

The State and Bureaucracy: The Turkish Case in Historical Perspective

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I. TURKEY: A VIRTUALLY SUI GENERIS POLITY

When viewed from a comparative perspective, the Ottoman-Turkish polity evinces a “strong state” in a Third World context. The Ottoman Empire, the antecedent political formation of the present-day Turkish Republic, has been an “imperial regime,” and the system as crystallized during the initial institutionalization pattern (ca. 1300-1600) was a bureaucratic rather than a patrimonial polity.

If after Eisenstadt (1987, pp. 175–178) one takes imperial (as well as imperial–feudal) regimes as political systems where center–periphery relationships are characterized by a high level of distinctiveness and autonomy of the centers, the Ottoman polity had been an Imperial regime par excellence. In the first place, although it was a “Muslim state,” in relative terms, the influence of the religion at least on matters of state was greatly constrained. The temporal power overshadowed the divine one. The Ottoman sultans issued rules and regulations that flouted freely the Islamic precedents (İnalçık, 1968–1970, p. 21). Based on the principles of “necessity” and “reason” and summed up by the norm of rationality, a particular outlook was formulated that provided ideals and values for the ruling groups. These ideals and values were inculcated in the military and the civil bureaucratic cadres in the state-run schools and through the roles that these functionaries filled, that is, through organizational socialization (Findley, 1982, p. 158). Called *adab*, this was “a secular and state-oriented tradition” (Findley, 1980, p. 9).

Second, in the Ottoman polity one came across a dominant center facing a weak periphery. This was basically due to the fact that the military played a key role in the establishment of the Ottoman Empire. There was an emphasis on purely “political goals” of conquests, territorial expansion, and maintenance of a strategic position in international diplomacy at the expense of an emphasis on the economic strength and expansion of the polity per se through mercantilist policies (such as France and Prussia of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries), let alone an emphasis on the advancement of social groups or the entire population or “society” (such as England of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries).

The types of goals pursued and the success in attaining them helped the Ottoman rulers to maintain their autonomy from the social groups. They obtained ample revenues from war booty. They also forcefully recruited young men from among the non-Muslim families in the conquered areas, converted them into Muslims, educated and socialized them through the state-run schools as already mentioned, employed them as military officials and civil servants, and used them to tax and control the Muslim social groups. These particular arrangements and the lack of a stress on economic goals enabled the rulers to obviate the need to mobilize social groups, and thus to accommodate their political demands; the rulers did not have to grant political territorial rights to the social groups in question. In the process, *Standes* and *parlements* remained alien to the Ottoman scene (Heper, in press).

It follows that not unlike the political experience of continental Western European polities, the Ottomans, too, had a distinctive center, or state, with its own normative system [1]. In the Ottoman case, however, the center was far more autonomous than its European counterparts (Mardin, 1969; Heper, 1980). The latter were imperial-feudal regimes; the Ottoman polity was an imperial regime. While in continental Europe the normative system of the center including that of the bureaucracy was to some extent interpenetrated by aristocratic and middle class values (Armstrong, 1973, pp. 93–103), in the Ottoman Empire the bureaucratic elites were “devoted exclusively to the secular interests of the state” (İnalçık, 1964, p. 55); it has even been claimed that “they represented no group or class interest, not even their own” (Berkes, 1964, p. 62).

It also follows that the Ottoman polity was a bureaucratic polity and not a patrimonial regime if the latter regime is defined, after Eisenstadt (1987, p. 179), as a polity where the center may turn out to be more grandiose than the periphery, but the center is nevertheless structured according to principles that are not greatly different from those prevalent in the periphery. One significant implication of bureaucratic structuring of the Ottoman polity for the later periods has been that the respect for the state and the salience of the state had been important dimensions of the Turkish political culture. On this particular point the Turkish political experience has differed sharply from those of many other Third World countries. For reasons which we cannot elaborate here [2], the political actors in many new countries, in particular in those with a colonial background, had been unable to transcend their particularistic orientations and develop a distinct political collective identity. Politics in these countries came to be based primarily on a system of relations linking rulers not with the “public” but only with patrons, associates, clients, supporters, and rivals, who together constituted “the system” (Eisenstadt, 1973, pp. 14,49; Heeger, 1974, p. 8; Clapham, 1986, pp. 43,49,143).

