

ISLAMIST RADICALISATION

THE CHALLENGE FOR EURO-MEDITERRANEAN RELATIONS

EDITED BY

MICHAEL EMERSON, KRISTINA KAUSCH AND RICHARD YOUNGS

AUTHORS

OMAYMA ABDEL-LATIF

MURIEL ASSEBURG

RUŞEN ÇAKIR

SENEM AYDIN DÜZGİT

ANA ECHAGÜE

MICHAEL EMERSON

KHALED AL-HASHIMI

IBRAHIM EL HOUDAIBY

KRISTINA KAUSCH

NONA MIKHELIDZE

ROBERT SPRINGBORG

NATHALIE TOCCI

RICHARD YOUNGS

**CENTRE FOR EUROPEAN POLICY STUDIES
BRUSSELS**

**FRIDE
MADRID**

The Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) is an independent policy research institute based in Brussels. Its mission is to produce sound analytical research leading to constructive solutions to the challenges facing Europe today.

FRIDE is an independent European think tank based in Madrid that provides innovative thinking on Europe's role on the international stage; its core research interests include democracy, human rights, peace and security.

The views expressed in this report are those of the authors writing in a personal capacity and do not necessarily reflect those of CEPS, FRIDE or any other institution with which they are associated.

This study was carried out with the kind support of the Fundacion Tres Culturas, Sevilla, and the Comunidad Autónoma de Madrid. CEPS' programme in this area is supported by the Compagnia di San Paolo and the Open Society Institute, which are also gratefully acknowledged.



Cover photo: Protest by the Islamic jihad in Bethlehem against the Danish newspaper cartoons, February 2006.

ISBN 978-92-9079-865-1

© Copyright 2009, CEPS and FRIDE.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means – electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise – without the prior permission of the Centre for European Policy Studies and FRIDE.

Centre for European Policy Studies

Place du Congrès 1, B-1000 Brussels

Tel: 32 (0) 2 229.39.11 Fax: 32 (0) 2 219.41.51

FRIDE

Calle Goya 5-7, Pasaje 2, E-28001 Madrid

Tel: 34 91 244 4740 Fax 34 91 244 47 41

CONTENTS

Preface

Richard Youngs and Michael Emerson i

Part I. The question

1. Is the EU contributing to re-radicalisation?
Robert Springborg 1

Part II. Case studies in Islamist radicalisation

2. Trends in political Islam in Egypt
Ibrahim El Houdaiby 25
3. Understanding Hamas's radicalisation
Khaled Al-Hashimi 52
4. Trends in Salafism
Omayma Abdel-Latif 69
5. Turkey: A sustainable case of de-radicalisation?
Senem Aydın Düzgit and Ruşen Çakır 87
6. The radicalisation of moderate Islamist parties: Reality or chimera?
Ana Echagüe 108

Part III. European engagement?

7. Europe's engagement with moderate Islamists
Kristina Kausch 129
 8. How can Europe engage with Islamist movements?
Nona Mikheilidze and Nathalie Tocci 151
 9. Conclusions: Dynamics in political Islam and challenges for European policies
Muriel Asseburg 170
- About the Authors** 181

5. TURKEY: A SUSTAINABLE CASE OF DE-RADICALISATION?

SENEM AYDIN DÜZGİT AND RUŞEN ÇAKIR

Political Islam has been on the rise in Turkey in the last two decades owing to a variety of factors including the impacts of globalisation and the related popularity of identity politics, large waves of migration from the countryside into the cities, the poor performance of centrist parties in government, increasing democratisation and the rise of a religious middle class particularly in Anatolia.

Daniel Brumberg's classification of political Islamist movements is particularly useful in the analysis of the Turkish case. Brumberg divides political Islam into three main categories: "radical/militant fundamentalists", "reformist fundamentalists"/"tactical modernists" and "strategic modernists". He defines radical fundamentalists as those groups that explicitly reject democracy and aim at establishing an Islamic state, often with recourse to violence. Reformist fundamentalists/tactical modernists also pursue an Islamic state as their ultimate goal, but agree to make use of democratic instruments and discourses in achieving it. Strategic modernists differ from these two groups in terms of both goal and strategy. Brumberg defines those groups that fall under this category as Muslim liberal democrats that embrace liberal democratic values and seek to extend religious freedoms in a political environment where they co-exist among other political movements in a secular order.¹

¹ D. Brumberg, "Rhetoric and Strategy: Islamic Movements in the Middle East", in M. Kramer (ed.), *The Islamism Debate*, Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, Tel Aviv, 1997.

It can be argued that the Turkish case embodies all three kinds of movements. Reformist fundamentalism can be found in the Welfare Party and its successive incarnations (namely the Virtue Party and the Felicity Party), while the concept of strategic modernism could be used in assessing the Justice and Development Party (AKP), albeit with reservations on the part of some segments of Turkish society. Although radical fundamentalism can be claimed to have little weight in Turkey compared with much of the Middle East, the case of Hizbullah deserves attention, not only because of its strength in the 1990s, but also because of more recent claims that it is experiencing a revival in south-east Turkey.²

1. The moderate course

1.1 *From the Welfare Party to the AKP: A major shift in discourse and policy*

The Welfare Party was the first political party with an explicit Islamist orientation to come to power in Turkey, as a dominant partner in a coalition government. The party claimed 21.6% of the votes in the 1995 general elections and formed a coalition government with the centre-right True Path Party, with its leader Necmettin Erbakan as the prime minister. Before coming to power, Erbakan had often praised sharia rule and advocated its implementation in Turkey.³ Once in power, the party adopted certain domestic and foreign policies in direct conflict with the republican constitutional order. Reactions to these policies reached their peak in 1997 when the National Security Council moved to oust the Welfare Party from government, in what has been termed as a ‘post-modern coup’. The Welfare Party was closed down in January 1998 by the Constitutional Court and its key figures, including Erbakan, were banned from politics for five years. Upon closure, the party’s parliamentary group joined a short-lived Virtue Party, whose programme reflected a more moderate posture and placed greater emphasis on democratisation and the

² See, for example, “Kurdish Militant Group ‘Turkish Hezbollah’ Issuing Terror Threats”, *International Herald Tribune Europe*, 21 December 2006.

