

ROUTING OUT THE OPPOSITION

THE COMPREHENSIVE REPRESSION OF HUMAN
RIGHTS IN TURKISH SOCIETY

Nafeez Mosaddeq Ahmed



Hüda Kaya and daughter arrive at trial, July 1999

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I. A LEGACY OF VIOLENCE

Turkey is currently undergoing a humanitarian crisis of tremendous proportions. The crisis has penetrated all conceivable sectors of Turkish society: military, political, cultural, societal and economical. This crisis is directly attributable to the historical, ideological legacy of the founder of modern Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Pasha, better known as Ataturk, who advocated an extreme form of Turkish nationalism that was both staunchly secular and statist, and which accordingly would refuse to recognise national and religious minorities.ⁱ Nevertheless, it is worth noting that Ataturk is widely lauded in the West. According to *Smithsonian Magazine*, “as his name implies (Ataturk means ‘Father Turk’) he was more than anything else the stern but essentially benign father of his country.”ⁱⁱ Mike Moore observes: “The West came to love Ataturk. He modernized Turkey, made it secular, and laid the groundwork for Turkey to later become a staunch NATO ally.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Ben Lombardi who is with the Directorate of Strategic Analysis in the Department of National Defence at Ottawa, Canada, describes some of the implications of Ataturk’s political philosophy: “Ataturk also believed that the transformation of Turkey from an Islamic state into a secular republic was essential to the process of modernization. Authority should not, he asserted, rest on its connection to religious faith. The Caliphate and the Shariah, or Moslem holy law, were therefore abolished; education in public schools was to be strictly secular and focused on the pre-Islamic (pre-Ottoman) Turkish past; outward displays of religious faith were prohibited.”^{iv} A cursory inspection of the methodology effectuated by the “essentially benign” Ataturk to impose his vision of nationalist, statist secularism upon the entirety of Turkish society illustrates the essentially fascist nature of his reforms. Not only were they enforced without consultation of the Turkish people, all domestic resistance was brutally eliminated. The intensity of resistance may be understood in light of the fact that Ataturk had to impose martial law nine times to dissolve widespread civil unrest which broke out in response to his reign.^v There was therefore certainly nothing genuinely democratic about Ataturk’s ‘reforms’, however much the West came to “love” him. As one historian records, “it was public knowledge that he was irreligious, broke all the rules of decency, and scoffed at sacred things. He had chased the Sheik-ul-Islam, the High Priest of Islam, out of his office and thrown the Koran after him. He had forced the women in Angora to unveil.”^{vi}

Mustafa Kemal thus lost no opportunity to crush all political, ideological and religious opposition. H. C. Armstrong reports: “The secret police did their work. By torture, bastinado, by any means they liked, the police had to get enough evidence to incriminate the opposition leaders who were all arrested. A Tribunal of Independence was nominated to try them. Without bothering about procedure or evidence, the court sentenced them to be hanged.”^{vii}

Ataturk’s political vision hence involved clamping down brutally on all national minorities and routing out all expressions of religious faith. The horrific policies he implemented have been well summarised by George J. Dariotis, Supreme

President of the American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association, who observes that “While Ataturk did shape Turkey into a secular Turkish state, as Turkey’s first dictator he did so by committing widespread human rights violations against his own people and by implementing the large-scale massacre and ethnic cleansing of millions of Turkey’s Armenians, Greeks, Assyrians and other Christian minorities. After his forces had already routed the Greek army out of Asia Minor in 1922, Ataturk’s troops perpetrated one of the most infamous and widely reported war crimes against an urban civilian population prior to WWII. According to reports by US Consul George Horton, Ataturk’s troops massacred 200,000 Greeks and Armenians in Smyrna (now Izmir), burning this cosmopolitan New Testament city to the ground while Western warships passively watched from its quay. As a result of widespread atrocities and of decrees by Ataturk’s new government expelling Asia Minor’s indigenous Christian inhabitants, well over a million Greeks were ethnically cleansed from Turkey. Many have mistakenly attributed this violent extinction of Hellenism’s three-thousand year presence in what is now Turkey to a subsequent treaty’s ‘population exchange’ between Greece and Turkey. In fact, Ataturk’s ethnic cleansing campaign against Turkey’s Greek minority had already taken place - and only 5 years after an earlier Christian holocaust: the Armenian Genocide.”^{viii} The New York Times reported concerning this that “According to the most recent statistics, the Christian population in Turkey has diminished from 4,500,000 at the beginning of this century to just about 150,000. Of those, the Greeks are no more than 7,000. Yet, in 1923 they were as many as 1.2 million.”^{ix}

Dariotus continues: “Ataturk institutionalized his hate of Islam and executed, tortured and imprisoned Muslims for wearing beards and fezzes, praying, or for simply practicing their faith. Many believe Ataturk’s anti-Islamic Inquisition, and its perpetuation by the Turkish state, has had the effect of radicalizing Islam... Ataturk also set up what would be considered a ruthless dictatorship by any contemporary standard, which he used to suppress Muslims and crush dissent to his program of Turkification and secularization. After Turkey’s indigenous Christian minorities were depopulated, Ataturk established Turkey’s policy of destroying its Kurdish minority through forced assimilation, ethnic cleansing and genocide.”^x

Ataturk’s comprehensive programme of repression established a precedent that has lasted to this day, partly due to having been formally integrated into the Turkish Constitution. The Constitution speaks of “full dedication to the reforms of Ataturk and Article 153 prohibits any retrogression from these reforms”, which were aimed at “safeguarding the secular character of the republic”.^{xi} In fact, “the 1982 constitution aimed to guarantee the depoliticization of Turkish society and... to enclose [the new moral order] within the magic triangle of family, mosque, and barracks.”^{xii} As President of the Middle East Information Network Edward Graham thus notes, the “1982 constitution was also designed to suppress religion in public affairs.”^{xiii} According to the New York Times then: “As a way to modernization, secularism was a basic principle of the republic founded by Ataturk 72 years ago. It is [still] a cardinal tenet of the governmental philosophy that bears his name, Kemalism.”^{xiv} After his death, Ataturk’s generals continued to influence

politics and control the flow of power as and when they willed. In the last four decades, the Turkish military has toppled popularly elected governments four times in accordance with their effectively totalitarian mandate.^{xv}

As Turkish political scientist and former Assistant Professor at Ankara University Haluk Gerger observes, Ataturk and his successors aimed their transformative programmes “directly at the cultural norms, social mores and the way of life of the masses. From religion to attire, from the alphabet to the role of women, the whole social fabric and institutions were effectively dismantled only to be recreated in the image of Kemalism.” However, this secularised “revolution from above” had no basis in popular sentiment. On the contrary, it was “mercilessly executed and later on unrelentingly enforced. It inevitably caused wide-spread opposition and resentment, and polarized the society further, widening the gap between rulers and citizens. This polarity that set a minority ruling elite against the majority of the people - the working classes, the Kurds, the conservative Muslim masses - produced its natural outcome: the rulers began to fear their own people.” The inevitable outcome of this was that the secular Turkish elite have effectively “shun[ned] democracy” due to their “dread [of] popular participation”. They have “violate[d] fundamental human rights and instead use oppressive methods to rule over disenchanting and disenfranchised masses. In other words, fear [of the people] inevitably produces repression and violence. This is exactly what happened in Turkey.”^{xvi}

