hated and feared than ever. Resentment against the state, in itself a traditional feature of country life, became more acute because the state became more effective and visible. It was also exacerbated because the state's secularist policies, especially the suppression of expressions of popular faith, severed the most important ideological bond between state and subject.

Industrial workers were still a very small minority in Turkish society, some 330,000 in a population of around 20 million, but the exact number depends on what is understood by 'industrial'; the number mentioned includes many who were really employed in artisanal production. Their socio-economic position was weak. Until June 1945, organizations based on class, and trade unions were regarded as such, were still prohibited in Turkey, as were strikes. The workers, like the other wage and salary earners, had been badly hit in their purchasing power by the rising cost of living during the war.

Discontent among the mass of the population was not new and in itself would probably not have led to political change. More immediately important in this respect was the fact that İnönü's government lost the support of important elements of the 'Young Turk coalition' on which the Kemalist movement had been built. During the war, the government, faced with the necessity to feed and equip a large army, had paid for its needs by having the Central Bank print money, thus encouraging inflation. On the other hand, it had tried to mitigate the social effects of this policy by establishing price controls and by punitive taxation on excessive profits through the wealth tax and the tax on agricultural produce. The inflation had led to a sharp drop in purchasing power for the civil servants, who numbered about 220,000. For lower-ranking civil servants the drop was about one-third; for senior civil servants it was as high as two-thirds, which was something that led to tensions within the bureaucracy.

Although its main victim had been the non-Muslim business community, the varlık vergisi (wealth tax) of 1942 had caused unrest and suspicion among the Turkish bourgeoisie in general. It had shown that the Kemalist regime, dominated as it was by bureaucrats and the military, was not an entirely dependable supporter of the interests of this group, whose essential vulnerability it had demonstrated. The position of the indigenous bourgeoisie, whose growth had been such a high priority for Unionists and Kemalists alike, had by now become so strong that it was no longer prepared to accept this position of a privileged, but essentially dependent and politically powerless, class.

Large landowners had been an essential element in the 'Young Turk coalition' since the First World War, but they had been alienated by the government's policy of artificially low pricing of agricultural produce to combat inflation during the war, by its 'tax on agricultural produce'
and especially by the introduction of a land distribution bill (the çiftçilik topraklandırma kanunu or 'law on giving land to the farmer') in January 1945. This last bill, which President İnönü strongly promoted, played a crucial part in the emergence of political opposition in postwar Turkey.

Widespread discontent prevailed. Because of the Republican People's Party's close identification with the state apparatus under the one-party system, this resentment was directed at the party as much as it was at the state. İnönü was aware of these tensions and, remembering Atatürk's experiment with the Free Party in 1930, he decided to allow a degree of political liberalization and the formation of a political opposition as a safety valve. That he and his government moved in this direction also owed something to international developments.

**External pressures for democratization**

In a very general sense, the defeat of the Axis powers in the Second World War was in itself a victory for democratic values. The United States of America, a pluralist, capitalist democracy, emerged from the war as the dominant world power and its example could not fail to impress many in Turkey, just as it did in countries all over the world. In April 1945 Turkey took part as a founding member in the San Francisco conference and, in signing the UN charter, committed itself to democratic ideals. There were, however, more immediate reasons why the Turkish government felt compelled to move closer to the West and especially to the United States.

A close relationship with the Soviet Union had been the cornerstone of Turkish foreign policy throughout the 1920s and 1930s, but the relationship had been soured first by the Molotov–Ribbentrop pact and then by Turkey's neutral stance during the war. The Soviet Union had announced that it would not renew the friendship treaty with Turkey after it lapsed in 1945 and in June that year, conversations with the Turkish ambassador, Molotov formulated a number of conditions that would have to be met before a new friendship treaty could be signed. They included a correction of the border between the two countries, returning to the Soviet Union the areas in northeastern Anatolia that had been Russian between 1878 and 1918, and the establishment of a joint Turkish–Russian defence force in the area of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles, in order to guard the Black Sea.

These conditions, of course, completely unacceptable to the Turks, but when the Soviets tabled their proposals at the inter-allied Potsdam conference in July, neither the British nor the Americans immediately rejected them. After all, Turkey's wartime policies had not exactly endeared it to the Western allies. Gradually, however, the United States became more supportive of the Turkish position. When the Soviet demands were communicated officially to Turkey in August 1946, the USA advised the Turkish government to take a firm line. Thus encouraged, Turkey refused the Soviet demands, but it did so in conciliatory terms, trying to keep down the tensions.

With concern about Stalin's policies in eastern Europe increasing with every communist regime established there, Washington began to re-evaluate the strategic importance of Turkey. Although theoretically the United Nations was the forum to which international conflicts could and should be referred, the constant use of the veto by the Soviet Union in the security council made working through the UN impossible, and the United States administration decided to act unilaterally. On 12 March 1947, President Truman launched his so-called 'Truman doctrine'. This stipulated that the USA should and would help defend 'free nations' whose existence was threatened by foreign pressure or by militant minorities inside their borders. The occasion for the promulgation of the doctrine was a proposal by President Truman to the US congress for military and financial support for Greece (where the civil war between communists and monarchists was raging at the time) and Turkey. It was the start of the American commitment to the defence of anti-communist regimes throughout the world. Shortly afterwards, in June 1947, the Marshall Plan, envisaging financial support on a gigantic scale to the European countries to help them rebuild their economies, was put forward. This plan had three complementary aims: to help the Europeans help themselves; to sustain lucrative export markets for US industry; and to eliminate poverty as a breeding ground for communism.

It was clear to the Turkish leadership that, in order to profit fully from the American political and military support and from the Marshall Plan, it would be helpful for Turkey to conform more closely to the political and economic ideals (democracy and free enterprise) cherished by the Americans. Thus we can say that the political and economic change in Turkey after 1945 had both domestic and international roots.