³ C. Karakas, *Turkey: Islam and Laicism between the Interests of State, Politics and Society*, Report No. 78, Peace Research Institute Frankfurt, Frankfurt, 2007, p. 25.

fostering of closer relations with the European Union.⁴ Nevertheless, the Virtue Party was also closed down by the Constitutional Court in 2001 for being the 'centre of anti-secular activities', after which the movement formally split into two parties: the Felicity Party of the 'traditionalists', led by Erbakan's closest associate, Recai Kutan, and the AKP of the reformists, led by Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

The Felicity Party remains strongly committed to the Welfare Party line in its goals of establishing a society based on an understanding of ethics and morality that rests on Islam and in its anti-Western outlook that also entails a strong belief in the incompatibility of Islam with Western values. It is explicitly against the United States and is strongly opposed to Turkey's accession to the EU. Western civilisation is perceived as unjust and corrupt, where Europe is presented as an enemy of Islam whose ultimate aim is to divide and partition the country. It advocates that Turkey should instead turn to the Muslim world and lead the Islamic states towards a 'more just world order'. This discourse, which is reminiscent of the Welfare Party, has not fared well in the general elections. The party only managed to win 2.5% of the votes in the 2002 elections and obtained a slightly lower 2.3% in the 2007 elections, failing to qualify for representation in the parliament for two consecutive electoral periods.⁵ In the face of decline, in October 2008, the party elected Numan Kurtulmuş as its new leader, a younger political figure with a Western education. It remains to be seen whether this will translate into any substantial moderation of the party's policy line.

In contrast to the Felicity Party, the AKP quickly disassociated itself from the old leadership and ideology. The party came to power in the 2002 general elections, obtaining 34% of the votes. It expanded its support base further in the 2007 general elections, in which it received 46.6% of the votes and formed its second round of single-party government. The party's performance in government so far is a major example of de-radicalisation in the sense that a shift has occurred from reformist fundamentalism, in which an Islamic state is pursued within a democratic order, to strategic modernism, in which the party espouses liberal democracy and a global

⁴ Z. Öniş, "Political Islam at the Crossroads: From Hegemony to Co-Existence", *Contemporary Politics*, Vol. 7, No. 4, 2001.

⁵ There is a 10% electoral threshold for representation in the Turkish parliament.

liberal economy. The party has undertaken fundamental reforms in the field of democratisation, started accession talks with the EU and achieved economic stability. Nevertheless, towards the end of its first term in government and particularly in its second round in office, significant segments of Turkish society, the judiciary and the military expressed deep concerns regarding the AKP's commitment to secularism and democracy, which culminated in the closure case against the party in March 2008.

1.2 The AKP in power: Prospects for sustainable moderation

It can be argued that the AKP has not yet made any major legal changes that challenge the secular order in Turkey. Yet, as the recent closure case indicates, this helps little in alleviating the secularists' fears of the party. Secularists in the country are aware that radical Islamist movements seeking to establish a state based on sharia have low chances of survival in the Turkish context. Both the Turkish military and the judiciary are known to be strong opponents of radical Islamic movements. Furthermore, public opinion polls suggest that radical Islamism is also opposed by the vast majority of Turkish society. A recent survey undertaken by the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV) found that 76% of the population is against the implementation of sharia, while only 9% favour it. Even among the AKP voters, 70% were found to oppose sharia. The survey also found that even those Turks who define themselves as "religious" do not perceive a contradiction between being a Muslim and being modern and secular.⁶

It is not just domestic constraints that are perceived to set limits on radical Islamism in Turkey. It can also be contended that the country's external context pushes it towards moderation since Turkey is strongly embedded in the West in economic, strategic and institutional terms. It is in the course of EU membership and is a long-standing member of NATO, the Council of Europe, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Moreover, the extent to which the Turkish economy is integrated

⁶ A. Çarkoğlu and B. Toprak, *Değişen Türkiye'de Din, Toplum ve Siyaset* [Religion, Society, and Politics in a Changing Turkey], TESEV, İstanbul, 2006.

into the global economy would make it very costly for any political movement in power to adopt an anti-Western and anti-globalisation discourse.

Still, it is also a fact that religiosity is on the increase in Turkey. In the same TESEV survey, 44.6% of the respondents were found to identify themselves primarily as a “Muslim” (compared with 36% in 1999), while only 29.9% identified themselves as a “citizen of the Turkish Republic” and 19.4% as a “Turk”.⁷ What the secularists fear is that this growing religiosity in Turkish society, mainly through the medium of social pressure, may lead to the gradual Islamisation of social life in Turkey. The TESEV survey found that around one-third of the population is concerned about the rise of Islamism and the erosion of secularism in Turkey.⁸ This segment holds that rather than major “legal-political changes”, the government’s “piecemeal administrative decisions” and “social influence” will promote religiosity in Turkey to the extent that the advances of the secular republic in areas such as gender equality will ultimately be eroded.⁹

One of the key examples of this view given by the secularists is the party’s public-sector recruitment policies. The secularists are particularly worried that the AKP is Islamising the education system and the judiciary through favouring individuals with Islamic backgrounds, such as graduates of İmam Hatip religious schools, in its appointments.¹⁰ While there is little empirical data to substantiate this claim,¹¹ the appointment of the governor of the central bank and more recently the head of the High Education Board (YÖK) from among those close to the party have helped little in dispelling such concerns. The government has also been accused of turning a blind eye to illegal Quran courses, promoting Islamic conservatism through school textbooks and taking a permissive approach

⁷ Ibid., p. 41.

