



# Mustafa Kamal and Secularism

Mhd Ihsan Rifa'i<sup>1</sup>, Yosi Nofa<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>STAI-YDI Lubuk Sikaping Pasaman, Sumatra Barat, Indonesia

✉ [ihsanrifai64@gmail.com](mailto:ihsanrifai64@gmail.com)\*

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## Abstract

This study aims to find out the reasons why Mustafa Kemal Ataturk received a very high award from Turkey, the forms of awards given, and the extent of the influence of the award on Turkish society. The method used is a library research method, with a descriptive and analytical method approach. The results obtained are that there are several Turkish awards for Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, in the form of conferring the title "Ataturk", serious care for the Ataturk mausoleum (tomb building), and the presence of Ataturk icons in the form of pictures, statues, or the embedding of the word "Ataturk" in the name. -names of specific places in Turkey. Mustafa Kemal Ataturk was introduced as a very important figure in maintaining Turkey's independence and in reforming the modern Republic of Turkey, and was credited with creating a parliamentary system of government and laying solid foundations for democratizing life in Turkey. The effect of this award goes linearly with the goals of the Kemalists (followers of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk's understanding) with their kemalism, namely to continue the missions of Kemalism and to continue the struggle of modern Turkey by fostering a sense of Turkish nationalism. Based on the results of the research above, it can be concluded that the award given to Mustafa Kemal Ataturk is an active effort made by the kemalists in carrying out their missions. Although the mission carried out achieves the expected vision, there is also an opposite impact in the form of an Islamic revival.

## INTRODUCTION

The transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic involved a political reorganization based on radically different principles. Turkey became a nation-state modeled on the Western model, reflecting the crucial role of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk (1881-1938) in the Turkish Revolution (1918-1927) and in creating a Turkish national identity. (Trias, 2018) Mustafa Kemal threw out all elements of the Ottoman era except for some elements of past splendor and renewed it with westernization and secularism. (Itsaini, 2016) The long journey of the 1,292-year-long Islamic caliphate/sultanate system collapsed after the founding of the Republic of Türkiye on October 29, 1923, after which the capital was moved to Ankara on October 13.

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The founding of the Republic of Turkey has become controversial in the Islamic world, which according to...(Philip Hiro)This was due, first, to Turkey as the center of government. The Ottomans were a symbol of the Muslim struggle in various countries; second, the establishment of the Republic of Turkey was followed by systematic efforts to radically transform Islamic culture and politics towards secularism. This secularization, in the sense of restructuring government mechanisms and bureaucratization processes, led to conflict with the ulama who maintained their adherence to the previous system. The secularism that was then implemented in state law contradicted the ulama groups active at the time, resulting in tension between religion and secularism, which both desired a modern state for the Turkish people.(Musdalifah, 2018)

For Muslims, who consider Islam not merely a matter of the afterlife, the loss of the Ottoman Caliphate caused deep sorrow, given that throughout Islamic history after the Prophet Muhammad's death, the caliphate model had become a symbol of the political power of Muslims. As it developed, Turkey shifted the pendulum of history drastically. It was no longer known as a country that maintained the symbol of Islamic political unity, but rather as a country that blamed Islam for Turkey's decline in relation to Western civilization.

As retribution for this Islamic "mistake," Mustafa Kemal, the respected ruler at the time, emphasized the need to achieve Turkish glory without Islam, emulating the West without half-hearted measures. Consequently, Islamic symbols became forbidden, as they signified the past and backwardness..(Syahrul, 2015)

The secularism brought by Mustafa Kemal was the culmination of the empire's long history and the values it embodied. Revolutions that eliminated the Ottoman entity and identity are characteristic of revolutions everywhere, such as the Iranian Revolution that overthrew the monarchy, the French Revolution that established a republic, the Chinese Communist Revolution, the Cuban Revolution, and others. Because the essence of revolution is total and massive change, its fundamental goal is to replace the system of power. There can be no revolution without a movement that completely removes and replaces the previous fundamental system, power structure, social institutions, and value system..(Tim Spirit, 2020)

Secularization and Westernization, imposed coercively from above on society without distinguishing between cultures as instruments of society, gave rise to their own resistance. Furthermore, because it was solely focused on urban areas, it created a gap within society, resulting in the state elite being dominated by urban communities that were developing into modern, secular societies, while the majority of Turkey was rural and traditional. Ultimately, Mustafa Kemal's policies created two polar opposites that dichotomized each other: those who opposed secularism and those who supported and defended it.

