

DEFINING LIMITS ON RELIGIOUS EXPRESSION IN PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS: THE TURKISH DILEMMA

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More than seven decades have passed since Mustafa Kemal abolished the Caliphate, disestablished Islam, banned the fez, strongly discouraged the veil, advocated European attire, introduced Western legal codes, changed the Turkish script from Arabic to a modified Latin alphabet, and proclaimed "laicism" (secularism) as one of the cardinal principles of the modern Turkish Republic. But today the issue of the proper relationship of religion and state has once again become an issue of intense debate. One manifestation of this struggle is the clash between Islamist female university students and the authorities over the strict enforcement of a dress code that bans headscarves and other symbols of Islamic attire. But as this essay points out, more is involved here than simply a clash between traditional religious fundamentalism and modern Western, secular culture. It also represents a radically new phenomenon in the struggle of young Turkish women to redefine Islam for themselves and liberate themselves from patriarchal domination.

Moreover, in the increasingly sharp debate within Turkey between secularists and Islamists, the question of the nature and extent of Turkey's relationship with Israel has become a sign of the future direction of Turkey's foreign policy orientation. In a more basic sense, the future of Ankara's relations with the Jewish

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state has been interpreted as a litmus test as to whether the guiding principles of the modern, pro-Western, secular Turkish Republic established by Kemal Atatürk in 1923 will endure and Turkey's ties with the West will be strengthened, or whether they will be eroded by growing ties with non-Western and Islamic states, and a growth of Islamist traditionalism at home, leading eventually to an Islamic state. The important role of the military in preserving the country's secularist orientation is also examined. For the military, the political leaders, and the country's educators, the ongoing dilemma is how to educate the younger generation with a respect for their Islamic heritage, while imbuing them with a firm commitment to the Kemalist principles of a progressive society in a secular Republic.

The Crisis Over Headscarves

On June 10, 1998, Turkish police and Islamist students scuffled at Istanbul University after authorities refused to allow 11 women wearing Muslim headscarves to take final exams. The students attempted to force their way into the examination hall past police who were helping college authorities enforce a long-standing ban on Islamist attire in places of education, government ministries, and other public institutions. Istanbul University, like nearly all educational institutions in Turkey, receives public funding. Similar scuffles had occurred the previous day when police forcibly removed headscarves from some girls' heads, the pro-Islamist newspaper *Zaman* said. The paper printed photographs of what it said were female students who fainted in distress after their headscarves had been torn off.¹

In September 1998, as registration for the fall semester was underway, Istanbul University authorities issued regulations reiterating that no student would be admitted to class without a valid student photo identity card. But no official photograph would be taken unless the student's face was completely uncovered. Both headscarves for women and Islamic-style beards for men were forbidden. The Associated Press reported, on September 14, that a Turkish Airlines plane headed from Ankara to Istanbul was hijacked to Trabzon, where the hijacker released all aboard and surrendered. He told police that he had taken this dramatic action to protest the university ban on Islamic-style head coverings!

These incidents were only the latest manifestations in a recurrent battle and increasingly sharp confrontation over public displays of Islamic symbols that poses a dilemma for the political

leaders of Turkey, a country of some 65 million inhabitants, of whom 98 percent are Muslims. Although more than 75 percent of Turkey's electorate has continued to support one of the dozen secular parties, these are deeply divided not only by ideological and policy differences but by bitter personal rivalries among their leaders. The result has been a series of unstable and short-lived coalition governments. Increasing public disappointment with establishment politicians who have failed to solve the country's serious economic and social problems, has led to growing popular support for charismatic and effective representatives of the pro-Islamic Virtue Party, successor to the Welfare Party, which was banned in January 1998. Most notable among the more than 200 pro-Islamist mayors and other officials, elected and appointed, who are under legal attack as part of an army-backed campaign against Islamic fundamentalism is Istanbul's embattled Mayor Recep Tayyip Erdogan. He successfully campaigned on a platform to end corruption, improve public services and promote social justice. As is discussed more fully below, Erdogan was sentenced to ten months in prison in June 1998 for a speech which the court ruled had illegally encouraged Islamic militancy. If not reversed on appeal, the sentence will result in banning Erdogan from political life.

The headscarf issue and the fate of the popular mayor were linked in a demonstration in Istanbul by some 1,000 Islamists on November 6, 1998, timed to mark the anniversary of the creation by the military, following their 1980 coup, of the highly secularist and conservative Higher Education Board (YOK in Turkish), which has called for vigorous implementation of the secular dress code and other restrictions on what they deemed disruptive or subversive activities on campus. Consequently, left-wing students have joined the Islamists in their fierce opposition to YOK. The Islamist student began their march outside the university, chanting "Break the hand that touches the headscarf" and "God is the Greatest," and then when the police chased them away they marched to City Hall to protest the sentencing of Mayor Erdogan.²

Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz, leader of the Motherland Party and head of a three-party secular government at the time, was subjected to conflicting pressures. On the one hand, he was being pressed to take more vigorous action by the determinedly secularist military leaders, who see themselves as the guardians of the westernizing reforms instituted by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of modern Turkey. On the other, Yilmaz was confronted by an increasingly assertive younger generation of women, who are redefining their traditional role in society by combining a de-

sire for modern higher education with a return to what they define as true Islamic values.

More than seven decades have passed since Mustafa Kemal abolished the Caliphate, disestablished Islam, banned the fez, strongly discouraged the veil, advocated European attire, introduced Western legal codes, changed the Turkish script from Arabic to a modified Latin alphabet, and proclaimed "laïcism" (secularism) as one of the cardinal principles of the modern Turkish Republic. But today the issue of the proper relationship of religion and state has once again become an issue of intense debate. An analysis of what is going on in Turkey is useful for Jewish scholars in Israel and the United States not only in the ways it may affect the lives of the 25,000 Jews who still live in Turkey, but also because it parallels in some ways debates going on in the United States, France, Israel and other countries in the region.

The new style of often colorful headscarves worn by the younger generation of Islamist university women has been given the name *turban* in modern Turkish, using the French meaning of the word as a fashion of headdress and as a symbol of the "women's religious politicization and empowerment," according to Turkish sociologist Nilüfer Göle. Even though the term, which is of Turkish and Persian origin, referred initially to the headdress of Muslim men, labeling the female Muslim students' movement of veiling as the "turban movement" differentiates it from the headcovering of Muslim men and women in the past. Contrary to the traditional practice of Islamic veiling, or the Islamic headscarf, which conveys such ideas as "return to traditions," "return to fundamentalism" and "subservience of women," the label "turban" reflects the new and controversial phenomenon of female Islamist intellectuals, who insist on participating in the Islamist movement and seek to shape its interaction with modern society. The result is a hybrid and evolving phenomenon involving contradictions and incongruities.³

Because she tried to understand this complex new reality rather than take sides in a polemical debate, Professor Göle notes that when the Turkish edition of her book on *The Forbidden Modern*, analyzing the contemporary reinterpretation of Islamic veiling, first came out, she was attacked both by traditional Islamists, who argue that "Islam is essentially different from the West" — and morally superior to it, and the Turkish secularists, who contend that "Westernization is a condition of women's liberation." The reason that this has become such an emotional and polarizing issue in Turkey and other countries with Muslim populations,

such as Egypt and France, is that the current veiling of women is not a smooth, gradual continuous process growing out of tradition. On the contrary, it is the outcome of a new interpretation of Islamic religion by the recently urbanized and educated social groups who have broken away from traditional popular interpretations and practices. They have politicized Islam as an assertion of their collective identity in protest against contemporary Western society that is viewed as materialistic and agnostic if not militantly atheistic.⁴

In Turkey the new political significance of “veiling” was sharply underlined by the “headscarf dispute,” which erupted in 1984.⁵ The Kemalist secularists viewed this new phenomenon at the high schools and universities as a threat, in contrast to the use of the traditional headscarf by lower-middle-class women living on the fringes of modern city life, which had gone almost unnoticed, and was dismissed as a residual practice of traditionalism. But when in the post 1983-period, after the military had permitted the resumption of normal multi-party politics, university women began to adopt an Islamist style of dress, the secularists became alarmed, contending that the impressionable young university women were cynically being manipulated by the rising fundamentalist political movement.

The secularist-Islamist battle has waxed and waned over the years. It heated up again in January 1998 when orders were given to begin to strictly enforce the decades-old ban on headscarves in Turkish universities, schools, courts and state offices. But, as American correspondent Philip G. Smucker reported from Istanbul in March 1998, “the effort has backfired, handing Islamic groups a powerful symbol of state repression and bringing thousands of students — including many moderate Muslims — into the streets in protest.”⁶

The strict enforcement of the ban on headscarves was criticized not only by Iran and other Islamic countries, but by newspapers and human rights groups in the United States and other Western countries. The Iranians portrayed the Turkish authorities not simply as secularists but as atheists who had betrayed Islam, while the human rights groups argued that this was a matter of individual religious expression that should not be subjected to regulation by the university authorities. In early March, as 3,000 religious and non-religious students held hands in solidarity outside the university, Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz seemed to capitulate and announced that “girls will not be forced to cover or uncover their heads.”

