OTHER NATIONS

Turkey's Secular Fundamentalists

A Survey of Recent Articles

When an Islamic woman elected to the Turkish parliament refused to remove her head scarf last spring in the Grand National Assembly chamber, the staunchly secular Turkish government was appalled. Fellow legislators hurled insults at her, and the country's chief prosecutor opened a criminal investigation. But the woman, Merve Kavakci, a 30-year-old, U.S.-educated computer scientist and a member of the Virtue Party, was unmoved. "I cover my head in accordance with my religious beliefs. It is a personal choice." The government soon chose to strip her of her citizenship.

The conflict between secularism and religious belief in Turkey is often portrayed as a struggle between Westernizing modernity and the primitive past. But secularism—one of the pillars of the Kemalist legacy left by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881–1938), the founder of modern Turkey—is not always synonymous with cultural pluralism and religious tolerance. And in recent years, with the Cold War over, the differences between Turkey's authoritarian regime and Western liberal democracies have assumed more importance. Thus, in December 1997 the European Union (EU) slammed the membership door shut on Turkey, after it had waited in line for decades.

"In decades past," note Barry Buzan, a professor of international studies at the University of Westminster, England, and Thomas Diez, a Fellow at the Copenhagen Peace Research Institute, writing in *Survival* (Spring 1999), "the promoters of Kemalism justified their program partly on the grounds that it was a path leading to eventual membership" in the EU. At the same time, advocates of Turkey's candidacy, both in Turkey and in Europe, insisted "that membership is a necessary anchor for Westernization." However, EU members decided that they could not overlook the military's frequent interventions in the Turkish government (most recently in 1997), or the government's repressive treatment of critics and the country's 15 million Kurds.

When the Turkish Republic was born in 1923, Kemal "imposed a single identity on the multicultural population of Turkmans, Armenians, Assyrians, Kurds, and others," notes journalist Kevin McKiernan in the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* (Mar.–Apr. 1999). "Most minorities were forcibly assimilated; everyone became a Turk." Over the next quarter-century, however, "there were dozens of Kurdish uprisings. All were crushed, but discontent continued. In 1984, a Marxist-led group called the PKK, the Kurdistan Workers Party, began an armed struggle against the government." Nearly 40,000 lives have been lost in the fighting, McKiernan points out "more than in the conflicts on the West Bank and in Northern Ireland combined."

"Ankara's treatment of the Kurds blends into a wider problem of bad government in Turkey, and slow progress towards building a democratic political culture—which is not a central pillar of Kemalism," Buzan and Diez point out.

Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit's government is seeking to ban the religious-oriented Virtue Party, as it did its predecessor, the Welfare Party, last year. The Islamic party lost 33 seats in last April's elections, slipping into third place behind Ecevit's Democratic Left Party and the far-right Nationalist Movement Party.

Confronted by the challenges of Islamic political activism and Kurdish nationalism, "the Kemalist establishment is fighting a desperate rearguard action to suppress civil society and preserve its own historic privileges and unchallenged right to command the nation," argues University of Utah political scientist M. Hakan Yavuz, writing in *SAIS Review* (Winter–Spring 1999).

The Kemalist notion of secularism, Yavuz says, is an anachronism, rooted in "the vehemently antireligious tradition of the radical, Jacobin-styled left that first emerged during the French Revolution. Such an ideology has little in common with the Western political

tradition of religious tolerance advocated by Locke, Montesquieu, and Jefferson," or with the formal separation of church and state found in the United States and other Western liberal democracies.

What is needed, he contends, is "a new and more inclusive 'social contract' that addresses the cultural diversity of Turkish society."

But that may be easier said than done. "Neither the country's élites, with their generally corrupt, inefficient, personalized and ineffective system of political parties, nor the masses have moved far from the authoritarian traditions of the Ottoman Empire and its weak civil society," write Buzan and Diez. The elected government has only limited influence on Turkey's security forces, they note and "the military still functions as a quasi-autonomous entity."

And the military has widespread support, notes the *Economist* (Apr. 10, 1999). The army is largely a conscript force, and opinion polls "consistently show the armed forces to be the country's most popular institution."

Where China's Water Goes

"Is China Living on the Water Margin?" by James E. Nickum, in *The China Quarterly* (Dec. 1998), School of Oriental and African Studies, Thornhaugh St., Russell Sq., London WC1H OXG.

From the Worldwatch Institute came a warning last year that China's farmers are running short of water, as the demands of the nation's cities grow. Ultimately, institute analysts said, China could be forced to boost grain imports, pushing world market prices higher and thus threatening the lives of impoverished people around the globe. Nickum, an institutional economist at the University of Tokyo, says the situation is not as dire as all that.

Droughts, floods, polluted flows, and urban water shortages are nothing new in China, he notes. But conditions vary greatly from one region to another. China's "monsoonal climate concentrates precipitation in the summer months," Nickum says, an effect especially pronounced in the north and northeast, where average precipitation is less than in the south and southeast. "Some places, especially in the north and along the coast, have been under high levels of stress for some time; others, in the central and southern areas, remain more liable to damage from too much water than from too little."

More than two-thirds of all the water consumed in China is used for irrigation. Virtually all of China's rice—whether grown in paddy fields (where irrigation is supplemental) or on irrigated dry land—is officially considered irrigated. Even in Beijing, half the water used in 1993 was for irrigation and other farm production purposes. Industry used only one-fourth of the total.

Economic development and all that it entails—industrialization, urbanization, chemical agriculture, and livestock production—has indeed increased the demand for water and threatened its quality. But "the primary pressure on irrigated [farmland] now, and probably for some time into the future," Nickum says, comes from the obsolescence of short-lived tubewells and other structures employed in irrigation, not from competing users.

Moreover, Chinese farms use water very inefficiently. The fees charged for irrigation are almost always less than the costs of delivering the water. But if "water becomes sufficiently valuable to make the additional costs worth bearing," Nickum says, more efficient use of it could easily be made. "'Green revolution' high-yielding varieties of rice, with their short stalks and brief growing seasons, actually tend to use less water per crop than traditional varieties," although the water has to be applied at the right times.

Industrialization need not strain agriculture. In Japan and the United States, Nickum points out, government regulation of wastewater discharges has cut industrial water use since the 1970s, despite continued industrial growth. Even in China, the total reported industrial water use dropped during the 1980s, Nickum says, and it could be reduced further by reforming or closing state-owned enterprises that use water heavily.