⁸ Ibid., p. 94.

⁹ M. Somer, “Moderate Islam and Secularist Opposition in Turkey: Implications for the World, Muslims and Secular Democracy”, *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 7, 2007, p. 1278.

¹⁰ See for example, “AKP’nin Eğitimde Kadrolasma İnadi Yargiya Carpti” [AKP’s Recruitment Policies in Education Blocked by the Judiciary], *Radikal*, 12 August 2008.

¹¹ Somer (2007), op. cit., p. 1279.

towards the encouragement of Islamic practice in public schools.¹² Although such incidents are from time to time reported in the mainstream media, it is hard to treat them as reliable indicators of the extent to which the party is promoting Islamisation in education. Indeed, they could very well be the acts of bureaucrats and civilians who believe that promotion of religiosity is acceptable under AKP rule.¹³

These cases do not mean that the secularists do not additionally perceive any direct legal-political challenges to the secular system by the AKP. The headscarf controversy is one of the key examples cited by the secularists in this respect. A Council of State decision in 1984 and a 1997 Constitutional Court decision prohibit the use of headscarves in all public institutions, including schools and universities. In his first term in office, Prime Minister Erdogan introduced two proposals partially to reverse the ban, both of which were successfully blocked by the secularist elite. In his second term in government, the AKP made its third attempt by advancing the proposal of the Nationalist Action Party to lift the ban in universities. Although the amendment was later turned down by the Constitutional Court, it led to severe tensions on the political scene and paved the way to the closure case opened against the AKP in March 2008. The Court ruled against lifting the ban in July 2008, but also concluded that the party had become the 'centre for activities against secularism'. The Court's official justification of its decision, published in October 2008, shows that the bulk of the evidence cited by the Court in branding the AKP as the centre of anti-secular activity rests on the party's position and the speeches of its key figures on the headscarf ban.¹⁴

Another controversial legal-political step concerns the government's proposal to increase access to education for graduates of İmam Hatip religious schools. Based on a YÖK decision issued in 1997, graduates of vocational schools who take the university entrance examinations can earn higher scores if they apply for bachelor programmes that coincide with the kind of vocational school from which they graduated. This implies that

¹² See for example, "Parents Reveal Scandal at High Schools", *Turkish Daily News*, 1 June 2007.

¹³ Somer (2007), *op. cit.*, p. 1279.

¹⁴ For the official justification of the decision of the Constitutional Court, see the *Official Gazette*, No. 27034, 24 October 2008.

İmam Hatip school graduates have to achieve higher scores than do the graduates of regular high schools to enter into non-theology faculties. In December 2005, the ministry of education issued a regulation that allows İmam Hatip graduates to earn degrees from regular high schools by taking corresponding courses and thus to be on a level playing field with regular school graduates in entering non-theology faculties. YÖK objected to the regulation, however, leading to its suspension by the Council of State in February 2006.

For the secularists, both the headscarf controversy and the dispute over İmam Hatip schools are gradual attempts at Islamising Turkish society and the state bureaucracy. In the case of the headscarf debate, the secularists (women in particular) view the headscarf as a “visible symbol of the Islamisation of Turkish society”.¹⁵ Regarding the ban in universities, it is often asserted that the young women who do not wear a headscarf would be compelled to do so over time owing to social pressure, particularly in Anatolian towns where there is already strong attachment to Islamic/conservative values. With respect to the dispute over İmam Hatip schools, the secularists complain that the AKP is attempting to infiltrate the state administration by facilitating the entry of Islamists into the related faculties in universities. For the AKP and its supporters, both cases involve the removal of discrimination and the promotion of individual liberties.¹⁶

It may indeed be argued that both attempts are related to tackling discrimination and that the fears are overstated. The TESEV survey, for example, found that although 64% of its respondents believed that the use of the headscarf had increased over the years, its use was actually found to have decreased between 1999 and 2006.¹⁷ The perceived increase may be linked to rising migration and urbanisation, which has led to the growing visibility of headscarved women in society. Furthermore, there is a high

¹⁵A. Rabasa and F.S. Larrabee, *The Rise of Political Islam in Turkey*, RAND Corporation/National Defense Research Institute, Santa Monica, CA, 2008, p. 61.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

¹⁷ The TESEV survey found that the percentage of headscarved women fell from 73% in 1999 to 61% in 2006. See Çarkoğlu and Toprak (2006), *op. cit.*, pp. 58-59.

degree of societal support for both lifting the headscarf ban in universities and facilitating the entry of İmam Hatip graduates to non-theology faculties.¹⁸

These initiatives could be considered positive and necessary steps, had they not been separated from the broader issue of democratic reform in Turkey. The AKP government – particularly in its first term – undertook important measures towards democratic reform to fulfil the Copenhagen political criteria. Nevertheless, especially from 2005 onwards, the reform process slowed down considerably, leading to disappointment among both EU circles and the reformist forces within the country. The government was perceived as attempting to appease the status quo forces in Turkey, for example through its reluctance to abolish outright Article 301 of the Penal Code, which regulates offences that involve “insulting Turkishness, the Republic, the parliament and state institutions” or to undertake any reform relating to the Kurdish issue. The party started preparations on the drafting of a new ‘civilian’ constitution soon after the 2007 elections, but the constitution project was abruptly put on hold in early 2008. After the closure case, the party seems more cautious about pressing for legal-political changes that may be interpreted as promoting Islamisation,¹⁹ but it is also apparent that the AKP is very reluctant to take any steps on the democratisation front.