Given the particular development of the Ottoman-Turkish polity as delineated here, the political and administrative roles that the Ottoman and Turkish bureaucracies have adopted can be placed in perspective if, after Evans et al. (1985), we “bring the state back in” and view it as an alternative mode of political integration and legitimation. The state as conceptualized in this latter approach is a *generalizing* idea. It embodies norms and values formulated by the self-designated “state-elites” in the name of general interest. Two complementary characteristics of the state in question derive from its generalizing characteristic: (1) the state is an *integrating* idea; it attempts to unify the disparate elements of society around the norms and values in question; (2) the state is a *legitimizing* idea; only that political power that is exercised in line with the said norms and values is legitimate [3].

The salience in the Ottoman-Turkish political experience of the phenomenon of the state as conceptualized here gave rise to a long-lasting conflict between the “state elites” and the “political elites.” For the most part the bureaucratic elites acted, not even doubled, as the state elites [4]. Thus, in Turkey the political role of the bureaucracy did not vary, as

Heady (1979) and others [5] hypothesized, with the "regime type"; if anything, the reverse was true.

In Turkey democratization of the polity was not an upshot of increased pressures from the weighty social groups; democratization was rather engineered by the state elites themselves. This process was started as part and parcel of defensive modernization strategy of the Ottoman rulers. Its origins go back to the 1860s when the secondary elites *within the Ottoman bureaucracy* wished to participate in the decision-making process. Thus, "democratization" of the system was conceived as a means to greater degree of (substantive) rationality on the part of the bureaucratic elites; these elites aimed at arriving at more intelligent decisions through a clash of ideas. Democratization was not taken as a process that would make possible conciliation of sectoral interests.

In the event, the transition to multiparty politics in the 1940s gave rise to a sharp configuration between the state and the political elites. The bureaucratic elites acting as the state elites attempted to carve out a sphere for themselves in which they could act autonomously, and to monitor the activities of the political elites in the area the former left to the latter.

A distinction made at the time by the bureaucratic intelligentsia reflected the division of labor in question. These intelligentsia distinguished "active dynamic politics" (politicians trying to capture political office and *articulating* rather than *aggregating* interests) from "politics in its widest sense" (determination of public policy by the bureaucratic elite on the basis of "rational" criteria). The formula discovered here was the concept of "the requirements of the service," which "could be determined only by the bureaucratic elite." The formula in question was used by the bureaucratic intelligentsia to bolster their attempts to structure a sovereign and autonomous state in the realm of public bureaucracy (Heper, 1985a, p. 82). A complementary aspect of politics in Turkey has been that in the eyes of the bureaucratic elites the elected governments were legitimate to the extent to which their activities did not violate the norms and values designated by the bureaucratic elites. All of the three military interventions in Turkey were carried out because the elected governments were perceived as having drifted away from Atatürkism--official ideology clamped upon Turkish polity by the bureaucratic elites (Tachau and Heper, 1983).

It is for this reason that, as I noted elsewhere (Heper, 1985b), the dominant (Weberian) paradigm on bureaucracy has been less than satisfactory to explain the political role of the bureaucracy in a country like Turkey because the proponents of the Weberian approach have not entered into an explicit discussion of the role of the state (in the sense it is conceptualized here). Diamant (1970, pp. 509-510), for instance, observed that "there is considerable evidence from a variety of developing polities that the nature and form of the legitimacy help shape the organization and functioning of the bureaucracy," but he did not entertain the idea that the state could be an integral part of the "legitimizing system." Presthus and Monopoli (1977, p. 176), who even conceived "political culture as well as political structure as a systematic and independent variable that helps explain both the role and ideology of bureaucracies cross-nationally," did not consider the state in conjunction with political culture (cf. *inter alia*, Badie and Birnbaum, 1983, pp. 86-92). Nor did they think that in given cases the impact upon the bureaucracy of the phenomenon of state may be greater than that of the government formed by the elected representatives of the people.

