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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

WEEKLY SUMMARY

Special Report

Election Prospects in Turkey

Secret

№ 44

3 October 1969
No. 0390/69B

25X1

Approved For Release 2006/05/24 : CIA-RDP79-00927A007300070003-4

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ELECTION PROSPECTS IN TURKEY

As the campaign for the National Assembly election enters its final week, the Justice Party headed by Prime Minister Demirel appears virtually certain of victory. The party's prospects are enhanced by its traditional support among the peasants, the relative impotence of the seriously divided opposition, and the absence of any major controversial issues. The possibility of a coalition government cannot be ruled out entirely, however, because the proportional representation system now being used favors such arrangements, and because the generally quiet and often dull campaign could result in a relatively small turnout at the polls.

Whatever the outcome of the election, however, the face of government and politics in Turkey is changing. There is great ferment within and among the several political parties, and among the electorate as well. The primaries clearly indicate that there will be a substantial turnover in the National Assembly—the lower house of parliament—as a result of the current elections.

Whether the Justice Party wins a majority or merely a large plurality, Prime Minister Demirel may believe he controls enough of the sources of power to lead with a firmer hand. After four years of relative domestic tranquility and a generally successful foreign policy, he must now seek answers to some of Turkey's unresolved social and economic problems. Not the least of these are the rising tide of extremism on both left and right, seriously depleted foreign exchange reserves, and rising inflationary pressures.

BACKGROUND

Turkey is one of the world's youngest republics, dating back only to 1923, when Mustafa Kemal Ataturk closed the book on the Ottoman Empire and oriented Turkey toward the West. After a military revolution in May 1960 swept from power the regime headed by President Bayar and Prime Minister Menderes and ushered in the Second Turkish Republic, the constitution was revised to restrain future governments from assuming excessive personal and partisan power. The new constitution also replaced the one-house Grand National Assembly with a bicameral parliament, thus offering yet another check on executive and legislative authority.

The prerevolutionary majority system of elections was replaced by a proportional system. During the first four years under this system, Turkey had three coalition governments and experienced two abortive military coups. Interparty cooperation proved extremely difficult, and the government became increasingly fragile. Following the collapse of the third successive coalition in February 1965, an interim government was formed by the Justice Party (JP) and some of the minor parties, with a neutral figure as prime minister, to clear the way for national elections.

In October 1965, when the JP was swept into power with an impressive 53 percent of the popular vote, party leader Demirel became the

first prime minister of the Second Republic with a majority government. Since then, the JP has continued to increase its parliamentary strength. Representation in the 450-seat National Assembly has gone up from 240 to 256, and the party has increased its elective seats in the Senate from 79 to 100. Recently, the party's popular strength appears to have stabilized at about 50 percent of the electorate. The JP draws its strongest support from the Turkish peasantry, about 65 percent of the total population, who have played an increasingly active role in the country's political life.

The JP, however, was the acknowledged successor of the Bayar-Menderes regime's Democrat Party, which had been banned following the revolution in 1960. As such, it aroused strong suspicions within the military, suspicions that were not substantially eased for many months and which still linger in some military circles. Indeed, the military shadow behind the political scenes surfaced again in May 1969, when threats of intervention forced the withdrawal of a bill aimed at restoring full political rights to former president Bayar and his colleagues, despite the bill's apparently overwhelming acceptance in parliament.

In 1965 as now, there was not a great deal of difference between the programs of the JP and the major opposition party, the Republican Peoples Party (RPP). In domestic economic policy, however, the JP placed greater emphasis on the private sector and free enterprise in contrast with the state ownership and control favored by its opposition. In foreign affairs, the JP maintained much the same lines as the RPP, including a firm Cyprus policy and a willingness to accept rapprochement with the USSR and the Communist countries of eastern Europe. Although in recent years the Turks have become more independent in their relations with the US, they continue to regard the Western alliance as a cornerstone of

their foreign policy, and this is not an issue in the current campaign.

