

The Turkey Analyst

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9 NOVEMBER 2009

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THE TURKEY ANALYST

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BACKGROUND: ca. 500 words of analysis about what has led up to the event or issue and why this issue is critical to the region. Include background information about the views and experiences of the local population.

IMPLICATIONS: 500 to 700 words of analysis of the ramifications of this event or issue, including where applicable, implications for the local people's future.

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Those interested in submitting an article to the *Turkey Analyst* should send their submission, or an article query describing the main arguments of the article, together with a CV to: info@silkroadstudies.org.

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TURKEY AND THE IMF: WHAT DELAYS THE DEAL?

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Since May 10, 2008, Turkey has been negotiating with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) over another three-year Stand-by Agreement, the corresponding loan and its conditionality. Despite debates on the need for such agreement, implicit in the statements of the IMF and Turkey's authorities, the fact is that they both want it. However, there is no deal yet, its conclusion being delayed by the Turkish government. The reason for such a delay is not the political cost of an IMF agreement, as is generally supposed: it is the lack of a compelling political benefit from announcing the decision early. Yet, the reluctance of the Turkish government risks coming at a cost for the recovery of the Turkish economy.



BACKGROUND: Turkey has signed nineteen Stand-By Agreements (SBA) from 1961 to the present. It has however concluded only two of them successfully, both under the AKP government. The first three-year SBA started in February 2002; and even before it expired, the AKP government signed the second one in January 2005. By the time this last agreement ended on May 10, 2008, the global financial crisis had been recognized and expectations for a new Turkey-IMF SBA deal were high. The Turkish

government had recently approved a Medium-Term Fiscal Policy Framework, revised its primary surplus target from 6.5 to 3.5 percent of GDP and adopted a social security reform. IMF officials in early May 2008 praised Turkey's achievements and its stronger position with reduced interest rates, halved public debt as a share of GDP, dramatically lower single-digit inflation, and record levels of foreign direct investment. Nevertheless, they warned this performance would be negatively affected by rising commodity prices, tightening global credit conditions and also domestic political uncertainties like the AKP closure case.

The IMF Mission Chief, Lorenzo Giorgianni, recommended early monetary tightening and rigorous compliance with the revised primary surplus target of at least 3.5 percent of GDP as a near-term priority. He stressed the centrality of institutionalizing fiscal discipline through the adoption of an explicit fiscal rule and continuing political commitment to sound policies and reforms for Turkey to retain investors' confidence

and face the crisis. The IMF expressed willingness for future engagement to support Turkey in tackling 'its remaining vulnerabilities', facing the global financial crisis and devising its policy targets. Its message was clear: ready for another agreement and waiting for the Turkish government to decide.

The Turkish government, on the other hand, from July 2008 to mid-September 2009 kept claiming that negotiations were in progress and a decision on the format and size of an IMF program was to be expected very soon. On October 13, 2008 the Minister of Economy, Mehmet Şimşek, declared the intention to introduce a formal fiscal rule in the coming months (as advised by the IMF). Seventeen days later he invited an IMF mission to

visit Turkey in early January in the context of Post-Program Monitoring (PPM), enhanced surveillance for members with exceptional debts of more than 100 percent of their quota to the IMF. After meeting with Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Minister Şimşek on November 14, 2008, the Managing Director of the IMF, Dominique Strauss-Kahn, stated that the disagreements about the size of the potential IMF-sponsored package and program would soon be settled as an agreement remained crucial to stabilizing the situation in Turkey. A week later, prime minister Erdoğan also articulated his hope for an agreement very soon. But neither the fiscal rule nor the mission and the deal materialized.

The demands of the Turkish government were articulated more clearly only in April 2009. Minister Şimşek told the *Wall Street Journal* that negotiations were conducted regarding a 3-year

loan arrangement. He affirmed Turkey's agreement with the IMF on a 'set of principles' but demanded more flexibility on its part. Until September 2009, the message was that an IMF deal was surely to come. In Şimşek's and Turkish Central Bank Governor Durmuş Yılmaz's speeches the IMF agreement was recognized as being helpful in easing 'concerns about external financing' and providing 'an external motivation' for keeping fiscal discipline, respectively.