**The process of democratization**

The first sign that the government was considering a change of direction came even before the end of the war, when İnönü strongly emphasized the democratic parliamentary character of the Turkish political system in his speech at the opening of the parliamentary year on 1 November 1944. On 19 May 1945, he elaborated this theme and promised measures to make the regime more democratic, without as yet specifying what these measures would be.
Also in May, the Land Distribution Law, which had first been put forward in January, came up for discussion in the national assembly. Turkey was still overwhelmingly a nation of small farmers. Some 97.75 per cent of the landownership consisted of farms with fewer than 500 dönüm (125 acres) of land. Properties of more than 5000 dönüm comprised only 0.01 per cent; most farmers held far fewer than 125 acres. There were great differences between the regions but in the more affluent agricultural areas a holding of between 25 and 50 dönüm (6–12 acres) was typical. Many of the small farmers led a marginal existence. There was not enough arable land to sustain the approximately three million peasant families and a holding of between six and twelve acres meant existing on, and in many cases below, the poverty line. As a result a great many farmers had long since become sharecroppers with a very low standard of living. As a rule a large landowner or an affluent city dweller supplied them with seeds and equipment and took from a quarter to a half of the harvest in return.

The law introduced in the assembly in May 1945 aimed to provide adequate land for farmers who had none or too little by distributing unused state lands, lands from pious endowments (evkaf), reclaimed land, land without clear ownership and land expropriated from landowners who owned more than 500 dönüm. Under Article 17 of the law even up to three-quarters of the land owned by farmers with more than 200 dönüm (50 acres) could be expropriated in densely populated areas. The peasants would also be given 20-year interest-free loans.

The discussions of this bill in the assembly were the first occasion when the government was openly and vehemently criticized. The opposition came from members with landowning connections and their spokesman was Adnan Menderes, himself a large landowner from Aydin. The opposition first focused on economic arguments (contending that the proposed land redistribution undermined the security of property, would impede investment and would lead to inefficient farming) but the autocratic way in which the government handled the debate also led to protests about the lack of democracy in the country, which were again led by Menderes.

In the end, the law was passed unanimously, despite the acrimonious debates — a clear indication of the discipline that still governed the RPP — but very soon after, on 7 June, Menderes, with three other deputies, Celâl Bayar (the former prime minister), Refik Koraltan and Fuat Köprüli (a famous historian) submitted a memorandum to the parliamentary party demanding that the Turkish constitution be implemented in full and democracy established. This Dörtlü Takir (Memorandum of the Four), as it has become known, seemed to aim at a reform of the RPP rather than at the establishment of an opposition party, but it nevertheless marked the beginning of organized political opposition after the war.

The parliamentary party rejected the proposals of the four, but the four were not themselves in any way punished for their temerity. This was generally interpreted as a sign that the government was prepared to allow a certain relaxation of the political climate. There were other signs that pointed in this direction. Some newspapers, notably the liberal (and American-oriented) Vatan (Fatherland) of Ahmet Emin Yalman and the leftist Tem (Dawn) of Zekeriyen and Sabiha Sertel began to support the 'Four', giving them room in their columns to express their ideas. When, a week after the submission of the Dörtlü Takir, by-elections were held in Istanbul, the government for the first time allowed a free choice between different candidates of the RPP.

Strictly speaking, the multi-party period began in July when a prominent Istanbul industrialist, Nuri Demirek, founded an opposition party, the Milli Kalkınma Partisi (National Development Party), which was officially registered on 5 September. The NDP’s platform consisted of a call for liberalization of the economy and the development of free enterprise. The party had no experienced politicians among its members and no representation in the national assembly. It was therefore not very effective and drew little support. The real breakthrough came slightly later when Adnan Menderes and Fuat Köprüli, followed shortly afterwards by Refik Koraltan, were officially ousted from the Republican People’s Party on 21 September because of the critical articles they had written in Tem and Vatan.

In a speech on 1 November, İsmet İnönü declared that the main shortcoming of Turkish democracy was the lack of an opposition party (apparently disregarding the National Development Party) and he announced that the general elections scheduled for 1947 would be free and direct — as opposed to the two-stage system with electors that was still in place at the time. At the beginning of December, Celâl Bayar resigned from the RPP. All four signatories of the ‘Memorandum of the Four’ had now left or been forced to leave the governing party and it was clear that the establishment of a new party was in the offing. In the preparations for launching the new party Bayar and İnönü worked closely together. The fact that Bayar was a veteran Young Turk, and trusted as someone who subscribed to the fundamental tenet of secularism, undoubtedly eased the acceptance of the existence of an opposition party by the Kemalist bureaucracy and party. For the new party it created a problem. While it was clear that the ‘Four’ would be dependent on İsmet İnönü’s goodwill during the embryonic phase of the new
party, the collaboration between Bayar and İnönü gave the impression that the creation of the party was the result of collusion and this would prove an accusation the new party would have difficulty in living down.

The Demokrat Parti (Democratic Party) was officially registered on 7 January 1946 and it was at first welcomed by the RPP and its organs, which took their lead from İnönü. Once the DP started establishing branches in became clear that it met with an enthusiastic response all over the country. The RPP leadership, which had been aware of the existence of discontent, was still shocked by its extent. An extraordinary congress was called for May 1946. It took a number of liberalizing measures: it accepted direct elections and the position of permanent chairman of the party was abolished, as was the title of millet başı (national leader). İnönü still remained chairman, of course, but he would now have to be re-elected. Soon after the congress, the press law was liberalized and the universities received a degree of autonomy, but national elections were brought forward from July 1947 to July 1946, clearly in the hope of catching the Democrats before they were fully established. The Democrats protested and even considered boycotting the elections (as they had boycotted the municipal elections earlier in the year), but in the end they took part and managed to win 62 of the 465 seats in the assembly.

