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SPECIAL REPORT

TURKISH POLITICS IN TRANSITION

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
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TURKISH POLITICS IN TRANSITION

Four years after the overthrow of the Menderes regime, Turkish politics are in a state of transition that may soon set a new pattern for the coming years. As the military influence gradually wanes, a two-party contest is taking shape between Premier Inonu's military-favored Republican Peoples' Party and the increasingly popular Justice Party, led by heirs to the Menderes tradition. Turkey's military leaders appear unwilling to free the politicians entirely from a paternal control, however, and some officers would like to turn the clock back to the 1960-61 period of direct military rule.

Politics Since the Coup

The 1960 coup occurred in response to a surge of opposition to the authoritarian and corrupt ways of the Menderes government, which operated under the banner of free enterprise. The coup ended nearly 40 years of superficially stable government which followed the founding of the first republic by Ataturk in 1923. During this time, power had transferred peacefully from Inonu and other Ataturk associates to Menderes' Democratic Party in the elections of 1950. The attempt to foster democracy, complete with a two-party system, gave way to traditionally Turkish authoritarian pressures during the last years of the Menderes regime.

After a year of direct rule, the military authorities returned the government to civilians under arrangements designed to preclude the resurgence of followers of the executed Menderes. His old Democratic Party was banned, most of its top figures imprisoned, and an electoral law imposed that set up a system of proportional representation.

In the first elections under this system, no single party secured a majority, and four showed significant strength, led by the venerable Inonu's Republican Peoples' Party (RPP). The second major force, the Justice Party (JP), attracted most of the dispossessed Democrats. Two minor groups, the New Turkey Party and the Republican Peasant Nation Party, also did well enough to poll a total of 28 percent of the vote between them.

Since that time Turkey has experienced three coalition governments. An RPP-JP coalition broke down when Inonu refused to grant amnesty to several political prisoners. A second Inonu-headed coalition with the two minor parties collapsed after local elections in late 1963 when the minor parties dissociated

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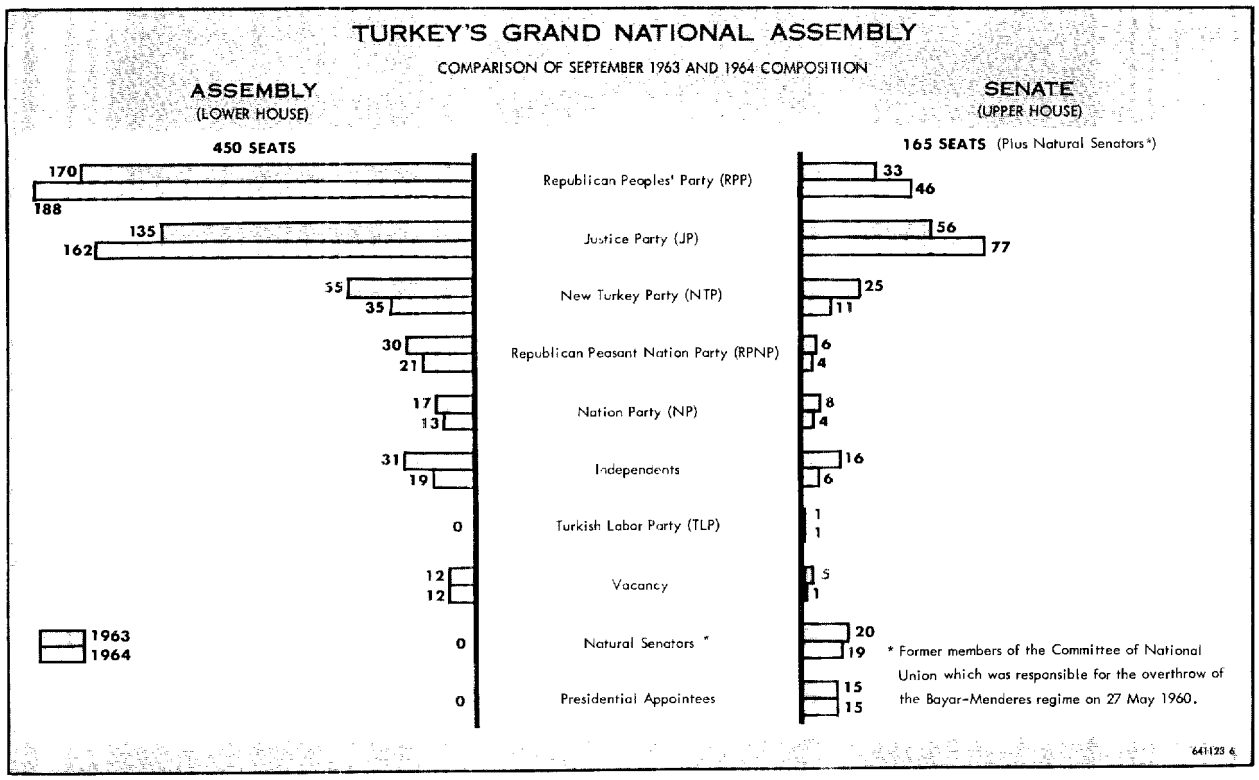

