Civil-military relations in Turkey in the post–Cold War period has been shaped to a great extent with the rise of Political Islam in the 1990s. As far as the Turkish military and, for that matter, the bulk of the Westernized elite in Turkey were concerned, an indispensable prerequisite for basing one’s decisions on informed judgment had been secularism. This was because from the early part of the nineteenth century to the present, the elite in question equated Islam with irrationality. They thought that Islam had fallen out of phase with life and could not be adapted to modern circumstances. They perceived a close relationship between the demise of the Ottoman Empire and the persistent opposition of Islam to the modernization efforts of the late eighteenth and the early part of the nineteenth centuries. These elites viewed secularism as the most important dimension of the Republican ideology. In the Republican period (1923 to the present), officers gradually became the most ardent guardians of secularism. The military’s direct interventions in politics in 1960–61, 1971–73, and 1980–83 had the ultimate purpose of safeguarding the secular-democratic state in Turkey.

At the same time, for officers, and for the rest of the Westernized elite in Turkey, modernization meant Westernization. They were of the opinion that an important component of Westernization was democracy. However, they favored “rational democracy,” that is, taking democracy as an intelligent debate among the educated for the purpose of arriving at the best policy option. As a result, from the late nineteenth century onward, officers and the other Westernized elite increasingly perceived Turkey’s salvation in introducing and maintaining a democratic as well as a secular state. It was thought, and the military agreed, that final authority rested with the civilian government.
The antecedents of the military having a privileged position in Turkish polity go back to the end of the thirteenth century when the military played a key role in the establishment of the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman State was born as a *ghazi* (warrior) state on the borderland of two rival religions and civilizations. In the early centuries of the Empire the military continued to play a primary role in state affairs. For this reason, for a long time the Ottoman ruling institution was referred to as *Askeri* (the military). During the period of decline (from the second part of the sixteenth to the end of the eighteenth century), the Ottoman state was virtually ruled by an oligarchy of the military, the civil bureaucracy, and the religious institution. During the nineteenth century, the military emerged first as the object and then the *subject* of modernization.

The founders of the Turkish Republic (Kemal Atatürk and Yısmet Yılmaz), too, had military backgrounds. During the single-party years of 1923–50, although the military was subordinated to the civilian government, it was nevertheless considered the ultimate guarantee of the secular republic. On the other hand, with a secular, modern education in the 1930s and 1940s, the military emerged as the champion of a democratic as well as secular state. In the late 1940s, young officers in particular began to have sympathies for the newly emergent Democratic Party (*Demokrat Parti*-DP) that challenged the “authoritarian rule” of the Republican People’s Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*-CHP). During the 1950s, the military shared the role of being a guardian of the secular-democratic state with the CHP. From the 1960s onward, with the fragmentation and polarization of Turkish politics on the dimensions of left-right, secular-Islamic, and cultural versus ethnic nationalism, and with the shift of the CHP from the center to the periphery, the military remained virtually the sole protector of the secular-democratic state in Turkey.

The military’s assumption of this role had a legal basis as well. According to Article 35 of the Internal Service Act of the Turkish Armed Forces (enacted in 1961), “the military is responsible for defending both the Turkish Fatherland and the Turkish Republic as defined by the Constitution.” According to the 1982 Constitution, the Turkish Republic is, among other things, a secular republic. Article 85 of the Internal Service Regulations of the Turkish Armed Forces stipulates that the “Turkish Armed Forces shall defend the country against the internal as well as the external threats, if necessary by force.” The military plays a role in government through the participation of the High Command in the National Security Council (*Milli Güvenlik Kurulu*-MGK). The MGK is made up of the president, prime minister, ministers of national defense, internal affairs, and foreign affairs, chief of the general staff, commanders of the army, navy, air force, and gendarmerie. The Council convenes under the chairmanship of the president. According to Article 118 of the Constitution, the MGK “shall submit to the Council of Ministers its recommendations against the internal and external security of the country.” The same article stipulates that the Council of Ministers shall give priority to the recommendations of the MGK to maintain the existence and independence of the State and the integrity and the indivisibility of the country.

It was in such a setting that on June 28, 1996, the religiously oriented Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*-RP) became the senior member of a coalition government of
the RP, led by Necmettin Erbakan, with the True Path Party (*Doğru Yol Partisi*-DYP) of Tansu Çiller. The RP’s venerable leader Erbakan became Prime Minister. This development caused anxiety among the officers and the rest of the Westernized elite in Turkey about the future of the secular-democratic.

