

**An Attack on Turkish Secularism?
May 31, 2006
Event Transcript**

HILLEL FRADKIN: We are here to have a discussion of two things, one particular and one general. The first is a particular group of recent events in Turkey. This series of events began with the killing of a judge and the wounding of four others in an Ankara courtroom by a man who did so shouting various Islamist slogans. The subsequent events connected with this are the public funeral and simultaneous demonstrations, along with the actions, non-actions, or reactions of various important and prominent political and intellectual figures in Turkey, both in and out of office. We are also here to discuss something more general: the current state of affairs in Turkey. In particular, these events raise the question of the relationship between the governing party, the AKP, and the tradition of Turkey's secular republicanism. I would like to add that there is implicitly a third subject, and that is the rise and new role of Islamist parties in the Muslim world in general. This is something that we have seen over the last few years, with somewhat increasing momentum in the last year and a half. This is relevant because Turkey's own governing party is understood at least in some sense to be an Islamist party and in any case it has been taken to be the leader and the model of this kind of development within the Muslim world.

For all these subjects, both particular and general, we are fortunate to have two extremely distinguished observers and analysts of the Turkish scene. Our first speaker is Ruşen Çakır, who is a correspondent here in Washington for the Turkish daily newspaper *Vatan* and the author of several books on the Islamist movement in Turkey. His writings go back more than a decade, so this is not a new subject for him. His long experience gives him the particular capacity to place what is now occurring within the context of the history of the last three or four years of Turkish politics.

Our second speaker is our own Zeyno Baran, the senior fellow and director of the Center for Eurasian policy, who joined Hudson in April. Zeyno has done considerable research on Islamist movements in Central Asia. We will start with Ruşen.

RUŞEN ÇAKIR: I do not want to spend time on my political interpretation of the events in my speech; I instead want to answer the question: who is Alparslan Arslan, the killer of the judge?

There are four options for the answer to this question, which I will list for you. First, he is a professional militant and an Islamist. Second, he is not professional, but is an Islamist. Third, he is professional, but not an Islamist. And fourth, he is neither professional nor an Islamist. These are the four options which are being debated in Turkey now.

The government's interpretation is that Arslan is a professional militant, but is not Islamist. This assumption is supported by the government, of course, but it is also supported by many Islamic circles and some leftist and liberal intellectuals. For them Arslan is a representative of the Turkish "deep state". For them, this means that Arslan has a strong relationship with a new political movement in Turkey called *ulusalci*. We can translate this to mean "supporters of the nation-state" or "nation-statism." This is not simply a reference to nationalism; it goes beyond nationalism to a stronger concept of the nation-state. This is a new movement in Turkey, in which we can find some authoritarians, some nationalists, some leftists—mainly former Maoists—and also a few conservatives. The preponderance of retired military officers and judges in this movement is also very striking. The government says that this is evidence of a big conspiracy against it specifically, i.e. against the ruling party rather than the regime or the country as a whole. I do not want to consider this possibility since there are so many allegations and rumors surrounding it, and since I personally do not believe that this assumption is true. There are many weak points in the assumptions behind this option.

The second option is that endorsed by secularist intellectuals in Turkey, who believe that Arslan is an Islamist and a professional militant. To discuss this option, let us go to recent Turkish history to look at the different kinds of Islamist terrorism in Turkey. There are three categories of terrorist attacks committed by professional Islamist militants in Turkey. The first is the assassination of secular intellectuals, specifically the killings at the beginning of the 1990s, such as the assassinations of Muammer Aksoy, Bahriye Üçok, Çetin Emeç, Uğur Mumcu, and the failed attack on Jak Kahmi, a prominent Jewish businessman. In connection with these attacks, Turkish secret forces arrested Islamist militants with ties to the Iranian secret service. In this case, two separate groups were involved. The first one, called "The Islamic Movement Organization", was founded by mainly Islamist militants from Batman and Diyarbakır, i.e. by people of Kurdish origin. This group killed some Iranian opposition figures living in Turkey. Agents of the Iranian secret service were, under diplomatic cover, providing the militants with arms and money. The Islamic Movement was also responsible for the killing of several Iranian opposition figures living in Turkey. The second group had no name, but was directly linked to the Army of Jerusalem, a secret, international branch of the Revolutionary Guard of Iran.

The second category of attacks by professional Islamist militants is Hizbullah. Hizbullah in Turkey is separate from and unlike the Lebanese Hizbullah, since it is made up primarily of Kurdish Islamist militants. The group has existed since 1979 and has a large base of support in southeastern Anatolia. In the 1990's, the group attacked another rival organization with whom it had previously been connected. The other organization also used the name Hizbullah. After this conflict, Hizbullah had a long fight with the PKK, which is terrorist organization of Kurdish separatists. The PKK blamed Hizbullah for cooperating with the Turkish government. However, the legendary leader of Hizbullah, Huseyin Velioğlu was killed in January 2000 by Turkish special forces. On the anniversary of the killing one year later, the group struck back, killing Diyarbakır police chief, Gaffar Okkan.

The third category deals with Al Qaeda in Turkey. Some Turkish Islamists who fought in Afghanistan, Chechnya, Bosnia, Kashmir, and Ogaden joined Al Qaeda. We know that a group of three Turkish Islamists met with Osama bin Laden and Hafeez al Misri in an al-Qaeda camp in Afghanistan just before 9/11. They discussed how and where to attack in Turkey. While the Turkish Islamists had wanted to break into a TUSİAD (Turkish Industrialists' and Businessmen's Organization) executive meeting, al-Misri asked them instead to plan a plot against the İncirlik air force base and against an Israeli tourist ship regularly visiting Antalya. Finally, Al Qaeda of Turkey simultaneously attacked two synagogues in Istanbul on November 15, 2003. Five days later, they entered the British consulate and the headquarters of HSBC Bank. All of the attacks utilized vans filled with explosives.