II. DICTATORSHIP UNDER THE GUISE OF DEMOCRACY

One of the latest examples of the Turkish military’s intervention to annul the vote of the people is leading Turkish politician Merve Safa Kavakci. Kavakci is the elected Istanbul representative of the Turkish Virtue Party. In 1999, she was to take oath in the Grand National Assembly wearing the Islamic headscarf (hijab), but was prohibited from doing so and promptly expelled for this expression of her religious faith. The independent Turkish human rights organisation Mazlumder reported: “During the oath ceremony, the reactions of some members of congress from the Democratic Left Party (DSP) against Merve Kavakci, Istanbul representative from the Virtue Party (FP), has exceeded its aim and turned to occupying the Turkish Grand National Assembly and blocking the bench against her.”^{xvii} “Pro-secular lawmakers began pounding on their desks and shouted at Kavakci ‘out’ as she entered the grand hall. She had to leave Parliament without taking her oath,” observed the Associated Press (AP).^{xviii} Mohammad Auwal, Associate Professor of Communication Studies at CSU, Los Angeles, observes that Merve Kavakci “was restricted from taking her parliamentary oath because she refused to remove her headscarf in the chambers of parliament. Turkish authorities have vowed to prosecute Kavakci on charges of inciting religious hatred. They are seeking to unseat Kavakci from her elected position and jail her for three years.”^{xix} Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit opposed her attendance of the General Assembly wearing the headscarf, describing this as “challenging the State”.^{xx} President Sulayman Demirel accused Kavakci of having “certain foreign connections”, an assertion that

remains unproven. A 31 year computer engineer, Kavakci thus became the victim of what Virtue Party Deputy Chairman accurately called a “merciless character assassination campaign”, the purpose of which was “intimidation, to hound her, to bully her till she runs away”.^{xxi}

Accordingly, the regime “revoked [her] right to citizenship and moved to shut down the Islamic Virtue Party to which she belongs”.^{xxii} Chief prosecutor Vural Savas declared that “Ms. Kavakci embodies the Islamic threat, sucking the blood of the secular state like a vampire.”^{xxiii} He further seethed: “Like bloodsucking vampires they are exploiting religion.” Having called for the banning of the Virtue Party, “Savas also asked the court to remove Virtue’s 110 deputies from Parliament and to ban them from politics for five years.”^{xxiv} This is in spite of the fact that according to 1999 opinion polls, Virtue “is the country’s most popular party”.^{xxv} If this move is brought to fruition it will essentially mean the removal of all Muslim politicians from their positions of government, thus striking a fatal blow to Turkish democracy. In the summer of 2000, the authorities even began to consider passing legislation that would allow them to purge all Islamists from the government. Turkey’s National Security Council has been instrumental in imposing increasing pressure on the government to cleanse all governmental offices of Islamists. In a recent statement, the Council called the President to force an appropriate bill into legislation in October to deliberately bypass discussion in Parliament.^{xxvi}

Kavakci’s plight and the ensuing controversy was only one of the latest outbreaks of the regime’s contempt for basic human rights on the most seemingly minute matter. The military has intervened in politics four times to eliminate popular reforms challenging this extremist version of secularism. In particular, from 1996 to 1998, there was open conflict between the military authorities allied with the secular political leadership, and the Muslim Welfare (Refah) Party. Prior to this, there were three military coups in the history of the Republic (in 1960, 1971 and 1980). In 1972 an anti-Kemalistic Islamist party (the National Order Party) was closed down by the Constitutional Court. Shortly afterwards another religious party, the National Salvation Party, was established. At the end of the 1970s it was part of a coalition government, but was again closed down after the 1980 military coup. In 1983 a new Islamist party was established - the Welfare Party. It won the 1995 parliamentary elections with 21 per cent of the vote and formed a coalition government with the secularist True Path Party of Tansu Ciller in July 1996. The military started a campaign to remove the government. It succeeded in the summer of 1997, and in January 1998 the Constitutional Court closed down the Welfare Party.^{xxvii} “After all [these] three previous coups” in which democratically elected governments were overthrown, “the West responded quickly by recognizing the military authorities as the new government in Ankara.”^{xxviii}

The primary reason for this authoritarian position held by the Turkish army is that the popularity of Islam constitutes a threat “to the legitimacy of Kemalism as the state ideology.” For this reason, the military is “sensitive to threats directed at Kemalism, since that ideological framework is their source of legitimacy.” The marginalisation of Kemalism among the general Turkish population therefore implies the de-legitimisation of the authority of the secular

elite in terms of democratic principles. Since the “growing political prominence of Islam and the re-Islamization of Turkish society threatens to undo much of Atatürk’s legacy that the armed forces have in the past sworn to protect”, the army has intervened to protect its own position of authority, as well as that belonging to the Turkish elite.^{xxix} According to the noted analyst of Turkish affairs Feroz Ahmad, “this thin urban layer of Turkish society would see every manifestation of Islamic reassertion as reactionary and fanatical.”^{xxx}

The campaign against democracy under the guise of secularism is familiar to those acquainted with Turkish politics. According to the Associated Press, “the military has purged from its ranks officers it regarded as favoring a more political role for Islam.”^{xxxi} The Ankara-based human rights group Mazlumder reports that during the last four years, army generals have purged hundreds of officers on the pretext that they are “Islamic fundamentalists” without allowing them the right to defend themselves in a court of law; the overwhelming majority of them are in fact merely married to women who wear headscarves.^{xxxii}

Innumerable similar examples abound of such policies, designed to marginalise popular opposition to effective military reign. For example, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the elected Mayor of Istanbul in 1994 and a leading figure of the Islamist Virtue Party, was imprisoned from 26 March to 25 July because of a speech he delivered in December 1997.^{xxxiii} Similar incidents have occurred repeatedly in relation to other democratically-elected officials who do not conform to the requirements of the military.

For example, according to the Federation of American Scientists (FAS), “Turkey’s democracy is in jeopardy. In 1997, the military played up fears that the government - led by the Islamic Refah Party - was seeking to undermine the secular state. It reacted strongly, forcing out Prime Minister Erbakan and keeping tight control over the policies of elected officials ever since.” Yet another incident occurred according to the FAS “In the fall of 1998,” when “Turkish courts upheld a sentence against the mayor of Istanbul, a leader of the Islamic movement, for reading a poem at a peace rally which supposedly ‘incited religious hatred’.”^{xxxiv}

Similarly, in late December 1999 Hasan Celal Guzel, former minister of culture and education during Turgut Ozal’s term, and the leader of the Rebirth Party, was thrown in jail on charges of “undermining the foundations of the secular republic.” He was given a five-month sentence, but he only began to serve his term a few days after Turkey was accepted as a candidate to join the EU. The judge based his accusations on a speech given by Guzel two years ago in which he had criticised the military’s intervention in politics, which had led to the overthrow of the then democratically elected Prime Minister Najmuddin Erbakan in June 1997.^{xxxv}

These instances provide tangible representative examples of the ongoing policy of the Turkish elite. It is clearly a policy designed to eliminate popular political opposition to the status quo, and thus to maintain the hegemony of the secular military regardless of the wishes of the general population. The

sheer contempt of the present rulers in Turkey for the political rights of their own people is therefore unambiguously evident.