As noted, the very target of the early Republican reformers was the hold of religion on the society and the polity. Islam was to resemble the Protestant tradition that placed emphasis on the absolute privacy of individual conscience. After Atatürk’s death in 1938, apart from the return of Muslim chaplains to the army and the introduction of elective courses on Islam in the state grade schools, not much had changed. In the multiparty period (from 1950 to the present), the state continued to monitor Islam closely. As it has been aptly put, “Turkey has always allowed Islam to use what means it can to spread itself provided that the Islamic institution is not recreated outside and apart from the state.” Such limited religious openings in the 1950s as the reintroduction of the call to prayer in Arabic and a somewhat expanded religious instruction in the grade schools were not the product of profound soul searching or of a spiritual crisis. They were the consequences of chiefly utilitarian and political considerations—the quest for a secure foundation of common morality, the need for a united front against communism, and, above all, the never-ending competition for electoral votes.

It is not surprising that Turkish Islam has been described as “simple,” and not “fanatical.” In 1957, when asked if renewed interest in religious duties involved a possible return to the Shari’a, the majority of urban and educated Turks smilingly replied that there was no question of such a “retrogression” implied in their actions. Villagers were of like mind. In 1986, only 7 percent of the people thought that the country should be ruled in accordance with Shari’a laws. In a nationwide survey carried out in February 1999, a mere 0.6 percent of the respondents considered themselves “very much religiously oriented.” In the same survey, only 80 percent disagreed with the statement “If a woman believes in God and the Prophet Mohammed she would still be considered a Muslim even if she does not cover her hair,” and only 1.0 percent thought that adultery should be punished according to Islam.

Therefore, what Dankwart A. Rustow had said of the National Salvation Party (*Milli Selamet Partisi*-MSP) of the 1970s, the RP’s predecessor, was not surprising: “[The MSP] would feel profoundly repelled by any regime of [Iran’s] Shiites ayatollahs.” The MSP could garner 11.9 and 8.6 percent of the votes in the 1973 and 1977 national elections, respectively. It is true that in the 1995 national elections, the RP could obtain 21.3 percent of the votes. This could, however, be explained primarily by secular rather than religious factors. Prior to the elections, the moderate left and the moderate right were divided among themselves; the secular parties had an unfavorable record that included cases of corruption and constant squabbling among their leaders, while, to many people, the RP was a symbol of integrity and morality. Also, the party had a very effective grassroots organization. Furthermore, the RP functioned as a social welfare agency. It secured appointments for people in hospitals and other public agencies. Through the municipalities it controlled, the party distributed coal, clothing, soup, and food to the needy. Then, in the April 18, 1999, national elections, at a time when the secular establish—
ment in Turkey talked of a serious threat from political Islam, the RP’s successor Virtue Party (Fazilet Partisi-FP) obtained only 15.2 percent of the votes and came third after the Democratic Left Party (Demokratik Sol Parti-DSP) and the Nationalist Action Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi-MHP).

All the same, when Refah became the senior partner of the coalition government in 1996, as noted, many in the secular establishment perceived Refah as a serious menace to Turkey’s secular Republic. They argued that the party’s endorsement of the secular-democratic order in Turkey was no more than taqiyya (dissimulating one’s faith on grounds of expediency). They pointed out that the RP’s leaders themselves had openly disclosed that their party was an alternative not only to other political parties but also to the secular-democratic order in Turkey.

Some students of Islam and politics in Turkey had a more generous view of the RP. The latter thought that the party’s mainstream leadership, if not a few militants among the rank-and-file, was oriented toward the electoral process. They argued that behind its radical rhetoric, the RP often showed pragmatism and flexibility. It was pointed out that this was the result of a strategic decision the party took in its Fourth Grand Congress (October 1993) to open up the party to new groups in the electorate.

Outside observers tended to side with the pessimists. Officers in Turkey were among those who had serious concern about the RP-DYP coalition. Following the formation of the coalition, there was talk among the pessimists of either the eventual success of political Islam or another overt military intervention. Neither of the two scenarios materialized, and a secularly oriented coalition government replaced the RP-DYP coalition.

Next, we first take up the developments that the military perceived as a threat to Turkey’s secular-democratic order. Next, we delineate how the military tried to deal with that “threat” while trying to remain within the formal legal rules and how in the end the crisis was defused. Finally, we discuss the crisis in question from a comparative perspective and offer some thoughts about the likelihood of the consolidation of democracy in Turkey in the near future.