When I consider these three categories, I do not think that Alparslan Arslan fits any of them. Thus, the assumption of the majority of secularist intellectuals in Turkey—i.e., that Arslan is a professional Islamist militant—is not true. Of course, there are some alternative options. It could be that Arslan is a new kind of operative for a secret service—perhaps Iran's—but I also do not think that this is the case. Arslan could also be part of the emergence of a new, fourth category of Islamic militant in Turkey, but as far as I know this is not happening either.

This brings us to the third option, which is that he is not professional, but is Islamist. This is certainly possible, and in Turkey we have some examples of this kind. A famous case is that of the IBDA-C, a very marginal group that is nonetheless well-known internationally because of their outspokenness. They are very radical, but in actuality their actions are less effective than their discourse. Although they have committed some terrorist acts in Turkey, they are not really professional; a better term might be semi-professional, or amateurish. There is another example that is very important and dangerous within the context of nonprofessional Islamist actors. This is the raid against the Masonic lodge in Istanbul the day before the bombing attack in Madrid in March 2004. One security guard and one attacker were killed, and another militant was injured in the attack. The two militants that executed the attack were copying al-Qaeda without being connected to it. The secular elites are having increasing difficulties in finding a group with which Alparslan Arslan is connected, so this third option is gaining popular credence in Turkey.

On the first day after the attack, I wrote in a *Vatan* column that there might be some similarities between this attack and the attack on the Masonic lodge. By that, I meant that the attackers exhibited some Islamist motives and tendencies, but without a direct professional link to a parent Islamist group or organization. The same might be true of Arslan.

But there is a fourth option, that he is neither Islamist nor professional. My personal views are closest to this option. I do not deny any Islamist motive behind the attack, but I do think that Arslan might fit a new terrorist profile in Turkey. We witnessed this profile several years ago with Mehmet Ali Ağca, among others. Alparslan was born in Bingöl, a

small city in the southeastern part of Turkey. It is an area over which the PKK does not have total control; Turkish nationalists are also very strong there. The more important fact is that Alparslan was raised in Elazığ, which is a very important city in Turkey. In 1997 I spent a week in Elazığ writing an article entitled “Islamic Life of the Turkish-Kurdish Border: The Case of Elazığ.” Elazığ lies at the border between Turkey and the Kurdish region, and it is a truly mixed city, with significant Kurdish and Turkish populations. During my work for this article, I observed once more that in Anatolia, nationalism—both Turkish and Kurdish—and Islamic conservatism are closely intertwined. This means that you see many Turkish and Kurdish nationalists with Islamist tendencies, as well as many Islamic conservatives with nationalist sensibilities. Many people here know about “Valley of the Wolves,” which was first a television series and later a movie. Its theme comes largely from Elazığ.

Let me give just one last example, that of the Aczimendi Muslims. This movement was quite eccentric, following special customs and requiring its members to wear special clothes. They had a presence in many major Turkish cities, and were a principal cause of the February 28, 1998 coup, in which the military intervened in the political process against the coalition of the Welfare Party and the True Path Party. Aczimendi leader Müslüm Gündüz was also from Elazığ, the capital of the movement.

I think that, after this attack and the subsequent events, we should of course continue to discuss the issue of secularism in Turkey. However, we should be careful not to conclude that we know the real motive of the killer. He is arrested and in jail now, but he is not giving much information about his motives and thoughts. This is a big question that needs to be answered. We hope that more information will come out during his trial, but this may not happen. In any case, all of these four options are open for discussion in Turkey, along with other explanations that may yet arise.

ZEYNO BARAN: I will build on a few things Ruşen said, and then go a bit more into the analysis of what this means. We assume you all know what happened, but I would like to highlight a few points. The shooting happened on May 17th, and it was committed by a 29-year-old lawyer. He used his attorney ID to gain access to the Turkish Council of State, which is the country’s highest administrative appeal court. He went to the council’s second chamber and shot five of the judges there, killing one of them. Early reports in the Turkish media, which were echoed by Hillel and in the invitation that we sent you, indicated that he chanted Islamist slogans during the attack; these reports have turned out to be untrue. This of course does not mean that he had no Islamic motivation for the attack.

After his arrest, Arslan said that the attack was done as revenge for the court’s decision that upheld a city government’s refusal to promote a teacher who wore a headscarf on her way to and from school. You may know that in the Turkish secular system, headscarves are not allowed for civil servants, members of Parliament, students, or educational staff. Until now, however, there has never been a case in which someone was punished for actions done in private life. The teacher did not wear, nor did she ask to wear, her headscarf while at school; she simply did so outside the classroom.

The decision of the Council of State was based on secularism as it is defined in the Turkish constitution. This is the principle that, as the Council reiterated, “Education should be kept at a distance from dogma and influences that run counter to science.” This is indicative of a clear focus on ensuring that the educators come from a particular mindset. Since the 1990s, the headscarf has become a big issue in Turkey, as it is seen as a symbol of political Islam. High tension and even occasional killings over this issue are nothing new. To give one example: in 1990, Bahriye Üçok, an outspoken female critic of universities’ tolerance on this issue, was killed by a mail bomb.

However, the timing of this particular attack, how the government has handled it, and what it may be leading to are very important – even more important than who did it. We do not fully know who the killer was at this point, as Ruşen’s different options make clear. Over the last several days people have been comparing Arslan’s situation to that of Mehmet Ali Ağca, who attempted to assassinate Pope John Paul II in 1981. Ağca’s motivations were also described as a complex mixture of religiosity and nationalism.

An important question about Arslan is whether he was truly acting alone. He said that he did, but any professional would say so. There was some initial reporting that he was connected to the *ulusalçı* faction, to which I will simply refer as the “ultranationalists.” It may be that Arslan was used by this group in order to provoke a confrontation that would further polarize the government and secularist organizations. Of course, there were also the inevitable questions about the role of the Mossad or the US. Even more speculation has focused on Iran, since as Ruşen noted, Iran has been involved in similar killings before.

Ultimately, we just do not know the answers, though no one really believes what Arslan has said so far. He said that he acted alone and that he acted due to the headscarf issue, but this is a nation that likes to believe in conspiracy theories—even if the truth is being told. It is more interesting to believe that there are dark forces at work, such as the “deep state” and other mystery elements. I am of course quite concerned that people in Turkey are buying into conspiracy theories rather than thinking critically.