III. THE DENIAL OF ELEMENTARY CIVIL RIGHTS

The forceful prevention of women from wearing the headscarf is not limited to the political sphere. Kavakci was forced to abandon her medical studies at Ankara University because Turkey's secular rulers believe that a woman's headscarf prevents her from acquiring knowledge. Accordingly, she migrated with her parents to the US to study computer science. Her parents have also been victims of the extremism of the State. Her mother, for example, was fired from her position as professor at Ataturk University because she refused to remove her headscarf. Similarly her father, Yusuf Ziya Kavakci, was dean of Islamic studies at the same university until he was forced to resign because he supported the right of women to wear the headscarf.^{xxxvi}

As the US State Department observes: "Several human rights monitors complained that the Government increasingly enforced a 50-year-old ban on the wearing of religious head garments in government offices and other state-run facilities. According to these groups, some women who wear head coverings have lost their jobs in the public sector as nurses and teachers. Others were not allowed to register for fall semester classes at universities, and some professors and university administrators were dismissed for wearing or supporting the wearing of head garments."^{xxxvii}

In a letter to the UN High Commission for Human Rights, the International Movement for a Just World similarly reported that "women are not allowed to wear the headscarf for any public purpose in Turkey", "a clear infringement on the right of the individual... At the root of the Turkish government's ban, is a deep hostility towards Islamic values and Islamic culture. This hostility has grown in the course of the last two years largely because of the increasing influence of the fanatically anti-Islamic military elite upon the Turkish government. The people have reacted to the government's anti-Islamic measures by organising mass demonstrations. Women from all walks of life have participated actively in this demonstrations. The headscarf issue has divided the Turkish society and has created widespread alienation from the government. It is quite conceivable that this will lead eventually to political instability and even chaos."^{xxxviii}

Turkish universities, schools, courts and state-offices are attempting to strictly enforce the ban against the headscarf and are consequently barring all women who choose to wear the traditional Islamic dress - the vast majority of the female population - from essential public activity. The reason is that the "secular, military-dominated establishment views [headscarves] as a tool of fundamentalists bent on undermining the constitutionally secular state."^{xxxix} The result of this peculiar fanaticism is that "[f]or the past 2½ months," for instance, "Feyza Cicek has not been able to attend her medical-school classes at Istanbul University. There is only one reason: She wears a scarf over her hair. When she tries to enter a lecture, she is turned away."^{xl} Thus,

the basic civil rights of the majority of the female population are being denied simply because they wish to adhere to the traditions of their faith. Turkish women are now “battling to wear scarves to work and school”, including “sit-ins and hunger strikes, to get authorities to rescind the ban. Instead of a symbol of subservience to men, many Islamic feminists view the scarf or the veil as a guard against the intruding eyes of men and as a sign that their first allegiance is to God - not to their husbands or fathers.”^{xlii} In October 1997, 300 female students staged a sit-down demonstration, one of many similar ongoing demonstrations, to protest at Istanbul University’s refusal to register them because they wore headscarves. “We are victims”, said protester Sehma Dovucu. “Our headscarves are our belief, honour and our identity. This ban is against our right to education and human rights”.^{xliii} On 11 October 1998, a nationwide demonstration was held against the policy. Mazlumder reports that at least 2.5 million people were holding hands during the one-hour peaceful demonstration to form a chain of human beings throughout the country, especially in Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir and the other 8 major cities.^{xliiii}

The reaction of the authorities to these popular Islamic sentiments has been to brutally clampdown on virtually all expressions of Muslim faith. In the process, women have been killed, attacked, imprisoned and denied education simply for wishing to wear a headscarf.^{xliv} For example, 75 students were arrested after participating in a demonstration at Malatya University against the ban on female students wearing headscarves and attending university. The prosecutor called for the death penalty to be applied to 51 of the students, charging them with attempting to overthrow the country’s secular constitution, and demanded up to 15 years jail for the rest of the accused on a lesser charge, without elaborating. Among those on trial and facing the death penalty was a 16 year old, Gulan Intisar Saatcioglu. Her part in the alleged attempt at “overthrowing” the constitution was to read out a poem entitled ‘Song of Freedom’ at the demonstration. Two of her sisters and her mother, journalist Huda Kaya, also faced the death penalty.^{xlv}

There is nothing novel about this sort of policy. In late 1995 and 1996 similar widespread student protests occurred. Among the issues being called for, reports Amnesty International (AI) were “the abolition of tuition fees which in some universities had risen by up to 350 per cent”, “an increase in state loans to students”, “the removal of police, gendarmerie and special security units from campuses”, and “an end to privatization in education.” After an unrelated violent incident on 30 March 1996, “31 students from universities in the city were detained almost three weeks later at their homes, their university or in the street. The detainees included active student representatives who had been prominent in the protests. The detentions occurred days before a major student demonstration planned for 24 April in Istanbul.” While some students were shortly released, others were held in incommunicado detention for up to two weeks, during which they were reportedly “coerced through beatings and torture, to make confessions implicating them in membership of an illegal armed organization, and the storage and throwing of petrol bombs. Their allegations of torture are in some cases corroborated by medical evidence. Some of the students - both male and female - allege that they were sexually assaulted by police officers”. Eight were eventually convicted by Turkish

courts of membership and support of an illegal armed group. They were then sentenced to up to 18 years imprisonment. However, Amnesty concluded from its investigation of the proceedings that “the students were denied a fair trial”. According to AI, “the students were targeted because of their previous peaceful campaigning and... they are prisoners of conscience, imprisoned for their non-violent principles and activities.”^{xlvi}

“Mysterious murders, extra judicial killings, deaths under torture and deaths in jails increased enormously in 1998”, reported Mazlumder on the escalating clampdown of the Turkish authorities. “While the applications which limit the freedoms of press and [other] organisations continues, the oppression of religion began with 28 February, a process [which] also increased enormously in 1998. There are ten thousands of victims in only this field.”^{xlvii} In *one month alone* for example, October 1997, there had been 15 cases of torture, 13 mystery murders, 2,215 detentions, 26 arrests, three disappearances and 25 confiscations of publications in Istanbul.^{xlviii}