But the Turkish military quickly made it clear to him that such a hands-off approach was not tolerable. For them the insistence of university women to cover their heads or male students to grow long beards were not simply issues of individual preference, but rather part of a concerted and increasingly powerful political effort by militant Islamists to turn the clock back, to cancel the Kemalist reforms and transform Turkey into an Islamic state, governed by the *Shari'a*, on the model of Iran, Sudan, or the Afghanistan of the Taliban. At the monthly meeting of the National Security Council, in which the chiefs of the armed services play a dominant role, the generals told Yilmaz and the other senior civilian leaders that the fate of the nation depended on waging a vigorous campaign against militant Islam, and presented him with a detailed list of steps he must take.

The National Security Council was first created under the new constitution adopted following the 1960 military coup. Composed of the Chief of the General Staff and the commanders of the land, sea and air forces, its original mandate was to assist the cabinet "in the making of decisions related to national security and coordination." Over the years its powers have increased and, following the 1980 military coup, the NSC ran the country until the restoration of the multi-party civilian democratic system in 1983. The NSC now regards any threat to national unity or to the Kemalist secularist principles as a matter of national security under its jurisdiction.⁷

Yilmaz had pointedly suggested that the military leave the fight against religious fundamentalism to him, adding that they had many other vital tasks to devote their energies to such as the dispute with Greece over Cyprus and other issues, the continuing battle against militant Kurds, and neighboring countries like Syria and Iran that have supported them. But the military have not accepted this division of authority. The generals view most of the civilian politicians with a jaundiced eye and lack confidence in their ability, honesty, and commitment to their national responsibilities. "These members of Parliament are ignorant people," a senior general told a *New York Times* reporter in Ankara in March 1998. "Many of them have no sense of duty, no idea of the big picture. When it comes to the survival of this country, we can't trust them to do the right thing."⁸

In a statement adopted after the March 27, 1998, meeting, the NSC reiterated that militant Islamic fundamentalism was the greatest danger to the country and declared: "Even the slightest concession in this matter is out of the question." Acknowledging Yilmaz's acceptance of their demands, the statement concluded,

“The Government’s good will, and its determination to combat the mentality of a minority intent on carrying Turkey to a non-contemporary way of life, was noted with pleasure.” A similar message was delivered on the same day to a squad of new young commando officers assembled to receive their diplomas at a military base in Kayseri. The regional commander, Gen. Seyfettin Seymen, told them that they must be ready not only to fight foreign enemies, but also to suppress religious extremism: “Each one of you will become a shield of steel against those who want to take the country backwards,” he declared.⁹

Thus the controversy over the limits of religious expression in the public space is also a debate on the proper domestic role of the military in a democracy. In the statement, following the March 1998 meeting in which the NSC had called for a series of anti-fundamentalist actions, including tighter enforcement of the existing restrictions on women who wear headscarves, the NSC insisted that these measures were aimed only at those who would misuse religion, and should not trouble the “genuinely faithful.”

This view is challenged by some of the young women involved in the demonstrations at Istanbul University. One of these is Feyza Çiçek, a fifth year medical student and a Quranic scholar. Even at the risk of suspension from the university, Çiçek and other young, educated, middle- and upper-class Turkish women remain determined to cover their heads, which they increasingly view as an act of self-assertion and female empowerment. “We believe our religion gives the most extraordinary rights to women if read properly and from the source,” the 23-year-old Ms. Çiçek told Mr. Smucker of *U.S. News & World Report*. Asserting their right to study and reinterpret basic Islamic teachings for themselves marks a revolutionary change from the traditionally passive role of women in traditional Islamic society.

This parallels in some respect the development within the Jewish community of such institutions for advanced Jewish studies for women, such as Drisha in New York, and the gradual and reluctant opening of Talmud studies to women in some modern Orthodox Israeli religious institutions. While the Conservative movement has in recent years also admitted women to the rabbinic program, the American Orthodox institutions have not yet done so. Although in Israel, after winning various court challenges, qualified Jewish woman lawyers have begun to be trained as advocates for women in divorce and other family matters in the religious courts, and women have been appointed to the community-based religious councils. In Turkey, as in Israel and the United States, this trend of greater assertiveness by religious women has

been made possible by the development of modern day schools which combine religious studies with secular studies on a high level. The recently opened new Jewish day school in Istanbul also follows this model in hopes of attracting the children of affluent members of the community, who might otherwise send their children to elite non-Jewish schools in the city.

However, this trend of giving women a greater role in religious matters has been resisted by the heads of the more conservative Jewish religious academies in the United States and Israel, who have limited their enrollment to young men, have emphasized the study of religious texts, and have frowned upon secular humanist studies.

For many of the young Turkish women protesting outside the university, headscarves and other forms of traditionally modest attire are no longer signs of male subjugation of women. They are redefining both Islam and feminism in their struggle, which has included sit-ins and hunger strikes as well as demonstrations. Instead of viewing veils and headscarves as symbols of subservience to a male dominated traditional society, many Islamic feminists view the scarf or veil as a guard against the intruding eyes of men and as a sign that their first allegiance is to God — not to their husbands or fathers. Consequently, sociologist Göle found in her interviews with these women, their aim was not simply fundamentalism, but a redefinition of womanhood. The scarf that totally hides the hair and the long raincoat-type gown have become the uniforms of the young women championing the “new Islam.” While some of the pious older women in Turkey have appeared in public in black garments that cover their heads, veil their faces and reach down to their shoes, the younger Islamic university students have favored brightly colored scarves.

Before it was outlawed, the Welfare Party, reportedly with the help of donations from wealthy Saudi Arabians and supporters in other Muslim countries and among the two million Turkish workers in Germany, had allegedly paid for the costs of the fashionable scarves and conservatively modest dresses of the female students. In a twist of irony, some of the scarves were reportedly purchased from the Vacco House of Fashion, the country’s largest and most chic apparel manufacturer, which is owned by a prominent Sephardi Jewish family that fled to the Ottoman Empire following their expulsion from Spain in 1492. “A scarf is a fashion,” says Jeff Hakko, heir to the scarf dynasty. “If people want to wear it on their head, it is ludicrous to ban it.”¹⁰

The secular, military-dominated establishment, however, sees the scarves as a tool of fundamentalists bent on undermining the

constitutionally secular state. They are not so worried about the affluent and well-educated Islamic feminists at the university as they are in the reactionary example they are setting for the masses. Some former Welfare Party officials believe that the government crackdown on headscarves has swung votes in their favor — and to the successor pro-Islamist Virtue Party. The popular backlash, they say, is helping them to mobilize poor women from the countryside and city slums. According to Islamist activists, once timid housewives are now imitating the students. “We are trying to get Muslim women to use their rights — their universal rights and human rights,” said Necdet Gokcinar, an Istanbul party chief.¹¹

The assertively observant young university women have sometimes clashed with their more secular parents, paralleling the tensions in American Jewish families between young men and women who have adopted an Orthodox religiously observant way of life, while their parents maintain a non-observant life style. Feyza Çiçek’s father, an associate professor of surgery at the medical school she attends, says that his own rediscovery of his faith in 1990 influenced his daughter’s religiosity. But he does not insist she cover her head. For him it is more important that she continue her education. After one of their difficult discussions, he suggested that she could cover her head and get an education by buying a wig. She rejected her father’s compromise. “It would be ridiculous. I’d still be the same person with the same ideas.” Some women in Islamic strongholds are reportedly buying wigs to solve the problem and avoid stiff fines for wearing scarves. While the Virtue Party supported a planned march in mid-June by students from Istanbul University to Ankara to present a petition to President Süleyman Demirel protesting enforcement of the Dress Code, another prominent Islamist community leader opposed making an issue of the ban. Fethullah Gülen, who has established a large network of schools that combine Islamic studies with modern secular and technical education in Turkey, Western Europe, and the Turkic Republics of Central Asia, stated that he thought that the threat of reactionaryism was being exaggerated, adding that “reactionaryism existed in all eras, including the era of the Prophet.” Nevertheless, he advised that “when our young girls are forced [to take off their headscarves in the universities in line with the Dress Code] they must make their choice in favor of continuing with their education. Headscarves are only a detail.”¹² Indeed, there is considerable evidence that headscarves and veiling preceded the introduction of Islam and were originally symbols of wealth and status among Greek and other women of

antiquity. Moreover, even in Islamic societies, such as rural areas of Anatolia where women did much of the farm labor, they usually did not wear veils or long gowns that would interfere with efficient work in the fields.¹³

The latest controversy has produced some interesting coalitions. The religious young women have been joined by secular leftist young women and men who regard the latest rules as violations of basic human rights and freedom of choice in religious matters. Moreover, in response to secularist efforts to also bar beards, they point out that not only pious Islamist men (and some Orthodox Jews) wear beards, but so do poets, hippies, and other secular men! In practice, the ban on beards is not being enforced in classes of modern art and drama, since those beards are regarded as artistic rather than Islamic. Under the Dress Code women are permitted to wear headscarves during officially-sanctioned Quran study classes.