On the face of it, this was a considerable, but not a spectacular success for the new party, but the reality was different. One reason the RPP was returned with a majority was that there had been massive vote rigging. The electoral procedures were far from perfect: there was no guarantee of secrecy during the actual voting; there was no impartial supervision of the elections and, as soon as the results were declared, the actual ballots were destroyed, making any check impossible. It has to be remembered that at this time all local and provincial administrators were RPP party members, who had great difficulty in discriminating between political opposition and high treason. The scale of the fraud was so obvious that there was an outcry in the country. Celâl Bayar stated that, according to a DP inquiry, the real number of seats won by the party was much higher and that there had been 'wickedness involved in the election'. His statement to this effect was published in the newspapers in disregard of a government notice that strictly forbade any criticism of the elections.3

Faced with widespread support for the DP, the RPP had a choice: either to suppress the opposition as it had done in 1925 and 1930, or to go further down the path of liberalization. For a year after the elections of 1946, the party seemed to hesitate between these alternatives. İnönü selected Recep Peker, who was considered the most prominent hardliner in the party and a supporter of the one-party state, as his new prime minister in August. Peker tried to intimidate the opposition into conducting itself as junior partner of the government and refraining from the constant attacks it launched against the RPP. This, however, the DP refused to do. The fraudulent behaviour of the RPP bureaucrats during the elections had thoroughly poisoned the atmosphere, but another reason why the opposition kept up its acrimonious criticism of the government was because its own programme differed less and less from that of the RPP. The DP subscribed to the basic Kemalist tenets of nationalism and secularism, so it could not differentiate itself from the government on that score. The points on which it had originally differed from the RPP (political and economic liberalization) were to a large extent taken over by the governing party between 1947 and 1950. So the DP needed an atmosphere of constant high tension to mobilize public opinion. It therefore introduced new complaints in the assembly almost on a daily basis.

Another way in which both parties tried to distinguish themselves from the other was by tarring each other with the brush of communism. The end of the Second World War had ushered in a period of relative tolerance for the left, while the government saw fit to suppress the extreme (and pan-Turkish) right. Even in this immediate postwar period there were elements in the RPP that identified the emerging opposition with a 'communism' it detested. On 4 December 1945, a crowd of nationalist students, who had been aroused by inflammatory articles in the RPP press, sacked the offices of the leftist newspaper Tan, which had been publishing articles by the future DP leader, and destroyed its printing presses. Police were present but did not intervene. Nevertheless, in June 1946, a socialist party and even the communist Türkiye Sosyalist Emekçi ve Köylü Partisi (Turkish Socialist Workers and Peasants' Party) led by the veteran communist Dr Şefik Hüsnü Değner were founded.

But the effects of the cold war soon began to be felt and, in December 1946, martial law regulations were used to close down these parties. The DP and the RPP now started mud-slinging campaigns in which they accused each other of being soft on communism. The DP was even accused of being in the pay of Moscow. The years 1948 and 1949 saw a witch-hunt against the left. Prominent pan-Turkists like Nihat Atsız and Zeki Veliğil Togan, who had been prosecuted at the end of the Second World War, were rehabilitated and their most vocal opponent, the socialist novelist Sabahattin Ali was murdered by one of Atsız's supporters.

Relations between the parties went from bad to worse. The dis-
cussions on the 1947 budget were extremely hostile and at one time the prime minister described Mendezes as a psychopath, whereupon the Democrats left the assembly and boycotted its meetings for a few days. In January 1947, the DP held its first congress, at which the representatives adopted the Hürriyet Misakı (Freedom Pact), a term that not coincidentally echoed the famous Millî Misak (National Pact) of 1920. The DP saw itself as the new political wave that would finish what Atatürk had begun. He had brought national independence and reformed Turkish society; they would now complete his reforms by introducing democracy. The Freedom Pact authorized the DP members of parliament to leave and boycott the national assembly unless the government withdrew a number of undemocratic laws. This was a serious threat because the Peker government, whose legitimacy was doubtful because of the ballot rigging in 1946, could not afford to be seen as anti-democratic by the people and the outside world—certainly not with the growing importance of American aid.

The DP and the RPP were clearly on a collision course, but in July 1947 İnönü intervened. He held separate talks with Peker and Bayar and then gave out a statement to the press. This so-called "Twelfth of July Declaration" legitimized the existence of the opposition and called upon the state apparatus to be impartial and to deal even-handedly with both parties. It was the decisive intervention by the president that made it clear that multi-party politics were there to stay. Within the RPP it meant the defeat of the hard-liners led by Recep Peker, who had to resign and was succeeded as prime minister by Hasan Saka, significantly the minister of foreign affairs who had headed the Turkish delegation at the San Francisco conference.

At its congress in November 1947, the RPP moved even closer to the DP programme. It advocated free enterprise and decided to retract article 17 of the Land Distribution Law (something the assembly eventually did in 1950). It also tried to counter the way in which the Democrats played the religious card and decided to allow religious education in the schools and to reform the Village Institutes, which DP propaganda had targeted and depicted as centres of communist agitation.

It is a measure of the discipline within the RPP that the party did not split after İsmet İnönü had so emphatically sided with the reformists and disavowed the hard-liners. The new conciliatory line of the People’s Party did cause serious problems for the Democrats, however, who were essentially bound together by their joint opposition to the RPP, not by a coherent political programme of their own. Several groups of representatives, who considered the DP leadership too moderate and wanted a more uncompromising opposition to the RPP, split off from the main body. One group founded the Millet Partisi (Nation Party) with Marshal Fevzi Çakmak (who had been an implacable enemy of İnönü ever since the latter had dismissed him as chief of staff in 1944) as its figurehead. The result was that by 1949 the DP faction in parliament had been halved, but at the same time it had become a much more cohesive body. Hasan Saka reshuffled his cabinet once, in June 1948, and in 1949 someone who was even more of a compromise figure, Şemsettin Günaltay, a university professor with known Islamist leanings, replaced him.

The main bone of contention between the two parties remained the election law that was changed several times under pressure from the opposition, which threatened to boycott the national elections scheduled for 1950 if completely free and fair elections could not be guaranteed. It specifically demanded supervision of the elections, not by the administration but by the judiciary. Finally, in February 1950, a compromise was reached, just in time for the elections of 14 May 1950.

