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**FROM DENIAL TO PARTICIPATION: TURKEY'S
EVOLVING DISCOURSE ON KURDISH NATIONALISM**

by

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ON KURDISH NATIONALISM**

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ABSTRACT

Kurdish nationalism has been a central issue in domestic Turkish politics since the founding of the republic nearly a century ago. Since 1984, the insurgency waged by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) has claimed the lives of tens of thousands citizens on both sides of the conflict. While Ankara has largely attempted to address the "Kurdish question" via military and security measures, unprecedented negotiations in the last year have raised hopes that a peace settlement may finally be within reach. While some observers are fearful that this round of talks will be yet another failed attempt to end the violence, this thesis seeks to explore whether recent changes in Turkey's social and political landscape have increased the likelihood of a lasting resolution. The research is framed as a historical survey of critical political events and public discourse from prominent politicians and public figures, relying on a mix of primary and secondary sources. This thesis argues that three domestic shifts have indeed helped set the stage for a lasting solution: increased political opportunities for Kurdish activists, the end of military tutelage in security affairs, and the reframing of Turkish nationalism through the assertion of Ottoman-Islamic identity.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AP	Justice Party
AKP	Justice and Development Party
ANAP	Motherland Party
BCG	Western Study Group
BDP	Peace and Democracy Party
CHP	Republican People's Party
CUP	Committee of Union and Progress
DEP	Democracy Party
DIB	Presidency of Religious Affairs
DKP	Democratic Mass Party
DP	Democrat Party
DTK	Democratic Society Congress
DTP	Democratic Society Party
DYP	True Path Party
ECHR	European Court of Human Rights
ERNK	Kurdish National Liberation Front
EU	European Union
FP	Virtue Party
GAP	Southeastern Anatolian Project
GUNSIAD	Southeastern and Eastern Anatolia Businessmen's Association
GYV	Journalists and Writers Foundation
HADEP	People's Democracy Party
HAK-PAR	Rights and Freedoms Party
HEP	People's Labor Party
HPG	People's Defense Force
HSYK	High Council of Judges and Prosecutors
IHD	Human Rights Association
JITEM	Gendarmerie Intelligence Anti-Terrorism Unit
KADEP	Participatory Democracy Party
KAMER	Women's Center

KCK	Kurdistan Communities Union
KDP	Kurdistan Democratic Party (Iraq)
KNK	Kurdistan National Congress
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government (Iraq)
MGH	National Outlook Movement
MGK	National Security Council
MGSB	National Security Policy Document
MHP	Nationalist Movement Party
MNP	National Order Party
MIT	National Intelligence Organization
MSP	National Salvation Party
MUSIAD	The Independent Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association
NUC	National Unity Committee
OHAL	Emergency Rule Law
OYAK	Turkish Armed Forces Pension Fund
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (Iraq)
PYD	Democratic Union Party (Syria)
RP	Welfare Party
SP	Felicity Party
SSC	State Security Court
TAK	Kurdistan Freedom Hawks
TIP	Turkish Workers' Party
TMK	Anti-Terror Law
TSK	Turkish Armed Forces
YAS	Supreme Military Council
YOK	Higher Education Board

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION

Kurdish nationalism has served as a fundamental political challenge for the Republic of Turkey since its founding in 1923. In response to the secular and modernizing reforms of Mustafa Kemal, Kurds in the country's southeastern region rose up in rebellion 17 times between 1924 and 1938.¹ Although nationalist aspirations were effectively suppressed by Ankara for the next four decades, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (*Partiya Karkaren Kurdistan*, PKK) launched an insurgency in 1984 with the objective of forming an independent Kurdish state. In the three decades since, the bloody conflict has claimed nearly 40 thousand lives and internally displaced over over one million citizens.² After the capture of PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan in 1999, the organization declared a ceasefire and withdrew most of its forces to northern Iraq, leading many to declare the movement defeated. Five years later, however, the PKK resumed its guerilla and terror tactics, and death tolls have been rising ever since.

Since the early rebellions, the state has handled the challenge of Kurdish nationalist militancy as a security problem that could be solved through force. While denying the existence of Kurdish ethnicity, Ankara claimed that the PKK had little sympathy amongst ordinary citizens and that terror attacks were motivated by socioeconomic problems or incited by meddling foreign powers. Since 2002, the ruling Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) has adopted a comparatively moderate approach to the "Kurdish question." Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has acknowledged past mistakes on the part of the state and presided over reforms that have increased Kurdish language and education rights. Nonetheless, Erdogan has largely failed to articulate a consistent approach to the problem, and PKK

¹ Omer Taspinar, *Kurdish Nationalism and Political Islam in Turkey* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 79.

² Some estimates exceed two million. Cengiz Gunes, *The Kurdish National Movement in Turkey: From Protest to Resistance* (London: Routledge, 2012), 131; International Crisis Group, *Turkey: Ending The PKK Insurgency—Europe Report No. 213* (Brussels: ICG, 2011), 4.

violence has worsened significantly during his tenure. In March 2013, after unprecedented meetings between Ocalan and state representatives, the PKK again declared a ceasefire and withdrawal, leading some to speculate that a negotiated end to the conflict may finally be possible.

In looking at the recent history of Ankara's struggle against militant Kurdish nationalism, important research questions arise: Have there been fundamental shifts in Turkey's political institutions that have increased the chances of finally reaching a peaceful resolution to the conflict? Are these changes evidence of progress toward a popular consensus, or merely a product of pragmatic maneuvering by political leaders? This thesis argues that three important shifts have laid the foundation for a non-military solution to Turkey's Kurdish question: increasing political opportunities for Kurdish activists, the decreasing political influence of the armed forces, and the growing importance of political actors asserting an Ottoman-Islamic identity.

B. IMPORTANCE

In recent years, Turkey has strengthened its claim as an important player in global politics. The country's location between Europe and the tumultuous Middle East serves to foster deep political, economic, and cultural connections with a host of important geopolitical actors. Its recent economic growth has distinguished Turkey as one of the strongest economies—not just in its volatile region, but worldwide.³ In the wake of the Arab Spring, multiple Muslim leaders singled out Turkey as a model for new regimes thanks to its unique synthesis of secular democracy and Islamic identity.⁴ As Syria's neighbor and the possessor of NATO's second-largest army, Turkey would undoubtedly play a major role in any intervention in that troubled country.⁵

³ "Turkey's Economy: Istanbul and Bears," *The Economist*, April 7, 2012, <http://goo.gl/WWN0qR>; "Turkey's Economy is Thriving in a Dangerous Neighbourhood," *Economics Blog* (blog), *The Guardian*, accessed August 15, 2013, <http://goo.gl/TIVunj>.

⁴ Gözde Nur Donat, "We Need Turkey in Post-Revolution Arab World, Morsi Says at AK Party Congress," *Today's Zaman*, September 30, 2012, <http://goo.gl/i9RBaQ>; "Ennahda Takes Turkey as Model for Democracy," *Hurriyet Daily News*, October 27, 2011, <http://goo.gl/yMY4dY>.

⁵ "Turkey Would Join Coalition Against Syria, Says Foreign Minister," *Reuters*, August 26, 2013, <http://goo.gl/f8U8Ef>.

Nonetheless, the violence and insecurity surrounding Ankara's three-decade struggle with Kurdish nationalism have hampered Turkey's rising status as a regional power. Aside from the staggering loss of life, the conflict has consumed significant financial resources and hindered development of the country's southeast region. Since Kurds represent significant minority populations in three of Turkey's neighboring countries (and are found in large numbers throughout Europe), the challenges presented by Kurdish nationalism have ramifications beyond Turkish domestic politics. In multiple instances, Turkey has engaged in cross-border operations into northern Iraq to strike PKK bases despite the protests of foreign leaders. Erdogan has threatened similar attacks on northern Syria, where Kurdish regions have assumed autonomy in the midst of that country's escalating civil war.⁶ The country's bid for European Union (EU) membership has been complicated by concerns that Turkey's minority rights and anti-terrorism measures are incompatible with European standards. In order for Turkey to achieve its potential as a regional leader, it must make significant strides towards ending the PKK's insurgency. Rather than a cynical deal to help politicians achieve short-term political objectives, however, Turkey needs a lasting peace that is supported by a broad national consensus. This thesis seeks to explore whether changes in the country's social and political milieu have increased the chances of such a resolution.

C. PROBLEMS AND HYPOTHESES

Although Turkey has been dealing with militant Kurdish nationalism for decades, recent government policies and statements have broken with past precedents in an apparently earnest effort towards achieving peace. In seeking to explain these actions, it is important to look at what has changed in Turkey in recent years to make such actions possible politically. The research presented in this thesis will assess three factors that have influenced Ankara's changing approach towards the PKK and Kurdish nationalism: the Kurdish national movement's increased participation in the political process,

⁶ Piotr Zalewski, "By Ceding Northeastern Syria to the Kurds, Assad Puts Turkey in a Bind," *Time*, July 27, 2012, <http://goo.gl/SEHIAF>.

significant power shifts in domestic civil-military relations, and the increasing importance of Ottoman-Islamic identity in Turkish politics.

Since 1984, the PKK has largely dictated the agenda of the Kurdish national movement. This has been partly due to Ocalan's charisma and his history of brutally dealing with potential challengers.⁷ A major factor in the PKK's hegemony, however, has been the limited opportunities for Kurdish activism within the state's established political system. Although Ankara has permitted the creation of pro-Kurdish⁸ parties since 1990, the government has repeatedly jailed their leaders, restricted their actions, or closed them completely based on their alleged ties to the PKK. In recent years, however, relaxed restrictions on associations and political speech have improved opportunities for discourse amongst Kurdish activists. This has improved the relative strength of Kurdish political and civil groups vis-à-vis the PKK in setting the Kurdish nationalist agenda. As part of this reshaping, the movement's rhetoric has discarded demands of independence in favor of calls for increased human and political rights. This thesis will explore how these changes have shaped Turkey's national debate such that a negotiated settlement may be a politically acceptable.

The Turkish Armed Forces (*Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri*, TSK) have played an important role in state politics since multiparty politics began in 1950. As the constitutionally enshrined protector of the secular republic, the TSK has directly or indirectly overthrown the ruling government four times since 1960. In addition to resorting to regime change, the army has also leveraged its institutional power and public status to influence, or even dictate, a broad range of state policies. Most notably, the army has viewed Kurdish nationalist violence categorically as a security problem and crafted

⁷ Aliza Marcus, *Blood and Belief: The PKK and the Kurdish Fight for Independence* (New York: New York University, 2007), 40–42, 89–96, 134–140; İbrahim Doğan, “PKK Kills Its Outspoken Members, Says Kurdish Politician Güçlü,” *Today's Zaman*, January 24, 2012, <http://goo.gl/qsZWEq>.

⁸ I will adopt Nicole Watts's imperfect term “pro-Kurdish party” to reference a legal political party that “publicly advocates collective Kurdish cultural and/or political rights.” As she points out, “‘Kurdish’ simply denotes ethnicity and contains no information about political preferences. Also, those who promote a pro-Kurdish agenda may be of any ethnicity.” Nicole Watts, “The Missing Moderate: Legitimacy Resources and Pro-Kurdish Party Politics in Turkey,” in *The Kurdish Policy Imperative*, ed. Robert Lowe and Gareth Stansfield (Washington: Chatham House, 2010), 97n1.

the state's responses accordingly. Since 1999, however, the military's power has been dramatically curtailed through reforms aimed at EU accession, failed showdowns with the increasingly popular AKP, and the conviction of hundreds of high-ranking officers on treason charges. This research investigates whether the shifting civil-military power balance has created opportunities for the government to reshape its approach to the political challenge presented by Kurdish nationalism.

A great deal of pro-Kurdish discourse concerns the nature of Turkish nationalism and identity. In the decade after he founded the republic, President Mustafa Kemal (who took the name Ataturk in 1934) mandated a top-down campaign to forge a unitary national identity based on shared language and culture. Ankara declared all Muslim citizens to be Turks, broke ties with its Ottoman past, and suppressed all expression of other ethnicities, including Kurdishness. Concurrently, the state's militant secularism banned all religion from the public sphere. Thanks to opportunities created by economic and political liberalization that began in the 1980s, however, some Turkish politicians have increasingly emphasized their Islamic identity and Ottoman heritage when addressing domestic and international problems. While attempts to placate Kurdish nationalism by asserting that "Islam is the cement" have largely backfired, the rising stature of Turkey's pious politicians has challenged exclusive concepts of national identity birthed by the Kemalist reforms of the early republic.

D. LITERATURE REVIEW

There are several works that are widely recognized as authoritative political histories of the late Ottoman Empire and the modern Republic of Turkey.⁹ In addition, a wide range of literature addresses the specific hypotheses of this thesis: Kurdish nationalism, Turkey's civil-military relations, and the role of Ottoman and Islamic identity in Turkish nationalism.

⁹ Erik Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004); Feroz Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (London: Oxford University, 1969); M. Sukru Hanioglu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire* (Princeton, Princeton University, 2008); M. Sukru Hanioglu, *Ataturk: An Intellectual Biography* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2011); Soner Cagaptay, *Islam, Secularism, and Nationalism in Modern Turkey: Who is a Turk?* (London: Routledge, 2006).

1. Kurdish Nationalism

There are a handful of canonical English-language historical works that provide important background on the Kurdish nation. Of these, David McDowall's *A Modern History of the Kurds* is the most ambitious, spanning from the pre-Islamic Kurdish tribes of Mesopotamia to the modern nationalist movements of Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Iran, and Iraq.¹⁰ Now in its third edition, McDowall's work serves as a standard reference for those researching the Kurdish people in the context of the late Ottoman Empire and the nation-states that succeeded it. Wadie Jwaideh's *Kurdish National Movement: Its Origins and Development* deals extensively with the relations between Kurdish tribes in the 19th and early- to mid-20th centuries, but provides excellent details of the rebellions led by Sheikhs Ubayd Allah and Said of Palu, two fundamental figures in the Kurdish national narrative.¹¹ The Sheikh Said rebellion of 1925—one of driving forces behind the Kemalist repression of Kurdish identity—has been the subject of two additional volumes of its own, both of which argue that the famous insurrection was motivated by both religious and nationalist aspirations.¹²

Many contemporary political history works highlight the contentious relationship between the modern Turkish polity and its Kurdish citizens, the authors of which generally fall into two camps. In the first camp are Kurdish scholars, i.e. those that primarily research the Kurdish nationalist movement but still devote attention to the political context of Turkey and its neighboring states. In the second group are scholars of contemporary Turkish history who have written on the Kurdish question thanks to its prominence in domestic politics. Amongst the Kurdish scholars, Michael Gunter is likely the most prolific, having authored a variety of short books, chapters, and journal articles

¹⁰ David McDowall, *A Brief History of the Kurds* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009).

¹¹ Wadie Jwaideh, *The Kurdish National Movement: Its Origins and Development* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University, 2006).

¹² Martin van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh, and State* (London: Zed, 1992); Robert Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism and the Sheikh Said Rebellion, 1880–1925* (Austin, TX: University of Texas, 1989).

that highlight the Kurds' quest for greater political participation.¹³ David Romano has approached his research using the theoretical framework of social movement theory,¹⁴ while Denise Natali has focused on the ethnicization and evolution of national identity.¹⁵ Robert Olson's works have detailed the intricacies of the national movement in Turkey in the 2000s, paying special attention to the role of the pro-Kurdish political parties.¹⁶ Also focusing on the movement parties is Nicole Watts, whose *Activists in Office* provides outstanding insight into the opportunities and restrictions presented to the People's Labor Party (*Halkin Emek Partisi*, HEP) and its successors.¹⁷ Thanks to her controversial *Blood and Belief*, which provides the most thorough English-language description of the antecedents, formation, and inner workings of the PKK, Turkey's state security courts charged Aliza Marcus with inciting racial hatred.¹⁸ Vera Eccarius-Kelly has also focused on the period since the 1980s, paying special attention to the network of PKK-linked European NGOs.¹⁹ Conducting his research from the perspective of discourse analysis, Cengiz Gunes methodically traces the evolution of the ideology, propaganda, and cultural rituals of the Kurdish nationalist movement.²⁰ Although somewhat dated, Kemal Kirisci

¹³ Michael Gunter, *The Kurds and Future of Turkey* (New York: St. Martin's, 1997); Michael Gunter, *The Kurds Ascending: The Evolving Solution to the Kurdish Problem in Iraq and Turkey* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008); Michael Gunter, "Turkey: The Politics of a New Democratic Constitution," *Middle East Policy* 19, no. 1 (2012); Michael Gunter, "Reopening Turkey's Closed Kurdish Opening?," *Middle East Policy* 20, no. 2 (2013).

¹⁴ David Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Opportunity, Mobilization, and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 2006).

¹⁵ Denise Natali, *The Kurds and the State: Evolving National Identity in Iraq, Turkey, and Iran* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University, 2005).

¹⁶ Robert Olson, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movements in Turkey: 1980 to 2011*, (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 2011). Robert Olson, *Blood, Beliefs, and Ballots: The Management of Kurdish Nationalism in Turkey, 2007–2009* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 2009).

¹⁷ Nicole Watts, *Activists in Office: Kurdish Politics and Protest in Turkey* (Seattle: University of Washington, 2011).

¹⁸ Marcus, *Blood and Belief*.

¹⁹ Vera Eccarius-Kelly, *The Militant Kurds: A Dual Strategy for Freedom* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2011).

²⁰ Gunes, *The Kurdish National Movement in Turkey*.

and Gareth Winrow's *The Kurdish Question and Turkey* frames Kurdish identity claims as minority rights amongst a broader international set of evolving norms.²¹

Amongst the Turkish group of scholars, one of the most prolific is Metin Heper, who has written and edited many volumes on the country's politics. In *The State and Kurds in Turkey: A Question of Assimilation*, he offers a weak defense of Ankara's Kurdish policies, claiming that a "lack of recognition" did not equate to a denial of Kurdish ethnicity within Turkey or an attempt at assimilation.²² *Turkey's Kurdish Question*, by Henri Barkey and Graham Fuller, provides an excellent overview of the conflict prior to Ocalan's capture, particularly with regards to the military-dominated state response.²³ Andrew Mango, famous for writing one of the most respected English-language biographies of Atatürk, has contributed an analysis of Turkey's counterterrorism efforts, *Turkey and the War on Terror: For Forty Years we Fought Alone*; although filled with excellent factual background, the book makes no attempt to objectively analyze political aspects of the conflict.²⁴ Mustafa Cosar Unal, a high-ranking intelligence officer within the Turkish national police, has approached the conflict from a data-driven analytical perspective; his *Counterterrorism in Turkey* attempts to tie swings in PKK violence directly to state policy changes, although some of his assumptions on causation appear questionable.²⁵

Amongst the scholars writing on the topic, only Watts has dedicated an entire volume to the importance of political participation for the Kurdish nationalist movement. Although some journal articles have focused on the role of the main pro-Kurdish

²¹ Kemal Kirisci and Gareth M. Winrow, *The Kurdish Question and Turkey: An Example of a Trans-state Conflict* (London: Frank Cass, 1997).

²² Metin Heper, *The State and Kurds in Turkey: A Question of Assimilation* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007).

²³ Henri Barkey and Graham Fuller, *Turkey's Kurdish Question* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998).

²⁴ Andrew Mango, *Turkey and the War on Terror: For Forty Years we Fought Alone* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

²⁵ Mustafa Cosar Unal, *Counterterrorism in Turkey: Policy Choices and Effects toward the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

parties,²⁶ surprisingly little research has expanded the discussion to the importance of smaller parties and other civil-society groups that have flourished in the last decade. This thesis seeks to fill this gap in the research.

2. Turkey's Civil-military Relations

Although a few English-language historical works focus on the importance of the armed forces in Turkish politics during the republican era,²⁷ many of the most-cited pieces dedicated to Turkey's civil-military relations are journal articles or chapters of edited volumes.²⁸ Amongst the scholars attempting to outline explanations for the

²⁶ Henri Barkey, "The People's Democracy Party (HADEP): The Travails of a Legal Kurdish Party in Turkey," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 18, no. 1 (1998): 129–138; Marlies Casier, "Designated Terrorists: The Kurdistan Workers' Party and its Struggle to (Re)Gain Political Legitimacy," *Mediterranean Politics* 15, no. 3 (2010): 393–413; Ahmet Hamdi Akkaya and Joost Jongerden, "Reassembling the Political: The PKK and the Project of Radical Democracy," *European Journal of Turkish Studies* 14 (2012), <http://ejts.revues.org/4615>; Aylin Guney, "The People's Democracy Party," *Turkish Studies* 3, no.1 (2002): 122–137; Ioannis N. Grigoriadis, "Political Participation of Turkey's Kurds and Alevis: A Challenge for Turkey's Democratic Consolidation," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 6, no. 4 (2006): 445–461; Günes Murat Tezcür, "When Democratization Radicalizes: The Kurdish Nationalist Movement in Turkey," *Journal of Peace Research* 47, no. 6 (2010): 775–789; Nicole Watts, "Reconsidering State-Society Dynamics in Turkey's Kurdish Southeast," *European Journal of Turkish Studies* 10 (2009), <http://ejts.revues.org/4196>.

²⁷ Steven A. Cook, *Ruling but not Governing: The Military and Political Development in Egypt, Algeria, and Turkey* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University, 2007); Ergun Ozbudun, *Contemporary Turkish Politics: Challenges to Democratic Consolidation* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2000); William Hale, *Turkish Politics and the Military* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Mehmet Ali Birand, *The Generals' Coup in Turkey: An Inside Story of 12 September 1980* (London: Brassey's, 1987); Mehmet Ali Birand, *Shirts of Steel: An Anatomy of the Turkish Armed Forces* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1991).

²⁸ Cizre, "The Justice and Development Party and the Military: Recreating the Past After Reforming it?," in *Secular and Islamic Politics in Turkey: The Making of the Justice and Development Party*, ed. Umit Cizre (London: Routledge, 2008), 132–172; Umit Cizre, "Disentangling the Threads of Civil-Military Relations in Turkey: Promises and Perils," *Mediterranean Quarterly* 22, no. 2 (2011): 57–75; Philip Robins, "The Overlord State: Turkish Politics and the Kurdish Issue," *International Affairs* 69, no. 4 (1993): 657–676; Gerassimos Karabelias, "The Evolution of Civil-Military Relations in Post-war Turkey, 1980–95," *Middle Eastern Studies* 35, no. 4 (1999): 130–151; Nil Satana, "Transformation of the Turkish Military and the Path to Democracy," *Armed Forces and Society* 34, no. 3 (2008): 357–388; Ali L. Karaosmanoglu, "The Evolution of the National Security Culture and the Military in Turkey," *Journal of International Affairs* 54, no. 1 (2000): 199–216; Ali L. Karaosmanoglu, "Civil-Military Relations," in *The Routledge Handbook of Modern Turkey*, ed. Metin Heper and Sabri Sayari (London: Routledge, 2012), 149–159; Ersel Aydinli, "A Paradigmatic Shift for the Turkish Generals and an End to the Coup Era in Turkey," *Middle East Journal* 63, no. 4 (2009): 581–597; Gerassimos Karabelias, "The Military Institution, Atatürk's Principles, and Turkey's Sisyphean Quest for Democracy," *Middle Eastern Studies* 45, no. 1 (2009): 57–69; Muge Aknur, "The Impact of Civil-Military Relations on Democratic Consolidation in Turkey," in *Democratic Consolidation in Turkey*, ed. Muge Aknur (Boca Raton, FL: Universal, 2012), 203–248.

military's consistent preeminence in the political sphere, there are differences in opinion. These authors generally fall into four camps that argue Turkey's civil-military relations are primarily driven by the strong nature of the state, a militaristic Turkish culture, institutions that privilege the armed forces, or ideological alignment amongst civilian and military elites.²⁹

Some scholars have argued that Turkey's civil-military balance has been defined by the strength of unelected state elites vis-à-vis their political counterparts. Metin Heper has argued that the state should not be defined in the traditional Weberian sense as "human associations that successfully claim monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force."³⁰ Rather, he considers "stateness" to be defined by the autonomy of unelected elites that "transcend particularist group interests" and do not involve themselves in politics.³¹ Using this definition, Heper has argued that Turkey has maintained a strong "state tradition" during its transition to democracy, and that the armed forces, as the primary guardians of the state, have reluctantly intervened in politics only when absolutely necessary.³² Despite these interventions, Heper argues the military "has always had respect for democracy," and the generals have willingly ceded some of their authority in recent years thanks to the belief that civilian oversight is ideal.³³ As Ahmet Kuru points out, this state-centric approach may describe Turkey's traditional balance of power, but it does not adequately explain the reasons behind the strong state itself.³⁴

Scholars seeking to better explain the supremacy of the armed forces highlight what they describe as Turkey's militaristic national culture. According to this argument, Turks have been raised to view the armed forces as the most important and trustworthy of

²⁹ Ahmet Kuru, "Tutelage in Turkey: Fears of Islamism, Kurdism, and Communism," *Insight Turkey* 14, no. 2 (2012): 39.

³⁰ Metin Heper, "State and Society in Turkish Political Experience," in *State, Democracy and the Military*, ed. Metin Heper and Ahmet Evin (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1988), 1.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

³² *Ibid.*, 2–10.

³³ Metin Heper, "Civil-Military Relations in Turkey: Toward a Liberal Model?" *Turkish Studies* 12, no. 2 (2011): 241.

³⁴ Kuru, "Tutelage in Turkey," 40.

state institutions, and therefore are not opposed to it exerting political authority. Authors in this camp, including Gareth Jenkins, point to mandatory conscription as a primary factor in tying military service to Turkish identity.³⁵ He points out that the importance of this duty is demonstrated by the often-repeated expression, “Every Turk is born a soldier.”³⁶ Jenkins argues that national culture, which “sees the military as embodying the highest virtues of the nation,” has made it “very difficult psychologically for most Turkish politicians to challenge the authority of the military.”³⁷ Ayse Gul Altinay agrees that military service serves an important cultural role, but also asserts that the educational system—which itself has been heavily shaped by generals—has been essential in creating the myth of a Turkish military-nation.³⁸ According to Altinay, the inclusion of weekly national security courses in public schools has privileged a “military perspective” toward politics that glorifies the armed forces and emphasizes the presence of internal and external threats to the Turkish nation.³⁹ A variety of polls demonstrate that Turks traditionally had far greater trust in the military than any other state institutions. In a 1999 survey, 86 percent of respondents answered that they had a “great deal of confidence” or “quite a lot of confidence” in the military. The police earned the confidence of 69 percent, the government 45 percent, the parliament 42 percent, the press 34 percent, and political parties only earned confidence from 28 percent of society.⁴⁰ Zeki Sarigil argues that the military’s popularity has created a “favorable environment for the military to become involved in civilian politics.”⁴¹ As Andrew Mango has written, “the military institution remains an important pressure group, whose power derives from the support

³⁵ Gareth Jenkins, “Continuity and Change: Prospects for Civil-Military Relations in Turkey,” *International Affairs* 83, no. 2 (2007): 340.

³⁶ Gareth Jenkins, *Context and Circumstance: The Turkish Military and Politics: Adelphi Paper 337* (New York: Oxford, 2001), 13.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 52.