This stance can partly be explained by the rise of nationalist sentiments in the country in response to the resumption of violence by the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) and the perceived need on the part of the AKP to forge an alliance with the highly nationalist establishment to

¹⁸ The TESEV survey found that 71% of the public is against the headscarf ban in universities and 82% of the public believes that İmam Hatip graduates should be on a level playing field with regular school graduates in the university entrance examinations (*ibid.*, p. 96 and p. 24).

¹⁹ One of the cases that is demonstrative of such caution involves the proposal of an AKP MP on the protection of children, which included establishing a place of worship in schools for students of every religion. The proposal was immediately dropped after a warning by Prime Minister Erdogan to refrain from controversial actions in the eyes of the public in the aftermath of the closure case. See “PM Lashes Out at Deputy for Controversial Youth Proposal”, *Turkish Daily News*, 13 August 2008.

alleviate any prospects of closure. The weakening of the EU anchor resulting from the mixed signals coming from Europe can also be considered a factor behind the reluctance to undertake democratic reform. Regarding the impact of the EU, the *Leyla Şahin v. Turkey* case – in which the European Court of Human Rights in November 2005 rejected an appeal to allow women to wear the headscarf in universities – can be considered a turning point for the AKP's perception of Europe in the promotion of democratisation in Turkey. It can be argued that this case led to a serious reassessment among certain segments of the party as to how far Europe could contribute to changes in Turkish secularism through an agenda of democratisation and human rights.²⁰

Such reluctance to take the necessary steps to consolidate Turkish democracy poses a serious risk for the sustenance of the moderation of political Islam in Turkey. Democratic consolidation can be regarded as the “ultimate insurance of secularism”.²¹ While there are secular states that are not democratic, “all established democracies have some type of a consolidated secular system enjoying acceptance by the majority of the socio-political actors”.²² Yet democratic consolidation would strongly depend on economic development and a credible external anchor as well as ideological changes on the part of both the Islamists and the secularists.²³

The economic performance of the AKP in its first term in government was impressive, with inflation under control and interest rates declining. Still, these results were made possible by the favourable international economic climate, which is no longer present in the party's second term. The AKP will have to find novel means of tackling the challenges of continued economic growth and new job creation in a deeply unfavourable global economic environment, to sustain the support of the middle classes that play such an important role in its moderation and to pursue further

²⁰ S. Aydın and R. Çakır, “Political Islam in Turkey”, in M. Emerson and R. Youngs (eds), *Political Islam and European Foreign Policy: Perspectives from Muslim Democrats of the Mediterranean*, CEPS, Brussels, 2007.

²¹ Somer (2007), op. cit., p. 1281.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., p. 1282.

democratisation.²⁴ An unequivocal commitment to Turkish membership by the EU would also play a crucial role in the consolidation of Turkish democracy by enhancing the credibility of the Union as a promoter of Turkish democratisation. The AKP would also need to reprioritise the EU accession process, not only for the future of the reform trajectory, but also for its own systemic survival. This became evident once again with the closure case opened against the AKP. Reforms undertaken by the AKP to attain harmonisation with the EU constituted the main official justification of the Constitutional Court for its decision not to ban the party.²⁵

Both the secularists and the Islamists would also have to readapt their ideology to expand their views on a pluralist democracy. The issues of “ambiguity” and “trust” consequently become highly significant in this context.²⁶ One of the main impediments to the building of trust between the Islamists and the secularists relate to the AKP’s ambivalence on issues that lie at the heart of the debates over secularism in Turkey. The AKP’s preferred label of “conservative democracy” claims to “give voice to the Turkish people’s values and to bridge the gap between the state and the people”.²⁷ How such shared “values” are defined, justified and selected remains (for the secularists, dangerously) ambivalent. Similarly, such ambivalence is also present in the party’s line on the public role of Islam, on which the AKP does not articulate a clear position.²⁸ This ambivalence in turn fosters fear among the secularists that the party has a hidden agenda of gradually Islamising Turkish society.

A sustainable moderation of political Islam in the framework of democratic consolidation furthermore requires the existence of strong secularist opposition parties that would push the AKP towards extending the democratisation process. Such parties would compete with the AKP for

²⁴ Ş. Pamuk, “Globalization, Industrialisation and Changing Politics in Turkey”, *New Perspectives on Turkey*, No. 38, 2008.

²⁵ *Official Gazette*, No. 27034, 24 October 2008.

²⁶ Somer (2007), op. cit., p. 1283.

²⁷ S. Tepe, “A Pro-Islamic Party? Promises and Limits of Turkey’s Justice and Development Party”, in M. Hakan Yavuz (ed.), *The Emergence of a New Turkey: Democracy and the AK Parti*, Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2006, pp. 121-122.