Social and economic reform

As in the process of political reform, 1947 was the turning point in the adoption of new economic policies. Up to then, the RPP was still wedded to the policy of "statism" (devletçilik) introduced in the 1930s. This policy increasingly came under attack, both from indigenous business circles and from the Americans. The DP made itself the voice of the indigenous criticism. Mendezes sometimes went so far as to depict statism as a discredited relic of fascism. The more moderate leaders of the DP, such as Celâl Bayar, wanted to change the role of the state in the economy from direct intervention to coordination and support of private initiative. In their eyes, private enterprise should have absolute priority and the state should only intervene where private enterprise failed or could not hope to succeed through lack of capital. In January 1947 a number of Istanbul businessmen founded the İstanbul Ticaret Derneği (Association of Istanbul Traders), the first such group not to be controlled by the government. It criticized statism, which it held responsible for the lack of economic progress in the country, and supported the ideas put forward by the Democrats.

At the same time, Turkey, impoverished as it was after the years of wartime mobilization, was desperate for American financial assistance. In order to facilitate this, the Turkish government had already applied for membership of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and in order to qualify for membership, it took the so-called "7 September Decisions" of 1946. Essentially, these meant a devaluation of the Turkish
lira by 120 per cent (the first of many devaluations of the republican era) and a number of liberalizing measures aimed at integrating the Turkish economy into the world economy.

In 1946, the RPP drew up a new economic five-year plan. It was similar to prewar plans, with an emphasis on autarky and state control (its authors came from the Kadro circle, which had been active in the 1932–34 period), but in 1947 it was ditched and a new ‘Turkish Development Plan’ was adopted, which echoed the wishes of the Istanbul businessmen and of the DP. It emphasized free enterprise, the development of agriculture and agriculturally based industry (instead of heavy industry), roads instead of railways and development of the energy sector (oil). The RPP congress of November 1947 embraced the plan wholeheartedly. From this time onwards, there was hardly any difference between the economic policies of the DP and of the RPP, the one exception being that the DP wanted to sell off the state industries, while the RPP did not. An ‘economic congress’ held in Istanbul in November 1948 (following the one held in Izmir in 1923) was even more emphatic in its support for liberal economic policies. Significantly, it was organized by a civil organization, the Association of Istanbul Traders (İstanbul Ticaret Derneği) and not by the state or a party. From 1948 onwards, the Democratic argument was much reinforced by the activities, and later the reports, of American fact-finding missions that reported on possibilities for economic development in Turkey and on how American aid should be given and used. These commissions, the best known of which was headed by industrialist Max Thurnburg for the World Bank, whose report came out in 1949, were very influential in government circles, both in Turkey and in the USA. Their recommendations were entirely in line with the Turkish Development Plan of 1947.

For the Turkish economy, the years between 1945 and 1950 were years of growth (roughly 11 per cent growth in GDP per year), but it should not be forgotten that this was partly a recovery from the very low level of economic activity of the Second World War. Two indications that the relative autarky of Turkey was coming to an end, and that incorporation was speeding up, were the fact that most of the economic growth was in the agricultural sector and that from 1947 onwards, the trade surplus changed into a persistent trade deficit, due to fast-rising imports of machinery. This means that the economic trends that were to be characteristic of DP rule after 1950 actually started before the takeover of power by that party.

The government’s social policies did not change as much as its economic policies during this time. When the ban on organizations with a class base was lifted in 1946, a number of trade unions sprang up, just in time for Turkey to be able to join the ILO, the International Labour Organization (which was linked to the UN). But most of the unions were small-scale affairs and the most active among them were linked to the communist TSWFP or the socialist TSP. In December 1946 the martial law regulations were invoked to close them down along with the two parties.

In 1947, a new ‘Law on Trade Unions’ was passed, giving the right of organization in trade unions to the workers, but at the same time forbidding political activity by trade unions, as well as strikes. Despite the ban on political activity both the DP and the RPP actively sought the support of the unions, which were founded in 1947, and the DP promised to grant them the right to strike once it took power. In reality, it took another decade for Turkish workers to gain that right. Apart from the restrictive policies of the different governments, the position of these embryonic unions was fundamentally weak because of the small number of industrial workers, their low level of education and their extreme poverty, which made it well nigh impossible to collect sufficient union dues.

The elections of 14 May 1950
The climax of the whole period of transition came with the elections of May 1950. They went off without major incident and by all accounts were indeed free and fair. The turnout was very high, with 80 per cent of the electorate casting its vote. When the results were announced, public opinion was stunned: the Democratic Party, which had campaigned with the slogan ‘Enough! Now the people have their say’, had won 53.4 per cent of the vote against the RPP’s 39.8 per cent. Under the Turkish electoral system this meant that the DP received 408 seats in the new parliament against the RPP’s 69. The RPP did not win a single province in the more developed west of the country – all the provinces it won were to the east of Ankara and that it did manage to hold on to them was largely because power brokers loyal to the RPP such as notables, tribal chiefs and large landowners controlled the vote in the less-developed regions.

The results were celebrated in an atmosphere of liberation all over the country, but they were a bitter disappointment to İnönü. In spite of his efforts to cut the ground from beneath the DP by introducing far-reaching political and economic liberalization, the memory of the years of repression, of which İsmet Pasha himself was very much the symbol, weighed too heavily with the electorate – it did not trust the RPP’s ‘new look’. It is probably correct to say, however, that the victory of the DP
would have been even more comprehensive, had the elections been held
two years earlier.
Although the details have never been established, some elements
within the military seem to have offered to stage a coup for İnönü and
nullify the elections. To his eternal credit, İnönü stuck to the course he
had set five years earlier. He had wanted to establish a loyal — but
basically powerless — opposition. He had miscalculated, but now he
accepted the consequences and handed over power with good grace
and, after 14 years as prime minister and 12 as president, devoted
himself to the duties of a leader of the opposition.
The DP now about to rule Turkey was an entirely new phenomenon
in Turkish politics, not because of its programme (which it has been
noted closely resembled that of the RPP, certainly after 1947) but
because the party, which had its roots in a split within the ruling
‘Young Turk’ coalition, was the first political organization in the
country’s modern history with a genuine mass following that had been
able to express its support in a free election.
It has often been said that the peaceful transition from a dictatorship
to multi-party democracy in Turkey in 1946 and the equally peaceful
handover of power four years later is a unique experience in the develop-
ing world. However, one should not overlook the fact that Turkey,
though socio-economically in many ways a developing country, had
had a heritage of experiments with parliamentary election since 1876,
and of multi-party democracy between 1908 and 1913, between 1923
and 1925 and in 1930. Although democracy had only shallow roots and
had been easily repressed, it did not have to be built from scratch.

