



# Turkey: Politics of Identity and Power

**Carol Migdalovitz**  
Specialist in Middle Eastern Affairs

September 21, 2010

**Congressional Research Service**

7-5700

[www.crs.gov](http://www.crs.gov)

R41368

## Summary

Turkey has long been a valued U.S. NATO ally and strategic partner. Successive administrations have viewed it as a secular democracy that could serve as an inspiration or model for other Muslim majority countries. However, the ruling Justice and Development Party's (AKP) foreign policy decisions have led some U.S. observers, including Members of Congress, to question its future course. Domestic political developments may be enabling the AKP's greater assertiveness in international affairs and are, therefore, worthy of closer scrutiny. This report provides that examination via an overview of the current Turkish domestic political scene.

The main theme of the report is that the ongoing struggle for power in Turkey will determine the country's identity, and that will have consequences for U.S. policymakers. Turkey's secular identity has long been considered unique among majority Muslim states, as secularism was a founding principle of the modern Turkish Republic as well as the principle that has produced the most domestic political tension. The AKP, formed in 2001, has Islamist roots but claims to be conservative and democratic. Its emergence and acquisition of power have exacerbated concerns, especially in secularist circles, about whether AKP is intent on altering Turkey's identity. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his AKP have governed in an increasingly confident manner since a court refused to ban the party for being "a focal point of anti-secular activities" in 2008. Already in control of the executive and legislature, they have gained influence over bastions of secularism in the judiciary and military. These developments may enable the AKP to implement a domestic agenda that is more consistent with its core identity. However, the AKP has failed to deal comprehensively with a significant domestic group's struggle for recognition of its own identity—the Kurds in a majority Turkish state. The government initiated a "Kurdish opening," but managed it poorly, produced unfulfilled expectations, and may have contributed to an escalation in terrorism.

The unraveling of a series of alleged coup plots is another arena in which the struggle for power and identity between the AKP and its opponents is being played out. In the first, major alleged conspiracy, called *Ergenekon*, ultranationalists and secularists are said to have planned to create instability in the country in order to provide a pretext for the military to intervene and overthrow the government. Believers in the conspiracies, who include the AKP and its supporters, cite the revelations as evidence of Turkey's progress as a democracy because what is called the "deep state," or elite who have controlled the political system for 50 years, is finally being confronted. Skeptics charge that the AKP is using a fictitious affair to intimidate and weaken opponents in the military, judiciary, media, and elsewhere who are ardent secularists, and that the authorities' handling of suspects fails to meet international legal standards, thereby marring Turkey's democratic advance. They also suggest that the enigmatic and powerful Fethullah Gulen Movement, a religious group, may be driving the investigations and is a new "deep state."

The AKP has appeared increasingly confident. Although its diminished plurality of votes in the 2009 municipal elections provided signs that it can be challenged, its victory in the September 2010 referendum on constitutional reforms produced doubts about whether AKP's ambitions to alter Turkey's identity and policies can be constrained. Nonetheless, the vote indicates that the AKP continues to function within the parameters of a democratic political system, albeit flawed, that allows these developments. For in-depth information on the period prior to this report, see CRS Report RL34646, *Turkey: Update on Crisis of Identity and Power*, by Carol Migdalovitz.

## Contents

Overview .....	1
Economic Context.....	2
Demographic Snapshot .....	2
Historical Context .....	3
Political Situation.....	4
The Lawsuit to Ban the AKP .....	4
Aftermath .....	5
<i>Ergenekon</i> and Other Alleged Plots .....	6
Assessment .....	8
2009 Municipal Elections.....	9
Cabinet Changes .....	10
Constitutional Reforms .....	10
Role of the Military.....	13
Kurdish Issue .....	15
Press Freedom.....	19
Fethullah Gulen Movement .....	21
Future Political Possibilities .....	23
Overall Assessment .....	25
U.S. Policy.....	26

## Tables

Table 1. Results of 2009 Municipal Elections .....	9
Table 2. Basic Facts .....	30

## Contacts

Author Contact Information .....	30
----------------------------------	----

## Overview

Turkey has become increasingly assertive on the international stage. Members of Congress and other U.S. officials require an understanding of the current domestic political situation that, combined with an exceptionally robust economy, has enabled the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) to act so confidently in order to develop appropriate policies. As a contribution toward that goal, this report provides an overview of the Turkish domestic political scene. It does not address specific foreign policy issues, which will be the subject of a separate report.

Turkey's domestic politics are turbulent largely due to an ongoing struggle for power that participants perceive as a struggle for the country's identity. Turkey's secular identity has long been considered unique among majority Muslim states, as secularism has been one of the "fundamental and unchanging principles" guiding the Turkish Republic since its founding in 1923. It also has been the principle that has led to considerable domestic political tension. Over the years, political parties have emerged to challenge strict secularism and to seek to restore the country's Islamic identity to centrality. Each time, these parties have been banned from politics. The AKP, formed in 2001, has Islamist roots but claims a conservative democratic place along the political spectrum. The AKP won the 2002 national elections by a wide margin and the 2007 elections by a wider one, but its victories did not end secular-religious friction.

In 2007, the public prosecutor initiated a lawsuit to ban the AKP for being a "focal point of anti-secular activities,"<sup>1</sup> but the party survived. The authorities have since arrested many prominent secularists/ultranationalists and active and retired military officers for alleged plots intended to provoke the military to overthrow the government. The government initiated what became a contentious "Kurdish opening" to address the causes of a decades-long insurgency/terrorism. It also proposed constitutional reforms, several of which critics believe could alter Turkey's secular-religious balance and the balance among the branches of government. These dramas served to highlight a polarized political climate and a still evolving contest over power and identity. Each side has champions and opponents who disseminate conflicting interpretations of events. In some instances, the schism is blurred, as some secularists argue AKP's case in the name of democracy, while some AKP supporters question their leaders' actions. Nonetheless, the national rift is real.

The United States is concerned about Turkey's domestic political stability because Washington views it as a valued strategic partner and NATO ally and must deal with any government in power there. The George W. Bush Administration regarded Turkey favorably as one of the few predominantly Muslim democratic countries and an inspiration for other Muslims in the context of the war against radical Islamist terrorism. President Obama visited Turkey and congratulated Prime Minister Erdogan for his victory in the September 2010 constitutional referendum, but his Administration generally has been reluctant to wade into Turkey's domestic political maelstrom. Nonetheless, some in the Turkish secularist political opposition interpreted the Administration's repeated outreach to Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan as unquestioning support. While that interpretation probably is exaggerated, there are indications that the Administration may be reassessing relations in light of some AKP foreign policy positions that have challenged traditional U.S. expectations. The party's ability to adopt those policies may derive, at least partly, from its determined consolidation of its domestic strength.

---

<sup>1</sup> Turkish law refers to "ban," which also is commonly termed "closure." In the West, some would use the word "dissolution."

## Economic Context

While this report focuses on politics, the economy provides a critical context. Turkey has the world's 17<sup>th</sup>-largest economy and is a member of the G-20 group of major economies. The AKP government's predecessor had stabilized the financial system in the aftermath of a severe crisis in 2000-2001, which prompted major reforms with the help of a massive infusion of funds from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Those reforms included floating the currency, strengthening the banking system, and creating an independent central bank. The AKP has retained the policies then instituted and privatized some state economic enterprises (SEEs), although the state sector still is large. It has been credited with consecutive years of growth between 2002 and 2008, averaging 4% a year, during which time the gross domestic product (GDP) per capita doubled. Turkey rapidly overcame a setback due to the global economic downturn in 2009, which affected exports and employment. The economy registered a striking 11.7% growth rate in the first quarter of 2010 and 10.3% growth rate in the second quarter, with a forecast for the year of over 6% growth. (See **Table 2** at the end of the report for a fuller picture of the economy.) During the AKP's tenure, exports have increased markedly as the government has plumbed new markets in the region and beyond. The growth in trade has especially benefited core AKP constituents in small and mid-sized enterprises, who have shared their growing wealth with donations to the party and to groups that support it. As a result, the party's finances are believed to be sound and it has easily withstood financial penalties that a predominantly secularist court imposed for being "a focal point of anti-secular activities."

There are limitations to this otherwise positive economic portrait. Analysts view the soaring current account deficits (projected at an estimated 5% of GDP in 2010) as a potential risk to the economy.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, a large unregistered economy makes it difficult for the government to raise revenues. In July 2010, the government postponed plans to adopt a "fiscal rule" to require a budget deficit target of 1% of GDP. The IMF warned that the delay threatens a loss of international "credibility" and that spending is in excess of targets. Prime Minister Erdogan responded that the government had "escaped" from the IMF and claimed that its record of fiscal discipline showed that it did not need the fiscal rule.<sup>3</sup> The government's secure victory in the September 12 constitutional referendum may constrain a propensity for increased spending in the run-up to the 2011 national elections that could worsen the deficit.

## Demographic Snapshot<sup>4</sup>

Turkey's 78 million people are relatively young, with 26.9% of the population 14 years of age or younger. This contrasts markedly with countries in the European Union (EU), which Turkey aspires to join. The comparable figure for Germany is 13.5%; the United Kingdom, 16.5%; France, 18.6%; and Italy, 13.4%. Approximately 99.8% of the population is Muslim; the rest are Christians and Jews. Most Muslims are Sunni, but 10 million to 20 million are Alevi, which appears to be a combination of Sunnism, Shi'ism, and pre-Islamic beliefs. AKP followers are

---

<sup>2</sup> For additional background, see Refik Erzan, "Turkey's Economic Prospects: As Good as it Gets?," *International Economic Bulletin*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 29, 1010.

<sup>3</sup> "IMF Pushes Turkey for Budget Deficit Cut," *Haberturk*, September 8, 2010, Open Source Center (hereafter OSC) Document GMP20100909016009.

<sup>4</sup> Figures for all countries from CIA, *The World Factbook*, various dates.

overwhelmingly Sunni, while Alevis have long been among the strongest supporters of the secular state from which they derive protection from the Sunni majority.

The Turkish population also is literate, with 87% of the people, 95.3% of the men and 79.6% of the women, able to read and write.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the government is making an effort to educate more girls. These figures are higher than those of other large Muslim countries. Egypt has a 71.4% total literacy rate, with only 59.4% of its women able to read and write, while Iran, Turkey's neighbor, has a literacy rate of 77%, with 70.4% of women able to read and write.

The Turkish government uses its demographic profile to support a bid for EU membership, arguing that it would bring a young, dynamic population to the aging ranks of Europe.

## Historical Context

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk founded the modern Turkish Republic in 1923 out of the remnants of the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman sultans had enjoyed both temporal and spiritual power, acting simultaneously as heads of state and as Muslim caliphs. Atatürk decisively severed the link, banishing religion to the private sphere and propounding laicism or secularism as a founding principle of the state. He abolished the caliphate and *seriat* (Islamic law), replacing it with a European civil code, closed religious schools, banned religious brotherhoods, discouraged women from wearing the veil, and made Sunday instead of Friday the weekly day of rest. These revolutionary changes distinguished Turkey from other Muslim countries.

Yet, there has long been doubt about how deeply “Kemalist” changes penetrated society. Major urban centers in western Turkey were considered secularist strongholds, while people residing in the vast Anatolian sub-continent (Asia Minor) remained devout. In 1950, Adnan Menderes of the Democratic Party became the first democratically elected leader of Turkey, and he was more tolerant of religious practices. His campaign called for the restoration of the Arabic call to prayer, which Atatürk had banned. Once in office, Menderes reopened mosques and implied that parliament could reimpose *seriat*. Menderes was overthrown in a 1960 military coup and he and two of his ministers were subsequently hanged after what many considered a show trial. Civilian governments returned in 1961, but they generally proceeded cautiously with respect to religious affairs. (Another military junta took power for several years in 1980.) As noted above, there has been little toleration of religiously oriented political parties over the years.