It is beyond the scope of this essay to examine how the courts have ruled in the United States and other democratic countries when the issue of permitting head covering in public places such as courtrooms and on active military duty have been raised by religious Jews, Sikhs, Muslims and others. Banning of beards has been justified by reason of safety in certain military and civilian occupations. In the U.S., the AMTRAK railroad's policy regarding beards for its conductors is that this is a matter of personal choice and is permitted on condition that the beard is neatly trimmed and the hair less than an inch long. According to Professor Lisa Anderson, former Director of Columbia University's Middle East Institute and currently Dean of the graduate School of International and Public Affairs, which attracts many foreign students, Columbia University has no specific dress code and imposes no restrictions regarding beards and head coverings.

Defenders of the Turkish Dress Code argue that the serious political challenges to secularism in Turkey today make invalid any analogies to the situation in the United States, where the principle of separation of church and state is deeply rooted and enshrined in the constitution. Although there may be a vigorous current debate over such issues as restricting a woman's right to an abortion or allowing a prayer to be said at the start of the school day in public schools, there is no powerful political movement in the United States to abolish the current secular legal system and replace it either by Catholic canon law or a Protestant, Jewish, or Muslim equivalent.

A formal written complaint challenging the legality of the ban on headscarves was brought in November 1997 by members of the

outlawed Welfare Party to Minister of State Sami Turk, who heads the Human Rights Coordination Supreme Council. The Council decided to undertake an intensive investigation that would include examining articles of the constitution that were related to the complaint.¹⁴ At its meeting on May 8, 1998, the Council announced its decision that the ban on wearing headscarves in government offices and universities did not violate basic human rights and freedoms, because the scarves were symbols of "political ideology." Turk explained the Council's reasoning as follows:

The regulations pertaining to headscarves, if evaluated according to the Constitution, are part of the constitutional principle of secularism which warrants the objectivity of the state in religious issues. In this context, a ban on headscarves, which are used as a symbol of political ideology, does not go against the Constitution.

The right to receive an education is a basic right which cannot be banned, but everyone has to obey the regulations of the educational institutions. The problem of headscarves we face nowadays, especially in the universities, is not a problem of personal freedom but is a symbol of political ideology.¹⁵

Reasons for the Military's Concerns

What has aroused the deep concern of the military leaders, as well as the staunch secularists among the civilian population, was the growing success of the pro-Islamic Refah [Welfare or Prosperity] Party of Professor Necmettin Erbakan. As a result of Turkey's fragmented, multi-party system, Erbakan's party narrowly came in first — with only 21 percent of the vote — in the December 1995 parliamentary elections. Because of the bitter personal rivalries among the other parties, which ended a short-lived secular coalition, Erbakan managed to be elected prime minister, on July 8, 1996, in a coalition with the center-right True Path Party. This was the first time in the 73-year history of the modern, secular Turkish Republic that a person who had so openly challenged the traditional pro-Western orientation of the country had come to power.¹⁶

The Erbakan coalition barely survived a year and he was forced to resign in June 1997 as a result of behind-the-scenes pressure from the military after he balked at implementing educational and other reforms mandated by the National Security Council to severely limit the future scope of Islamist-sponsored schools

and the rapidly increasing infiltration of their graduates into the cadres of the civil service. Erbakan had placed his supporters not only in the various ministries he controlled in Ankara, including education, interior and police, but also into the governorships and other provincial appointments he was authorized to make. While all able-bodied Turkish young men are drafted into the army, entry into the career officer corps is much more selective. The military strenuously resisted Erbakan's calls to open their ranks to graduates of the Islamic schools.

The issue of enforcing the ban on headscarves in Turkish schools is thus only one of the symbolic issues that have led to clashes between secularists and Islamists in the public space. An even more fundamental issue is to what kinds of schools Turkish parents may send their children.

Although the Welfare Party was formally dissolved by Turkey's Constitutional Court in January 1998, Erbakan was banned from political leadership for five years, and further legal action is under way against some 200 of his national and local appointees, the underlying problem has not gone away. Most of the former parliamentary members of the Welfare Party have joined a newly created party called Fazilet, translated variously as "virtue" or "merit." While currently in opposition, the party is already the largest party in the Grand National Assembly. The choice of the name "virtue" not only echoes the call for a "just order" proclaimed by the Welfare Party in its program and championed in its election campaigns, but also is intended to favorably distinguish the new party from the older secular parties and their politicians, some of whom have been tarnished and discredited by almost daily new revelations of corruption, cooperation with criminal elements, and other serious illegalities. In August 1998 there were finally signs that the secular authorities were beginning to crack down on ultra-right and other criminal elements.¹⁷

In a well-timed counterattack on the Islamists' claims to virtue, public prosecutor Vural Savas announced on August 25 that he had asked the courts to put former prime minister Erbakan, opposition leader Recai Kutan, a former Welfare Party energy minister and currently leader of the Virtue Party, and ten other prominent Islamists on trial for illegally diverting one trillion lira (\$3.6 million) from the Welfare Party just before it was outlawed by the constitutional court for sedition. In a press release, the prosecutor charged that the party's leadership had committed "the biggest fraud" in the country's history to prevent the treasury from seizing the party's assets. The accused face a term of up to three years in prison. If convicted and sentenced to more than one

year, they are barred from running for office under Turkey's electoral law.¹⁸

On June 16, 1998, Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz announced that he would resign before the end of the year in accordance with an agreement he had reached with Deniz Baykal, leader of the Republican People's Party, which was founded by Atatürk himself and is today a leading social democrat party. The Yilmaz-led coalition fell after it lost a vote of confidence in November 1998 over charges against Yilmaz, which he denied, of graft and influence-peddling. As of this writing [early January 1999] no leader has been able to form a coalition and if this continues, the president will appoint a nonpartisan caretaker administration to prepare for new parliamentary and local elections, scheduled for April 1999. Both the secularists and Islamists have already begun to mobilize their forces for the elections.

Also on June 16, in a further display of its fierce determination to stamp out radical Islam, Turkey's military summarily fired 109 officers and 58 non-commissioned officers. The dismissals are final and not subject to court review. More than 300 officers had been dismissed over the past two years for having ties with radical Islamic groups, but this was the largest purge carried out on a single day. Recai Kutan, leader of the Virtue Party, denounced the military's practice. "Our conception of secularism is a democratic secularism," he declared, echoing earlier statements by Erbakan, in which he had characterized the militant secularism of his opponents as "fascist," while claiming that his party advocated a democratic approach, under which individuals were free to choose whether to be religious or not and how to put their personal faith into practice.

Sources of Erbakan's Support

Even before Erbakan became prime minister in 1996, these issues had already begun to be hotly debated on the local level after the Welfare Party won large numbers of municipal elections in 1994, not only in the traditionally conservative rural regions of Anatolia, and religious centers such as Konya, but even in such major metropolitan centers as Istanbul and Ankara, the capital. While also attracting the support of some of the new Islamist university women and other elements of the urban middle class who had been disenchanted with the traditional secular political parties, a significant base of support was drawn from among the millions of poorer immigrants from the villages and towns of eastern

Anatolia who had fled the 14 years of conflict between the Turkish armed forces and the separatist Kurdish guerrillas of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), as well as the economically depressed conditions in the east. They created and swelled the shantytowns on the edges of the urban centers. The Welfare Party succeeded in recruiting their support by providing a network of grassroots economic and social services that the government and the major secular parties had failed to deliver. In this they followed the successful example of Tammany Hall at the time of the mass immigration in New York, the Daley organization in Chicago, and Shas among Israel's *edot hamizrach* (Jewish immigrants of Middle Eastern origin), or Hamas among the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. The Welfare Party also provided a common religious solidarity and sense of belonging for families uprooted from their traditional communities.