THE MILITARY, SECULARISM, AND THE RP

From the very beginning, the military did not look with sympathy on the RP’s participation in government. Having strong suspicions about the party’s secular as well as democratic credentials, officers were worried lest it had in mind “one man, one vote, once.” However, following the coalition’s obtaining a vote of confidence (July 7, 1996), in contrast to what the Algerian military had done under similar circumstances, officers in Turkey adopted a strategy of wait-and-see. In 1992, the military in Algeria had prevented the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) from coming to power and, furthermore, they had eliminated the Front’s moderate political leadership.

In Turkey, during the wait-and-see period in question (July–December 1996), a report submitted to the MGK by the National Intelligence Agency (January 1997) indicated that a number of religious orders and associations were trying to create “alternative state structures.” Another report prepared by the General Directorate
of Security pointed out that more than 300 Islamic organizations have been “trying
to bring back to Turkey an order based on Shari’a.” A second report by the same
Directorate noted that “such Islamist groups as Hizbullah (the Party of God) and
Ýslami Búyúk Akýncýlar Cephesi (Great Raiders’ Front of Islam) were particularly
dangerous. These reports further alarmed the military.

The military also became disturbed by the accumulation of large amounts of
funds in the hands of some Islamic holding companies. According to the military
intelligence, the funds collected from Turkish workers abroad by the radical Turk-
ish Islamic organizations were channeled to Islamic holding companies in Turkey.
The military came to the conclusion that the funds in question had been used to
support the cause of political Islam.

The military was also concerned about the number of students graduating from
the Prayer Leader and Preacher Schools (Ýmam-Hatip Okullary-IHO) (sixth
through eleventh grades). According to their intelligence, even though the annual
need for religious functionaries in the late 1990s was around 3,000, every year
more than 50,000 students graduated from these schools. In addition, in 1996–97,
1,685,000 students were attending the illegally offered Koran courses, and this
number was doubling every year. Although the IHOs had been operating under
the supervision of the Ministry of Education, there were claims that the values and
attitudes inculcated in students could easily turn them into proponents of political
Islam. The military also felt uneasy about the RP’s packing the public bureaucracy
with its coideologists.

A more immediate concern of the military had to do with certain projects the RP
had in mind. According to one such project, (1) only those who knew Arabic were
to be admitted to the Foreign Ministry, (2) diplomats at foreign posts were to prac-
tice their religion; for this purpose chapels (mescit) were to be set up at Turkish
embassies, and (3) every Turkish representative abroad was to act as a missionary
for Islam. The RP also wanted the Chief of the General Staff to report to the Minis-
ter of Defense rather than to the Prime Minister.

Certain statements of some militant members of the RP too alarmed the mili-
tary. There was talk among the members of the secular establishment of closing
the middle-school sections (grades six to eight) of the IHOs, making eight-year
secular education (five years at the grade school and three years at the middle
school) compulsory. In reaction to this idea, one RP deputy from the city of Þanlý
Urfa, Ýbrahim Halil Çelik, said: “If you close these schools there would be blood-
shed. It would be worse than Algeria. In such an eventuality I will be rejoiced to
see bloodshed! The army could not deal with even 3,500-strong PKK [Kurdistan
Workers Party]. How will it cope with six million Islamists?” Earlier, another RP
deputy from Ankara, Hasan Húseyin Ceylan, had stated that if the RP controlled
the military academies, Turkey would be a much nicer place to live. He claimed
that guns and tanks could not destroy Refah, adding that Turkey met its tragic end
when it began to be ruled by a parliament. According to this deputy, the country
was reborn when religiously oriented parties were formed. Still earlier, Refah
parliamentarian Þevki Yýlmaz had said that when he was mayor of the city of
Rize, on national days he did not attend the ceremonies held in front of the statues
of Atatürk. In his opinion, “Visiting a blind and deaf rock was a sign of one’s being a retarded person.”

The military was also greatly upset by the so-called Jerusalem Night organized on February 5, 1997, by the RP-controlled Sincan Municipality on the outskirts of Ankara. In a play, the protagonists booed Arafat, made statements along the lines used by the militant Hizbullah, and called for the return of Shari’a. Four days later, tanks roamed the streets of Sincan. Everybody received the message; however, unwilling to make an overt intervention in politics, the military insisted that it was part of a preplanned military exercise.