The survey data in Turkey and South Korea showed that the "historical bureaucratic tradition," rather than variations in regime type, may offer the better explanation of the behavior of the public service in some countries, especially where there exists a firmly established tradition of the civil service. That study, in which I participated, found that in

Turkey, a country considered more polyarchal than South Korea, the bureaucratic elite attributed to themselves a greater degree of substantive rationality (in the Weberian sense) than did their counterparts [6].

II. OTTOMAN-TURKISH BUREAUCRATS, STATE, AND POLITICS

A. The Ottoman Period (1299–1923)

From the particular perspective suggested here the Ottoman centuries can be divided into three distinct periods. The first period extends from the beginning of the fourteenth century to the middle of the sixteenth. The rule during this phase was enlightened despotism, or rule based on carefully delineated state norms. The state was structured in the person of the sultan. The sultan, however, was not a patrimonial ruler. His was not a personal rule for he was the first servant of the state. At the time the civil servants were expected to be both personally loyal to the sultan and meritorious (Barnett, 1964, p. 70). Merit was here conceived in terms of their conformity to the *adab*, that is, the secular and state-oriented, tradition. Theirs were to be substantive rationality; as an extension of the sultan, each official, in his relations with people, was a minisultan himself. As İnalçık (1971, p. 113) noted, “those who were in the service of the sultan or who exercise authority in his name . . . were considered a separate and distinct group above the rest of the population.”

From the second part of the sixteenth up to the nineteenth century this particular institutionalization pattern underwent significant transformations. The sultans lost their control over the “free-floating resources” and over the polity. In the process, the *adab* tradition of the earlier centuries were eroded. In order to strengthen their claims to absolute authority the sultans increasingly underscored their religious role as caliphs, or the divinely selected and inspired leaders of Islam.

As the Ottoman center thus showed characteristics of a patrimonial rather than bureaucratic rule, the “meritocracy” tended to be replaced by a system of patronage. Each group within the bureaucracy began to organize itself around one or several ambitious pashas, or higher functionaries. The Ottoman bureaucracy lost its earlier characteristics as the loyal servant of the state: “all state positions, all instruments exercising state-delegated authority, came to be a means for personal gain” (İnalçık, 1972, p. 342). Also during this period the local notables gained influence, particularly through their role as tax farmers.

As an integral dimension of the defensive modernization strategy that the Ottomans adopted from the end of the eighteenth century on, there were efforts, particularly during the *Tanzimat* (Regulation) period (1839–1876), to reestablish the distinctiveness of the center. Not unlike the rationalist tradition of eighteenth century Western Europe, the political conception underlying the *Tanzimat* period was a direct relationship between the state and each of its subjects. There was no place in this particular scheme for a privileged local notable class, not even for their role as intermediaries between the state and the people.

Within the center itself initially, that is, during the first three decades of the nineteenth century, the goal was to reestablish the primacy of the Sultan not as a personal ruler but, again, as the first servant of the state. The Sultan (Mahmud II, 1808–1839) considered himself “the enlightener of the citizenry. . . . He brought the concept of *adalet* (justice) to the field of legal enactments where it meant the promulgation and judicial execution of rules outside (and later superseding) the ‘will’ of the Sultan . . . outside the *Seriat* (Islamic canon law)” (Berkes, 1964, pp. 9–95). Mahmud II also took measures to render the civil bureaucracy into a pliable instrument, one with a formal rationality.

With the outset of the *Tanzimat* period, however, the civil bureaucratic elite began to take initiative in the pursuance of the Ottoman modernization program. Their motto of the necessity of “institutions replacing individual rulers” could easily be put into practice in a milieu with a tradition of a distinctive center. The civil bureaucratic elites adopted the secularizing orientation restarted by Mahmud II. *Adab* tradition was revived in its most secular form; the only criterion in promulgating policies and programs was going to be “reason” (Mardin, 1962, p. 104). The bureaucratic elite of the time viewed themselves (and no longer the sultan) as the servants of the state. The bureaucratic elite thought that the policies developed by them, and freed from Islamic tradition, would be best for the Empire. The civil bureaucracy aspired to substantive rather than formal rationality.