The RPP, since its formation in 1923 as the government party, has been closely associated with the social and economic reforms on which the Second Republic is based. In 1950, however, a "silent revolution" among peasant voters took control of the government out of the hands of the RPP and passed it to the Democrat Party. Since then, the RPP has consistently held the support of only 30 to 40 percent of the electorate, primarily among bureaucrats, intellectuals, and businessmen. Even in the first election following the military revolution in 1960, the party polled less than 37 percent of the vote. In the spring of 1967, the party's popular strength was further reduced when its more conservative element withdrew and formed the Reliance Party (RP).

Under the present proportional representation system, the JP can gain majority control of the National Assembly—the only house being contested—by winning only 55 percent of the seats in those provinces where it previously won either a popular majority or a plurality. Although the JP needs only 226 seats for a bare majority, it probably would need at least 245 seats to hold working control of the lower house. Its stated goal is to gain two-thirds (300) of the seats, to permit it to amend the constitution.

PARTIES, PROGRAMS, AND PERSONALITIES

The eight political parties participating in the election on 12 October cover the entire spread of the political spectrum from left to right. The parties range from the rightist Nationalist Movement Party to the Marxist Turkish Labor Party, but only the incumbent moderate JP and the left-of-center RPP have any potential to control the government. Because of recent changes in the electoral law, some of the minor parties may

even lose their representation in the National Assembly and be faced with extinction unless they merge with other parties.

In the coming elections, over 3,400 candidates—including 160 independents with little chance of winning—will be vying for the 450 seats. Votes in the national election are cast for the party, however, rather than for the candidate, and only those high on the list are elected. Favorable positions at the top of the lists have been pre-empted by the leaders of most parties, an action that has generated considerable heat in local party circles.

The campaign thus far has passed quietly, almost to the point of dullness. None of the candidates has demonstrated much charisma or oratorical ability. Prime Minister Demirel has been by far the most active of the major candidates, especially during the early part of the campaign. He traveled to all parts of the country carrying the JP story of accomplishment, especially in industrialization and internal development, and the promise of things to come such as the large Keban dam being built in southern Turkey and the projected bridge across the Bosphorus. Demirel was born a peasant, grew up in the countryside, understands the peasants' problems, and talks their language.

Bulent Ecevit, the energetic secretary general of the RPP and the main architect of the party platform, has also traveled widely, talking of ambitious plans and lofty ideals. Nevertheless, he lacks the popular appeal of the party's old war horse, 85-year-old Ismet Inonu, whose health has not permitted a barnstorming campaign. None of the RPP spokesmen has been able to present the party program in terms that attract the peasant voter.

PROMINENT POLITICAL LEADERS

Suleyman Demirel
Prime Minister and
President of the
Justice Party



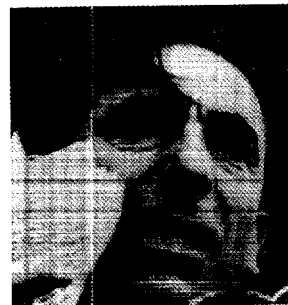
Bulent Ecevit
Secretary General of the
Republican Peoples' Party



Mehmet Ali Aybar
President General of the
Turkish Labor Party



Alpaslan Turkes
President General of the
National Movement Party



Other opposition spokesmen, when not engrossed in intraparty squabbles—especially prevalent in the Turkish Labor Party—have focused their attention on the country's economic ills and have offered mostly promises. Probably the most colorful of the candidates is Professor Necmettin Erbakan, an independent and an ardent believer in the religious far right. Erbakan made his initial public splash earlier this year by fraudulently maneuvering himself into the presidency of the influential Union of Chambers of Commerce and Industry and then resisting efforts to oust him by his opposition, by the government, and by the police for several weeks before finally capitulating in the face of a court order.

The only other independent candidate of interest is Turhan Dilligil, the owner of a right-wing newspaper and former JP deputy, who has become a close associate of former president Bayar and may be fronting for Bayar's group. Although the independents have little chance of being elected, they probably will draw some votes away from the JP.