PART III

A Troubled Democracy
Military Coups and Turkish Democracy, 1960–1980

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ABSTRACT  In 1921, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk enunciated an important verity. He proclaimed, “We resemble ourselves.” Nowhere is that more true than in regard to the Turkish military’s role in politics. As many have pointed out, the Turkish armed forces have not behaved as a South American model might have suggested. Nor have they acted as Middle Eastern or North African military establishments would have. Instead the institution has taken a course consistent with Turkey’s history and culture.

The Turkish military carried its recognition as a modernizing institution from the Ottoman Empire into the Turkish Republic. Indeed, the Turkish armed forces still continue to be closely identified with Atatürk’s reforms that initiated Westernization during the early years of the Republic. The military establishment for many years has shared the allegiance of the populace at large as the public considered the institution an impartial, nonpartisan, trustworthy element of the state, and one dedicated to protecting citizens. Thus Turkey’s civilians at large were prepared to display high tolerance for the military excursion into politics in 1960. Yet successive military interventions over the years have weakened the general acceptance of military actions. Differing views of the military’s role now have become part of the sharp left-right cleavage in the Turkish politics.

The 1960 Precedent

The 1960 coup in Turkey grew out of tensions engendered by a widespread belief that the Democrat Party government of Adnan Menderes and Celal Bayar was about to return to one-party rule by abolishing Atatürk’s party led by former President İsmet İnönü. The military move in 1960 thus represented, in the minds of most of its initiators, a move to save the state. Yet it was to a significant degree orchestrated and designed by field grade officers, some of whom had far more radical intentions than merely putting the constitutional train back on track. However, because the
Turkish military culture relied on a strong chain of command, it was essential to have senior generals appear at the head of the action, even if they were not the initiators of the coup. As a result, one of Turkey’s most senior generals, General Cemal Gürel, was appointed to bless the actions of junior officers. Yet even his leadership was not automatically accepted by a significant number of the key plotters who wanted to be the decision-makers themselves.

Therefore there was a failure to sort out roles and aims before the coup took place. This failure ensured a power struggle within the leadership as soon as the plotters took control of the state. The situation was exacerbated by the fact that former President İsmet İnönü and his party also immediately began to seek allies among the National Unity Committee (NUC) members and throughout the officer corps. Their effort found most receptivity among the general officers. Yet, in the immediate aftermath of the 1960 coup, the generals were defensive against pressure from lower ranks. Initially it seemed as though field grade officers who wished to remain in power indefinitely might prevail. Indeed, within a short time, some 90 percent of the general officers retired to open the way for promotions from the lower ranks.

This split between field grade hotheads and more conservative generals witnessed a time of intense plotting by officers of all ranks. Many of the NUC members were afraid to sleep in the same place for two consecutive nights worrying that they would be captured by rival plotters. Fourteen middle-grade officers were ousted from the leadership group and sent to temporary exile abroad for promoting dissen- dence and unrest within the armed forces continued. To combat this wave of plotting within the ranks of the armed forces, ranking generals created the Forces Solidarity organization (Kuvvetler Tesanıdı) dedicated to restore the chain of command and restore discipline within the Turkish armed forces. The descent of the armed forces into unrest led many senior officers to conclude that they should return power to civilian hands as soon as a new constitution was written.

The generals gradually restored the chain of command. These officers diagnosed the cause of the problem with Menderes/Bayar regime as stemming from the concentration of all administrative and legislative power in a one-body parliament. Hence they saw the need to hem in the legislature by creating a senate with power to delay execution of laws and a constitutional court with authority to invalidate laws that were seen to contravene the constitution. They instituted a system of proportional representation which would assure representation of Kemalist views congenial to the military leadership in the parliament. A National Security Council was created to give the military a forum to share their views with civilian authorities.

The military rulers insisted on one final act to assure that the coup could not be undone by civilian politicians at some later date. Despite appeals from Turkey’s civilian politicians, including former President İsmet İnönü, and from the US and other NATO partners as well, the NUC ordered the death sentences of Prime Minister Menderes and two colleagues. Former president Celal Bayar’s sentence was commuted for age.
Coup Plotting Continues

Then, after a new constitution to provide these extensive checks and balances went into effect in 1961, elections were held to return rule to a civilian government. But instead of İnönü’s party winning a clear majority in October 1961 as the generals expected, it won only a plurality of vote. A coalition government had to be formed. The generals exerted pressure to make sure that İnönü, as head of the largest party, became the Prime Minister. Moreover, the unexpectedly strong showing of the Justice Party (JP), which appeared as a successor to the banned Democrat Party of Adnan Menderes and Celal Bayar, increased dissatisfaction within the military. As Col. Talat Aydemir began assembling a group of dissidents, Prime Minister İnönü commissioned General Refik Tulga to try to head off a counter coup. Tulga approached the US officials to solicit Washington’s attitude toward another military coup, but it is not clear whether he received an authoritative answer.3

Amid this uncertainty, Aydemir made an initial effort to overthrow the coalition government. But when it became obvious that his move based on cadets at the War School would fail, he was persuaded to back down in exchange for honorable retirement. That provided only temporary relief, for Aydemir soon tried a second putsch; this attempt had to be put down by force of arms. When the army failed to split and Aydemir’s forces were overcome by loyalist forces, he was executed. That headed off for a time serious challenges from field grade officers to the chain of command, though maneuvering for position among the senior officers would continue.