According to Harun Nasution, Mustafa Kemal was a nationalist and admirer of the West..(Musdalifah, 2018).Repeatedly stated that he only wants to return Islam to its nature as an individual faith that is not institutionalized, stop the supremacy of scholars who issue political fatwas, and eliminate the clerical tradition, because in Islam itself there are no clerics and levels of clerical degrees. The modernization he did was to release the influence of dogma, superstition, and indifference to modernity which was considered a factor in Turkey's backwardness. However, for his opponents, he is considered to have brought a new dogma that wants to replace Islam.

## METHODS

This study attempts to answer important questions, such as why Mustafa Kemal Ataturk received such high honors from Turkey, the forms of honors given, and the extent to which these honors influenced Turkish society. To address these

issues, this study employed a literature review to seek more definitive answers to the previously discussed issues from the perspectives and perspectives of those who have previously conducted research related to this topic.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Biography of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk

Before Turkey became the Republic of Turkey in 1923, it was an Ottoman Islamic empire. This change in government was driven by the increasingly significant decline within the empire, which was also supported by the involvement of modernist and nationalist Turkish intellectuals seeking solutions for the benefit of Turkey. Ideas for reform emerged from intellectuals influenced by Western thought, which served as an example of a civilization capable of rising above its historical background and becoming a modern nation. (Philip, K)

The debate about the best way to restore the political integrity and effectiveness of the Ottoman military began to surface in the early 17th century. According to Syafiq A. Mughni, reformers at the time believed that the Ottoman Empire should adopt European practices, particularly in military education, organization, and administration. These efforts were intended to create changes in education, economics, and social life to support the formation of a modern state. In the 18th and especially the 19th centuries, the modernist group emerged openly and ultimately emerged victorious. (Musdalifah, 2018)

Mustafa Kemal Ataturk was originally Mustafa bin Ali Riza Effendi. He was born in Salonika, Ahmed Subashi District, which is now in the Greek region, in 1881. During his education he received the title behind his name "Kemal" which means perfect, because he was known as a very intelligent student in various subjects. Furthermore, the title "Ataturk" (Father of Turkey) which is an honorary title given by his supporters (Kemalist) as a symbol of the Father of Fighters and Proclaimer of the Republic of Turkey, was also awarded the title "Ghazi" (victory) which means the savior of the Dardanelles and Turkey.

Mustafa's father, Ali Riza Effendi, was a customs official in a government agency. After being transferred to a small town on the slopes of Mount Olympus, some distance from his original location, he resigned from his job and became a timber trader. In his final years, in dire financial circumstances and in poor health, he died when Mustafa was seven years old. His wife, Zubaida Hanim, was deeply religious and desired her son to become a devout scholar. (Khoiriyah, 2008).

Mustafa's early education involved enrolling him in a madrasah (Islamic school) at the request of his mother, who wanted him to memorize the Quran and become a religious teacher. He enrolled in the Fatimah Mullah Kadin school, a leading Islamic educational institution in Salonika. However, he did not stay long there because he disliked the school. He hated reading and writing Arabic and rebelled when told to sit cross-legged on the floor. Eventually, his parents transferred him to the Semsî Afendi public school. (M Alfani, 2015).

After graduating from elementary school, instead of following his mother's wishes to continue to a civilian school, Mustafa, without her knowledge, enrolled in a military preparatory school and was accepted there in 1893. After that, he continued until graduating from the Ottoman Military Academy in Istanbul in 1905. It was this military school that later influenced his insight and inclinations in politics later in life. Departing from there, he was then assigned to strengthen the Army in Damascus, Syria, and moved from place to place, even becoming a prominent figure in the war of independence.

When Mustafa Kemal was studying in Istanbul, it was a time of widespread challenges to the absolute power of Sultan Abdul Hamid and the formation of secret societies among politicians and among young men in military schools. Through a

friend named Ali Fethi, Mustafa Kemal was introduced to the world of politics and was encouraged to deepen his French language, which eventually enabled him to read and understand the writings of French philosophers, such as Rousseau, Auguste Comte, Montesquieu, and Voltaire. He was even thrown into prison and exiled for his fanaticism in politics. After his release, Mustafa began a career in the military, joining the Fifth Army in Damascus, then being assigned to the Third Army in Macedonia after being promoted to the rank of Major. (Imbron, 2011).