³⁸ Ayse Gul Altinay, *The Myth of the Military-Nation: Militarism, Gender, and Education in Turkey* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 87.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 157

⁴⁰ Zeki Sarigil, “Deconstructing the Turkish Military’s Popularity,” *Armed Forces and Society* 35, no. 4 (2009): 710.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 711.

extended to it by society rather than from legal arrangements. The Turkish military serve the state, and their service is appreciated by the public.”⁴²

The third group of scholars argues that the Turkish military has maintained political influence primarily through a set of institutional mechanisms. Ergun Ozbudun has outlined the military’s skillful creation of “exit guarantees” to maintain influence over civilian politics in the wake of the interventions of 1960, 1971, and 1980.⁴³ By pushing through constitutional and legislative changes before returning power to elected politicians, the generals incrementally accumulated more political privileges with each coup. Most scholars point to the “parallel government” of the National Security Council (*Milli Güvenlik Kurulu*, MGK), an advisory board through which the general staff has exerted influence on civilian leaders, as the most important of these institutions.⁴⁴ Umit Cizre, one of Turkey’s top scholars on civil-military relations, has argued that in addition to exerting influence on civilian governance, the military has also enjoyed a large amount of institutional autonomy.⁴⁵

Ahmet Kuru has argued that while the above explanations have some merit, the military has stayed politically relevant primarily through alliances with civilian elites that share its ideological fears. Because many Turks share “assertive secularist, Turkish nationalist, and anti-communist” ideologies, the military easily finds support for its guardianship status amongst leaders of the judiciary, media, and some political parties.⁴⁶ These alliances have allowed the general staff to shape public discourse, informally influence politics, and even seize control of the state without provoking a backlash. Tanel Demirel has similarly argued that the military’s role in Turkish politics come with the consent of much of the society:

⁴² Andrew Mango, *The Turks Today* (London: John Murray, 2004), 139.

⁴³ Ozbudun, *Contemporary Turkish Politics*, 10.

⁴⁴ Cizre, “The Justice and Development Party and the Military,” 133.

⁴⁵ Umit Cizre-Sakallioglu, “The Anatomy of the Turkish Military’s Political Autonomy,” *Comparative Politics* 29, no. 2 (1997), 157.

⁴⁶ Kuru, “Tutelage in Turkey,” 45.

The Turkish military, which perceives itself as the true guardian of the state, enjoys a privileged place in the political system largely because it has managed to get the chief actors in polity and citizenry at large to consent to such a posture. It has done so not only with the threat of arms but also by creating a belief that it has been an indispensable requirement for the survival of the Turkish nation.⁴⁷

While the variety of explanations of for the historical influence of the Turkish Armed Forces are all compelling, thanks to their publication date, many of the above works do not capture the dramatic power shift that has occurred in Turkey since 1999 or its relationship to the Kurdish question. This research seeks to address this gap in the literature.

3. Islam and Turkish Nationalism

The historical relationship between Islam and Turkish nationalism has been a topic of considerable scholarly debate. In 1904, a Tatar named Yusuf Akcrua published an essay declaring that the Ottoman Empire was facing a choice between three competing ideologies: an Ottomanism emphasizing equality amongst various national groups, an Islamism that attempted to unite the empire (or even the entire Islamic world) based on shared religion, and an ethnically-defined Turkism.⁴⁸ The work heavily influenced early Western historians, including Bernard Lewis, who argued that Ottomans of the early 20th century finally regained a Turkish identity after the failed projects of Ottomanism and Pan-Islamism.⁴⁹ More recent works by M. Sukru Hanioglu, Kemal Karpat, and Howard Eissenstat have argued that such sharp distinctions do not accurately capture the ideological pragmatism demonstrated during the transition from imperial to republican rule.⁵⁰ These scholars point out that in the final decades of his rule, Sultan Abdulhamid II

⁴⁷ Tanel Demirel, "Soldiers and Civilians: The Dilemma of Turkish Democracy," *Middle Eastern Studies* 40, no. 1 (2004), 143.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Howard Eissenstat, *The Limits of Imagination: Debating the Nation and Constructing the State in Early Turkish Nationalism* (PhD dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 2007), 11.

⁴⁹ Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 340–354.

⁵⁰ Hanioglu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire*, 142; Kemal Karpat, "The Ottoman Ethnic and Confessional Legacy in the Middle East," in *Ethnicity, Pluralism, and the State in the Middle East*, ed. Milton J. Esman and Itamar Rabinovich (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1988), 51; Eissenstat, *The Limits of Imagination*, 1.

instrumentalized religion to strengthen Muslim solidarity in the face of separatism amongst Christian millets.⁵¹ While the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) was decidedly anti-clerical and positivist in ideology, it similarly resorted to Islamic rhetoric during the second constitutional period in attempt to mobilize Anatolian peasant soldiers.⁵² According to Zurcher, the Young Turks were driven by none of Akcura's three competing ideologies; rather, their policies reveal that they were actually nationalists seeking to establish a state for Muslim Ottomans.⁵³ Eissenstat argues that the process of conflating "Muslimness" and the ethnic Turkish identity occurred over the decades preceding the revolution.⁵⁴ After founding the republic, Ataturk committed to programs of modernization and secularization, forcing the state's abandonment of a national identity based on religion in favor of one defined by shared language and culture.⁵⁵

A variety of scholars have argued that ambiguous concepts of Kemalism, national identity, and the place for religion continue to have important ramifications on the role of Turkey's contemporary political dynamics. Zurcher highlights that, contrary to the anti-Islam character often ascribed to the secular state, Ankara has continued to instrumentalize religion when it sees fit, as when Kenan Evran mandated nationwide religious education supporting the "Turkish-Islamic Synthesis" following the 1980 coup.⁵⁶ According to Haldun Gulalp, Turkey's unique form of secularism, which simultaneously bans religion from the political sphere but also assumes control of its

⁵¹ Hanioglu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire*, 142; Erik Zurcher, "The Importance of Being Secular: Islam in the Service of the National and Pre-National State," in *Turkey's Engagement with Modernity: Conflict and Change in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Celia Kerslake, Kerem Oktem, and Philip Robins (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 60; Karpas, "The Ottoman Ethnic and Confessional Legacy," 50.

⁵² Zurcher, "The Importance of Being Secular," 61.

⁵³ Erik Zurcher, *The Young Turk Legacy and Nation Building* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 231.

⁵⁴ Eissenstat, *The Limits of Imagination*, 9.

⁵⁵ Karpas, "Historical Continuity and Identity Change," 2; Zurcher, *The Young Turk Legacy*, 232.

⁵⁶ Zurcher, "The Importance of Being Secular," 64

institutions, is inherently undemocratic.⁵⁷ M. Hakan Yavuz argues that there exists a large disparity between the hegemonic ideology of secular Kemalism and the religious beliefs of most Turks.⁵⁸ The resulting tension, combined with “opportunity spaces” created by the liberalizing policies of Turgut Ozal, allowed for the growth of a growing Muslim bourgeoisie business class and Naksibendi religious movements.⁵⁹ Yavuz argues that the religious civil-society groups, the most prominent of which is the Nurcu movement led by Fetullah Gulen, have promoted pluralism and moderation by offering religious alternative to the state-sanctioned variant.⁶⁰ Anthropologist Jenny White argues that the Naksibendi movements, who engage in unofficial “vernacular politics” based on shared values and community networks, have been a central component of a growing “Muslim nationalist” class of Turks that assert that Islam is compatible with democracy and modernity. Both Yavuz and White highlight that that members of these movements have increasingly referenced Turkey’s Muslim character while advocating an inclusive, neo-Ottoman concept of citizenship divorced of ethnicity.⁶¹ Waxman characterizes the changes in Turkish identity as a two-way “perpetual negotiation” that has begun with the founding of the republic: the Islamization of an artificial, state-created Turkish nationalism along with the molding of a Turkish form of Islam that respects the limits imposed on it by the state.⁶²

⁵⁷ Haldun Gulalp, “Enlightenment by Fiat: Secularization and Democracy in Turkey,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 41, no. 3 (2005): 357.

⁵⁸ M. Hakan Yavuz, “Search for a New Social Contract in Turkey: Fethullah Gülen, the Virtue Party and the Kurds,” *SAIS Review* 19, no. 1 (1999): 115.

⁵⁹ Ibid; M. Hakan Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey* (Oxford: Oxford, 2003), 24.

⁶⁰ Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, 25.

⁶¹ Jenny White, *Muslim Nationalism and the New Turks* (Princeton: Princeton, 2013), 186; Jenny White, *Islamist Mobilization in Turkey: A Study in Vernacular Politics* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington, 2002), 53; Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, 261.

⁶² Dov Waxman, “Islam and Turkish National Identity: a Reappraisal,” *Turkish Yearbook of International Relations* 30 (2000): 5.

E. METHODS AND SOURCES

This thesis is a historical study focusing on important recent political events and the public discourse surrounding Kurdish nationalist violence in Turkey. Due to language restrictions, the bulk of the research utilizes secondary sources in English, including scholarly volumes and peer-review journal articles. Whenever possible, secondary sources based on direct interviews receive priority attention. Thanks to their growing availability in English, Turkish newspapers serve as primary sources, especially on recent political events. Because the two most accessible publications—*Hurriyet Daily News* and *Today's Zaman*—are viewed as having sharply opposed political leanings, this thesis attempts to balance their contributions.

F. THESIS OVERVIEW

In exploring the changes in Turkish society that have improved the chance for political settlement, this thesis will proceed by examining each hypothesis in greater detail. Chapter II will argue that the Kurdish national movement's expanding avenues of political participation have increased opportunities for political settlement. The chapter will begin by outlining the history of Kurdish nationalism during the republican era, paying extra attention to the factors behind the PKK's uncontested leadership within the movement. It will then proceed by attempting to evaluate whether other pro-Kurdish political actors might be considered a "moderate alternative" to Ocalan's organization.

Chapter III argues that a dramatic shift in Turkey's civil-military relations has removed long-standing restrictions on political measures aimed at resolving the conflict. It will begin by demonstrating that Turkey's military has long acted as one of the state's most important political actors, as evidenced by its history of interventions and its institutional means of exerting influence over civilian politicians. The chapter will argue that the military maintained control over the state's response to Kurdish terrorism for much of the conflict, and that the generals viewed the problem entirely as a security issue that could be won through force. While the resulting heavy-handed strategies may have succeeded in crippling the PKK's military capabilities, they also mobilized the Kurdish population into supporting the nationalist movement. The chapter will argue that while

the EU accession process triggered democratic reforms that decreased the military's formal means of exerting influence, its political stature was weakened by showdowns with the ruling AKP. The chapter will conclude by illustrating that after the military's influence was undercut, Prime Minister Erdogan was finally free to propose policies that indicated an increasing openness toward political solutions.

Chapter IV asserts that an increasing importance of Ottoman-Islamic identity has helped discredit exclusive concepts of Turkish nationalism, and that these changes have brought Turkey closer to a more-inclusive model of citizenship. The chapter will begin by reviewing the increasing prominence of Islamic identity and Ottoman narratives in Turkish political discourse since the founding of the republic. In effort to examine the effects of this resurgence on the resolution of Kurdish question, the discussion will then turn to a detailed analysis of the applicable discourse of Turkey's most influential Islamic political actors: the AKP and the Gulen movement.

Chapter V will conclude the thesis by briefly discussing the current peace negotiations between the AKP and Abdullah Ocalan and evaluating whether the process might finally lead to a lasting peace agreement.

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II. THE KURDISH NATIONALIST MOVEMENT AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

A. INTRODUCTION

Turkey's struggle against militant Kurdish nationalism is not new. Shortly after the formation of the republic, a series of insurrections demonstrated the desire of many Kurds to restore the autonomy they had enjoyed under the Ottoman Empire. In response, Ankara denied the existence of a unique Kurdish identity and attempted to assimilate all citizens into the Turkish nation. Thanks to the state's high willingness to repress dissenters, Kurdish nationalism was largely dormant until the 1960s, when it began finding a voice amongst the Turkish left. In 1978, Abdullah Ocalan formed the PKK as a Marxist-Leninist group committed to using guerilla warfare and terrorism to achieve independence for Kurds in Turkey's southeast. The PKK launched its insurgency against state security forces in 1984 and came to dominate the Kurdish nationalist movement thanks to Ocalan's charismatic leadership and brutal willingness to kill all dissenters. After Ocalan was captured in 1999, many predicted that Kurdish nationalism had run its course in Turkey. Nonetheless, Ocalan was able to maintain control of the organization from prison, and the PKK resumed terror attacks in 2004.

In March 2013, Ocalan declared a ceasefire as part of a new round of direct negotiations between him and the state. Many are hopeful that these new talks may finally bring to an end the bloody conflict that has claimed nearly 40,000 lives. Nonetheless, Ocalan is a highly polarizing negotiating partner from the perspective of the Turkish public. His primary objective—getting released from prison—is absolutely unthinkable for the average Turk. If that issue cannot be resolved, the process may fall apart and open the door to a fresh round of violence. I assert that in the long term, the chances of achieving a lasting peace will be tied to finding a “moderate alternative”⁶³ to the PKK: a political actor who is willing to condemn political violence and compromise on contentious political issues. In looking at the history of Kurdish nationalism in

⁶³ Watts, “The Missing Moderate,” 97.

Turkey, research focuses on answering some critical questions. Does the pro-Kurdish movement include moderate political and civil actors? What restrictions have impeded the growth of moderates? Have recent changes in Turkey's political landscape helped or hurt these actors' chances of becoming legitimate representatives of the movement? I argue that the pro-Kurdish political movement parties, today represented by the Peace and Democracy Party (*Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi*, BDP), did not develop into independent, moderate actors thanks to coercion from the state and pressure to align with the PKK. Nonetheless, the state's relaxed restrictions on associations and political speech have dramatically increased opportunities for non-violent Kurdish activists to form associations, articulate their demands, and engage leaders. Although activists currently may not be able to challenge Ocalan as a representative of the movement, the strengthening of civil society has improved the chances that moderate pro-Kurdish actors will soon help resolve the conflict peacefully.

This chapter will proceed by first outlining the history of Kurdish nationalism in Turkey, paying particular attention to the factors that have contributed to the PKK's dominance of the movement. It will then survey some of the movement's other political and civil actors, focusing on their credentials as potential moderate alternatives to the militant wing of the movement.

B. KURDISH NATIONALISM IN TURKEY

1. Prior to 1984

During most of the Ottoman Empire, the state primarily distinguished its subjects based on religion, with Muslims retaining a privileged stature above that of the non-Muslim *dhimmi* minorities. Nonetheless, most non-Muslim minority communities, or *millets*, enjoyed a relative degree of local autonomy in matters of governance, language, and customs.⁶⁴ In 1804, nationalism first began to weaken the empire when a Russian-aided insurrection in Serbia catalyzed a resistance movement that eventually brought the region independence.⁶⁵ In an effort to prevent further regional challenges to Ottoman

⁶⁴ Zurcher, *Turkey*, 12; Hanioglu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire*, 19.

⁶⁵ Zurcher, *Turkey*, 29.

power, Sultan Mahmud II undercut the power of the provincial leaders (*ayans*) throughout the empire in the 1820s and 1830s.⁶⁶ Imperial advisors feared that nationalist sentiment, especially if combined with incitement from external powers, could lead to further loss of territory.⁶⁷ Incorporating these concerns, the Tanzimat reforms of 1839 declared all subjects to be Ottomans that would receive equal protection under imperial law, regardless of religion.⁶⁸ Despite this attempt to placate Christian minorities and rival European powers, separatism and foreign wars would continue to plague the empire throughout its final decades.

In the predominantly Kurdish regions of southeast Anatolia, Mahmud's repression of local *ayans*, combined with historic tribal divisions, largely limited nationalist sentiment until the end of the nineteenth century.⁶⁹ After the secular chieftains had been deposed, a large power vacuum opened that religious Kurdish sheikhs eventually filled.⁷⁰ Several scholars agree that the first significant Kurdish nationalist leader was Sheikh Ubayd Allah, who Abdulhamid appointed to head regional forces in the defense of the northeastern empire during the Russo-Turk War of 1877–1878.⁷¹ Under the ensuing Treaty of Berlin, Kurds were alarmed that Armenian minorities were guaranteed a protected status, which they worried may lead to that group earning its independence. Partly in response to this threat, Ubayd Allah led an invasion of Persia in 1880 with the intent of establishing an independent Kurdish state.⁷² Although the invasion was unsuccessful, it marked the first of many rebellions intended to forge Kurdish independence.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 45

⁶⁷ Ibid., 54

⁶⁸ Hanioglu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire*, 76.

⁶⁹ Zurcher, *Turkey*, 176; Jwaideh, *The Kurdish National Movement*, 54.

⁷⁰ McDowall, *A Brief History of the Kurds*, 50.

⁷¹ Jwaideh, *The Kurdish National Movement*, 77; McDowall, *A Brief History of the Kurds*, 53; Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh, and State*, 185.

⁷² Jwaideh, *The Kurdish National Movement*, 83.

In the first years of the 20th century, Kurdish nationalists were largely divided into two groups. In the first group were those that desired Kurdish autonomy within a traditional Ottoman framework; some of these reformers would help form the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), which seized control of the state in the 1908 constitutional revolution. The second group, which sought complete independence for Kurdistan, included Kurdish intellectuals, who formed nationalist organizations in urban centers, and sheikhs concerned about the loss of the caliphate and their favored status under Abdulhamid.⁷³ When World War I broke out, Kurdish nationalist aspirations were largely set aside, as Kurdish leaders were still concerned about encroachment by Armenians and Russians. Kurds thus joined Ottoman soldiers in the fight against their shared enemies, at times participating in ruthless massacres of Armenian civilians. After the armistice was declared in 1918, most Kurds put their support behind Mustafa Kemal's national resistance movement, which sought to restore the empire's sovereignty over Anatolia. In outlining the movement's objectives, Kemal emphasized Islamic solidarity against the encroaching foreign threat in effort to maintain Kurdish support.⁷⁴ When the Treaty of Sevres was finally signed in 1920, its mandate for Kurdish autonomy gave Kurds a huge opportunity to pursue independence. Despite this, Kurdish leaders—with the exception of those who led the failed Kocgiri uprising in Dersim—remained largely loyal to Kemal throughout the War of Independence.⁷⁵

After the nationalists' victory and the creation of the Turkish Republic, the relationship between the state and its Kurdish population deteriorated rapidly. In 1923, the new government began eliminating all references to Kurdistan and changing place names from Kurdish to Turkish. The following year, Ankara mandated Turkish as the sole language of courts and schools, effectively obstructing education for most Kurdish children. Perhaps the most egregious offenses in the minds of many Kurds, however,

⁷³ Ibid., 105; McDowall, *A Brief History of the Kurds*, 96.

⁷⁴ McDowall, *A Brief History of the Kurds*, 187; Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement*, 30.

⁷⁵ McDowall, *A Brief History of the Kurds*, 134; Zurcher, *Turkey*, 177; Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement*, 31.

were Kemal's abolition of the caliphate and banning of all religion in public life.⁷⁶ The government's desire to suppress the language and religious institutions of the Kurds elicited a strong surge in nationalism as evidenced by the formation of the Azadi (Freedom) movement in Erzurum.⁷⁷ From this group emerged Sheikh Said of Palu, who started a major revolt against local Turkish gendarmes in February 1925. To suppress the rebellion, Ankara deployed almost half its army to the region and enacted draconian "Tribunals of Independence" to punish offenders.⁷⁸ Although the Turkish government sought to paint the insurgents as religious reactionaries, scholars have largely agreed that the insurrection had both nationalist and religious causes.⁷⁹ The Sheikh Said rebellion was emblematic of the increasingly significant problem of Kurdish nationalism in the new republic; of eighteen revolts against the state between 1924 and 1938, seventeen were Kurdish in origin.⁸⁰

Although the brutal repression of the 1938 Dersim rebellion kept separatist expressions to a minimum for over two decades, the 1960s saw an upswing in Kurdish nationalism that David McDowall deemed a "revival."⁸¹ Commonly cited explanations for the timing of the increase include demographic factors such as higher urbanization and unemployment.⁸² Some scholars have also pointed to Mustafa Barzani's return to prominence following the 1958 Iraqi revolution as a galvanizer of Kurdish identity.⁸³ Nicole Watts and Omer Taspinar emphasize changes brought about as part of Turkey's

⁷⁶ McDowall, *A Brief History of the Kurds*, 192.

⁷⁷ Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh, and State*, 280.

⁷⁸ McDowall, *A Brief History of the Kurds*, 195.

⁷⁹ McDowall, *A Brief History of the Kurds*, 197; Jwaideh, *The Kurdish National Movement*, 209; Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh, and State*, 298; Zurcher, *Turkey*, 171; Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement*, 34

⁸⁰ Taspinar, *Kurdish Nationalism and Political Islam in Turkey*, 79.

⁸¹ McDowall, *A Brief History of the Kurds*, 402.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 411; Watts, *Activists in Office*, 34.

⁸³ McDowall, *A Brief History of the Kurds*, 403; Martin van Bruinessen quoted in Jwaideh, *The Kurdish National Movement*, ix.

1960 coup, including relaxed national restrictions on trade associations and the media.⁸⁴ Watts also highlights that the introduction of a proportional electoral system for parliament allowed smaller political parties to successfully run their candidates.⁸⁵ Thanks to the combination of these factors, Kurdish activists had greater desire and opportunities to challenge existing government policies through established political processes.

For much of the 1960s, pro-Kurdish challengers sought their political objectives through non-violent left wing parties and associations. The most prominent of these was the socialist Turkish Workers' Party (*Türkiye İsci Partisi*, TIP), which Watts argues gave Kurdish activists access to resources, networks, and ideas that strengthened and shaped their political discourse.⁸⁶ Although TIP was an invaluable platform for pro-Kurdish intellectuals, the organization largely avoided addressing ethnicity-based grievances directly, but instead focused on broad concepts of democratic and economic equality.⁸⁷ Because many party representatives could not directly address Kurdish grievances, they instead championed "Eastism," a set of policies intended to improve the backwardness of the southeastern region.⁸⁸

In the 1970s, many Kurdish activists sought to more directly challenge the state on its oppression of their rights. Because the mainstream Turkish socialist organizations were unwilling to adopt such a cause, the activists formed new groups that retained leftist ideologies but focused solely on Kurdish grievances.⁸⁹ At a 1975 meeting in Ankara, Abdullah Ocalan and fifteen others decided to form a new organization dedicated to fighting for an independent Kurdish state shaped by Marxist-Leninist ideology.⁹⁰ Although there were many Kurdish nationalist groups at the time, the relatively unknown

⁸⁴ Watts, *Activists in Office*, 31; Taspinar, *Kurdish Nationalism and Political Islam in Turkey*, 89.

⁸⁵ Watts, *Activists in Office*, 31.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Taspinar, *Kurdish Nationalism and Political Islam in Turkey*, 90; Gunes, *The Kurdish National Movement in Turkey*, 64.

⁸⁸ Watts, *Activists in Office*, 39.

⁸⁹ Gunes, *The Kurdish National Movement in Turkey*, 65.

⁹⁰ Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 28.

Ocalan attracted members by advocating for an immediate armed struggle.⁹¹ He soon moved the organization, which took the name Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in 1978, to the Kurdish regions of southeastern Turkey. The group initially used violence exclusively against rival Kurdish actors—wealthy landowners and other leftist groups—in order to assert its power in the region.⁹² In the year preceding the 1980 military coup, Ocalan traveled to Syria and Lebanon and avoided the military administration's wave of arrests that imprisoned many prominent political dissidents. In August 1984, after having taken up bases in northern Iraq and the mountains of southeastern Turkey, the PKK launched its first wave of attacks on Turkish security forces, marking the beginning of its long insurgency. In addition to attacks on the military, the PKK also organized riots, orchestrated boycotts, and distributed propaganda intended to turn the Kurdish population against the Turkish state.⁹³

2. 1984 to 1999

It was not long before Ankara initiated sweeping efforts to counter the PKK's violent campaign in the Southeast. Although the military administration had restored democratic rule in 1983, it nonetheless maintained significant control over Turkey's defense policies.⁹⁴ Thus, while newly elected Prime Minister Turgut Ozal made unprecedented pronouncements recognizing the Kurdish identity, militant nationalism was dealt with primarily as security problem. Martial law, which had been declared throughout the region in 1980 as part of the coup, was replaced in 1987 by the Emergency Rule Law (OHAL), which granted an unelected governor extremely broad counterterror powers that included detention without trial and forced evacuation of entire villages.⁹⁵ Some observers have estimated that over two million Kurds lost their homes

⁹¹ Ibid., 39.

⁹² Ibid., 40, 45.

⁹³ Eccarius-Kelly, *The Militant Kurds*, 111.

⁹⁴ Barkey, *Turkey's Kurdish Question*, 143; see Chapter III for in-depth discussion.

⁹⁵ Watts, *Activists in Office*, 89.

throughout the 1990s during forced relocations under OHAL rule.⁹⁶ Ankara also established the controversial Village Guard system in 1985, in which security forces armed, trained, and paid civilian Kurds to protect their localities from the PKK. Some critics have alleged the program, which still exists today, increased violence in the region by encouraging waves of retaliatory attacks between local tribes and the PKK.⁹⁷ Although Ankara's policies were reasonably effective at checking the PKK's military capabilities, they nonetheless increased discontent amongst many Kurdish citizens.

By the end of the 1980s, the PKK had assumed the role of the uncontested leader of the Kurdish national movement. This can partly be explained by rising Kurdish sentiment that only the PKK was willing to stand up for Kurdish rights against an increasingly heavy-handed Turkish state. Although some of the PKK's tactics were unpopular—the killing of civilians and mandatory conscription, for example—they were increasingly viewed as justified, especially given local traditions that permitted communal revenge.⁹⁸ The PKK also benefitted from a lack of competition from other Kurdish nationalist actors. This paucity of challengers was likely the result of the post-coup wave of arrests, in which thousands of leftist and Kurdish actors were imprisoned, and the PKK's reputation of violently dispatching with political rivals.⁹⁹ Increasing urbanization may have also increased Kurdish acceptance of the PKK, whose secular Marxist-Leninist ideology stood in stark contrast to the Islamic values and tribal identities associated with the citizens of the rural Southeast. As villagers arrived in the cities such as Diyarbakir looking for work, those feeling newly detached from their traditions may have been receptive to Ocalan's offer of a "new Kurdish identity."¹⁰⁰ The PKK also gained support through the efforts of political organizations it created. In 1985, Ocalan ordered the formation of the Kurdistan National Liberation Front (*Eniya Rizgariya*

⁹⁶ Gunes, *Kurdish National Movement*, 131.

⁹⁷ Barkey, *Turkey's Kurdish Question*, 148; McDowall, *A Brief History of the Kurds*, 424; Unal, *Counterterrorism in Turkey*, 15.

⁹⁸ Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 111, 116.

⁹⁹ Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 40–42, 89–96, 134–140; Doğan, "PKK Kills Its Outspoken Members."

¹⁰⁰ Gunes, *Kurdish National Movement*, 107.