With the announcement of a very strong rebound in the second quarter after the deep contraction in economic activity in the first one, statements from Turkish authorities became more ambiguous. Despite businesses' continuous insistence on the need for an IMF-sponsored agreement,

the AKP government communicated growing reluctance to accept IMF help soon, especially in its speeches to domestic audiences. In early October 2009, Prime Minister Erdoğan told the international media about the solution to disagreements on the independence of Turkey's tax administration and their 'hoping to sign a deal soon'. Deputy Prime Minister Babacan, on the other hand, stated that concepts like 'autonomous' and 'independent' were inapplicable to the 'not-matured-enough' tax and revenue administration institutions in Turkey and that they were 'not convinced' by the IMF proposals. After the IMF-WB Annual Meeting, hosted by Turkey in early October for the second time, negotiations go on. It is said that 'the next round of talks will be decisive'. Meanwhile, on October 24, Babacan admitted that they want an IMF deal because of



'the positive impact' it would have on Turkey's growth rate.

IMPLICATIONS: Ambivalent declarations and the marathon of 'negotiations' have caused considerable market anxiety. Before the Annual Meetings in Istanbul, Turkish and foreign analysts at Morgan Stanley, Goldman Sachs and Bank of America Merrill Lynch called the IMF deal a 'golden opportunity' that 'must be seized' in order to close the financial deficit, keep one-digit inflation and interest rates, and improve the discipline and credibility of the Medium-Term Financial and Fiscal Programs. Turkish financial markets and business leaders want an IMF accord as soon as possible. Three-fourths of Turkey's leading companies' CEOs participating in a poll conducted by the Turkish Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association (TÜSIAD) in late July this year regarded the deal necessary and its delay an extra risk and cost for the economy. Even after the announcement of a Medium-Term Economic Framework by the government on September 16, 2009, and its endorsement by the IMF, doubts remain on the ability of the government to follow its targets successfully without the IMF loan. Until now, financial markets have supported each step 'closer' to the agreement asserted by the prime minister. This shows an implicit recognition of the fact that there is a delayed IMF deal rather than an undecided or unwanted one.

Thus the question should not be if there will be a deal, but when and how comprehensive it will be. Both parties want the agreement but they have different calculations of the right time. The IMF would prefer the loan agreement very soon. It has experienced an increase in its finances this year, especially in July 2009 when France and the EU committed US\$15 billion and 100 billion respectively after similar moves by Japan, Norway and Canada in contribution to the IMF's resources.

The Turkish government has other calculations. The rhetoric of succeeding alone (without the IMF loan) in managing the way out of the crisis is used domestically to boost the impression of a strong, independent government. There is no direct political cost to an SBA (the AKP could sign the one in 2005 without repercussions) and the economic benefit of a deal is recognized. Nevertheless, the political benefit is still not obvious to the AKP government. Positive growth expectations for 2010 and 2011 as well as the fact that no early elections are expected to be held in 2010 mean that there are no incentives for the Turkish government to accept an IMF loan soon. Nevertheless, while waiting for the IMF to be more flexible on conditionality, the government risks getting a smaller loan and creating more uncertainty for foreign investors and the private sector. It will not be easy to recover from the global crisis with an expected 63 billion liras (\$43 billion) budget deficit and about \$8 billion debt to the IMF from earlier programs.

CONCLUSIONS: The IMF and Turkey both want the deal. It seems likely they simply do not agree on when to announce it, as the Turkish government wants to delay it for the moment. This stance shows how the AKP plays the IMF card both domestically and internationally. It is used domestically in order to boost the standing of the government. However, a full-blown recovery from the global crisis cannot be expected soon. Consequently, any short-term benefit of not accepting the loan soon, waiting for IMF 'flexibility' or the parliamentary elections of 2011 risks having unnecessary economic costs for the Turkish economy and post-2001 crisis achievements.

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ISLAMIST AND NATIONALIST VIEWS ON JEWS AND ISRAEL: ANOTHER COVERGENCE OF PERCEPTIONS?

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The attitude toward the Jewish “other” offers a prism through which Turkey’s ideological affiliation may be appraised. The Islamic conservatives and the secularist nationalists come across as similarly apt to be suspicious of the Jewish “other”. They are parented heirs to an illiberal tradition that has flourished throughout the nominally secular republican era. The conclusion that imposes itself is that the Turkish modernization endeavor remains hampered by an inability to fully internalize the values of liberal, universal civilization.

BACKGROUND: Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan continues to speak harshly of Israel in public speeches and in party group meetings in the wake of the row over Turkey’s decision to disinvite Israel from participation in the annual military exercise, “Anatolian Eagle”. Erdoğan has set the tone of a new, public discourse about Israel. Last week, the governor of Rize, the hometown of the prime minister, leveled heavy criticism at Israeli policies, accusing Israel of being an occupier and an expansionist country during a courtesy visit paid by Israeli ambassador Gaby Levy to the Rize Municipality.