Another meaningful fact—though I must acknowledge (with apologies to Turkish journalists) that, since I read it in the Turkish press, it may not be true—is that Arslan’s nickname is Polat Alemdar. Polat Alemdar is the main character of *Valley of the Wolves*, the movie that turns the ultranationalist archetype into a hero. This kind of a person has no respect for the rule of law; he is his own state, and implements his own laws. This complex figure, representing a mix of criminal and religious elements, has sadly become someone idolized in Turkey.

Even more important is the timing of the attacks. If there were a different government in office, we might not be having this discussion. But, as you all know, there has been widespread mistrust from secularists in Turkey since the Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in 2002. I recognize that the use of the label “secularists” is itself a

problem, since it reinforces an “us and them” paradigm that is truly bad for Turkey; unfortunately, it is the reality.

In the West, particularly in the United States, most attention has been devoted to what the AKP has done in foreign policy. Moves such as reaching out to the Syrian regime, having talks with Iran, and inviting a visit by Hamas leaders have all been viewed in the West as worrisome indications that the party might comprise some Islamist elements. In addition to these foreign policy indications, however, there have also been domestic developments that have created and exacerbated this polarization between the government and the secularists—developments that have gone largely unnoticed outside of Turkey.

It is therefore not a surprise that there is this tension, and this tension is likely only going to increase—especially since two important dates are coming up. The first is this August, when there will be a change of leadership in the military. Such a change is always an interesting occurrence, but it is particularly important in this case. The person in line to take over, General Büyükanıt (the current head of the land forces), is known to be fairly strict in his views, and it is commonly known that there is no love lost between him and the current ruling party. There was also a mini-crisis in which he was accused of interfering in the judicial process and of involvement in a criminal gang in the southeast. The issue is not quite resolved; although he has been cleared by the military, there is still a lingering feeling of doubt. Despite these difficulties, he will most likely replace General Hilmi Özkök—although, since this is Turkey, anything can happen.

The second date is that of the presidential election, now set for 2007. This is especially important because there is a sense that the presidency, along with the courts, is the last bastion of secularism in Turkey. We can therefore expect to hear much about the independence of the courts and of the presidency during the pre-election period. It is widely known that Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has an interest in becoming the next president. Since he has an overwhelming majority in Parliament, on paper he has a good chance of becoming president. However, such a move would dramatically escalate tensions; thus, many in the secularist camp believe that it would never happen. If it did, they believe that it would be a watershed event, after which Turkey would henceforth be Islamist. (In what they view as an important symbol, Erdoğan’s wife wears a headscarf). Whatever the outcome, it is clear that the next presidential election will be an important turning point.

In light of these important dates, the question must be asked: why did the shooting happen now? The court’s decision about the headscarf issue was made in February. What happened in the intervening three and a half months? A number of things may have occurred: whether or not he was a professional, Arslan may have been deliberately provoked; at the very least, he became angrier and more radical. Since February, a number of developments occurred to heighten tension in Turkish politics. In this context, people are now wondering whether this shooting might be the beginning of the end for the AKP government.

Since February, the military has become much more politically vocal, urging, for instance, “the relevant constitutional institutions to come to [their] duty” and expressing concern that there are forces in society attempting to weaken the military. We have therefore seen the military come back into the political realm, and I would argue that this is not because the military has been dying to get back into politics, but because the political opposition has been so terribly weak—a disastrous and embarrassing situation for Turkish democracy. Instead of coming up with a political alternative, the opposition parties have decided to sit back and wait for the military to step in; this is clearly very bad for Turkey.

We also saw in April a conflict that centered on the appointment of a new head of Turkey’s central bank. The candidate first proposed by the government had reportedly worked for the previous 21 years at Albaraka Türk, a partially Saudi-funded bank that adheres to sharia law. Many thought that his appointment would be a disaster for Turkey; after many public expressions of concern, President Ahmet Necdet Sezer vetoed the nomination.

In addition to these events, there have also been statements by key members of the AKP, including the speaker of parliament, about “redefining” secularism in Turkey. Turkish secularism is indeed fairly strict—it is much closer to the French model than to the American—and there have been discussions about whether it is outdated. Yet, in an atmosphere of mutual distrust, such statements are interpreted as dangerous to the country’s political system. Accordingly, Sezer responded with a very strong speech in support of the secular democratic republic. There have also been other developments, for example the public remarks of former president Süleyman Demirel, in which he advised students desiring to wear the headscarf at school to “go study in Saudi Arabia.” Some secularists applauded these comments, while others thought them inappropriate for a former president.

Ultimately, throughout this period of tension, it has been conservative, traditional Muslims who have suffered most—since they are seen as “outsiders” and as dangerous people. To the average conservative person, this reaction is very painful.

After the attack, President Sezer said that “May 17 will be remembered as a black mark in Turkish history, and an assault on the country’s democratic and secular character.” Former Prime Minister Ecevit, who was always very much committed to both democracy and secularism, attended the funeral, despite his age and frail condition. Ecevit said that he “had to go,” as his last duty to the judge who was killed while serving his country. While at the funeral, he actually called for the government to resign, saying that the prime minister and his government were directly responsible for this attack against the secular democratic republic. Of course, in any country, the government in charge at the time of such an event tends to get blamed. Yet, these remarks may be seen as even more important, since shortly afterward Ecevit suffered a stroke—and is now in critical condition.

The contrast to the current prime minister is very important. Ecevit, despite his condition, attended the funeral and stood with a group of people shouting, “Turkey will remain secular” and telling the government to resign. Prime Minister Erdoğan, on the other hand, did not even attend. He may have calculated that this was best for political reasons; perhaps he did not want to get jeered along with the rest of the AKP ministers and other party officials who did attend. In any case, it will be interesting to see, if and when Ecevit passes away, how his death will be handled. Will it become a big event? What will be said?