In 1997, the military maneuvered a government coalition led by the Islamist Refah (Welfare) Party out of power. A successor government was unable to cope with a major financial crisis in 1999-2000 that severely harmed average Turks. Those in power were viewed as ineffective and many also were considered corrupt. In that atmosphere, a group of young rebels who had begun their political lives in Refah created the Justice and Development Party (AKP), a new political party that played down religion while striving to project a clean image as conservative democrats. They said that they supported Turkey's EU ambitions in order to transform the country into a truly modern state, but also probably because required reforms would ensure greater religious liberty and constrain the power of the military. In the fall 2002 election, Turkish voters broke from politicians of the past whom they held responsible for their economic plight and chose new

---

<sup>5</sup> CIA, *The World Factbook*, June 24, 2010.

leaders. AKP won a plurality of the vote and formed the first single party government in many years.

On September 17, 2010, following his victory in the September 12 constitutional referendum, AKP leader and Prime Minister Erdogan paid homage to Menderes and his colleagues when he laid a wreath at their tombs. (See “Constitutional Reforms,” below.) Erdogan said, “The Turkish nation has been commemorating these beloved people with gratitude and prayers for decades.” He described Menderes and the others as “martyrs of democracy” and asserted, “the torch of democracy lit by Menderes and his friends was carried at the highest level after passing from one hand to another, each passing day, eventually reached us.”<sup>6</sup>

## Political Situation

### The Lawsuit to Ban the AKP

A political crisis began in spring 2007, when the AKP-controlled parliament sought to elect then Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul as president of the republic.<sup>7</sup> Gul has roots in Turkey’s Islamist movement and his wife wears a head scarf, which secularists consider a symbol of both Islamism and backwardness. To secularists and Islamists alike, therefore, the country’s identity was tied to the selection of its president. Moreover, they argued that because the AKP already controlled the prime ministry and parliament (the Turkish Grand National Assembly), the balance of political power in the government would tilt in favor of Islamists if the party also assumed the presidency. A Turkish president is mainly a symbolic head of state, but he has significant powers of appointment as well as a bully pulpit. The crisis was temporarily resolved via early national elections on July 22, 2007, which the AKP won with a decisive 46.6% (usually rounded up as 47%) of the vote, enabling it to gain a strong majority in parliament. On August 28, the new legislature elected Gul president.

Secularist opponents continued to scrutinize the AKP government’s performance for Islamist tendencies, and a reprise of the crisis may have been expected. In December 2007, President Gul named an AKP-allied professor to head the Higher Education Board (YOK), disturbing some secularists.<sup>8</sup> They were even more provoked when, on January 14, 2008, Prime Minister Erdogan declared that the ban on women wearing the head scarf in all public institutions was “a serious problem in terms of freedom.”<sup>9</sup> The ban has been in effect for several decades. On February 9, following Erdogan’s lead, an overwhelming 411-vote majority in the 550-seat parliament passed two constitutional amendments to lift the ban on wearing head scarves on university campuses; President Gul ratified them on February 22.

On February 27, 2008, the opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP) and Democratic Left Party (DSP) filed suit in the Constitutional Court to overturn the new amendments. Then, on

---

<sup>6</sup> Fulya Ozerkan, “Turkish PM Commemorates Executed Former Leader with Visit,” *Hurriyet Daily News.com*, September 17, 2010.

<sup>7</sup> See CRS Report RL34039, *Turkey’s 2007 Elections: Crisis of Identity and Power*, by Carol Migdalovitz, and CRS Report RL34646, *Turkey: Update on Crisis of Identity and Power*, by Carol Migdalovitz, for background.

<sup>8</sup> YOK oversees state universities and traditionally has been viewed as a bastion of secularism.

<sup>9</sup> “Lifting the Headscarf Ban, Promoting Turkishness,” *Turkish Daily News*, January 15, 2008.

March 14, the chief public prosecutor of the Court of Appeals requested the Constitutional Court to ban the AKP and 71 of its leading members, including Erdogan, Gul, more than 40 members of parliament, and 11 mayors, from politics for becoming a “focal point of anti-secular activities.” Among other charges, the request cited parliament’s lifting of the head scarf ban in universities. The AKP held a 340-seat majority in the 550-seat parliament and, therefore, the prosecutor deemed it responsible for the action. He did not seek to indict the opposition Nationalist Action Party (MHP) or smaller parties which had joined the AKP to provide the super-majority required for parliament to amend the Constitution. The AKP defense claimed that lifting the ban was aimed at expanding freedoms and rejected the prosecutor’s allegations.

Many analysts considered the outlook for the AKP’s survival bleak, as the Constitutional Court was known to have a secularist majority. On June 5, the court ruled that parliament’s lifting of the ban on head scarves in universities was unconstitutional; the decision was widely viewed as a harbinger of a judgment on the AKP.

A seven-member super-majority out of 11 members was required to close the party. However, on July 30, only six judges voted to ban the party, providing the AKP with a narrow escape. Four others agreed that the party was a focal point for anti-secular activities, but not serious ones. Thus, 10 judges found the party guilty. Yet, lacking seven votes, the court only imposed a financial penalty that was no hardship for the AKP, whose private donors could readily compensate for the loss. No AKP officials were banned.

Some observers suggested that the court may have been influenced by the lack of a possible alternative government, given the absence of a serious political opposition at that time. Thus, the AKP benefited from what was seen as the ineffectiveness and lack of vision of the two main opposition parties, CHP and MHP. Neither has a party organization nor a level of grassroots support that can compete with the AKP. Under Deniz Baykal’s leadership, the CHP, the party of Ataturk, opposed government proposals without offering alternatives and may have lost its social democratic ideals.<sup>10</sup> Recent elections had shown that its constituents were mainly residents of cities along the Aegean coast. For his part, MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli supported lifting the head scarf ban and opposed banning the AKP, but maintained that AKP’s leaders, such as Prime Minister Erdogan, should be held responsible for illicit actions and subject to being banned from holding political office. Thus, Bahçeli transparently and opportunistically saw a route to possible greater personal political success via banning the most popular and charismatic politician in the country. A ban on the AKP might have produced an indefinite period of political instability or at least uncertainty and been devastating for the country’s economy. It also could have seriously harmed Turkey’s European Union prospects and perhaps its relations with other allies.

## **Aftermath**

In the months after the prosecutor proposed the ban, AKP leaders assiduously conducted business as usual in public, even though Ankara seemed frozen while awaiting the ruling. They refused to call supporters into the streets for protests, believing that a counter-reaction by security forces or opponents would exacerbate tensions and prove counterproductive. Shortly before the Court ruling, Prime Minister Erdogan reportedly admitted that “we made mistakes.”<sup>11</sup> However, he did

---

<sup>10</sup> This is the opinion of some in the CHP as well as others who have since left. See, e.g., “Turkey: Summary of Interview with CHP Leadership Candidate Haluk Koc,” *Milliyet*, April 21, 2008, OSC GMP20080421742001.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Ertugrul Ozkok, *Hurriyet*, July 26, 2008, OSC Document GMP20080726016007.



not repeat that admission after the ruling, when he denied that his party had ever been a focal point of anti-secular activities. After the judgment, AKP officials reaffirmed their commitment to an agenda of reforms and EU membership. President Gul called for “self-criticism and empathy,” saying, “in looking at our own errors, we at the same time have to place ourselves in the position of those opposed to us and try to understand the thinking and feelings of those against us.”<sup>12</sup>

Yet, AKP had not abandoned its desire to change society. On August 6, 2008, President Gul rejected 9 out of 21 nominees for university rector posts, reportedly because they had opposed the government on the head scarf issue. Instead, he chose others close to the AKP. Gul acted within his presidential authority, but some observers argued that he had proven unable to put himself—as he had proposed—in the position of the opposition and understand how it would react. He could not breach the country’s divide.

### *Ergenekon* and Other Alleged Plots<sup>13</sup>

As the AKP was surviving the attempt to ban it with greater confidence, a series of revelations of alleged coup plots besieged and weakened its more ardent opponents. On June 12, 2007, police raided an apartment in Istanbul and seized a cache of hand grenades, explosives, and fuses. The investigatory trail led to the arrests in January 2008 of prominent ultranationalists and secularists, including retired military officers, the head of a fringe political party, a university rector, the head of a non-governmental organization, businessmen, and journalists. On July 1, two retired four-star generals, additional retired military officers, the head of the Ankara Chamber of Commerce, and journalists were taken into custody. The arrests of generals of such high rank were unprecedented. The common denominator of those arrested appears to have been their opposition to the AKP and its ancestor, the Islamist Welfare (Refah) Party of the 1990s.

The first indictment proposed on July 14, 2008, requested that 86 individuals be charged with being members of an armed terrorist organization, attempting to overthrow the government by force, inciting people to armed insurgency, instigating the killing of a judge during a 2006 attack on the Council of State (the highest administrative court), and bombing of the *Cumhuriyet* newspaper in 2007, among other crimes.<sup>14</sup> The final first indictment was about 2,500 pages and included almost all sensational political crimes committed in Turkey in recent times. Critics have emphasized the length, excessiveness, and messiness of this and subsequent indictments. The case began to be heard in October 2008. In January 2009, there were additional arrests of senior officers, including three retired generals, a former head of the Higher Education Council (YOK), and the former chief prosecutor who had tried to get the AKP banned.

The terrorism charge used in *Ergenekon* and in other alleged coup plot cases described below enables the authorities to bypass the regular court system and use specially authorized courts for which the minister of interior names judges and prosecutors, thereby involving the AKP

---

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Hasan Cemal, *Milliyet*, August 2, 2008, OSC GMP20080802742001.

<sup>13</sup> The charged members of the alleged criminal organization are said to have referred to themselves as *Ergenekon*. *Ergenekon* means “steep mountain pass” and refers to the Turkish national myth: it was the route via which Turkish ancestors, following a gray wolf, escaped from Central Asia to freedom in Turkey to exact revenge on their enemies. All of the accused are known to have openly opposed the AKP.

<sup>14</sup> The prosecutor defined terrorism according to Turkey’s Counterterrorism Law 3713, as “actions undertaken with the aim of weakening, destroying, or seizing state authority, destroying the security of the state both at home and abroad, and destroying public order.”

government directly. No trials have concluded and no defendant has been convicted since *Ergenekon* and other suspected plots began to surface, although the length of time that has elapsed since the first detentions is not unusual in Turkey's legal system.

A second indictment, submitted in March 2009, ran over 1,900 pages, and charged 56 people with attempting to overthrow the government and possession of explosives and secret state documents. Diaries allegedly belonging to a retired admiral and a leftist journalist were presented as evidence amid other materials. The authorities controversially detained a number of academics and leaders of non-governmental organizations for their alleged involvement in the plot. A third indictment, submitted in August 2009, was more than 1,400 pages long and charged 52 suspects with a plot to kill the prime minister, among others. A fourth indictment, submitted in January 2010, was "only" 300 pages long and charged 17 naval officers, including two retirees, in connection with a large cache of arms found in April 2009 that was allegedly to be used to assassinate prosecutors of the *Ergenekon* plot.

In addition, a special prosecutor in Erzurum submitted an indictment in March 2010, naming 16 defendants including 3<sup>rd</sup> Army Commander General Saldiray Berk, an active duty four-star general, and the Chief Prosecutor for Erzincan who had been investigating the Gulen community, several gendarmerie officers, and intelligence officials. (See "Fethullah Gulen Movement" below for more on Gulen.) They also were charged with "membership in a terrorist organization," that is, *Ergenekon*, and intent to implement plans presented in earlier indictments. The group was alleged to have conspired to incriminate members of the Gulen community, among other acts. The plot has been called "The Action Plan to Fight Reactionaryism" as fundamentalism is called in Turkey. Then Chief of the General Staff General Ilker Basbug and Land Forces Commander General Isik Kosaner, who succeeded Basbug on August 30, 2010, defended General Berk and charged that the indictment was based on secret witnesses and on misinterpreted innocent military actions.

While the *Ergenekon* probe has been evolving, several other suspected plots have surfaced. The "Cage Operation" is alleged to have been a plan originating in the navy to undermine the government by assassinating prominent non-Muslims and bombing a museum while children were present. Blame for the crimes was to be cast on the AKP.