In 1915, during the Dardanelles/Galipoli offensive, Mustafa Kemal had just been promoted to colonel. He was hailed as a hero for successfully repelling the Anglo-French forces. The attackers withdrew from Galipoli in 1916, the same year Mustafa Kemal was promoted to general after liberating two major provinces in eastern Turkey from Russian troops. (Triyas, 2018) which also led to his appointment as Minister of Defense. (Ahmad 2016). In between his military career, Mustafa Kemal was also active in politics. Among other things, in 1906 he founded an underground opposition group called the Vatan (Fatherland) Association, which was later developed in his birthplace, Salonika, under the name Vatan ve Hurriyet (Fatherland and Freedom). According to him, opening branches of the association in areas such as Jerusalem and Beirut would prevent the Turkish revolution from emerging, because the population was Arab and the area was far from Istanbul. In 1907, the Union and Progress Association was formed, Mustafa Kemal took part in this association and resigned from the association he founded. (*Homeland and Freedom*) However, his relationship with the leaders of the association was not harmonious, until finally he decided to resign from there. (Triyas, 2018). The defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War I resulted in the loss of all its territories in the Middle East, except for the traditional Turkish territories around Asia Minor. On May 19, 1919, Mustafa Kemal's troops landed at the Black Sea port of Samsun, starting the Greco-Turkish War (also known as the War of Independence). (Harun, 2003).

Mustafa Kemal died on November 10, 1938, at Dolmabahçe Palace, Istanbul, and was buried in Ankara on November 21. Initially, Mustafa Kemal's grave was in the Ankara Ethnography Museum, but on November 10, 1953, it was moved to a mausoleum in downtown Ankara. (Muhammad Iqbal and Amien Husein Nasution, 2017). His name is great among his supporters, but he left a lot of regret and heartache among religious circles (Islamists, as those who opposed Kemalism) who branded him as the person most responsible for its secularization. (Musdalifah, 2018). Although his successors actively pursued reforms based on the principles of Kemalism, they failed to eradicate the religious (Islamic) sentiment deeply embedded in Turkish society. Therefore, it is not surprising that movements sought to restore the Islamic system and spirit in Turkey.

### **Kemalism and Its Propaganda**

Kemalism is a series of reform policies initiated by Mustafa Kemal that later became the state ideology. Its foundations were outlined in the party's 1931 program, namely republicanism, secularism, nationalism, populism, etatism, and revolutionism. After Mustafa Kemal's death, the military, judges, and prosecutors became the vanguard of the Kemalist ideology, particularly secularism. Each institution worked in its own field to safeguard this ideology. The military claimed to be the guardian of Mustafa Kemal's legacy and would confront any groups deemed to be in conflict with the state's secularist concept. (M Sya'roni Rofii, 2019)

The Turkish military has deep roots in society. Its influence predates the establishment of the republic. Historically, the military is Turkey's oldest social institution. It is the only organization to have survived the traditional to modern era,

inheriting the spirit and traditions of the Turks in Central Asia from the Ottoman Empire (1299–1918) to the Republic of Turkey.

The role of the military in modernization is also clearly documented. The military emerged in the late Ottoman period as “the strongest, most fervent advocate of modernization.” For many Western-educated Ottoman military leaders, modernization required a government based on pluralism. Turkish military leaders, who admired Western civilization and democracy, believed that the establishment of liberal democracy for example, the establishment of a pluralistic political order representing all major social groups was integral to becoming a modern society. (Triyas, 2018)

Its crucial role in the Turkish revolution since the Young Turks gave the Turkish military a powerful legitimacy to enter and control the ruling elite. Mustafa Kemal's charisma as a military leader and power holder further strengthened the military's dominance in Turkish politics. Furthermore, its alliance with the powerful civil bureaucracy fully supported the implementation of Kemalism's program of etatism, secularism, modernism, authoritarianism, and centralization, aimed at uniting the entire nation.

become a homogeneous community entity by focusing on urban area development. (Syahrul Hidayat, 2015). The military's intervention in the civil government was not primarily based on power politics or military interests alone, their intervention in the political realm was more due to their unique position as guardians, guardians of the state's widely accepted and legitimate revolutionary ideology, namely Kemalism.

With the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, the military began to position itself in daily politics for administrative reasons. On the one hand, the role of the military elite in maintaining Turkey's existence and in the modernization process in the late Ottoman and early Republican eras was generally the primary reason for military intervention, as it was the primary actor in safeguarding and protecting the state from external and internal enemies. On the other hand, the military was also seen as the sole legitimate guarantor of Kemalist ideology.

Turkey's Kemalist military elite acted as guardians of civilian authority, political stability, and the constitution, as Mustafa Kemal Atatürk clearly stated: "The Turkish military is the protector of the state with its Kemalist traditions." Under other circumstances, the military would feel the need to intervene in civilian affairs when it perceived the civilian government had deviated from the path established by Atatürk (particularly secularism). They consistently asserted that their intervention was aimed at maintaining secularism, restoring stability, and, in specific cases, combating Kurdish separatism. All of this, for the military, was a sacred duty. (Triyas, 2018)

From the founding of the Republic of Turkey in 1922 to 1924, Mustafa, with military support, asserted the separation of religion (Islam) from the state. He envisioned the establishment of the Turkish state as a symbol of a Turkish nation with full sovereignty and independence from foreign interference. He used Turkey's decline from the Middle Ages to its defeat in World War I as a pretext to marginalize Islam. (Syahrul Hidayat, 2015).