²⁸ *Ibid.*; see the discussion on pp. 123-132.

the party's moderate constituency by being in favour of expanding individual rights and freedoms, and they could help decrease polarisation along the religious/secular axis in Turkish society. There is currently an absence of such parties in the Turkish political context. The Republican People's Party, which is currently the major party on the left, is almost indistinguishable from the ultra-nationalist Nationalist Action Party in its defensive nationalism and its reluctance concerning democratic reform.²⁹

The moderation of political Islam under the AKP should thus not be taken for granted. As the compatibility between Islam and free market values became a central element of the Islamic identity in Turkey, especially from the mid-1990s onwards, a new Islamic middle class emerged that is not only visible, but is also a strong competitor for state power.³⁰ This new middle class upholds economic liberalism, but is socially conservative, particularly on gender-related issues.³¹ As recently observed by the famous Turkish scholar of Ottoman and Turkish history, Şerif Mardin, the promotion of Islamic/conservative social values by the AKP, combined with social pressure stemming from this new middle class, creates a strong potential for the increasing Islamisation of Turkish society. Mardin highlights that this may not be the ultimate intention of the AKP; yet the party policies that promote societal Islam, such as ignoring illegal Quran courses, may indeed facilitate such social dynamics, possibly to the extent that they shift the party further to the right.³² The AKP is not a monolithic or homogenous party, but consists of various factions including those that have joined it from the ranks of conventional centre-right parties. Nevertheless, there is still a strong Islamist core, meaning that there may always be potential for gradual Islamisation under conditions of

²⁹ Z. Öniş, "Conservative Globalists versus Defensive Nationalists: Political Parties and Paradoxes of Europeanization in Turkey", *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans*, Vol. 9, No. 3, 2007.

³⁰ Pamuk (2008), op. cit.

³¹ European Stability Initiative (ESI), *Islamic Calvinists: Change and Conservatism in Central Anatolia*, ESI, Berlin/Istanbul, 19 September 2005.

³² See Ruşen Çakır's interview with Şerif Mardin in R. Çakır (ed.), *Mahalle Baskısı: Prof. Dr. Şerif Mardin'in Tezlerinden Hareketle Türkiye'de İslam, Cumhuriyet, Laiklik ve Demokrasi* [Small-Town Pressure: Islam, Republic, Secularism and Democracy in Turkey from the View of Şerif Mardin's Theses], Istanbul: Doğan Kitap, 2008.

incomplete democratic consolidation and an absence of strong secularist rivals who would help keep the party in check and pressure it to follow a moderate course.

2. The violent fringe

Radical/militant Islamic fundamentalism with recourse to violence has generally remained a marginal force in Turkey. There are two main radical/militant Islamic fundamentalist groups currently present in the country, namely al-Qaeda and the Turkish Hizbullah.

2.1 *Al-Qaeda*³³

A Turkish al-Qaeda cell was responsible for the consecutive bombing of two synagogues as well as the British Consulate General and the HSBC Bank headquarters in Istanbul in November 2003. The perpetrator was arrested by the Turkish police in August 2005, after which 33 suspects were arrested in 2007.³⁴ Further investigations revealed that Turkish militants in al-Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan had organised a cell before 11 September 2001, that the Istanbul bombings were ordered directly by Osama bin Laden and that preparations for these bombings were carried out under the guidance of Muhammad Atef – also known as Abu Hafs al-Misri – then leader of al-Qaeda’s military wing. Initially, Atef assigned two targets for the Turkish militants: the Incirlik Air Base in Adana and an Israeli tourist ship travelling to the southern port of Antalya. The militants decided that it was impossible to stage an assault on Incirlik, and postponed an attack on the Israeli cruise ship because of a lack of intelligence.

This attack came as a shock to Turkey given the widespread belief in the country that al-Qaeda would not perpetrate crimes in a Muslim country. Yet, there were already sufficient grounds for concern about the possibility of al-Qaeda attacks in Turkey. It is well known that many Turkish radical Islamists, who had earlier fought in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Chechnya and Kashmir, had later joined the international network of al-

³³ Some parts of this section draw from R. Çakir, “Turkey in Denial of al-Qaeda”, *Terrorism Focus*, Vol. 5, No. 2, Jamestown Foundation, January 2008.

³⁴ Rabasa and Larrabee (2008), p. 27.

Qaeda. It is also known that hundreds of Turkish radical Islamists have been trained in al-Qaeda camps in Afghanistan and Pakistan. It can be reasoned that Turkey constitutes an obvious target as a Muslim country with close ties to the West. Its secular political system, which (albeit with its problems) has managed to incorporate the Islamists, presents an alternative model where Islam and democracy coexist. On top of that, although Turkey has recently experienced some setbacks in its relations with the US, it has generally supported US actions in both Afghanistan and Iraq.

As part of its global strategy, Turkey has long been used by al-Qaeda as a transit country that provided key logistics such as international money transfers and a base for international travel for its members. It can be argued that Turkey's importance for al-Qaeda significantly increased with the war in Iraq, where it became a crucial route for the transmission of weapons, members and money to Iraq via Syria. Following the US occupation of Iraq, there was also a steady outflow of Turkish volunteers ready to fight in the Iraqi insurgency. Newspapers often report stories of Turkish nationals who die in suicide attacks or in armed combat. For instance, Habib Akdas – the ringleader of the Istanbul bombings – was reportedly killed in a US bombardment of al-Anbar province in September 2004. Similarly, it is claimed that Gurcan Bac, another leading member of al-Qaeda, died in a clash in Fallujah in 2005.³⁵

The 2003 attacks confirmed fears that Turkey is now a major target country for al-Qaeda attacks. Two years after the Istanbul bombings, Louai Muhammad Hajj Bakr al-Saqa – an al-Qaeda operative of Syrian origin – was arrested after a failed plot to attack an Israeli cruise ship near Antalya. Even though al-Qaeda has so far never staged an attack on Turkish soil using non-Turkish operatives, the al-Saqa incident shows that it would be possible. The latest al-Qaeda attack in Turkey was directed at the US consulate in Istanbul in July 2008. Three Turkish policemen were killed in the attack, which was described by the Turkish security forces as al-Qaeda's retaliatory response to the recent effective operations carried out by the Turkish security forces.³⁶

³⁵ *Hürriyet*, 15 February 2005.