"Operation Sledgehammer," first reported in January 2010, is said to have been a high-level military plot to perpetrate a coup in 2003, not long after the AKP took power. It reportedly was an elaborate scheme to show that the AKP could not cope by bombing mosques, attacking museums, and creating military tensions with Greece, and thereby pave the way for a military intervention. A large number of active duty and retired military officers were arrested in connection with the plot. Retired 1<sup>st</sup> Army Commander General Cetin Dogan is alleged to have been the mastermind. Once again, AKP supporters accepted the veracity of the claims, but the general staff described the preparations as a 1<sup>st</sup> Army training seminar for dealing with possible domestic uprisings or threats.<sup>15</sup> Some journalists and other analysts who have carefully examined the evidence maintain that many documents used to support the case are forgeries or are flawed in other ways.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> "Turkish Army Spokesman Highlights Timing of Coup Plan Reports," Anatolia (the state news agency), January 22, 2010, BBC Monitoring European.

<sup>16</sup> Gareth Jenkins, *Between Fact and Fantasy: Turkey's Ergenekon Investigation*, Silk Road Paper, August 2009, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies and the Institute for Security and Development Policy, Dani Rodrik, "The Death of Turkey's Democracy; 'I No Longer Recognize the (continued...)"

The detentions provoked tensions as General Basbug convened a meeting of all serving full generals and admirals, sparking rumors of mass resignations. President Gul held an unusual meeting with Prime Minister Erdogan and General Basbug and issued a statement to reassure citizens. Former Deputy Chief of Staff General Ergin Saygun, former Air Force Commander General Ibrahim Firtina, and former Naval Commander Admiral Ozden Ornek were released from custody shortly thereafter. However, the 986-page indictment submitted on July 19 still names General Dogan as “mastermind” and Firtina, Ornek, and former Land Forces Commander Aytac Yalman, and other active duty generals and admirals as “suspects.”

Authorities also arrested military officers in connection with an alleged plot to assassinate Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Arinc. The investigation began after two of the officers were apprehended for acting suspiciously near Arinc’s home in December 2009. The general staff claimed that the officers were engaged in intelligence collection unrelated to Arinc.<sup>17</sup>

## Assessment

Turkey has a highly centralized government in which the interior minister, a member of the AKP government, controls and funds the police, and the justice minister has influence over aspects of the judiciary. Some analysts believe that the AKP is using *Ergenekon* and subsequent indictments to intimidate its opponents, especially in the military.<sup>18</sup> They claim that some allegations are derived from extensive police wiretapping and some are wildly inaccurate.<sup>19</sup> These observers suggest that leaks of wiretaps to pro-government media outlets are part of a disinformation campaign to boost the AKP’s fortunes and to help it ensnare well-known secularist opponents, and not just coup-plotters.<sup>20</sup> Former CHP Chairman Baykal argued that the *Ergenekon* charges are “fictitious” and asserted, “there is a suspicion in society that it is turning out to be a political revenge process rather than a legal process.”<sup>21</sup>

It is unknown if AKP or the Gulen Movement (see below) has devised *Ergenekon* for the purposes of revenge and intimidation. However, there has been considerable and convincing criticism of the conduct of the investigations, with practices such as defective search warrants, excessive reliance on wiretap evidence, prolonged detention without charge, and harsh treatment of those indicted.<sup>22</sup> There also have been accusations of planted evidence and forged documents and that “(d)eception at such a scale would be unimaginable without at least the implicit cooperation of members of the government.”<sup>23</sup> Some analysts suggest the police and prosecutors’ methods contradict European Union (EU) and international standards of justice and may

---

(...continued)

Country Where I was Raised,” *Wall Street Journal*, June 22, 2010.

<sup>17</sup> Statement of Office of the General Staff, December 23, 2009, OSC Document GMP20091223016002.

<sup>18</sup> Nicholas Birch, “Ataturk Veneration Challenged; Nationalists and Islamists Pursued by Prosecutors,” *Washington Times*, July 10, 2008, quoting a Turkish investigative journalist.

<sup>19</sup> Bulent Aliriza and Seda Ciftci, “Another Long Hot Summer in Ankara,” *Turkey Project Commentary*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, July 9, 2008.

<sup>20</sup> Gareth Jenkins, “Pro-AKP Media Steps up Disinformation Campaign Over *Ergenekon*,” <http://www.jamestown.org>, July 7, 2008.

<sup>21</sup> Hidir Goktas and Selcuk Gokuluk, “Plan for Coup in Turkey,” *The Gazette* (Montreal), July 4, 2008.

<sup>22</sup> See e.g., Riza Turman, “Waves of Arrests and Police Searches,” *Hurriyet Daily News.com*, April 21, 2009, Mehmet Ali Birand, “*Ergenekon* will Make Life Difficult for AKP,” *Hurriyet Daily News.com*, April 21, 2009.

<sup>23</sup> Dani Rodrik, Pinar Dogan, “Turkey’s Other Dirty War,” *The New Republic*, May 24, 2010.

undermine hope that the case would serve to reinforce Turkey’s democracy, rule of law, and path to the EU. The serial “revelations” are said to have produced a climate of fear among critics of the government, worried that they could be apprehended next based on innocuous or fictitious evidence. As yet, no AKP or government official is known to have criticized the manner in which the investigations are being conducted. To the contrary, Prime Minister Erdogan has repeatedly expressed support for the investigations and denied that they are a tool of the AKP.

Some observers see the alleged coup cases as a test of the ability of the civilian government to achieve supremacy over the military.<sup>24</sup> Mainly, they view the investigations as confronting the extra-governmental power of what has long been referred to as the “deep state.”<sup>25</sup> The “deep state” refers to like-minded members of the military, bureaucracy, and related elite who believe it their duty to safeguard the legacy of Ataturk and his vision for Turkey as a modern, secular state, and who, according to this theory, have controlled the country and manipulated the political system for 50 years. In that time, the military was responsible for two major coups d’état and several other actions that deposed civilian governments. Members of the network are said to feel most threatened by the AKP’s rise. This record of military interference or what its opponents describe as “tutelage” lends some credibility to *Ergenekon* and other alleged plots.

## 2009 Municipal Elections<sup>26</sup>

**Table I. Results of 2009 Municipal Elections**

Party	Orientation	Percent of Vote	Change <sup>a</sup>
Justice and Development Party (AKP)	Moderate Islamist/Centrist	38.1%	-7.8%
Republican People’s Party (CHP)	Nationalist Left	23.1%	+2.2%
Nationalist Action Party (MHP)	Nationalist Right	16.1%	+1.8%
Democratic Society Party (DTP)	Kurdish	5.6%	b
Felicity Party (SP)	Islamist	5.2%	+2.4%

- a. From 2007 national election.
- b. DTP did not compete as a party in 2007 because of the 10% of the vote threshold for parties to enter parliament. Instead, it worked around that obstacle by sponsoring independent candidates and won 20 seats.

The March 2009 local elections for mayors and provincial councils may have been a wake-up call for the AKP and dispelled the notion that its continued domination of Turkish politics is inevitable. Although it placed first with 39% of the vote, won the most municipalities, and scored victories nationwide, the party’s total vote was less than the 46.6% it had registered in 2007 and its strength was mainly in Anatolia. Moreover, the combined vote of the opposition parties was greater than the AKP’s. Voter turnout was normally high at 80%. CHP was said to have run a more issue-oriented campaign than in 2007, when it sounded anti-religious. It won most of the provinces along the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas. DTP retrieved its followers from AKP,

<sup>24</sup> Omer Taspinar, “A Rotten Year for the Military,” *Today’s Zaman* online, January 4, 2010.

<sup>25</sup> See, e.g., Oral Calislar, “Bitterness Against AKP Shouldn’t Blind Us to *Ergenekon*,” *Turkish Daily News*, July 16, 2008.

<sup>26</sup> For an analysis of the election, see Eser Sekercioglu, “Turkey’s March 2009 Elections: Loss Without Defeat, Gain Without Victory,” *Middle East Review of International Affairs* (MERIA), Vol. 13, No. 2, June 2009.

which had polled well in the predominantly Kurdish southeast in 2007 and had tried to woo the populace there. Instead, the Kurds asserted their ethnic identity by choosing DTP, a party whose mission was to defend that identity. Elsewhere, nationalist parties may have gained some traction from popular reaction to the unending war with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Some moderates, who supported the AKP when it was under siege in 2007, were said to have become disenchanted with the AKP's flagging support for democratizing EU reforms. In addition, some Islamists may have been repelled by an incipient stench of corruption afflicting AKP and asserted their identity with SP, which had acquired new leaders since 2007.

While the election results were largely attributed to the economic downturn and the opposition's choice of more effective candidates,<sup>27</sup> analysts also suggested that some voters were wary of giving the AKP and its combative and somewhat authoritarian leader, that is, Prime Minister Erdogan, monopolistic power.<sup>28</sup> Others simply may have become tired of a government that had been in power for seven years.

## Cabinet Changes

The municipal elections produced a cabinet shake-up. On May 1, 2009, Prime Minister Erdogan implemented major changes to renew his government by changing almost half of his ministers. Most of those replaced represented districts where the AKP had fared badly in the vote. Portfolios affected dealt mainly with the economy and foreign policy, but other significant ones took on new leaders as well. The prime minister anointed former speaker and fellow AKP founder Bulent Arinc as first deputy prime minister. Arinc's appointment was seen as an effort to stanch the rise of or undermine the SP because he is associated with the orientation of National View or *Milli Gorus* that characterized AKP's precursor, the more Islamist Refah Party.<sup>29</sup> Balancing that move, advocate of girls' education and former member of the CHP Nimet Cubukcu was named the first woman minister of education, replacing a fervid advocate of Islamic education.<sup>30</sup> Ali Babacan, who some had considered out of his depth as foreign minister, became another deputy prime minister and returned to his métier with oversight of ministries related to the economy. Meanwhile, Ahmet Davutoglu, the academic influential advisor to President Gul and Prime Minister Erdogan and architect of AKP's foreign policy, emerged from the shadows for the public role of foreign minister.

## Constitutional Reforms

In 2010, the AKP government proposed to amend the 1982 constitution, which had been written under the auspices of a military junta and has since been amended many times. The government asserted that the changes were needed in order to pave the way for European Union membership

---

<sup>27</sup> Turkey registered a growth rate of only 1.1% in 2008 and unemployment was 15.8% in March 2009, at the time of the election. "Turkish Economy Growth 1.1 pct in 2008," Xinhua News Agency, March 31, 2009, and "Turkey's Unemployment Rate Rises to 14.5% in Jan 2010," Anatolia, April 15, 2010, OSC Document GMP20100415788015.

<sup>28</sup> Soli Ozel, "The Electorate's Tune-Up," *On Turkey*, the German Marshall Fund of the United States (hereafter GMF), March 31, 2009.

<sup>29</sup> Amberin Zaman, "Turkey's Cabinet Reshuffle: Another Balancing Act," *On Turkey*, GMF, May 11, 2009.

<sup>30</sup> The role of women in the government and bureaucracy reportedly has otherwise been diminishing statistically since AKP came to power. Soner Cagaptay and Rueya Perincek, "Women's Diminishing Power in Turkey," *Hurriyet Daily News.com*, May 24, 2010.

and to create a modern and advanced democracy. The EU has advocated many of the reforms and has pressed Turkey to adopt a completely new constitution.

Many of the 27 proposed amendments were in fact democratizing, such as ones to create an ombudsman, and to improve the rights of children, elderly, women, the disabled, labor unions, civil servants, and to privacy. Other changes would allow the trial of military officers who took power via the September 1980 coup and enable the trial of military personnel in civilian courts for non-military crimes.<sup>31</sup> The most controversial reforms were amendments to add judges to the Constitutional Court, change the makeup of the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK), which appoints judges and prosecutors, and make it more difficult to ban parties. The court was to be enlarged from 11 members to 17, with the president gaining power to appoint most and parliament, where AKP holds sway, the remainder; members' terms would be limited to 12 years; and the court's jurisdiction would be limited. Meanwhile, HSYK would be enlarged from 7 members to 21 and the minister of justice would gain more control over it.