The published party platforms are generally colorless and unimaginative, with the exception of the lengthy manifesto of the RPP, which is trying to raise a groundswell of popular support. Only the two major parties and the relatively small Reliance Party have issued statements that have attracted much attention.

The JP delayed releasing its platform until the campaign opened officially on 21 September. In addition to offering glowing accounts of past accomplishments and future hopes, the JP made a strong plea for massive popular support that would give it the control of the lower house necessary to amend the constitution. Specific reference was made to amendments needed to permit stronger government action against "Communists and others opposed to the state," to

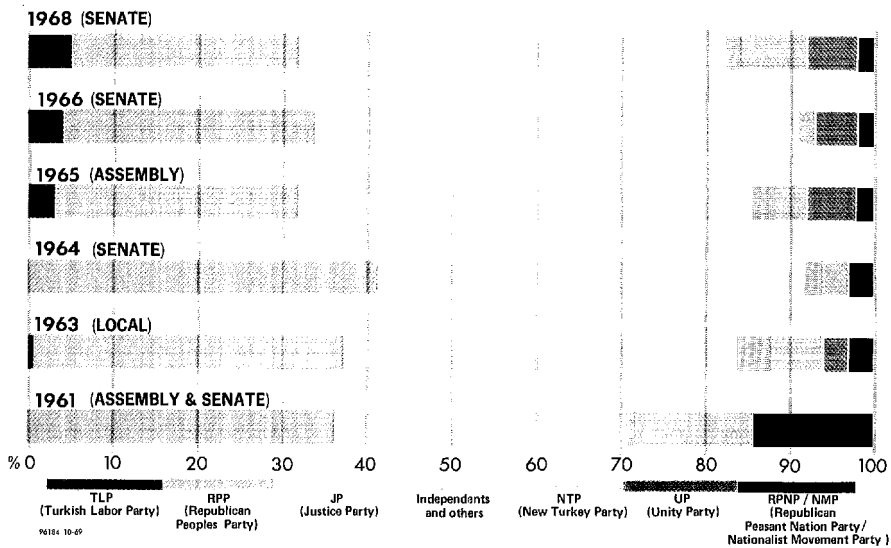
increase government influence over the normally autonomous universities, to assert more government control over the generally independent communications system, to permit more action through executive order, and to return full political rights to former Democrat Party leaders.

These proposed amendments, widely condemned by both moderate and leftist elements, are almost certainly a political ploy designed to reduce friction within the JP and attract marginal votes. Nevertheless, they have raised serious questions about the JP's intentions and its future relations with the military leadership, which has generally opposed constitutional change. If the JP wins a substantial majority, these questions could become matters of embarrassment to the government and raise serious concern among the opposition and within the military.