After public demonstrations following the assassination, General Özkök, who in the past has been accused by some military hardliners of being “too soft,” publicly declared that “the protests [of thousands of Turks outside Atatürk’s mausoleum] and the people’s sentiments are truly hope-giving and admirable, but this reaction should not be limited to a single day, to a single event. It must gain continuity, and it should be followed by everyone all the time.” I have followed the “color revolutions” in Georgia, Ukraine, and elsewhere very closely, and when I read the general’s statement I thought it was truly interesting—a statement backed by the military urging the Turkish people to demonstrate *en masse*, possibly as a way to bring down the government.

Where was the prime minister during this entire period? I think he made a lot of mistakes in his handling of this whole incident. Right after the attack, he accused the ultranationalists—before any investigation had begun. He immediately said that no one should connect this attack with the headscarf issue, almost in a defensive way, even though the killer proclaimed that the headscarf decision was his motive for the shooting. In a calmer situation, one would think that the prime minister of the country should wait for an investigation and not be the first to speculate, especially when very little is known. In any case, emotions are so raw and people are so agitated, that I think that the issue has not been handled very well.

Where do we go from here? I think that the big question, one that the *New York Times* raised in yesterday’s editorial, is this: could there be a military intervention in the Turkish political system? The editorial urged Washington to “use its long-standing ties with Turkey’s generals to communicate zero tolerance for military meddling.” Now, I am not sure how relevant the US would be, even if there was a military “intervention” planned, because the relations between the Turkish military and the US have not been particularly good as of late. The current state of relations is due largely to Turkish opposition to the way in which the US has implemented its agenda of democracy promotion. Ultimately, I believe that talk about military intervention is premature, but in light of questions and rumors, it must be remembered that it is feasible. While I do not believe that there will be a coup, it is possible that the secular bloc—not just the military, but including also the press, women’s organizations, NGOs, business associations, and of course opposition political parties—could come together and in one way or another (whether through a vote of no confidence or through other means) to prevent the current government from serving its full term.

I was in Washington in 1996 when Necmettin Erbakan became prime minister. Unlike Erdoğan, Erbakan was definitely an Islamist politician, and did not try to hide it. Erbakan pushed too hard, and was soon ousted by a combination of the secular forces. I remember talking at the time to some people from the party leadership. These individuals could not conceive of the possibility of their ouster, since they thought that they had a lot of support, both in the West and at home. What we see in the reaction of Erdoğan and his party to the shooting is this—that they, too, were caught unprepared. Again, the AKP thinks that it has strong support from the West and at home. For now, the latter is true—if elections were held today, the AKP would be the most popular party, with over 30percent of the votes. However, their support has been declining—not just due to issues of political Islam, but also because of the party’s performance on corruption.

I do not think that the US government needs the *New York Times* to tell it to oppose military intervention, since this has been the unchanging official position for the last three years. The EU political elite also would like to see a reduction in the military’s role in politics. However, this would likely lead to an open door for the appearance of more Islamic elements both in politics and in society—something that European citizens clearly do not want.

Which way should Turkey go? If it opens up and becomes more Islamic, then it increases the possibility of a European no vote on Turkish accession. The EU leadership responsible for framing Turkey’s EU admission prospects cannot even ensure the ratification of its own constitution, so Turkey cannot count on its help. Membership has long been a goal for reformers, democrats, and Islamists alike in Turkey. However, the benefits of membership are becoming less certain. One important development to watch between the August change in military leadership and next year’s presidential elections is the Cyprus negotiations. If the EU mishandles the issue, it will be difficult for the current government—in fact, for any Turkish government—to pass the reforms that the EU desires. Thus, if the EU does not want to trigger major instability in Turkey, it must come up with a creative formula to avoid forcing the Cyprus issue on Turkish decision-makers at this time.

The biggest question for speculation is this: can this level of political tension persist until the presidential elections in 2007? Most people in Turkey believe that it cannot, since it is already impacting the economy and the investment climate, creating a more general mood of nervousness. I would argue that, should the AKP call early elections, it will probably lose many seats, as it seems likely that three more parties would exceed the 10 percent threshold. The AKP would be weaker, but Turkey would benefit—since the tense situation would be resolved democratically and without further escalation.

One final issue of relevance to us in Washington is that of a potential Erdoğan visit to the United States. Whether or not he comes—i.e., whether or not he receives an invitation from the White House—will have a considerable impact on Turkish domestic politics. If he does not come, it will be interpreted in one way; if he does, it will be interpreted in another. The US has been drawn into Turkey’s domestic turmoil, and although this is not the platform to make a plea to US officials, I would say that the invitation decision has to

be handled very carefully, since it will affect the infighting that is going on in Turkey. Even with all the best intentions, the US can hurt the political process in one way or another.

HILLEL FRADKIN: Before we open the floor to questions, let me just summarize a few points and then ask a question. Ruşen opened with the apparently narrow questions of who Alparslan Arslan is and whether we draw any more conclusions from the question of his identity. Ruşen has made it quite clear that it will be some time, if ever, before we know exactly who he is, but there is the separate question of who people think he is and how this will be interpreted by various forces. There is also a question of what kind of arguments people will try to throw up, since blame will be given on the basis of claiming that Arslan is one thing or another. The question I had was, in the context of all these general issues, which interpretation will prevail with which groups of people? We have all these options, and all of them might prevail—there might be many parties to this debate, which could become a real fight. There are ties to other issues as well, including international ones—Zeyno just mentioned the question of Erdoğan being invited to Washington, and what that would mean in Turkey. It would have international effects, since he has undertaken various initiatives with Iran, Hamas, et al., and these could either be regarded as accepted or endorsed if Erdoğan is invited, or seen as rejected if the invitation is not extended.