The generals, however, had made constitutional changes not only to dilute the power of civilian government, but also to allow the commanders to maintain an influential role in political life. In order to communicate their desires to civilian politicians, the new constitutional regime instituted a National Security Council in which civilian leaders were obliged to take into consideration the views of ranking generals on matters on security. In this context, security was defined to embrace threats to domestic order as well as foreign policy issues, thereby according the generals wide latitude in expressing their views. The generals made clear that the standing orders of the military were to do whatever necessary to protect the regime from domestic and foreign dangers. In addition, by tacit consent, the office of the Presidency was to be filled by a retired general or admiral. Moreover, the generals insisted on regularly purging the ranks of the officer corps of those deemed too attached to Islamic practice.

Coup by Memorandum: Way Station to 1980

Despite being equipped with such power, the ability of the top generals to dictate the course of events began to gradually erode as the civilians used power of assignment to bring in new blood, especially after İsmet İnönü stepped down as Prime Minister in 1965. Toward the end of the 1960s, the decline of military influence began to be reversed by the need to combat growing domestic disorder. Clashes between right-wing and left-wing students turned murderous. Killings spread to gatherings, and forceful disruption of extreme left and right political meetings became common. Prime
Minister Süleyman Demirel did not take action to end this widespread leftist violence out of fear that he would suffer the same fate as Adnan Menderes, whose harsh dealing with students had been one cause of the 1960 coup. At the same time, a clique of younger officers began preparations for an intervention under the influence of radical leftist intellectuals such as Doğan Avcıoğlu. Faced with disorder and with a view to head off action by the junior officers, the senior generals delivered an ultimatum to the civilian government in March 1971.

This “coup by memorandum” demanded that a cabinet of technocrats be formed to cope with leftist terrorists. Otherwise, the generals threatened to use “the authority of law to protect the Turkish Republic” by taking over the government directly. Demirel and his cabinet quickly resigned. Parliament followed the generals’ demand and gave vote of confidence to a cabinet of technocrats, while authorizing the military to take stronger measures against internal disorder. These series of non-party governments launched a wave of arrests, including people who had no direct connection with violence, claiming that Turkey faced “a strong, active uprising against the motherland and the republic.”

The 1971 military ultimatum thus did not represent a full military takeover. The top generals served rather as watchdogs behind the scenes, making it clear that they wanted martial law in provinces that were the principal locus of violence. Yet they were careful not to dictate civilian politicians exactly how to proceed. Demirel and his party retained majority in parliament. And the generals did nothing to prevent the JP from campaigning freely in the 1973 elections. In return, Demirel and his party made no effort to challenge the procession of non-party cabinets that ruled until the 1973 elections.

Constitutional Changes

As after the 1960 coup, the generals saw the remedy for Turkey’s ills in changes to the constitutional and legal structure to strengthen their hand on the political scene. They amended 35 regular articles of the constitution and added nine temporary articles. These changes aimed to reinforce the powers of the government against threats to national unity, public order, and national security on one hand and to increase the autonomy and freedom of action of the commanders on the other. The left now was seen as the principal enemy of national security, hence prohibitions were expanded against the exploitation of class, sect, religion, race or language to divide the nation. Restrictions were placed on the possibility that the press would encourage violations of national unity. Unions were restricted as was the autonomy of universities, where students had previously enjoyed sanctuary from police incursions. To bolster the position of the armed forces, amendments provided right to increase the authority of the Minister of Defense and enhanced the powers of the military members of the National Security Council. Further, civilian administrative courts were not allowed to review military personnel actions.

This catalogue of remedies demonstrates that the generals saw the problem in 1971 limited in scope. They felt it necessary merely to engage in “fine tuning” of the
existing system. Accordingly, they made no basic change to the overall position of
the military nor did they sponsor any sort of radical reform to strengthen civilian gov-
ernment. Given the success of the JP in attaining parliamentary majorities in the
1960s, they apparently did not see any need for basic change in the election system. They failed to recognize that one of the baleful effects of proportional rep-
resentation would be to increase the likelihood of weak coalition governments that
might resolve domestic disorder.

Unrest in the Military

The course from the partial intervention of 1971 to the full military takeover of 1980
took place in an atmosphere of gradual weakening of the influence of the top armed
forces commanders and an increasing disregard of military interests. At the same
time, security threats soon began to multiply. Public perception of rivalries and dis-
sension within the top ranks of the armed forces, particularly between Air Force
Commander Muhsin Batur and General Faruk Güler, eroded military prestige. At
the same time, a general breakdown of the government’s ability to confront political
challenges led to an acute security crisis by the end of the decade. In fact, disorder and
terrorism in Turkey again mounted to the point where democratic process was clearly
threatened.

The constitutional remedies enacted in 1971 thus conspicuously failed to serve the
purpose of bringing stability and coherence to the Turkish political scene. In the first
place, these measures were not sufficient to assure that the military’s views would be
taken into consideration, even in the security field. In part, this result reflected
increasing opposition of leaders of the major parties, Süleyman Demirel and
Bülent Ecevit, who both saw the military ultimatum as directed against their interests.
But as neither political leader nor their parties were restricted from general political
activity by the military’s verbal putsch, these leaders were well placed to counter the
generals’ bid to increase political power of the armed forces. Both these leaders
worked to undercut the political influence of the senior generals.

When the former Chief of the General Staff, General Cevdet Sunay, ended his term
as President in the spring 1973, the politicians saw their chance to weaken the hold of
the commanders in politics. In part, this opportunity was provided by the senior gen-
erals themselves. Feuding among the senior generals along inter-service and partisan
lines as the military prepared for the presidential selection was exacerbated by the
annual round of promotions and reassignments in August 1972. The fault lines
between Chief of General Staff Memduh Tağmaç, who leaned toward the JP and
Air Force Commander Muhsin Batur, who would later join the Republican Peoples
Party (RPP), seemed responsible for creating a stalemate at the top of the military
command. According to rules of military promotions, Faruk Güler became the
Chief of Staff. But his bid to become President met unexpected resistance within
the officer corps. Furthermore, the civilian leaders saw Güler as an activist who
might dominate the political scene, and coalesced behind retired Admiral Fahri
Korutürk, a far less ambitious, long-retired senior officer with strong links to civilian
politicians. That preserved the unwritten allocation of presidency to someone of military stripe which would not rival civilian control of government.