The AKP clearly intended to exert greater influence over both judicial bodies. Professor Ilter Turan suggested that Prime Minister Erdogan is “inclined to think that a party enjoying a parliamentary majority should reign unconstrained by other institutions.”<sup>32</sup> Other critics accused the government of attacking the independence of and politicizing the judiciary, seeking to destroy the separation of powers and checks and balances, and weaken a last bastion of secularist opposition. The AKP denied the accusations and maintained that the changes would make the functioning of the judicial system similar to that of some EU member states. Omer Taspinar of the Brookings Institution observed that the judiciary heretofore has not been truly independent anyway, as it primarily has served secularism.<sup>33</sup>

Parliament—in essence, 336 AKP members—agreed to all but one of the proposed amendments, voting down the one making it more difficult to ban political parties. Ironically, that amendment failed mainly because several AKP members said to be nationalists were concerned about the loss of the ban as a weapon against allegedly separatist Kurdish political parties even though the amendment also would have shielded the AKP. President Gul approved the package of amendments on May 12. The AKP submitted the 26 amendments that passed parliament with less than the 367 votes needed to avoid a referendum as a single package, not individually, to a September 12 national vote.

Democratization advocates were disappointed that the AKP did not propose an entirely new constitution and that the proposed amendments did not advance the rights of ethnic or religious groups and of free expression, lower the 10% of the vote threshold for a party to enter parliament, require political parties to hold primaries in order to end party leaders' inordinate control, or limit legislators' immunity. Other critics charged that submitting the amendments as a package for a referendum resembled methods used in authoritarian regimes. The (Kurdish) Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) had indicated willingness to support changes if they included a lowering of the 10% of the vote threshold for parties to enter parliament, which has long been an obstacle

---

<sup>31</sup> Due to the probable expiration of the statute of limitations, none of the perpetrators of the coup may be prosecuted. Moreover, General Kenan Evren, head of the 1980 junta, is now 93 years of age. The amendment appeared to be a ploy to get the opposition CHP, which was ousted from power in 1980, to support the package of amendments. It did not work.

<sup>32</sup> Ilter Turan, “A Background to the Constitutional Referendum: Reinforcing the Politics of Polarization,” *On Turkey*, GMF, August 30, 2010.

<sup>33</sup> Omer Taspinar, “Judicial Independence and Democracy in Turkey,” *Today's Zaman* Online, July 13, 2010.

for Kurdish parties. As the amendments did not address that issue, the BDP members did not vote for them. CHP deputies did not attend the votes, and MHP members voted against amendments.

CHP and 14 other members of parliament applied to the Constitutional Court to annul the entire package of amendments, arguing that it contravenes the immutable Article 2 of the present constitution, which defines Turkey as “a democratic, secular, and social state governed by the rule of law,” etc.<sup>34</sup> The court had the prerogative to annul individual amendments or the entire package. On July 7, it annulled parts of the amendments dealing with the court and the HSYK. While upholding increasing the number of members of both bodies, it opposed limiting the legal establishment’s role in the selection of candidates for the court and thereby expanding the president’s power of appointment. It also opposed expanding the pool of candidates for the HSYK beyond the legal profession, which might have made it easier for the AKP to pack that body. The remainder of those two amendments and rest of the package were submitted to the referendum.

The AKP was satisfied that its reforms survived the court review with only minor changes. As Deputy Prime Minister and former Justice Minister Cemil Cicek observed, “the constitutional package is pretty good even in its new form.”<sup>35</sup> AKP, SP, and the small Islamist Grand Unity Party (BBP) campaigned for a “yes” vote in the referendum. MHP and CHP campaigned for a “no” vote. CHP continued to argue that the amendments would politicize the judiciary. BDP said that it would boycott the vote because the changes ignored the Kurds’ concerns. An EU endorsement of the constitutional changes may have undermined the opposition description of them. The Office of the EU Commissioner for Enlargement called the measures “a positive step in the right direction as it addresses a number of shortcomings which the EU has identified over the years.”<sup>36</sup>

The referendum campaign disappointed as neither side focused on the substance of the amendments, leaving many voters ill-informed. Instead, Prime Minister Erdogan and CHP leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu engaged in a nasty, divisive personal battle and dwelt on unrelated policy issues, such as a general amnesty for the PKK and negotiating with the terrorist group. Erdogan raised fears about his future conduct when he appeared to threaten non-governmental organizations which chose to remain neutral with regard to the referendum and described opponents of the amendments as “supporters of the (1980) military coup.” The campaign transmogrified into a vote of confidence on Erdogan and possible preview of the next national elections.

Despite predictions of a close vote, a much larger than expected 58.45% majority approved the amendments, while 41.54% disapproved of them. The participation rate was 77% in a peaceful climate. However, regional differences were strong and evidenced continuing polarization of society. Most of Anatolia voted yes; most of the Mediterranean and Aegean coasts and Thrace (the part of Turkey that is geographically part of Europe) voted no; and much of the southeast did not vote. Erdogan hailed the result as a victory for democracy. It certainly was a personal victory for him and for the AKP, which increased its share of the vote from the 2009 municipal elections. CHP also appears to have increased its share, but it did not increase its vote in the southeast

---

<sup>34</sup> Yusuf Kanli, “Indecent Offer,” *Hurriyet Daily News*. com, April 27, 2010.

<sup>35</sup> “AK Party Hopeful, Opposition Vows to Vote Against Package,” *Today’s Zaman* Online, July 9, 2010.

<sup>36</sup> Carol Malouf, “Turkey’s Democratic Revolution,” *McClatchy-Tribune Business News*, July 12, 2010.

despite Kilicdaroglu's campaign there. MHP suffered major defections to the yes position, as it lost many municipalities that it controls.

Almost immediately after the results were announced, Erdogan announced plans for implementing legislation and to draft a new constitution for approval after the national elections. Interior Minister Besir Atalay declared, "a way has been opened now to help us to a more radical change in our constitution and change it entirely."<sup>37</sup> The chairman of the parliamentary Constitutional Commission (or committee) is considered an expert on presidential systems, which the prime minister is known to prefer. The kind of system that is adopted may be the final test of AKP's dedication to democracy and its view of the identity of the state.

## **Role of the Military**

The Turkish military views itself as the guarantor of the Turkish Republic and protector of its secular identity, and has overtly intervened in the political process at least five times since 1960, including two coups. Civilian leaders have heretofore had limited control over the military. The general staff is not subordinate to the minister of defense; the chief of staff reports to the prime minister. For years, the military practically chose its own chief of staff by submitting a name for appointment. The name was that of the land forces commander.

Yet, during the crises over the possible closure of the AKP and the *Ergenekon* affair, the military commanders were restrained, aside from calling for caution and respect for the law. They may not have recovered from a bungled attempt to prevent President Gul's election by means of a warning notice that then Chief of the General Staff Yasar Buyukanit posted on the general staff's website on April 27, 2007, described by some as an attempted "e-coup."<sup>38</sup> That action was counterproductive, as it helped bring about early national elections, contributed to the AKP victory in the 2007 elections by generating sympathy for it as an underdog confronting the powerful military, and produced Gul's election.

Thus, the military may have been content to let secularist allies in the judicial bureaucracy take the lead in the effort to eliminate the AKP. After the party survived its judicial test, the military commanders verbally reasserted their oversight role and dedication to secularism at the change of command ceremony on August 30, 2007, in the presence of President Gul and Prime Minister Erdogan. Incoming Land Forces Commander General Isik Kosaner, who became chief of staff on August 30, 2010, forthrightly stated, "protection of fundamental characteristics of the republic cannot be considered intervention in domestic politics." Then new Chief of the General Staff General Ilker Basbug communicated the same message, but with more subtlety. He confirmed, "the Turkish Armed Forces is always involved as a party when it comes to safeguarding and protecting the underlying philosophy of the Republic of Turkey," noting, "the principle of secularism is one of the pillars of the underlying philosophy of the Republic." Basbug also quoted Article 24 of the constitution, which stipulates that religion should not be exploited for political benefit.<sup>39</sup> He recommended that it was essential for social peace that those concerned about the growing influence of religious ideas on the country's cultural identity be taken seriously.

---

<sup>37</sup> "Referendum Opened Way for More Radical Change in Constitution, Interior Minister," *Anatolia*, September 14, 2010, BBC Monitoring European, September 15, 2010.

<sup>38</sup> Elif Safak, "It is Not Easy to Be a Turk," *Turkish Daily News*, May 12, 2007.

<sup>39</sup> Speech delivered by Turkish Chief of the General Staff Gen. Ilker Basbug at an inaugural ceremony held on August (continued...)



The military has not followed its rhetoric with action. Some analysts suggest that it has been intimidated by the *Ergenekon* and other prosecutions and, therefore, is reluctant to challenge the AKP directly. Others observe that the AKP has proven its popularity at the ballot box repeatedly and there has been no public demand for military intervention. Moreover, until recently, there have been no credible alternatives to AKP rule, so its removal might have produced a period of instability that could derail the considerable economic progress that Turkey has made in the past decade. Thus, the military's own patriotism may have constrained any desire to overthrow the government.

For its part, the AKP has gradually chipped away at the military's power. Early on, it deprived the general staff of the chairmanship of the National Security Council, giving the post to a civilian. In 2009, parliament passed a law granting jurisdiction over civilian crimes committed by members of the military to civilian courts. (The Constitutional Court overturned the law in January 2010, but AKP revived the idea as a constitutional amendment in the package that passed in September.) As noted, critics of AKP rule believe that the investigations into *Ergenekon* and other alleged coup plots for which retired and active duty members of the armed forces have been detained is serving as a weapon to tame the military. Media leaks about *Ergenekon* and the other plots also reveal possible fissures within the previously presumed united ranks of the armed forces, as some journalists suggest that only those in the military could be sources of the revelations. Finally, in February 2010, the government abolished the Protocol on Cooperation for Security and Public Order (EMASYA), which allowed the military to intervene in domestic security matters on its own initiative. It had been signed in the aftermath of the military's 1997 ouster of a civilian government led by AKP's more Islamist predecessor. EMASYA's demise was a byproduct of the "Sledgehammer" Plot, in which military elements reportedly planned to create a climate of insecurity in order to justify another military intervention. Chief of Staff General Basbug said that the protocol was no longer needed.

Although the general staff is cooperating with the police by allowing searches of military residences and the seizure of documents, its responses indicate that it may be unable to contend with the barrage of media leaks from the investigation.<sup>40</sup> In June 2009, General Basbug first charged that an "asymmetric psychological operation" was being waged against the Turkish Armed Forces via the media and that there was an organized "campaign to discredit and slander" them.<sup>41</sup> He voiced similar concerns on additional occasions, and new Chief of Staff General Kosaner has echoed that anxiety. It is a sign of the military's diminishing power that these remarks have not stopped the legal and media onslaught.

The government played its strongest card against the military at the August 2010 meetings of the Supreme Military Council (YAS), which decides military promotions. In a landmark development, Prime Minister Erdogan and President Gul exerted civilian control over the military

---

(...continued)

28, 2008, text on website of the Office of the Chief of the General Staff, OSC Document, GMP20080828734009. A more complete Basbug quote from Article 24 was "nobody should exploit or abuse any religion or religious feelings or things that are regarded as sacred with a view to basing the basic social, economic, political, and legal systems or any part of them on religious rules or deriving political or personal benefit or clout..."

<sup>40</sup> Some view the cooperation with the police as a sign that some in the military command may be trying to get rid of undemocratic elements. However, this notion may be yet another conspiracy theory produced in an atmosphere conducive to them.