This has therefore involved systematically finding and terrorising outspoken activists, intellectuals or organisations which question the fanatically secularist policies and ideology of the State. An outstanding example is the treatment by Turkish security forces of the Science Research Foundation (SRF). The Chairman of the Board of the Istanbul-based Science Research Foundation, Tarkan Yavas, has reported to IHRC a host of serious violations of human rights conducted by the State-apparatus against members of the Foundation, including the honorary president, Adnan Oktar. Members of this leading Turkish academic institution consist of “medical doctors, economists, engineers, young industrialists and businessmen, all of whom speak at least two foreign languages, who are very well educated... and have no criminal record whatsoever.” The Science Research Foundation is also a very active group. Yavas observes: “We are democratic, contemporary, modern and religious young people who engage in activities for the welfare of our country under the roof of the Science Research Foundation, and in an endeavor to protect and strengthen moral values.” The Foundation has been recognised by the Turkish public for its devotion to community projects and the many services the organisation undertakes for the people. “In the last one year alone, we have organized around 140 conferences in 80 different cities of Turkey, distributed many cultural and scientific booklets to people for free and realized many other cultural activities. In addition, we have organized conferences and panels on Turkish foreign policy, the Balkan countries, and their individual problems, in which Turkey’s prominent intellectuals, scholars of respected universities and politicians as well as many world-renowned foreign scientists participated.” Indeed, this appears to be the primary reason the Foundation has been targeted by the Turkish authorities for terrorisation - the organisation constitutes a significant and popular intellectual obstacle to the staunchly secular ideology of the State and its undemocratic policies of repression.

Chairman Tarkan Yavas reports, for instance, a violent police operation that occurred on 12 November 1999 at around 3 AM in which 85 members of the Science Research Foundation were captured and detained in brutal house

raids. "The doors of the raided houses were broken, the guard dogs were killed, the possessions in the houses were arbitrarily destroyed, cigarettes were put out on carpets, all kinds of personal possessions were confiscated without any serious report being kept, many valuable goods including even the cars of the guests who happened to be in the houses then were confiscated in a senseless manner." At Security Headquarters, "people who were taken into custody, including females, were subjected to serious physical pressure during the six days they were kept at the security prison. Starting from the first moment they stepped in... some SRF members, among whom were females, were made to sit on the cold stone floor, handcuffed and blindfolded, and kept in that state for 6 days. Female members were subjected to physical and spiritual torment, by having their hair cut, slapped in the face, pushed and shoved, subjected to insults... they have never been subjected to before in their lives. The pressures were not limited to these... The physical torments practiced on the male members of the foundation were so intense that these would never be practiced in a lawful State."^{xlix}

These included the following acts in the words of Chairman Yavas:¹

- In the operation carried out against the SRF, the police has broken into the houses of many respected people, among whom are professors, renowned businessmen and old parliament members. After the police officers broke in the houses, they made everyone in the house lie down face up on the floor with their hands tied behind their necks. Cocking their guns, they pointed them on their heads and made them wait in that state for hours, although they did not show any resistance. Without notification of any indictment charges or investigation orders neither to themselves nor to their families, these people's houses were searched in an extreme manner. When the police officers asked us to pass from one room to another, they wanted us to crawl on the floor with their hands tied behind their necks. Elderly and sick people, including those who had just undergone an operation received the same treatment. The officers started to hurl death threats as soon as they stepped in the house and they said that they will torment us to death after taking them to the security headquarters.
- Many personal belongings such as cameras, videos, stereo tapes, televisions, and even glasses, which, by no means can be considered as elements of offence and taken into account as evidence in any stage of the investigation and jurisdiction, were purposelessly confiscated without making any inventory and keeping any record. In some houses, even the personal belongings and cars of the guests who happened to be there were confiscated. Most of the possessions and belongings confiscated were destroyed, some were hardly returned. No information was given on many belongings that were not delivered.
- Lawyers summoned to the place of incident and whose judicial help was sought by those who were caught during the police raid, were detained by the security guards and prevented from seeing their clients. Moreover, some lawyers were insulted and subjected to ill-treatment. Because of the lack of any clear and specific indictment charge and an affirmative evidence for this indictment, the security forces who took part in the

operation sought to find a ground for their practices without knowing what they were looking for to create an element of offense.

- At the security headquarters, they lined up everyone in a single row with their faces against the wall. They made them wait for 3-4 hours like that. They hit very hard on the necks of those who moved their heads left and right, and swore and insulted them. Among us were friends who had undergone an operation very recently and who were brought there by being pulled off from their beds. Although they were not strong enough to stand so long on foot, with the fear of being beaten, they were kept waiting in that position until they collapsed.
- Starting from day one, we were made to sit on the damp stone floor in front of the toilet instead of being placed in wards. They also made those who very recently had stomach bleeding or still had surgery marks in the open sit on this damp floor. The police officers passing by kicked or hit the heads of those who were sitting on the floor. While sitting in that position, their eyes were tied with a filthy piece of cloth. The eyes of some were infected because of this bandage. Blood effused on some of our friends' eyes who were allergic, but they were not allowed to take pills. Their demand to put tissue in the bandage was denied with swear-words and kicks.
- They handcuffed those who sat on the floor either to each other or to the radiator pipes on the walls. Since some detainees were handcuffed to the pipes high above, and some were handcuffed with their hands on their back, they soon started to suffer from cramps. They demanded the handcuffs to be positioned differently, but they were denied that. Afterwards, our friends stated that this gives such a pain as if one's arm is dislocated.
- The name of those who were sitting on the floor were frequently cried out and they were taken away blindfolded to somewhere. The officers started beating them on the corridor to the interrogation room and they particularly hit their waist, spine and kidneys. While the detainees were walking blindfolded, they did not tell them where to bow their heads and made their heads hit against walls and joists. Then they laughed saying 'you could not pass through there? Come, pass through here'.
- Because some of our friends received very strong blows on their neck, their sight was blurred and they could not see properly for 3-4 days.
- The interrogation room is a place where only the interrogator police officers and the detainee who is interrogated are let in. Since we were blindfolded, we were not able to see who sat next to us. They started hitting even before waiting for us to answer the questions they asked. After almost each question, they were strongly squeezing our genitals to intimidate us and to make us give the answers they wanted. Many of our friends suffered in writhing pain for hours because of this act.
- I developed cancer last year, and received chemotherapy treatment for a long time. I had to have one of my ovaries taken to prevent cancer from spreading throughout my body. Although I told this to the officers the first day we were taken into custody, they got mad at me and hit very strongly with fists numerous times on the region where I had surgery, and they squeezed it with all their strength. I almost fainted from pain. One of the

officers held back the other policeman as he was afraid that I would die. But still, they kept on doing it the following days.