The specific question I wanted to address is to Ruşen. It is related to the question of a new kind of hero. I was wondering if you might speak more about that, because it would be interesting in its own right—it is yet another possible factor in the kaleidoscope of the last 20 years of Turkish history, which has thrown up so many different possible routes for Turkey to take in the form of individual movements and the heroes of those movements. Building upon that, I was wondering if the emergence of a new hero might in itself be a reflection of the last few years—perhaps the Erdoğan government, its quarrels with the secular tradition, and other factors have produced some kind of longing, a feeling of impasse that has solicited yet another answer to Turkey's future. I was particularly struck in that regard by the difficulty you had in defining exactly what this new kind of group is, these ultranationalists. It is a poor phrase, but it makes a certain amount of sense if one is talking about a country that has several different ethnic groups in it but still lays hold to the claim that it is one republic.

RUŞEN ÇAKIR: I want to say something about this problem of Turkey's ultra-polarization. We have so many kinds of terrorism in Turkey, not only that of Islamic origin, but also that of leftists, some nationalists, Turkish nationalists, Kurdish nationalists, and so on. Yet, every time there is an attack, these acts become an instrument used by one part of the society against the other. For example, we had our own 9/11 in 2003; I am referring to the four attacks in Istanbul carried out by al-Qaeda. At that time, we did not witness any popular, unified demonstration against terrorism. Instead, we discussed how to characterize these attacks—Islamic terrorism, Islamist terrorism, fundamentalist terrorism, etc. We did not have any kind of unified civil demonstration. In Madrid, we have seen this, as well as in London and in Amman. After the last attack on hotels in Amman, the Jordanian people came out as a whole against

terrorism—though of course there were some Islamists and others who hesitated. In Turkey, though, we do not see anything like this anti-terrorist unity—never. Perhaps it exists against the PKK, though even then there is a large part of the Kurdish population that supports the group’s activities. So instead, the big question in Turkey after an attack is this: who is responsible? The answer is always “our rivals.” The secularists say it was the government, the government says it was the ultranationalists, or the “deep state”, and so we continue, still trying to find out who is really responsible. I am trying here to end this ideological blame cycle by looking at Arslan in context.

I also have some political opinions and interpretations of my own, which are largely opposed to what Zeyno said. The real problem is that while discussing responsibility is of course important, what is even more important is for Turkey to realize and accept that this attack was against the entire country. Unfortunately we cannot create a post-9/11 or 7/7 atmosphere of unity in Turkey—and this is our greatest challenge. When we are attacked, we turn to questions of politics. The majority of commentators after this shooting focused their remarks on a potential election, rather than on the vital questions of who the attacker is and why he committed his crime.

Finally, on the question of whether Erdoğan comes to Washington or not, I want to share my personal opinion. If he really will discuss with President Bush and other officials such global issues as new kinds of terrorism and how to fight it, then his visit is a good thing. If, however, as Zeyno said it will be only an investment in Turkish domestic politics, then as a citizen I have to think that this is not good. As a journalist, though, it is good, because I will have plenty to write about! Thus, I want him to be here.

ZEYNO BARAN: May I just make one comment on that? I am not saying that the prime minister would come and talk about domestic issues here. In fact, if he comes, it doesn’t matter what he discusses. The perception matters—how will people view it in Turkey?

HILLEL FRADKIN: I just have one more comment on what Ruşen said. I take your point that the discussion in Turkey should be whether or not this is terrorism and therefore bad, but as for the various possibilities, one occurred to me, perhaps for even what the deep state is, if it even exists. I was particularly struck by the man’s name, Alparslan, and it occurred to me that this might be the revival of Seljuk nationalism, or rather the creation of Seljuk nationalism, since it didn’t exist in the first place.

RUŞEN ÇAKIR: I think that his family is comprised of Turkish nationalists, because the leader of the Turkish nationalist movement was also named Alparslan. Indeed, this man was the *Führer* of Turkish nationalism. This Alparslan is a symbol of Turkish nationalism, as it was the name of the man who first entered Anatolia. Islamists also love this name, but I think that it is more of a nationalist symbol.

HILLEL FRADKIN: Thus, Turkish in an ethnic sense.

RUŞEN ÇAKIR: Yes.

QUESTION AND ANSWER SECTION

QUESTIONER: My name is Fritz Ermarth, and I am here primarily as an acquaintance of Ms. Baran and Dr. Fradkin. Both of our speakers made a curious and very interesting reference to another assassin, Mehmet Ali Ağca. If you are serious about that parallel, then a number of questions arise. Ağca did not act alone, neither in the unsuccessful shooting of the Pope nor in the successful killing of Abdi İpekçi. He had an immediate helper, who happens still to be alive: Oral Çelik. Behind their activities was a conspiracy, which provided money, instructions, transportation, and more. An acquaintance of mine doing research in the Stasi archives of East Berlin has come across very convincing documentation that the group from which Ağca and Çelik emerged, namely the Grey Wolves, was created and funded by East Berlin and Moscow with the objective of destabilizing Turkey. The shooting of the Pope was aimed at stabilizing Poland, not destabilizing Turkey, but the shooting of Abdi İpekçi was definitely aimed at destabilizing Turkey. This was a strategic objective of the Soviet bloc, since Turkey was and is an important NATO ally. Thinking about that parallel leads therefore to two questions. Who is Arslan's Oral Çelik, and who stands behind a strategic campaign to destabilize Turkey—of which this one shooting may only be one episode? The obvious candidate of course is Iran, but it may not be the only one.

RUŞEN ÇAKIR: Well, there is Mehmet Ali Ağca and there is the *figure* of Mehmet Ali Ağca. When I refer to Ağca here in the case of Alparslan, I am referring to the symbol of Mehmet Ali Ağca. I think you all know about Ağca's adventure, in which he served time in Italy, came to Turkey, was freed for a time and provoked public demonstrations on his behalf, etc. Here in Turkey, the younger generation knows only that Ağca is the Turkish guy who tried to kill the Pope and was in prison for many years. They know nothing of these conspiracies, but view him as a hero nonetheless. In this sense, Alparslan Arslan may be like Mehmet Ali Ağca without the existence of any conspiracy behind him. Of course, history may be repeating itself, and we may be seeing a second Ağca with the same type of international or transnational connections. I do not think so, however. The important question is whether Alparslan will become a conservative, nationalist figure in Turkey. I think that while discussing Alparslan Arslan, we should therefore discuss the symbol of Ağca, not the man himself.