In Trabzon, students from the Black sea Technical University staged a protest against the Israeli ambassador. An anti-Israeli rally was recently held in Istanbul. In another sign of the prevailing climate in Turkey, the state channel TRT has broadcast a television series with clearly anti-Semitic undertones that depicts Israeli soldiers as merciless assaulters that do not spare civilians.



Dome of the Ashkenazi Synagogue in Istanbul

It has long since been an article of faith of the official Turkish state ideology that Turkey, in the image of the Muslim world in general, has no history of any anti-Semitism even remotely comparable to what has been the case in the Christian world. Indeed, the assumption that non-Muslim minorities were privileged under Ottoman and Turkish rule has supported the Turkish self-image of tolerance. Among those

minorities, the Jews have enjoyed a special status; while the Armenians are accused of having betrayed the confidence of the Turks by what official Turkish historiography deems was a perfidious act of rebellion, the experience of the Jews under Turkish rule has fit conveniently into a self-congratulatory narrative of Turkish tolerance.



Istanbul's Jewish Quarters, nineteenth century

Yet, the quietude of the Jews in the Turkish realm has not always protected them from the transgressions of Turkish nationalism. As the ethnic cleansing of the Jews in the region of Thrace in 1934 bore witness, the Jews were viewed with suspicion by the state - their presence in the

sensitive border area of Thrace could therefore not be tolerated. Ultimately, their loyalty to the Turkish republic was questioned, indeed even assumed to be missing. In that regard, the Jews have been viewed no differently than the other, non-Muslim minorities, ultimately stigmatized as "alien citizens". Significantly, the military, the bureaucracy and the judiciary have all been off-limits for Jews as well as for Turkish citizens of Armenian and Greek origin.

Attitudes on a popular level toward the Jews have not been distinguished by any inclusiveness, either. The Turkish Jews, although spared outbursts of violent anti-Semitism, have nevertheless been treated as "the other". A recent survey by Istanbul's Bahçeşehir university revealed that 64 percent of Turkey's population did not want Jews in their neighborhood. 52 percent objected to having to share a neighborhood with Christians. ([See Turkey Analyst, July 3, 2009](#)) Overall, the survey leaves no doubts about the endurance of deeply conservative, Muslim cultural instincts; the fact that the results were more or less identical in a similar survey conducted in 1990 suggests that Turkish society has not evolved into a society less marked by contempt for and intolerance toward "the other" during the last two decades.

The policies and the rhetoric of the ruling AKP nevertheless do represent a departure from what has been the traditional stance of the Kemalist state toward the non-Muslim - as well as Muslim - minorities. The recent Armenian and Kurdish openings are rooted in the recognition that the constraints imposed by a narrow nationalism do not serve the interests of Turkey. The change of mentality seemed on evident display when Prime Minister Erdoğan earlier this year stated that "in the past,

those who had different identities were chased from our country; that was an unreasonable, fascist practice”.

IMPLICATIONS: Yet, the conversion of the Islamic conservative movement to liberalism and universal tolerance is belied by the fiercely anti-Israeli rhetoric of Prime Minister Erdoğan in particular. Erdoğan could obviously argue that he is not giving voice to any anti-Jewish sentiments, only being critical of the policies of Israel; it is however evident that the Turkish prime minister does not take the set of universal values as his point of reference when he condemns Israel's acts of violence in Gaza, and accuses China of committing “near Genocide” in Xinjiang, while he denies the internationally recognized genocide in Darfur. Indeed, the ideological world view of Prime Minister Erdoğan remains fundamentally informed by the dichotomy of believers and non-believers, by the division of the world into Muslims and non-Muslims. Thus, Erdoğan last week defended the scheduled presence of the Sudanese president and indicted war criminal Omar al-Bashir at the Islamic summit in Istanbul. (Al-Bashir subsequently desisted from attending, reportedly out of fear of being apprehended en route to Istanbul by the Israeli and Greek air forces). Erdoğan stated that he had been in Sudan without noticing any evidence of genocide. “And that is only natural, since Muslims do not commit acts of genocide”, Erdoğan declared. Thus, the AKP leader has not in any fundamental sense broken with the mind-set of the past: non-Muslims may be tolerated, but the Muslims are nevertheless superior, endowed with virtues that “the other” does not possess, implicitly giving the Muslims the right to rule and pass judgments.