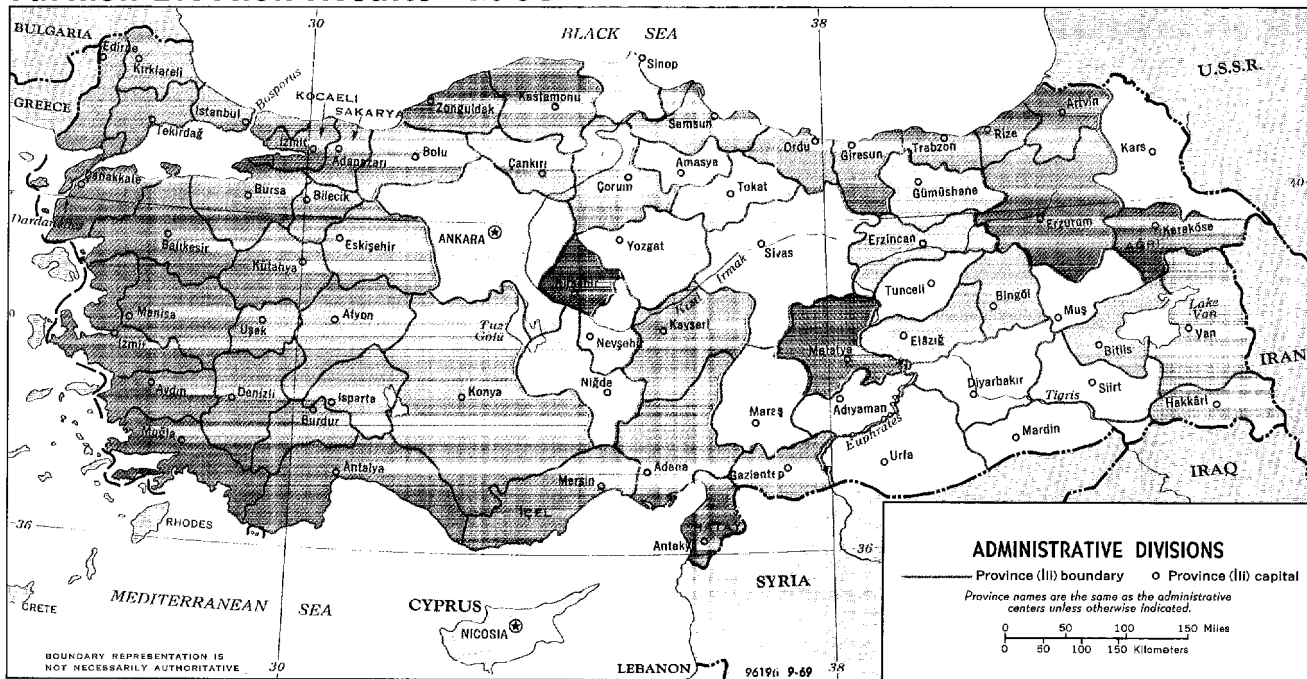
The RPP manifesto played heavily on the theme of "time for a change" and "let's drive the rascals out." The lengthy document focused primarily on the economy, promising major land reform, tax reform, and increased industrial growth. The party platform is an obvious attempt to break the JP's monopoly of the peasant vote. The RPP also issued a "secret election strategy" aimed at improving the image of the party and keeping it clear of highly controversial issues. Members of the party were urged to refrain from discussing past political differences and quarrels, to defend the democratic regime, and to avoid talk that could be interpreted as a threat to the national opinion expressed at the polls. This air of restraint is in marked contrast with the party's past efforts to promote gains by creating a crisis atmosphere.

Secretary General Ecevit has described the RPP's "change of order" program as aimed at creating an industrial revolution in Turkey. This would be led by the state, but would be based on

TURKISH POLITICAL SPECTRUM - Percent of Popular Vote



Turkish Election Results - 1965



- Justice Party Majority
- Republican Peoples Party Majority
- Even (within 7%)
- New Turkey Party Plurality
- Justice Party Plurality
- Republican Peoples Party Plurality
- Nation Party Majority

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TURKISH GRAND NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (GNA)

COMPOSITION AFTER 1965 ELECTION

COMPOSITION IN JUNE 1969

PARTY	NATIONAL ASSEMBLY	SENATE	GNA	NATIONAL ASSEMBLY	SENATE	GNA
JP	240	92	332	256	100	356
RPP	134	50	184	86	34	120
NP	31	2	33	14	1	15
NTP	19	1	20	13	1	14
RPNP/NMP	11	1	12	6	1	7
TLP	15	1	16	14	1	15
UP				4	-	4
RP				31	11	42
INDEP.		3	3	17	1	18
VACANCIES				9	-	9
TOTAL (ELECTED)	450	150	600	450	150	600
PRESIDENTIAL APPOINTEES		15	15			15
LIFETIME (FORMER CNU)		20	20			18
GRAND TOTAL			635			633

the investments of large masses of people rather than a few individuals or foreign concerns. Regardless of the outcome of the present election, the party's platform and the new strategy indicate what to expect from it in the years ahead.

The smaller parties have not played a very important role in the campaign thus far. They face not only the possibility of losing parliamen-

Student Demonstration in Istanbul, August 1968



tary representation, but also the divisive effects of internal dissension. The leftist Turkish Labor Party is in particularly difficult straits because of internal factionalism. Although a deep schism may be papered over for the remainder of the campaign, a major contest for power is shaping up between evolutionary socialists and more extreme leftists. The current struggle is reported to extend down to the provincial and local levels, and to have transformed the party into a "den of dervishes." The party may not be destined for oblivion, but it could regroup along more extremist lines.