QUESTIONER: My name is Kemal Köprülü. I am here from Istanbul, and I am the founder of the ARI Movement, which is a 12-year-old NGO in Turkey. I do not want to comment on the presentations, but I do want to comment on what Zeyno was saying about what is happening in Turkey these days. Yes, there is a nationalist movement that has been expanding over the past 7 or 8 months. I think October 3 of last year was the critical date. As most of you know, this was when Turkey gained access to negotiations with the EU. There was a kind of understanding among the elite in Turkey—including the commercial and media elites along with the state bureaucracy—that agreed not to criticize the government too much, but instead to allow it to do what it needs to do. It was faced with two important issues: one was securing a date for negotiations on October 3—this was an exact date, and a very specific goal—and the other was keeping the economy

in line, which was performing well after the famous Kemal Derviş program of 2001. (That program's four-year period ended in May 2005.) These dates, as you can tell, are very close—only five months separate, May and October 2005. So until then, there was very little criticism of the government, even on corruption—as Zeyno mentioned.

Yet, since October 3, and especially within the last couple of months, there has been a slow breakdown of Turkish-EU relations as well. EU officials are now starting to question the Turkish government's sincerity in relation to its EU goal. I was actually in Brussels just last week before coming here. In the week that I spent there, I met with a number of EU officials and international journalists. Everybody has essentially reached the conclusion that the Turkish government is no longer sincere on the EU issue. Thus, just as there was a breakdown in Turkish-American relations after the famous March 1 decision, so too is there now a breakdown in Turkish-EU relations—a situation which, when coupled with the problem of Cyprus, could turn into a serious crisis by the end of the year.

Along with all of these international issues, we have also had domestic problems for the last three months. The first, of course is the economy, evidenced by the central bank crisis when we went 35 days without a central bank governor—the result of a very badly managed process. Because of that process, international institutions, fund managers, and international bankers all lost confidence in the Turkish economic management system. We are now seeing that the Turkish economy is undergoing severe turbulence. I know that this is in part due to international conditions, but domestic economic mishandling is also to blame. We also have had the problem of the PKK. Right now, unofficially we have 200,000 soldiers in the southeast. This is a lot of soldiers to handle a few thousand terrorists! When all of these domestic difficulties are combined with the international problems that I mentioned, Turkey has lost credibility internationally—and is now losing credibility domestically as well.

The question now is thus: can this government govern properly for the next six months to a year? Many people in Turkey are saying no, that this government cannot govern, that it is not capable, and that it does not have the capacity to govern. There is now a growing anti-government movement among journalists, NGO leaders, academics, and business people. There are more emails, more meetings, more telephone calls, and more of many other activities as part of an unofficial, uncoordinated movement against the government. Every day, this movement becomes more apparent than the day before. My institution was the first NGO in Turkey to publish a policy declaration—which is currently in Turkish, though we are working on translating it into English. This declaration, which was sent to the Turkish press and to different institutions throughout Turkish society, criticized the government's handling of all the issues that I just mentioned from foreign policy to the economy to the security situation. It called upon women, civil society organizations, young people, etc., to come together and become more active politically in Turkey, especially by voting in the next election.

I would also like to make a final point: in the last election (November 2002), 8.7 million Turks did not vote. What we are trying to do is to get those 8.7 million to vote this time.

Furthermore, there are also 4.3 million new potential voters this time—this is the group targeted by my institution. When these two groups are combined, the total is 13 million voters—a huge number, especially when noted that the AKP received fewer than 11 million votes in the last election. I would thus be cautious of numbers that you hear. Nothing is ever certain in Turkish politics. Ecevit got 22 percent in 1999; but 1 percent in 2002. Deniz Baykal received 18 percent in 1999; but 8 percent in 2002. In Turkey, the electorate responds to performance, trust, and confidence. If they do not trust the government, if they do not see that it can perform, they will move on. I am not concluding that the AKP is going to lose the next elections, but I do not believe that there is any kind of fixed percentage that it is guaranteed to receive. No one is guaranteed to get anything in Turkish politics—which changes weekly, even daily.

RUŞEN ÇAKIR: I want to say something about the secular strategy against the Islamic movement in Turkey. In 1994, the Refah Party won the Istanbul municipal elections, and Erdoğan was elected mayor. After that election, there was a kind of mobilization via fax machines, since the Internet was not widely used at the time. One and a half years later in the general elections, the Welfare Party became the leading party. Sometimes, these Islamic movements may not be compared to the political parties we have seen in Algeria, Jordan, or in other countries, which have participated in elections. I think that it is true that in Turkey the nationalists, social democrats, and centrist parties lose votes after a few years. However, this formula does not necessarily apply to the AKP.

I have been working for 21 years on Islamic movements. I used to talk about the Welfare Party when it seemed like a marginal party, and tried to demonstrate the importance of this movement. People made a joke of me at that time—but some of those people are now members of the AKP.

Now, an important question is how to compete with Islamists. This is a big issue, and I do not think that there exists a real answer based on secularism. Yet, as Mr. Köprülü said, corruption and the economy might be important ingredients in the success of Islamist politicians. This is really the heart of the issue, since so many voted for Islamists in Algeria and Palestine not because the voters themselves are Islamists, but because they saw the Islamist parties as less corrupt. Pointing out the corruption in the AKP might be a good way to oppose Islamists in Turkey.

However, if we follow General Özkök's suggestion that there should be nonstop public demonstrations in favor of secularism, then we will only see a Turkey that is more Islamist. In our conservative country, people see secularist mobilization as an attack on religion. We have seen this several times in Turkey. When the press was attacking Erdoğan, the AKP candidate for mayor of Istanbul, many people voted for him based on Muslim solidarity. Thus, I think that everybody should be careful while playing the so-called secular card.