<sup>41</sup> General Iker Basbug News Conference on Plot Allegations, Anatolia, June 26, 2009, BBC Monitoring European, June 28, 2009.

by not rubber stamping recommendations of the military commanders. Two days before the YAS session, AKP allies in the judiciary charged with prosecuting the alleged coup plots appeared to aid the government. An Istanbul court hearing the Sledgehammer case (above) issued arrest warrants for 102 officers, including 11 generals and admirals whose future service the YAS was to determine. (The warrants would be annulled on August 7.) Some journalists perceived political motivation in the timing of the arrests, as the trial is not scheduled until December.<sup>42</sup> Gul and Erdogan would not approve promotions of those subject to arrest, including 1<sup>st</sup> Army Commander General Hasan Igsiz, who was expected to become land forces commander and next in line to be chief of staff but was called to testify in the Sledgehammer case. In addition, Gul opposed retiring officers and thereby infringing on their rights before the judicial process ran its course. Thus, YAS did not announce the appointments of land forces commander and chief of the general staff as per usual practice on the fourth day of meetings. Gul and Erdogan withheld approval of the chief of staff until the land forces commander was decided, thereby denying the incoming chief of staff of influence over the latter appointment.

Commander of the Gendarmerie General Atilla Isik reportedly was the government's choice for land forces instead of Igsiz, but he unexpectedly decided to retire early and not to take a post denied his comrade. In the end, a compromise was reached. General Erdal Ceylanoglu was named land forces commander to serve for one year before reaching mandatory retirement, at which time General Necdet Ozel will succeed him and be in line to become chief of staff in 2013. Finally, General Isik Kosaner was named the new chief of staff as expected.

## **Kurdish Issue**

Kurds represent between 15% and 20% of the Turkish populace and have long struggled to claim their own identity in a majority Turkish state. However, they do not constitute a recognized minority, as Turkey only recognizes groups named in the 1923 Lausanne Treaty as minorities, that is, Greek Orthodox, Armenians, and Jews. Because of a resulting perception of minorities as "others," Kurdish politicians do not seek "minority rights" when they state their demands. Instead, they voice them in terms of group or constitutional rights. Most Kurds trace their origins to the impoverished southeast of the country, which still is predominantly Kurdish, but many have migrated to major urban centers elsewhere.

Since 1984, the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which the U.S.-State Department designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) in 1996, has waged a guerrilla war against Turkish security forces mainly in southeast Turkey and engaged in urban terrorism elsewhere in the country. In 1999, PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan was captured and sentenced to life in prison on the island of Imrali in the Sea of Marmara and the insurgency abated temporarily. However, the PKK took advantage of the chaos in Iraq after the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003 to establish safe havens in northern Iraq, from which it has since launched attacks against Turkey.

Since 2007, the United States military has provided "active intelligence" to Turkish counterparts, leading to more targeted operations against the PKK. Turkish commanders have expressed satisfaction with this cooperation. These operations, as well as increased cooperation with the Iraqi government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in northern Iraq, may have gradually provided Ankara with some sense of security needed to address the concerns of

---

<sup>42</sup> Yusuf Kanli, "Domesticating the Military," *Hurriyet Daily News.com*, August 5, 2010.

Turkey's Kurds. The combination of military escalation and government measures affected the PKK, which unilaterally declared a cease-fire in 2009. The declaration had little meaning, however, as intermittent PKK attacks on soldiers continued to occur. PKK military leader Murat Karayilan, who is based in northern Iraq, claimed that the group was no longer seeking independence, only autonomy. But this, and his demand for a separate regional parliament, similar to those in Scotland and Wales, run counter to Turkey's constitutional definition of a unitary state.

From 2005, when Prime Minister Erdogan delivered a major speech to Kurds in the southeast city of Diyarbakir, until 2007, the AKP government emphasized socioeconomic development of the region and reaped benefits from these policies in terms of votes in the 2007 national election. However, it also may have raised expectations that it would next address cultural identity issues, which it did not do. Perhaps as a result, AKP's showing in the southeast in the 2009 municipal elections was poor, as DTP reclaimed many municipalities.

Over the years, Kurds repeatedly have endeavored to participate in Turkey's political system legally via the formation of political parties. Yet, none of these parties has distanced itself from or condemned the PKK, as the parties and the terrorist group share the same goals and believe that they serve the same community. Therefore, the courts have banned each party for alleged links to the PKK. Most recently, the Democratic Society Party (DTP) was represented in parliament until December 2009. It had an ambitious agenda: constitutional protection of Kurdish cultural rights and language, what it called "democratic autonomy" or strengthening local administrations in the southeast, abolition of the system of village guards (local militias set up by the state to help the military fight the PKK), improvement of Ocalan's prison conditions, and a general amnesty for the PKK. Not unexpectedly, in November 2007, the prosecutor asked the Constitutional Court to ban the DTP and 221 of its members, including 18 members of parliament, for being in conflict with the indivisible integrity of the territory of the state and supporting the PKK. Shortly after the March 2009 municipal elections, security forces detained many DTP leaders and members.

A political calculus to position the AKP better for the next national elections after the 2009 municipal results may have spurred the government to launch what has been called a "Kurdish opening." The government said that the initiative was aimed at undermining support for the PKK and finally ending the decades-long conflict. The move also may have been inspired by U.S. plans to withdraw from Iraq and by Turkey's improved relations with the Kurdish administration in northern Iraq. On July 29, 2009, Interior Minister Atalay announced a "democratization" initiative. He said that he would seek a national consensus to shape measures to be undertaken by consulting political parties, non-governmental groups, and others. However, the government never discussed specific proposals or sought a consensus with its interlocutors.

The nationalist opposition rapidly succeeded in defining the initiative in the public space. The CHP and MHP charged that the government was negotiating with terrorists because of its willingness to talk to the DTP, which they maintained was the same as the PKK. MHP leader Bahçeli accused the government of engaging in a "treasonous project," and then CHP head Baykal charged that the government was "trying to prevent terrorism by inciting ethnic division."<sup>43</sup> Baykal said that he would oppose partial autonomy and initiatives that would

---

<sup>43</sup> "Opposition sets Red Lines, Incurs Gov't Wrath," *Hurriyet Daily News.com*, August 10, 2009, "Erdogan Makes Emotional Appeal for Unity on Kurdish Initiative," *Today's Zaman* online, August 12, 2009, Murat Yetkin, "We Will Not Be Fellow Travelers in This Affair," *Radikal*, September 6, 2009, BBC Monitoring European, September 7, 2009."

introduce ethnicity into the education system, that is, instruction in Kurdish language. Both parties refused to meet with Atalay.

Chief of the General Staff General Basbug took a more nuanced approach. He had previously acknowledged that there is no military solution to the Kurdish problem, yet he quoted Article 3 of the Constitution which states, “The Turkish state ... is an indivisible whole. Its language is Turkish,” which appeared to eliminate regional autonomy and recognition of the Kurdish language as possible aspects of the initiative. Basbug also declared, “the Turkish armed forces cannot engage in any activity which might lead to the establishment of relations with the (PKK) terrorist organization or its supporters.” Yet, he expressed support for “measures in the economic, socio-cultural, and international areas,” thereby suggesting that the military was not completely opposed to the government’s initiative.<sup>44</sup>

The “Kurdish opening” suffered a severe setback in October 2009, when 8 PKK members and 26 other Kurds returned to Turkey from a refugee camp in northern Iraq to a heroes’ welcome in Diyarbakir, the regional capital of southeastern Turkey. Thousands of Kurds shouted slogans in support of the PKK and of Abdullah Ocalan as if it were a victory celebration. The televised images outraged many Turks because of the PKK’s long record of terrorism. Prime Minister Erdogan described the events as a “crisis of confidence” and repeatedly blamed the DTP for the demonstration and for upsetting the process.<sup>45</sup> The government halted the arrival of additional groups from Iraq and most of the returnees were imprisoned.

These developments did not completely deter the government, although the initial steps it announced as part of the initiative, retitled the “democratic overture,” were modest. As stated in November 2009, they included establishment of an independent human rights institution and a commission to combat discrimination; parliamentary ratification of the U.N. Convention Against Torture; a national mechanism to prevent torture; establishment of an independent body to receive and investigate accusations of torture and mistreatment by the security forces; renaming areas in line with demands from local residents (i.e., restoration of Kurdish names for villages that had been renamed in Turkish); and freedom for political parties to communicate in languages other than Turkish.

The government did not describe the measures as serving a specific group, that is, the Kurds. Interior Minister Atalay said that they were part of a “dynamic process” and not a final list. There was no amnesty for Ocalan or PKK militants, no federalism, and no raising of Kurdish to the level of an official language. In other words, the government did not propose changes to constitutional provisions mandating the unitary state or the official language (Turkish). As of this date, the government has not implemented its limited proposals.

Meanwhile, DTP chose to champion ending Ocalan’s alleged ill-treatment in prison as a condition for supporting the “Kurdish opening” and called for a government dialogue with Ocalan, whom it considered essential to a solution of the Kurdish issue. DTP leader Ahmet Turk described the government’s proposals as “some minor steps which will have no significance.”<sup>46</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> “Victory Week Message by General Staff Chief General Ilker Basbug,” Office of the Chief of the General Staff, August 25, 2009, OSC Document GMP20090825788006.

<sup>45</sup> “The Return of PKK Members from Europe Postponed,” NTV Online, October 24, 2009, OSC Document GMP20091024017003.

<sup>46</sup> “We will not Obstruct this Process,” Interview with Ahmet Turk, *Milliyet*, November 16, 2009, BBC Monitoring (continued...)

In December, seven soldiers were killed in a PKK attack in Tokat. Then, the Constitutional Court unanimously voted to ban DTP and 37 members, including Ahmet Turk, from participating in politics for five years. Turk and Aysel Tugluk, his deputy leader, also were expelled from parliament. Shortly thereafter, some 200 Kurdish politicians were arrested in the southeast. Other DTP members of parliament joined the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), which has 20 members of parliament and Selahattin Demirtas and Gulden Kisanek as co-chairmen. Demirtas has expressed interest in working with the government to find a solution.<sup>47</sup> He denies that there is an organic link between the BDP and PKK, but notes that the PKK is a reality with an important constituency in the southeast, where BDP (DTP) receives its 2.5 million votes, and must be an important actor for solution to the Kurdish problem. Demirtas has suggested that “Kurd” need not be mentioned in the constitution, but that it should be “the Constitution of the Turkish citizens,” not the Turkish nation. He also wants the constitution to allow education in a mother tongue without supplanting the compulsory teaching of Turkish.<sup>48</sup> In addition, he calls for the establishment of regional assemblies to legislate on local issues, such as education and the economy. He insists that the BDP is the interlocutor for cultural, political, and economic dimensions of the Kurdish issue, and that only Ocalan can end the armed struggle. Police have arrested dozens of BDP members, administrators, and mayors from the southeast who are part of the Assembly of Communities of Kurdistan (KCK), which has alleged connections to the PKK. In February 2010, a prosecutor launched an investigation into the BDP, which may pave the way for yet another party closure.

While no longer in parliament, Ahmet Turk still is the most prominent Kurdish politician. In August 2010, he became co-chairman of the Democratic Society Congress (DTK), with Tugluk as his co-chair. DTK is an umbrella organization of Kurdish parties and actors that is an influential forum and appears to act as a superior to the BDP. It has called for a “reciprocal cease-fire.” Ahmet Turk also calls for lowering the threshold to enter parliament to at least 5% and for the release of local leaders and others from prison, where they have been held without trial.<sup>49</sup>

In the spring of 2010, the PKK again escalated its attacks, and Turkish warplanes responded with bombing raids against the group’s strongholds in northern Iraq. In late May, the PKK killed seven naval servicemen in Iskenderun—outside its usual areas of operation. On June 19, more than 200 PKK terrorists assaulted a mobile military unit in Semdinli, near the Iraq border, killing 9 soldiers and injuring 14. Two others died and two were injured in pursuit of the perpetrators. Then, a PKK front group claimed credit for bombing a military bus in Istanbul, killing 5 and injuring 11. Officials also believe that the PKK was responsible for an explosion on a natural gas pipeline near the Iraqi border in July, although company officials indicated that the cause was not determined. Observers noted that, as opposed to its past acts of terrorism, the PKK did not target civilians. Prime Minister Erdogan charged that the PKK was trying to sabotage “the economic, social, and democratic improvement process,” but others suggested the group may be attempting to fill the void created by the lack of real government action on its initiative.<sup>50</sup> Most analysts

---

(...continued)

European, November 17, 2009.