THE RISING IMPORTANCE OF YOUNG VOTERS

The youth of Turkey have become a more important political factor than in previous elections. Not only are there more of them—almost three million new voters since the last national election—but they are more literate and

politically conscious than before. Perhaps of greater significance is the estimate of some observers that this new group of young voters represents almost one third of the total electorate in each province.

The youth of Turkey are certainly the most volatile of all the country's political forces, especially at the two extremes. There are rumors that leftist extremist students may take to the streets and escalate clashes with police in the hope of frustrating an election from which the left seems unlikely to gain.

At one point, leftist student leaders reportedly warned that the situation in Turkey this month would resemble the turmoil in France in 1968. Heavy pressure by the major parties as well as the leftist Turkish Labor Party may have prevented student demonstrations.

Nevertheless, Istanbul authorities are becoming increasingly concerned over student violence in the city, where three students have been killed in recent days. Extremist students may try to exploit the situation to promote unrest, but security forces should be able to keep any demonstrations within bounds.

THE MILITARY AS A POLITICAL FACTOR

The military formed the backbone of the elite during the early years of the First Republic. After the election upset in 1950, and especially after 1955 when the Bayar-Menderes regime began to rule more arbitrarily, the prestige of the military began to suffer. Military leaders particularly resented the smear on Turkey's national honor of the anti-Greek riots in 1955, for which they held the politicians responsible, and the increasingly dictatorial policies of the regime. Finally, in May 1960, the army—with navy and air force backing—ousted the civilian government for

the stated purpose of saving the constitution and the republic.

Although the military withdrew from the forefront of the political scene within 18 months, its representatives—General Gursel as president and the remaining 22 members of the revolutionary Committee of National Union as lifetime senators—served notice that the armed forces retained a watchful eye on developments.

The military establishment still constitutes a potent force in Turkish politics. Few major decisions concerning foreign or domestic affairs are made without military sanction. Prime Minister Demirel, during his four-year term, has established close rapport with the military leadership. He is enough of a realist to know that the civil regime cannot act in the face of strong military opposition, especially in areas pertaining to the constitution and the ideals of the revolution. On questions primarily military in nature, such as the NATO command structure or bilateral defense treaties, the high command will be hard nosed, and its opinions often will prevail.

Nevertheless, the military is not expected to play any significant role in the approaching elections except to maintain security, if necessary.