ZEYNO BARAN: I would like to add one point, relating to Hillel's question about the general rise of Islamist parties. It really is due to the lack of performance on the part of alternative forces. This is why so many people voted for the AKP in Turkey in the 2002

elections—not because the party was Islamic, but because it seemed to have the best party program. Many voted for the AKP even despite doubts that the party was in fact tied to the previous Welfare Party. Among these voters, there is now some disappointment, as the AKP has not been able to deliver on some of its promises

I acknowledge that Turkey is a conservative country; however, even in the United States, both major parties frequently discuss religion. Thus, the question in Turkey is not specific to the country or to Islam, but part of a broader tension between religion and politics that exists in many places. Throughout the world, many people are searching for a new kind of identity—not least those significantly affected by globalization, as Turks are. In Turkey, since the alternative political forces have not been able to offer a viable alternative identity, civil society groups such as Kemal's have stepped in. It is easy to oppose something, but hard to put in its place something meaningful. While Islamist parties—not including the AKP—can get away with only vague promises due to their religious leanings, secular parties must promise and achieve clear deliverable goals. However, the established Turkish political parties have been completely bankrupt in terms of ideas. I hope that civil society will fill the gap. To me, that is the only way out of this current impasse.

QUESTIONER: I am Ali Alyami from the Center for Democracy and Human Rights in Saudi Arabia. It sounds like the Turkish democracy is actually pretty fragile, in terms of its fundamentals. But I think that you have mentioned a very important point here, which is corruption. We just saw the election of Hamas, which was elected not because the Palestinians wanted an extremist group, but because they did not like what Arafat and his cronies were doing. The reason Hamas won was because it was able to provide for the Palestinian people. And the reason that it was able to provide for the Palestinian people was because the Saudis and others were bankrolling the organization. Is there a possibility that the same sort of thing could happen in Turkey, given that the Islamic world and the Middle East is moving toward increasing Islamization?

ZEYNO BARAN: Of course, there is money coming from Saudi Arabia and other places in the Persian Gulf to Turkey. These flows are difficult to quantify, since they are indirect, but they have triggered some speculation. Precisely how much money is coming in, and what is the reason behind it? One of the reasons behind Turkey's fairly solid market performance is Saudi participation. It is actually possible to make money in Turkey, which attracts Saudi investment. Another reason for the Saudi financial presence in Turkey is part of the Islamization agenda to which you alluded—an agenda which is not new, as Wahhabis have always considered Turkey to be a strategic country—because Turkey is a secular democratic country, something seen as inimical to the Wahhabi system. After some of the previous killings in Turkey, journalists have investigated the financial connections between Saudi Arabia and Turkey. Thus, it is an issue that is being discussed. I do not have a clear picture of what exactly is going on at this point, but it is being discussed.

RUŞEN ÇAKIR: I think that since Turkey is such a big country, with so many economic resources, the amount of foreign money coming in from Saudi Arabia and other places is

mostly exaggerated. Money for political activity instead comes from the people themselves. For example, there are immigrant workers in Europe who are very politically active and who send huge amounts of money to Turkey. During every electoral campaign, these people traveled to Turkey with cars and technical equipment in order to volunteer for these electoral campaigns. Thus, Islamic movements rely most of all on money from their own members. Sometimes, major entrepreneurs support one of these parties; however, when looking at the financing of these groups, we should look first of all at the ordinary people of Turkey.

QUESTIONER: My name is Ninie Syarikin, and I run a language and cultural consulting company. I am very curious about the headscarf issue, because it has been the problem for so many years. I am curious, because Turkey and the United States are very similar in that they are both secular and are democracies. But somehow in the United States, even government officials are free to wear a hijab if they want. Turkey is an Islamic country, but officials are not allowed to do this. Thus, my question is this: is religious freedom guaranteed in the Turkish constitution?

RUŞEN ÇAKIR: There are several separate issues regarding the headscarf in Turkey. The first is at universities, where it is forbidden. As in France, it is also not allowed in elementary schools—however, in Turkey, these schools are not the focus of the debate. Instead, for the last two decades, we have been debating the issue of the headscarf at universities. After 20 years, Turkish and European courts approved the ban at the university level.

The other principal issue regarding the headscarf is whether civil employees can wear it. The existing Turkish constitution is clearly against the wearing of the headscarf in official buildings. Yet, as Zeyno noted, the Danıştay banned the headscarf even being worn on the way to and from work. I think that Turkey has taken the ban too far. First, the ban on the headscarf for adult university students is totally illogical. Second, there is a very interesting contradiction: the overwhelming majority of the wives of Turkish politicians, ministers, party officials, and bureaucrats wear the headscarf. Official ceremonies often consist of a sea of headscarves! In response, the president has refrained from inviting to public ceremonies deputies or ministers whose wives wear veils. AKP members whose wives are uncovered, however, are invited. In response, the speaker of parliament organized an alternative ceremony, at which the sea of headscarves was present. In Turkey, the headscarf issue presents a tragic, comic situation.

HILLEL FRADKIN: I think that people have to remember that, since the founding of the Turkish Republic, the question of what people wore on their heads was far more about men than women. This question precedes the trend in recent years towards more and more women wearing the hijab. Atatürk focused his efforts on the practices of Turkish men, who wore hats without brims. This issue is so connected to the founding of the republic that, as Ruşen was saying, it can produce these sorts of comic, paradoxical, and contradictory things. It is not, as in other Muslim countries, an issue that arose only in the last two decades or so.

QUESTIONER: (Syarikin) Yes, but is religious freedom itself enshrined in the Turkish constitution?

RUŞEN ÇAKIR: Yes, it is. The state does not consider the headscarf issue one of belief—everyone is free to believe or not to believe in any religion. Instead, it considers the headscarf a symbol of the rejection of what we call (from French) *laïcité*, the principle of secularism. The state and courts consider the headscarf to be a symbol of fundamentalist opposition to the Turkish system.

QUESTIONER: (Hudson intern) I was just curious what the different roles are for the prime minister and the president in the Turkish system.

RUŞEN ÇAKIR: I once read that the Turkish president can be compared to the Chief Justice of the US Supreme Court. However, the presidency is principally a symbolic office, one that represents the republic. The president does have some limited powers, however. He has a one-time veto on any law or motion of parliament, and also appoints key officials—notably judges and members of the higher education board.