³⁶ *Taraf*, 10 July 2008.

In fact, in the wake of the Istanbul bombings, groups linked to or inspired by al-Qaeda have been the target of greater scrutiny by the Turkish intelligence services and the security forces. As is the case in many parts of the world, however, it is much harder to trace small groups that have no direct link to al-Qaeda than larger movements that are better organised. For example, on 9 March 2004, two Islamist youths independently sought to bomb 40 Freemasons congregating at the Masonic Lodge in Istanbul's Kartal district.³⁷ Security prevented the two from deploying the bomb properly. The activists had no direct connection with al-Qaeda, but were clearly inspired by the network.³⁸ Far from being professional militants, Turks influenced by al-Qaeda are generally ordinary citizens. One of the suspects arrested as part of a major operation in the central Anatolian city of Aksaray in December 2007 was a high school English teacher, and four others were likewise employed and socially integrated individuals. Al-Qaeda style militancy in Turkey continues to attract individuals outside the usual profile of young, single, unemployed/underemployed youths.

Turkish intelligence services and security forces are well equipped and experienced in counter-terrorism. Yet for several reasons, Turkey is ill prepared for a potential fight against al-Qaeda. One of the main reasons is that Turkish counter-terrorism is overwhelmingly focused on the PKK. Furthermore, Turkish public opinion remains unconvinced of the threat posed by al-Qaeda. Some believe that this organisation does not exist, having been fabricated for manipulative purposes by countries such as the US and Israel. Others accept that al-Qaeda is real, although they do not view it as an organisation countering US and Israeli hegemony, but rather as a tool used by these countries to colonise the Middle East. With Turkish-US relations strained as never before, a larger number of Turks are also inclined to sympathise – or at least empathise – with al-Qaeda's stated goal of combating US policies. Many Turks continue to believe that it is impossible for al-Qaeda to target Turkey, especially as the country is run by a party with Islamist roots. Others subscribe to the theory that al-Qaeda did not, in fact, target Turkey in November 2003. According to this view, the intended victims of the synagogue bombings were Jews, and therefore a

³⁷ Freemasons are considered pro-Zionist by many Turkish Islamists.

³⁸ *Hürriyet*, 12 March 2004.

“concern” of Israel, even though the victims were Turkish rather than Israeli citizens. Similarly, attacks against the British Consulate and HSBC Bank have been dismissed as attacks upon the UK, although again, most of those killed were actually Turks.

2.2 *The re-emergence of Hizbullah in Turkey*

The emergence, rise and fall of the movement

The Turkish Hizbullah – not to be confused with the Lebanon-based Shiite Hizbullah – is a militant, Islamist Sunni group based in south-east Turkey where a conservative understanding of Islam is predominantly embraced. A handful of Kurdish youngsters initiated the movement at the end of the 1970s, and it was institutionalised immediately after the military coup of 12 September 1980.

Between 1988 and 1990, Hizbullah laid the foundations of jihad. It was influenced by the Iranian revolution and it received both financial and logistical support from Iran.³⁹ During this period, its leader Hüseyin Velioglu reportedly summarised his strategy as follows: “There should be no other movements opposing the regime besides ours. Being the only alternative to the regime is a must in order to consolidate people’s opposition to the regime in one alternative. After becoming the only alternative, the reckoning will be between the regime and this one alternative.”⁴⁰ In line with this strategy, the main target of the organisation was initially not the state, but the PKK, which was a strong competitor for people’s allegiances in the region. Hizbullah turned increasingly violent in its efforts to defeat the PKK and draw public support by appearing more hard line than the PKK. The conflict between the two, which raged between 1993 and 1995, led to heavy losses on the part of the PKK. It was finally brought to an end through the mediation efforts of the leaders of the Kurdistan Islamic Movement in Iraq and the Iraqi Kurdish Revolutionary Hizbullah party. Soon after, an internecine conflict emerged between two

³⁹ See R. Çakır, *Derin Hizbullah* [Hizbullah Goes Deeper], Istanbul: Metis, 2001.

⁴⁰ Quoted in R. Çakır, *The Reemergence of Hizbullah in Turkey*, Policy Focus No. 74, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Washington, D.C., September 2007, p. 6.

factions within the organisation: the more moderate Menzil group argued for gradualism and the İlimcis for imminent jihad, resulting in the success of the latter.

In the 1990s, the organisation began to expand its activities into western Turkey by carrying out a number of assassinations, which also paved the way to its decline. On 17 January 2000, the police raided a house in Istanbul, killing the organisation's leader Velioglu and leading to a major clampdown of the organisation by the Turkish security forces. Approximately one year after this first operation, the organisation assassinated Diyarbakir's chief of police, Gaffar Okkan, as revenge for its leader's death. This resulted in a second crackdown against Hizbullah, where both the perpetrators of the assassination and the majority of the organisation's top leadership were caught. Some members fled abroad to Europe, Syria, Iran and Northern Iraq.