The pro-Islamist mayors varied in the extent to which they attempted to impose Islamic restrictions on behavior in public, such as banning consumption of alcohol in sidewalk cafes, the introduction of separate busses or separate seating for women in public conveyances, the banning of immodest advertising posters and films, and the insistence on modest attire in public. In some villages and towns, in recent years during Ramadan, municipal offices were closed early so government workers could get home in time to break the fast. There were also reports of intimidation of workers who did not observe the fast, of harassment by Welfare Party activists of women whom they deemed were immodestly dressed, and of efforts to impose rules of Islamic modesty on them. In Turkey the courts had in the past opposed time off for workers for Friday noon prayers or closing early during Ramadan, since under the Kemalist reforms the official day off in secular Turkey since 1935 has been Sunday. It should be noted that other democratic states have, however, made such accommodations, e.g., Israeli offices close early on Friday and on the eve of Jewish holidays, and in the U.S., Christmas is an official holiday despite the constitutional separation of church and state.

In Turkey, *mesjids* (small mosques) have recently been built in some official workplaces and state institutions in order to meet the religious needs of employees for prayer in private. This has been criticized by Turkish secularists. Because government policy has not changed, the Directorate of Religious Affairs, which is under the prime minister's office, proposed that the Friday prayer time itself should be changed so as to adapt it to working hours and make it possible for officials to pray during their lunch time break. Two major traditional Islamic feasts have been incorpo-

rated into the Turkish calendar as official holidays: the feast at the end of Ramadan, *Id al-Fitr*, known in Turkish as *Seker Bayram* (the holiday of sweets), and the Feast of the Sacrifice (*Kurban Bayram*). Other religiously significant days are celebrated by prayers in the mosques and recitations from the Quran, which is broadcast on state radio and television as well as private electronic media.¹⁹

During a visit to the traditionally religious city of Konya in October 1994, I saw on local television a film of worshippers marching around the Qa'aba in Mecca. Together with Turkey's explosive population growth there has been a boom in mosque building, with some 1,500 local mosques constructed each year. The government has itself authorized the construction of various mosques, including the giant Kocatepe mosque built in 1987 in Ankara, which accommodates 16,000 persons and is used for state funerals. In 1990 the government also commissioned Behruz and Can Cinici to construct a modern mosque for Ankara's parliament building. According to *The Economist*, "the parliamentary mosque is without a doubt the most innovative religious design in Turkey's republican era." The secular-minded politicians wanted to make sure the style of the building would fit in with the existing national parliament building, "a proud symbol of modernism." Arguments about the architecture of the parliament's mosque have inevitably gotten tangled up with issues of secularism and Islam. "Traditionalists advocate the addition of a minaret and secularists counter by arguing that the Cinicis have allowed for that with a tall cypress, planted where the mosque and library meet. The conservatives are upset by other features, too. The architects have reduced to a low platform the traditional divisions between prayer spaces for men and women. What is more, taking off one's shoes — a standard requirement in mosques — is not encouraged."²⁰

However, the government, at the urging of the powerful military, is concerned over reports that privately organized mosques are becoming centers for radical anti-state Islamic political activism. Accordingly, a new law passed in August 1998 will require that 180 mosques owned by private individuals or organizations be placed under the control and supervision of the Department of Religious Affairs.

Welfare Party mayors had actively supported the construction of numerous additional mosques and provided other services for the faithful. In Istanbul, for example, Mayor Recep Tayyip Erdogan authorized the use of the large public square next to the Blue Mosque (Sultan Ahmet), which originally was established by the Romans as the Hippodrome (*At Meydan* in Turkish), for a great

circumcision party. The square was filled with colorfully decorated beds, on which young boys in Islamic blue nightgowns lay as they recovered from their circumcision. They and their families were provided with refreshments and entertainment. For the secularist critics of Erdogan in Turkey this was clearly use of a public space for religious purposes. The mayor's supporters may have responded that the proximity of the courtyard area to the historic Ottoman mosque justified its religious use.

However, the mayor's plan to construct a giant new mosque at Taksim Square, in a popular modern cultural and shopping center of the city, was clearly seen as a provocation by the secularists. They argued that there was certainly no shortage of mosques in Istanbul. Moreover, its erection at Taksim Square, at whose center is a monument to Atatürk that depicts scenes of the Turkish War of Independence, and which is the meeting point of "Independence" and "Republic" Avenues, was intended as a symbolic gesture to challenge, overshadow, and dwarf the legacy of the founder of modern, secular Turkey.

As noted above, Erdogan, the popular 43-year-old mayor, has become a target of the military establishment. In April 1998 he was brought before a State Security Court in Diyarbakir, in southeastern Anatolia, to face charges of illegally using religion as a political weapon and provoking people to hatred and enmity. Those usually brought before such courts are suspected guerrillas and Kurdish nationalists. What aroused the army's ire was a speech he gave near Diyarbakir in 1997 in which he said, "The mosques are our barracks, the domes are our helmets, the minarets are our bayonets and the faithful are our army." Prosecutors asserted that by making such a statement, he was praising fundamentalism and violating a law that bans "provoking enmity and hatred among the people." In June he was convicted and sentenced to a fine and ten months in jail. At the time of this writing he is still free, pending the outcome of the appeal of his sentence.

In his defense, Erdogan said the words he spoke were from a poem and were aimed at "no person or target." After his testimony, the popular mayor immediately flew back in a chartered jet to Istanbul and to his job of providing services for his constituency of nearly 10 million persons. According to Turkish sources, the author of the poem quoted by Erdogan was Ziya Gökalp, the Ottoman intellectual, who Professor Bernard Lewis notes was influenced by Enlightenment thinkers, including the French (Jewish) sociologist Émile Durkheim, and who "constructed the first elaborate theoretical formulation of Turkish nationalism." Not only was he a supporter of pan-Turanism, i.e., the union of all the Turkic-

speaking peoples, but he was also one of the first advocates of a clear separation of church and state. Lewis comments that it was perhaps unfortunate that, “to render the unfamiliar French term *laïque*, he should have used the word *la-dini*, which could mean irreligious.” Lewis adds that the Turkish historian Abdulhak Adnan-Adivar concluded that the resulting confusion between laïcism and irreligion led the Muslim clergy in Ottoman Turkey into a hostile attitude toward Gökalp.²¹

It is ironic that his words are today being so differently interpreted by an Islamist mayor and a secularist State Security Court! In its reasoned verdict, the court ruled that Erdogan’s speech should not be judged within the acceptable framework of expressions of political views and religious concepts, but rather as part of the pernicious campaign by the Welfare Party’s leaders — of whom Erdogan was the most prominent rising star — to undermine the republic’s secular institutions. By separating the people into camps of “believers and non-believers,” he had caused social peace to be disrupted and was dragging the country into an atmosphere of clashes and civil war. The basic message of the speech, taken as a whole, the court concluded, was a call for a state based on religion, i.e., the Islamic *Shari’a*.²²

The Changing Role of Turkish Women in Public Life

In a paradoxical sense, it is the very success of the modernization process initiated by Atatürk and implemented by his successors in the Turkish Republic that brought about the educational and political liberation of women. One of Atatürk’s oft-quoted statements was: “If a society does not wage a common struggle to attain a common goal with women and men, scientifically there is no way for it to get civilized or developed.”²³ In 1924, the Kemalist reforms opened the way for women to join the civil service. In 1930, women gained the right to participate in municipal and, in 1934, national elections. It should be noted that this was decades before “enlightened” Switzerland finally gave its women the vote. (However, with the exception of two short-lived opposition parties, Turkish voters had only one party to choose from before 1946.)

According to a study by Professor Burcak Keskin, it was only in the 1980s that the “Turkish woman began to see herself as a political actor rather than as a housewife at home with a life based only on her family.” But in most parties, including the Welfare Party, women were recruited to talk to other women and en-

courage them to vote for the party's candidates. In the summer of 1993 there was a debate during the Welfare Party's Congress in Ankara about the desirability of running women candidates in the next election in an effort to broaden the popular base of support for the party, which had hopes of becoming a majority party. One successful campaigner for the party was an attractive woman dentist from Izmir, but the hardliners in the party vetoed her selection after a photo was published in the press of her dressed in a bathing suit. The photo may have been taken at a private pool rather than a public beach, but such immodest attire offended some of the party faithful. In the end, not a single woman was selected for the Welfare Party's election slate.

In the 1995 elections, altogether there were 531 women out of a total of 12,775 candidates. Among the big parties, female candidates comprised about five percent of the total, with the exception of the True Path Party, where they comprised nearly 10 percent of the total. This was probably as a result of the efforts of party leader Tansu Çiller, who had been Turkey's first and so far only woman prime minister. Currently only 11 of the Grand National Assembly's 550 members are women. Professor Keskin concludes that in the 1990s Turkish women appear to participate in politics more actively than before. He attributed this to "rapid modernization and eradication of the patriarchal, traditional social structure." However, women still are more active in local than national politics. In the civil service, occupation and career opportunities are improved but still unequal. In political parties, women remain as "vote gatherers" rather than "decision-makers." Still, he concluded, many — if not all — women have discovered their status outside of the kitchen "and entered the political as well as the socio-economic realm."