After becoming the senior partner in the coalition, the RP had given signs of developing into a pro-system party with respect to the issue of secularism. For instance, it had scrapped its Islamic economic program of the Just Order (Adil Düzen), which was, among other things, against taking interest. The party had also abandoned its rhetoric against the West in general and Israel in particular, and had even ratified a defense agreement with Israel. Perhaps to make up for these “concessions” and appease its not too large but militant activists, Erbakan condoned certain acts and statements by the latter. The military perceived Erbakan’s soft stance on this matter as evidence of his thinking along the same lines as well. After all, before the RP-DYP coalition was formed, Erbakan himself was guilty of similar statements, although in each case he had later pointed out that he was misunderstood. On one such occasion, he had even declared that Islamists “will come to power either through normal channels or by shedding blood.”

The military became doubly alarmed when, shortly after becoming Prime Minister, Erbakan visited a number of militantly Islamic states, including Iran and Libya. While in Iran, Erbakan openly expressed doubt about the soundness of the earlier unfavorable briefing given to him by the Turkish National Intelligence Agency (Millî Ystihbarat Teşkilâtı-MÝT) about Iran. In Libya, when Muammar Qadhaﬁ had publicly accused past Turkish governments for having acted in the interests of the United States and Israel and called for the establishment of an independent Kurdish state in southeastern Turkey, Erbakan remained silent. In the same speech, Qadhaﬁ had talked of a Supreme Council of Islamic Commanders under his command, and disclosed Erbakan’s being a member of that Council; Erbakan did not deny it.

Erbakan’s inviting the leaders of religious orders, including the militant ones, to a dinner party at his prime ministerial residence and religious leaders attending the dinner in their religious garb (January 11, 1997) was the last milestone in the unfolding of the political crisis. The Prime Minister had overlooked the violation of one of the Republic’s most important Westernizing legislation—the dress code—which forbade religious personages to put on their religious clothing in public. More significantly, at dinner, one of the religious leaders openly said that they had helped the RP to garner votes in the elections.

THE MILITARY, DEMOCRACY, AND THE RP

The commanders expressed their concern about political Islam openly for the first time at a meeting of the MGK in August 1996. They proposed that the MGK
should look into this matter at its next meeting. President Süleyman Demirel, chairing the meeting and being anxious to prevent a showdown between the military and the civilian government, remained noncommittal; he merely pointed out that the MGK “could, of course, take up the matter.”

Following the meeting, the President warned the coalition leaders to act prudently on the issue of political Islam. At the same time, the President asked the commanders to remain in their barracks. The RP and DYP leaders did not pay attention to the President’s warning. In December 1996, a high-ranking general offered the view that nobody should expect a solution to the political problems from the military; rather, the solution should come from the civil society and the parliament. The same month, Chief of the General Staff Ýsmail Hakký Karadayý pointed out that both secularism, “which is the very essence of intellectual progress, liberty of conscience, and democracy,” and liberal democracy, “which is the lifestyle of free, civilized, and modern individuals,” are the fundamental characteristics of the Turkish Republic. The government gave short shrift to these statements, too.

At the December 1996 meeting of the MGK, the commanders noted that since August, the Islamic threat had become greater by the day and reiterated their request that this matter be placed on the agenda of the Council. The President was again noncommittal, indicating that he would look into the matter. The postmeeting press bulletin made it clear that at this stage, the Council had still left it to the government to adopt the necessary measures.

At the same time, the commanders set up the so-called West Study Group (Batý Çalýýma Grubu-BCG) in the General Staff headquarters. The BCG was to monitor the activities threatening the secular republic and plan appropriate measures lest they become necessary. Among other things, the BCG was to explore which groups might lend support to the military and which groups to the Islamists in the event of an armed clash between them.

Demirel continued his efforts to defuse the crisis by keeping close contact with the Chief of the General Staff and sending new warning signals to the coalition leaders. In January 1997, the commanders told the President that political Islam had become the number one threat and that the high command had no choice but to “actively concern itself with that threat.”

At the January 1997 meeting of the MGK, commanders complained that the activities of the militant Islamists were still not on the agenda of the MGK. The President replied by saying that he continued to warn the government about the Islamic threat, adding that nobody could do away with Turkey’s secular-democratic republic. The commanders’ response was that they were well aware of the President’s earnest endeavors concerning this matter, but Prime Minister Erbakan and Deputy Prime Minister Çiller were refraining from taking the necessary measures; worse still, they were acting against the laws enacted to safeguard secularism. They mentioned Erbakan’s notorious invitation of the leaders of the religious orders to his official residence and pointed to the fact that Çiller had recently said, “Politics is at the disposal of religion.” Commanders let it be known that if the MGK did not take up the matter, it would be held responsible by the future generations.
The President came to the conclusion that it would no longer be appropriate to prevent the Council from discussing the issue at length. At the same time, he wanted to give the impression that the discussion of the issue by the MGK did not mean that the military was taking things into its own hands. He argued that the commanders participated at the MGK meetings not as spokespersons for the armed forces but as the higher functionaries of the state who had expertise on security issues. He then placed the issue of political Islam on the agenda of MGK’s February 1997 meeting.