This outcome significantly changed the relative weights of civilian and military players. By appearing to give in to the civilians almost completely, the top generals lost their ability to threaten effectively with words. Henceforth, the commanders would find that they had the option of acting or being ignored, but nothing in between. That guaranteed that by the end of the 1970s, warnings from the Chief of the General Staff and other military leaders calling the civilian politicians to cooperate in establishing more effective government would not be heeded. The civilians would use the power of assignment to reassign officers they considered troublesome to ceremonial posts. In sum, the retreat of the generals in the 1972 presidential election left the mistaken impression that the commanders were willing to leave the political scene and return to barracks. It created a fatal disjunction between the continuing real power of the military establishment and the illusion that it could be confronted with impunity by civilian politicians.

The Political Climate Deteriorates

This disjunction might not have entailed such significant consequences if the politicians had been better able to cope with Turkey’s political challenges. Indeed, the military leaders seemed prepared to accept a considerable level of political and social disorder, but only if those in charge of the political process were serious about tackling the problems. But the concern of the generals was increased by the disinclination of political leaders to pull together instead of seeking immediate partisan advantage. The need for coalition government after no party was able to win a majority in the lower house after 1969 meant that cooperation was essential to provide effective government. Yet the nearly equal strength of the two major political parties (RPP and JP) encouraged a bidding war between them to entice minor parties to allow the formation of a government. The resulting blocs were unstable as parties and individual deputies shifted alignment. The evenness of the parliamentary balance led to all but complete paralysis when in 1980 the term of President Korutürk ended. From March to September 1980, nearly all parliamentary business was put on hold due to the inability of parliament to elect a successor in over 100 rounds of inconclusive balloting.

New Economic Policy

Although political disarray prevented action on many pressing problems, it did not stop progress in the economic field. Under strong IMF pressure, both of the large political parties launched plans to reform the economy. This was particularly needed as mounting oil prices and declining remittances from Turkish workers in Europe along with weakening markets for Turkish exports buffeted the Turkish economy toward the end of the 1970s. In fact, in 1980 under Turgut Özal, the minority JP cabinet
began to carry out the most far-reaching economic reform program in Turkey, to the approval of the military leaders.

**Islamic Politics Intrude**

It was the political failings of the coalition regimes that most upset military leadership. Indeed, challenge of the religiously oriented National Salvation Party (NSP) under Necmettin Erbakan now became one of the most pressing concerns of the top commanders. Erbakan was able to use his swing position as a necessary part of any viable coalition to extract concessions that seemed to violate Atatürk’s principles of secularism dear to the senior commanders. The NSP’s success in shaping policy toward education and foreign policy was unacceptable to many generals. This unhappiness was reinforced by insult to the armed forces when the NSP leadership did not congratulate the commanders on August 30, 1980 and by disrespect shown by the party’s membership who conspicuously sat silent during the national anthem at a televised local party gathering on September 6, 1980. This disturbing conduct peaked with a successful assault on the foreign minister from the secular wing of the coalition that was forced out of the cabinet on September 5, 1980 for failing to defend Turkey’s interests in the Middle East.7

While the NSP’s actions were powerfully undermining military confidence in the political structure, the civilian failure effectively to combat separatist agitation and violence in southeastern Turkey created the impression that the system could not respond to crisis. Although Bülent Ecevit’s government in 1977 had declared martial law in a number of southeastern provinces after large-scale communal clashes in Kahramanmaraş, the martial law commanders were nonetheless restricted in their ability to take decisive measures. The generals were frustrated at being blamed for failing to curb violence under these restrictions. Moreover, communal violence spread to western Turkey where much of the population had begun carrying weapons. Hence, by early September 1980 it was clear that the civilians were unable to cooperate with measures to restore order.

**The 1980 Military Takeover**

When the senior generals moved to take over in September 1980, they strictly observed the chain of command. Chief of the General Staff General Kenan Evren became Chief of State as head of the National Security Council with expanded powers. Navy Chief Bülend Ulusu was appointed Prime Minister to keep all executive power in military hands. All political activity was banned and the leaders of the political parties were placed under detention. Martial Law courts were used for those accused of fomenting violence. The new regime carried out a number of executions—more of leftists—to emphasize the determination of the generals to squash dissent from all quarters. But the main effort of the generals was to rewrite political rules by elaborating a new constitution, a new election law, and a new political parties act. Thus the new order turned out to be more authoritarian than the one enacted in
The adjustments introduced in 1982 were designed to provide ways to prevent parliamentary deadlock or to end it through elections. The focus was on creating a system that would assure effective governance, not restrict the electorate’s ability to express opinions. The Senate was abolished as were the life-time rights of the former National Unity Committee to sit in parliament. With a view to reduce the possibility that minor parties would gain representation in parliament, a threshold of ten percent of national vote was imposed for parties contesting the elections to gain seats.

The 1982 Constitution accorded the military establishment significant new powers. It added precision to the composition of the National Security Council and provided for a staff. In addition, it specified that “decisions of the Council . . . are to be given priority consideration by the Council of Ministers.” That strengthened the language inserted in 1971 providing merely for the National Security Council to “recommend” its views to the Council of Ministers. But it stopped short of giving the generals the right to dictate to the Cabinet.

The generals were relying on the office of the Presidency for additional protection of their views. The new Constitution did not specify that the President always must be drawn from a military background—that was taken for granted. Yet the new arrangements gave the president the authority to represent “the office of the commander in chief” and the right to decide on the use of Turkey’s armed forces. He was accorded the prerogative to appoint the Chief of General Staff on the proposal of the Council of Ministers and convene the National Security Council, as well as to proclaim martial law. For the first seven years, the president was provided special additional authority to protect the system by mandating that by ratifying the new constitution Chief of Staff General Kenan Evren would be chief of state and could veto constitutional amendments, a power that could be overturned only by a vote of three quarters of the parliament.