B. The Republican Period (1923 to Present)

1. The Single Party Years (1923–1950)

Atatürk, founder of the Turkish Republic, nurtured for Turkey a political system in which initially the state would have salience but in time this state would wither away. In Atatürk’s view, toward the end the Ottoman sultans had shown signs of drifting to personal rule and had given short shrift to the vital interests of the country [7]. Atatürk thought Turkey needed a state distinct from the person of the rulers.

From 1919 (when he started the Turkish “War of Independence”) until 1938 (when he died) Atatürk attempted to institutionalize an impersonal state in Turkey on two planes. First, he tried to depersonalize the day-to-day conduct of public affairs. He was careful to differentiate between the person who occupied an office from the office itself (Heper, 1985a, pp. 60–61) [8]. Second, he was instrumental in developing a republican version of *adab* tradition, later referred to as Atatürkism.

In Atatürk’s view, the natural progress that people would have gone through if left to their devices had been arrested by the personal rule of the sultans. It was thus incumbent upon the new leadership group to restart and accelerate that progress (toward contemporary civilization). Atatürkism was conceived as a means to that end. It was taken as an antidote to the hold of religion, that is, “a nonscientific mentality,” on society. Thus, the basic components of Atatürkism were (1) republicanism, or the need for an impersonal rule; (2) nationalism, or people themselves generating their own goals; (3) populism, or emphasis on general interest; and (4) secularism, or nation’s goals not derived from religious precepts.

Atatürk did not have high regard not only for the Ottoman sultans but also for the bureaucracy the republic inherited from the Ottomans. In his opinion the civil servants had remained indifferent to, if not actively undermined, the national effort during the Turkish War of Independence (1919–1922). Thus, initially, Atatürk tried to relegate them into a secondary role. At this stage, for him the civil bureaucracy was to be a lesser part of the government. The high degree of centralization effected in each ministry left but little room for bureaucratic initiative.

Later, however, when some elements from the bureaucracy were purged and the products of the new schools offering a Westernized curriculum began to join the civil service, Atatürk began to see the bureaucratic elite as an integral element of the leadership group which was to lead Turkey to contemporary civilization. Having had the assumption that the people inherently had a potential to develop, Atatürk, however, did not perceive the bureaucracy as an Hegelian “absolute class”, or as the sole formulator and guardian of the general interest. The bureaucratic elite were, of course, expected to be loyal to and promoter of Atatürkism, but Atatürkism as taken by Atatürk was not an ideology in the

Shilsian sense, that is, a closed system of thought, but it was a mentality (Özbudun, 1981, pp. 87–92), or “non codified ways . . . of reacting to situations” (Linz, 1975, pp. 266–269).

2. The Multiparty Years (1945 to the Present)

Despite the essentially instrumental role that Atatürk attributed to civil bureaucracy, even during Atatürk’s life time the bureaucratic elite aspired to a much more substantive role. They tried to acquire for themselves such a place in the polity through a reinterpretation of Atatürkism. They attempted to legitimate the influential role they wanted to play in what was now formally a Rousseauist parliamentary democracy by transforming Atatürk mentality into a political manifesto. The principles of Atatürkist thought that were described above as techniques of finding out truth began to be loaded with substantive meanings. For the bureaucratic elite, reformism came to mean preserving and safeguarding whatever institutional transformations were effected in the fabric of the Turkish social and political structure. The institutional transformations in question became ends when they should have been only means (Turhan, 1967, pp. 71–72).

The formal education offered to the prospective bureaucratic intelligentsia was conducive to reviving the bureaucratic ruling tradition that had first fully developed during the *Tanzimat* period. The school engendered in the bureaucratic elite a willingness to act as a policy initiator and/or policymaker rather than as a policy implementer, and an inclination to place emphasis among the decision-making factors on “what . . . [he] think[s] is best” (Heper and Kalaycıoğlu, 1983, p. 190).