HILLEL FRADKIN: So Ruşen, the question is a good one, because either you or Zeyno has brought up the question of the upcoming elections and their relation to the ambition of the prime minister to become president, but it sounds as if you are saying that there are certain areas that the prime minister does not have an impact on, specifically the judiciary and education.

RUŞEN ÇAKIR: In recent history we have had two big examples, with Turgut Özal and Süleyman Demirel. They were both prime ministers who later became president—thus establishing a kind of tradition. Some people have said that Erdoğan really wishes to become president and then adopt a semi-presidential system, as in France. Another alternative is rendering the presidency more symbolic, naming perhaps a very low-level and low-profile president from the ranks of the AKP. Such a person need only be married to a wife who does not wear a headscarf. These are two possibilities. Now, clearly, when you look at the Turkish political system as a whole, the prime minister is more important. But in many cases, the president has prevented actions of the AKP. For example, the president vetoed the central bank nomination, which then had to be changed.

QUESTIONER: I am Stanley Kober with the Cato Institute. Over the past few years, I have met quite a few Turkish students here in Washington, at Georgetown, George Washington. I have been impressed by how Western-oriented they are, and how perfect their English is. Yet, when I have asked them what their future plans are, I have been struck by how many want to stay and work here in the US, rather than go back to Turkey. I have a sense that they are concerned about the future of Turkey, as was mentioned with the up-and-down economy, sort of like a roller coaster that lacks stability. There is also a sense that they are seeing a growing religious trend, about which they are uneasy—so they hold back, and remain here. Yet, by not returning to Turkey, they are only reinforcing this trend. Do you have any statistics or any information on how many students come to study in the West, without returning home?

QUESTIONER: I am Ali Aslan, Washington correspondent for *Zaman*. I have a few observations and two questions. I come from Turkey, from a conservative and more religious background. I do not see large tensions in Turkish society itself on questions of secularism and religion. In the streets, people walk side-by-side, as friends—both those who do cover their heads, and those who do not. Do you really think that secularism is in danger in Turkey? How do you prove that? The second question is this: I have been covering Washington for about 9 years now, and have observed a tendency here to assume that secularists are pro-American and that religious people are anti-American. Do you think religious people are more anti-American than secularists in Turkey?

HILLEL FRADKIN: There was one question to which I can respond, which is Mr. Aslan's last question about the difference of perception in Washington. It seems to me that at this point in Washington there is suspicion of both sides. I take your point that in normal life people may get along extremely well. But insofar as these are considered to be two different groups within the political elite, I think that people have felt for some time now that it is at least as possible for the nonreligious to be as anti-American as the AKP. When the AKP took office, I think there was a certain sense that the party might be more anti-American. Ultimately, the crisis over the war in Iraq engaged the entirety, at least as far as anyone here could tell, of the Turkish government. Thus, ever since then there has been a sense that anti-Americanism may be very broad-based in Turkey.

What is true is that there was a very long and very old relationship between the United States and Turkey, although more at a military level. The military level was not unimportant, since there were periods in the past during which many Americans served with Turks in the army. I think that there is a natural inclination to think positively of Turkish society from those times—they stood shoulder to shoulder with us, fought in the Korean War, and created the second-largest army in NATO. However, now I think that Americans do not know exactly where they stand with Turkey—and have a feeling that perhaps the same is true in reverse.

ZEYNO BARAN: In response to Ali's question I would like to say that I do not believe secularism is in danger in Turkey. Instead, I believe that there is a commitment to secularism among both religious and secular Turks alike. Even the conservative Muslims, apart from a very small group of radicals, have learned to appreciate secularism—which is both freedom *of* religion and freedom *from* religion.

If we look at anti-American sentiment in Turkey, which is shared by over 70 percent of the population, it clearly includes both secular and religious people. If there was a shift in perception in Washington, it was because of the Hamas visit, which was a big issue here. Due to the roots of the AKP and the way the party handled the visit, there were questions about its reliability. In the post-September 11 atmosphere, when there are people such as Ahmadinejad and others trying to build some sort of an Islamic alliance, there is of course increased sensibility in the US about what might be happening in Turkey.

RUŞEN ÇAKIR: I can easily say that the most dedicated, hard-line anti-Americans in Turkey are non-Islamic secularists—what we call the *laics*, those who are ideological

supporters of *laïcité*. These people, who are very anti-American, see any action by the United States as a conspiracy against Turkey—especially in Iraq, regarding the Kurds. Still, we cannot deny that in the Turkish hardcore Islamist movement, there have always been anti-American and anti-Semitic motives. I personally think that Erdoğan and his close friends, along with many in the AKP, long ago abandoned this anti-Semitic and anti-American worldview—though this does not mean that they do not criticize the United States. There are of course many differences on foreign policy, but I think that this is very normal.

On the question of danger: since my career began in studying Islamic movements, I have been asked this question maybe a thousand times, a few times even by conservative people such as Ali. I will never forget when I was asked by a German journalist from the *Tageszeitung* whether Turkey would become the next Iran. I said no, and then he really laughed, saying that I was like the Iranian leftists before that country's revolution. Yet, as I continue to repeat, the word “danger” itself is very dangerous. It carries with it everyone's ideological prejudices, as a result of which we are unable to discuss the real issues behind recent events such as the Alparslan shooting. The price for this inability will be paid by everybody in Turkey, from Islamists to the government to the army and so on. We should avoid discussing the “danger” paradigm in Turkey. Instead, we should try to understand what is really happening.

As a secular-minded person, I think that we should appeal to Muslims in order to show them that, for them, our system is also best. Unfortunately, in Turkey secularism is always a stick, not a carrot. Yet, I believe that secularism is a carrot. We should also point out examples such as that of Hizbullah, which killed and tortured so many Muslims in the name of religion. Instead of discussing the danger, we should for these reasons defend the secular values promoted by the founding father of our republic.

HILLEL FRADKIN: Thank you all for coming.