

The Establishment's Power

by Daniel Pipes

A trip to Turkey and Israel in mid-December impressed on me the surprisingly weak position in both countries of a mere prime minister. If the key institutions that make up the establishment are against the top fellow, as is the case presently with both Necmettin Erbakan and Binyamin Netanyahu, then he won't get very far. In the first case, this situation pleased me to no end; in the latter case, rather less so.

Turkey. Erbakan capped a three-decade career this summer by becoming prime minister of Turkey. A fundamentalist Muslim who rejects nearly all the premises of the Turkish state as founded over seventy years ago by Kemal Atatürk, Erbakan has worked within the system. Although he won only one-fifth of the popular vote in the elections a year ago, he did have a bare plurality and is now the senior partner in a coalition government. He comes to office with an ambitious agenda but has been thwarted at almost every turn by the fact that nearly the entire elite of Turkey—its intellectuals, business leaders, bureaucrats, and especially its military officers—subscribe to the secularist tenets associated with Atatürk.

When combined with the fact that both President Süleyman Demirel and Erbakan's coalition partner Tansu Çiller are secularist, it is exceedingly difficult for Erbakan to effect the sort of transformation of Turkish society he seeks. Thus, he keeps the manda-

tory picture of Atatürk in his office. He feels compelled to sign a military technology agreement with Israel, even as he portrays Israel as an enemy of his country. But perhaps most symbolic of his inability to effect a fundamentalist program is that he has twice since coming to power (in August and December) signed orders dismissing officers from the armed forces for fundamentalist religious activities—in other words, for sharing his own beliefs!

Given an entrenched opposition to Erbakan throughout the country's leading institutions, it seems likely that he will only transform Turkish society by staying in power for many years and managing slowly to create a counterestablishment that can take over from the existing establishment. Short of that, his rule seems likely to have little lasting effect.

Israel. Binyamin Netanyahu does not offer nearly so radical an alternative to the existing order. Nevertheless, he faces an establishment that has united against him no less than the Turkish one, and it has managed to make him bend to its will: Netanyahu has become the faithful executor of the very Oslo accords that he so vehemently railed against before coming to office. He just fulfills them more grudgingly and wins less credit for doing so.

Even accepting Oslo does him little good, for the establishment blames virtually any and every mishap on his government. This became clear in late Sep-

tember 1996 with the response of Shimon Peres, now leader of the opposition, to the Palestinian violence that accompanied a tunnel opening in Jerusalem. Peres declared that "The present situation was caused by a misguided [Israeli government] policy," and with this opened the hunting season on Netanyahu; President Clinton and most of the outside world (with the notable but now futile exception of Bob Dole) followed in assigning blame for the violence on the Likud Party.

The elite in Israel deride nearly every aspect of Netanyahu's prime ministry, from the great and important (the economic slowdown) to the trivial (his hopes to create an Israeli version of Camelot). In particular, the establishment focuses on the tensions that have arisen between Netanyahu and others—coalition partners, security chiefs, Yasir Arafat, the Arab states, the Europeans, the U.S. government. When further violence breaks out, it will almost certainly blame him for it.

It is interesting to note that Netanyahu himself acknowledges the depth of this opposition. When asked in a recent interview by *Ha'aretz* (often called *The New York Times* of Israel) why he acts as though

he were still in the opposition, he replied: "The opposition I encounter reminds me of the way the nomenclatura of the old regime used to behave. There is certainly an attempt being made to deny the legitimacy of the new administration, discredit the government and delegitimize me. . . . We face a situation of ideological monolithism, perhaps even ideological tyranny."

Although Netanyahu has important advantages over Erbakan (a much larger base of electoral support, a far less radical program to implement), he also does not seem likely to achieve his goals unless he manages to create a counterestablishment. In the same *Ha'aretz* interview, he laid out his plan to do just that: "I intend to help establish a fund in Israel along the lines of the Adenauer Fund in order to set up a number of research centers which will not be controlled by the government, but will create genuine ideological competition in Israel." But, as in the Turkish case, that could take a long time, and so appears to be an unlikely prospect.