The cult of Mustafa Kemal grew and strengthened after his death. He was presented as the father of the Turkish nation and as a savior. Indoctrination in schools and universities (where "History of the Turkish Revolution" became a compulsory subject in 1934) focused on him with extraordinary intensity, and avoided any association with his discredited ideologies, such as fascism, national socialism, and Marxism-Leninism, allowing his personality cult to survive changing political climates. (Tabrani ZA, 2016) If Mustafa Kemal Atatürk had not come with his ideas of modernism, Türkiye today might be like the Taliban in Afghanistan—

that is the propaganda that was once built by the Kemalist regime to influence public perception so that they would forget the Ottoman legacy.

During this period, the golden legacy of the Ottoman Empire was largely ignored and replaced by the history of the Turkish ancestors, the Hittite civilization, which existed in Anatolia during the pre-Christian era. In contrast, discussions of the Ottoman Empire tended to focus on the dynasty's decline and defeats in wars against Britain and Russia. This hegemonic approach by the CHP (Kemalist) regime systematically spread its influence.

The ultra-nationalist Kemalist group has a feeling of superiority over other nations and considers the figure of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk as a perfect ideologue without any exception. That (M Sya'roni Rofii, 2019). Meanwhile, on the other hand, religious groups consider Islam as a complete teaching and feel that Islam has become an inseparable part of Turkish culture.

### **The Rise of Turkish Nationalism**

In terms of identity, namely secularist and Islamist, both have their own stances. Regarding whether the recognition of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk influenced their secular or Islamist identities, it is unclear whether there has been a significant shift in either group's stance.

This is seen in the attitude of the state and its people who when faced with things that offend Mustafa Kemal, such as the commemoration of his death on November 10, they (Islamists and secularists) still attend or commemorate it; about how icons featuring Mustafa Kemal's figure are displayed everywhere, they still carry out their rights as Turkish citizens, namely to respect and honor their national hero by not disturbing or damaging these attributes. And they live in a secular state environment with strict supervision of Kemalist values (especially secular ones), Islamists also follow the rules of their secular state.

A more visible influence related to this is their sense of nationalism, which aims to bring Turkey forward and become more modern. This is as President Erdoğan once expressed in his speech on the anniversary of Atatürk's death in 2019, emphasizing that the Turkish nation must understand Atatürk's teachings and introduce Atatürk to the Turkish generation as a true patriot. The direction of this statement was his effort to adapt to the secular state and at the same time desire for the Turkish generation to have a high spirit of nationalism, similar to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. As discussed previously, Mustafa Kemal's influence in Turkish society was due to his efforts as a foundational figure in the development of modern Turkey. This, in turn, fostered an awareness of modernity, especially among Islamists. The rejection of modernization through secularization and Westernization was a critique of the inequality between the cultures and religions of the majority of the Turkish people at that time.

It cannot be denied, however, that Mustafa Kemal's reform and secularization movement overlooked something: its failure to understand the role Islam played in shaping the Turkish nation's character. They forgot that Islam, in its entirety, possesses a teaching that directly engages humanity in dialogue about the essence of "human existence on the world stage."

However, due to a lack of awareness of the essential tenets of Islamic teachings, the solutions adopted to life's problems have disrupted the well-being of Turkish Muslims in general due to the inconsistency between the Turkish national background and the decisions taken. From an Islamic perspective, development or modernization is a programmed and planned process aimed at improving the standard and quality of human life, achieving not only worldly happiness but also happiness in the afterlife.

## CONCLUSION

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk is seen as a very important figure in the process of modernization of the Turkish nation through the ideology of nationalism and reform of the modern Turkish Republic. He succeeded in maintaining Turkey's independence, pioneering the establishment of the Republic of Turkey by launching a parliamentary system of government and laying strong foundations for democratic life in Turkey, fostering the self-confidence of its people as an independent nation, as well as his role in changing or shifting traditional mindsets. Mustafa Kemal won the hearts of the Turkish people also cannot be separated from the efforts of the Kemalists through propaganda launched in introducing the figure of Mustafa Kemal and his ideology intensively. Some forms of appreciation given to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk include the title "Atatürk" given by the Grand National Assembly of Turkey in 1934, the mausoleum (tomb) of Atatürk in Ankara which is very well managed by the state, as well as the face and name of Atatürk which are displayed and made a source of pride. The impact of this award is the recognition of the figure of Mustafa Kemal and his understanding which resulted in the survival of secularism in Turkey which is in line with the goals of Kemalism, the emergence of the rise of Islam as its antithesis, and the rise of Turkish nationalist awareness as an alternative to the two previously contradictory things (Kemalism and Islamism).

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