The cadres of the AKP have notably been influenced by the poet and writer Necip Fazıl Kısakürek. Kısakürek's ideas are known to have had a significant impact on the thinking of

Erdoğan as well as President Abdullah Gül. Kısakürek was not only a prominent conservative critic of the secularist republic, but equally and perhaps even more importantly in light of current developments, a pioneer of systematic, unabashedly anti-Semitic thinking in Turkey. Kısakürek was a typical anti-Semite, who saw Jewish machinations behind the march of history; the Jews were responsible for religious strife in Islam, the architects of capitalism, the instigators of the French revolution and of communism. They were, Kısakürek wrote, condemned by God in the Quran.

From the perspective of the AKP, giving anti-Jewish resentment a free rein serves to reset an ideological balance that has been upset by the “openings” on the Kurdish and Armenian fronts. Opinion surveys indicate that both openings may be coming at a significant political cost for the AKP, with its concurrently Turkish nationalist and Muslim conservative base showing signs of being tempted by the nationalist parties. Furthermore, indulging in anti-Israeli – and by implication anti-Jewish – rhetoric and policies has the benefit of conforming to growing unease with Israel within the military establishment as well.

The Turkish-Israeli military and strategic relations were strengthened from the mid 1990s on. Several defense projects, such as the modernization of F-4, F-5 aircrafts and M-60 tanks and direct procurement of Heron unmanned aerial vehicles were awarded to Israeli firms, mostly without tender. However, severe managerial and technical problems soon arose. Deliveries were delayed and commitments were not met. The last example of this has been the Heron systems, which were manufactured by Israel's IAI-Elbit firms. The Israeli firm failed to meet the technical specifications requested by the Turkish Air Force. The view held in defense and military circles in Ankara is that the Israeli failure to deliver the

Heron systems ultimately made the military less inclined to dispute the government's decision to disinvite Israel from Anatolian Eagle. The lack of competition in procurement processes has created rumors about corruption. These allegations, along with the lack of the procurement of technical specifications at the user level, have created disappointment and fueled resentment against the Israeli systems.

projects have made forces in the Turkish military more resentful of Israel.

CONCLUSIONS: In terms of economics and business interests, Turkey has little to gain from steering too close to Israel, as the country's economic ties with the Arab and Muslim world has expanded vastly over the last decade. Yet, it is the convergence of religious conservatism, represented by the ruling AKP, and the nationalism of a disenchanted military establishment that has grown increasingly resentful of the role Israel is assumed to play in Iraq, that has set Turkey's downgrading of its relations with Israel in a particularly radical ideological context.

The attitude toward the Jewish "other" offers a prism through which the ideological affiliation of Turks – historically as well as currently – may be appraised. In that perspective, it becomes clear that the new, Islamic conservative elite of the republic has not yet broken with the mindset of the past, which divided the world into Muslims and non-

Muslims. Indeed, the Islamic conservatives as well as the secularist nationalists come across as similarly apt to be suspicious of the Jewish "other". They are parented heirs to an illiberal tradition that has flourished throughout the nominally secular republican era. Ultimately, that convergence suggests that Turkey's modernizing aspirations – yesterday represented by Kemalist nationalists, today by Islamic conservatives – remain hampered by an inability to fully internalize the values of liberal, universal civilization.



Dinsel ve etnik ayrımcılık oranları ürkütücü

İçimizdeki ırkçılık

Türkiye toplumu ateist, Yahudi ve Hıristiyan komşu istemiyor. Yahudi ve Hıristiyanları devlete bağlı saymıyor, kamusal görevler almalarını istemiyor



Radikal Headline: "Our internal racism"

Furthermore, the developments in Northern Iraq with its impact on the Kurdish separatist movement in Turkey have been another important cause of the disenchantment of the Turkish military establishment with Israel. The view that Israel seeks to help create an independent Kurdistan has come to be widely held among the Turkish military, which has viewed the training given by Israeli security units to the Kurdish forces of Northern Iraq with great suspicion. Taken together, Israel's presumed support for an independent Kurdistan, and the disappointments experienced in the area of defense industry

WHAT THE COLUMNISTS SAY

The role of the military in politics is once again at the focus of attention in the Turkish debate. The revelation that a blueprint for a coup may indeed have been prepared at the General staff has led to a more or less general condemnation of the perennial military habit of intervention in politics. Most columnists have taken it for granted that plans for the undermining of the AKP government – by means of agent provocateur operations directed against civil society – have indeed been made up at the General staff, although there are diverging views concerning the role of the Chief of the General staff General Ilker Basbug in the process. Several columnists demand his resignation. The tone of the public debate clearly suggests that the military is in the process of being politically marginalized, put on the defensive, and with the traditional deference to it belonging to a bygone era.