- They were hitting with sticks over the towel not to leave any marks. Despite this, marks were left on some. Although we were taken to medical examination every day, we had to say no to the doctors who asked whether there was ill-treatment or not. This was because before taking us to the hospital, the policemen were threatening us with death or increasing the intensity of torture if we were to talk. Some were saying that if we were to tell the doctor, we would be killed and buried with the pig knot method. No one could tell the doctor that we were subjected to ill-treatment. When the doctor asked about a mark on the chest of one of our friends, he said that it could have happened by chance accidentally and that he did not know the reason for it.
- Cables were tied around the genitals of many detainees and electric was given to them. They taunted us saying that this can make one impotent in the future. One of our friends who was too weak to stand the beatings and was given electric shock on top of that had a stomach bleeding and was taken to the hospital. However, when he came back from the hospital, he was again harassed.
- A person had severe asthma and was very allergic to dust, cold, and airlessness. His state was known by the police. However, he was still kept in cold, filthy and airless places. Because he said he was allergic to cigarette smoke, they deliberately smoked besides him. Most of the time, he had difficulty in breathing. Although he increased the dose of his pills to 20 from 8 - the maximum he could take daily - he still could not recover. Knowing that he had asthma, they were deliberately coming hard on him, making him do exercise despite his being sleepless until he suffered on the floor. Not being able to stand all of these, he had an asthma crisis. His legs and arms started to shake fiercely and he collapsed as he could not breathe. They made this person wait for hours in that state and laughed at him but when it became so that he had the risk of death, they had to take him to the hospital. Doctors said that they could not save him if he had arrived just a little bit later and gave him serum. Then he returned to the security and he was tortured yet again. This friend of us had been receiving treatment for years and he had just started to recover. However, when he was released, it was certified that his illness was worse than its initial state and a longer treatment was started. During this one week, his lungs were about to crash.
- Many detainees were asked to strip naked after being taken to special rooms. After these detainees were stripped naked, they were approached by officers holding bottles and truncheons in their hands and hurling threats that they would use them for sexual harassment. When they were standing blindfolded and naked in the room, strangers were taken into the room and they were asked to walk around them. However, since our friends were blindfolded, they could not see who was taken into the room.
- They were denied access to the toilet for very long periods of time such as 20 hours. When they had the chance to use the toilet, they were not allowed to stay in that filthy place - which was filmed by a camera and in which the person who used it could be openly seen - more than 30 seconds. Since we were made to sit on chilly damp floor, many of us had

stomach problems and needed to visit the toilet very frequently. Despite this, we were not allowed to use the toilet. Because of this, we ate very little food and drank very little water for one week.

- Those who were about to sleep were awakened with kicks. Senior officers who came to inspect the wards would say 'You will not treat these like humans, I will damn you if you do so. You will treat them like animals'. Police officers who wanted to please their seniors tortured us for days very severely.
- They sprayed pressurized water on most of us and made us sit in front of the window despite the cold winter breeze. One of our friends could not help having a shiver crisis. Another of our friends wanted to come close to him to warm him at least a little bit, but the police officers pulled them apart and did not allow that. One of our friends who asked for a sweater because he was cold was made to feel even colder with having water poured on him.
- One of our friends had heart disease, but despite this, they tortured him most. The more he stated that he had heart disease, the more they harassed him, and made him do exercise in a state sleepless and beaten, till he suffered on the floor. They made him clean all over the place. Finally, our friend could not stand all of these and had even more serious heart problems.
- They made a detainee who just had a operation on his hand do push-ups. When he said that he could not do it and his hand really hurt, they stepped on the spot where he had the operation with their shoes. The spot where he had the operation bruised and the pain lasted for a long time.
- The physical torture the SRF members who were taken into custody suffered, was officially reported in the petition submitted by Emre Nil, a member of the society and a respectable businessman, to the Turkish National Assembly human rights commission as follows: "... From the moment most of our friends were put into custodial prison, they were blindfolded and they were made to sit on the cold concrete by being handcuffed to radiators. I bore witness to their staying at the same position for days. They were not allowed to use the toilet for a long time, they were frequently subjected to ill-treatment... Even in the corridors on our way to the interrogation room, policemen were striking our back, and especially our spinal cord. During interrogations, we received many blows with stick over the towel so that it won't leave any trace. Electric shock was applied to my and some of my friends' sensitive organs. Additionally, such methods as squeezing testicles, spraying with high-pressure cold water, and then keeping in cold were used. I know that hairs of some of our female friends were pulled, and they were smacked in the face... Finally, they gave us the testimonies written by them and asked us to sign them. They made threats that if we had declined to sign, the torture would continue. Me and many friends of mine signed these testimonies as pain was intolerable and we were worried of being crippled. There are many crimes ascribed to us, but these are untrue accounts. We do not accept them, they are signed by force under torture."ⁱⁱ

Such testimony illustrates the contempt of the Turkish security forces for basic human and legal rights. Clearly, this treatment of those eminent individuals in

the forefront of social, educational and cultural projects for the Turkish people plays a strategic role. By brutally terrorising and punishing reformative individuals or groups with broad grassroots popularity, a clear warning is given to such organisations conveying the consequences of peacefully challenging the status quo even on an intellectual or ideological level.

IV. INSTITUTIONALISED FACISM

The Turkish government has also been practicing ethnic cleansing against its Kurdish minority (the majority of whom are also Muslim)ⁱⁱⁱ as part of its war on the PKK that began in 1984, although the vast majority of Turkey's Kurdish population do not claim to support the PKK as the Federation of American Scientists has noted; the scale happens to be much wider than what Serb forces have apparently perpetrated in Kosovo. By 1999, an estimated 4,500 civilians had been killed. The vast majority of those killed were Kurdish civilians. Around 3,000 Kurdish villages and settlements have been plundered and subsequently incinerated by Turkish security forces in the scorched earth campaign, the occupants either killed or driven out. Up to 3 million people have been internally displaced in this way from their subsequently burned down homes.^{liii} Most of this destruction has taken place within the last several years.^{liv}

Systematic detention and torture of captured Kurdish civilians has also continued with impunity. One representative example of the nature of these policies is noted by AI in its annual country report: "Two Kurdish girls, 16-year-old N.C.S. and 19-year-old Fatma Deniz Polattas, were detained and reportedly tortured for several days at the Anti-Terror Branch of Police Headquarters in Iskenderun in early March. They were held blindfolded and naked. N.C.S. was exposed to verbal and sexual harassment. Fatma Deniz Polattas was anally raped. A formal complaint was lodged, but the prosecutor decided not to prosecute the police officers."^{lv}

Turkish political scientist Haluk Gerger comments on the foundations of this genocidal policy: "The basic insecurity that characterized the system and the resultant fear that shaped the behavior of the ruling elite have their roots in history. That is, both in the imperial heritage upon which the republican reconstruction was attempted, and the very essence of the structure that was created. This phenomenon is now being augmented in all its dimensions by the war against the Kurds... Turkish militarism is characterized by the rampant prominence of its values in society, the preponderance of the military establishment in politics, and by the unabashed legitimacy accorded to violence both at popular and official levels. Turkish chauvinism is expressed in extremely aggressive ultra nationalism, in xenophobic Turkism, in excessive bigotry and in the irrational and superfluous 'master race' and 'one-nation state' ideas."^{lvi}

It is additionally worth noting the February 1997 ruling by the National Security Council that "Muslims are the number one enemy of the principles of the State of Turkey." The statement went on to prioritise the clampdown on "Islamic

activism” over the anti-Kurdish policy. Given that about 99 per cent of the population is Muslim, the implication of all this is that the regime is indeed undertaking a wholesale programme of repression against the entirety of the Kurdish and Turkish people, in particular involving the attempt to eliminate all public expressions of Islamic identity - a policy bearing all the hallmarks of facism.