The President spent the following four weeks trying to prevent a head-on clash between the commanders and the government. In a letter to Erbakan, the President wrote: “Article 2 of the Constitution stipulates that Turkish Republic is a democratic, secular, and social state based on rule of law. Threats the anti-secularist activities pose for the secular Republican State give rise to serious concern both in the society and in the state institutions. I would like to bring to your attention the need to implement intact those laws enacted to safeguard secularism . . . and prevent the fundamentalist views from penetrating into schools, local governments, universities, the judiciary, and the military.” On the religious Lesser Festival (id al-fitr) (February 8, 1997), in a message to the nation, the President’s tone became harsher: “The exploitation of the people’s religious feelings for political purposes constitutes a felony.” He asked the public prosecutors to be vigilant on this matter, and urged civil societal groups to shed their indifference and play a more active role. Both Erbakan and Çiller still could not figure out the gravity of the situation, the latter even declaring that in the next elections her party would form an alliance with the RP.

Demirel talked with Erbakan for the last time on February 21, and reportedly “told him everything that could be said.” He then advised Karadag that it was necessary to have patience and stay “within the Constitution,” and that “if one’s patience snaps Turkey would face great difficulties in the days to come.”

At the MGK’s February meeting, the commanders pointed out that if those who govern the country overlook the threat the secular-democratic republic faced and, to add insult to the injury, they themselves use religion for political ends, the republic would tatter at its very foundations. They urged that the Council recommend to the government the necessary measures, adding that otherwise a critical threshold would be crossed. Çiller responded by saying that religion could not be used for political purposes because her party stood guard for secularism. The commanders retorted by pointing out that they did so only in words but not in deeds, and gave some examples. Erbakan did not challenge the commanders; he only requested that the Council’s recommendations should be expressed in general terms, adding that otherwise he would have problems in explaining them to his rank and file. Demirel, too, tried to make the recommendations more palatable to the RP so that the already tense political situation would not escalate. The meeting ended by the MGK making eighteen recommendations to the government. Among others, the MGK wanted to see pupils going through an eight-year secular education attending the IHOs.
The government dragged its feet on the MGK recommendations. At the same time, to prevent the military from making a drastic move, Erbakan kept on saying that his party had harmonious relations with the military. The commanders tersely pointed out that that they “could not be in good terms with those who acted against the Atatürkist principles.”

Still, the commanders did not press the issue in the MGK’s March meeting. At the April meeting, the commanders once more brought the issue to the table. At this meeting, the necessity of monitoring the short-, middle-, and long-term planning, programming, coordinating, and budgeting concerning the measures to be adopted was underlined.

The commanders were reluctant to take unilateral action, but they were intent on not letting the matter be put on the back burner. At the end of April, the General Staff gave a briefing to the members of the media about the threat of political Islam. Meanwhile, in March and April, every night, starting at 9:00 P.M. sharp, several people began to protest the government by turning their home lights off and on for ten minutes. And, through a number of public statements, the peak organizations of interest group associations representing both business and labor expressed their deep dissatisfaction with the government.

The government still did not move. To put more pressure on the government, in late May the military dismissed a number of commissioned and noncommissioned officers from its ranks on the grounds that they had sympathies for political Islam. At this point, the President told journalists that he had requested the Chief of the General Staff that the military should refrain from making public statements. The President also pointed to “the need for an early election.” On June 10, the General Staff gave still another set of briefings first to the judiciary and the academia, then to the media, and finally to the business groups in order to mobilize the public in the hope that the government would act.

As the pressure on the government increased, Çiller perceived this as her opportunity to become prime minister. She first asked Chief of the General Staff General Karadayý to support a minority government led by her. General Karadayý told her that this was the exclusive business of the President and Parliament. Çiller then told Erbakan that the pressure from the military was unbearable and, therefore, Erbakan and she should change posts. Erbakan, who apparently could not figure out whether the military would or would not take power into its own hands, agreed. On June 18, Erbakan resigned, both Çiller and he having in mind a game of musical chairs between them.

