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## Turkey taking Iran's lead?

Could an Iranian-style Islamic revolution occur in Turkey? Most observers think not; yet seething beneath Turkey's present veneer of calm are powerful destabilizing forces that could threaten this important nation.

Modern Turkey exists in a psychological and geographical no-man's land between Europe and the Middle East; while part of both, its 47 million citizens really belong to neither.

During the past 25 years, Turkey has been afflicted by savage political and street warfare between left and right as well as a steadily deteriorating economy. Now virtually bankrupt, Turkey is slowly emerging, under the new civilian regime of Turgut Ozal, from years of Draconian military rule.

Many of Turkey's difficulties stem from its basic problem of massive psychological disorientation, a disorder also evident in many other Third World nations.

At the end of World War I, a Turkish-Albanian officer, Mustafa Kemal, seized power and was determined to make Turkey into a modern European nation. Kemal — or Ataturk as he soon came to be known — commanded that all reminders of Turkey's links to the Muslim world be purged. Fezes, robes, and turbans were banned; Islam was almost proscribed, and all Turks were ordered to look and act like Europeans.

This was not a happy turn of events for the deeply religious and yet happily lusty Turks who derived great strength from Islam.

Ataturk and his political successors neglected agriculture and Turkey's large rural population in vain efforts to industrialize the nation. Chronically short of foreign exchange and without natural resources, Turkey's industries today operate at 50% of capacity. Reliance on expensive imported oil has left Turkey with a growing and dangerous external deficit.

### Ataturk alienated Turks

Worse yet, Ataturk's efforts to rid Turkey of its Middle Eastern character produced a profound alienation among its citizens. Modern Turkey, having lost its Islamic roots, has still to find a new identity. No political movements have succeeded in replacing the secular, moral and psychological strength formerly provided by the Muslim faith.

While Turkey's military and middle class look toward Europe, the poor, hardworking farmers comprising the majority of the population, remain devout Muslims, possessing a powerful sense of moral and spiritual kinship to the Islamic world and its values. This division is a growing risk to the Turkish Republic; it contains many of the same elements that led to Iran's revolution.

Iran's example bears examination. There, the Shah and his capacious family determined, like Ataturk, to de-Islamicize their nation and transform it into a modern industrial society. In fact, the Shah really did not want to be an Iranian at all, but rather a German emperor.

In the attempt to change Iran into a European country, Persia's elite became totally isolated from the beliefs, wishes and culture of its own people. The inevitable revolution, which surprised no one except for the Shah's backers in Washington, terminated this process of Westernization and restored Iran to its true ethnic and religious personality.

### Restoring Islamic character

Can this happen in Turkey? The military men who still dominate Turkey are determined to prevent any return to the past. But a number of increasingly powerful religious-nationalist movements are working to restore the nation's Islamic character. Championed by the National Salvation Party, they believe Turkey must again embrace Islam, reassert its former identity and join the polity of Muslim nations.

Given the moral and spiritual vacuum prevalent in modern Turkey, these calls are being met by wide acceptance among rural dwellers and students. The strong nationalistic feelings of most Turks are finding expression in these fundamentalist beliefs, a process that is today sweeping across the Muslim world. Unlike Westerners, many Turks believe that betterment can be found in the past, not in the future.

The recent election of Turgut Ozal, whose rightist party advocates a moderate reassertion of Islamic values, is an important indicator of this trend. He roundly defeated the Western-oriented parties promoted by Turkey's generals.

These events are being watched closely in the West. Turkey has NATO's largest standing army and serves as a bulwark against Russian expansion into the Middle East. After the loss of Iran, Turkey has become the cornerstone of NATO's eastern defence; any change in Turkey's orientation would be a disaster for the West.

It is certainly difficult to imagine today's dreary, aimless Turkey suddenly recapturing the fiery spirit of its glorious past. Yet beneath the grey veneer of state capitalism, there are stirring emotional currents that could lead, one day, to yet another dramatic chapter in the continuing 20th-century Islamic Revolution.

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