Following the transition to multiparty regime in the 1940s the Democratic Party, which captured political office in 1950, came to power with the claim that they represented “the people as against the bureaucracy (read the ‘state’).” For a long time in the post-1950 period, however, the elitist approach on the part of the bureaucracy did not wane. The bureaucratic elite were unwilling to accept an instrumental role for themselves with popular sovereignty as a fact of life. Thirty-four of the 36 civil servants who held highest bureaucratic posts in the 1945–1960 period agreed (in 1969) that “what Turkey needs more than anything else is experienced and informed people significantly contributing to public policy-making” (Heper, 1976, p. 516), and needless to say they considered themselves as best fitting that definition. In 1974, among 510 civil servants in eight central ministries, mean scores on a Likert scale (ranging from 1 to 5 with higher scores indicating a higher ranking on each scale) for tolerance for a democratic way of life were 1.48, for “elitism” 3.58, and for social responsibility 3.53 (Heper, 1977, p. 76). And in 1978, among all the civil servants in the central organizations of three ministries only 16.4% disagreed with the statement that as compared to other citizens civil servants judged the country’s interests better (Bozkurt, 1980, p. 130).

Not unlike the bureaucratic intelligentsia, the military, too, took democracy at the time as a discourse at a high level of rationality. Not unexpectedly, the rationality in question was defined by Atatürkist principles loaded with substantive meanings (Heper, 1985, p. 85). When the military intervened in 1960 they adopted the view that political power had fallen into a position hostile to the state’s genuine and main institutions, and to Atatürk’s reforms, which were of extraordinary value and importance if Turkey was to occupy a worthy place among the nations of the world as a civilized state (Ahmad, 1977, p. 164).

Thus emerged the 1961 Constitution, which stacked the bureaucratic elite against the representatives of the nation. Article 4 of the Constitution stipulated that “the nation shall exercise its sovereignty through the authorized agencies as prescribed by the principles laid down in the Constitution” [9]. The principles in question were made explicit by Article 153,

according to which no provision of the Constitution was to be interpreted to nullify certain specific laws that were passed during the Atatürk era. The clear intention was to maintain Atatürkist thought as a political manifesto, and to put an end legally to the supremacy of parliament. Among other institutions, the judiciary was given a considerable share in the exercise of sovereignty. The newly created Constitutional Court had the power to test from the perspective noted here the constitutional validity of statutes. The Council of State (the Turkish version of the French *Conseil d'Etat*) was also conceived as a countervailing force against political governments.

In the last analysis, however, these measures provided only a veto power to the bureaucracy, and as such were bound to be ineffective against a government determined to dominate bureaucracy. The 1961 Constitution, while attempting to bring bureaucratic controls over democracy, had at the same time expanded the scope of basic rights and liberties. In this more liberal milieu hard ideologies of leftist and rightist variety flourished, and competed successfully with Atatürkism (Frey, 1975, p. 70). Some members of the bureaucratic intelligentsia, too, joined the bandwagon of ideological polarization in question. Moreover, during the 1970s in particular, the political parties managed to turn many members of the bureaucracy into political party bureaucrats [10].

The political governments tried to render bureaucracy into a loyal rather than a legal-rational one. Given the fact that in the Ottoman-Turkish polity the state for a long time almost completely dominated civil society, there has been an absence of a constructive involvement in politics by the entrepreneurial middle classes. Consequently, there was in that polity no development in bureaucracy away from substantive rationality as reflected in cameralism and in reason of state, and toward formal rationality, as reflected in narrow specialization in administrative techniques.

In Turkey, to the extent the state-dominated political system was eroded it tended to be replaced by a party-centered, rather than bourgeois, politics (Heper, 1985a, p. 100). That is, antistate political parties have functioned as largely autonomous from weighty social groups. Instead, they came to be vehicles of elite conflict. The conflict revolved around "cultural" rather than functional cleavages. In the ensuing legitimacy crisis that has pervaded Turkish politics, always at issue was the *nature* of substantive rationality on the part of the bureaucracy, and not its *replacement* by formal rationality.