Some scarf proponents have also found that their liberation rhetoric has alienated the traditional male leadership of the Welfare Party. Fatma Kariljak, an attorney barred by the government from practice in Istanbul courtrooms as long as she wears a scarf, became a senior official for Welfare in 1989. She was quickly disillusioned by their refusal to advance women to parliamentary positions. "There is a patriarchal and macho side to their leadership," she says. "I've argued that our work and support in the female community has elected hundreds of Welfare officials, but they won't allow us a greater role, at least for now."²⁴

Erbakan's History of Projecting Islam in the Public Space

The choice facing Turkish voters is between "Greater Turkey and Greater Israel," declared Erbakan, the leader of the Welfare Party, in campaign speeches before the October 1991 parliamentary elections. On May 21, 1996, following Israel's "Operation Grapes of Wrath" campaign in Lebanon, Erbakan charged that because the coalition government of Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz's Motherland Party (ANAP) and Tansu Çiller's True Path Party (DYP) had in February 1996 concluded a military training agreement with Israel, they were agents of "the Jews who bombed our Muslim brothers." Therefore, he warned, a vote for any party other than Welfare in the June 2 municipal bi-elections was giving "a vote to the Jews. Islamic martyrs and saints will strike them down!"²⁵ He vowed to cancel the agreement with Israel and work to "liberate Jerusalem" once his party came to power.

Contrast this with the views of Turkey's secular political and military leadership: During the first official visit to Israel by a Turkish prime minister, in November 1994, Premier Tansu Çiller had explicitly termed the cooperation between Turkey and Israel "a strategic relationship."²⁶ "The operational Israeli flights in Turkish airspace will continue," Turkish Defense Minister Turhan Tayan declared on his first visit to Israel on April 30, 1997, contradicting Prime Minister Erbakan's statements that they would be indefinitely postponed. Brushing aside Arab and Iranian protests over the Turkish-Israeli defense cooperation agreements, Tayan insisted that "in the cooperation between us, we are not working against third parties." He went on to declare: "Turkey places great importance on these relations and I believe that the cooperation between us will add to stability in the region and advance the peace process."²⁷

In the increasingly sharp debate within Turkey between secularists and Islamists, the question of the nature and extent of Turkey's relationship with Israel has become a sign of the future direction of Turkey's foreign policy orientation. In a more basic sense, the future of Ankara's relations with the Jewish state has been interpreted as a litmus test as to whether the guiding principles of the modern, pro-Western, secular Turkish Republic established by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in 1923 will endure or whether they will be eroded by growing Islamist traditionalism, leading eventually to an Islamic state, governed in accordance with the *Shari'a*.

This basic clash of world-views was briefly papered over when, on July 8, 1996, the Turkish Grand National Assembly ap-

proved a new Welfare-True Path coalition government, headed by Erbakan as Prime Minister and Mrs. Çiller as Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister. A year later the two were to trade places, but as already noted, the outraged military forced Erbakan to hand in his resignation before the year was up. Before examining some of the other actions that had brought down the wrath of the secularist military on the Welfare Party leader, let us note briefly why the Turkish military and secular establishment have given such unusual prominence to their relationship with Israel. The answer lies at least in part in the impact of the current Islamist-secular debate on Turkey's image abroad.

While the current high level of Turkish-Israeli strategic cooperation is extraordinary in its scope and extent, it is not unprecedented, and in fact dates back to the 1950s. What is new, however, is the degree to which Ankara's military and secular political establishment has publicly flaunted its ties to the Jewish state. What contributed to this new openness were changes in the global and regional political environment, notably the collapse of the Soviet Union, the success of U.S.-led forces in the second Gulf War (Desert Storm), and the start of direct Arab-Israeli negotiations, as well as the shared perception in Ankara and Jerusalem concerning the threats to their vital interests presented by the policies of the leaders of Syria, Iran, and Iraq. Well-publicized cooperation with the Jewish State of Israel also provides certain intangible but important benefits to Turkey in its currently troubled relations with the United States and the European Union. It demonstrates to Washington and the Western European capitals that Turkey's military elite remain firmly committed to the Western alliance, that pragmatism and secularism remain the bases of Turkey's foreign policy, and that they are powerful enough to reject fundamentalist Islamist appeals to redirect its foreign policy orientation toward the Islamic world. Ankara's political and military elite are also mindful of Israel's special relationship with the United States, its free trade agreements with both the U.S. and the EU, as well as the reputed power of the "Jewish Lobby" in influencing Congress and the administration in Washington. By demonstrating its shared values and mutual interest with the State of Israel in promoting peace and combating terrorism, Ankara hopes that the American Jewish community will help Turkey gain a more sympathetic hearing in the United States as it faces Congressional efforts to restrict U.S. arms sales as a result of continuing criticism from Americans of Armenian and Greek ancestry as well as Americans generally concerned with human rights, over

Turkey's handling of the Kurdish problem, its disputes with Greece, and its treatment of political dissent.²⁸

An earlier example of cultural and public relations cooperation among Turks, Israelis, and American Jews was the year-long series of activities in 1992 spearheaded by the Quincentennial Foundation of Istanbul to mark the anniversary of Sultan Beyazıt's decision to welcome and provide refuge to the Jews expelled from Spain in 1492. These celebrations also helped to cement the burgeoning Turkish-Israeli relationship. When Israeli President Chaim Herzog came to Istanbul in July 1992 to participate in the gala dinner of the Quincentennial Foundation, his personal trip quickly assumed all the trappings of an official visit. Herzog had lengthy meetings with both President Turgut Özal and Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel, and was interviewed on state television. At a joint press conference following their meeting, Prime Minister Demirel noted that Turkish-Israeli relations were gradually improving and declared that "further development of bilateral relations would be in the interests of the region and the world."²⁹ At the Quincentennial gala in New York, Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy summed up the importance of the event for him as a Sephardi Jew and as an Israeli: "Turkey opened the doors to our brethren at a very important time. We now have a very good relationship with Turkey, and we are working for an even better future."³⁰

The Turkish media generally welcomed Herzog's visit and the growing ties between Ankara and Jerusalem. But the visit was condemned by Iranian television and at a demonstration by Turkish fundamentalists at the Beyazıt Mosque in Istanbul on July 17. The demonstrators — variously estimated at 700 to 2,000 — burned American and Israeli flags, carried placards saying "the *intifada* (the Palestinian revolt) will continue until Israel is destroyed," and shouted "Allah is Great" and the Turkish "dictators of laïcism [secularism] are the puppets of the Jews."³¹

The Arab-Israel conflict and Ankara's relations with the Jewish State of Israel have been recurrent themes in the internal struggle within Turkey between Islamic fundamentalist and pro-Western secularists. After the outbreak of the *intifada*, the Palestinian uprising in the Israel-administered territories, and the harsh measures adopted by Israel to quell the riots, in a meeting with Arab ambassadors on December 26, 1987, Özal "declared our strong condemnation of these incidents," and on March 18, 1988, the Turkish Grand National Assembly unanimously adopted a communiqué stating: "We denounce the violent actions of the Israelis against the Palestinians living in the occupied territories

and the inhuman violation of Palestinians' human rights." The parliamentarians concluded with an expression of hope that the Turkish government would continue its efforts to convince Israel to change its policy. The Turkish indignation was similar to that expressed in Western European capitals and essentially the Turkish approach to the Arab-Israel conflict and the Palestinian issue was in accord with the line adopted by the European Community in its Venice Declaration of June 1980.³²

However, the only Turkish party that called for breaking off all ties with Israel was the pro-Islamic, anti-Western, and anti-Zionist Refah (Welfare) Party. The party organized major anti-Israeli demonstrations in Istanbul, Konya, and Diyarbakir. The one in Istanbul, on March 20, 1988, drew an estimated 10,000 to 25,000 participants, including Iranian, Saudi, and PLO officials. The Israeli flag was burned and anti-Jewish as well as anti-Israeli slogans were shouted by the conservative Islamic crowd. The utilization of the Palestinian cause to rally support for pro-Islamic groups aroused concern among Turkey's secular elite. Ilnur Çevik, editor of the *Turkish Daily News*, on March 22, charged that persons who had "never lifted a finger for Palestinian rights" were cynically exploiting the current anti-Israeli sentiment to gather support for their real but illegal objective, "the creation of Islamic rule in Turkey." Professor Necmettin Erbakan, an automotive engineer by training, had long appealed to conservative voters by combining a call for return to traditional Islamic values with emphasis on modern technology to industrialize rural areas. He had called for creation of an Islamic Common Market and blamed "international Zionism" for Turkey's economic problems.