While a new structure to embody these alterations was being elaborated, the generals saw need for a cooling-off period without civilian political competition and with severe measures to restore law and order. Their original intent was apparently to suspend, but not ban the major parties of the past. But after Bülent Ecevit and Süleyman Demirel refused to cooperate, the generals abolished their parties, even though Ecevit was at the head of Atatürk’s old party and the military leaders held up Atatürk as the model ruler for Turkey. The commanders also kept in their hands the authority to limit both individuals and political parties to participate in the 1983 elections. They did not want to take any chance of seeing a revanchist party along the lines of the JP in 1961 rise to challenge the handpicked political party sponsored by the generals.

**Kenan Evren Becomes President**

Kenan Evren, who led the 1980 coup, was perceived to be non-political by politicians. Ecevit during his time as Prime Minister had brought him to the top military post in 1978 to replace a supposedly more partisan General Semih Sancar. Evren had
used his position in the National Security Council to call civilian politicians to cooperate before the 1980 intervention. After the coup, Evren kept power firmly in his own hands, vastly overshadowing force commanders with whom he nominally shared responsibility in the National Security Council. He showed his political mastery with frequent radio and television addresses as well as speaking tours. By the end of the military’s time in power, he was well established as a popular political leader in his own right, a standing reinforced by his accession to the presidency with the ratification of the 1982 Constitution.

The depth of the political crisis when the generals took over and the confidence inspired by the fatherly approach of General Evren assured that the populace at large would accept the military intervention as legitimate. Even Bülent Ecevit acknowledged that the people generally welcomed the end of political violence. Unlike the aftermath of the 1971 ultimatum, when only the left was pursued with vigor, the generals after 1980 also moved against those on the right. The period of military rule would end, therefore, without leaving a residue of bitterness at partiality which had marked the aftermath of earlier military interventions. But neither Ecevit nor Demirel would permit their followers to participate in elaborating the new constitution. Although they were banned from politics for a time, Demirel appeared to sponsor a revival of his old party as the quickly banned Great Turkey Party, while Ecevit’s wife emerged as the leader of the Democratic Left Party. Thus political leaders were not effectively changed and civilian politics in Turkey was ready to continue on its usual course once the military rule ended.

The success of the generals in solving Turkey’s political problems through legal and constitutional changes was called into question by events during the return to civilian rule. The desire of the generals to have three or four parties at most in the contest in order to avoid the possibility of coalition politics was frustrated. The forceful intervention of the commanders limited the field to three parties in the 1983 elections. The interest of the military leadership in diminishing partisanship could not be realized. Indeed, from the vigor of the political contest in the wake of the return to civilian politics, new politicians were clearly no more disposed than their predecessors to eschew partisan advantage for the sake of national interest.

The Özal Regime

The victory of the Motherland Party (MP) in the 1983 elections seemed a rebuke to the generals. Evren had openly favored the conservative Nationalist Democracy Party (NDP) led by a former general. In fact, Evren made an election eve appeal asking voters not to support Turgut Özal’s Motherland Party. Yet people spurned this advice and gave Özal a commanding majority. The NDP, with which Evren was identified, ran a poor last.

That set the tone for the start of the post-1980 coup era, for Özal came to office as Prime Minister neither beholden to the military for his election nor concerned that opposition from the generals would hurt him. Further, he saw that the Europeans had reservations about dealing with military rule in Turkey and he believed that
having just elaborated a constitution the generals could hardly push him out of power as long as he followed the rules. On the other hand, he saw the value of sharing with the president responsibility for law and order, especially in the southeast, inasmuch as that challenge could not be handled without military participation. To show his independence, Ö zal and his party overrode Evren’s veto of a bill regulating municipal elections, contests in which the MP then ran well. Yet Ö zal strongly opposed giving in to voices from all quarters of the political scene to grant amnesty to many thousands jailed for involvement in violence during the years of military rule. That stand helped to mollify those in the military who were suspicious that civilian politicians nourished revanchist attitudes.

Indeed, Turkey was fortunate in having a politician of the ability and stature of Ö zal to lead the transition. His domestic and international standing was important in this process. Clearly, the return to civilian rule left important unanswered questions about the ability of the officer corps and the politicians to coexist. There seemed little question that if provoked the armed forces might respond. But time would tell what the degree of provocation would have to be.

Role of the Military Today

Looking back at what has transpired since 1960, it seems clear that once the Turkish military ousted a legitimately elected civilian government with the acquiescence of the general public, it became easier to repeat the performance. And to this day, Turkish politicians still appear to believe (witness the Ergenekon case) that the military could step in again, not only to deal with widespread disorder, but even for such nebulous causes as violations of Atatürk’s secular policies. This perception continues to influence political attitudes and behavior. Indeed, it may have played a role in the drive of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) to join the European Union as a way to increase the guarantees against a military move. And it certainly was instrumental in delaying Abdullah Gül’s election as president until this course seemed ratified by hastily called elections.

Yet there is reason for optimism as well. The most favorable sign for the future of Turkish democracy is the persistence of almost all Turks in pursuing an elective parliamentary process. It is significant that all military interventions to date have been brought to an end by the officers themselves. And the causes for military takeovers have universally been pervasive civilian disorder, not merely the ambition of officers. So Turks can approach the future with at least guarded confidence that all parties have learned from the past and Turkish democracy will be able to meet the tests it will face in future.

Notes

2. The coup appeared to be welcomed by the populace at large because it relieved the great political tension that had grown up in the weeks before the military moved. However, this author was told by a senior
Republican politician at the time that that party’s leadership, far from welcoming the coup, believed that it had been robbed of power that it would have garnered if only elections and not a coup had taken place. From the very first day the RPP top leaders, in particular İnönü, believed their main task would be to ease the military out of power.

3. İnönü clearly was hoping that Tulga would elicit strong American disapproval of another Turkish military coup to use in discouraging plotting against his government.


8. The author was present when Ecevit spoke to a group attending a conference on Turkey in 1982. Ecevit expected, however, that effect to wear off relatively quickly thereafter.