V. SUPPRESSING THE FREE PRESS

The regime has also systematically clamped down on writers and journalists who do not conform to the requirements of the dictatorship. Human Rights Watch noted that “the system often breaks down when writers and journalists discuss and criticise the nature of the state”.^{lvii} “Risky areas include the role of Islam in politics and society, Turkey’s ethnic Kurdish minority and the conflict in southeastern Turkey, the nature of the state, and the proper role of the military. Repression for reporting or writing on such topics includes the killing of journalists by shadowy death squads believed linked to or tolerated by security forces, imprisonment and fines against journalists, writers, and publishers, the closing of newspapers and journals, the banning of books and publications, denial of press access to the conflict in southeastern Turkey, the banning of political parties, and the prohibition on the use of Kurdish in broadcasting and education.”^{lviii}

“Pressure against the Islamist press, writers and others has increased markedly over the past two years,” reported HRW in 1999, “a result of the Turkish military’s fear of what it perceives as the increasing Islamization of society.”^{lix} The New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists reported that more journalists were killed in Turkey in 1998 than in any other country.^{lx}

Examples are therefore, naturally, in extreme abundance. “Former editor Nureddin Sirin is serving a 17 and a half year sentence for providing pictures to a political rally in 1997. Aydin Koral, a chief writer faces over a hundred years in prison if he returns to Turkey for an article he wrote in 1997. Gul Aslan recently returned to her desk, after three years spent in prison without due process. Her case was thrown out by a judge in August this year, who acknowledged that international scrutiny had exposed the case as laughable.”^{lxi}

HRW highlights other instances that are “representative of prosecutions against Islamist politicians, intellectuals, and writers”: “On April 22, 1998, the popular mayor of greater Istanbul, Recep Tayyip Erdoan of the Islamist Fazilet Party, the successor of the now-banned Welfare Party, was sentenced to ten months of imprisonment under Article 312.2 of the penal code and fined TL716,666... Mr. Erdoan was prosecuted for a speech he made in Siirt in December 1997 in which he quoted the following poem: ‘The minarets are our swords, the mosques are barracks, the domes are helmets.’ The poem, which served as the basis for the prosecution, was written by Ziya Gökalp, an ethnic Kurd who is considered the intellectual father of Turkish nationalism... In September 1998, the High Court of Appeals (*Yargıtay*) confirmed the

conviction. Mr. Erdoan - a favorite for reelection as mayor and possible successor as leader of the main Islamist party - is banned from politics for life under Turkish law because of the conviction.”^{lxii}

Another representative example is Islamist intellectual and writer Mustafa Slamolu, who “has been prosecuted several times and imprisoned twice because of his writings and speeches. In October 1995, he was remanded into custody after his sentence under Article 159, ‘insulting Turkishness and the Republic’, was confirmed upon appeal.” The charge was based on a November 1993 speech at a forum on the Kurdish question organised by Mazlumder, in which he stated that in Anatolia unity cannot be achieved on the basis of racism, that the common identity of many of those living in Turkey is Islam, and that the slogan ‘How happy is he who calls himself Turk’ issued forth from an ignorant and rotting racism. This was construed by the court as “openly insult[ing] and ridicul[ing] the Republic”. He was thus sentenced to “one year of heavy imprisonment”, “according to penal code Article 159/1”. While in prison on the first charge, a second conviction under the ‘Law Concerning Crimes Committed Against Atatürk’ was upheld by the High Court of Appeals. The prosecution was based on a 13 December 1993 article in the *Selam Weekly* newspaper, where Slamolu allegedly referred to Atatürk as “a dictator.”^{lxiii}

Another late instance is the arrest and detention of the editor of *Selam Weekly*, Erhan Gungor, in October 1999 on the order of Istanbul’s State Security Court for “insulting the Turkish army”. A spokesman for the paper told IHRC that it was a disgrace that under Turkish law, “saying Atatürk had a long nose could result in a six year prison sentence.” The newspaper had also held an article reporting and criticising a recent public speech of General Isymer in which he attacked the Prophet Muhammad, declaring that the Turkish military would “f**k his followers.” Accordingly, the offending issue (no. 409) was also confiscated by the authorities.^{lxiv} These representative examples are only a few out of an ongoing campaign against press criticism of the secular elite.^{lxv} They demonstrate the derision with which the Turkish authorities view the voice and feelings of the Turkish people. Free speech is in other words ‘permissible’ in so far as it conforms to the requirements of the secular military elite - as soon as the press ventures beyond the rigid boundaries of strict conformity to the Kemalist ideology, it becomes subjected to extreme measures by the authorities designed to clampdown and eliminate all such dissent.

VI. ECONOMIC WAR

Only less than a year after the 1997 coup overturning the democratically elected government, “Muslim businessmen have become the new targets in the ongoing campaign” against Islam. “A court has demanded the closure of Turkey’s second largest commercial lobby, which represents the interests of almost 3,000 [Muslim] business people.” Then Chairman of the Association of Independent Industrialists and Businessmen (MUSIAD), Erol Yarar, faced “up to three years in jail on charges of inciting religious hatred for a speech he

made last October in which he accused the government of trying to eliminate Islam by closing state-run clerical training schools.” In 1997, the army had “circulated a list of more than 1000 pro-Islamic companies whose goods it said should be boycotted in order to check their growth.” Political commentators described the pressures on MUSIAD as merely another stage in the military’s comprehensive programme to “wipe out” Turkey’s popular Muslim movement.^{lxvi} As the leading American journalist Thomas Goltz observed: “The generals announced a military boycott of some 1,000 Islamic companies in the country - including Ulker, the firm that makes most of the nation’s cookies. Another Muslim firm, Kombassan, which receives hundreds of millions of Deutschmarks from Turks living in Germany, had its assets frozen... The generals drew a line in the sand”, placing “all Islamist-inclined people in Turkey [i.e. the majority of the population] on its far side.”^{lxvii}

The closure of MUSIAD was also demanded. Istanbul columnist Cengiz Candar, for example, observed that such policy implemented by the military is “the primary step in their project of establishing a new Islam-free society... where everyone can be religious in private but not in public. If you defend the Islamists’ right to freedom of expression you are viewed as helping the enemy.”^{lxviii}