From 1972 to 1980 he had led the National Salvation Party (NSP). Many observers believe that an earlier "Jerusalem Liberation Day" rally organized by Erbakan's NSP, in Konya on September 6, 1980, was a factor in the decision of the Kemalist army officers, who see their role as guardians of Atatürk's secular principles, to seize power and end the growing street violence between radical leftist and extreme rightist gangs, and oust the fractious and ineffective coalition government. In the 1980 Konya rally, the NSP demonstrators had called for restoration of the caliphate, refused to sing the Turkish national anthem, carried anti-Semitic signs, and burned the Israeli, American, and Russian flags.³³ Pro-Western Turkish officials regarded it as ominously significant that these were the flags of the "two Great Satans and the Little Satan" being reviled by the Khomeini regime that in the previous year had established an Islamic Republic in neighboring Iran. When informed that the Iranian ambassador to Turkey had

participated in an anti-Israeli and pro-Islamic demonstration in the religiously conservative city of Konya, then Foreign Minister Mesut Yilmaz declared his actions as “contrary to diplomatic practice and protocol.”³⁴

The Konya rally was the last straw for the Turkish military. Less than a week later, on September 12, they seized power, abolished the existing parties and arrested Erbakan and other leaders. He was tried for undermining the secular foundations of the republic, but was eventually released and was permitted to resume his political career after 1983.

But the struggle continued. In February 1997 several hundred persons jammed a hall in Sincan, a working class town 25 miles from Ankara, to celebrate “Jerusalem Day,” an annual holiday proclaimed by Khomeini. The host was Welfare Party mayor Bekir Yildiz and the guest of honor was Mohammed Reza Bagheri, the Iranian ambassador, who was greeted with chants of “Down with Israel! Down with Arafat.” Ambassador Bagheri delivered a fiery speech calling on his audience to struggle for re-imposition of the *Shari'a*. As a clear warning that their patience was again wearing thin, the army ordered a column of tanks to roll through Sincan’s streets. The Iranian ambassador was declared *persona non grata* and the Turkish ambassador to Teheran was also recalled.³⁵

They returned to their respective posts only in September 1997 following discussions at the United Nations between Turkish Foreign Minister Ismail Cem and Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi. In a speech at Columbia University on September 30, 1997, Kharrazi reiterated his private assurances to Cem that Iran believed that “respect for non-interference in the domestic affairs should be the basis of bilateral relations.”³⁶ Mayor Yildiz was interrogated, arrested, and tried before the State Security Court in Ankara, which on October 15, 1997, sentenced him to four years and seven months in prison for advocating an Islamic state and “provoking hatred and animosity among people by emphasizing differences of region, class, religion or race.”

Paradoxically, the Military Encourage More Islamic Instruction

The 1980 coup brought an end — at least for several years — to the sharp polarization in Turkish political life, characterized by bitter street fighting between radical gangs of extreme leftist and rightist youth that had resulted in more than 20 murders a day in

1980. Asking themselves why the younger generation had succumbed to the appeals of communism and other radical leftist ideologies, the generals concluded that the educational system had failed to instill in them traditional family values and respect for their elders. Secularism had led to atheism and communism. Thus, ironically, while promising to restore Kemalism to its proper place, the generals played a key role in enhancing the role of religion in society.

Even before 1980, during the multi-party period of Turkish politics that began in 1950, Turkish politicians, beginning with Adnan Menderes of the Democratic Party, and including the late Turgut Özal in the 1980s, and the many times elected prime minister and currently President Süleyman Demirel, had courted religious voters by building mosques and schools, closed their eyes to the growth of religious observance, and began to take an active part in the meetings of the Islamic Conference Organization. However, before General Kenan Evren attended an Islamic Summit Conference as Turkey's president in 1984, Ankara made it clear that Turkey would only be bound by those resolutions that did not conflict with the secular principles of Turkey's constitution. Turkey also had some pragmatic secular objectives in joining the ICO, namely, the hope — soon frustrated — of getting the political support of Islamic states at the United Nations in Turkey's continuing dispute with Greece over Cyprus, as well as economic objectives — in which it was more successful — to broaden commercial ties and win contracts for Turkish construction firms in the booming oil-producing countries of North Africa and the Persian Gulf.

As Professor Feroz Ahmad has noted, according to the published record of the discussions within the National Security Council following the 1980 coup, the generals believed that the liberal constitution of 1961 had created a permissive youth culture totally ignorant of religion, which made them susceptible to Communist and other radical ideas. They decided to pass laws which would create a "religious culture" to replace the one which had "poisoned the minds of our youth." Ahmad comments that the general ignorance of Islam, the absence of religion in the home, and the failure of parents to teach religious values to their children were a tribute to the inroads that secularism and modernism had made in Turkish society, at least in the major urban centers.

Precisely because children learned little about Islam at home, the NSC decided that the state would have to teach them in the schools; Islam would be a required subject in the schools, like history, geography, and mathematics. The generals and their advi-

sors saw Islam as a factor of unity which, if manipulated properly, could overcome, or at least paper over many divisions in Turkey, not least of all the Turkish-Kurdish ethnic divide. They therefore made a serious effort to promote religion and their legacy was adopted by the Motherland Party government led by Turgut Özal elected in 1983. (A delegation from the lay council of the Chief Rabbinate appealed to the authorities to exempt non-Muslim children from attendance at Quran courses in the secular elementary schools. The request, which was endorsed by the representatives of the Christian minorities in Istanbul, won the approval of the Turkish authorities and was made officially public in August 1990.)

The Turkish military's efforts to use Islam as a benign influence on society is reminiscent of the early attempts by some in Israel's military and intelligence establishment to encourage Palestinian involvement in Hamas as a counterweight to the politically active and militant Palestine Liberation Organization. They misguidedly thought that students who spent their days and nights studying medieval texts in the mosque or *medrese* would be like pietistic monks or *haredi* yeshiva students who were not interested in day-to-day political affairs. They soon learned that, unfortunately, fundamentalist teaching and militant activism can often go together.

As Feroz Ahmad correctly points out, "Özal not only accepted the thesis of Islam as the antidote to the left, but also he and the majority of his party felt a genuine affinity to a culture heavily laden with elements generally described as Islamic since Turkey is overwhelmingly Muslim. This is the culture of Turkey's lower middle class whose members stood on the periphery of the Kemalist revolution and the Westernization associated with it." Frequently in his speeches, Özal would cite Japan as the model that Turkey sought to emulate, namely, a country that had adopted the technical tools from the West necessary to develop a highly productive modern society, while at the same time retaining its own unique cultural identity.³⁷

Özal and his supporters argued that the Kemalist regime had failed to provide a new identity for Turks and created an identity crisis by divorcing them from Islam. The modern Islamic resurgence that they sought to fashion would restore the country's true identity. This was compatible with democracy, which they defined as the rule of the majority, which in Turkey's case was Muslim. They did not foresee this trend as being reactionary or fundamentalist. They claimed they were restoring religious freedom and giving the people what they wanted. The constant expansion of

the religious establishment under the Directorate of Religious Affairs, which reported to the prime minister, became a source of education and jobs for the provincial lower classes, and patronage for local politicians.

The staff of the Directorate of Religious Affairs had increased from 50,765 in 1979 to 84,712 in 1989. It has grown even more rapidly in the past decade. Along with the Imam-Hatip schools to train Islamic clergy there has been a great expansion in the lower-grade Quranic schools where the children were taught to read and write as well as the basics of Islam. Before the 1980 coup there were 2,610 such schools; by 1989 the number had grown to 4,715. The number of students in attendance had risen from 68,486 to 155,403 during the same period. (The number of people going on the pilgrimage to Mecca had also risen from 10,805 in 1979 to 92,006 (40,057 females) in 1988.)³⁸

In its cover story on "Turkey on the Brink," *Time International* on January 12, 1998, reported that the number of Imam-Hatip schools had grown from seven in 1951 to nearly 600 today, and that there were currently 1.5 million alumni of the religious high schools. The Turkish *Probe* reported on February 22, 1998, that Minister of Education Hikmet Ulugbay, who had pressed for strict enforcement of the ban on headscarves when he took office in July 1997, had announced that he would close unnecessary Imam-Hatip schools, since some 50,000 students graduated each year, while only about 2,300 new imams were required annually.³⁹

The salaries of most of these teachers were reportedly provided by Saudi Arabia, as were scholarships and dormitory facilities for students. It is believed that the Islamic Republic of Iran also provided assistance, in part out of rivalry with the Saudis and also, Turkish secularists suspect, as part of the Islamic leaders' efforts to undermine and eventually bring about the overthrow of the Kemalist regime. (Some Iranian leaders who visited Ankara have angered Turkish secularists when they refused to participate in the traditional ceremony of laying a wreath at Atatürk's tomb. They reportedly explained their refusal to do so, by saying that bending down to place a wreath before the statue of Atatürk they would be violating the Islamic prohibition against bowing down to an idol.)