It is often argued that the Turkish security forces overlooked Hizbullah atrocities when the organisation was fighting the PKK in the 1990s, but there is no strong empirical proof to substantiate this claim. The data published by Turkey's semi-official news source, the Anatolia Agency, suggests that the security forces countered Hizbullah during the years the latter was working to eliminate its adversaries, despite the organisation's ability to establish strong control over the streets in many of south-eastern Turkey's towns and provinces.⁴¹ Still, it was only after the organisation had ended its operations against the PKK that the security forces went after it more aggressively. As one police report states, "[a]s activities declined, the number of operations increased...The most important factor in this case was that the security forces were too busy with the PKK, which was operating in the region and was more of a serious threat than Hizbullah in the years when Hizbullah was founded."⁴² That Hizbullah's operational strategy was more covert than the PKK's was another factor that contributed to Hizbullah's growth.

After the intensive crackdown, Hizbullah stopped its armed attacks (at least temporarily) and entered a phase of serious internal strife. The US-led, post-11 September 'global war on terror' also contributed to this

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 9.

⁴² Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 10.

process, as Hizbullah did not want to be another target of international powers seeking to fight terrorist groups. Furthermore, after 2002, Hizbullah escaped critical attention owing to Turkey's preoccupation with the PKK.

Hizbullah's ideology

The movement's leader, Velioğlu, identified three main stages culminating in the establishment of an Islamic state. The first one is 'propaganda', in which the Islamists would try to convince people to live in accordance with Islam and to establish an Islamic state. The next stage is 'community', in which the local communities would be reorganised in accordance with Islamic rules. The third and the final stage is 'jihad', in which armed struggle would be used to establish and defend the Islamic state. Party politics is considered a great sin that is strictly forbidden since it is perceived as recognition of the present establishment.⁴³

The movement is primarily centred on Turkey's Kurdish-populated regions. Nonetheless, its aims are universalist, in the sense that it aspires to emancipate the entire Islamic society by seeking to "establish an Islamic system on earth that will demolish tyranny, injustice, segregation and exploitation".⁴⁴ Hence, although most of its members are Kurdish, it does not pursue a Kurdish nationalist agenda.

For Hizbullah, 'jihad' and 'martyrdom' are inevitable. Martyrdom is valued very highly since it is considered the "greatest benefit for the Muslim *ummah* and the greatest investment for the *ummah's* future".⁴⁵ Contrary to most radical movements in the region, Hizbullah is not critical of tradition. Instead, it often praises traditional religious orders and sects in its propaganda material to gain popular support.

⁴³ M. Kürsad Atalar, "Hizbullah of Turkey: A Pseudo-Threat to the Secular Order", *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 2006, p. 327.

⁴⁴ I. Bagasi, *Kendi Dilinden Hizbullah ve Mücadeleden Kesitler* [Hizbullah in Its Words and Important Aspects of the History of the Struggle] (unknown publisher), 2004, p. 56.

⁴⁵ F. Hamza, "Sehadet bir Ruhtur", *Inzar Dergisi*, Vol. 17, February 2006, quoted in Bagasi (2004), *supra*.

Revival of Hizbullah

Despite the massive clampdown, Hizbullah is still alive in Turkey. The resurgence of the organisation was confirmed in a 2007 briefing to a group of parliamentarians by the head of the National Intelligence Organisation, in which it was stated that Hizbullah was awakening after a long period of silence.⁴⁶ Following this assessment, the National Security Council reached the same conclusion in November 2006 during a meeting that dealt with the organisation. This revival has come with a fundamental change in strategy, however, which involves a shift from violence to grassroots support. Firat News Agency, known for its close relations with the PKK, claimed in December 2006 that Hizbullah had become ‘civilianised’ and had begun to raise funds and organise social activities through institutions, primarily through an association known as Mustazaflar Derneği [Association of the Oppressed]. The most striking example of its new strategy, which includes being more visible, was a gathering held in February 2006 in Diyarbakir, where tens of thousands of people protested about the cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad in the “Respect to the Prophet” rally. The second major example came during another rally in Diyarbakir, called “Love to the Prophet”, which took place in April 2006 and was similarly attended by tens of thousands.

Hizbullah now functions legally, through existing associations and by publishing periodicals, books and a weekly newspaper. This can be deemed a radical change, given that the organisation had in the past not published a single pamphlet or organised a single public meeting for propaganda purposes. It now argues that Muslims have to make use of communication and information technology in “serving the aims and targets of the Islamist case” as a platform for “education, invitation and communication”.⁴⁷ In line with this, the organisation’s members and sympathisers within and outside Turkey have also begun to communicate through the Internet.⁴⁸ Social connections among its members have intensified.

⁴⁶ Çakır (2007), op. cit., p. 13.

⁴⁷ “From the Editor”, *Intizar*, November 2008.

⁴⁸ The most popular website is www.yesrip.com.

These developments suggest that, unlike in the past, the new version of Hizbullah wants neither to entrap itself in an all out war with the state nor to be washed away by a spiral of violence. Thus, one may be tempted to define this transformation as a case of ‘de-radicalisation’ of the Turkish Hizbullah, in the sense that the organisation no longer resorts to violence. Nevertheless, given the organisation’s history of atrocities and brutality, its full abandonment of violence is difficult to imagine. The members of the organisation have so far not acknowledged their violence in any of their publications. Instead, they view past deeds as acts of “self-defence” committed in response to the attacks of the “enemies of Islam”, such as the Turkish state.⁴⁹ Furthermore, the members’ continued praise of former leader Velioglu as the ‘martyr guide’ lends credence to the organisation’s respect for violence. Hence, it can be argued that once it feels securely grounded, a now-docile Hizbullah could indeed turn violent.