The militarist lead was also pushed onto pro-secularist consumer associations, designed to organise boycotts of grocery stores, newsstands and even public transportation linked to Muslim activism. One anti-Muslim ophthalmologist from Istanbul described how the pro-secular elite attempted to go about establishing these conditions: “We started taking notes and making lists of people who did not show enough respect for Ataturk (the founder of secular Turkey), and then faxed the lists around the neighborhood as places to avoid... I will not even get a taxi from a man with a beard anymore out of general principle.”^{lxix}

In Turkey, there are 13.5 million people living in poverty. An estimated 34.2 per cent of the population lives at the minimum subsistence level. When added to those people living at or below the poverty line, “75 per cent of Turkey’s citizens struggle with some degree of impoverishment”, reports the *Turkish Daily News*. Turkey also has a very disproportionate income distribution structure. Globally speaking, “Turkey is in the top 20 on the list of nations with the worst income distribution. Among low to medium income countries Turkey ranks fifth.” The last 20 years of secular rulership under the existing military-dominated system has seen a sharp rise in inequality. “Between 1987 and 1994 the share of the national income earned by the bottom 20 percent of the population dropped by 7.25 percent. Over the same period the share earned by the top 20 percent increased by 10 percent. More importantly, the share of the national income that went to the group defined as ‘middle class’ decreased by 10 percent.” In other terms, “The 600,000 wealthiest people in Turkey have an average annual income of more than \$20,000 per person. They control 16.6 percent of Turkey’s national income. Meanwhile, the average annual income of the 600,000 poorest people is \$172, a mere 0.7 percent of the national income.”^{lxx}

While previous military-backed governments have therefore systematically marginalised the majority of the population, escalating poverty and inequality, “Refah has named itself the defender of laborers, artisans, and small tradesman threatened by unemployment and high interest rates ‘contrary to Islam’... Recent political trends may signal the end of the Kemalist dream of a strictly secular Turkey, and the rise of Islam in the mainstream political landscape. Even while the secular parties work to block this emergence, the voice of the people is saying otherwise.”^{lxxi} The principles of the Refah Party, after being forcefully disbanded by the Constitutional Court in January 1998, nevertheless continued to live on in its successor party, the Fazilat (Virtue) Party, which was formed by previous members of Refah to sustain its popular cause; consequently the Virtue Party has been subjected to the same brand of pressure from the authorities.

It is because Refah (and later Fazilat) dubbed itself the “defender” of the marginalised classes, thus gaining “the voice of the people”, that “big business leaders were very anxious about Welfare [Refah] Party being the number one political party in the general elections of 1995”, observed founder of MUSIAD Erol Yerar. “Right after the election, they placed large advertisements in the newspapers, declaring an open war on those who would contribute to a possible Welfare government.” MUSIAD has similarly come under fire for challenging the hegemony of conglomerates and noting that economic decline has come about largely because “the Turkish state apparatus is penalising the productive small businessmen.” Recent pressure from the State against MUSIAD appears to be based on its detailed criticisms of the dominance of big business empires in Turkey and its active support of the rise of smaller businesses: “the so-called Anatolian Lions are growing year by year” to the anxiety of the State, observed Erol Yerar. “Apart from conventional family firms, we now have the investment corporations which combine the small savings of 10 to 40 thousand people (mostly workers from Europe). Local people, suppliers, customers, managers and workers of the company are all partners. This is what a distinguished social scientist called growth through equality. The big business is so scared of this new model of growth that they mobilized all their resources to block this process. If they succeed, the ersatz capitalism of Turkey will survive another decade at most. No more, because there are natural limits to irrational political action. A state devouring its most wealth-generating companies cannot live on the shoulders of uncompetitive domestic monopolies.”^{lxxii}

Accordingly in his March 1999 report, prosecutor Nuh Mete Yüksel of the State Security Court in Ankara filed charges against Erol Yerar, alleging that he was among 24 people who were guilty of “anti-secular activities”. His report stated that MUSIAD should be “disbanded”. The charges, which were also filed against a variety of other Muslim individuals and organisations, carried sentences from 7 to 22 years of imprisonment. Members of the former-Refah/Welfare Party were also targeted. “Four former members of the pro-Islamic Welfare Party, which was closed down by the Constitutional court in January 1998, now face the death penalty after Nuh Mete Yüksel, the prosecutor of the State security court in Ankara, filed suits against them, claiming they had sought to topple the regime and replace it with a theocracy.

The four men, Ahmet Tekdal, Hasan Huseyin Ceylan, Ibrahim Halil Celik and Sevki Yilmaz, all former deputies of the Welfare party, drew the attention of the secular authorities with fiery speeches, deemed to be ‘disrespectful’ to Ataturk’s principles”, while supporting the popular call for Islam.^{lxxiii}

For such reasons, the same report “also focuses on the activities of the National Youth Foundation, asking for its closure, and especially on the National View, an Islamist organization founded in 1974 by Erbakan in Germany and popular among Turkish guest workers in Europe.” Furthermore, “the death penalty would also be sought against former prime minister Necmettin Erbakan and former Justice minister Sevket Kazan, who have been banned from politics, as well as against several other members of the Islamist movement who are currently members of parliament for the Virtue party. At the last minute, the prosecutor decided to continue with his investigation and file these suits separately at a later date.” Ironically, the death penalty to be sought against former prime minister Erbakan was based on the notion that, in the cause of peace, he had “used intermediaries to contact PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan, in order secure a ceasefire in exchange for concessions on cultural rights for the Kurds”. This attempt by then Islamist prime minister to end the secular army’s genocidal war on the Kurds in the southeast and institute a ceasefire, was construed by the prosecutor as wanting to “legitimize the status of bandits.”^{lxxiv}

All this illustrates how the dictatorial policies of the illegitimate regime have led it to exploit even economic and legal means to attempt to marginalise popular movements for Islam-based social change. The results have been the impoverishment of vast sectors of the Turkish population, and the utilisation of economic and legal pressure against Turks and Turkish businesses with even trivial links to Islam and Islamic identity.

VII. THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

The Western powers have unfortunately been heavily complicit in the Turkish regime’s institutionalised repression of its domestic population. Indeed, Turkey continues to enjoy an image of benign liberalism within the Western media, which has largely ignored the country’s massive domestic crisis. As Dr. Gerger points out, Turkey’s “bonds with the West” were “forged at the onset of the Cold War”, and these bonds have directly “bolstered the country’s predisposition to militarism. With the active participation of the United States and NATO, a cold war democracy, a national security cult and apparatus were created in Turkey.” To obtain Western approval for its policies, the regime also needed to manufacture domestic enemies to play on Western fears. “The frenzied structure thus created engulfed the society in militarism. Successive American administrations were happy to see, and therefore instigated, militarist authoritarianism in a country they considered a critical proxy in the Cold War. In Turkey they perceived a contradiction between democratization and protection of Western interests. The infection of this imported bigotry was socially devastating in Turkey, since it found fertile soil to grow, interacted with

the already existing propensity to violence, and magnified its destructive contamination.”^{lxxv}