There were also an unknown number of informal schools that sprang up beyond the supervision of the Turkish authorities. As already noted, the generals and the secularist Kemalist political elite began to become seriously concerned as the graduates of these schools began to infiltrate the civil service. Their alarm

heightened after Erbakan became prime minister and controlled half of the coalition government's ministries.

Turkish General Assures Israel of Turkey's Secular Character

On the eve of his trip to Israel in February 1997, Turkish Chief of the General Staff General Ismail Hakki Karadayi was interviewed by Eytan Rabin, the military affairs correspondent of *Ha'aretz*, who asked: "Do you not fear that your visit will anger the increasingly powerful Islamic circles in Turkey?" The Turkish Chief of Staff replied: "The secular and democratic structure of the Turkish Republic is anchored in the Constitution and cannot change." Relations with Israel were part of Ankara's multifaceted foreign policy, which sought good relations with all the countries of the region. He went on to stress what was special about the Turkish-Israeli relationship: "The fact that our two countries are the only democracies in the region, along with the fact that they both share a similar approach to security problems, facilitates the development of these relations." Alluding to Erbakan's highly publicized efforts to improve relations with Libya, Iran, and other countries openly hostile to Israel, the reporter noted that Israelis were worried that Turkish-Israeli defense cooperation would lead to the transfer of vital information to such third countries. General Karadayi insisted that under Turkish law no such transfer to third countries was possible without explicit approval by both parties. Despite such formal assurances, the Israelis feared that if Erbakan had his way, he would conclude a military cooperation agreement with Iran and press for admission of graduates of the Islamic religious Imam-Hatip schools into the permanent army officer corps. Both moves had so far been blocked by the opposition of the generals, but the infiltration of Refah supporters within the civilian administration was growing rapidly, with some 70,000 already employed in the ministries controlled by Refah.

The NSC Demands Major Changes in Religious Education

The day after his return from Israel, on February 28, General Karadayi presented a report to the National Security Council's (NSC) monthly meeting stating that Islamist elements were threatening the country's stability and presenting a detailed list of 22

recommendations — read ultimatums — to block the pro-Islamic initiatives that Refah had been advocating. The NSC communiqué declared that “destructive and separatist groups” were seeking to weaken Turkish democracy by “blurring the distinction between the secular and the anti-secular.” The NSC had therefore decided that “no steps away from the contemporary values of the Turkish Republic” would be permitted, and further asserted that “in Turkey, secularism is not only a form of government but a way of life and the guarantee of democracy and social peace.” Alluding to the difficulties Turkey faced in its efforts to join the European Union, and no doubt also having in mind the concerns voiced by the United States and Israel, the NSC communiqué declared: “It is necessary to end all speculation which may lead to suspicions about our democracy and damage Turkey’s image and prestige abroad.”⁴⁰

The well-publicized trips by the Turkish Chief of Staff and Minister of Defense to the Jewish state, followed by Prime Minister Yilmaz in September 1998, clearly also were helpful in projecting the image of Turkey as allied to the modern, democratic, and pro-Western elements in the region. After attacking his opponents as “secular fascists” and insisting that all he really wanted was a “democratic secularism” that permitted religious freedom of choice, Erbakan reluctantly bowed to the combined pressure of the military and his True Path coalition partners and at a cabinet meeting on March 13 agreed to implement all the NSC recommendations. A key military demand was the closing down of unauthorized Imam-Hatip schools and the extension of compulsory public education from fifth to eighth grade. The underlying assumption is that if students can be imbued with Kemalist principles until they are teenagers, they are far less likely to fall under the fundamentalist influence of Islamist teachers than if they enter the religiously-based schools at a younger and more impressionable age.

It is precisely for this reason that Erbakan stalled and delayed implementation of this crucial change. More than 100,000 Welfare party supporters demonstrated in Istanbul on May 11, 1997, holding banners saying “Keep your hands off our Imam-Hatip schools.” Significantly, they also reportedly carried signs saying, “This is Turkey, not Israel!”⁴¹

The following month Erbakan was forced to resign. Yilmaz succeeded in forming a coalition government with two other major secular parties in June. One of the new coalition’s first acts was to ratify the Turkish-Israeli Free Trade Agreement that President Demirel had signed during his visit to Israel but that Erbakan

had bottled up in committee. Under intense pressure from the military, Erbakan had finally approved the \$630 million five-year defense contract under which Israel Aircraft Industries and Elbit were working together with their Turkish counterparts in the Turkish Defense Industry Undersecretariat, to upgrade 54 of the Turkish Air Force's American-made F-4E Phantom fighters with sophisticated Israeli radar systems, air-to-air missiles, and advanced avionics.

In a second major secularist victory, on August 16, 1997, Yilmaz secured parliamentary passage of the educational reforms that the NSC had approved in February. Under the new law, approved by a vote of 277 to 242, schoolchildren will have to spend eight years in public schools instead of only five years, before being eligible to enroll in religious academies.⁴² Emotions had run high during the parliamentary debate and anger over the bill led to demonstrations in several cities. The police used batons and water cannon to break up religious-led protests in Istanbul and more than 100 persons were arrested in Istanbul and other parts of the country. "I will not condone religious academies that train warriors for the Welfare Party," Yilmaz declared. The purpose of the Imam-Hatip schools, the Prime Minister emphasized, was "to educate intellectual clergy for our secular republic. In no way are we restricting freedom of religion, freedom of worship or the right to learn about religion. We are simply opposing those who want to use religion for political purposes."⁴³

Islamic critics of the new measure pointed to the closeness of the parliamentary vote as evidence that many Turks want their children to have unrestricted access to religious academies. They interpreted Yilmaz's action as evidence that he was no more than an errand boy for the military. "In its haste to carry out the orders it has received, the new government has spent the last 45 days violating the constitution, human rights, and the will of the people," former Prime Minister Erbakan told his supporters in Ankara. The new system was to be imposed in stages, partly because no one was certain how the public school system would be able to accommodate such an influx of students. Officials in the Education Ministry estimated that the first phase would cost several hundred million dollars.

After the Yilmaz government lost a vote of no confidence in November 1998, six weeks of political jockeying finally resulted in parliamentary approval on January 17, 1999, of a new caretaker government under former Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit, leader of the secularist Democratic Left party. In an apparent move to court pro-Islamic and other conservative voters in the forthcoming

April elections, Tansu Ciller conditioned support of her True Path party for the new government on the removal of Ulugbay from the Education Ministry. (He was appointed deputy prime minister for economic affairs.) Ecevit pledged that his government would “decisively continue” with the secular educational reforms of the previous eighteen months requiring “eight-year uninterrupted and compulsory elementary education.” Meanwhile, on January 8, 1999, the army stepped up its own public education efforts when the General Staff announced the creation of a new Press Information Center and issued a 14-page pamphlet that proclaimed: “A new War of National Liberation must be launched with determination against Islamic activism that threatens the secular republic.”

As the continuing demonstrations against efforts to enforce the ban on headscarves and beards show, there is substantial public opposition within Turkish society against arbitrary restrictions on personal religious practices in public institutions. The demonstrations by young female university students in Istanbul’s streets also revealed that they were engaged in two battles: to make room in modern Turkey for Islam, and to make room in modern Islam for feminism. For the military, the political leaders, and the country’s educators, the ongoing dilemma is how to educate the younger generation with a respect for their Islamic heritage while at the same time imbuing them with a firm commitment to the Kemalist principles of a modern, progressive society in a secular Republic.