Netewa Kurdistan, ERNK), an organization largely focused on mobilizing popular support for the movement in Europe. The ERNK organized a variety of events, including rallies, hunger strikes, and music festivals centered on fostering a revival of Kurdish culture.¹⁰¹ The ERNK existed as a division of the larger Kurdish Parliament in Exile, later known as the Kurdistan National Congress (*Kongra Netewiya Kurdistan*, KNK).¹⁰² The KNK was formed to portray the Kurdish national movement, including members from Syria, Iran, and Iraq, as legitimate in the eyes of the international community.¹⁰³ Regardless of their democratic appearances, many observers agree PKK leaders maintain control or influence on most of these organizations.¹⁰⁴

The PKK showed noticeable shifts in ideology during the 1990s. Most critically, Ocalan began backing down from his organization's *raison d'être*: an independent Kurdish state. In 1990, he stated, "There is no question of separating from Turkey. My people need Turkey. We can't split for at least 40 years."¹⁰⁵ Since then, Ocalan and PKK spokesmen have argued that a solution might be reached within the existing borders of Turkey if Ankara is willing to grant autonomy and increased cultural rights.¹⁰⁶ With the fall of the Soviet Union, the PKK also recognized that the other pillar of its founding charter—Marxist-Leninism—had lost much of its credibility. Similarly, the resurgence of Islamic identity throughout Turkish society highlighted the dissonance between the organization's secular ideology and the values of average citizens. In the 1990s, Ocalan thus removed the hammer and sickle from the PKK's flag, formed splinter groups

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 109.

¹⁰² Barkey, *Turkey's Kurdish Question*, 34; Michael Gunter, "The Multifaceted Kurdish Movement in Turkey," in *Understanding Turkey's Kurdish Question*, ed. Fevzi Bilgin and Ali Sarihan (Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2013), 75.

¹⁰³ Gunter, "The Multifaceted Kurdish Movement," 83.

¹⁰⁴ Barkey, *Turkey's Kurdish Question*, 34; Gunes, *Kurdish National Movement*, 109; Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 187.

¹⁰⁵ McDowall, *A Brief History of the Kurds*, 431.

¹⁰⁶ Gunes, *Kurdish National Movement* 127; Gunter, *The Kurds Ascending*, 65.

justifying liberation through Islamic narratives, and delivered speeches praising Muhammad as a “great revolutionary.”¹⁰⁷

Turkey’s Kurdish national movement marked an important milestone in 1990, when the People’s Labor Party (*Halkin Emek Partisi*, HEP) formed. The HEP was the republic’s first legal pro-Kurdish party, although the state election law prohibited it from explicitly referencing ethnic identity. While Ocalan initially considered the HEP a threat to the PKK, he soon came to view the new party as useful to advancement of the national movement. Although the party was closed in 1993 for ties to the PKK, its members all immediately formed the Democracy Party (*Demokrasi Partisi*, DEP) to take its place. This marked the first of what would become a string of Kurdish party closures as the movement attempted to maintain a political presence in the face of Ankara’s opposition. The most dramatic instance of such conflict occurred in 1994, when the state revoked seven DEP deputies’ parliamentary immunity, charged them with crimes related to supporting the PKK, and banned the party outright.¹⁰⁸

During the 1990s, violence tied to the PKK’s insurgency reached record shocking levels. The Turkish armed forces, having adopted new weapons and tactics, largely routed the PKK militarily in 1994 and 1995, but the organization continued its resistance through terror attacks throughout the country, including some instances of suicide bombings.¹⁰⁹ The conflict took a dramatic turn in 1999, when the state achieved a stunning victory by capturing Ocalan on the run in Kenya. He was soon tried and sentenced to death, although Ankara later reduced this to a life sentence to help Turkey comply with EU norms. After Ocalan’s capture, he continued to exert influence over the operations of the PKK from his cell in the Imrali Island prison. This was demonstrated shortly after his capture, when Ocalan ordered a ceasefire and PKK militants immediately complied. After the PKK forces retreated across the Iraqi border, many believed the bloody 15-year insurgency was finally over.

¹⁰⁷ McDowall, *A Brief History of the Kurds*, 435; Gunes, *Kurdish National Movement*, 128.

¹⁰⁸ Watts, *Activists in Office*, 110.

¹⁰⁹ Unal, *Counterterrorism in Turkey*, 8.

3. 1999 to the Present

In the few years following Ocalan's capture, it appeared that Turkey had finally overcome the problem of militant Kurdish nationalism. Having sustained a significant military defeat, the PKK announced its dedication to democratization through non-violence and changed its name twice.¹¹⁰ The Turkish government also signaled a new approach to Kurdish grievances. Legislative packages passed to align Turkey with EU standards ended the ban on Kurdish in broadcasting and private education.¹¹¹ In 2002, Ankara restored normal governance to the three regions of the southeast still under emergency rule. That same year, the AKP entered office, raising Kurds' hopes for gaining further cultural rights. The party, which ran a large number of ethnic Kurds as candidates, emphasized democracy as a potential solution for militant nationalism. With political violence nearly non-existent, cities such as Diyarbakir witnessed dramatic increases in political participation and civil society associations.¹¹²

In June 2004, the PKK ended its five-year ceasefire with an attack on Turkish security forces, arguing that Ankara was unfairly holding Ocalan in solitary confinement and avoiding dialogue on improving Kurdish rights.¹¹³ One year later, Prime Minister Erdogan referred to the "Kurdish problem" for the first time and promised to solve the issue through democracy. His conciliatory tone disappeared soon, however, when terror attacks spread to cities throughout western Turkey. A previously unknown organization, the Kurdistan Freedom Falcons (*Teyrêbazên Azadiya Kurdistan*, TAK), claimed responsibility for some of the bombings, leading analysts to wonder if it was a legitimate splinter group or a fictional entity invented to distance the PKK from civilian deaths. The

¹¹⁰ In 2002, the PKK changed its name to the Kurdistan Freedom and Democracy Congress (KADEK), and in 2003, it became the Kurdistan People's Congress (Kongra-Gel). In 2005, the PKK officially reformed under the KCK umbrella organization. Unal, *Counterterrorism in Turkey*, 8; Gunter, "The Multifaceted Kurdish Movement," 76.

¹¹¹ Ekrem Eddy Guzeldere, "Was There, is There, Will There Be a Kurdish Plan?," *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 7, no. 1 (2008): 101.

¹¹² Zeynep Gambetti, "The Conflictual (Trans) Formation of the Public Sphere in Urban Space: The Case of Diyarbakir," *New Perspectives on Turkey*, no. 32 (2005): 43–71.

¹¹³ Gunes, *Kurdish National Movement*, 148.

increased violence provoked a backlash of Turkish nationalism that compelled the AKP to further delay its promised democratic reforms, including a new constitution.

In 2005, Ocalan ordered the creation of the of Kurdistan Communities Union (*Koma Civakan Kurdistan*, KCK), an umbrella organization that unites the PKK and related Kurdish nationalist organizations from around the region. The KCK's primary purpose, however, is the establishment of a parallel government apparatus made up of PKK members that influence the legal activities of local politicians, businesses, and civil associations.¹¹⁴ It effectively created a new means for Ocalan to exert influence on civil actors and members of the latest of the Kurdish movement parties, the Democratic Society Party (*Demokratik Toplum Partisi*, DTP). In 2007, DTP marked a milestone by winning 21 seats in parliament, the first held by pro-Kurdish MPs in thirteen years. Most surprising, however, was the AKP's electoral success in the Southeast, where it defeated the DTP in many provinces. Many Kurds were apparently still hopeful that Erdogan would deliver on his promise to improve Kurdish rights. By 2009, however, Kurdish support for the AKP had declined despite the January launch of TRT Six, a state-run channel broadcasting entirely in Kurdish. Later that year, the DTP made significant gains in local elections at the expense of the ruling party. Not long after the elections, AKP leaders promised a renewed attempt to resolve the Kurdish question through democratic reform. The "Kurdish Opening," seemed threatened, however, after public anger at images of PKK fighters triumphantly celebrating their return from Iraq.¹¹⁵ In December 2009, hopes of reconciliation were again shattered when the Constitutional Court banned the DTP and Turkish police arrested hundreds, including thirty-five DTP mayors, on charges that they were members of the KCK.¹¹⁶ Pro-Kurdish politicians that survived the sweep switched into the newly formed Peace and Democracy Party (*Baris ve Demokrasi Partisi*, BDP), which remains as the movement party today.

¹¹⁴ Gunter, "The Multifaceted Kurdish Movement," 77; International Crisis Group, *Turkey: The PKK and a Kurdish Settlement: Europe Report No. 219* (Brussels: ICG, 2012), 24.

¹¹⁵ Eccarius-Kelly, *The Militant Kurds*, 194.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 164; "DTP Members Detained In KCK Operation," *Today's Zaman*, September 12, 2009, <http://goo.gl/UV3SFN>; Gareth H. Jenkins, "Squaring the Circle: The PKK Return to Violence and Turkey's Intractable Kurdish Problem," *Turkey Analyst* 4, no. 5 (2011), <http://goo.gl/zG57Kq>;

Two years later, the AKP made a stunning admission: the National Intelligence Organization (*Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı*, MİT) secretly had been conducting direct talks with PKK leaders in Oslo since 2009.¹¹⁷ Although the AKP had long decried negotiations with terrorists as sacrilege, public reaction to the news was largely muted. Perhaps as a result of the talks, the PKK called a ceasefire in the fall, but it would be short lived. In the months preceding the 2011 parliamentary elections, both sides took aggressive measures. In June, after the state election board canceled newly elected Hatın Dicle's parliamentary membership, the BDP began a three-month boycott of the assembly. The Oslo talks ended abruptly, Ankara cut off Ocalan's access to his lawyers, and violence escalated to levels that had not been seen since the early 1990s.¹¹⁸ In December, the public was shocked to learn that Turkish fighter jets had killed 34 civilian smugglers near Uludere, having apparently mistaken them for PKK fighters.¹¹⁹

In September 2012, a small group of Kurdish prisoners began a hunger strike. Their demands were twofold: end Ocalan's isolation and remove restrictions on the use of Kurdish in education and government services. Soon, several hundred others had joined in the strike, including several prominent BDP deputies. After 68 days, Ocalan ordered the strike to end, and the protestors immediately complied.¹²⁰ Just over a month later, Erdogan announced that the AKP and Ocalan were working on a new, three-phase plan to end the conflict. On January 3, two BDP MPs visited Ocalan on the Imrali island prison for the first of a series of talks. On March 21st, the Kurdish holiday of Newroz, Ocalan announced phase one of the plan: he ordered the PKK to withdraw from Turkey. In the months since, it has come to light that the second phase of the plan will consist of

¹¹⁷ "Secret Recording Interpreted as Attempt to Sway Opinion against Gov't," *Today's Zaman*, September 13, 2011, <http://goo.gl/5tK2j7>.

¹¹⁸ ICG, *Turkey: Ending The PKK Insurgency - Europe Report No. 213*, 3; Jake Hess, "The AKP's 'New Kurdish Strategy' Is Nothing of the Sort: An Interview with Selahattin Demirtas," The Middle East Research and Information Project, May 2, 2012, <http://goo.gl/YGsWix>.

¹¹⁹ "Air Strike Kills 35 Villagers in an 'Operational Mistake,'" *Hurriyet Daily News*, December 30, 2011, <http://goo.gl/VFBRsu>.

¹²⁰ Daren Butler and Seyhmus Cakan, "Kurd Militants End Hunger Strike in Turkey, Deal Seen," *Reuters*, November 18, 2012, <http://goo.gl/J30ZuH>; Fatma Dişli Zibak, "BDP And The Hunger Strike," *Today's Zaman*, November 16, 2012, <http://goo.gl/MXRvN7>.

legislative reforms and the adoption of a new constitution in order to address some of the Kurdish movement's political grievances. The final phase would see the PKK finally lay down their arms for good and return to Turkey.¹²¹

Although many Turks are hopeful that the Imrali talks will finally bring an end to the bloody conflict, some are skeptical of the actors' sincerity. Observers have alleged that Erdogan, who is approaching the end of his final term as prime minister, is primarily motivated by a desire to pass a constitution that will give Turkey a presidential system and, with it, a chance for him to remain leader of the government.¹²² In order to pass such a system—which is not supported by either the of the major opposition parties—Erdogan needs an alliance with the BDP. It appears the prime minister may only get the pro-Kurdish party's support if he agrees to Ocalan's demands. According to the BDP, these demands are the release of Ocalan and all KCK suspects; the ceasing of building new gendarmerie posts and dams in the Southeast; education in Kurdish; the abolition of the anti-terrorism law; the end of the Village Guard system; and the lowering of the ten percent election threshold required to seat candidates in parliament.¹²³ While many in Turkey may be willing to accept some of these concessions, releasing Ocalan—even to house arrest—would likely provoke an extreme backlash amongst Turks. Because Erdogan and the AKP are proceeding unilaterally, opposition party members and the public are still feeling left in the dark.¹²⁴ Although the Imrali talks have provided a glimmer of hope, the current process faces many challenges that could easily derail it. While the primary negotiators have strong personal incentives to reach a deal—Ocalan getting released and Erdogan becoming president—it is my contention that a lasting peace is unlikely until the moderates on both sides of the conflict can bridge ideological

¹²¹ Daren Butler, "Kurdish Rebel Leader Sees Turkey Pullout by August: Media," *Reuters*, February 27, 2013, <http://goo.gl/bahqZU>.

¹²² Fikret Bila, "Turkey's BDP, AKP Mull Alliance on Constitution," *Al-Monitor*, accessed August 13, 2013, <http://goo.gl/HeozDK>.

¹²³ Ali Aslan Kiliç, "BDP Lists Demands, Including Freedom for PKK Leader Öcalan," *Today's Zaman*, June 30, 2013, <http://goo.gl/eDfdKs>.

¹²⁴ "CHP Discusses Peace Move, Calls on Government to Be Transparent," *Today's Zaman*, March 16, 2013, <http://goo.gl/ATLafE>.

gaps between them. The remainder of this chapter will examine whether recent increases in political opportunities for Kurdish nationalists have helped shape “moderate alternatives” to the PKK.

C. PRO-KURDISH ACTIVISTS: THE SEARCH FOR THE MODERATE ALTERNATIVE

In analyzing the chances for resolving the Kurdish conflict, I will frame the problem as one of incomplete democratic consolidation. In his analysis of the situation, Murat Somer follows Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan by arguing that conflict resolution is most likely when cooperation can be encouraged between the moderates on either side of the conflict.¹²⁵ Somer asserts that Kurdish political actors must demonstrate moderation in two dimensions. First, they must credibly denounce violence and act autonomously from the PKK. Second, they must have the ideological flexibility to bridge the “cognitive gaps” between themselves and Turkish moderates.¹²⁶ In other words, they must demonstrate the willingness to meet their moderate counterparts halfway. Using Somer’s criteria, I will examine the moderate credentials of the three most prominent pro-Kurdish parties and some notable civil actors.

1. Political Parties

The pro-Kurdish movement political parties, from the HEP to the BDP, have played an important role in the assertion of national identity. When Kurdish activists enter the established political system, they gain important resources, including legal immunity, a national audience, and access to high-level politicians both in Turkey and abroad.¹²⁷ Using these resources, Kurdish politicians have generally employed three methods of furthering their nationalist agenda. First, they have used their prominent positions as “loudspeaker systems” to directly contest state policies and challenge

¹²⁵ Murat Somer, “Why Aren’t Kurds Like the Scots and the Turks Like the Brits? Moderation and Democracy in the Kurdish Question,” *Cooperation and Conflict* 43, no. 2 (2008): 223; Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1996), 61.

¹²⁶ Somer, “Why Aren’t Kurds Like the Scots,” 235.

¹²⁷ Watts, *Activists in Office*, 14, 162.

traditional narratives. Second, they have created parallel government structures to help foster a sense of Kurdish collective consciousness. Third, they have attempted to reshape state policies directly through political actions within state institutions.¹²⁸

Despite their access to political resources, the movement parties have not charted an independent course or challenged the PKK for leadership of the Kurdish national movement for two reasons. First, Ankara has repeatedly marginalized the parties based on their association with the PKK or articulations of Kurdish nationalist ideologies. Since 1990, Ankara has closed nearly every pro-Kurdish party and imprisoned hundreds of politicians for their statements or connections to the PKK.¹²⁹ Because they face such a hostile political system, few pro-Kurdish politicians have dared enter the fray. For those that have entered politics, it has been critical to temper their messages to avoid criminal charges or worse. Second, pro-Kurdish actors feel significant pressure to remain aligned with the PKK. This is partly thanks to the PKK's long history of attacking or threatening its political challengers. Resit Deli, a deputy of the smaller Rights and Freedom Party (HAK-PAR), stated, "Most Kurds are fed up with Abdullah Ocalan and the PKK, but they cannot say so openly because they are intimidated."¹³⁰ Some of the pressure on the parties to stay aligned with the PKK, however, comes from their constituents. Amongst those Kurds that vote along ethnic lines, support amongst the PKK is extremely high; publically criticizing Ocalan or his organization might thus be viewed as a betrayal of the movement. Watts has argued that because few BDP party members are former PKK fighters, they lack the "battlefield" credentials of Ocalan, and thus rely on his endorsement to shore up votes.¹³¹

¹²⁸ Ibid., 13, 124, 164.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 6.

¹³⁰ M. Hakan Yavuz and Nihat Ali Ozcan, "The Kurdish Question and Turkey's Justice and Development Party," *Middle East Policy* 13, no. 1 (2006): 117.

¹³¹ Watts, "The Missing Moderate," 105.

a. Peace and Democracy Party (BDP)

The BDP, like the pro-Kurdish parties before it, has consistently avoided operating autonomously from the PKK. As discussed earlier, this lack of independence is driven by the political realities of representing the Kurdish nationalist movement. For this reason, the party has rarely denounced violence perpetrated in the name of Kurdish nationalism. After seven civilians were killed in two attacks on the same day in September 2011, BDP co-chairs Selahattin Demirtas and Gultan Kisanak condemned the attacks but avoided naming the PKK.¹³² In October 2012, BDP deputies denounced attacks on schools in southeastern Turkey by alleged PKK supporters, going as far as to call the attacks “terrorist activity,” and stating that the party “could not approve of them on any account.”¹³³ In response to their criticism, the PKK labeled the MPs as traitors.¹³⁴

Similarly, party leaders have occasionally called for the PKK to lay down its arms and pursue negotiations. In October 2011, after a particularly bloody battle between PKK fighters and the army in Hakkari, the party leaders issued a written statement calling for an end to fighting: “We appeal to both the PKK and government to immediately end the war . . . Dialogue is the only solution.”¹³⁵ Diyarbakir BDP mayor Osman Baydemir, who is considered by some to be far less beholden to Ocalan than other party politicians, has spoken out against violence as well: “Neither side should use violence, otherwise neither the PKK nor the government will reach their goal . . . We have to look for an all-encompassing solution.”¹³⁶ Nonetheless, the BDP’s denunciations of PKK violence are mostly notable for their rarity; there are countless attacks that pass without comment.

¹³² “BDP Condemns Attacks,” *Hurriyet Daily News*, September 21, 2001, <http://goo.gl/HIK04J>.

¹³³ “BDP Criticizes PKK School Burnings,” *Hurriyet Daily News*, October 13, 2012, <http://goo.gl/YXkAGT>.

¹³⁴ Eyüp Can, “Is There a Difference Between PKK, BDP?,” *Today’s Zaman*, November 6, 2012, <http://goo.gl/fTawoQ>.

¹³⁵ “BDP Urges Government and PKK to ‘End War,’” *Hurriyet Daily News*, October 19, 2011, <http://goo.gl/Wxabq9>.

¹³⁶ ICG, *Turkey: The PKK and a Kurdish Settlement - Europe Report No. 219*, 20.

The BDP's unwillingness to consistently condemn violence furthers the perception that the organization is merely the political wing of the PKK. Such views are widely held even amongst Kurdish activists. Zeynel Abidin Kizilyaprak, an advocate of Kurdish rights, stated:

The BDP didn't win those elections. It's the PKK. There is no such organization as the BDP, and the BDP knows that best of all. There is one PKK representative who chooses all the candidates. If you join the party, there's one condition: you have to become the PKK's parrot. You have to pay back your debt.¹³⁷

Ali Kemal Ozcan, a Kurdish academic who has spent time with Ocalan and the PKK, argues that the BDP is not a moderate interlocutor, but rather a military organization: "The BDP is like the PKK leg working in the field. It does not have any authority to make a decision . . . Which one of the BDP deputies can criticize any of Ocalan's remarks?"¹³⁸ The sentiment that the BDP and PKK are synonymous, also widely held amongst Turkish citizens, was further inflamed by the circulation of a video in August 2012. The video showed a group of prominent BDP MPs, including Aysel Tuğluk and Gultan Kisanak, warmly greeting and hugging armed PKK militants on a remote road in the Southeast.¹³⁹ A few months later, another video emerged in which BDP deputy Ozdal Ucer advised citizens to take up weapons against security forces at the funeral of a PKK fighter.¹⁴⁰ Public outcry over the events led Prime Minister Erdogan to threaten to revoke the MPs' parliamentary immunity, although the motion never reached the floor of the assembly.¹⁴¹ Events such as these underscore the beliefs of many Turks that the BDP has neither the desire nor the ability to act independently of the PKK.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 24.

¹³⁸ Bünyamin Köseli, "Kurdish Academic: Granting BDP Active Role In Settlement Process Was Wrong," *Today's Zaman*, July 14, 2013, <http://goo.gl/gDL9Df>.

¹³⁹ "BDP-PKK Meeting Adds to Controversy," *Hurriyet Daily News*, August 20, 2012, <http://goo.gl/A2ethR>.

¹⁴⁰ "BDP Deputy Urges People to Take up Arms against Security Forces in Video," *Today's Zaman*, November 26, 2012, <http://goo.gl/FZ0dlo>.

¹⁴¹ "Motion to Lift Immunity of BDP Deputies Submitted to Justice Ministry," *Today's Zaman*, October 31, 2012, <http://goo.gl/deTrba>.

While the BDP has not consistently denounced PKK violence, it has at times demonstrated the ideological flexibility to facilitate moderate-moderate cooperation. However, there are aspects of its recent discourse that have caused confusion or provoked a backlash from Turkish nationalists. One of the more contentious of the party's recent demands is that of "democratic autonomy." Although this is now a core tenet of the BDP's rhetoric, the party has been inconsistent on what democratic autonomy entails. In recent years, the party has advocated a new state structure that is federal in nature: between 15 to 26 regional governments with their own flags, locally elected governors, legislatures, and taxation systems.¹⁴² According to a 2011 poll, however, such a proposal is extremely unpopular in Turkey: only seven percent of all citizens support a federation, and the number drops to three percent amongst ethnic Turks.¹⁴³ Nonetheless, it is possible that BDP may have some ideological flexibility on the matter. In 2010, the party drafted a proposal for democratic autonomy that described it merely as the strengthening of regional governance under the existing structure.¹⁴⁴ Because such a proposal is far more popular—28 percent of citizens would support it—there may be room for negotiating on this core demand of the Kurdish nationalist movement.

When it comes to matters related to identity, the BDP has argued that a new constitution must not discriminate against Kurds in any way. The party seeks the removal of any terminology that references Turkishness, which they argue marginalizes other ethnicities. The BDP's draft constitution replaces the terms "Turkish nation" with "the people of Turkey," although BDP MP Ahmet Turk has claimed that the party would not object if the change were not adopted.¹⁴⁵ The current constitution, when referring to

¹⁴² Göksel Bozkurt, "BDP Wants Autonomy for Kurds in New Constitution," *Hurriyet Daily News*, September 4, 2011, <http://goo.gl/PFWHSQ>; ICG, *Turkey: Ending the PKK Insurgency: Europe Report No. 213*, 23.

¹⁴³ Wise Men Center for Strategic Study, *Expectations of the Turkish Society from the New Constitution* (Istanbul: BILGESAM, 2011), 37, <http://goo.gl/IAoKTJ>.

¹⁴⁴ Olson, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movements*, 62.

¹⁴⁵ "BDP Won't Object to 'Turkishness' in Constitution, says Türk," *Today's Zaman*, May 21, 2013, <http://goo.gl/ytRMdm>.

the republic, reads, “its language is Turkish,” while the BDP’s draft states, “the state’s official language is Turkish.”¹⁴⁶ Polling has shown that such changes would be supported by approximately a third of the population, indicating that cooperation between moderates may be indeed possible on these issues.¹⁴⁷ Of note, the BDP has not explicitly called for the addition of Kurdish as an additional official language, a move that would undoubtedly spark a backlash amongst Turks.

Another important demand of the BDP is the possibility of education in mother tongues other than Turkish. While education in Kurdish is currently permitted at the university level and private schools, it is only available in public schools as an elective.¹⁴⁸ BDP leaders have argued that public school students should be able to receive their education entirely in Kurdish where there is demand. Further, they argue that the state should attempt to provide public services in mother tongue languages to those who do not speak Turkish. Again, the public is not strongly opposed to such proposals: a 2012 poll showed that 61 percent of citizens support mother-tongue education if students also learn Turkish.¹⁴⁹ Similarly, another survey showed that 53 percent of the public agrees with the statement “convenience should be provided for those receiving public service in mother tongues other than Turkish.”¹⁵⁰ In the area of granting increased recognition of Kurdish identity, the BDP has articulated a set of proposals that are moderate enough to serve as a baseline for negotiations.

Perhaps the most contentious issue in the resolution of the Kurdish conflict is the future of PKK and KCK members. Soon after the 2013 Imrali talks began, the BDP released a list of demands that would need to be met prior to the PKK disarming. While the list included many of the demands discussed above, it most strongly emphasized something considered unthinkable for a majority of Turks: the release of

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Wise Men, *Expectations of the Turkish*, 58.

¹⁴⁸ ICG, *Turkey: The PKK and a Kurdish Settlement: Europe Report No. 219*, 27.

¹⁴⁹ Fatma Dişli Zibak, “Majority of Turks Support Education in Mother Tongue,” *Today’s Zaman*, March 26, 2013, <http://goo.gl/wUST8A>.

¹⁵⁰ Wise Men, *Expectations of the Turkish*, 60.

Abdullah Ocalan.¹⁵¹ The statement also called for the release of all those imprisoned under the sweeping KCK investigations, which some argue is as many as eight thousand people.¹⁵² Amnesty is an extremely unpopular idea amongst the country's ethnic Turks: less than three percent favor amnesty for PKK fighters overall, and less than two percent believe Ankara should transfer Ocalan to house arrest. Even amongst ethnic Kurds, only 17 percent support house arrest.¹⁵³ Thus, even most moderate Turks will find this to be a considerable roadblock to future negotiations. Some have argued that the inclusion of such demands is not only unrealistic, but it overshadows the remainder of the BDP's reform proposals, which are far more moderate. Their parroting of Ocalan's demands underlines that the BDP—and the rest of the PKK/KCK leadership, for that matter—is still completely beholden to their imprisoned leader.¹⁵⁴ Some have alleged that the BDP is not happy about their diminished role in the talks, and may have leaked minutes from the sessions to embarrass Ocalan and sabotage the negotiations.¹⁵⁵ Until the BDP can more decisively break their links with Ocalan, however, it will continue to be viewed as a radical organization in the eyes of the Turkish majority, regardless of its espoused ideology.

b. *Smaller Pro-Kurdish Parties*

The BDP is not the only political party representing the promotion of Kurdish identity. The Participatory Democracy Party (*Katılımcı Demokrasi Partisi*, KADEP) has attempted to differentiate itself amongst pro-Kurdish actors by condemning violence on either side of the conflict. The party was founded by the late Serafettin Elci,

¹⁵¹ Kiliç, "BDP Lists Demands;" "Main Demand Of Peace Process is 'Liberation' of PKK Leader Öcalan, BDP Says," *Hurriyet Daily News*, June 30, 2013, <http://goo.gl/xz8EXw>.