themselves from the increasingly unpopular government. Inonu now presides over a minority government, maintained mainly by the JP's unwillingness to take the responsibility of upsetting it. Public dissatisfaction centers on high unemployment, a tax structure benefiting the upper classes, social dislocation resulting from the movement to cities, and Cyprus policy.

Growth of Justice Party

The Justice Party probably has the support of a slight majority of the Turkish electorate at the present time.

This stems partly from the decline of the two minor parties. In Senate elections held earlier this year in one third of the provinces, they received less than 6 percent of the vote. Aware that many Turks consider votes for minor parties wasted, many of their legislators and aspiring candidates are inclined to desert. Election losses and defections have cost the minor parties over a third of their seats in parliament during the past year alone.

The JP has reaped most of the political harvest. As measured by the vote in the Senate elections, its support has risen in three years from 35 percent to 50 percent. It has already achieved a plurality in the Senate. If elections were held soon for the more powerful National Assembly, the JP probably would

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also gain a small majority there. Assembly elections are scheduled to be held by the end of 1965.

However, the primary cause of the JP's rise is its success in identifying itself with the outlawed Democratic Party. The JP has included many minor Democratic officials in its leadership. In the two years since it left Inonu's coaliton its criticisms implying that the RPP is the tool of the military and demanding the release of political prisoners have facilitated its popular association with Menderes, whose promises are now better remembered than his mistakes.

Inonu's policy failures have aided this switch in sentiment. The JP's tactics, apart from advocating a reduction in state economic control and a lessening of military influence in the government, consists largely of exploiting day-to-day shortcomings of Inonu's ministers and programs.

Until now, the JP has refrained from pressing its advantage. It has failed to seize several opportunities to topple Inonu by votes in the National Assembly. JP leaders remain uncertain of how much success the military would tolerate. They also appear reluctant to accept responsibility for governing while the Cyprus dispute remains unsettled--the JP prefers to saddle Inonu with responsibility for this during next year's election campaign.

The persistence of internal factional difficulties has also dimmed the JP's enthusiasm to form a government. Leadership is currently in the hands of a revanchist wing that would like to eliminate military influence from the government and undo much of the work of the 1960 coup. Recently these leaders, notably Sadettin Bilgic and Suleyman Demirel have been toning down their public utterances, probably to assuage the military. During its brief history the JP has also been troubled by a lack of discipline. Its failure to produce any single figure of acknowledged national stature may also deter it from any early bid for power.

RPP Dilemma

Inonu's faltering Republican Peoples' Party meanwhile appears to be groping for an answer to the JP challenge.

In its search for new sources of support, the RPP has made some overtures toward the country's two-million-strong Kurdish minority. It has courted Kurdish politicians in minor parties and promised improvements in eastern Turkey where most Kurds live. In the Senate elections, it appears to have secured more of the minor party vote in that area than did the JP.