Notes

1. Reuters report from Istanbul, June 10, 1998.
2. Reuters report from Istanbul, November 6, 1998.
3. Nilüfer Göle, *The Forbidden Modern: Civilization and Veiling* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), pp. 1-6.
4. For discussion of the dispute concerning the ban on headcovering in French high schools, see “La France et l’Islam,” *Le Monde*, October 13, 1994. For an analysis of the differentiation between traditional, pious and Islamist styles and the symbolic functions of covering in Egypt, see Andrea B. Rugh, *Reveal and Conceal: Dress in Contemporary Egypt* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986); and Sherifa Zuhur, *Revealing Reveiling: Islamist Gender Ideology in Contemporary Egypt* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992).
5. For an analysis of the events and terms of this debate, see Emelie A. Olson, “Muslim Identity and Secularism in Contemporary Tur-

- key: The Headscarf Dispute,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 58:6 (October 1985).
6. Philip G. Smucker, “The Meaning of a Scarf,” *U.S. News & World Report*, March 16, 1998, pp. 31-33. The article was accompanied by a large photograph showing young women students wearing colorful headscarves protesting at Istanbul University and carrying a large sign in Turkish demanding “Freedom of thought and expression for everyone now!” [emphasis in the original].
 7. On the development of the National Security Council’s role, see Feroz Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey* (London: Routledge, 1993).
 8. Stephen Kinzer, “Secularism and Islam: Politicians in Turkey Seesaw with Military,” *New York Times*, March 29, 1998.
 9. *Ibid.*
 10. Quoted by Smucker, p. 33.
 11. *Ibid.*
 12. Quoted in *Radikal*, June 22, 1998. The planned march was reported in the pro-Islamist *Yeni Safak*, June 22, 1998.
 13. On the origin and varying practices of veiling, see two interesting articles: Golnar Mehran, “Islam and Women’s Roles,” pp. 115-124, and Nagat El-Sanabary, “Women in Some Liberal Modernizing Islamic Countries,” pp. 513-523. The latter article compares and contrasts the situation in Turkey, Tunisia, and Egypt. Both essays are in Nelly P. Stromquist, ed., *Women in the Third World: An Encyclopedia of Contemporary Issues* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1998).
 14. For a historical summary of religion-state issues, see the section on Turkey in Kevin Boyle and Juliet Sheen, eds., *Freedom of Religion and Belief: A World Report* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 386-396.
 15. Anatolia news agency report, *Turkish Daily News*, May 9, 1998. This is only the latest ruling on this controversial issue, which has in recent years been taken up by various Turkish courts, including the Council of State, the Constitutional Court, Parliament, and the President since the 1980s. For a detailed discussion of the twists and turns in the policy on university dress codes, see Boyle and Sheen, eds. *Freedom of Religion and Belief*, pp. 395-397.
 16. For an analysis of the factors leading to Erbakan’s victory and the fundamental ideological and policy differences with former Prime Minister and True Path Party leader Tansu Çiller, his coalition partner, see George E. Gruen, “Turkish-Israeli Relations: Crisis or Continued Cooperation?,” *Jerusalem Letter*, no. 338 (15 July 1996); George E. Gruen, “Where is Turkey Heading? Implications for the United States, Israel, and Middle East Peace,” *American Foreign Policy Interests*, 19:1 (February 1997):1-13; and George E. Gruen, “Turkey and the Middle East after Oslo I,” in Robert O. Freedman, ed., *The Middle East Peace Process After the Oslo*

- Agreements* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998), pp. 169-212.
17. A traffic accident in Susurluk on November 3, 1996, led to a series of revelations of collusion of various state officials and security agencies with right-wing criminal elements. Positive signs that the authorities were finally seriously tackling the problem was published in a report from Ankara by the Parliament Bureau of the *Turkish Daily News* under the heading: "State Gangs are being Cleaned Out," August 25, 1998.
 18. Alistair Bell, "Turkish Islamists Face Fresh Legal Battles," Reuters dispatch from Ankara, August 25, 1998.
 19. See Boyle and Sheen, *Freedom of Religion*, section on Turkey, pp. 386-397, for an excellent discussion of all aspects of religion and state from the Ottoman period to recent court cases.
 20. "The Architecture of Mosques: Ignore the Past," Ankara, *The Economist*, U.S. Edition, January 24, 1998, p. 83.
 21. Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 231, 351, and 403. Lewis provides an excellent historical analysis of development of the secularist reforms, the opposition to them, and the changing relations of religion and state, as well as extensive quotes from Kemal's speeches, especially pp. 255-279 and 401-442.
 22. Anatolian Agency dispatch from Diyarbakir, June 4, *Turkish Times*, June 15, 1998.
 23. Cited by Burcak Keskin in "Political Participation Patterns of Turkish Women," *Middle East Review of International Affairs (MERIA Journal)*, no. 4 (December 1997) (Internet edition).
 24. Smucker, "The Meaning of a Scarf," p. 33.
 25. Suna Erdem, "Turkey's Islamists Preen for Power, Blast Jews," Reuters dispatch from Istanbul, May 21, 1996.
 26. Interview with the *Jerusalem Post*, November 4, 1994.
 27. Agence France Presse dispatch from Tel Aviv, April 30, 1997.
 28. For a detailed analysis of recent developments in Turkish-Israeli relations and their significance, see Amikam Nachmani, "The Remarkable Turkish-Israeli Tie," *Middle East Quarterly*, June 1998, pp. 19-29. On the implications for the United States, see Carol Migdalovitz, "Israeli-Turkish Relations," July 17, 1998, a *CRS Report for Congress*. Migdalovitz is a specialist in the Middle Eastern Affairs, Foreign Affairs and National Defense Division, Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress.
 29. Text broadcast on Turkish TV, 1600 GMT, July 17, 1992.
 30. Among the activities in the U.S. were a gala dinner in New York on April 27, attended by President Özal and Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy, and a two-day academic conference on May 19-20, 1992. *The Quincentennial Papers* were published by the American Society of Sephardic Studies in 1996 as *Studies on Turkish-Jewish History*, edited by David F. Altabé, et al. The Levi quotation is in-

- cluded in the article by George E. Gruen, "Turkey's Relations with Israel: From Ambivalence to Open Cooperation," pp. 112-129.
31. See George E. Gruen, "Turkey's Potential Contribution to Arab-Israel Peace," in *Turkish Review of Middle East Studies, Annual, 1993*, no. 7 (Istanbul: Foundation for Middle East and Balkan Studies, 1994), pp. 179-214; anti-Israel demonstration on p. 193.
 32. George E. Gruen, "Turkey Between the Middle East and the West," in Robert O. Freedman, ed., *The Middle East from the Iran-Contra Affair to the Intifada* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1991), pp. 415-417. Erbakan had made notoriously anti-Israel and anti-Semitic statements long before the outbreak of the intifada. For some earlier quotes, see Sabri Sayari, "Turkey's Islamic Challenge," *Middle East Quarterly* (September 1996), pp. 35-43; and Alan Makovsky, "Assessing the Intentions of Turkey's Refah Party," *Muslim Politics Report* (Council on Foreign Relations), no. 10 (November/December 1996), pp. 1-3 and 5.
 33. George E. Gruen, "Turkey Between the Middle East and the West," p. 392. For additional details, see Dankwart A. Rustow, *Turkey: America's Forgotten Ally* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1987), pp. 77-79; and George E. Gruen, "Turkey after the Military Coup: Impact on the Jewish Community and on Turkish-Israeli Relations," background paper for the American Jewish Committee, New York, March 26, 1981.
 34. Sam Cohen, dispatch from Istanbul, *Jewish Chronicle* (London), April 22, 1988.
 35. See Stephen Kinzer's dispatch from Sincan, *New York Times*, February 13 and his article, "The Islamist Who Runs Turkey, Delicately," in *New York Times Magazine*, February 23, 1997.
 36. The text of his address at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs was provided to the author by Foreign Minister Kharrazi during a conversation at a reception at the Middle East Institute following his address. He reiterated his government's sharp criticism of Israel and rejection of the peace process.
 37. The view that Özal's victory represented "a constructive compromise between modern, pragmatic policies and greater emphasis on Islam," was developed by Nicholas S. Ludington in *Turkish Islam and the Secular State* (Washington, D.C.: American Institute for Islamic Affairs, 1984).
 38. Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey*, pp. 219-221.
 39. Maryann Bird, "The Army v. Religious Education," *Time* (International Edition), January 12, 1998, p. 19.
 40. *New York Times*, March 2, 1997. In addition to maintaining the ban on religious dress in universities and other public work places, the NSC communiqué called for the closure of certain Muslim retreats, curbs on the employment of religious fundamentalists in government, restrictions on the clerical training schools, and putting Quranic courses under the Ministry of Education.

41. On April 27, 1997, the police raided and closed seven buildings in Bursa housing unauthorized Quran courses. See Reuters dispatch of April 28 in *New York Times*, May 12, 1997.
42. Ahmed Gul, a Refah party member and director of religious education at the Turkish Ministry of Education in Ankara, told the *Time* reporter that the plan to make eight years of secular state schooling compulsory "had been gathering dust as an unpromulgated law since 1973." One government estimate of the cost of implementing the decision was \$12 billion in the first three years, a sum that would require an increase in tax collections. *Time*, January 12, 1998, p. 19.
43. Stephen Kinzer, "Turkish Leader Wins a Key Vote to Limit Religious Education," dispatch from Istanbul, *New York Times*, August 17, 1997.