In the process, the bureaucracy's reaction to the efforts on the part of the political governments to politicize it was that of resorting to "negative politics," or alienative political involvement. The bureaucracy and political governments became hostile powers. The former began to sabotage the latter's policies. As the bureaucrats could no longer manipulate appointments and promotions and thus keep under control political spoils, they did this through a pathological bureaucratization of the system (Heper, 1977, pp. 80-82).

When in 1980 the military intervened (for the third time) in Turkish politics a new chapter began in the political development of that country. In the eyes of the military, the crisis essentially pointed to the one major failure of the system, namely, the almost complete erosion of the dominant state in the absence of intermediary structures with a moderating influence. In Turkey, the intermediary structures in question could be no other than political parties and the bureaucracy. Before long all the political parties were disbanded, and the military attempted the political engineering of encouraging the establishment of brand new political parties, which, it was hoped, would function responsibly as well as responsively (Turan, 1988, pp. 73-75).

As for the bureaucracy, the first step was to purge the bureaucracy of the "militants." Also, a considerable number of civil servants were "induced" to retire (Heper, 1984, p. 66ff). In the post-1980 restructuring of the Turkish political system the military reserved for itself

the “mission” of the guardianship of the state [11]. Thus, during the interregnum (1980–1983) there were efforts to render the bureaucracy into a legal–rational institution.

While some steps were being made in that direction, Turkey again made a transition to multiparty politics. The Motherland Party, which formed the new government, attempted to launch a “liberal revolution” in Turkey (Rustow, 1985). The Motherland Party government adopted a two-pronged policy of (1) debureaucratization of the system and (2) turning, in particular, the upper reaches of what would remain of the bureaucracy into a rational–productive [12] rather than a legal–rational one.

The government tried to carry out debureaucratization through sidestepping some age-old ministry bureaucracies and creating more flexible boards directly responsible to the prime minister, through privatization of some of the state economic enterprises, and through decentralization of the government. The rendering of the bureaucracy into a rational–productive one was tried to be effected through appointing to the heads of the critical directorates and agencies technocrats recruited from outside the bureaucratic ranks (Evin, 1988, pp. 201–207).

Thus, toward the end of the 1980s the substantive rationality on the part of the bureaucracy came to be considerably eroded. Only time will tell whether the bureaucracy will become in its stead rational-productive.

NOTES

1. Hale (1976, p. 1), in this context, argued that “while economists and sociologists may rank Turkey as a developing country, her post-Renaissance history has more in common with those of certain European countries than, for instance, with that of Nigeria, India or Brazil.” Also see Mango (1977).
2. See, inter alia, Mansur (1963, pp. 4, 23, 26, 28, 75, 80, 130–131, 168–169) and Scott (1970, pp. 27, 40–41).
3. For this definition of the state I draw upon Dyson (1980, pp. 208–214). Also see Heper (1987, pp. 3–6).
4. Below I take up this point at length.
5. Inter alia, Riggs (1963), Fainsod (1963), and Esman (1966).
6. Reported in Heper et al., (1980, pp. 81–105).
7. Here he particularly seems to have in mind the last Ottoman sultan, who, in his opinion, collaborated with the enemy when, following the First World War, parts of the country were invaded.
8. On how, despite his charismatic qualities, Atatürk shunned personal rule, see Heper (1980–1981).
9. The (previous) 1924 Constitution had simply stated that the nation would exercise its sovereignty through the GNA.
10. The efforts to politicize the bureaucracy started as early as the 1950s when the Democratic Party came to power. Before the 1970s, however, the civil servants had never been shuffled in such an arbitrary fashion as they were during this decade (Heper, 1979–1980, pp. 105–106).
11. The particular arrangements in this regard are discussed in Heper (1988, pp. 5–10).
12. According to Ilchman (1968, pp. 474–479) the common bond that joins rational-productivity bureaucrats derives largely from their legitimating source in knowledge, their loyalty to substantive programs, and their value commitment to productivity.

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