The President, however, surprised them by appointing Mesut Yılmaz, leader of the Motherland Party, as prime minister, despite the fact that at the time Çiller and Erbakan together had commanded a majority in Parliament. Soon, however, that majority melted down, and a new coalition comprising the Motherland Party, the Democratic Left Party, and the Democratic Turkey Party, supported from outside by the (new) Republican People’s Party, received a vote of confidence. This was a coalition of secularly oriented parties. The commanders stated that they would continue to monitor the developments in the problem of political Islam, but that “now there was no need for them to be actively involved concerning the efforts to
tackle that problem.” When, however, at one point new Prime Minister Yýlmaz asserted that now the government and not the military was responsible for dealing with the problem of political Islam, the military retorted that they had a constitutional duty to act as a watchdog concerning this critical matter.

In January 1998, the Constitutional Court dissolved the RP, on the grounds that it had attempted to establish a state based on Islam. The court used as evidence some of the statements by militant members of the RP. Erbakan and four other members of the party, including Ýbrahim Halil Çelik, Hasan Hüseyin Ceylan, and Þevki Yýlmaz, were banned from active politics for five years.

The RP was succeeded by the Virtue Party (FP), which is led by a moderate leader—Recai Kutan. With the FP, secularism began to be defined as religion not interfering in the affairs of the state and the state leaving religion alone. Women, including those who did not cover their hair and openly consumed alcoholic drinks, took their places not only in the municipalities the party controlled but also in Parliament. Most significantly, party members began to ask the crucial question of “where did we go wrong?”

Still, in the April 18, 1999, parliamentary elections, the FP placed fourth. The new government that has been formed by three secularly oriented parties, with Bülent Ecevit as Prime Minister, has displayed an effective and prudent governance and, not unexpectedly, has had cordial relations with the military. In December 1999, Turkey was designated as a candidate for full membership in the European Union (EU).

The military has evinced a positive attitude toward the possible entry of Turkey into the EU. For instance, the military supported the proposal to increase the number of the civilian members of the MGK. On the other hand, it put reservations on those issues that it deemed important for the external security of Turkey.

The last general elections held on November 3, 2002, are quite illustrative of the continued unwillingness of the military to intervene in politics unless the secular-democratic regime faced an immediate threat. The military acted with utmost restraint despite the fact that the religiously oriented Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkýnma Partisi-AKP) led by Recep Tayyip Erdoñan emerged with the 34.2 percent of the votes, captured two-thirds of the parliamentary seats, and formed a government all by itself. Although the party was an offspring out of the split within the FP, the party rhetoric and the program was designed quite carefully so that it did not touch upon the sensitive issues that the military deemed quite important. As a consequence, in contrast to what had happened in Algeria about a decade ago, the military gave the benefit of the doubt to the AKP and stayed on the sidelines.

THE TURKISH CASE IN PERSPECTIVE

The recent crisis over political Islam in Turkey has shown that although civilian supremacy over the military has not yet been fully established, there is little reason to expect a direct military intervention. It is true that the military keeps stating that as long as the threat of political Islam looms large their responsibility of acting as the guardian of the Republic will not come to an end. The military is also sensi-
tive on the issue of granting group rights to the Kurdish citizens of Turkey, a matter on which the EU has been pressuring Turkey.65

Yet officers are not enthusiastic even for indirect intervention. When they think some kind of intervention is absolutely necessary, they now mobilize the democratic forces and, thus, try to remain within law. They keep repeating that the final authority rests with the people.66 They also continue to emphasize the supremacy of the civilian rule. When the PKK leader, Abdullah Öcalan, was captured and given a death sentence, the military stated that it is up to the Parliament to ratify or commute that sentence.67 The military remains open for dialogue even on issues that it deems critical. One retired admiral observed: “If governments explain the rationale behind their policies in a convincing manner the military would support them.”68

Despite the fact that in 1996–97 commanders perceived political Islam as a serious threat to the secular–democratic state in Turkey, they did not resort to direct action. Instead, they chose to pressure the government via a constitutionally sanctioned mechanism—the MGK—and urge it to act more prudently. They justified their limited intervention in politics by reference to the constitutional provisions and their internal code that saddled them with the responsibility of safeguarding the republic from internal as well as external threats.

In the wake of the military’s intervention in politics in 1980, Frank Tachau and one of the present authors had commented that “it should occasion little surprise . . . if the military retain (either overtly or covertly) some share of the guardianship of the state.”69 At the turn of the century, the military in Turkey chose a moderating role—exercising influence and even effecting a change of government—without taking the helm of government into its hands. The military tried everything it could so that they would not feel obliged to escalate their moderating role to a guardianship role—taking power into their hands, clearing up “the mess,” and returning to their barracks.