The RPP has also shown growing interest in the largely unorganized political left. In the past little effort has been made to win the votes of urban

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workers, who still tend to vote as peasants. Two small parties are now in that field, the Communist-influenced Turkish Labor Party and the entirely untested Social Democratic Party.

Only a few of Turkey's articulate socialists have become closely involved with any particular party, but their main links with the political power structure are with the RPP, apparently because of its endorsement of state planning as contrasted with the JP's backing of free enterprise.

Inonu's moves have included some gestures toward an independent foreign policy. While he has stopped far short of the more extreme demands of some leftists, such as to leave NATO, the cautious cultivation of improved relations with Moscow this year could serve to bring the left and the RPP closer together. Some RPP leaders below Inonu lean toward socialist ideas and once in power would probably be more active in seeking favor with the emergent left.

The Military Factor

The previous open hostility of Turkey's military leadership to the Justice Party seems to be eroding. The military have allowed the JP to control the Senate and to continue political activities aimed at winning next year's assembly elections. Unless the JP openly espoused reversing the 1960 revolution, the high command probably would allow a popularly chosen JP majority to assume power. As distasteful as this would be, most top commanders probably consider this preferable to following the only alternative course: reassuming direct governmental control.

In the meantime, military influence will still be used against the JP, and even to influence its orientation. In an open letter of 16 November the chief of the General Staff warned the JP against further statements critical of the army. This and subsequent statements regarding JP extremism may be an attempt to influence the JP's selection of a new president-general during its convention in the closing days of November. Continued JP resistance to such pressure could bring the army to decide not to tolerate a JP government regardless of the implications of military support of a regime lacking popular approval.

Even if the top-ranking military officers are reconciled to an eventual JP government, many lower ranking and retired officers are not. This element, dissatisfied with current conditions and future prospects, includes some of the officers who participated in the Committee of National Union which governed the year after the 1960 coup; others are junior officers and a few high-ranking ones whose personal ambitions have been frustrated. The dissatisfaction in this group ranges from a feeling that the army is losing prestige to a belief that Turkey's democratic system has failed. Certain of these officers would seize dictatorial powers for themselves if able to

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do so, while others advocate a socialist dictatorship. Such feelings led to abortive coup attempts in 1962 and 1963, which still find many sympathizers among this dissident group.

Differing aims, the inability to maintain secrecy in any plotting, and clashing personalities so far have kept the dissidents fragmented and relatively harmless. Efforts are reportedly being made to coordinate their activities, however, and in a political crisis they might feel strong enough to move against the government even without the support of the high command.

Outlook

The principal threat to an orderly realignment of Turkish politics lies in the possibility of a sudden crisis outside the control of either of the major parties. Sharply unfavorable developments in the Cyprus situation could easily upset the trend. Should the ailing 69-year-old President Gursel resign, the selection of a successor could arouse new friction between the JP and the army and destroy much of the JP's progress of the past year.

More serious would be the death or retirement of the 80-year-old Inonu, whose prestige and political skill are a major factor in the survival of the present minority coalition. His departure would intensify squabbling within what has been a well-disciplined RPP, and might lead to a loss of military support. Among those already maneuvering for the succession are Nihat Erim, the representative at the Geneva talks in Cyprus; Turhan Feyzioglu, a former deputy prime minister; and Ismail Aksal, a former RPP secretary general. Even should these three agree on the succession, strong opposition within the party might arise from the current deputy prime minister, Kemal Satir, and from supporters of Kasim Gulek, whom Inonu expelled from the party last year.

Barring any major disturbances, the prospects are for the Justice Party to win next year's elections and to assume power peacefully. Behind the facade of a two-party system the military will remain a determining factor against any sharp changes in direction, but in the long run the country's slow economic progress and dissatisfaction with the military influence may disrupt the picture of stability. (SECRET NO FOREIGN DISSEM)

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