¹⁵² Andrew Finkel, "Kurdish New Year's Resolutions," Latitude (blog), *New York Times*, March 27, 2013, <http://goo.gl/DMJ7FW>.

¹⁵³ Salih Akyürek and Mehmet Ali Yilmaz, *Turkish Societal Perceptions Concerning Combat against PKK Terrorism* (Istanbul: BILGESAM, 2012), 17, <http://goo.gl/96p8Iq>.

¹⁵⁴ İlnur Cevik, "Ocalan Peace Plan Irks PKK Militant Leaders," *Al-Monitor*, March 3, 2013, <http://goo.gl/UqEsX6>.

¹⁵⁵ "BDP Deputies Deny Media Leak as Needle of Suspicion Points at Them," *Today's Zaman*, March 1, 2013, <http://goo.gl/IumlR2>.

who had made history in 1979 when, while serving as a cabinet minister, he declared, “There are Kurds in Turkey. I am also Kurdish.”¹⁵⁶ Elci first formed another party—the Democratic Mass Party (*Demokratik Kitle Partisi*, DKP)—in 1996 as an attempt to avoid the “mistakes” of the dominant pro-Kurdish movement parties and pursue “a more cautious approach.”¹⁵⁷ Elci was an early advocate of a federal structure as a solution to the Kurdish question, and hoped that his party could “soften up minds,” i.e. help assuage Turkish fears that decentralization would not destroy the republic.¹⁵⁸ Nonetheless, the Constitutional Court saw the party’s rhetoric as a threat to the unitary nature of the state, and banned the party in 1998.¹⁵⁹ After Elci formed KADEP in 2006, his party’s discourse could also be controversial: its unapologetic usage of the term “federalism,” a party program that criticizes military meddling in security policy,¹⁶⁰ and an insistence on explicitly acknowledging the Kurdish nation in the new constitution.¹⁶¹ Thus, while the KADEP’s commitment to non-violence certainly contributes to its credibility as a moderate actor, in some ways its policy proposals are more radical than those of the BDP.

The Rights and Freedom Party (*Hak ve Özgürlükler Partisi*, HAK-PAR) is another pro-Kurdish party that has denounced armed resistance. Founded by Ibrahim Guclu and Abdulmelik Firat, son of the famous Kurdish rebel Sheikh Said, ¹⁶² HAK-PAR has been unafraid to criticize the PKK. After a string of terror attacks in 2008, the party released a statement stating that “all democrats of Turkey should unite against those

¹⁵⁶ Taspinar, *Kurdish Nationalism and Political Islam in Turkey*, 95.

¹⁵⁷ “DKP: ‘The Party of the Oppressed,’” *Hurriyet Daily News*, January 17, 1997, <http://goo.gl/421Nr1>.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ Ozbudun, *Contemporary Turkish Politics*, 144.

¹⁶⁰ “Participatory Democracy Party (KADEP) Program,” *Katilimci Demokrasi*, accessed August 15, 2013, <http://goo.gl/YWYUO6>.

¹⁶¹ Irfan Aktan, “Turkey’s Kurdish Organisations Call for Conference of Unity,” *KurdNet*, March 15, 2013, <http://goo.gl/G4jP2U>.

¹⁶² Olson, *Blood, Beliefs, and Ballots*, 37.

who are for guns and violence.”¹⁶³ It went on to claim that the PKK’s campaign of violence was the primary impediment to the formation of a strong Kurdish democratic movement.¹⁶⁴ In 2012, Guclé submitted a report on intra-PKK murders to a parliamentary committee on human rights,¹⁶⁵ drawing a sharply worded threat from the PKK.¹⁶⁶ Since 2012, the party has been lead by Kemal Burkay, a famous Kurdish poet and activist who recently returned from three decades of European exile. Burkay has publically called for the PKK to lay down its weapons and recommends the BDP clarify its democratic autonomy proposal.¹⁶⁷ Like KADEP, HAK-PAR asserts that a federal system will improve the democracy deficit underlying the Kurdish question, a suggestion that nearly led to its closure by the Constitutional Court in 2008.¹⁶⁸

Both KADEP and HAK-PAR have had trouble mustering significant electoral support with Kurdish voters. While this may partly be due to federalism’s weak support amongst Kurds—only 22 percent are in favor of such a restructuring¹⁶⁹—it is also a reflection of the difficulty of attracting pro-Kurdish voters without the endorsement of Ocalan. After years of keeping their distance from the PKK and its affiliated parties, both KADEP and HAK-PAR made pragmatic compromises and joined an electoral coalition with BDP and the Labor Party for the 2011 parliamentary elections.¹⁷⁰ The Labor, Freedom, and Democracy Bloc won 36 seats in the election, but only two non-BDP politicians—Elci and Leven Tozel of Labor—joined the assembly under the

¹⁶³ “HAK-PAR Calls on Intellectuals to Unite Against PKK,” *Today’s Zaman*, October 11, 2008, <http://goo.gl/Obj1QG>.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ “PKK Kills its Outspoken Members.”

¹⁶⁶ Emrullah Bayrak, “Kurdish Intellectuals Start Support Campaign for Author Threatened by PKK,” *Today’s Zaman*, March 16, 2012, <http://goo.gl/gFUIbV>.

¹⁶⁷ “Burkay Elected Leader of HAK-PAR,” *Today’s Zaman*, November 5, 2012, <http://goo.gl/Y17rrx>; “Interview with Mr. Kemal Burkay (2nd Part): ‘Democratic Autonomy’ is not a Well-Founded Demand,” Research Turkey, accessed August 15, 2013, <http://goo.gl/i8P1AK>.

¹⁶⁸ “Court Case against Turkey’s Ruling Party,” Human Rights Watch, July 27, 2008, <http://goo.gl/BzCeU3>.

¹⁶⁹ Wise Men, *Expectations of the Turkish*, 37.

¹⁷⁰ Ozgur Ogret, “Turkish Bloggers Analyze Election Results,” *SETimes*, June 18, 2011, <http://goo.gl/IG7rUy>.

arrangement.¹⁷¹ While HAK-PAR and KADEP attempt to maintain their identity as pro-Kurdish parties committed to peaceful means, the realities of operating in the polarized political landscape have been challenging.

2. Civil Society Groups

Over the past decade, Kurds have had far greater opportunities to articulate their interests through various civil society organizations. These include organizations dedicated to promoting human rights, women's equality, professional interests, and Kurdish culture. Thanks to more liberal laws on language and associations, these groups have been freer to articulate messages that emphasize Kurdish identity and demands. Like the pro-Kurdish political parties, however, civil associations often face pressure to temper their messages. This pressure may come from the state, which is currently holding thousands of pro-Kurdish activists imprisoned for alleged ties to terrorist organizations, or the PKK itself, which has a history of intimidating its critics. These constraints, combined with the popularity of Ocalan, have rewarded actors that tacitly—if not directly—support the PKK but manage to avoid state prosecution. Nonetheless, the “thickening” of Kurdish civil society helps shape an environment in which political demands become more diverse and moderate.

a. Democratic Society Congress (DTK)

One of the most important pro-Kurdish civil actors is the Democratic Society Congress (*Demokratik Toplum Kongresi*, DTK), a federation of over 600 intellectuals, politicians, associations, and NGOs that functions as an advocacy group for Kurdish interests.¹⁷² Founded in 2007, the DTK includes a diverse group of non-violent actors, but it has direct ties to the BDP. The organization is headed by BDP deputy Aysel Tugluk and Ahmet Turk, the former chairman of the DTP who was banned from politics for five years in 2009. The DTK has claimed its purpose is to develop a roadmap for a peace process, but some of its actions have proved divisive. At its congress in July 2011,

¹⁷¹ “Independent Kurdish Deputies join BDP,” *World Bulletin*, July 1, 2011, <http://goo.gl/py4nDm>.

¹⁷² Gunter, “The Multifaceted Kurdish Movement,” 81.

the DTK created controversy by unilaterally declaring “democratic autonomy” and requesting recognition from international actors. The timing of the announcement—just hours after a PKK attack killed 13 Turkish soldiers—was criticized not only by Ankara, but also by members of the pro-Kurdish movement, including Elci and HAK-PAR’s Bayram Bozyel.¹⁷³ In June 2013, the DTK was a prominent participant in the “North Kurdistan Unity and Solution Conference,” which brought together a wide variety of political actors, allegedly at the request of Ocalan.¹⁷⁴ By referring to Turkey as “North Kurdistan”—an expression that would have certainly brought criminal charges a decade ago—conference organizers intended to provoke a strong reaction from Turkish observers. Similarly, the meeting’s attendees demanded the release of Ocalan and stated, “the peoples of Kurdistan have the right to determine their own status in the form of autonomy, federation, or *independence*.”¹⁷⁵ The DTK’s inflammatory rhetoric seems to indicate that the group, while claiming to democratically represent a diverse group of Kurdish activists, operates as the civil arm of the BDP.

b. *Human Rights Association (IHD)*

Another NGO that features prominently in the pro-Kurdish movement is the Human Rights Association (*İnsan Hakları Derneği*, IHD), the largest human rights organization in Turkey. The IHD was founded in 1986 primarily as a response to the massive number of leftists imprisoned by the post-coup military administration, but the organization has since paid particular attention to human rights violations perpetrated as part of the Kurdish conflict, including extralegal murders, torture, and extended confinement.¹⁷⁶ IHD reports on the conflict, which are widely referenced by foreign human rights observers and governments, have greatly increased international awareness

¹⁷³ “Unilateral Declaration of Autonomy Creates Rift in BDP,” *Today’s Zaman*, July 21, 2011, <http://goo.gl/jJedL4>.

¹⁷⁴ “Kurdish Conference Ends with List of Demands from Gov’t,” *Today’s Zaman*, June 17, 2013, <http://goo.gl/WYrk3V>.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

¹⁷⁶ Basak Cali, “Human Rights Discourse and Domestic Human Rights NGOs,” in *Human Rights in Turkey*, ed. Zehra Kabasakal Arat (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2007), 221.

of the conflict and applied pressure on Ankara to adhere to EU standards.¹⁷⁷ Although IHD has urged both the state and the PKK to adhere to the Geneva Conventions, Ankara has repeatedly charged the IHD with ties to the PKK. As part of the 2009 KCK sweeps, Turkish police raided IHD's offices and arrested multiple individuals, including the head of the organization's Diyarbakir office, Muharrem Erbey, who has yet to be released.¹⁷⁸ Perhaps Ankara's interest in the IHD stems from its role as a incubator for prominent pro-Kurdish politicians; several of the BDP's prominent deputies were top leaders of the organization, including party co-chair Selahattin Demirtas, Diyarbakir mayor Osman Baydemir, Nazmir Gur, and Akin Birdal.¹⁷⁹ Whether or not the IHD has direct links to the PKK/KCK, the organization has undoubtedly had a moderating influence on the Kurdish national movement's discourse. By shifting its focus from independence to human rights, pro-Kurdish advocates legitimized their struggle internationally and increased the chances of moderate-moderate cooperation within Turkey.

c. Other Groups

Over the last decade, the number of NGOs and associations in the southeast has blossomed. While some of these organizations are defined by their assertion of Kurdish identity, many are dedicated to causes unrelated to ethnicity. The relative pluralism of the civil society has the effect of shaping—and often moderating—the agendas of political actors, including the state and the Kurdish nationalist movement. One notable phenomenon has been the large increase in the number of organizations dedicated to furthering women's rights. One of the first such organizations, the Women's Center (KAMER), initially was criticized by members of the Kurdish national movement as being divisive and a distraction from the primary cause. While maintaining its distance from the PKK, KAMER has since expanded into over twenty cities and serves as one of

¹⁷⁷ For example: International Crisis Group, *Turkey's Kurdish Impasse: The View From Diyarbakir - Europe Report No. 222* (Brussels: ICG, 2012), 10.

¹⁷⁸ Olson, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movements*, 43; Michael Gunter, "Reopening Turkey's Closed Kurdish Opening," 90.

¹⁷⁹ Watts, "The Missing Moderate," 106.

the country's prominent women's rights organizations.¹⁸⁰ Not all influential civil actors maintain such clear breaks with militant movement actors, however. The Kurdish Language and Education Project, or *TZP Kurdi*, has achieved notoriety for its organization of school boycotts, in which Kurdish families have kept their children at home to protest a lack of mother-tongue education. While some in the Turkish press criticized the boycotts, which were publicly supported by the PKK and BDP, the protests did help elevate the discussion of Kurdish language rights to the national level.¹⁸¹

Kurdish civil society groups have demonstrated, especially when they join forces, the ability to engage directly with important policymakers. In April 2008, a group of 17 NGOs from the Southeast met with the prime minister to discuss a roadmap for solving the Kurdish question. The group included KAMER, the Diyarbakir Chamber of Commerce, the Southeastern and Eastern Anatolia Businessmen's Association (GUNSIAD), and the Islamic human rights organization MAZLUM-DER. The suggestions of the group were decidedly oriented toward economic solutions—the IHD had boycotted the meeting thanks to its focus—but they did include some cultural demands: the opening of Kurdish faculties in universities, the use of Kurdish in government services, and education in the mother-tongue. Although Erdogan reacted harshly to the final suggestion, the exchange represented a remarkable instance of civic leaders making direct demands of their leaders in a constructive and moderate manner.¹⁸² One year later, the AKP announced its “Kurdish Opening,” which, although much of the package was soon abandoned, included some of the policy changes suggested by the group.

The increasing prominence of interest groups has clearly also had an effect on the agendas of the Kurdish national movement. Since the early 2000s, the PKK and its

¹⁸⁰ Kemal Kirisci, “Turkey’s Kurdish Challenge,” in *The Kurdish Policy Imperative*, ed. Robert Lowe and Gareth Stansfield (Washington: Chatham House, 2010), 69; Busta Ersanli and Gunay Goksu Ozdogan, “Obstacles and Opportunities: Recent Kurdish Struggles for Political Representation and Participation in Turkey,” *Southeastern Europe* 35, no. 1 (2011): 86.

¹⁸¹ Olson, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movements*, 29; Rahime Sezgin, “Could Boycott Cause Division Among Children?,” *Today’s Zaman*, September 26, 2010, <http://goo.gl/SvL8Do>; “Thousands of Kurdish Students Boycotted Turkish Schools,” KurdNet, September 9, 2010, <http://goo.gl/txQOVF>.

¹⁸² Guzeldere, “Will There Be a Kurdish Plan?,” 109.

associated organizations have made increasing mention of topics seemingly unrelated to its original charter, including environmental conservation and equal rights.¹⁸³ Two of the DTK's nine commissions, for example, are devoted to women's rights and ecology.¹⁸⁴ Similarly, at the recent "North Kurdistan" conference discussed earlier, the attendees included demands for equal treatment of a variety of minorities, including Armenians and Alevis.¹⁸⁵ It appears that Ocalan has recognized that the movement's appeal cannot solely be its advocacy of Kurdish identity, and that he must ideologically compete in a broader spectrum of political interests. While the PKK and KCK have certainly not renounced violence thanks to this phenomenon, it has pushed their discourse towards a more moderate middle ground.

D. CONCLUSION

In looking at changes in Turkey that may increase the chances of a last resolution to the conflict, I concur with Somer that success is largely dependent on cooperation between moderates on either side. I have adopted his two-dimensional model for assessing whether an actor might serve as a "moderate alternative" to the PKK: it has renounced violence and possesses enough ideological flexibility to compromise with its counterparts. The first logical candidate for such an actor is the BDP, the latest in a string of movement parties that claim no direct ties to the PKK. Like its predecessors, the BDP has not grown into a strong actor capable of distancing itself from the PKK for two reasons. First, Ankara has created significant impediments to the party's operations through high election thresholds, censorship, arrests, extended detention, and other forms of harassment. Second, the BDP has faced significant pressures to align itself with Ocalan, both to avoid retribution from the PKK and to prevent alienating its voters, who continue to strongly support the jailed terrorist leader. Thanks in part to these restrictions, the BDP refuses to condemn violence and continues to operate essentially as the PKK's political wing. Its lack of clout was highlighted vividly during the recent Imrali talks,

¹⁸³ Gunes, *The Kurdish National Movement in Turkey*, 144; Gambetti, "The Conflictual (Trans)Formation of the Public Sphere," 66.

¹⁸⁴ ICG, *Turkey's Kurdish Impasse: The View From Diyarbakir: Europe Report No. 222*, 9.

¹⁸⁵ "Kurdish Conference Ends with List of Demands from Gov't."

when it acted merely as Ocalan’s courier and loudspeaker. KADEP and HAK-PAR, meanwhile, have largely maintained their solid credentials as moderates, but their lack of popular support limits their usefulness as an interlocutor for now. There is some hope, however: the mere existence of these smaller parties—and the diminishing harassment they receive from Ankara—is evidence that Turkey’s political landscape is now friendlier to moderate pro-Kurdish political parties.

Like the BDP, many influential pro-Kurdish NGOs are associated closely with the PKK and KCK. Most prominent of these is the DTK, whose rhetoric closely matches that of the BDP. While the IHP has worked hard to develop legitimacy as an impartial human-rights organization, it continues to be the target of state repression based on alleged ties to the KCK. Over the last decade, however, there has been a dramatic “thickening” of civil society in the Kurdish-majority southeast. Increasingly diverse actors, who do not base their political demands solely on ethnic identity, have engaged with political leaders and steered the discourse in a moderate direction. As one women’s rights activist said, “Diyarbakır is not just two rival camps as it used to be. There is a big group in the middle, watching for whoever is speaking the language of peace.”¹⁸⁶ Nonetheless, none of these individual actors currently represent a viable alternative to the PKK. As a group, however, they have improved the chances that a moderate actor—one that delivers real political benefits to the Southeast without resorting to violence or hardline ideology—may find support in the future. Barring a major turn that severely discredits Ocalan amongst his supporters, however, the rise of such an actor may still be years away.

¹⁸⁶ ICG, *Turkey: Ending The PKK Insurgency - Europe Report No. 213*, 18.

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III. CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS: A SHIFTING BALANCE

A. INTRODUCTION

Despite the fact that Turkey transitioned from single-party rule to competitive electoral politics in the late 1940s, the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) maintained a prominent role in state politics for decades afterwards. As discussed in the literature review of Chapter I, a variety of scholars have outlined explanations for Turkey's unique history of civil-military relations. Thanks to the military's significant political clout, the TSK was instrumental in shaping Turkey's policies surrounding militant Kurdish nationalism. As the vanguard of Kemalist ideology, the general staff has consistently maintained hardline stances against political measures that acknowledge Kurdish identity claims in any form. Instead, it has securitized the Kurdish question by viewing it as a problem that can be solved primarily through force. In its effort to end terrorism, however, the military permitted a variety of heavy-handed tactics—torture, assassinations, and the forced evacuation of villages—that galvanized Kurdish nationalist sentiments rather than quelling them.

Since 1999, the balance of power between Turkey's military and its civilian government has shifted. This change, which began with reforms triggered by Ankara's aspirations of joining the European Union, was a byproduct of the antagonistic relationship between the Turkish general staff and AKP leaders during the party's first two terms in office. It was only after a controversial set of coup trials, however, that military leaders were placed under greater civilian rule. In this chapter, I argue that the recent realignment of Turkish civil-military relations has removed the hardline restrictions on Ankara's policies regarding the Kurdish question, which has increased the chances of a negotiated settlement to the conflict in the long term.

This chapter will proceed with an outline of the dominant role that the Turkish military has played in state politics, with an emphasis on its four successful interventions since 1960. I will then detail the ways this military influence has specifically shaped the state's response to the PKK insurgency. Discussion will then turn to the key factors and

events that have dramatically decreased the armed forces' influence in Turkish politics since 1999, focusing particularly on the effects that this shift has had on the potential resolution of the Kurdish conflict.

B. A BRIEF HISTORY OF TURKEY'S CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS

The Turkish military first intervened in state politics on May 27, 1960, when it overthrew the government led by Prime Minister Adnan Menderes of the Democrat Party (DP). The leaders of the coup d'état—mid-level military officers who had grown frustrated with the DP's increasing authoritarianism—formed the National Unity Committee (NUC) to serve as an interim military administration until parliamentary elections could be held. During the NUC's one year term, it supervised the drafting of a new constitution to replace the 1924 version. The 1961 constitution was considerably more liberal and democratic than its predecessor in many ways: it expanded civil liberties and social rights, created an independent judiciary, and granted relative autonomy to some state agencies.¹⁸⁷ Before it handed rule back to civilians, however, the junta made sure to create “exit guarantees”: institutional mechanisms for maintaining a degree of military control in governance and autonomy from civilian oversight.¹⁸⁸ The most significant new constitutional body for ensuring military tutelage was the National Security Council (MGK), a board made up of high-ranking civilian and military officials. The MGK was touted as an independent advisory council, but in practice it worked as a means for the general staff to express its views on a broad range of governance issues.¹⁸⁹ Military members of the MGK were also permitted to attend preparatory meetings for various cabinet ministries, giving the generals opportunities to interfere in debates across a range of issues.¹⁹⁰ The new constitution further privileged the armed forces by having the chief of the general staff report directly to the prime minister instead of the minister

¹⁸⁷ Zurcher, *Turkey*, 245.

¹⁸⁸ Ozbudun, *Contemporary Turkish Politics*, 12.

¹⁸⁹ Cook, *Ruling but not Governing*, 25.

¹⁹⁰ Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey*, 130.

of defense, as is the case in most consolidated democracies.¹⁹¹ This effectively created an unofficial deputy prime minister role for the chief of the general staff.¹⁹² The junta also enshrined significant powers for the military in the TSK Internal Service Law and Directive in 1961. Article 85/1 of the directive states, “It is the duty of the Turkish Armed Forces to protect the Turkish homeland and the republic, by arms when necessary, against internal and external threats.”¹⁹³ The TSK has used this language to justify interventions in state politics in the years since.¹⁹⁴ Thanks to the armed forces’ skillful creation of tutelary institutions, it enjoyed significant political autonomy after handing power back to elected civilians.¹⁹⁵

During the 1960s, Turkey’s political cleavages became more pronounced as left- and right-wing groups found it easier to organize under the more liberal constitution. By 1971, the military used increasing levels of factional violence to justify another intervention. On March 12, the chief of the general staff presented Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel with an ultimatum: either the government needed to step down, or the military would “exercise its constitutional duty” by seizing power.¹⁹⁶ After the prime minister resigned, the military did not take control of the state directly, but instead it mandated the formation of a nonparty government that was largely beholden to the mandates of the MGK.¹⁹⁷ During the two-year intervention that followed the “coup by memorandum,” the government declared martial law and amended the constitution to limit civil liberties and increase the powers of the armed forces.¹⁹⁸ The amendments gave the military significant autonomy from the civilian court system and created independent

¹⁹¹ Cizre-Sakallioglu, “The Anatomy of the Turkish Military’s Political Autonomy,” 159.

¹⁹² Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey*, 130.

¹⁹³ Jenkins, *Context and Circumstance*, 45.

¹⁹⁴ Ozbudun, *Contemporary Turkish Politics*, 110.

¹⁹⁵ Zurcher, *Turkey*, 251.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 258.

¹⁹⁷ Ergun Ozbudun, *The Constitutional System of Turkey: 1876 to the Present* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 14. Ozbudun, *Contemporary Turkish Politics*, 34, 111; Zurcher, *Turkey*, 259.

¹⁹⁸ Zurcher, *Turkey*, 259.

State Security Courts (SSC), judiciaries made up of civilian and military judges intended to handle terror and sedition cases.¹⁹⁹ Additionally, the government strengthened the military's influence within the MGK by mandating the TSK representative seats be filled by the commanding officers of the various services.²⁰⁰

During the 1970s, weak coalition governments suffered in popularity thanks to an inability to stem political chaos. Radicals on the left and right, as well as Kurdish nationalists, engaged in rampant violence that claimed the lives of thousands throughout Turkey. Particularly shocking was the May Day massacre of 1977, in which unknown gunmen killed 39 protestors in Istanbul's Taksim Square.²⁰¹ Using the government's paralysis as justification, the Turkish General Staff announced it was again taking control of the state on September 12, 1980. The military administration, led by General Kenan Evren, threw out the 1961 constitution and replaced it with one further increasing the political influence of the military. Under the 1982 constitution, the president—who had traditionally been a retired general—was granted broad powers including the ability to deploy the armed forces, appoint the chief of the general staff, and declare martial law.²⁰² The constitution also increased the membership of the uniformed members of the MGK, granting the armed forces “dominance” over the council.²⁰³ More significantly, the council of ministers was directed to “give priority consideration” to all MGK recommendations related to national security.²⁰⁴ Because national security was elsewhere defined in extremely broad terms,²⁰⁵ the new constitution effectively granted the MGK the means of influencing a wide range of policies including education, labor regulations,

¹⁹⁹ The SSCs had been previously abolished in 1976. Zurcher, *Turkey*, 260; Ozbudun, *Constitutional System of Turkey*, 15.

²⁰⁰ Ozbudun, *Contemporary Turkish Politics*, 108.

²⁰¹ Zurcher, *Turkey*, 263.

²⁰² Aknur, “The Impact of Civil-Military Relations,” 219.

²⁰³ Ozbudun, *Contemporary Turkish Politics*, 108; Jenkins, *Context and Circumstance*, 51.

²⁰⁴ Jenkins, “Continuity and Change,” 344.

²⁰⁵ Jenkins, *Context and Circumstance*, 46.

local governance, and television broadcasting.²⁰⁶ Before the September 12 coup leaders passed on control to elected officials in 1983, the NSC had directed the passage of over 600 laws that spanned the gamut of policy arenas.²⁰⁷

The military did not intervene in state governance again until 1997, when it compelled the resignation of Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan. Erbakan, the leader of the Islamist Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*, RP), had been serving for nearly two years as prime minister as part of a coalition government with the True Path Party (*Dogru Yol Partisi*, DYP) when the general staff decided that he represented a threat to the secular nature of the republic. Similar to the intervention of 1971, the generals elected not to seize control of the state directly. Instead, the military leadership presented Erbakan with an ultimatum in the form of 18 policy “recommendations” during an MGK meeting on February 28, 1997. When Erbakan ignored the recommendations—all of which were intended to stamp out visible expressions of Islamic political identity—the general staff launched a propaganda onslaught portraying the Islamist leader as a reactionary intent on destroying Turkey’s secular nature. Eventually, DYP leader Tansu Ciller pulled her party out of the ruling coalition, Erbakan resigned, and the RP’s leadership was banned from politics. The February 28th “postmodern coup” vividly demonstrated the general staff’s ability to topple an elected leader through its political influence.²⁰⁸

The important role of the Turkish military in state politics has been vividly demonstrated four times since 1960. While all of the interventions removed democratically elected governments, the armed forces have nonetheless enjoyed enormous support from the Turkish public and other key elites, who view the institution as the rightful guardian of the state. In the cases where the generals assumed power, they did not return control to civilian politicians without first creating exit guarantees that enabled them to continue exerting influence. For much of the republic’s history, the general staff has thus played a role in shaping state policies.