It may be argued that during the 1997 crisis the military, in fact, acted basically as a pressure group, that is, as a group that aims to promote the general interest as it itself interprets it, without trying to come to office. It is true that in 1997 even if the military acted as a pressure group it was more than primus inter pares. And, of course, if absolutely necessary, its exhortations could be backed up by effective “sanctions.” Still, the commanders preferred to have support in society. They attempted to recruit to the “common cause” various civil societal groups—the secularly oriented media, interest group associations of the business and labor—such bureaucratic groups as the judiciary and the academia, and the people at large. They found a receptive and, in fact, an enthusiastic audience. Such “outside” support facilitated a basically “non–armed forces solution” to the crisis. In return, the military wished to see civil societal groups take initiative in critical junctures. They talked highly of the efforts of some voluntary groups to save the people from under the rubble following the August 1999 earthquake in Turkey.70

Particularly critical for arriving at a “non–armed forces solution” in 1997 was the significant role President Demirel had played. Demirel prevented the crisis from escalating to a point of no return. He assured the commanders that a “non–armed forces solution” was possible. On the other hand, he kept the anti-
government sentiment under control so that no major confrontation took place between the secularists and Islamists.\textsuperscript{71} As a consequence, secularists did not send signals to the military that they should intervene, as some secularists had done on the eve of the 1971 military intervention.\textsuperscript{72}

Another contributing factor for a “non-armed forces solution” to the crisis was the new ability of the majority of the secularly oriented political parties to set aside their differences and cooperate when the country faced a serious threat to the secular and democratic state. It should also be noted that when Çiller chose not to join the bandwagon, because of her anger at having been “ignominiously removed from power,” some of her close colleagues deserted her.

Another important development that would render the “non-armed forces solution” even more likely in the future is that, from the National Order Party (\textit{Milli Nizam Partisi}-MNP) (1970–72) to FP, the religiously oriented parties in Turkey gradually freed themselves from the clutches of the Islamic ideology in order to appeal to larger groups of the electorate. The closure of these parties by the Constitutional Court on the grounds that they promoted political Islam provided a further momentum to this development. Consequently, the RP increasingly took on the trappings of a pro-system party. It came to power through democratic means. It used its Islamist themes basically to explain what was fundamentally wrong with the country, describing to the electorate fundamental mistakes the previous governments had made. Once in power, the RP shed many of its earlier utopian, if not militant, Islamic views.

The change had, in fact, started when RP’s predecessor—the National Salvation Party (\textit{Milli Selamet Partisi}-MSP)—was in power (1972–80). During those years, as compared with the MNP period, there was a tendency to have relations with the then European Economic Organization and an inclination to engender reform in specific state institutions rather than sweeping changes in the constitution.\textsuperscript{73} When the RP replaced the MSP, secular and religious world views were not seen as incompatible. The RP defined secularism as the freedom to practice one’s religion according to one’s belief and without harassment.\textsuperscript{74} The RP referred to the members of secular parties as “incompetent politicians” and not as “false Muslims,” as their predecessors had done.\textsuperscript{75} On a symbolic level, but not less significantly, women began to attend party congresses, though with their hair covered, and more men began to wear neckties.\textsuperscript{76}

It is true that the RP in general garnered votes in Turkey’s underdeveloped regions.\textsuperscript{77} And there had been ethnic support for the party in the eastern and southeastern provinces.\textsuperscript{78} However, the RP had essentially been a party of forward vision, placing emphasis on modern science and technocracy, and not a party of protest and rejection. If this had not been the case, in all probability the party’s votes would have been considerably fewer, because the “Turks have been looking forward, not back.”\textsuperscript{79}

From the mid-1990s onward, the RP adopted the procedural rules of democracy—those rules designating the constitutional means of competing for and holding political office.\textsuperscript{80} The party has not considered coming to power by means other than elections. Following its removal from office, many in the party began to
seek an answer to the question of where the party had gone wrong. As noted, Recai Kutan, the leader of the present VP, has so far given the impression that he is a leader with views more moderate than those of Erbakan on the issue of secularism. It is probable that in the near future, a moderate and an innovative generation of Islamist politicians will take over from the less moderate and orthodox old guard and the FP will become a definitely prosystem party.

During and in the wake of the 1997 crisis, the Turkish military had identified its destiny with that of the nation. The officers believed that civilians were indifferent to the long-term interests of the community. They conceived of themselves as national political overseers; they thought that when the national interest was in peril, but only then, they should set things right. Their preference was to stay on the sidelines and obey political rulers. If they thought they had to come into the picture, they preferred the role of arbiter to that of exercising a veto power, and the latter to actual intervention. When they were engaged in “extracurricular activities,” they wished to return to silence as soon as possible. During the recent decades, due to the absence of strong and effective governments, the Turkish military has been in the limelight more often than it would have preferred.