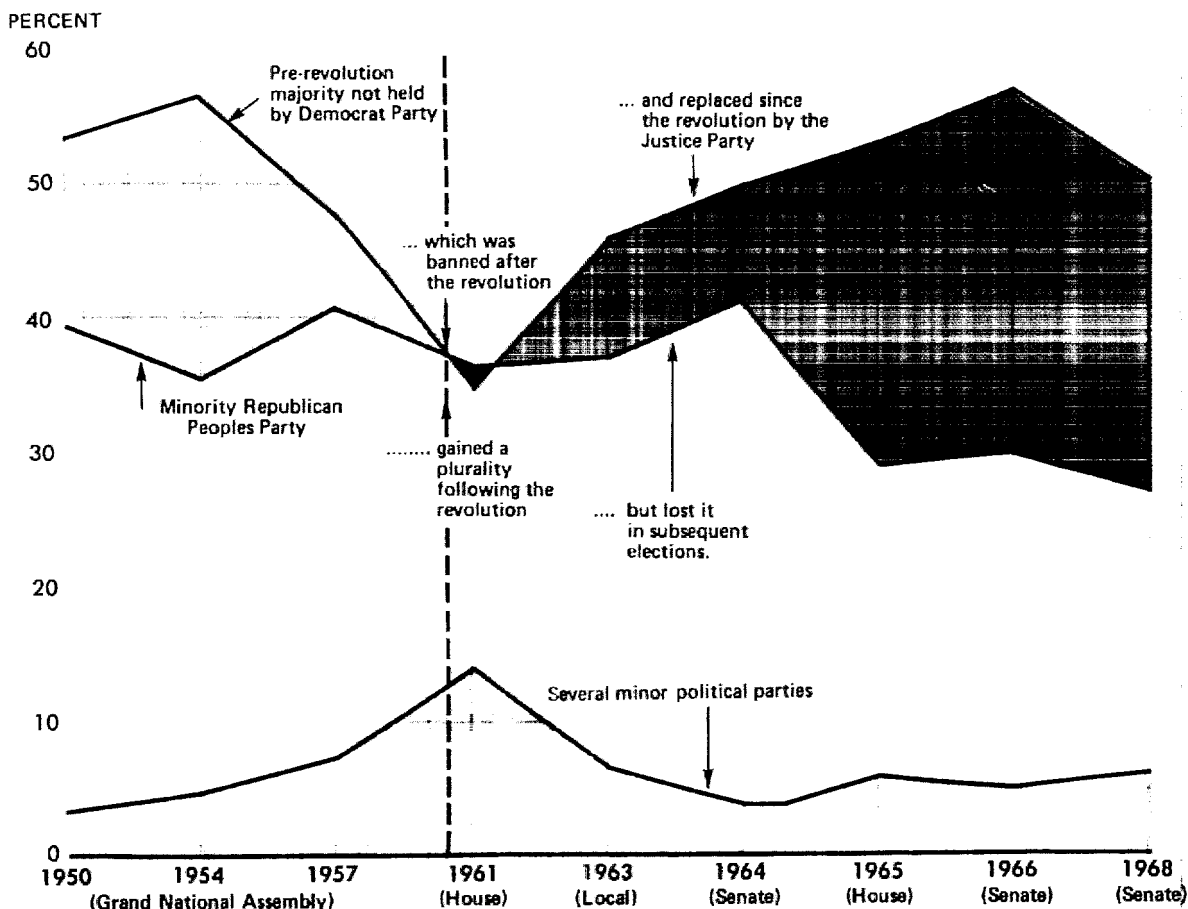


Clash Between Rightists and Leftists, February 1969

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TURKISH ELECTION RESULTS, 1950-1968



Some recently retired military leaders may soon become influential figures on the political scene, however. There have been scattered rumors of dissension among some junior and middle-level officers, but their influence remains one of the imponderables of the political equation.

OUTLOOK

The odds at the moment favor a clear majority victory for the JP. None of the opposition parties has been able to uncover an issue with which to damage the Demirel regime, or to field candidates who could attract the necessary votes

to unseat the government. Some press and political observers estimate the JP will win better than 50 percent of the votes, the RPP about 35 percent, and that the remainder will be divided among the minor parties and independent candidates. The RPP estimate seems high, however, in view of the split in 1967 over the "left-of-center" issue that resulted in the formation of the Reliance Party. No realistic estimate can be made of this party's popular strength.

Despite the widespread voter apathy evident in the campaign thus far, the JP continues to be confident of victory. The RPP, on the other hand,

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while not exuding much vigor or enthusiasm, is still going through the motions. In the absence of any upsurge in emotional domestic issues or a sudden foreign crisis, increased incomes and improved standards of living plus the obvious indications of industrial growth throughout the country should benefit the JP in the final vote tally.

A coalition government remains a possibility, although not a strong one. If no party receives a majority, the JP—with an almost certain plurality—would be asked to form the new government. This would leave Demirel as prime minister, but with a seriously weakened position within both his party and the government. His first choice for a coalition partner almost certainly would be the Reliance Party. There have been rumors that these two parties might merge after the elections in any case. A coalition govern-

ment would encourage opposition obstructionism, however, and would increase the tendency to govern through executive decision rather than by legislative direction.

Trouble from extremist elements during the few remaining days before the elections continues to be a possibility. [Redacted]

[Redacted]

there almost certainly will be the usual number of scattered incidents involving shootings, knifings, and local brawls, especially in the provincial areas where local issues and personalities often take precedence over national ones. [Redacted]

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