²⁰⁶ Cizre-Sakallioğlu, “The Anatomy of the Turkish Military’s Political Autonomy,” 158.

²⁰⁷ Ozbudun, *Contemporary Turkish Politics*, 115.

²⁰⁸ Cook, *Ruling but not Governing*, 126.

C. THE TURKISH ARMED FORCES AND THE KURDISH QUESTION

Since the resurgence of Kurdish nationalist violence in the late 1970s, the military has played a central role in dictating the state's response. As Barkey and Fuller wrote in 1998, "As the traditional guardian since Ataturk of Turkish security in the broadest sense, the military naturally plays the dominant role in not just the execution but also the shaping of policy in the Kurdish situation as well."²⁰⁹ This is not surprising given the military's broad institutional means of influence, its constitutional mission to protect the republic, and its fear that Kurdish nationalism is a threat to the country's territorial integrity. As Karaosmanoglu wrote, "In the military's eyes, there are two fundamental internal enemies: one is the militant Islamist movements that threaten the secular character of the state; the other is the Kurdish separatist movement represented by the PKK."²¹⁰ Military leaders have formally expressed this view in the National Security Policy Document (MGSB), commonly referred to as the "red book," the secret document approved by the MGK that officially delineates state security priorities.²¹¹

Within the MGSB, the Kurdish question is encapsulated under the threat of "separatism." This term—which includes no reference to ethnicity—reflects the military leadership's traditional narrative that the violence in the country's southeast is due to a small group of terrorists that do not represent their fellow citizens. This argument is understandable given that Kemalism—the ideology firmly ingrained in military officers throughout their education—insists on a unitary Turkish nation free from competing identity claims based on ethnicity.²¹² In this vein, the mere acknowledgement of the Kurdish ethnicity was long considering taboo amongst military elites. In the 1990s, for example, the general staff published a report claiming that Kurds were an invention of foreign imperialists hoping to split the country in the manner of the 1920 Sèvres

²⁰⁹ Barkey, *Turkey's Kurdish Question*, 139.

²¹⁰ Karaosmanoglu, "The Evolution of the National Security Culture," 213.

²¹¹ The MGSB, which is updated every five years, is prepared by the general staff, MIT, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs before reaching the MGK for approval. Because it is a secret document that is not prepared by the civilian government, some observers refer to the MGSB as a "secret constitution." Jenkins, *Context and Circumstance*, 47.

²¹² Birand, *Shirts of Steel*, 52.

treaty.²¹³ Similarly, until the mid-1990s, Kurds were commonly referred to as “mountain Turks” in order to avoid acknowledging the ethnic group’s existence.²¹⁴ Given the military’s role as the guarantor of Kemalist ideology, the general staff largely held to the insistence that the insurgency was a problem of “security, law and order, and violence promoted by external powers.”²¹⁵ The granting of any identity rights or the acknowledgement of legitimate political grievances was thus untenable for Turkish military brass. Instead, they sought to defeat the PKK militarily and suppress any expressions of Kurdish identity.²¹⁶

During the 1980s and 1990s, the Turkish military’s strategy formed the basis of the state reaction to Kurdish nationalist violence. Following the 1980 coup, the military administration deployed over two thirds of the Turkish army to the southeast regions to maintain order.²¹⁷ In order to suppress any expressions of Kurdish identity, the Turkish Grand National Assembly enacted Law 2932, which prohibited the use of any language other than Turkish, even in private conversation.²¹⁸ Although the military handed control of the state to the democratically elected Ozal in 1983, Kenan Evren remained closely involved in developing the state’s security policy as president and chairman of the MGK. In 1985, the state began attempts to maintain order with the village guard system, but the ensuing reprisals and inflamed tribal rivalries escalated violence to new levels.²¹⁹ Two years later, Ankara declared a state of emergency (OHAL) for much of the southeast, placing the region as a whole under the rule of an unelected governor with sweeping

²¹³ Barkey, *Turkey’s Kurdish Question*, 153n28.

²¹⁴ Rabia Karakaya Polat, “The Kurdish Issue: Can the AK Party Escape Securitization?,” *Insight Turkey* 10, no. 3 (2008): 77.

²¹⁵ Barkey, *Turkey’s Kurdish Question*, 134.

²¹⁶ Karabelias, “The Military Institution,” 61.

²¹⁷ McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, 414.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 424; Tim Jacoby, “Semi-Authoritarian Incorporation and Autocratic Militarism in Turkey,” *Development and Change* 36, no. 4 (2005): 647.

²¹⁹ McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, 422; Taspinar, *Kurdish Nationalism and Political Islam in Turkey*, 100; Barkey, *Turkey’s Kurdish Question*, 147.

authorities to counter PKK violence.²²⁰ These powers included the forced evacuation of Kurdish villages, which eventually resulted in displacement of over one million Kurds. Many of the three thousand villages targeted for evacuation were destroyed in the process.²²¹ At times, the military's heavy-handed repressive force did severely weaken the PKK's operational capabilities, especially during the mid-1990s.²²² However, multiple authors have documented how these measures greatly increased the collective sense of Kurdish national identity, strengthened sympathies for the PKK, and motivated ordinary Kurds to take up arms against the state security forces.²²³

Prior to the AKP, Turgut Özal was the only Turkish leader that successfully challenged the armed forces' monopoly on shaping policies related to the Kurdish question and foreign affairs.²²⁴ In 1988 and 1991, he convinced the general staff to allow Kurdish refugees to cross the border from northern Iraq, which created a host of domestic questions about the state's Kurdish policies. Seeing an opportunity for a political opening, Özal revealed his own Kurdish ancestry, admitted past mistakes by the state, and partially repealed the ban on languages other than Turkish.²²⁵ In February 1993, PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan declared a ceasefire and passed a peace proposal to Özal via Iraqi Kurdish leader Jalal Talabani that pledged an end to the insurgency in exchange for democratic concessions.²²⁶ Although Özal appeared serious about accepting the terms

²²⁰ McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, 425; Taspinar, *Kurdish Nationalism and Political Islam in Turkey*, 100.

²²¹ Some estimates exceed two million. Gunes, *Kurdish National Movement*, 131. ICG, *Turkey: Ending The PKK Insurgency - Europe Report No. 213*, 4.

²²² Barkey, *Turkey's Kurdish Question*, 140.

²²³ Karabelias, "The Military Institution," 61; Taspinar, *Kurdish Nationalism and Political Islam in Turkey*, 100.

²²⁴ Barkey, *Turkey's Kurdish Question*, 154n34.

²²⁵ Michael Gunter, "Turgut Ozal and the Kurdish Question," in *Nationalisms and Politics in Turkey: Political Islam, Kemalism, and the Kurdish Issue*, ed. Marlies Casier and Joost Jongerden (London: Routledge, 2011), 88; Taspinar, *Kurdish Nationalism and Political Islam in Turkey*, 101, 103, 105.

²²⁶ Gunter, "Turgut Ozal and the Kurdish Question," 93.

of the agreement—he had scheduled an MGK meeting to “seek political solutions to the crisis”—he died suddenly on April 17, 1993.²²⁷

After Özal’s death, Turkey’s civilian leaders largely allowed the armed forces to set counterterrorism policy as they saw fit.²²⁸ In the southeast of Turkey, the result was a massive buildup in the number of soldiers and large cross-border operations into Iraq—at least one of which was launched without Ankara’s knowledge.²²⁹ As the concentration of troops increased, nominal civilian oversight of the OHAL governor’s operations ended.²³⁰ After retirement, Admiral Atilla Kiyat reflected on the problems created by the military’s autonomy:

As soldiers, we define our own strategy, evaluate threats on our own, form the force structure that will fight against this threat again on our own . . . The civilians do not exercise an effective control of this process. They don’t use the rights that the laws have given them.²³¹

The admiral went on to say that that he felt the military had improperly assessed the threat of Kurdish nationalism:

Mistakes were made back in the 1970s. We built this problem on the assumption that Turkey could be divided. If we had built it on the assumption that Turkey is strong enough not to be divided . . . perhaps there would have been no need for an [armed struggle]. We could have chosen to solve this problem by promoting freedom and not prohibitions, in which cases our preventative measures would have been different. We could have succeeded with such measures in those days.²³²

²²⁷ Ibid., 95; During 2013 coup trials, prosecutors accused a defendant of poisoning Özal despite a recent investigation that concluded he had died of natural causes. Gareth Jenkins, “From Fear to Absurdity: Turkey’s Continuing Politicized Court Cases,” *Turkey Analyst* 6, no. 7 (2013), April 10, 2013, <http://goo.gl/VVHN9g>.

²²⁸ Barkey, *Turkey’s Kurdish Question*, 139.

²²⁹ Ibid., 40; M. Hakan Yavuz, “Cleansing Islam from the Public Sphere,” *Journal of International Affairs* 54, no. 1 (2000): 36.

²³⁰ Barkey, *Turkey’s Kurdish Question*, 153n22.

²³¹ Altınay, *The Myth of the Military-Nation*, 160.

²³² Ibid.

Although the military was largely autonomous in setting policy, some of the blame lay on civilian leaders who preferred to leave strategy to the officers. In a separate interview, Kiyat indicated that politicians had told him, “Vice Admiral, if you write something, I’ll sign it.”²³³

In cases where politicians advocated positions that did not align with that of the armed forces, the general staff was not afraid to publicly pressure politicians to rein them in. Soon after her election as prime minister, Tansu Ciller suggested that Turkey should pursue a “Basque model” as a means of resolving the Kurdish question. Chief of the General Staff Dogan Gures immediately rebuked her, publicly advising the prime minister that such matters should only be discussed in the MGK.²³⁴ According to insiders, Gures also manipulated Ciller’s Kurdish policy direction behind closed doors, and before long she had transformed into a hardliner on the issue.²³⁵ In the eyes of scholar Gerassimos Karabelias, the military’s influence over civilian politicians was most obvious in 1994, when—under Ciller’s premiership—the parliament, Constitutional Court, and state security courts acted in unison to lift the immunity of Kurdish deputies of the pro-Kurdish Democracy Party (*Demokrasi Partisi*, DEP), arrest the politicians on terrorism charges, and close the party.²³⁶

One of the least understood aspects of Ankara’s struggle against Kurdish nationalism is the role of the deep state (*derin devlet*), a shadowy network of military officers, intelligence operatives, and their civilian allies dedicated to eliminating threats to the secular state through extralegal means. According to Gareth Jenkins, the deep state was not a centrally controlled organization, but instead loosely affiliated nationalist gangs and organized crime syndicates that enjoyed immunity from prosecution thanks to their personal connections with state elites or the Gendarmerie Intelligence (*Jandarma*

²³³ Icarus Blake, “An Admiral and a Gentleman,” *Citizen Brooklyn*, accessed September 1, 2013, <http://goo.gl/MTJEB4>.

²³⁴ Barkey, *Turkey’s Kurdish Question* 137; Taspinar, *Kurdish Nationalism and Political Islam in Turkey*, 107; Kirisci, *The Kurdish Question and Turkey*, 139.

²³⁵ Barkey, *Turkey’s Kurdish Question*, 151n6.

²³⁶ Karabelias, “The Evolution of Civil-Military Relations,” 142; Watts, *Activists in Office*, 110.

İstihbarat ve Terörle Mücadele, JITEM).²³⁷ Although details are sketchy, there is evidence that killing squads affiliated with the deep state were responsible for thousands of assassinations and disappearances as part of a “dirty war” against the PKK in the southeast during the 1980s and 1990s.²³⁸ Although the existence of the deep state had been rumored for decades, it was first exposed to the public through a shocking scandal in November 1996. In the incident, a car crash killed three and injured one near the town of Susurluk. It was soon revealed that the occupants of the car, which had firearms and silencers in the trunk, included a sitting member of parliament, a former Istanbul police chief, and a wanted ultranationalist mafia leader carrying state-issued false identification.²³⁹ The Susurluk incident revealed secret connections between Ankara and violent criminals, and although it resulted in no convictions, many Turks saw the event as proof of the state’s willingness to use illegal methods to silence its enemies.

As the vanguard of Kemalist ideology, Turkish military leaders have been largely unwilling to concede the legitimacy of Kurdish identity claims or consider the usefulness of democratic measures in attempting to end the conflict. Instead, they have viewed the PKK insurgency as a security problem that should be solved via military measures. With the exception of Turgut Ozal, Turkish politicians prior to the AKP were unwilling or unable to challenge the general staff’s authority on the matter, which largely allowed the military brass to set their own counterterrorism strategy. The resultant heavy-handed approach may have come close to crippling the PKK’s military capacity, but it also provoked the strong backlash of Kurdish nationalism that has perpetuated the conflict.

D. THE DECLINING POLITICAL INFLUENCE OF THE TURKISH ARMED FORCES

When the AKP entered power in November 2002, many observers had high expectations that the party would improve Turkey’s relationship with its Kurdish citizens.

²³⁷ Gareth Jenkins, *Between Fact and Fantasy: Turkey’s Ergenekon Investigation* (Washington: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, 2009): 24.

²³⁸ Dexter Filkins, “Letter from Turkey: The Deep State,” *New Yorker*, March 12, 2012, <http://goo.gl/fnKyol>.

²³⁹ Jenkins, *Between Fact and Fantasy*, 22; Oktem 102

As a party with Islamist pedigree, it shared with Kurdish activists the view that the excesses of the early Kemalist reforms had created some of the state's most fundamental problems. Yet, while the party did oversee some modest improvements in language and broadcasting rights after entering office, the AKP was unable to make significant headway towards ending the insurgency of the PKK. This lack of progress was due to restrictions imposed on the party by the general staff. Thanks to the TSK's history of interventions—including most recently against Erdogan and Gul's former Welfare Party—it was understandable that party leaders were especially sensitive to the “red lines”²⁴⁰ set by the military brass. A former U.S. ambassador reported that AKP leaders spent their first term living in fear of a coup²⁴¹, but in 2013, the situation now stands radically changed. In the past twelve months, hundreds of military officers have been convicted of terrorism in civilian courts and Ankara has started public negotiations with Abdullah Ocalan. How did Turkey's power balance shift so dramatically in just over a decade? How does this recent history shed light on prospects for an end to the conflict? In this section, I will outline the remarkable series of events that have marked the Turkish Armed Forces' loss of political influence.

1. EU Accession Reforms

One factor that has played a critical role in normalizing Turkish civil-military relations has been the country's attempt to join the EU. Although the AKP has often been cited as being particularly open to EU membership, it cannot claim to be responsible for the pursuit. The accession process formally began in December 1999 with the EU's declaration of Turkey as a candidate state, and Turkish governments had been cultivating ties with Brussels for decades prior.²⁴² Although Turkey had officially started the process, its accession was contingent upon the country making a broad set of reforms that would bring it into compliance with the Copenhagen criteria. The same month that

²⁴⁰ “Military Outlines its ‘Red Lines’ on Kurdish Move,” *Hurriyet Daily News*, August 25, 2009, <http://goo.gl/wtrjfW>.

²⁴¹ Filkins, “Letter from Turkey.”

²⁴² Kemal Kirisci, “The Kurdish Issue in Turkey: Limits of European Union Reform,” *South European Society and Politics* 16, no. 2 (2011), 337.

Turkey's candidacy became official, the effects of EU contingency on Ankara's approach to the Kurdish question started becoming apparent: the government elected to grant Ocalan a stay of execution, and the MGK elected to gradually end emergency rule in the southeast of Turkey by 2002.²⁴³ In addition, the national assembly began passing a series of legislative harmonization packages and constitutional amendments that would incrementally bring Turkey into compliance with EU standards.²⁴⁴ By the time the AKP took office, the parliament had passed three reform packages and a constitutional amendment that improved civil liberties, most notably by reducing restrictions on the use of spoken or written Kurdish.²⁴⁵ The changes also decreased some of the military's institutional powers: military judges were removed from state security courts, thereby increasing the independence of the judiciary, and the MGK was reformed. With the new changes, the MGK's civilian members now outnumbered their military counterparts and cabinet ministers were no longer constitutionally mandated to "give priority to the recommendations made by the MGK."²⁴⁶

After the AKP took office, the party accelerated the EU reform legislation process. In 2003 and 2004, the general assembly passed harmonization packages that substantially reduced the military's autonomy and political influence. These "momentous"²⁴⁷ reforms ended MGK military members' unfettered access to civilian agencies, declassified its decrees, reduced the frequency of meetings, and mandated the body's secretary general—a non-voting yet influential member of the council—be a civilian.²⁴⁸ The packages also significantly increased the degree of civilian oversight over

²⁴³ Ibid., 337.

²⁴⁴ William Hale and Ergun Ozbudun, *Islamism, Democracy and Liberalism in Turkey: The Case of the AKP* (London: Routledge, 2010), 57.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 52; European Commission, *2002 Regular Report on Turkey's Progress Towards Accession* (Brussels: Commission of the European Communities, 2002), 16.

²⁴⁶ Metin Heper, "The European Union, the Military and Democracy," *South European Society and Politics* 10, no. 1 (2005): 36; Jenkins, "Continuity and Change," 346; Aknur, "The Impact of Civil-Military Relations," 227.

²⁴⁷ Cizre, "The Justice and Development Party and the Military," 147.

²⁴⁸ Jenkins, "Continuity and Change," 346; Aknur, "The Impact of Civil-Military Relations," 228.

the budget of the armed forces.²⁴⁹ In 2004, a constitutional amendment abolished the controversial state security courts altogether and officially banned the death penalty,²⁵⁰ a change that had been vigorously promoted by the EU since Ocalan's capture.²⁵¹ The amendment also stipulated that when domestic laws and international agreements came into conflict, Ankara would honor the latter, which motivated many Turkish citizens to begin petitioning the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) to intervene in human rights cases.²⁵²

The EU reforms enacted by Ankara between 1999 and 2004 effectively rolled back many of the authoritarian aspects of the 1982 constitution that restricted civil liberties and codified institutional privileges for the armed forces. Given the remarkable curbs on the powers of the military brought by the changes, it is not surprising that the general staff voiced its protest. In May 2003, the MGK's last military secretary general, General Tuncer Kilinc, publically expressed his resentment of the reform packages by suggesting that rather than pursuing membership in the EU, "Turkey should perhaps seek other alignments with such countries as Iran and Russia."²⁵³ Three months later, after the parliament passed the summer 2003 reform package that gave his job to a civilian, Kilinc sharply criticized the changes as a threat to national security:

[This] reform package has rendered the MGK functionless. Political Islam and ethnic separatism remain to be serious threats. The appointment of a civilian secretary-general to that body would politicize it. One should not have weakened the MGK for the sake of democracy and the EU.²⁵⁴

After a series of similar incidents in which his subordinates openly weighed in on politics, Chief of the General Staff Hilmi Ozkok, who was largely in favor of EU accession, provided his fellow generals with a memorable rebuke:

²⁴⁹ Aknur, "The Impact of Civil-Military Relations," 228.

²⁵⁰ The death penalty had been restricted by the 2001 amendment. Ozbudun, *The Constitutional System of Turkey*, 53.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Ibid., 51.

²⁵³ Heper, "The European Union, the Military and Democracy," 39.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 38.

At this time my co-commanders are disclosing their views on a number of issues. One should take these statements as their personal opinions. I am not saying that my co-commanders' views are wrong. Nor am I saying that they are right. Let me, however, point out that it would have been better if they had made those views public after they had retired.²⁵⁵

Verbal disagreements such as these have been highly unusual amongst high-ranking Turkish military officers, who largely maintain a unified front. This exchange thus illustrates that EU accession—and the reduction in political power it brought the military—created divisions within the top echelons of the military elite.

2. AKP's First Term: Gradual Escalation

For much of the AKP's first five-year term, the armed forces and the new government avoided direct confrontations. The occasional public complaint aside, the generals were largely accepting of the reforms required by the EU accession process, a cornerstone of the AKP agenda. As Umut Cizre has argued, the military was forced to choose between challenging a widely supported initiative of the popular new government or accepting some political restraints; out of self-preservation, it chose the latter.²⁵⁶ Because the PKK observed a ceasefire between 1999 and 2004, Kurdish nationalism did not provoke sharp debates about the importance of fighting terrorism during the AKP's first few years in office, which decreased the military's justifications for imposing its influence in the political sphere.

During the AKP's first term, the primary source of tension between the armed forces and the government was the latter's overtly Islamic identity. Despite party leaders' insistence that the AKP was a conservative democratic party with no Islamist aspirations, many high-ranking Turkish officers had difficulty stomaching what they perceived as threats to the secular nature of the state. This conflict became obvious April 2003, when the general staff, along with President Ahmet Sezer and representatives of the Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP), elected to boycott the traditional Children's Day reception held by Speaker of the Parliament Bulent Arinc because his

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Cizre, "The Justice and Development Party and the Military," 141.

wife, who wears an Islamic headscarf, would be attending the event.²⁵⁷ Following an MGK meeting a week later, the council released a statement indicating that during the meeting “stress [had] been made to the importance and the need to diligently protect the principle of secularism, which is one of the main pillars of the state.”²⁵⁸ Shortly after, the general staff issued a statement declaring,

It should not be forgotten that the united and unified Turkish Armed Forces are today, as they were in the past, the greatest guarantee of the secular, democratic and social characteristics of the Turkish Republic and shall remain at the service of our exalted nation.²⁵⁹

This thinly veiled threat of intervention illustrated that the armed forces were willing to pressure the civilian government to adhere to its demands regarding what it considered to be threats to the state.

Despite the military’s warning to the government regarding secularism, AKP leaders elected to push the military’s boundaries on its other declared threat: Kurdish nationalism. In August 2005, Prime Minister Erdogan signaled a new approach to the issue, saying “the Kurdish problem is my problem,” and “we will solve all problems through democracy.”²⁶⁰ The pronouncements spurred an immediate condemnation from General Ozkok, who declared, “The biggest problem facing Turkey is that of separatist movements which resort to terrorism as a means to achieve their objectives.”²⁶¹ As with the headscarf case, the military used the next MGK meeting to issue a stern warning to the prime minister against making such statements without first consulting the

²⁵⁷ “Reception Rift Far Beyond a Headscarf Crisis,” *Hurriyet Daily News*, April 25, 2003, <http://goo.gl/WENBdb>.

²⁵⁸ “Backstage of the Critical MGK,” *Hurriyet Daily News*, May 1, 2003, <http://goo.gl/ZHZw48>.

²⁵⁹ Gareth Jenkins, “Symbols and Shadow Play: Military-JDP Relations, 2002–2004,” in *The Emergence of a New Turkey*, ed. M. Hakan Yavuz (Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah, 2006), 198.

²⁶⁰ Burhanettin Duran, “The Justice and Development Party’s ‘New Politics,’” in *Secular and Islamic Politics in Turkey: The Making of the Justice and Development Party*, ed. Umit Cizre (London: Routledge, 2008), 97; Basak Ince, *Citizenship and Identity in Turkey: from Ataturk’s Republic to Present Day* (New York: I.B.Tauris, 2012), 172.

²⁶¹ Cizre, “The Justice and Development Party and the Military,” 155.

military.²⁶² The council's public statement included a reminder for the government that its duties included "protecting the independence and integrity of the nation and indivisibility of the country."²⁶³ The military was not alone in criticizing Erdogan's new initiative; CHP leader Deniz Baykal asserted, "terrorism in Turkey is politically planned and cannot be resolved by democratic means."²⁶⁴

Cizre argues that the sharp and unified response from the military and its Kemalist supporters convinced Erdogan to abandon ideas of addressing the Kurdish question through democratic reforms. An increase in PKK violence over the following year, which incited a backlash of "street nationalism" amongst Turks, instead pushed the AKP to align its policies with the traditional securitization mindset of the armed forces.²⁶⁵ The pressure on AKP leaders also increased in July 2006, when General Yasar Buyukanit succeeded Ozkok as the chief of the general staff. While Ozkok had reluctantly accepted AKP oversight, he represented a minority in the general corps; Buyukanit was far more representative of the Kemalist generals that saw the party as a mortal threat and demanded it take a firmer stance on terrorism.²⁶⁶ Only a month prior, the parliament passed amendments to the Anti-Terror Law 3713 (TMK) that broadened the definition of terrorism to include a variety of non-violent acts, increased the sentences for terror offenses, and gave judges the prerogative to close media outlets.²⁶⁷ Thousands of political protestors have since been imprisoned under the revised statute.²⁶⁸ The change to the law was indicative of a gradual shift away from the AKP's democratization

²⁶² "Military, Government Meet to Assess Terror and 'Kurdish Problem,'" *Hurriyet Daily News*, August 24, 2005, <http://goo.gl/FF1gpl>.

²⁶³ Gencer Ozcan, "National Security Council," in *Almanac Turkey 2005: Security Sector and Democratic Oversight*, ed. Umit Cizre (Istanbul: TESEV, 2006), 41.

²⁶⁴ Cizre, "The Justice and Development Party and the Military," 155.

²⁶⁵ Cizre, "Disentangling the Threads of Civil-Military Relations in Turkey," 70.

²⁶⁶ Aknur, "The Impact of Civil-Military Relations," 237.

²⁶⁷ Cizre, "The Justice and Development Party and the Military," 155; ICG, *Turkey: The PKK and a Kurdish Settlement - Europe Report No. 219*, 21; Human Rights Watch, *Protesting as a Terrorist Offense: The Arbitrary Use of Terrorism Laws to Prosecute and Incarcerate Demonstrators in Turkey* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2010), 22.

²⁶⁸ ICG, *Turkey: The PKK and a Kurdish Settlement - Europe Report No. 219*, 22.

agenda that had been such a large part of their early platform. Multiple scholars have argued that while pressure from the armed forces partially accounts for the change, some of the realignment was likely due to growing disenchantment with the EU accession process, which began derailing in 2006. With the promise of membership looking less likely in the near term, the AKP was less motivated to take domestic political risks in the name of democratic reforms.²⁶⁹

Although the AKP may have partly aligned with the military on matters of security policy, tensions between the party and the general staff reached new heights in 2007. In February, Prime Minister Erdogan announced that he planned to establish diplomatic ties with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) of northern Iraq to help quell PKK violence. Days later, General Buyukanit declared that the KRG's political parties were supporting the PKK, and that he had nothing to say to them. After Erdogan—who typically downplayed public disagreements with military leaders—suggested that Buyukanit was merely expressing his personal opinion, the general staff issued a statement clarifying that he was speaking for the institution.²⁷⁰

In the months following the showdown, the AKP made preparations to put forward either Erdogan or Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul as a nominee for president. Many nationalist Turks were incensed by the prospect of a politician of Islamist pedigree assuming the role of head of state, which they viewed as a secular and apolitical post.²⁷¹ In April 2007, a number of nationalist civil society groups organized mass rallies throughout the country to protest the prospective nomination of the AKP ministers. On April 12, Buyukanit weighed in on the matter by indirectly encouraging the protests and stating, “we hope that someone will be elected president who is attached to the basic values of the republic, not just in words but in spirit.”²⁷² The general's statement—made

²⁶⁹ Cizre, “The Justice and Development Party and the Military,” 151; Hale, *Islamism, Democracy and Liberalism in Turkey*, 67.