<sup>47</sup> Comments at Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, May 4, 2010.

<sup>48</sup> Safak Timur, “Pro-Kurdish Leader sees Dawn to Follow Political Midnight in Turkey,” *Hurriyet Daily News.com*, June 29, 2010.

<sup>49</sup> “I Prefer ‘Yes’ from a Conscientious and Ethical Standpoint,” interview with Ahmet Turkey by Cemal Kalyoncu and Ayse Adli, *Sunday’s Zaman Online*, September 5, 2010, OSC Document GMP20100905788004.

<sup>50</sup> “Turkish Premier says PKK a Tool for Plots Against Turkey,” *Anatolia*, June 20, 2010, BBC Monitoring European.

agree that the government's Kurdish opening is closing despite the government's assertions that "the democratic overture is continuing."

In July 2010, Erdogan invited selected political parties to discuss terrorism. MHP and BDP were noticeably not among the invitees because the prime minister claimed that they exploit terrorist attacks for their political interests. This led some to question the sincerity of the government's desire for non-military solution to the Kurdish issue because representatives of two significant antagonists were missing.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, as nationalist anti-PKK sentiment has risen, the government has focused increasingly on use of armed force, such as calling for the deployment of professional soldiers along the border, while retaining its advocacy of a multifaceted approach.

There were fears that an escalation in ethnic violence was beginning. In July, nationalists and Kurds clashed in the streets of a town in southeast Turkey after four policemen were killed in an alleged PKK attack. Then, large-scale street battles between Turks and Kurds occurred in the northwestern province of Bursa. Some analysts attributed the widening tensions, especially in the west, to greater public discussion of ethnicity and identity and to a pre-election period in which all groups seek to make their marks. The violence was unlikely to be conducive for even modest government measures, much less for more dramatic ones that might satisfy Kurds' ambitions designed to gain greater official recognition of their demands regarding identity issues. However, in August, the PKK announced a cease-fire for the month of Ramadan. As it was set to expire, a bomb killed nine and wounded four civilians, including two children, in the southeast province of Hakkari on September 17. The government blamed the PKK, but the group disavowed responsibility and some reports implicated a dissenting PKK faction.<sup>52</sup> The PKK subsequently extended the cease-fire.

## Press Freedom

The U.S. State Department and the European Union have long criticized Turkey for imposing legal limitations on freedom of expression. Increasing pro-government groups' acquisition of formerly more independent media outlets and constraints on press freedom in particular have raised questions about Prime Minister Erdogan's and the AKP government's commitment to democratic values and whether they are attempting to squelch opposition voices. According to the annual State Department report on human rights practices in Turkey in 2009, "individuals in many cases could not criticize the state or government publicly without risk of criminal suits or government investigations."<sup>53</sup> This particular criticism did not appear in the previous State reports and may have resulted from the investigation and detention of journalists known to be ardent secularists and critics of the AKP in the *Ergenekon* probe.

Moreover, pro-government forces, with family or business connections to Erdogan, have acquired control of the second-largest media conglomerate in the country. In 2007, state banking regulators took over and then sold, with the assistance of generous loans from state banks, the Ciner

---

<sup>51</sup> Rusen Cakir, "Let us say the Professional Army was a Success," *Vatan Online*, July 15, 2010.

<sup>52</sup> "Interior Minister Atalay: All Findings in the Hakkari Blast Point to Similar Attacks by the Organization to Date, *Anatolia*, September 17, 2010, OSC Document GMP20100918016008, "Deep PKK Responsible for Land Mine Attack, Officials Say," *Anatolia*, OSC Document 20100918017004.

<sup>53</sup> U.S. State Department, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 2009 *Country Report on Human Right Practices*, March 11, 2010.

publishing group to a company whose chief economic officer is the prime minister's son-in-law. Its large circulation daily, *Sabah*, subsequently became another voice supportive of the government. Similarly loyal companies may now control about half of the media in the country. The other half may be considered independent or opposition in orientation.

The case of the Dogan Media Group, the largest media conglomerate not controlled by government allies, may be a prime example of Erdogan's sensitivity to criticism and of dangers to press freedom. Dogan owns seven newspapers, including the English-language *Hurriyet Daily News*, *Hurriyet*, and *Milliyet*, as well as 28 magazines and 3 television channels, and engages in business in other fields, as do other media conglomerates. Owner Aydin Dogan had long used his media outlets to gain political influence for the benefit of his other businesses. In 2008, the Dogan press increasingly criticized the AKP government's actions. They reported about some Erdogan family members' business dealings and about a criminal case in Germany involving a Muslim charity (Lighthouse) accused of funneling money to the AKP in violation of a Turkish ban on foreign funding. In response, the prime minister castigated the Dogan Group publicly and called for a boycott of its outlets. This treatment was not new, as Erdogan previously had attacked other media owners, revoked the accreditation of journalist critics, sued cartoonists for defamation, and called for other boycotts. In the Dogan case, Erdogan's personal predilections may have waxed into government policy.

In April 2008, the Ministry of Finance began a tax inspection of Dogan's companies. In February 2009, it ordered Dogan Media to pay a penalty of approximately \$490 million.<sup>54</sup> In September, another penalty of approximately \$2.6 billion was imposed. Aydin Dogan charged that this constituted an assault on freedom of the press and was the result of selective government enforcement. Similarly, a European Commission spokesman stated, "when the sanction is of such magnitude that it threatens the existence of an entire press group ... then freedom of the press is at stake."<sup>55</sup> Then European Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn observed, "if a tax fine is worth the annual turnover of the company, it is quite a strong sanction, and it may not only be a fiscal sanction but also it feels like a political sanction."<sup>56</sup> Several international press and human rights groups raised questions about the fine. The International Press Institute's director said, "the timing and unprecedented size of this tax fine raise serious concerns that the authorities are changing their approach from rhetoric to using the state apparatus to harass the media.... (T)he aim is not to punish the tax irregularity, but to liquidate the largest media group in the country."<sup>57</sup> Erdogan responded, "freedom of the press cannot be used as a means to shade smearing and slander."<sup>58</sup> Dogan newspapers have since made personnel changes and they, and other media, have muted their criticism of the government, although the case remains in the courts, which have upheld some of the fines. A chilling effect on freedom of the press may be at play.

---

<sup>54</sup> The case involved a dispute concerning the date that Dogan sold a percentage of its television holdings to a German company. Dogan maintains that the sale occurred on January 2, 2007, while the Finance Ministry claims that it was done in 2006 and that the government is owed taxes that were evaded, plus a penalty charge. Yusuf Kanli, "Whose Turn will be Next?" *Hurriyet Daily News.com*, February 21, 2009.

<sup>55</sup> "EU Slams Turkey over Media Group Fine," Agence France Presse, September 11, 2009.

<sup>56</sup> Stephen Castle and Sebnem Arsu, "Europeans Criticize Turkey over Threats to Media Freedom," *New York Times*, October 15, 2009.

<sup>57</sup> International Press Institute, Press Release, February 20, 2009, BBC Monitoring Media, February 23, 2009.

<sup>58</sup> BBC Monitoring, "Turkish Dogan Group Tax Penalty Termed 'Assault' on Media Freedom," February 23, 2009, OSC Document GMP20090223950045.

Concern about constraints on freedom of expression also has been voiced about internet censorship in Turkey. Authorities have banned some 5,000 websites for “inappropriate content.” The video-sharing site YouTube has been banned since 2008 for illegally broadcasting videos defaming Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, and several Google services were banned in June 2010, provoking protests in Istanbul. The government has defended its actions as a way to prevent distribution of pornography and a response to tax delinquency. Reporters Sans Frontiers classifies Turkey with less democratic regimes, such as Russia, United Arab Emirates, and Eritrea, when it comes to internet censorship.<sup>59</sup> As with the press, the larger issue involved is that of increasing government control over access to information from varied sources.

## Fethullah Gulen Movement<sup>60</sup>

A somewhat enigmatic force on the domestic political scene and one supportive of the AKP is the Fethullah Gulen Movement (or Community). Fethullah Gulen, called *hocaefendi* (master), was born in a village in Erzurum Province in eastern Turkey in 1941 and gained a popular following while an imam on the government payroll in Edirne and Izmir in the west. Gulen is a student of the ideas of Said Nursi (1876-1960), whose message was in part that “Muslims should not reject modernity, but find inspiration in the sacred texts to engage with it.”<sup>61</sup> Nursi opposed violence, appreciated globalization, and encouraged interfaith dialogue.<sup>62</sup> He founded the Sufi Nurcu *tariqat* (Followers of Light religious order).<sup>63</sup> The Nurcu fragmented after Nursi’s death, and Gulen founded his own *cemaat* or Islamic group.

Gulen’s philosophy added a theme of nationalism to Nursi’s ideas. One analyst suggests that “Gulen’s goals are simultaneously to Islamize the Turkish nationalist ideology and to Turkify Islam. He hopes to reestablish the link between religion and the state that existed in the Ottoman era, when leaders were expected to live their lives based on Islamic regulations. Such an approach, he argues, would strengthen the state, and protect society by widening the state’s base of legitimacy.”<sup>64</sup> However, Gulen does not favor making *shariat* (Islamic law) state law. In the 1980s, the Gulen Movement became a nationwide phenomenon.

In the aftermath of the military’s ouster of the Islamist Refah (Welfare) Party-led government in 1997, authorities brought charges against Fethullah Gulen for “working to overthrow the secular government in Turkey” even though Gulen had publicly supported the military’s actions against Refah. At the time, Gulen was in the United States for medical treatment. He was acquitted in 2006 and the acquittal was upheld in 2008. However, Gulen has not returned to Turkey. He

---

<sup>59</sup> Cinar Kiper, “Roundup: Turks Start to Organize Against Internet Censorship,” Xinhua News Agency, July 17, 2010.

<sup>60</sup> Fethullah Gulen websites include <http://en.fgulen.com> and <http://www.fethullahgulen.org>. For an outsider’s overview, see Bill Park, “The Fethullah Gulen Movement,” *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 12, No. 4, December 2008.

<sup>61</sup> “Fethullah Gulen Promotes a Modern Islam,” *Oxford Analytica Daily Brief Service*, January 18, 2008.

<sup>62</sup> Ahmet T. Kuru, “Globalization and the Diversification of Islamic Movements: Three Turkish Cases,” *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 120, Iss. 2, Summer 2006.

<sup>63</sup> Mustafa Kemal Ataturk officially outlawed *tariqats* after founding the modern Turkish Republic. They remain outlawed today, but survived and Turkish leaders have been linked to them. For example, former President Turgut Ozal was known to be a Nakshibandi and Prime Minister Erdogan attended a seminary run by Nakshibandis.

<sup>64</sup> Bulent Aras and Omer Caha, “Fethullah Gulen and his Liberal ‘Turkish Islam’ Movement,” *Middle East News Online*, January 5, 2001.



sought permanent residence in the United States. In 2007, the Department of Homeland Security denied his application as an educator, maintaining that he “is primarily the leader of a large and influential religious and political movement with immense commercial holdings.”<sup>65</sup> Gulen won an appeal and became a permanent U.S. resident in 2008. He resides in Saylorsburg, PA, in the Pocono Mountains.

Gulen’s public message has evolved over the years to include a call for greater religious tolerance and interfaith dialogue.<sup>66</sup> He personally met Turkey’s chief rabbi, the Armenian and Greek Orthodox Patriarchs, and Pope John Paul II.

Today, the Fethullah Gulen Movement is a vast grassroots movement. It controls a network of schools around the world, including some in the United States; universities; banks with more than \$5 billion in assets; non-governmental organizations; and newspapers, magazines, and television networks in Turkey and other countries.<sup>67</sup> Its wealth is based on these sources and on generous donations from members, who are from the new middle class that has developed since the 1980s. One analyst has described it as “the most powerful movement right now (in Turkey)... The point where they are today scares me. There is no other movement to balance them in society.”<sup>68</sup>

The movement’s main voice in Turkey is the *Zaman* newspaper, which enjoys the largest circulation in the country, and its English-language sister *Today’s Zaman*. Since 1988, its Foundation of Journalists and Writers has organized annual Abant Platform discussions of the relations between Islam and modernity. The movement is present in the Washington, DC, area with a U.S. office of the Turkish Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists trade association, schools, and probably other organizations whose affiliation is publicly clouded.