The military constituted an integral part of what they considered a non politicized state. In all three cases, at times they intervened in politics as the state elite and not as the political elite. They were not in a political competition with the political elite. They considered themselves as nonpartisan arbiters, and not as rivals to the political elite. Most of the time they were on the sidelines and not in the political swirl, not because they have been forced to act in that manner, but because they thought it was proper for them to act in such fashion.

In Turkey, despite the increased democratization of the regime, the military’s prerogatives were kept almost intact. The military continued to use the MGK to influence government policy in those matters that they considered critical for the internal and external security of the country. In the wake of a return to democracy, officers were not in a weak position. Consequently, they could not be politicized by the civilian elite and turned into an instrument at the latter’s disposal. The Turkish military always subscribed to the republican principles of secularism and (cultural) nationalism, and were perceived by the bulk of the populace as defenders of the national interest. On the other hand, from the 1950s onward, particularly following Turkey’s becoming a member of the NATO, the military progressively developed into a professional body. In addition to their being always aloof from day-to-day politics, this fact also contributed to their basic unwillingness to be continuously involved in the swirl of Turkey’s politics. It can be concluded that in the foreseeable future neither political Islam nor another military intervention is in the cards.

NOTES

9. Erbakan had also been the leader of two religiously oriented political parties that preceded the RP, the National Order Party and the National Salvation Party.
21. For this definition of *taqiyya*, we draw upon Faruq Sherif, *A Guide to the Contents of the Qur’an* (Reading, UK: Garnet, 1995), p. 122. The principle of *taqiyya* that belongs to the Shi'ite doctrine is not a generally accepted tenet of Islam, although two instances of such actions are mentioned in the Qur’an: making friends with infidels (Ill. 27) and denying God (xvi. 28). Ibid.
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27. Concerning the march of events in this period, we primarily draw upon three Istanbul dailies, all of which have nationwide circulation—*Hürriyet*, *Milliyet*, and *Sabah*.


30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.


33. These numbers were disclosed to the media on June 11, 1997, in a briefing given by the Office of Chief of the General Staff.


40. For a further elaboration of the activities of the Islamists that caused alarm in the military, see Yeşilada, “Refah Phenomenon in Turkey,” and Sayari, “Islamic Challenge in Turkey.”

41. The MGK meets every month.

42. Turkey has a parliamentary system of government with a somewhat strong president. The president, not unlike his French counterpart, is “responsible for the smooth functioning of the state organs.” He appoints the members of the Constitutional Court and the State Supervisory Council, the members of the Council of Higher education, one-fourth of the members of the Council of State, the Chief Public Prosecutor, and the members of the Supreme Council of Judges and Prosecutors. He also prepares the agenda of the MGK meetings.

43. *Hürriyet*, December 12, 1996.

44. *Sabah*, December 12, 1996.


50. Ibid.


52. The three-day festival right after the Ramadan.

54. Ibid.
55. Ibid.
63. Milliyet, February 27, 1999.
70. Milliyet, September 3, 1999.
71. The 1982 Constitution provided the president with rights more extensive than those normally provided in parliamentary regimes. Among other things, the Constitution stipulated that the president is responsible for the harmonious functioning of the state organs. Thus concerning political stability and harmony in the country, Demirel adopted an activist role. The majority of politicians and intelligentsia criticized him for overstepping his authority; they wanted him to act as no more than a symbolic head of state. See Metin Heper and Menderes Çınar, “Parliamentary Government with a Strong President: The Post-1989 Turkish Experience,” Political Science Quarterly 111 (Fall 1996), pp. 483–503. Thus, in helping to resolve the recent crisis, Demirel had to draw upon the high esteem he held in the country.
72. Hale, Turkish Politics and the Military, 187. It was perhaps because of the critical role Demirel had played during the 1997 crisis that when the time came for the election of his successor by Parliament, the military made it known that it too was interested in the outcome (Hürriyet, April 15, 2000). There is no evidence, however, that the military tried to influence the election.
78. Ibid.
79. White, “Pragmatists or Ideologues?,” p. 28.
81. We say “almost,” because, once (July 1987) the military’s candidate for the post of Chief of the General Staff was successfully challenged by the Prime Minister. See Metin Heper, “The Executive in the Third Turkish Republic, 1982–1989,” Governance 3 (July 1990), p. 314.