²⁷⁰ Umit Enginsoy, “Military, Gov't Divided Over Iraqi Kurds,” *Hurriyet Daily News*, February 19, 2007, <http://goo.gl/0lYki6>; “Turkish Military to Erdogan: General Buyukanit Speaks for our Institution,” *Hurriyet Daily News*, March 2, 2007, <http://goo.gl/L5i8ui>.

²⁷¹ Hale, *Islamism, Democracy and Liberalism in Turkey*, 40.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 91.

just two weeks before the elections—was a clear reference to the “radical doubt” many Kemalists felt regarding the AKP’s commitment to secularism.²⁷³ On the evening of April 27, the national assembly conducted an inconclusive first round of presidential voting with Gul as the only candidate. Hours later, a shocking statement appeared on the general staff’s website that appeared to threaten an intervention:

The problem that emerged in the presidential election process is focused on arguments over secularism. Turkish Armed Forces are concerned about the recent situation. It should not be forgotten that the Turkish Armed Forces are a party in those arguments, and absolute defender [*sic*] of secularism . . . It will display its attitude and action openly and clearly whenever it is necessary.²⁷⁴

The AKP, having tolerated the meddling of the general staff for nearly five years, took the opportunity of the “e-memorandum” to finally stand up to the military. The following day, the AKP issued an uncharacteristically defiant statement:

It is inconceivable in a democratic state that the general staff would use any phrase against the government on any matter . . . the chief of general staff, in terms of his duty and authority, is accountable to the prime minister.²⁷⁵

Thanks to the deadlock caused by the CHP’s boycott of the next round of voting, parliament was forced to call for early general elections. The general staff, having drawn criticism for their intervention from international and domestic actors for all political stripes, had little choice but to sit and await the results. The July elections—which the AKP won with a remarkable 46 percent of the vote—served to dramatically undercut the military’s challenge to the party.²⁷⁶ Four months later, Gul was sworn in as president. After emerging victorious from the dramatic showdown with the armed forces, AKP took a more aggressive approach to asserting civilian rule over the military.

²⁷³ Ibid.; Cizre, “The Justice and Development Party and the Military,” 156.

²⁷⁴ Sarigil, “Deconstructing the Turkish Military’s Popularity,” 711.

²⁷⁵ Cizre, “The Justice and Development Party and the Military,” 153.

²⁷⁶ Hale, *Islamism, Democracy and Liberalism in Turkey*, 40.

3. AKP's Second Term: The Military on the Defensive

The AKP's second term began with the party in a substantially more confident position vis-à-vis the military and its Kemalist allies. In February 2008, the AKP chose to capitalize on its renewed mandate by introducing a controversial constitutional amendment that would lift the headscarf ban in universities. Although the amendment passed the parliament thanks to a coalition with the National Action Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*, MHP), the Constitutional Court would later strike it down. Citing the amendment as evidence of the party's violation of secularism, the chief prosecutor initiated proceedings to close the AKP in March 2008. By a margin of only one vote, the Constitutional Court ruled in July that the party could remain open, but that it would have to forfeit a portion of its campaign funds due to its alleged anti-secular activities.²⁷⁷

The AKP, which had been the target of attacks for much of its existence, had survived two existential threats in less than a year and earned outstanding popular support. The armed forces and secular elites could not deny the reality that a dramatic power shift was underway. What they did not know then, however, was that that a massive wave of investigations, arrests, and trials would soon deliver the deathblow that consolidated Turkish civilian rule over the military. The first indication that Turkey's military elite was in trouble had actually arrived in March 2007, when *Nokta* magazine published what it claimed were excerpts from the journals of Admiral Ozden Ornek, the former commander of the navy. The alleged diaries—which Ornek claimed were forgeries—outlined an operation known as “Blonde Girl,” in which the armed forces would incite domestic unrest in order to justify a coup against the AKP.²⁷⁸ In June, the plot thickened when police discovered a crate of 27 grenades hidden in an Istanbul house owned by a retired army officer. Soon thereafter, prosecutors announced that they had tied the grenades to a number of terror attacks spanning the previous nine years. Over the next few years, hundreds of seemingly unrelated individuals—active and retired military officers, academics, leftists, lawyers, and media personalities—were arrested for their

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 75.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 88.

alleged membership in an organization known as Ergenekon, a nationalist network reminiscent of the deep state.²⁷⁹

As the Ergenekon investigation proceeded, it divided the Turkish public. While some AKP voters saw the case as a long-overdue dose of justice for the authoritarian guardians of the state, many secular Turks alleged the affair to be a massive sham orchestrated by the AKP to eliminate its political rivals.²⁸⁰ The country's print media similarly divided into two camps; while the Islamic-rooted *Zaman* (and its English version *Today's Zaman*) and leftist *Taraf* published every detail of the allegations as fact, writers for traditionally nationalist papers such as *Hurriyet* (and *Hurriyet Daily News*) were far more likely to dismiss the prosecutors' claims.²⁸¹ Regardless of the veracity of evidence, however, the coup investigations that began in 2007 slowly chipped away at the military's public reputation and political stature, continuing the realignment of Turkey's civil-military balance.

In addition to allegations about illegal conspiracies, the armed forces began to receive criticism about their competency during the AKP's second term. In October 2008, PKK militants ambushed an army outpost near Aktutun, killing seventeen soldiers. Soon after, *Taraf* published allegations that the armed forces possessed prior intelligence that an attack was forthcoming, but did not act to prevent it. General Ilker Basbug, the new chief of the general staff, responded by warning the media: "Those, who despite everything show this attack of the terror organization as a success story, share responsibility for the bloodshed . . . I call on everyone to act with caution and stand in the correct spot."²⁸² The general's harsh statements launched a firestorm of protests from

²⁷⁹ Jenkins, *Between Fact and Fantasy*, 37–45.

²⁸⁰ After the trials concluded in 2013 with convictions, a MetroPoll survey found that 35 percent of Turks believe that the verdicts had been just, while 39 did not. 26 percent did not know or did not respond. "Turks Still Fear Military Coup Despite Ergenekon Verdicts," *Today's Zaman*, August 29, 2013, <http://goo.gl/KGviLr>.

²⁸¹ Ali Balci and Tim Jacoby, "Guest Editor's Introduction: Debating the Ergenekon Counter-Terrorism Investigation in Turkey," *Middle East Critique* 21, no. 2 (2012): 140.

²⁸² "Turkish Army Harshly Criticizes Recent Media Stories on PKK Attacks," *Hurriyet Daily News*, accessed September 1, 2013, <http://goo.gl/axVziX>.

other media outlets,²⁸³ which had grown more comfortable criticizing the previously unimpeachable armed forces in the wake of the coup investigations. Rather than seizing on an opportunity to further humiliate the armed forces, Erdogan backed Basbug: “There is no place for weakness or hesitation in this fight. No one should even attempt to show our security forces as being weak or hesitant. We have lost some of our youngest sons to this.”²⁸⁴ Erdogan’s response to the exchange demonstrated the careful balancing act he would attempt in the coming years; while he certainly was benefitting from the slipping stature of the armed forces, he sought to avoid the appearance of a partisan cheering on the weakening of a respected Turkish institution.

In 2009, Prime Minister Erdogan, emboldened by the military’s defensive position, again elected to pursue a new series of Kurdish policies. On January 1, Erdogan helped launch the state-run Kurdish channel TRT Six by speaking in Kurdish during the initial broadcast, a gesture that would have been unimaginable only years earlier.²⁸⁵ Later in the year, he and President Gul began making promises of democratic reforms and amnesty for PKK militants in hopes of finally ending the long insurgency. In response to the “Kurdish Opening,” as the initiative came to be called, the military attempted to exert its influence to reign in the PM. In a public statement in August, General Basbug stated, “the Turkish Armed Forces will not allow harm to be done to the unitary state structure,” a clear reference to potential proposals for autonomy or a federal system.²⁸⁶ He similarly cautioned that any form of direct negotiations with the PKK would cross one of the military’s “red lines.”²⁸⁷ Despite the general’s warnings, Erdogan elected to push forward with the opening in a clear demonstration that the military had lost much of its ability to pressure civilian leaders. In October, the Kurdish Opening came to ignominious end thanks to a public relations disaster when images of PKK militants openly

²⁸³ Fatma Disli Zibak, “Basbug Ire Draws Reaction from Media,” *Today’s Zaman*, October 17, 2008, <http://goo.gl/rDC9OX>.

²⁸⁴ “[Event of the Week] Gen. Başbug’s Harsh Remarks Cause Concern over Press Freedoms,” *Today’s Zaman*, October 19, 2008, <http://goo.gl/Vt0lhZ>.

²⁸⁵ Hale, *Islamism, Democracy and Liberalism in Turkey*, 77.

²⁸⁶ “Military Outlines its ‘Red Lines’ on Kurdish Move.”

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

celebrating their return to Turkey sparked a strong nationalist backlash. Any promises of further reforms were temporarily shelved, but it was popular opinion—not the general staff—that had thwarted the initiative.

The armed forces continued to suffer the erosion of their public stature and institutional privileges in 2010. A new coup investigation began in February that would come to implicate hundreds of active duty and retired military officers for their alleged participation in an operation known as Sledgehammer. According to prosecutors, top-ranking generals had developed plans in 2003 to foment civil unrest as a pretext for a coup.²⁸⁸ Later in the year, the AKP proposed a major constitutional amendment incorporating multiple provisions that would further decrease the autonomy of the armed forces, including allowing military members to be tried in civilian courts. The amendment was put to a nationwide referendum on September 12, the symbolic anniversary of the 1980 coup, and it passed handily with 58 percent of the vote.²⁸⁹ It was yet another demonstration that a majority of the Turkish public supported the retreat of the armed forces from the political sphere.

4. The AKP's Third Term: The Final Nail in the Coffin

In the November 2011 general elections, the AKP earned an unprecedented 50 percent of the popular vote, further reinforcing its mandate. Meanwhile, the armed forces' reputation had suffered in light of the expanding Sledgehammer and Ergenekon investigations. While over 90 percent of Turks expressed high confidence in the military in 2002, that figure had dropped to only 60 percent by 2011.²⁹⁰ In contrast, the public has gained trust in the civilian leadership. While only 29 percent of respondents in 2000 had a significant amount of confidence in the government, a 2011 poll put the figure at 61

²⁸⁸ Filkins, "Letter from Turkey."

²⁸⁹ Goksel Bozkurt, "Turkish Charter Poll Gives AKP Green Light for New Constitution," September 12, 2010, <http://goo.gl/LdeF9U>.

²⁹⁰ Gul Tuysuz and Sabrina Tavernise, "Top Generals Quit in Group, Stunning Turks," *New York Times*, July 29, 2011, <http://goo.gl/3cuzHx>.

percent.²⁹¹ The numbers were a telling sign that Turkey's era of military tutelage had come to an end.

In August 2012, the Sledgehammer verdicts were announced: over 320 suspects were found guilty of acts of treason. Those convicted included three retired service commanders, who all received 20 year sentences for their alleged leadership roles in a terrorist organization. After four days of silence following the momentous announcements, the general staff's response amounted to little more than a whimper: "We deeply feel and share the sadness that our comrade friends—with whom we have worked together for many years—and their precious families have been living."²⁹² Although the general staff indicated it looked forward to the appeals verdict, which is due in October 2013,²⁹³ it expressed no outrage or calls for public protest.

In December 2012, Prime Minister Erdogan announced the start of negotiations between the government and Abdullah Ocalan toward a possible peace agreement. Although Ankara had previously talked secretly with the PKK, the revelations reflected an unprecedented willingness of the government to negotiate directly with Ocalan on potentially significant political concessions. Although some opposition political groups howled in protest at the AKP's audacity, there was one voice noticeably absent from the dissent: the general staff. While only seven years earlier, military leadership lashed out at the mention of the words "Kurdish problem" and "democracy" in the same sentence, the generals were now forced to sit and watch silently as Erdogan ordered the armed forces to allow PKK militants to retreat—with their weapons—across the border to Iraq.²⁹⁴ While it is possible the Imrali peace process may not end the Kurdish conflict

²⁹¹ Omer Caha, "What do Opinion Polls Tell us about Turkey?," *Turkish Review*, October 5, 2011, <http://goo.gl/wIQwvL>.

²⁹² "Tremors of Coup Plot Rock Turkish Politics," *Hurriyet Daily News*, September 26, 2012, <http://goo.gl/zrjd2f>.

²⁹³ "Appeals Trial for Sledgehammer Case to End on Oct. 9," *Today's Zaman*, August 16, 2013, <http://goo.gl/agRy5k>.

²⁹⁴ "Turkish PM Offers Safe Exit Passage to PKK," *Hurriyet Daily News*, February 4, 2012, <http://goo.gl/7Wxvq4>.

permanently, it serves as convincing evidence that civilian politicians are now firmly in control of Turkey's security policy.

After a five-year trial, the Ergenekon case concluded in August 2013 with the conviction of 275 defendants. Nineteen of the suspects, including former chief of the general staff Ilker Basbug, received life sentences for their roles in the alleged terrorist organization. Like the Sledgehammer case before it, the most notable aspect of the verdict was the relative silence from the general staff and influential institutions of the secular elite. Soon after the verdict, Basbug issued a letter calling for General Necdet Ozel, the current chief of the general staff, to publically speak out against the verdicts, but Ozel remained silent.²⁹⁵ It appeared that the divisions amongst Turkey's general staff—which had first become evident during the early EU reforms—had only worsened over time. While the Ergenekon verdicts will also be appealed, the anticlimactic end to the long saga only served to further humiliate Turkey's military brass.

E. CONCLUSION

For much of the republic's history, the Turkish Armed Forces played a central role in politics. While Turkey began democratic consolidation soon after World War II, a combination of cultural, institutional, and structural factors allowed the military to maintain significant autonomy and political influence. The military repeatedly showed its willingness to directly seize power directly in the coups of 1960 and 1980; similarly, it compelled transitions in 1971 and 1997. Partly as a result of the interventions, the armed forces forged unique institutional mechanisms of exerting influence over state policy under the broad mandate of protecting the state's secular and unitary nature. The most important of these was the National Security Council (MGK), which was considered by many to be a secretive "parallel government" that the general staff dominated. The most important component of the armed forces' influence, however, was its unrivaled popularity with the Turkish people.

²⁹⁵ "PM Erdoğan, General Must Speak up against Coup Case, Retired General Basbug Writes," *Hurriyet Daily News*, August 10, 2013, <http://goo.gl/5ZyTDR>.

Thanks to its influence—and the willingness of most civilian leaders to abdicate security matters to the generals—the military largely dictated Turkey’s policies regarding the Kurdish question. As guarantors of the Kemalist ideology that demanded a unitary national identity based on Turkishness, the general staff had little choice but to insist that PKK terrorism be dealt with largely as a security problem. While the general staff conceded social and economic factors might have played a role in the violence, there was no consideration for political grievances based on ethnic identity claims. The resulting policies—a heavy military presence, village guards, emergency rule, village evacuations, and a dirty war waged by the shadowy deep state—were unable to end the scourge of militant nationalist violence and reinforced sentiments of Kurdish identity.

The AKP entered power in 2002 having promised to prioritize democratization and EU accession. In order to meet the Copenhagen criteria, Ankara passed a series of reforms that significantly undercut the Turkish Armed Forces’ institutional influence, particularly via the MGK. Thanks to the overwhelming popularity of EU accession and internal divisions amongst the generals, the armed forces put up little resistance to the changes. Having lost their primary institutional method of steering policy, the general staff increasingly applied pressure to AKP politicians via public pronouncements. For much of the party’s first term, this method managed to keep the AKP’s Kurdish policy aligned with that of the armed forces. General Buyukanit’s clumsy “e-memorandum,” however, turned out to be a major misstep, and the AKP came out of the showdown with a renewed popular mandate.

Over the next several years, what remained of the armed forces’ political power was finally erased through the highly divisive Ergenekon and Sledgehammer trials, which resulted in the convictions of over 500 individuals. With the military defanged, Prime Minister Erdogan was able to publically announce negotiations with PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan, a move that would have been unthinkable just years earlier. The current peace process faces many obstacles including insufficient transparency, significant public resistance to concessions, and the exclusion of opposition voices. Similarly, the questionable legitimacy of the recent trials of military leaders is indicative of an increasingly authoritarian streak by the AKP. Nonetheless, by ending the political role of

Turkey's military brass—whose hardline approach to the Kurdish conflict has been counterproductive for years—the AKP has increased the long-term chances for a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

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IV. THE RESURGENCE OF OTTOMAN-ISLAMIC IDENTITY

A. INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, there has been undeniable increase in the visibility of Islamic identity in Turkey's social and political spheres. Evidence of these changes is hard to miss: the unprecedented electoral power of a party with an Islamist pedigree, an explosion of religious private schools throughout the country, and the greater visibility of covered women in universities and corporate offices. Similarly, the country's top politicians and civil leaders have often evoked memories of the Ottoman era to help frame solutions to current political crises. The echoes of this imperial nostalgia are evident in speeches on foreign policy, in the themes of the country's most popular television shows, and in debates over the architecture of Istanbul.

In examining Turkey's long struggle with militant Kurdish nationalism, it is worth considering the political ramifications of this apparent "neo-Ottoman" revival. Pious politicians, who long shared a marginalized political status with Kurdish nationalists, have historically been more willing to recognize claims that challenge Kemalist notions of a unitary Turkish nation. Turgut Ozal, an openly pious leader who regularly evoked memories of Ottoman greatness, broke ground by acknowledging the Kurdish problem and advocating for increased cultural rights in the late 1980s. In 2002, the AKP won considerable electoral support amongst Kurds in hopes it would similarly adopt a conciliatory approach. While the party has recently presided over unprecedented negotiations with jailed PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan, the AKP's overall legacy on the Kurdish question is yet to be written. Although a variety of factors will continue to shape the ongoing attempts at a peaceful solution, this chapter will focus specifically on the discourse of the country's most influential Islamic actors: the AKP and the socio-political movement lead by Fethullah Gulen, which reaches a massive audience through its international network of schools and media outlets. The statements of these organizations are important to review because, as Umit Gunes states, "the success of political reconciliation and conflict resolution is strongly connected to building a national

consensus.”²⁹⁶ In looking at the discourse specifically related to the Kurdish question, some important questions arise: Have Turkey’s influential Islamic actors contributed unique ideas to the national discussion on the Kurdish question? Have these ideas resonated with the public and political elites? Are Ottoman-Islamic concepts useful in redefining traditional notions of national identity? Have the Islamic credentials of these actors helped legitimize politically contentious concepts and foster dialogue between the country’s opposed factions?

This chapter argues that the assertion of an Ottoman-Islamic identity has been useful in building consensus on resolving Turkey’s Kurdish question, but with a critical caveat. While an emphasis on Islamic brotherhood may reinforce bonds between Turkey’s citizens, such platitudes are of limited value if core political grievances also are not addressed. Meeting some fundamental Kurdish nationalist demands—multilingual education and a constitution free of references to Turkishness—has proven politically difficult due to official Kemalist concepts of a unitary Turkish nation. By legitimizing Ottoman-Islamic identity over traditional Kemalist concepts, Turkey’s pious politicians have highlighted the obstacle of ethno-nationalism and improved the chances that the Turkish public can accept a redefined identity based on equality.

B. OTTOMAN-ISLAMIC IDENTITY IN A SECULAR REPUBLIC

During the first years of the Turkish republic, Mustafa Kemal sought to obliterate nearly all links with the Ottoman Islamic past through a dramatic set of reforms. Having ended the 623-year reign of the sultanate in 1922, Kemal persuaded the parliamentary assembly to also abolish the institution of the caliphate, the symbolic leader of Sunni Islam, two years later.²⁹⁷ Continuing with efforts to decrease the remnants of religion in governance, Ankara abolished sharia courts and adopted a legal system based on Swiss

²⁹⁶ Cengiz Gunes, “Political Reconciliation in Turkey: Challenges and Prospects,” in *The Kurdish Question in Turkey: New Perspectives on Conflict, Representation and Reconciliation*, ed. Cengiz Gunes and Welat Zeydanlioglu (London: Routledge, forthcoming), 261.

²⁹⁷ Hanioglu, *Ataturk*, 115, 151.

Civil Code.²⁹⁸ He also closed all *medreses*, the religious schools where many Turks received their only formal education, and banned the Sufi orders (*tarikats*), which had served as important religious institutions.²⁹⁹ As part of his modernization efforts, Kemal also ordered the abandonment of a variety of Ottoman customs in favor of European customs. The fez, the ubiquitous hat of Muslim men, was banned and Kemal publically discouraged females from wearing traditional headscarves. The Gregorian calendar replaced the Islamic calendar and the national day of rest moved from Friday to Sunday. In 1928, an amendment to the Turkish constitution removed any reference to Islam as the official state religion.³⁰⁰ That same year, Kemal introduced perhaps the most significant discontinuity when he ordered the wholesale shift from Arabic-Persian script to a modified Latin alphabet, rendering all future generations incapable of directly engaging with Ottoman history.³⁰¹

In addition to ordering the abandonment of past practices, Kemal attempted to replace the nation's troublesome Ottoman legacy with a new, more grandiose national mythology. He commissioned academics to produce a new official Turkish historical narrative, which credited the nation's pre-Islamic ancestors with bringing civilization from central Asia to much of the Western world, including the Greeks and Romans.³⁰² Similarly, an Austrian scholar in Kemal's employ authored the "sun-language theory," which claimed that an early Turkic dialect was the predecessor of all modern languages.³⁰³ Throughout the country, state officials replaced markers of Ottoman history with monuments to the first "Turkish" civilization of Anatolia, the Hittites of the second millennium BC. Notably, the official symbol of the new Turkish capital, Ankara, was a

²⁹⁸ Some Ottoman-Islamic practices regarding family law were retained in efforts to prevent popular anger. Gavin D. Brockett, *How Happy to Call Oneself a Turk: Provincial Newspapers and the Negotiation of a Muslim National Identity* (Austin, TX: University of Texas, 2011), 47; Hanioglu, *Ataturk*, 158.

²⁹⁹ Hanioglu, *Ataturk*, 155.

³⁰⁰ Brockett, *How Happy to Call Oneself a Turk*, 43.

³⁰¹ Hanioglu, *Ataturk*, 159.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, 166.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, 177.

Hittite sun until the 1980s.³⁰⁴ The promotion of the newly discovered national identity and the denigration of the Ottoman past were also perpetuated through school textbooks³⁰⁵ and the state-controlled print media.³⁰⁶ Although Kemal's revisionist projects were questionable scientifically,³⁰⁷ they provided the nation-building project with a unifying historical narrative that largely ignored the Ottoman-Islamic past in favor of tales of ancient greatness.³⁰⁸

Despite the ambitious attempts of Kemal, many Turkish citizens were not ready to discard their Muslim identity and Ottoman heritage. While the Sheikh Said rebellion, the largest of 19 insurrections between 1924 and 1938, was largely a bid for Kurdish autonomy, many of those who joined were motivated by anger over the abolition of the caliphate.³⁰⁹ Ankara was also alarmed by the 1930 Menemen incident, in which a Sufi sheikh led a protest demanding sharia law and beheaded a military officer.³¹⁰ Similarly, four smaller protests between 1925 and 1933 were responses to the fez ban and the new requirement for mosques to make the call to prayer (*ezan*) in Turkish instead of the traditional Arabic.³¹¹ The public's underlying dissatisfaction over the reforms became more evident as Turkey's single-party rule and state-controlled media began slowly liberalizing after World War II. Leading up to the first multiparty elections in 1950, at least 13 new political parties ran on platforms emphasizing Muslim identity and

³⁰⁴ White, *Muslim Nationalism*, 27.

³⁰⁵ Sam Kaplan, *The Pedagogical State: Education and the Politics of National Culture in Post-1980 Turkey* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 2006), 80.

³⁰⁶ Brockett, *How Happy to Call Oneself a Turk*, 72.

³⁰⁷ Can Erimtan, "Hittites, Ottomans and Turks: Agaoglu Ahmed Bey and the Kemalist Construction of Turkish Nationalism in Anatolia," *Anatolian Studies* 58 (2008): 141.

³⁰⁸ Cagaptay, *Islam, Secularism, and Nationalism*, 51.

³⁰⁹ McDowall, *A Brief History of the Kurds*, 197; Jwaideh, *The Kurdish National Movement*, 209; Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh, and State*, 298; Zurcher, *Turkey*, 178; Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement*, 34.

³¹⁰ Gavin D. Brockett, "Collective Action and the Turkish Revolution: Towards a Framework for the Social History of the Ataturk Era, 1923–38," in *Turkey Before and After Ataturk*, ed. Sylvia Kedourie (London: Frank Cass, 1999), 54.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, 49.

criticizing Kemalist secularism.³¹² In recognition of the public's demands, even politicians from the late Ataturk's Republican People's Party (CHP) began openly attending mosques, reintroducing religious education, and permitting Turks to again join the *hajj* pilgrimage in Mecca.³¹³

In the 1950 general assembly elections, the Democrat Party (*Demokrat Parti*, DP) convincingly defeated the CHP by appealing to what Serif Mardin defined as the "periphery" of Turkish political culture: provincial citizens grounded in Islamic values who had grown frustrated with the Kemalist-dominated center.³¹⁴ Capitalizing on its mandate to address the excesses of secular reforms, the new government made one of its first initiatives the return of the *ezan* to the traditional Arabic, a move which was widely popular.³¹⁵ The DP also ended the persecution of banned Sufi brotherhoods, most notably the Naksibendis and Nurcus, the followers of Said Nursi.³¹⁶ These Islamic networks, which had operated underground since 1925, served as an important segment of the DP's electoral base throughout the 1950s; they have continued to grow in influence ever since. One result was the dramatic increase in state-run *Imam Hatip* (Islamic preacher) schools, institutions for children that provided seven years of dual instruction in secular and religious curricula.³¹⁷ These schools, which helped strengthen the mobilization of Turkey's Islamic movements, have continued to be a controversial component of the state's religion policies ever since.

The DP not only promoted the public practice of Islam through policy, but it challenged the Kemalist historical narrative that had denigrated the Ottoman past. During a debate in the General Assembly in 1950, the DP Education Minister argued for the restoration of Ottoman mausoleums, which Ataturk had closed in 1925. Harkening the

³¹² Brockett, *How Happy to Call Oneself a Turk*, 116.

³¹³ Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, 60.