Gulenists have not sought power directly. Yet, before he went into exile, Gulen reportedly advised his followers to “move into the arteries of the system, without anyone noticing your existence, until you reach all the power centers.”<sup>69</sup> In August 2010, he asserted, “we are still at an equal distance from every party. We never told anybody to enroll in a specific (party), attend its rallies or act as its supporters.”<sup>70</sup> However, Gulen encouraged support for the AKP’s effort to amend the constitution in the September 12, 2010, referendum, maintaining that he was praising the work rather than those who had achieved it.<sup>71</sup> Also, members of the movement have assisted the rise of the AKP government, which some suggest depends upon them because of their resources and education.<sup>72</sup> Gulenists have benefited greatly from the AKP’s emphasis on the free market and trade. They have supported the AKP financially and in their media since the 2002 election and, in

---

<sup>65</sup> Joe Lauria, “Confrontation at Sea: Reclusive Imam, Influential in Turkey, Criticizes Flotilla Aid Effort,” *Wall Street Journal*, June 4, 2010.

<sup>66</sup> For more on this theme, see Zaki Saritoprak, Sidney Griffith, “Fethullah Gulen and the ‘People of the Book’: A Voice from Turkey for Interfaith Dialogue,” *The Muslim World*, Vol. 95, Iss. 3, July 2006.

<sup>67</sup> “Gulen Movement: Turkey’s Third Power,” *Islamic Affairs Analyst*, jiaa.janes.com, February 2009.

<sup>68</sup> Alexandra Hudson, “Turkish Islamic Preacher—Threat or Benefactor,” Reuters, May 14, 2008, quoting Hakan Yavuz.

<sup>69</sup> Bulent Aliriza, “Turkey’s Changing Dynamics,” *Turkey Update*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Turkey Project, March 31, 2009.

<sup>70</sup> “Gulen Endorses Reform Package, Appealing for ‘Yes’ on Sept. 12,” *Today’s Zaman* Online August 1, 2010.

<sup>71</sup> “Gulen Says His Call for Yes Vote not Linked to Political Motives,” *Today’s Zaman* Online, August 25, 2010.

<sup>72</sup> M. Hakan Yavuz and Nihat Ali Ozcan, “Crisis in Turkey: The Conflict of Political Languages,” *Middle East Policy*, Vol. XIV, No. 3, Fall 2007.

exchange, Gulen members and supporters have been appointed to the judiciary and bureaucracy, including the police and especially the domestic intelligence wing of the police.<sup>73</sup>

Gulenist champions emphasize their master's public statements about the importance of democracy and its compatibility with Islam, his opposition to anti-Western feelings, and his condemnation of the 9/11 attacks.<sup>74</sup> Gulen criticized the organizers of the controversial May 2010 flotilla seeking to bring aid to the Gaza Strip for not seeking Israel's permission. (The flotilla is known for a violent confrontation between passengers/activists on a Turkish ship and Israeli special forces.) The Turkish group associated with the flotilla reportedly has ties to the Felicity Party (SP), a direct descendant of the Refah Party, with which Gulen disagreed in the 1990s. So his position may have more to do with domestic Islamist political competition than with the flotilla per se, although it is in line with his advocacy of limiting tensions.

Critics charge that the Fethullah Gulen Movement is the force behind the *Ergenekon* investigation and other anti-military campaigns, seeking revenge against those who had prosecuted Fethullah Gulen. If true, this would contrast sharply with the benign public image that Gulenists have cultivated over the years. As noted above, Gulenists reportedly play a major role in the police and in its intelligence bodies. Leaked documents related to the investigations are publicized in *Zaman* newspapers, known for their anti-military line. Columnists harshly criticize and even threaten those who question the veracity of the *Ergenekon* affair, the benefits of AKP rule, or who shine a contrarian light on the movement. The excesses of his followers, which belie a commitment to tolerance, probably are not attributable to Gulen himself.

Other critics suggest that the movement's understanding of democracy is narrow in that it sometimes focuses on religious freedoms such as the right to wear headscarves and attend universities after graduating from theological high schools, while also advocating stifling of some free speech. (See disparagement of perceived opponents immediately above.) They warn "naïve" Westerners not to be beguiled by the Gulenists.<sup>75</sup> Rusen Cakir, an astute observer of Turkish religious movements, describes the Gulen movement as another "deep state."<sup>76</sup>

## Future Political Possibilities

In April 2010, Prime Minister Erdogan stated that he favored a presidential system, and it has long been believed that he has ambitions to be the first directly elected president of Turkey. President Gul's term in office ends either in 2012 or 2014. The uncertainty is due to his election when the system still called for a seven-year term, before passage of a constitutional amendment allowing for direct election of the president for a five-year term. It is not known which criterion will apply to his tenure. Should AKP win the next national election that must be held by July

---

<sup>73</sup> In summer 2010, a controversial new, best-selling, memoir (not available in English) by Hanefi Avci, a career police officer and former Chief of Police in Eskisehir Province, alleged that the Gulen Movement has infiltrated the police, gendarmerie, National Intelligence Organization (MIT), judiciary, and other government departments and have conducted comprehensive wiretapping. It also charges that they are leading investigations in the *Ergenekon* and *Sledgehammer* cases.

<sup>74</sup> Kuru, op. cit.

<sup>75</sup> Eldar Mamedov, "Fethullah Gulen Movement—a View from Brussels." *Hurriyet Daily News.com*, May 28, 2010."

<sup>76</sup> "Former Turkish Police Chief's Book Receives Conflicting Reactions in Media," *Hurriyet Daily News.com*, August 30, 2010.

2011, it is assumed that the party will move to change the political system to a presidential one via a new constitution, and that Erdogan would want the post and an election in 2012. Given that eventuality, President Gul is not expected to insist on a seven-year term, and he might then return to parliament as prime minister.

Much of the above scenario depends upon AKP winning sufficient seats in the next national election to form another single party government that could change the political system. However, the opposition is actively working to prevent that from happening. After a sex scandal forced the resignation of CHP leader Deniz Baykal in May 2010, a CHP convention elected Kemal Kilicdaroglu as the new party chairman. Kilicdaroglu, who is known for his personal integrity, had made an impressive showing in the election for mayor of Istanbul in 2009 with a campaign that sounded strong anti-corruption, anti-poverty themes, even though AKP won the post. On assuming the CHP leadership, he announced a revived social democratic agenda, sympathized with coal miners who had recently experienced a disaster, toned down the party's strident secularism that some viewed as anti-religion, pledged to avoid ethnic and cultural politics, and sharply attacked Erdogan. Kilicdaroglu announced his support for lowering the threshold to enter parliament and limiting parliamentary immunity—both changes have been long considered democratizing imperatives. In July, the CHP submitted a bill to lower the threshold from 10% to 7%. (AKP and MHP are considered likely to oppose the measure, as it would benefit BDP or its successor.) It would not take effect until after the next national election if passed. Kilicdaroglu has called for a new constitution “in line with the EU norms, that is based on the principle of separation of powers, that guarantees the independence of the media,” etc.<sup>77</sup>

For added measure, Kilicdaroglu refreshed the CHP by replacing about three-quarters of the 80-member party assembly and removing the most strident ultranationalists, who were close associates of Baykal. Moreover, Kilicdaroglu hails from Tunceli, in the east, which may enable the party to gain some votes outside of the Aegean and Mediterranean coasts, to which it has been limited in recent elections.

Kilicdaroglu asserts that (PKK) terrorism is caused by economic problems and that the alleviation of poverty and unemployment would marginalize it. In line with his party's established nationalism, which he has not abandoned, he opposes use of Kurdish as a language of education.<sup>78</sup> Kilicdaroglu says that he refrains from using the word “Kurdish” in order not to separate people by ethnic identity. Instead, he prefers to refer to an “eastern” or “southeastern” issue.<sup>79</sup> In contrast to his predecessor, the new CHP leader met the prime minister to explore ways of cooperating in the fight against terror. At the meeting he brought up lowering the threshold to enter parliament, abolishing special courts, and developing the southeast. He declared that, “as long as there are sound and reasonable policies,” CHP will support the government on the terrorism issue.<sup>80</sup>

Kilicdaroglu has not expressed many foreign policy views. He is committed to Turkey's EU accession and applauds the EU process for its potential to advance Turkey's democracy,

---

<sup>77</sup> “Kilicdaroglu Talks to *Radikal*,” interview, July 1, 2010, OSC Document GMP20100701744003.

<sup>78</sup> Interview with Zekai Ozcinar and Habib Guler, “Turkey has to End Era of Military Intervention, says New CHP Leader,” *Today's Zaman* online, June 13, 2010.

<sup>79</sup> “Turkey's Route Should be Toward EU, Says Kilicdaroglu,” *Hurriyet Daily News.com*, June 11, 2010.

<sup>80</sup> Selahattin Sonmez, “Opposition Leader Urges Turkish PM to Improve Living Conditions in Southeast,” *Hurriyet Daily News.com*, July 15, 2010.

freedoms, and human rights. Yet, he also states that Turkey would accomplish all that with or without membership and opposes “a special preoccupation about EU entry or rejection.” He has criticized the government for drifting away from the values of the West, such as democracy, human rights, and laws, which have been the model for Turkey up to now, and called on it to explain the reasons for the blockages in the EU process. He has not stated views on relations with the United States. Therefore, it is not known if CHP will finally abandon its propensity for anti-Americanism, such as conspiracy theories that blame America for everything bad that occurs in and affects Turkey.

While it may be too early to announce the CHP’s revival, such a development is considered more possible now than under Baykal. Kilicdaroglu suffered a defeat in the September 12 constitutional referendum vote; he adopted the unsuccessful tactic of attacking Erdogan personally during the campaign. Nevertheless, as noted, the party increased its share of the vote from the 2009 municipal elections without expanding its geographic base. The outlook remains uncertain.

Other parties also are endeavoring to make their mark. These include the Democrat Party, a melding of former rivals True Path Party and Motherland Party, in which Mehmet Ali Bayar, a former diplomat in Washington, is a major player. However, DP’s outlook probably is far less optimistic than CHP’s. Some of the opposition parties may compete for the same constituencies, which may limit their prospects of ousting AKP.

Many analysts believe that AKP still will come in first in the next national election and that it gained momentum from the referendum vote. Given that a week is a lifetime in politics and the elections are months away, it is not at all certain if the party would again win a sufficient plurality to enable it to form a single party government, as it had after the last two national elections. Instead, it might be forced into a coalition with one or more other parties. Alternatively, opposition parties might win a plurality through their combined vote totals and be able to form a coalition without the AKP. AKP’s confidence may be shaken, and its achievement of ambitions to change Turkey’s political system and ability to modify its secular identity would be limited if it is forced to take on a coalition partner. A government of opposition parties would have a different agenda, while probably seeking to advance Turkey’s democracy in ways different than the AKP. The opposition is strongly nationalistic and self identifies first as Turks, not as Muslims as do many in the AKP. This might reassure currently besieged secularists, but not Kurds, whose struggle seems destined to continue whoever is in charge of the next government.

## **Overall Assessment**

One assessment that AKP’s critics sometimes offer concludes that the abortive attempt to ban the AKP and 2007 national election resulted in strengthening the AKP’s hold on power and its ability to weaken its actual and perceived opponents. President Gul’s exercise of his power of appointment extended the party’s sway to the educational establishment. *Ergenekon* and other alleged coup plot investigations have been vehicles for an assault on the military and the media, among others, and the methods used in the probes have instilled fear in the ranks of the opposition. AKP supporters have taken over much of the media, while the government’s lawsuits against other elements have cowed some critics. Meanwhile, the party derives considerable assistance from the financial and media support of followers of Fethullah Gulen. The AKP’s attempt to burnish its democratic credentials and stanch terrorism with a Kurdish initiative has not borne fruit, and it has had to revive the military option to deal with PKK violence. Analysts

increasingly doubt the party's commitment to democratic values and worry that the more authoritarian tendencies of its leader may come to dominate.