The US-based Human Rights Watch reports that rather than condemning Turkey’s atrocious policies of repression, torture and ethnic cleansing, “Turkey’s NATO partners have extended generous political and military support, helping Turkey to develop a formidable arms industry and supplying it with a steady stream of weapons, often for free or at greatly reduced cost. The United States in particular has been deeply involved in arming Turkey and supporting its arms production capacities.” US weapons, as well as those supplied by other NATO members, are regularly used by Turkey to “commit severe human rights abuses, and violations of the laws of war in the southeast... The most egregious examples of Turkey’s reliance on US weaponry in committing abuses are its use of US-supplied fighter-bombers to attack civilian villages and its use of US-supplied helicopters in support of a wide range of abusive practises, including the punitive destruction of villages, extrajudicial executions, torture and indiscriminate fire.” HRW refers to the employment by Turkey’s special counterinsurgency forces, “reknown for their abusive behaviour”, of US-supplied small arms, such as the M-16 assault rifle and British armoured cars. In fact, “the Clinton administration... supplies Turkey with 80 per cent of its foreign military hardware” despite its knowledge of the use to which that hardware is being put. According to the report, “it appears that Pentagon representatives in Ankara are more eager than ever to sell Turkey US weapons, including M-60 tanks, helicopter gunships, cluster bombs, ground-to-ground missiles and small arms.” Moreover, “the US is also involved in co-production agreements with the Turkish defence industry, most notably helping to build the F-16 fighter bomber”, which the US reluctantly acknowledges has been used “indiscriminately to kill Kurdish civilians”. HRW also reports US plans to aid Turkey in building “a new armored personnel carrier.” Thus, many of the Western powers, particularly the US and Britain, have been actively supporting Turkey’s genocidal behaviour in the ample provision of military aid.^{lxxvi}

Support for the Turkish regime has continued in this way ever since its existence. A few examples suffice to clarify this. In 1992-93 alone, the Pentagon shifted a mammoth military shipment to Turkey at no cost. According to the UN arms registry the US government had turned over 1,509 tanks, 54 fighter planes, and 28 heavily armed attack helicopters to Turkey.^{lxxvii} Veteran Washington Post correspondent Johnathan Randal reported that it was in 1994 that Turkey became “the biggest single importer of American military hardware and thus the world’s largest arms purchaser. Its arsenal, 80 percent American, included M-60 tanks, F-16 fighters, Cobra gunships, and Blackhawk ‘slick’ helicopters, all of which were eventually used against the Kurds.”^{lxxviii} In 1997 the State Department granted market licenses to Bell and to Boeing Aircraft for attack helicopters; although these are used to bombard Kurdish villages. In particular, Turkey has about 2,800 US supplied armoured personnel carriers (APCs), which are often used to clampdown on domestic dissidents by Turkey’s misnamed “anti-terror” police units. Amnesty International conducted a three-year study on these police groups, which it sent to US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright in an effort to block the transfer. The report provides examples of identified “anti-terror” units torturing children, sexually assaulting prisoners, using electric shock torture, beating, burning, and the near-drowning of suspects, as well as other gross violations of human rights. Among 280 victims of the “anti-terror” units mentioned in AI’s report were “infants, children, and the elderly.” In spite of this evidence, during December 1998 the US State Department granted an arms deal to Turkey relating to the sale of further APCs. Due to the recently enacted Leahy Amendment,

some restrictions were imposed on the use of US loans for APCs destined for areas of conflict - but the export license for all 140 vehicles to the 'anti-terror' police was still approved.^{lxxix}

Thus, crucial US military aid to Turkey has persisted while the brutal regime conducts systematic violations of human rights against its domestic population. Despite its systemically anti-humanitarian policies, Turkey is a member of NATO, a political ally and a client of the US, Britain and other NATO allies. The US State Department admitted in 1999: "Turkey is vitally important to US interests. Its position athwart the Bosphorus - at the strategic nexus of Europe, the Middle East, the Caucasus and the Caspian - makes it an essential player on a wide range of issues vital to US security, political, and economic interests." It also argued in an apparent attempt to justify this position: "In a region of generally weak economies and shaky democratic traditions, political instability, terrorism, and ethnic strife, Turkey is a democratic secular nation that draws its political models from Western Europe and the United States. Turkey has cooperated intensively with the US as a NATO ally and is also vigorously seeking to deepen its political and economic ties with Europe."^{lxxx}

President Clinton elaborated on the implications of this during the visit of Turkey's then Prime Minister, Mesut Yilmaz, to the United States on 18-21 December 1997: "First of all, I think it is very important that we do everything reasonable to anchor Turkey to the West... If you look at the size of the country, if you look at its geostrategic significance, where it is, what it can block, and where it can open doors to, it is terribly important." Notably, during his visit, Yilmaz met Vice President Gore and the secretaries of State, Defense, Commerce and Energy, along with officials of the IMF, the World Bank, and the CEOs of several major US corporations. In fact, a contract was signed with Boeing worth about \$2.5 billion.^{lxxxi} By November 1999, the BBC reported that "Accords for the construction of oil and gas pipelines from the Caspian Sea through Turkey to the Mediterranean have been signed at the European security summit Istanbul." The deal has been described as "a policy victory for the Clinton administration", enabling "oil and gas from newly-developing fields in the Caspian Sea to reach international markets."^{lxxxii} It is worth noting in this context that the US oil pipeline routes are planned to stretch from the oil-rich Caspian Sea, straight through Kurdish populated southeastern Turkey, from which up to 3 million of the primarily Muslim Kurdish people have already been conveniently 'ethnically cleansed'.^{lxxxiii}

The principle behind these policies are clearly not humanitarian. On the contrary, humanitarian considerations appear to be rather irrelevant in this case; economic and strategic interests in maintaining regional US hegemony have motivated policy. Turkey, a Western client in receipt of significant economic, military and diplomatic aid from the West, in particular the US, has been implementing a sustained policy of domestic repression, embracing every dimension of Turkish society, military, political, economical, educational, cultural, and so on. This policy has even involved committing ethnic cleansing and acts of genocide against the Kurdish population. Nevertheless, due to Turkey's lucrative strategic position in relation to the Caspian, the Middle East and the Balkans, the regime continues to receive extensive support from the Western powers, specifically the United States. Clearly, this support exists in sheer disregard for its inevitable ramifications in terms of having prolonged and provided direct assistance to Turkey's brutal policies of repression. The maintenance of US/Western hegemony to secure regional politico-economic interests is far more important than human rights and their protection in the contemporary world order. As Franz Schurmann, Professor Emeritus of

History and Sociology at the University of California (Berkeley), points out, "Washington has been searching for a surrogate power to lead a new alliance system that would keep the region securely within the US orbit. When Israel and Turkey announced the conclusion of a military alliance just before the Israeli elections on May 28, the Arab world knew who had been chosen [by Washington] as the new surrogate - Turkey."^{lxxxiv}

NOTES

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^{xvii} Press release from Mazlumder Human Rights Organization, Istanbul, e-mailed to IHRC on 6 May 1999.

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