³¹⁴ Serif Mardin, "Center-Periphery Relations: A Key to Turkish Politics?," *Daedalus* 102, no. 1 (1973): 185.

³¹⁵ Brockett, *How Happy to Call Oneself a Turk*, 122.

³¹⁶ Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, 33.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 123.

memory of the sultan that had conquered Istanbul in 1453, he stated, “Just as our children visit Atatürk’s tomb, so too will they visit the tomb of Fatih Sultan Mehmed.”³¹⁸ Three years later, when the 500-year anniversary of the conquest arrived, the event was marked by a ten-day celebration prominently featuring prayers heralding the importance of the Ottoman victory in Islamic and Turkish history.³¹⁹ Similarly, school textbooks and popular print media of the 1950s began portraying the imperial era in a far more favorable light than what had been acceptable during previous decades.³²⁰ It was under the DP’s ten-year rule that social and political discourse on the nation’s Ottoman-Islamic history first showed a departure from the official Kemalist narrative.

In 1960, the Turkish military overthrew the DP in a coup d’état. Citing the “unconstitutional” rule of the DP, they seized control of the state, hanged Prime Minister Adnan Menderes, and drafted a new constitution. The coup and subsequent military rule established that the armed forces had assumed guardianship of the state and its Kemalist ideology. Even after power was handed back to democratically elected parties, the general staff shaped state policy through their role in the newly formed National Security Council (MGK). Nonetheless, the new constitution was comparatively liberal, granting increased civil liberties and tolerance for political associations. This political opening extended to religious institutions as well. Rather than clamp down on Islamist movements, the state attempted to thwart radical ideologies by emphasizing religious education that promoted a “modern, rationalist version of Islam.”³²¹

The post-coup government’s co-option of religion as a counter to leftist ideologies marked a trend that would continue for the next few decades. This instrumentalization of religion benefitted from a new current of conservative thought that considered Islam to be an integral part of Turkish nationalism. This movement, which had grown dramatically with increases in *Imam Hatip* schools, combined elements of Islamist and Turkist thought

³¹⁸ Brockett, *How Happy to Call Oneself a Turk*, 173.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 198.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, 190.

³²¹ Zurcher, *Turkey*, 247.

from intellectuals such as Ziya Gokalp and Mehmet Akif. Members of the movement saw no contradiction in celebrating an Ottoman-Islamic past and Turkish nationalism. In the late 1960s, the MHP, a right-wing party that promoted the racial superiority of Turks throughout the greater Turan region (Anatolia and Central Asia), began prominently featuring Islam in their discourse.³²² Another important political movement that gained influence during the period was Necmettin Erbakan's National Outlook Movement (*Milli Gorus Hareketi*, MGH), a nationalist Islamic movement that sought to restore Ottoman-Islamic greatness and decrease western influence.³²³ The movement formed a string of political parties under Erbakan's leadership that, like the DP in the 1950s, owed much their electoral success to close ties with the Naksibendi brotherhoods. The increasing alignment of Islamists and nationalists marked the unification of the Turkish right in the 1970s.

The synthesis of Turkish nationalism and Islam was also the core ideology of Intellectuals' Hearth (*Aydinlar Ocagi*), a group of conservative intellectuals that formed in 1970 as a reaction to leftist, separatist, and Islamist movements that were increasingly wreaking havoc amongst Turkish society. When violence reached extreme levels in 1980, the Turkish military intervened in national politics for the third time in 20 years, seizing control of the state, imprisoning thousands, and banning all existing political parties.³²⁴ General Kenan Evren, the leader of the military administration, elected to adopt the Hearth's "Turkish-Islamic Synthesis" as a guide to reshape the state's approach toward religion to counter radicalism. The synthesis attempted to combine the two competing strains of Turkish nationalism: the secular narrative emphasizing pre-Islamic Turkish civilization, and the Ottoman-Islamic identity that Kemalist reforms had failed to suppress. Through education and political rhetoric, the state began advocating a reimagined national history in which ancient Turkish civilizations, which held family and the military as their most important institutions, converted to Islam upon settling in

³²² Gokhan Cetinsaya, "Rethinking Nationalism and Islam: Some Preliminary Notes on the Roots of 'Turkish-Islamic Synthesis' in Modern Turkish Political Thought," *The Muslim World* 89, no. 3-4 (1999), 371.

³²³ Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, 209.

³²⁴ Zurcher, *Turkey*, 268.

Anatolia. The pre-Islamic Turkish values and Islam thus formed the dual pillars of a “national culture” that emphasized the importance of national unity and respect for authority.³²⁵ Military historians published volumes arguing that Ataturk was a pious Muslim whose secular reforms were only necessary to protect Islam from reactionary ideologies. In the new narrative, not only were Kemalism and religious identity compatible, but Islam provided the cement that held the nation together. In 1983, the military agreed to hand the state over to a democratically elected civilian government. With the Turkish left virtually non-existent in the wake of the coup, Turgut Ozal’s center-right Motherland Party (*Anavatan Partisi*, ANAP) formed a government despite the military’s objections.

Under Ozal’s rule during the 1980s, Turkey underwent significant economic and political changes that fostered the increased influence of Islamic movements. He presided over Turkey’s dramatic economic liberalization, which promoted exports, stabilized inflation, and increased foreign investment.³²⁶ Consequently, many small and medium-sized businesses throughout Turkey benefited, strengthening a pious new class of entrepreneurs, sometimes called the Anatolian Tigers.³²⁷ The state also enacted political reforms that gradually eased restrictions on religious associations, private education, and media. Ozal’s government likewise weakened the Kemalist monopoly within the state bureaucracy by hiring a more diverse group of civil servants, including many outwardly pious Muslims.³²⁸ The 1980s thus saw a dramatic increase in the opportunities for Turkey’s Islamic movements to expand their influence through government, business networks, schools, and independent media. In the years since, the most important of these

³²⁵ Binnaz Toprak, “Religion as State Ideology in a Secular Setting: The Turkish-Islamic Synthesis,” in *Aspects of Religion in Secular Turkey*, ed. Malcom Wagstaff (Durham, NC: Centre for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, 1990), 11.

³²⁶ Dani Rodrik, “Premature Liberalization, Incomplete Stabilization: The Ozal Decade in Turkey,” NBER Working Paper 3300, National Bureau of Economic Research, Cambridge, MA, 1990, 1.

³²⁷ Ahmet T. Kuru, “Globalization and Diversification of Islamic Movements: Three Turkish Cases,” *Political Science Quarterly* 120, no. 2 (2005): 259; Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, 82; M. Hakan Yavuz, “Turkish Identity and Foreign Policy in Flux: The Rise of Neo-Ottomanism,” *Critique: Journal for Critical Studies of the Middle East* 12 (1998): 30.

³²⁸ Yavuz, “Turkish Identity and Foreign Policy,” 32.

movements has been that of Fethullah Gulen, an imam heavily influenced by the late Said Nursi, Turkey's most famous Sufi scholar. Beginning in 1966, Gulen and a small group of followers initially focused on providing secular and religious tutoring for students in the Izmir area. After his arrest for religious activities in the wake of the 1971 military coup, Gulen avoided politics, instead expanding his efforts to print media. Over the next few decades, the Gulen movement, sometimes known as *Hizmet* amongst its followers, expanded rapidly into a global movement that has assumed a prominent, although controversial, role in Turkish society.³²⁹

In addition to enacting reforms that reshaped the country's political landscape, Turgut Ozal was notable for his public emphasis on the importance of the Ottoman-Islamic roots. A pious man heavily influenced by the Naksibendi Sufi order, Ozal became the first republican prime minister to travel to Mecca for the *hajj*.³³⁰ He also introduced *iftar* (breaking of the fast) dinners as official state ceremonies during Ramadan, a practice that would have been unimaginable only years before.³³¹ Beyond his public demonstrations of piety, Ozal's rhetoric often included strong neo-Ottoman themes. In a statement with implications both for foreign policy and Kurdish nationalism, Ozal referred to Islam as a great unifier:

Just as it was during the Ottoman Empire, it is possible today to transcend ethnic differences through Islamic identity. I believe that the most powerful single constituting element of identity in this society is Islam. It is religion that blends Muslims of Anatolia and the Balkans. Therefore, Islam is a powerful cement of co-existence and cooperation among diverse Muslim groups . . . Being a Turk in the ex-Ottoman space means being a Muslim or vice versa.³³²

In addition to highlighting the connection between Turkey and former Ottoman lands, Ozal's quote also idealizes brotherhood amongst Muslims of various ethno-linguistic groups. Ozal did not just envision stronger bonds with former Ottoman

³²⁹ Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, 179; M. Hakan Yavuz, *Toward an Islamic Enlightenment* (Oxford: Oxford, 2013), 32.

³³⁰ Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, 75.

³³¹ *Ibid.*

³³² Yavuz, "Turkish Identity and Foreign Policy," 24.

Muslims. In 1992, he hosted representatives from throughout Central Asia for a Turkic summit and declared that the 21st century would be “the century of the Turks.”³³³ Despite his emphasis on Muslim and Turkish unity, Ozal was not an anti-Western Islamist. He consistently advocated for Turkey’s full accession to the EU, partly to provide an external anchor to help counter statist policies of his domestic adversaries.³³⁴ Similarly, he worked closely with the United States, which he favorably compared to the Ottoman Empire for its multiculturalism.³³⁵ Ozal’s neo-Ottomanism was not a vision of territorial expansion, but rather an aspiration of increasing regional influence and a reimagined, broader national identity that could help counter exclusive elements of Kemalist ideology and foster unity.

In 1987, a referendum ended the ban of Necmettin Erbakan and other politicians, permitting the National Outlook leader to form another Islamist party. In the relatively liberal political sphere shaped by the Turkish-Islamist Synthesis and Ozal’s policies, the new Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*, RP) was able to gain prominence rapidly on a platform centered on social justice. After winning a plurality of votes in the 1995 parliamentary elections, the RP formed a coalition government with the True Path Party (*Dogru Yol Partisi*, DYP) in which Erbakan would serve the first of rotating prime minister terms. Like Ozal before him, Erbakan sought to challenge Kemalist nationalism through emphasis on a shared Ottoman-Islamic history. When describing the concept of nation, party members consciously used the term *milli* as a religious reference to the communities of the Ottoman Empire.³³⁶ Like the Democratic Party in 1953, the RP

³³³ Virginia Aksan, “Ottoman to Turk: Continuity and Change,” *International Journal* 61, no. 1 (2005): 33.

³³⁴ Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, 75.

³³⁵ Sedat Laginer, “Tugut Ozal Period in Turkish Foreign Policy: Ozalism,” *USAK Yearbook of International Politics and Law* 2 (2009), <http://goo.gl/nTHDZf>.

³³⁶ The primary meaning of *milli* has become that of a nation, but Yavuz argues RP rhetoric used the term in a religious sense as a conscious reference to Ottoman millets. Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, 223.

promoted a revival of celebrations surrounding May 29, the anniversary of Sultan Mehmed's conquest of Istanbul.³³⁷

After taking power, Erbakan's first two foreign visits were to Libya and Iran, indicating a desire to build stronger ties with other Muslim states.³³⁸ By 1997, the military could no longer stomach what it viewed as Erbakan's direct affronts to Kemalist concepts of secularism. On February 28th, the generals presented the prime minister with a list of means for curbing Islamist activities; when he refused to comply, the military applied pressure to coalition members until Erbakan was forced to step down.³³⁹ After the "postmodern coup," the Constitutional Court closed the FP and again banned Erbakan from politics. Although two successor parties—the Virtue and Felicity Parties—followed, they never achieved substantial electoral support.

Despite the attempts of the military to end Islamic activism, Turkey's conservative base continued to demand political representation. In 2001, Abdullah Gul and a group of former RP politicians formed what would become Turkey's most dominant political actor in recent years: the AKP. Having learned lessons from their previous experience, the new AKP leaders distanced themselves from the Islamic label, instead branding the new party as a conservative democratic party that respected the secular system. Capitalizing on voter dissatisfaction over the economy and government infighting, the AKP dominated the 2002 national elections, winning an outright majority in parliament. Under former Istanbul mayor Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who became prime minister in 2003, the AKP mobilized broad segments of the population by balancing an Islamic identity with pro-Western policies, including a commitment to EU accession.

C. OTTOMAN-ISLAMIC IDENTITY AND KURDISH NATIONALISM

For the first six decade of the republican era, official Turkish discourse on Kurdish nationalism was defined by denial. State leaders refused to acknowledge the

³³⁷ Alev Cinar, *Modernity, Islam, and Secularism in Turkey: Bodies, Places, and Time* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2005), 143.

³³⁸ Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, 243.

³³⁹ Zurcher, *Turkey*, 300.

existence of the Kurdish ethnicity, and they heavily repressed any expression of Kurdishness. When violence broke out in the Southeast, Ankara downplayed any nationalist objectives, instead blaming the insurrections on socioeconomic problems or reactionary backwardness. Virtually all Turkish politicians adhered to this narrative until 1983, when Ozal became the first Turkish leader to break many important taboos surrounding the problem. He claimed Kurdish ancestry, admitted the state had made mistakes in the past, and promised a “quest for a serious model for solving the Kurdish problem in a manner that goes beyond police measures.”³⁴⁰ He even went as far as to suggest that the introduction of a federal system might provide a solution.³⁴¹ The discourse melded well with Ozal’s neo-Ottoman rhetoric that Islam formed a crucial—and unifying—aspect of national identity. Despite public statements indicating he was adopting a new approach to the Kurdish question, it was under Ozal’s tenure that the armed forces enacted some of the harshest measures of the anti-terror campaign in the Southeast.³⁴² This dichotomy highlighted the limits Turkey’s civilian governments have had to observe under the Kemalist tutelage of the military.

Although Ozal was not an Islamist, his discourse was indicative of a common critique of Kemalism that has been articulated by many pious citizens. In their view, the excessive promotion of Turkish nationalism, rather than unifying the country, has fueled Kurdish separatism. As a member of an Islamist party wrote, “the republic’s militant secularism and Kemalist suppression of the country’s Islamic heritage had antagonized Turkish citizens of Kurdish origin” by ending the unifying bond of Islamic brotherhood.³⁴³ In the early 1990s, the Islamist RP loudly echoed this critique in its party platform, attributing the problem to “the materialist and racist character of Turkish nationalism.”³⁴⁴ Party supporters felt strongly that the RP could help solve the problem

³⁴⁰ Taspinar, *Kurdish Nationalism and Political Islam in Turkey*, 104; Gunter, “Turgut Ozal and the Kurdish Question,” 88.

³⁴¹ Gunter, “Turgut Ozal and the Kurdish Question,” 90.

³⁴² For a more in-depth discussion, see Chapter II.

³⁴³ Hale, *Islamism, Democracy and Liberalism*, 75.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 76.

by instead appealing to an Ottoman-Islamic identity that would be more inclusive to Kurds.³⁴⁵ Although the RP had strongly advocated recognizing Kurdish identity and language rights, these calls ended completely once Erbakan became prime minister in 1995. Again, the military had curbed the challenge to their policies on the matter.³⁴⁶

Despite the armed forces' restrictions on the discourses surrounding the Kurdish question, it nonetheless concurred that Islamic identity could potentially serve to counter separatism and radical ideologies. This belief had motivated Kenen Evren's promotion of the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis following the 1980 coup, a move that had required a delicate reconciliation with official Kemalist ideology. By claiming Islamic identity as a component of Turkishness, the state could use religion as an instrument not only to foster a shared Islamic identity, but also to denigrate Kurdish nationalists amongst pious citizens. In 1981, the military administration ordered the formation of new department within the government's religious affairs bureau charged with organizing conferences and lectures in the Southeast that preached about the anti-religious ideology of the PKK.³⁴⁷ The army also has used helicopters to distribute flyers citing Qur'anic verses to implore Kurds to take up arms against terrorist groups.³⁴⁸ The state's hopes of a religious Kurdish backlash were realized when the militant Islamist group Hizbullah (no connection to the Shi'ite group of Lebanon) began a series of attacks on the PKK in 1991. While it is uncertain if the state helped in the formation of the group, authorities clearly allowed Hizbullah to carry out its violent campaign unencumbered until 2000, when the armed forces finally crushed it.³⁴⁹ Overall, the Turkish state has traditionally viewed the promotion of Islam as a means to both quell Kurdish nationalist sentiment and mobilize a counter movement.

³⁴⁵ Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, 74.

³⁴⁶ Hale, *Islamism, Democracy and Liberalism*, 76.

³⁴⁷ M. Hakan Yavuz, "Political Islam and the Welfare (Refah) Party in Turkey," *Comparative Politics* 30, no. 1 (1997): 68.

³⁴⁸ Ince, *Citizenship and Identity in Turkey*, 150.

³⁴⁹ McDowall, *A Brief History of the Kurds*, 435; Jenkins, *Between Fact and Fantasy*, 21.

1. AKP

The AKP, which has now presided over a majority government for an unprecedented eleven years, has shown an ambivalent approach to the Kurdish question. While Prime Minister Erdogan has at times echoed traditional denials of the problem, he has more recently modeled himself as a democratic reformer committed to human rights. What has remained constant, however, has been a belief that Ottoman-Islamic identity will help solve the problem. The seemingly haphazard evolution of the party's discourse, much like previous political actors, has been heavily shaped both by the tutelage of the armed forces and the requirements of electoral politics. In the last several years, however, the AKP has managed to finally undermine military authority and consolidate civilian power. Because of the AKP's unrivaled stature, the party's contributions to the discourse on resolving the Kurdish question are worthy of further analysis.

In the run-up to the 2002 national elections, many Kurds supported the AKP in hopes the new party would address their demands for increased rights. This support was based largely on two factors. First, the AKP had positioned itself as an anti-system party that would challenge the state's Kemalist ideology that denied Kurdish identity. Bulent Arinc, who would later become deputy prime minister, summarized the party's strategy of uniting the periphery when he said, "we need to steer ourselves from the margins of society and become a party that can be trusted by everyone."³⁵⁰ Second, the party's strong Islamic roots were attractive to many of the pious voters of the Kurdish southeast. Like the National Outlook parties before it, AKP did especially well amongst Kurdish voters with connections to the Naksibendi and Nurcu Islamic movements.³⁵¹ Despite the support from the southeast regions, the AKP platform included little in the way of specific policies related to the Kurdish problem. Minding the requirements of EU accession, the party statement merely read, "cultural diversities within the framework of

³⁵⁰ Tozun Bahcheli and Sid Noel, "The Justice and Development Party and the Kurdish Question," in *Nationalisms and Politics in Turkey: Political Islam, Kemalism, and the Kurdish Issue*, ed. Marlies Casier and Joost Jongerden (London: Routledge, 2011), 104.

³⁵¹ Yavuz, "The Kurdish Question and Turkey's Justice and Development Party," 109.

the democratic state should prevail.”³⁵² Also being conscious not to offend Kemalist ideology, the party did remain committed to maintaining Turkish as the official language of the state and education.³⁵³

After taking office in 2002, AKP presided over the passage of several legislative reform packages intended to harmonize Turkish law with the standards required for EU accession. These included the constitutional abolition of the death penalty and State Security Courts.³⁵⁴ Most notably, the reforms included provisions allowing broadcasting and private education in languages other than Turkish “provided they do not compromise constitutional principles.”³⁵⁵ While the packages represented significant progress for Turkey in improving democratic standards, the new AKP government had played little role in their drafting.

Aside from passing the harmonization packages started by the previous administration, the party was initially reluctant to pursue any rhetoric that deviated from traditional policies on the Kurdish question. This was likely due to fears amongst party leaders that such a policy initiative could trigger a backlash from the still-powerful military leadership. Similarly, the AKP could not afford to alienate the large percentage of its constituents with nationalist beliefs.³⁵⁶ When asked about the Kurdish problem in 2002, Erdogan replied, “I say there is no such problem. We are all from Turkey.”³⁵⁷ In April 2005, less than a year after the PKK called off their five-year cease fire, Erdogan again refused to articulate the ethnic aspect of the conflict: “There isn’t a Kurdish problem in Turkey; it is a fictitious problem. We approach this issue within the

³⁵² Bahcheli, “The Justice and Development Party and the Kurdish Question,” 105.

³⁵³ Arda Can Kumbaracibasi, *Turkish Politics and the Rise of the AKP: Dilemmas of Institutionalization and Leadership Strategy* (London: Routledge, 2009), 167.

³⁵⁴ Hale, *Islamism, Democracy and Liberalism*, 56.

³⁵⁵ Guzeldere, “Will There Be a Kurdish Plan?,” 101.

³⁵⁶ Yavuz, “The Kurdish Question and Turkey’s Justice and Development Party,” 103.

³⁵⁷ Ince, *Citizenship and Identity in Turkey*, 172.

framework of citizenship . . . We do not make distinctions between [ethnic] groups such as Turks, Kurds, Laz, Georgian, and Abkhaz.”³⁵⁸

In 2005, Erdogan shifted his rhetoric on the Kurdish question to reflect a new approach. During a landmark visit to Diyarbakir in August, Erdogan declared, “the Kurdish problem is my problem,” marking a bold departure from his earlier denials. He also promised, “We will solve all problems through democracy,” and pledged to introduce a “citizenship law.”³⁵⁹ In the speech, the prime minister not only admitted the problem, but also acknowledged a primary grievance of many Kurdish nationalists: the constitution’s declaration that all citizens are members of the Turkish nation, a definition many Kurds find as denigrating to their ethnic identity. Later in the year, Erdogan again addressed the topic by referring to the concept of a unifying supra-identity: “The Turk should be able to say that he is a Turk, the Kurd should be able to say he is a Kurd . . . but the supra-identity of all of us is the same, being citizens of the Turkish Republic.”³⁶⁰ By referring to “citizens of the Turkish Republic” instead of “Turks,” Erdogan again indicated his preference for a constitution free of ethnic terminology.³⁶¹ Baskin Oran argues that Erdogan’s language intentionally evoked citizenship under the Ottoman Empire, in which a variety of sub-identities—Greek Orthodox, Jewish, Muslim, Armenian—all existed under the supra-identity of Ottoman citizenship.³⁶²

Soon after Erdogan began the discussion of constitutional reform, political constraints soon thwarted him. The general staff, incensed by Erdogan’s critique of the official concept of Turkishness, publicly warned that these debates could “endanger the

³⁵⁸ M. Hakan Yavuz, *Secularism and Muslim Democracy in Turkey* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University, 2009), 188.

³⁵⁹ Duran, “The Justice and Development Party’s ‘New Politics,’” 97; Ince, *Citizenship and Identity in Turkey*, 172.

³⁶⁰ Ince, *Citizenship and Identity in Turkey*, 173.

³⁶¹ Yavuz, *Secularism and Muslim Democracy in Turkey*, 111.

³⁶² Baskin Oran, “The Minority Concept and Rights in Turkey: The Lausanne Peace Treaty and Current Issues,” in *Human Rights in Turkey*, ed. Zehra Kabasakal Arat (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2007), 50.

state's unitary structure, harming its integrity and unity."³⁶³ These words were a reminder that the military stood ready to again intervene in national politics if the AKP did not soften their rhetoric on Kurdish identity. The party also faced a popular swell of Turkish nationalist sentiment in the wake of a new wave of PKK terror attacks in 2005. In the face of these events, the AKP reconsidered its promises of reform and reverted to rhetoric reminiscent of its first years in office. Only months after his groundbreaking Diyarbakir speech, Erdogan echoed official Kemalist ideology when he declared "there is one state, one nation, one flag."³⁶⁴ For the next few years, the party faced threats of closure for policies perceived as threatening to the secular state, and party speeches on the Kurdish question remained largely nationalist in tone. After surviving the "e-memorandum" and constitutional crises, AKP leaders announced a new commitment solving the problem through democratic means in 2009. The "Kurdish Opening" faced sharp criticism from opposition parties, however, and popular opinion turned against the initiative after a group of pardoned PKK fighters triumphantly celebrated their reentry into the country.³⁶⁵ The overtly contrasting tone of Erdogan's speeches during these years reflected the political obstacles to the party's goal of applying its neo-Ottoman vision to the Kurdish question.

While Erdogan's discourse on the Kurdish question has evolved, he has been consistent in his assertion that a stronger sense of Ottoman-Islamic identity will improve the chances of a peaceful resolution. This approach appeals first to the collective memory of the Ottoman past, during which Turks and Kurds were all members of the same Muslim *millet*. It also references Islamic traditions that encourage loyalty to the *ummah*—the collective group of all Muslims worldwide—over any tribe, ethnicity, or nation. AKP leaders have regularly alluded to Islamic brotherhood when discussing the Kurdish issue. In a 2005 speech, when asked about the Kurdish question, Erdogan stated, "In our country, ethnic components of the population are unified by shared Islamic

³⁶³ Hale, *Islamism, Democracy and Liberalism*, 77.

³⁶⁴ Duran, "The Justice and Development Party's 'New Politics,'" 99.

³⁶⁵ Gunter, "Reopening Turkey's Closed Kurdish Opening?," 89.

bonds.”³⁶⁶ When he was later asked if these Islamic bonds should form a national supra-identity, he differentiated between supra-identity and shared culture:

In Turkey there are almost 30 different ethnic groups all belonging to Islam. In such a country *religion is the cement* [emphasis added]. The supra-identity is, as I said previously, ‘citizenship of [the] Turkish Republic’. Religion is the cement, our most important unifying element. Mustafa Kemal has similar statements.³⁶⁷

Erdogan’s statement, which demonstrates the multi-faceted ideology the party has adopted on the issue, includes a variety of contrasting elements: an allusion to a civic definition of citizenship, a reference to shared Islamic values, and an assertion of secular legitimacy through a reference to Ataturk.

AKP’s promotion of a neo-Ottoman national identity is not based on a desire to literally discard the construct of the nation-state. Instead, it offers the country’s citizens—both Turks and Kurds—a shared identity that is free from the political baggage of Kemalist concepts of nationalism. Given the country’s political landscape, this represents a significant political gamble on the part of the AKP. As discussed in Chapter III, it is only due to the party’s defanging of the Turkish Armed Forces that much of this discussion has been possible. In the run-up to the 2011 national elections, Erdogan made a remarkable statement in Diyarbakir:

We are all the descendants of the great soldiers of great leader Selahaddin Eyyubi [a Kurdish Muslim who established the Ayyubid dynasty], who conquered Palestine and Jerusalem . . . *I am against both Turkish and Kurdish nationalisms* [emphasis added]. All the Kurds and Turks are my brothers . . . We turn our faces towards the same qibla [the Kaaba in Mecca, the holiest place of Islam].”³⁶⁸

The thought of a Turkish prime minister expressing contempt for Turkish nationalism, whether the term implied an ethnic concept or not, would have been

³⁶⁶ Yavuz, *Secularism and Muslim Democracy in Turkey*, 191.

³⁶⁷ Cited in Halime Karakas Kokce, “Two Transformative Actors of Turkish Politics: Justice and Development Party and Kurds” (master’s thesis, Middle East Technical University, 2010), 81, <http://goo.gl/6EXoeE>.