Hizbullah, Europe and the al-Qaeda connection

It is reported that since 2002, Hizbullah has intensified its actions among Kurds in Europe, mainly through the similar strategy of establishing associations, organising discussion groups and socialising at activities such as weddings.⁵⁰ In fact, its new leader, Isa Altsoy, was a former member who took refuge in Germany after the major clampdown by the Turkish security forces. One of the fundamental strategies of the new leader is to firmly establish Hizbullah in Europe by expanding its support base among the Kurdish expatriates on the continent and by profiting from the freedoms in the EU.

Some political analysts have also hinted at a connection between Hizbullah and al-Qaeda, suggesting that Hizbullah might be a bridge between Europe and Iraq for foreign fighters. Through their Internet statements, Hizbullah members fiercely deny any connection with al-Qaeda. Indeed, drawing similarities between the radicalism of an Iranian revolution-inspired Hizbullah and that of al-Qaeda would be a serious

⁴⁹ M. Zeki Güney, “Şehit Rehber Hüseyin Velioglu’nun Mücadelesi Üzerine” [On the Struggle of the Martyr Guide, Hüseyin Velioglu], *İntizar*, No. 2, April/May/June 2008.

⁵⁰ S. Cagaptay and E. Uslu, “Hizbullah in Turkey Revives”, PolicyWatch No. 946, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Washington, D.C., 2005

mistake. There is no substantial evidence to confirm such a connection. Even so, although it can be held that the current disarmament of Hizbullah makes tactical cooperation unlikely, one cannot rule out the possibility that Hizbullah may work with al-Qaeda operationally.

Countering Hizbullah

Hizbullah is currently thriving in Turkey's south-east. Turkish security forces have clearly underestimated its resurgence after a major clampdown on the organisation. While the PKK's status among the Kurds in the south-east is declining, Hizbullah has been developing projects to fight poverty and to increase its social status in the region.⁵¹ It seems to be attracting significantly more supporters than the PKK to take part in the demonstrations held by its legal organisations. Developments in Iraq and in the region as well as the PKK's stagnating political crisis have favoured Hizbullah's emergence as an alternative to the PKK in south-eastern Turkey. The AKP's single party rule is also believed to have facilitated the actions of the organisation. The AKP's rise has further legitimated various political interpretations of Islam and has consequently created room for organisations like Hizbullah to exist. It can even be contended that the moderation of political Islamist parties operating at the legal level have actually increased the attractiveness of Hizbullah in the post-11 September context.

An exhaustive analysis of the present and future of Hizbullah would require scrutinising Lebanon's Hizbullah, Hamas, Iraq's Muqtada al-Sadr movement and Afghanistan's Taliban, in that order. All these organisations emerged as second fiddles to violent nationalist or traditionalist groups and remained so for a long time. Yet, with the exhaustion and degeneration of the main structures (leftist movements and Amal in Lebanon, Fatah and the PLO in Gaza and the West Bank, all of the traditional mujahidin organisations in Afghanistan, and SCIRI and Dawa in Iraq), these 'second fiddles' reached out to large audiences that viewed them as both fresh blood and the only hope. This state of exhaustion is somewhat present in south-eastern Turkey (regarding the PKK) and currently throughout the rest of the country (regarding the AKP). That being the case, it can be

⁵¹ S. Öztürk, "İste MGK'da Ele Alınan Hizbullah Dosyası" [Here is the Hizbullah File Assessed at the National Security Council], *Hürriyet*, 16 April 2007.

argued that Hizbullah has viable prospects for the future in the sense that it can become an influential power in south-eastern Turkey in the mould of Lebanon's Hizbullah and Hamas.

The rise of Hizbullah would likely result in a less stable south-eastern Turkey, a region that already requires far-reaching reforms on Turkey's road to EU accession. This necessitates careful scrutiny of Hizbullah's actions, including its use of media and other means of propaganda. Cooperation with European governments is crucial since the organisation is reported to have growing financial and social networks in Europe. Furthermore, possible networks and connections between Hizbullah and other radical groups with which it has strong potential to enjoy closer links – such as al-Qaeda – also need to be carefully observed for the wider interests of the West. The brutal Hizbullah atrocities of the 1990s and their denial by the present organisation should serve as a warning that the possibility of its further radicalisation remains serious. Even if violence is dropped for good, there are grave doubts over the compatibility of Hizbullah's ideology with democracy and fundamental freedoms.

Conclusions

Political Islam in Turkey has given rise to cases of de-radicalisation at two different but related levels. One concerns the political party system, where there has been a significant moderation of ideology and policy from the Welfare Party to the AKP. The second one concerns the revival of Turkey's radical and violent Islamist group, Hizbullah, which now employs the legal means to increase its grassroots support in south-east Turkey. Neither instance nor kind of moderation should be taken for granted, however. The sustained moderation of the AKP will depend on the emergence of a strong secularist and democratic opposition, economic performance, progress in democratic consolidation and a strong EU anchor. The future course of Hizbullah is harder to tell. So far, the organisation has not dealt with its violent past nor officially renounced violence in any of its recent propaganda tools. Moreover, its ideology, discernable mainly from the variety of publications it currently produces, still espouses the establishment of an Islamic state, with weak democratic credentials. This situation requires caution and closer inspection by both Turkey and the EU, not only because the organisation is expanding among Kurds in Europe, but also because of its suspected operational links with other radical groups, notably al-Qaeda.