

What is Behind Erdogan's Purge?

by Jerry Gordon (September 2016)



Erdogan at Coup Victims Funeral, July 2016

When we wrote about the mid-July 2016 failed Turkish coup, it was apparent that autocratic President Erdogan wanted to vanquish all opposition and conduct a purge that rivals Stalin's in the 1930's. By doing so, no one would oppose his perfecting an Islamic Ottoman Republic to supplant the secular constitution of the Turkish Republic founder Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. In the process, he would remove secular opposition and institutions at the foundation of Kemalist democracy. Subsequent developments culminating in his purge following the July 2016 coup suggest that he is primed to overthrow Turkey's secular traditions, the military and social democratic opposition that supported the Kemalist Constitution. In its place there would emerge a Constitution under Sharia principles. His purge is laced with paranoia and xenophobic excess and wild accusations about those in the West, especially here in America. Turkey has been a Member of NATO since 1952 and under the Charter's Article 5 could call upon all members if attacked.



Erdogan at 93rd Anniversary of the Treaty of Lausanne, July 23, 2016

Erodgan's Rise to Power as an Islamist

Erdogan, the former Mayor of Istanbul, founded and led the rise of the conservative Islamic Justice and Development Party (AKP). At Marmara University in Istanbul, where he earned a management degree and played professional soccer, he made the acquaintance of [Necmettin Erbakan](#), Turkey's first Islamist prime minister. He led the Refah or Justice Party for one year, 1996 to 1997. Erbakan wanted to leave NATO, end agreements with Israel and advocated closer relations with both Syria and Iran. That inspired Erdogan to join his Islamist movement. He was [convicted](#) in 1998 under a law in Turkey for espousing religious hatred in a poem. He served four months of a ten month sentence. He wrote:

The mosques are our barracks, the domes our helmets, the minarets our bayonets and the faithful our soldiers.

Then there is his riposte about moderate Islam captured in an August 2007 Turkish TV presentation. Translated by MEMRI, it [resonated](#) across the spectrum of Salafist, Wahhabist and Muslim Brotherhood preachers as the embodiment of Political Islam:

Speaking at Kanal D TV's Arena program, PM Erdogan commented on the term "moderate Islam," often used in the West to describe AKP and said, "These descriptions are very ugly, it is offensive and an insult to our religion. There is no moderate or immoderate Islam. Islam is Islam and that's it."

In 2001, the Ankara Parliament changed the Constitution so that Erdogan could run for a seat in the general election the following year. In November 2002, he and the AKP were swept into power. Ironically, he had an ally in that electoral victory, Sheik Fethullah Gulen, who Erdogan is now seeking to have the US extradite on unproven grounds that the latter organized the failed coup in July, 2016. Initially, when first elected as head of the ruling AKP in parliament he espoused the view that he was a pro-Western Islamist who supported NATO membership and sought accession to the EU. The later has been a tough slog in view of his regime's human rights violations especially from 2007 on. Speaking on the 93rd anniversary of the Treaty of Lausanne on July 23, 2016, which abrogated the Treaty of Sevres ending the Ottoman Caliphate and concluding the Turkish War of Independence, Erdogan [referred](#) to the failed coup:

In this regard, it is easier to understand the contents of the Treaty of Lausanne, which are based on the basic principles of the Republic of Turkey including national will and democracy. The determined stance of our people against different treason attempts by various groups is the clearest proof showing that our country will proceed on the path of democracy, freedom and development.

Erdogan accuses the Gulenist Terror Organization (GTO) – his term for the Gulen Hizmat (service) Movement led by his former ally, Sheik Fethullah Gulen, of being the eminence grise behind the coup.

Scope of Erdogan's Purge

Erdogan's purge rivals that of Stalin in terms of the breathless magnitude of paranoia instilling xenophobia in his loyal AKP followers. He has sacked nearly 1,500 Military officers, among them 150 generals and Admirals. He has sacked 2,800 members of the Judiciary and fired over 40,000 educators and academics, virtually closing down hundreds of Gulen sponsored private secondary schools and dozens of affiliated universities. This after a decade-long expansion of state sponsored technical colleges and universities, many of them established in the mold of his conservative Islamic views. Many of those threatened academics with foreign connections have sought or are seeking bolt holes in foreign university programs in the EU and US. Gulen private secondary school administrators and staff might rush for the exits seeking H1B visas to staff the problematic network of 140 US Gulen Movement Charter Schools in the US.