ALTAN: THE END OF THE MILITARIST REPUBLIC

Mehmet Altan in *Star* writes that the judicial authorities have established that the General staff document that details the plans for how the AKP government was going to be undermined is indeed an authentic document, with the signature of Colonel Dursun Çiçek. What is there more to say? Yet, the General staff still refuses to get the message. It tries to subvert the rule of law by its efforts to protect the officers implicated in the coup plans. The insistence of the military to steer the state and politics, instead of concentrating on defense matters and on developing military technologies, hurts its own prestige. The refusal to face up to the reality, the efforts to cover up the matter of Colonel Çiçek fatefully damages its credibility. I hope that the military will soon realize that we have indeed reached the end of the militarist republic, and that the transition to a democratic republic can take place smoothly and painlessly.

MERT: THERE IS NO ABSOLUTE POWER THAT LASTS FOR EVER

Nuray Mert in *Radikal* rejoices at the fact that the attempts of the military to subvert civilian politics have now once for all come to be generally regarded as utterly unacceptable. Yet, I can nevertheless not suppress an anxiety that we may eventually find ourselves in a situation where one form of authoritarianism has been substituted with another one. However, the fate of the once all-powerful military is instructive. Those who wield supreme power today would be wise to take appropriate notice of the fate that has befallen the once so mighty military that used to inspire fear in every quarter. There is no absolute power that lasts for ever.

KISLALI: TO MONITOR AND COMBAT RELIGIOUS REACTION IS THE DUTY OF THE MILITARY

Mehmet Ali Kislali in *Radikal* recalls that it is the duty and responsibility of the military, according to the law to protect the

constitutionally defined republic. And has not religious reaction and separatism long since been the two main threats to the republic? Has not the General staff always monitored the activities of religious reaction? So why does the revelation that a unit within the General staff has prepared a blueprint for how these threats are going to be combated cause such uproar? From a distance, it seems that the document that bears the signature of Colonel Dursun Çiçek is a draft intended to be submitted for the overview of his superiors.

BERKAN: A STRANGE HIERARCHY

Ismet Berkan in *Radikal* writes that the root of the problem is that Turkey has a very strange hierarchy: We have a people; it is owned by the state, which in turn is owned and ruled by the military. Obviously, the hierarchy should be the reverse: The state and the military should defer to the people. The military regards itself as standing above not only parliament and government, but also as standing above and outside the confines of the constitutional order itself. It believes it knows better than everybody else, and that it has the right to steer politics, if need be by subverting civilian governments. It makes clumsy attempts at societal engineering that are doomed to fail. It is time the military retreats into minding its own professional matters.

KORU: LET'S LEND THE MILITARY A HELPING HAND

Fehmi Kuru in *Yeni Safak* writes that Turkey has undergone a breathtaking change during the last couple of years. We can all observe the changes, in politics, in social life and in

our laws. The aspiration to become a full-fledged democracy, together with the courageous ambition to seek EU membership, has taken Turkey from being an inward-looking country that was embroiled in troubles with almost all of its neighbors to the dynamic country it has now become. We are a short step from qualifying to the first league of democracy. There is only one area where change is halting, difficult, and that is the civilian-military relation. I am confident that there is realization among the military that it has to adapt to the change, and that the necessary measures are indeed prepared. Yet there is also the fact that old habits and traditions can be difficult to shed. Even certain legislation stands in the way of change. So shouldn't we try a different approach? Of course, I am not suggesting that we should refrain from enforcing the laws in the case of the blueprint for a coup. But we should also try to lend the military a helping hand in the adjustment to change. Shouldn't we for instance consider revising the famous article 35 that regulates the internal workings of the military, and that is interpreted as inviting military to interfere in politics, in a way that befits a mature democracy?

ÇONGAR: GENERAL BASBUG SHOULD RESIGN

Yasemin Congar in *Taraf* writes that she has two expectations concerning the meeting between Prime Minister Erdogan and the Chief of the General staff General Ilker Basbug (that was held on October, 29): First of all I expect that General Basbug will give a full account to the Prime Minister of what has transpired in his headquarters and about his own personal role in the matter. Secondly, I take it for granted that the Prime Minister

upon receiving this information will subsequently take whatever appropriate measures that are called for in the matter. If Basbug has indeed been involved in the preparation of the blueprint for a coup, or in its cover-up, then he should immediately hand in his resignation. If he has not been involved, then he should immediately hand

over those officers that are implicated in the matter to the law enforcement authorities. Ultimately, what will make it easier for Basbug to do the right thing is that his superior (the prime minister) makes it unequivocally clear for him that this is what he expects him to do.