³⁶⁸ Zeki Sarigil and Omer Fazlioglu, “Religion and Ethno-nationalism: Turkey’s Kurdish Issue,” *Nations and Nationalism* 19, no. 3 (2013), 560.

absolutely unthinkable a decade earlier. After the revelations of the Oslo talks and the announcement of the 2013 Imrali meetings, Erdogan again reiterated that ethno-nationalism must be discarded: “In this process, no one should oppose us with Kurdish or Turkish nationalisms . . . Whoever promotes ethnic nationalism is one engrossed in aberration, turmoil, and disorder.”³⁶⁹ These bold statements, definitive indicators the AKP no longer feared military intervention, were likely intended to gauge and shape public reaction to the AKP’s draft constitution, which reportedly will eliminate any references to the term “Turkish nation.”³⁷⁰

The circuitous arc of the AKP’s discourse on the Kurdish question demonstrates the difficulties of reconciling party ideology with the realities of Turkish politics. While the party came to power largely through its religious values and counter-system image, party leaders initially avoided statements that recognized Kurdish identity claims. As the party gradually consolidated power over the military, Erdogan began questioning existing concepts of national identity. In place of ethnic Turkishness, the prime minister has advocated a civic concept of citizenship and a renewed focus on shared Ottoman-Islamic values. These pronouncements alone will not solve the problem: Turkish nationalists still remain skeptical of granting identity rights, while many Kurds will only be satisfied once more concrete democratic reforms are announced. Nonetheless, the discourse of the country’s dominant political actor have helped pave the way for the difficult negotiations ahead.

2. The Gulen Movement

Like the AKP, Fethullah Gulen sees a shared Ottoman-Islamic identity as playing a critical role in resolving the Kurdish question. The Gulen movement has become an increasingly influential actor in Turkish society thanks to its international network of media outlets, schools, and NGOs. While the movement had been largely silent on the Kurdish issue for many years, it has lately contributed significantly to the discourse on

³⁶⁹ Hüseyin Gülerce, “I am a Nationalist,” *Today’s Zaman*, February 21, 2013, <http://goo.gl/0Xd1cB>.

³⁷⁰ Mustafa Akyol, “Turkish Nationalism vs. Turkey Nationalism,” *Hurriyet Daily News*, April 3, 2013, <http://goo.gl/B9Nt1M>.

solving the problem. A significant portion of the movement's rhetoric has centered on the promotion of Islamic values and nostalgia for the Ottoman era, during which Turks and Kurds coexisted within the Muslim millet. Since 2008, however, members of the Gulen movement have increasingly gone beyond traditional refrains of "Islam is the cement." Instead, they have advocated for important democratic reforms that, although unimaginable just a decade ago, have increased the chances for a peaceful resolution to the Kurdish question.

Although some staunch secularists have characterized the Gulen movement as an Islamist organization, the group has made efforts to operate within the boundaries set by the secular elite. While Erbakan's National Outlook movement sought to take control of the state institutions and impose top-down reforms, Gulen has focused on gradually increasing the role of Islam throughout society from the bottom up.³⁷¹ For the first few decades of its existence, the movement thus avoided public politics and showed deference to state authority.³⁷² Despite his attempts to avoid confrontation with the Kemalist elite, Gulen and his followers came under heavy state scrutiny following the 1997 "postmodern coup." After revelations that the former imam had directed his followers to quietly infiltrate state institutions, a state prosecutor indicted Gulen for attempting to undermine the state through his "illegal network."³⁷³ Under the guise of requiring health care, Gulen fled to the United States, where he remains today. In the wake of his showdown, Gulen took a more involved role in Turkish politics in an effort to chip away at the general staff's hegemony in state affairs.³⁷⁴ Some observers have argued that Gulen sympathizers within the bureaucracy were a driving force behind the Ergenekon and Sledgehammer coup trials, which have ended the era of military interventions and weakened Turkey's secular elite.³⁷⁵

³⁷¹ Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, 30.

³⁷² *Ibid.*, 199.

³⁷³ Yavuz, *Toward an Islamic Enlightenment*, 212.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 213.

³⁷⁵ Ali Balci, "A Trajectory of Competing Narratives: The Turkish Media Debate Ergenekon," *Mediterranean Quarterly* 21, no.1 (2012), 97; Soner Cagaptay, "What's Really Behind Turkey's Coup Arrests?," *Foreign Policy*, February 25, 2010, <http://goo.gl/AdVSW6>; Jenkins, "From Fear to Absurdity."

Because Gulen has become increasingly vocal in Turkey's political sphere, his public statements on ethno-nationalism are hugely important for the resolution of the Kurdish question. For years, many observers—Turks and Kurds alike—have viewed the Gulen movement as statist and nationalist. As evidence, these writers have pointed to Gulen's promotion of the benefits of a uniquely "Turkish Islam,"³⁷⁶ the ubiquity of Turkish language and symbols in many of the movement's international schools,³⁷⁷ and the hosting of an international Olympiad that awards prizes to foreign children for performances in Turkish.³⁷⁸ While there is no doubt that Gulen is more of a Turkish nationalist than many of the country's Islamist actors, his writing and statements indicate that he has eased away from traditional Kemalist narratives that portray Kurdish identity as a threat to the state.

Gulen's writings make it clear that he shares Said Nursi's belief that there are two forms of nationalism: negative and positive.³⁷⁹ In his seminal work *Risale-i Nur*, Nursi decried negative nationalism as a form of "racism or chauvinism" that had led to the breakup of the Ottoman Empire.³⁸⁰ He considered positive nationalism as solidarity based on shared language, religion, and territory. Even in the positive form, however, Nursi warned that nationalism should never replace Islamic unity; doing so would be "as foolish as replacing the diamonds in a citadel with its stones."³⁸¹ Referencing Nursi's

³⁷⁶ Berna Turam, *Between Islam and the State* (Stanford: Stanford, 2007), 35; M. Hakan Yavuz, "The Gulen Movement: Turkish Puritans," in *Turkish Islam and the Secular State*, ed. M. Hakan Yavuz and John Esposito (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University, 2008), 21.

³⁷⁷ "Like American Protestant missionaries of the nineteenth century, the [Gulen movement] teachers are seeking to deliver God along with Turkish nationalism." Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, 194.

³⁷⁸ Ipek Üzümlü, "Students Give International Turkish Olympiad a Moving Sendoff," *Today's Zaman*, June 17, 2013, <http://goo.gl/nZoMuA>.

³⁷⁹ Fethullah Gulen, "What are the Greatest Dangers and Pitfalls That a Believer Faces, and What Precautions Can Be Taken?," Fethullah Gulen Chair, accessed August 16, 2013, <http://goo.gl/955AyI>.

³⁸⁰ Said Nursi, *The Letters: Epistles on Islamic Thought, Belief, and Life*, trans. Huseyin Akarsu (Somerset, NJ: The Light, 2007), 337.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 339.

passages, Gulen labels nationalism as a great danger to belief and advises, “in Islam, it is the unity around faith that abolishes the clan and nationality-oriented concepts.”³⁸²

In recent discourse on the Kurdish question, members of the Gulen movement have similarly focused on the importance of Ottoman-Islamic identity while downplaying traditional concepts of ethnic Turkish nationalism. Ihsan Yilmaz, a prominent columnist of Gulen’s Zaman newspaper, wrote an article in 2013 entitled “I am Not a Nationalist,” in which he argued that while the official concept of Turkish nationalism—*milliyetçilik*—may have been intended as a civic concept of citizenship, it soon morphed into an exclusionary concept based on ethnicity. Believing this new form of nationalism to be a source of many problems, he stated, “practicing Muslim Turks must criticize themselves since they failed, at least discursively, to accept and fight the fact that non-Turks and their cultures, languages, etc. also deserve the same respect and recognition from the state.”³⁸³ Gulen has similarly warned that Turkish nationalism could enflame the conflict, writing,

Today, already the government does not have a choice but to let Kurds have their birthright. All who care about our country and our people should remain calm and exercise restraint against agitations and provocations, and avoid retaliatory actions. This problem cannot be resolved by nationalistic reactions and slogans, “Martyrs are immortal, and the homeland is indivisible.”³⁸⁴

After the announcement of the Imrali talks in 2013, Gulen’s response to the events was highly anticipated. Speaking to an Iraqi Kurdish newspaper, Gulen offered public encouragement for the peace process and advocated equal rights for all citizens in the tradition of the prophet Muhammad. Most significantly, Gulen declared the time has come for the granting of a major Kurdish demand: “Education in mother tongue should be accepted. The state needs to be fair to all of its citizens. After accepting this, then we

³⁸² Gulen, “What are the Greatest Dangers and Pitfalls.”

³⁸³ Ihsan Yilmaz, “I am not a Nationalist,” *Today’s Zaman*, February 27, 2013, <http://goo.gl/DvzyKg>.

³⁸⁴ Markar Esayan, “Gulen and the New Paradigm in the Kurdish Issue,” *Today’s Zaman*, October 26, 2011, <http://goo.gl/4EuuvU>.

will fix the problems that come along with it.”³⁸⁵ Given the movement’s statist reputation, the recent discourse of Gulen and his followers has been remarkable for its critique of Turkish nationalism and its framing of Kurdish cultural demands as fundamental human rights.

Gulen believes that ethno-nationalism can be countered through education stressing Islamic values and a shared Ottoman past.³⁸⁶ The movement has thus opened a large number of its successful schools in southeastern Turkey and northern Iraq since 2007.³⁸⁷ While the schools adhere to state curricula guidelines, the pious instructors stress “a nostalgia for the Ottoman past” and seek to instill religious values through “exemplary behavior and altruistic idealism for their students.”³⁸⁸ Because the schools often represent the best educational opportunities in the region, they have been popular amongst families from a variety of backgrounds. Said one Diyarbakir academic, “It is simply the best education you can get . . . People are falling over each other to get their kids into these schools, whether or not they like Fethullah Gulen.”³⁸⁹ Yavuz argues that Gulen believes education “is not about affirming one tradition and identity in opposition to another, but rather teaching in a way to indicate their connections and similarities.”³⁹⁰

Not all actors have approved of the Gulen movement’s attempts to counter ethno-nationalism. To many in the Kurdish movement, Gulen has been an agent of the Kemalist state that seeks to placate and assimilate Kurds.³⁹¹ A Kurdish nationalist intellectual summarized this line of critique, saying, “Gulen tries to assimilate Kurds by emphasizing the Ottoman ideology in his school, causing many Kurds to see themselves as [Ottoman]

³⁸⁵ “Gülen, Kürtçe Gazeteye Konuştu: Temel Hak ve Hürriyetler Pazarlık Konusu Olamaz,” *Cihan*, June 24, 2013, <http://goo.gl/CYwyzk>. Translation by Zeynep Timmester.

³⁸⁶ Yavuz, *Toward an Islamic Enlightenment*, 113.

³⁸⁷ Zalewski, “A Turkish War of Religion.”

³⁸⁸ Yavuz, *Toward an Islamic Enlightenment*, 108, 109.

³⁸⁹ Nicolas Birch, “Turkey: The Country’s Biggest Religious Movement Educates Kurds, and not Everyone Is Happy,” EurasiaNet, March 2, 2009, <http://goo.gl/VnsA0A>.

³⁹⁰ Yavuz, *Toward an Islamic Enlightenment*, 108.

³⁹¹ Aland Mizell, “Kemalism Replaced by Gülenism in Turkey,” KurdishMedia, July 12, 2012, <http://goo.gl/CZiYwt>.

rather than as [Kurdish].”³⁹² Altan Tan, a BDP deputy who participated in the Imrali talks, also took aim at Gulenists in 2010, writing, “And they say in the name of Islam, ‘Yes, let us help you improve your belief but forget about your identity.’”³⁹³ Other critics of the movement argue that if Gulen and other religious leaders had cared about Kurdish citizens, he would have spoken up far sooner on language and education rights.³⁹⁴ Kurdish nationalist opposition to the movement has reached extreme levels in recent years, with Gulen schools in the Southeast becoming a regular target of bomb and gun attacks.³⁹⁵ Caught in the middle are many average Kurds, who have ambivalent views of the organization. One lawyer said, “I know the movement is the rival organization to Kurdish nationalism. However, I support the education activities of the movement . . . I think stressing Islam as a shared identity is important.”³⁹⁶

The Gulen movement’s contributions to the dialogue on the Kurdish question have not been limited to appeals to brotherhood and educational endeavors. One of the most critical contributions of the movement has been the promotion of a wide variety of civil associations that have advocated for increased dialogue on the topic. These organizations are notable not only for their ideas, but also for bringing together religious and secular intellectuals. One of the most prominent of these associations is the Journalist and Writers Foundation (GYV), which has organized a series of conferences that have sought to “build a new social contract, stressing the need for tolerance and pluralism in Turkish society.”³⁹⁷ The most notable of these is an annual symposium known as the Abant Platform, in which intellectuals, journalists, politicians, and legal experts meet to discuss important social issues. The 2008 conference, which pre-dated the AKP’s Kurdish Opening by a year, was dedicated to the Kurdish question, and the attendees co-

³⁹² Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, 232.

³⁹³ Zalewski, “A Turkish War of Religion.”

³⁹⁴ Aland Mizell, “Gulen’s New Strategy for Solving the Kurdish Problem: Why Gülen Was Silent about the Kurdish Problems for Decades,” *Kurdish Aspect*, November 3, 2011, <http://goo.gl/eTHvE0>.

³⁹⁵ Zalewski, “A Turkish War of Religion.”

³⁹⁶ Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, 233.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 143.

authored a statement that took a remarkably liberal stance on the topic. While rejecting violence as a solution, the statement denounced “assimilation policies toward the Kurds,” advocated the recognition of “all social, cultural, and political rights,” recommended a “comprehensive amnesty law,” and argued that mother-tongue education “is an indispensable human right.”³⁹⁸ While the 2012 meeting focused on rewriting Turkey’s constitution, the Kurdish question featured prominently in the discussion. The platform statement called for a new definition of citizenship that would not reference ethnicity and reiterated the importance of education in one’s native language.³⁹⁹ Although the conference statements did reference Kurds as “brothers,” they did not appeal to religious ties whatsoever. Instead, they focused on democratization and specific steps for conflict resolution. The activities of the GYV, which considers Fethullah Gulen as its honorary chairman,⁴⁰⁰ is evidence that Turkey’s most important Islamic movement has expanded its discourse beyond religious solidarity to include meaningful policy recommendations that could contribute to the peace process.

D. CONCLUSION

Despite state secularist policies, Turkish elites have instrumentalized Ottoman-Islamic identity to counter internal dissidence since 1960. This was most evident in the adoption of the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis by the military administration of the early 1980s, which sought to counter the ideologies of left-wing radicals, Islamists, and Kurdish nationalists by emphasizing the role of Islam in national identity. This policy opened the door for Turgut Ozal’s liberalizing reforms and the expansion of political opportunities for a variety of new associations including Islamic social movements and political parties. Today, two such organizations—the AKP and the Gulen movement—dominate much of the political discourse on the Kurdish question.

³⁹⁸ “Abant Platform to Present Solutions for the Kurdish Issue,” *Today’s Zaman*, July 6, 2008, <http://goo.gl/U4RwVN>.

³⁹⁹ Merve Büşra Öztürk, “Abant Talks on Constitution,” *Today’s Zaman*, March 12, 2012, <http://goo.gl/qav4zk>.

⁴⁰⁰ Sinem Cengiz, “Journalists and Writers Foundation Gathers All Colors of Turkey at Iftar,” *Today’s Zaman*, July 25, 2013, <http://goo.gl/RJPwxc>.

The AKP received significant political support from Kurdish voters in 2002, thanks in part to a sense that the party shared Kurdish activists' disdain for the hegemony of official Kemalist ideology. Nonetheless, Prime Minister Erdogan failed to articulate a coherent policy on the issue during his first term for two reasons. First, the Turkish Armed Forces were still playing an important role in shaping state security policy. Second, a large percentage of the Turkish public views Kurdish identity claims as a threat to the republic. These political restrictions persuaded Erdogan to buy himself time through rhetoric focusing on the shared Islamic bonds between Turks and Kurds, but the discourse did not diminish nationalist violence. After the AKP undercut the political power of the military, it had removed the first of the two roadblocks to the peace process. Since then, the AKP has attempted to persuade its constituents that ethno-nationalism, whether Turkish or Kurdish, will only perpetuate the conflict. Instead, the country should become comfortable, according to the Erdogan, with a civic national identity based on citizenship, not Turkishness. As the party looks to reframe a new national identity, it has consciously evoked nostalgia for the greatness and pluralism of the Ottoman era.

Fethullah Gulen long assumed a relatively accommodating stance vis-à-vis the Kemalist elite, and has generally avoided publically weighing in on policy matters. Nonetheless, his socio-political movement ranks as a major political force thanks to its media empires, network of international schools, and sympathizers within the state bureaucracy. Like the AKP, Gulen has long believed a renewed emphasis on Ottoman-Islamic values through education will foster unity and decrease separatism. While some critics have labeled Gulen as overly nationalist, in recent years the movement has facilitated—through media outlets and civil associations—discussions on redefining Turkey's national identity. Much of this discourse includes critical debate on ethno-nationalism and suggestions for specific democratization policies that go beyond those of the AKP. These ideas were previously expressed primarily within liberal segments of society, but today they feature prominently in the country's top newspapers, including those targeted at a conservative audience. Given the Gulen movement's broad influence, its recent discourse on the Kurdish question has certainly helped the country work towards a consensus on the importance of identity and equality.

As Turkey's citizens prepares to have some very difficult discussions on the Kurdish question, the increased focus on Ottoman-Islamic identity features prominently. Like other political actors before them, the AKP and Gulen Movement have demonstrated that militant nationalists will not lay down their arms because of banal assertions that "Islam is the cement." At this juncture, however, it is not Kurdish nationalists that are the target audience for those heralding the importance of Ottoman-Islamic identity. Rather, the AKP and Gulen are hoping that it will be Turkish nationalists that will respond to this dialogue by looking critically at their long-held assumptions about national identity, citizenship, and democratic rights. The AKP has already successfully ended the military's role in shaping state security policy. It now remains to be seen if the party can also convince the Turkish public that some concessions—language rights, electoral reform, redefined citizenship, or even a form of autonomy—may be helpful democratic reforms that will not threaten the integrity of the state.

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V. CONCLUSION

This thesis makes three main assertions about Turkey's long struggle with Kurdish nationalism. First, increased political opportunities have diversified and moderated the field of Kurdish activists, thereby increasing the likelihood that moderates may eventually challenge the PKK's hegemony of the Kurdish nationalist movement. Second, the dramatically diminished political influence of the Turkish Armed Forces has removed the hardline restrictions on political measures aimed at addressing Kurdish grievances. Third, through their critiques of ethno-nationalism, politicians asserting Ottoman-Islamic values have encouraged a reevaluation of national identity, citizenship, and human rights. I argue that these changes in Turkey's social and political landscape have all improved the chances that a negotiated settlement will eventually end the PKK's long and bloody insurgency. While this thesis has focused squarely on how domestic factors at the national level have shaped the prospects for peace, further research should be devoted to organizational dynamics within the PKK itself and the importance of international power shifts, including the increasing autonomy of Kurds in Turkey's neighboring countries.

Although many observers are hopeful that the recent Imrali negotiations and ceasefire might be the first steps to a peace agreement, this thesis has instead focused on large-scale shifts in political opportunity structures, civil-military relations, and national identity that hopefully will lay the foundation for successful conflict resolution in the long term. In the near term, however, I contend there are several reasons to be skeptical that the current process will result in a lasting peace. First, the conflict has already witnessed the failures of four halts in fighting.⁴⁰¹ The most notorious example occurred in 1993, when the PKK's first declared ceasefire ended after militants executed 33 unarmed Turkish soldiers and four teachers near Bingol.⁴⁰² Conversely, the PKK has accused the Turkish Armed Forces of ambushing its forces in violation of other previous

⁴⁰¹ Unal, *Counterterrorism in Turkey*, 133.

⁴⁰² Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 214.

agreements.⁴⁰³ In the months since the 2013 ceasefire, sporadic PKK attacks and kidnappings have continued, while many Kurds claim the military has continued to reinforce its positions in the southeast.⁴⁰⁴ If continued provocations trigger a fatal confrontation, the entire process could derail.

Second, leaders on both sides appear to lack trust in their counterparts. While BDP leaders have recently claimed that 80 percent of PKK fighters have left Turkey since the withdrawal began in May, Erdogan has angrily protested that only 20 percent have departed.⁴⁰⁵ In addition, the government was incensed by reports that the PKK has recently increased its recruiting efforts⁴⁰⁶ and has permitted the formation of a civil defense agency in Cizre.⁴⁰⁷ There are signs of growing frustrations on the side of the Kurdish nationalists, as well. Claiming that the AKP has been stalling the peace process, BDP leader Selahattin Demirtas recently threatened war if the AKP did not pass its promised reform package by October 15.⁴⁰⁸ Cemil Bayik, the new co-chair of the KCK, complained, “We’ve amply fulfilled what was up to us. [But] the process cannot go on like this. The state has brought the process to the brink of a deadlock.”⁴⁰⁹

Third, political actors on both sides are feeling excluded from the process and are skeptical of the motivations of the primary negotiators. CHP leaders, while offering tepid support for the withdrawal, have accused the AKP of withholding information from other

⁴⁰³ Ibid., 214, 286; “Hitches Seen with PKK Withdrawal,” UPI, June 28, 2013, <http://goo.gl/UhAhf8>.

⁴⁰⁴ Emre Peker, “Turkish Military: Kurds Fire on Helicopter, in Violation of Ceasefire,” *Wall Street Journal*, June 21, 2013, <http://goo.gl/DIKRXd>; “Hitches Seen with PKK Withdrawal;” Daniel Dombey, “Erdogan’s Historic Gamble on PKK Peace Begins to Falter,” *Financial Times*, August 22, 2013, <http://goo.gl/UD1JL4>.

⁴⁰⁵ Tulin Daloglu, “Can Erdogan Keep the Peace Process on Track?,” *Al-Monitor*, July 2, 2013, <http://goo.gl/PhM36D>.

⁴⁰⁶ Dombey, “Erdogan’s Historic Gamble.”

⁴⁰⁷ “PKK ‘Police Unit’s’ Traffic Control Investigated,” *Hurriyet Daily News*, June 26, 2012, <http://goo.gl/JbDHNr>.

⁴⁰⁸ Yavuz Baydar, “Turkish–PKK Peace Process Faces Deadline,” *Al-Monitor*, August 16, 2013, <http://goo.gl/FA4BtR>; “Ruling AKP, BDP in Row over Kurdish Peace Bid,” *Hurriyet Daily News*, August 19, 2013, <http://goo.gl/IrtDwV>.

⁴⁰⁹ Yavuz Baydar, “Is Turkey–PKK Peace Process at Dead End?,” *Al-Monitor*, August 30, 2013, <http://goo.gl/xEvhMe>.

politicians and the public.⁴¹⁰ The opposition party also resents the privileged role Ocalan has played in the negotiations, while they have been excluded entirely.⁴¹¹ Devlet Bahçeli, leader of the right-wing MHP, is dead-set against the entire enterprise, and has warned that Erdogan was “negotiating to divide Turkey.”⁴¹² There are also signs of possible infighting amongst those on the other side of the table. After a transcript of an early Imrali meeting was leaked to the press, some argued BDP deputies were attempting to sabotage the negotiations to protest their minimal role in the process.⁴¹³ In July, the PKK/KCK organization shuffled its leadership, with Bayik and Bese Hozat taking co-chair positions, while former chair Murat Karayilan took over as head of the People’s Defense Force (*Hêzên Parastina Gel*, HPG), the PKK’s military wing. Some have speculated that the change may have resulted from internal disagreements over the peace process.⁴¹⁴

Lastly, Turkish citizens do not strongly support the current process or have faith that it will succeed. In an April poll, when asked about the negotiations, 51 percent of respondents replied that they did not back the initiative, while only 37 were in favor.⁴¹⁵ When asked if they approved of Ocalan’s role as a negotiator, only 22 percent found it to be acceptable; even amongst AKP voters, the portion was only 30 percent.⁴¹⁶ Respondents also appeared to object to the political dealings underlying the process, with 62 percent expressing disapproval of a potential collaboration between the AKP and BDP

⁴¹⁰ Kadri Gursel, “PKK’s Withdrawal from Turkey Shows Peace Process on Track,” *Al-Monitor*, accessed September 2, 2013, <http://goo.gl/Z0tQCo>; “CHP Supports Withdrawal, but Wants More Information,” *Hurriyet Daily News*, April 25, 2013, <http://goo.gl/LJyu1t>.

⁴¹¹ “Ruling AKP, BDP in Row over Kurdish Peace Bid;” “Political Parties Divided over PKK Withdrawal,” *Hurriyet Daily News*, April 25, 2013, <http://goo.gl/Opw5zq>.

⁴¹² “Turkish PM Erdogan’s Aim is to Divide the Country: Nationalist Leader,” *Hurriyet Daily News*, May 25, 2013, <http://goo.gl/FbdGqd>.

⁴¹³ “BDP Deputies Deny Media Leak.”

⁴¹⁴ Emre Uslu, “Leadership Change in the PKK,” *Today’s Zaman*, July 10, 2013, <http://goo.gl/cO09BX>.

⁴¹⁵ Ozer Sencar, *Turkey Pulse: April 2013 “The New Resolution Process”* (Ankara: MetroPoll, 2013), 11.

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

on a new constitution.⁴¹⁷ Similarly, of the political concessions on the negotiation table—house arrest, amnesty, autonomy, and a federal system—none were supported by more than 22 percent of the public.⁴¹⁸ Most troubling, only 28 percent of respondents believed that the process would result in the PKK laying down their arms.⁴¹⁹ Given that the AKP will be competing in three elections—regional, parliamentary, and presidential—in 2014, party leaders have significant incentives to either stall or abandon the unpopular process altogether.

In addition to concerns over its chances for success, I argue that the current negotiations may be counterproductive to long-term chances for a peaceful resolution. Rather than attempting to empower and engage moderates within the Kurdish nationalist movement, the Imrali talks have strengthened Ocalan's position as the primary representative of Kurdish activism. Although the BDP may not qualify as a moderate actor based on its ties to political violence, the party still would have been a preferable public negotiating partner. Instead, the BDP's parroting of Ocalan's demands for release will only perpetuate the party's role as the puppet of the PKK. When the current talks break down, the Turkish public will have simply grown more cynical about the priorities of Kurdish activists. In the long term, Ankara should look to discredit Ocalan as an obstacle to Kurdish demands for democratic rights while allowing the political growth of moderate alternative Kurdish actors.

Although the current peace negotiations face significant challenges, Turkey has made meaningful strides toward resolving its Kurdish question over the last decade. Kurdish citizens have gained important cultural rights and political opportunities that permit them to assert their ethnic identity while advocating for further democratization. In addition, the government has finally asserted civilian control over the armed forces, opening the door to addressing legitimate grievances through political measures. Lastly, the resurgence of Ottoman-Islamic political actors has called into question exclusive

⁴¹⁷ Ibid., 24.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid., 17–20.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid., 16.

concepts of national identity that have been long an obstacle to equality. Although the current government has recently strayed from its commitment to democracy in favor of political gains, the foundation for a more peaceful Turkey has been laid.

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