Several developments may mitigate this judgment. The 2009 municipal elections may be a harbinger of the renewal of the political opposition. They had the immediate effect of producing changes in the cabinet, such as the replacement of the minister of education, that may constrain some of the government's more Islamist propensities. Moreover, Kilicdaroglu's assumption of CHP leadership may make it possible for a combination of opposition parties to force the formation of a coalition government either with AKP in the lead or without AKP's participation. Before then, because the government failed to gain sufficient votes in parliament to ram through its constitutional changes, it was forced into a referendum or popular vote to obtain its goals. In addition, the Constitutional Court, in annulling some provisions of proposed amendments, may have delayed the AKP's realization of its ambitions to gain control over the judiciary. Finally, regardless of how achieved, the military's restraint may signal that its interference with civilian rule has finally ended and that Turkey's democracy, while still flawed, is maturing. In other words, the situation may be more complex than the doomsday projections of AKP's harshest critics.

## **U.S. Policy**

The overall U.S. policy toward Turkey has been largely determined by the United States' need and appreciation for Turkey as a strategic partner and NATO ally. Because of these priorities and the traditional and inordinate role of the military in Turkey, the armed forces commanders had long been considered primary interlocutors of U.S. policymakers—both civilian and military. Since the AKP came to power, and especially since 2003, U.S. administrations have dealt more with civilian counterparts, and the Turkish military has become the counterpart only of the U.S. military.

Despite the AKP-dominated parliament's refusal in March 2003 to allow U.S. troops to use Turkish territory to open a northern front against Iraq, the George W. Bush Administration nonetheless valued Turkey as a predominantly Muslim secular democracy that might provide political inspiration for other Muslim countries in the context of its war on terror perpetrated by radical Islamists. It also appreciated what was then Turkey's willingness to cultivate good relations with Israel in contrast to other Muslim governments. Therefore, the Bush Administration had a vested interest in the continuation of Turkey's democracy and political stability and did not want a military coup there. The Administration adopted a stance of studied neutrality toward the Turkish domestic political crisis resulting from the closure case against the AKP. On April 15, 2008, then Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said, "we believe and hope that this will be decided within Turkey's democratic context and by its secular democratic principles."<sup>81</sup> Her spokesman stated, "we are strong supporters of democracy in Turkey and we have faith in Turkish democracy. But ultimately, these questions about politics and religion and different social values are going to have to be ones that are resolved within the context of Turkish law, politics, and their Constitution." However, the constitution that Administration officials referred to was drafted under the supervision of a military junta and accepted in a 1982 referendum without opposition. Nonetheless, the Administration continued to emphasize democracy in Turkey, even as it

---

<sup>81</sup> At American Turkish Council meeting in Washington, D.C., April 15, 2008.

appeared to mute that theme for other Muslim majority countries due to the increasing popularity of fundamentalist parties.

Rice also remarked about enjoying an excellent relationship with the AKP government. Yet, the Bush Administration did not satisfy any group in Turkey. The AKP's advocates sought stronger opposition to the possible banning of a party that had won a decisive election. They believed that the EU's threat to suspend membership talks if the AKP were banned was more in line with democratic principles. Others observed that the EU had to take a stronger stand and had more clout because Turkey is a candidate for membership. On the other hand, secularists believed that the Bush Administration brought the AKP to power, supported it as a model for Muslim democracies, and wanted it to continue in office. They were suspicious of any positive comment U.S. officials might make about the party.

Shortly after it took office, the Obama Administration signaled its appreciation for the importance of U.S. relations with Turkey. In March 2009, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton visited Turkey and heralded it as an extraordinary example for the world because it showed that "democracy, modernity, secularism, and Islam could all coexist."<sup>82</sup> The Secretary stated that the United States and Turkey shared "a commitment to democracy, a secular constitution, religious freedoms, a free market economy, and a sense of global responsibility."<sup>83</sup> Clinton announced a forthcoming visit by President Obama and said that it showed the importance of the Administration's relations with Turkey.

Turkish officials appreciated the compliment that President Obama paid to their country by visiting on his first overseas trip, and they were open to improving bilateral relations. They singled out the President's opposition to the war in Iraq and willingness to engage Syria and Iran as indicators of a change in Washington. While in Turkey, the President stated that "Turkey and the United States can build a *model partnership* in which a majority Christian and a majority Muslim nation, a Western nation ... can create a modern international community."<sup>84</sup> (Italics added.) The phrase pleased Turkish leaders immensely.

In March 2010, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Philip Gordon concluded remarks on U.S.-Turkish relations by commenting briefly on Turkey's domestic political scene.<sup>85</sup> He urged care with regard to press freedoms and closure cases and alluded to the *Ergenekon* prosecutions. Gordon stated, "media freedom is one of the bedrocks of a democratic society and no actions should be taken that appear to undermine the ability of the press to do its vital job.... (I)t is important that investigations or court proceedings, especially on politically sensitive cases, must be open and fully respect Turkish law.... (I)n a democracy, political parties should not fear being closed down." Gordon's comments were not as severe as the State Department's 2009 report on human rights practices in Turkey, released a week earlier.<sup>86</sup> Yet, this

---

<sup>82</sup> "U.S. Secretary of State Attends Talk Show on Turkish TV," *Anatolia*, March 8, 2009, OSC Document GMP20090308788003.

<sup>83</sup> Joint news conference by U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Foreign Minister Ali Babacan in Ankara, March 7, 2009, NTV, OSC Document GMP20090307744001.

<sup>84</sup> "Turkish, US Presidents Answer Questions on Bilateral Ties, Armenian Issue," NTV, April 8, 2009, OSC Document GMP20090406744020.

<sup>85</sup> "The United States and Turkey: The View from the Obama Administration," accessible at <http://www.brookings.edu>.

<sup>86</sup> The Report, released on March 11, stated outright, "The government limited freedom of expression through the use of constitutional restrictions and numerous laws and through the application of tax fines against media conglomerates." Available at <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/20-09/eur/136062.htm>.

part of his speech drew few comments in Turkey, and one journalist wondered, “how many people in total in Washington and Ankara give a damn about Phil Gordon’s words?”<sup>87</sup>

After the September 12 referendum on constitutional amendments, President Obama telephoned Prime Minister Erdogan to “acknowledge the vibrancy of Turkey’s democracy.”<sup>88</sup> The State Department added “hope that through these reforms, it will further enhance Turkey’s democratic processes and human rights protection.”

There has been increasing anxiety in Washington that the AKP’s consolidation of its position domestically may be enabling a more assertive and independent foreign policy, favoring some Muslim states and groups, that may challenge U.S. policymakers. In the spring of 2010, a spate of events may have spurred some reassessment of bilateral relations. Those events include Turkey’s championship of an international flotilla to break Israel’s blockade of the Gaza Strip.<sup>89</sup> The flotilla effort produced a confrontation between Israeli special forces and passengers/activists on a Turkish ship, resulting in the deaths of eight Turks and one Turkish-American. In addition, it produced a barrage of unsparing, inflammatory rhetoric from Prime Minister Erdogan and other Turkish officials that some suggested had anti-Semitic tones.<sup>90</sup> Erdogan also claimed that Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip, is a democratically elected political organization, and not a terrorist group, and that it is needed for a successful peace process. This position contradicts U.S. policy, which lists Hamas as a State Department-designated Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO). At the same time, Turkey has continued to cultivate close relations with Iran and Syria. Washington does not view Turkey’s neighbors with the same rose-colored glasses as Ankara, due to their nuclear ambitions, support for terrorist groups, and animosity toward Israel, among other suspicions.

Turkish-Iranian relations and their progress in recent years are of special interest in Washington.<sup>91</sup> Turkey appeared to undermine U.S. policy toward Iran on May 17, 2010, when Foreign Minister Davutoglu and his Brazilian counterpart reached an agreement with Iran, called the Tehran Declaration, for an exchange of uranium to take place in Turkey. Davutoglu and other officials claimed that they had closely followed U.S. guidance. However, the Obama Administration maintained that the declaration was based on parameters developed in fall 2009 that Iran’s continuing uranium enrichment had rendered obsolete and appeared to believe that the Turkish-Brazilian effort aimed at undermining a harder approach toward Iran that the United States and others had been developing. This may well have been the Turkish intent, as the government feared that Turkey, a close neighbor of Iran, would be most harmed by sanctions, citing past experience with sanctions against the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq. Thus, on the heels of the declaration, Turkey voted in the U.N. Security Council against the imposition of new sanctions on Iran for failing to ensure the peaceful nature of its nuclear program. In doing so, it voted against a consensus of the international community and its partners in NATO, including the United States,

---

<sup>87</sup> Asli Aydintasbas, “Loveless Marriage in Washington,” *Milliyet Online*, March 18, 2010, OSC Document GMO20100318016005.

<sup>88</sup> Marc Champion, Joe Park Inson, “Turkey Votes to Change Constitution,” *Wall Street Journal*, September 13, 2010.

<sup>89</sup> For more on this, see CRS Report R41275, *Israel’s Blockade of Gaza, the Mavi Marmara Incident, and Its Aftermath*, by Carol Migdalovitz.

<sup>90</sup> Erdogan expressed understanding for those who compared the Zionist (sic) star to the swastika. Adem Kadam, “Prime Minister in Konya,” *Anatolia*, June 4, 2010, OSC Document GMP20100608734014.

<sup>91</sup> For background on Turkish-Iranian relations prior to these recent developments, see the chapter on Turkey in CRS Report R40849, *Iran: Regional Perspectives and U.S. Policy*, coordinated by Casey L. Addis.

which had pushed for the sanctions. Its failure to join its allies or at least to abstain appeared to indicate that the AKP valued its relationship with Iran more than ties with the West.

The dimensions of foreign policy developments will be addressed in another report, but they may have implications for how the Obama Administration views and deals with the AKP government and Prime Minister Erdogan and how they may be endeavoring to alter Turkey's foundational identity via the consolidation of power domestically. It is not yet certain that they are bent on implementing a fundamental change in Turkey's historic direction toward the West. Congress has begun to assess the change and express its concern about that prospect, as seen in July 28, 2010, hearings of the House Foreign Affairs Committee.<sup>92</sup> That oversight is likely to continue. Although Turkey has not been a major recipient of U.S. foreign assistance for many years, Members may express their views on events in resolutions and other legislation. Both branches of government will be scrutinizing the results of the constitutional referendum and of the national elections, which must be held by July 2011, for their possible effects.

---

<sup>92</sup> For hearing transcript, see <http://foreignaffairs.house.gov/111/transcripts.pdf>.



**Table 2. Basic Facts**

Population	77.8 million (July 2010 est.)
Ethnic Groups	70%-75% Turkish 18% Kurdish 7%-12% other (2008 est.)
Religion	99.8% Muslim (80%-85% Sunni, 15%-20% Alevi) 2% other (mainly Christians and Jews)
Gross Domestic Product (GDP) real growth rate	-5.8% (2009 est.)
GDP per capita	\$11,200 (2009 est.)
Unemployment	14.1% (2009 est.)
Underemployment	4% (2008 est.)
Inflation	6.3% (2009 est.)
Current Account Deficit	\$13.96 billion (2009 est.)
External Debt	\$274 billion (December 31, 2009)
Exports	apparel, foodstuffs, textiles, metal manufactures, transport equipment
Export Partners	Germany, France, UK, Italy, Iraq (2009)
Imports	machinery, chemicals, semi-finished goods, fuels, transport equipment
Import Partners	Russia, Germany, China, U.S. Italy (2009)

**Source:** Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook*, September 2, 2010.

## Author Contact Information

Carol Migdalovitz  
 Specialist in Middle Eastern Affairs  
 cmigdalovitz@crs.loc.gov, 7-2667