He is freeing 38,000 convicted felons to make room in the country's prisons for suspected Gulenists and the secular opposition in the military, media, judiciary, and education. In effect he is creating an internal gulag. He indicted the head and leaders of the Kurdish-led secular People's Democratic Party (HDP). Doubtless that was for the effrontery of having joined with the other secular parties depriving his AKP party of super majority control of the Ankara Parliament.

Erdogan has accused NATO and the US CENTCOM commanders of assisting the coup plotters. Laughably, his AKP minions have accused convicted US serial murderer Scott Peterson of complicity in the coup.

Not unlike Hitler, he reached out to Russian President Putin to hold a reconciliation meeting in Moscow on August 9. Some analysts maintain it may have been in gratitude for communicating to Turkish intelligence the onset of the coup. This followed his earlier apology for shooting down a Russian SU-24 fighter in October 2015 – an act that triggered retaliatory sanctions by Russia against the Turkish economy.



Gen. Ilker Basbug, Former Turkish Military Chief, Istanbul 2014, Source: Reuters

The Ergenekon Conspiracy Show Trial – Precursor to Erdogan's Great Purge

In 2008, Erdogan [concocted](#) accusations of a coup attempt against senior military, journalists, lawyers, academics and others suggesting they belonged to a mythic organization, the Ergenekon Group. Charges were brought by state prosecutors against 275 accused on the grounds that they were engaged in a conspiracy plotting in 2003-2004 to overthrow the Erdogan government. Trials were conducted on suspicions that there was a "deep state" seeking to foster unrest leading to an overthrow. Over the period from 1960 to 1997, the Turkish military removed civilian governments in four bloodless coups under Constitutional provisions charging the military with being protectors of the Kemalist democracy. The predecessor Refah (Justice) led Islamist government was ousted in 1997. Hundreds of military officers were investigated over a five year period from 2008 to 2013 in both the Ergenekon and companion "Sledgehammer" cases. The Sledgehammer case began in 2010 and involved 200 Turkish navy and air force officers. Prosecutors were seeking long sentences of 15 to 20 years for conspiracy to overthrow the Erdogan government in 2003-2004.

Individual trials were held outside Istanbul amid police breaking up protests with water cannons and tear gas. Convictions were handed down in 2013. Among those falsely accused was the then Chief of Staff of the Turkish military, General Iker Basbug who served from 2008 to 2010. He and sixteen others were given life sentences, many others were given long terms. However in 2014 the Constitutional court [overturned](#) Gen. Basbug's conviction on technical grounds releasing him from prison. In March 2015, 236 military officers were similarly released when the coup plot convictions collapsed in the "Sledgehammer" case and were [overturned](#) again on technical grounds.

In April 2016, a Turkish appeals court overturned those convictions in both the Ergenekon and Sledgehammer cases on the grounds that the clandestine Ergenekon organization was unproven. The appeal rulings could lead to retrials. In the wake of the July coup, there may be the distinct possibility that those released as a result of the appellate ruling like Gen. Basbug might be detained as participants in the new mythology of the Gulenist Terrorist Organization-led coup. Such is the paranoia rampant in Erdogan's Turkey.



Rize, Turkey – Erdoğan's home town on Black Sea Source: *Wall Street Journal*

Purging Academia in Erdoğan's Turkey

As we noticed earlier, tens of thousands of academics in Turkey's state and private educational systems have been fired or are preparing to leave Turkey before they are detained. It is all part of Erdoğan's strategy to purge secular ideology and Western views. A review by the *Wall Street Journal* on August 25, 2016 plumbed the depths of Erdoğan's remaking of academia along Islamist doctrinal lines, "[In University Purge, Turkey's Erdoğan Hits Secularists and Boosts Conservatives.](#)"

For those academics in elite secular or Gulenist universities and technical colleges versus those in institutions favored by Erdoğan their treatment and futures are starkly different. Emblematic of those running for their lives and futures was the case of a 42 year old woman Nil Mutluer, former chair of the sociology department at the Istanbul Nisantasi University, who escaped the Erdoğan post coup dragnet. She was one of the 1,000 academics who signed a letter in January 2016 promoting peace negotiations between Erdoğan's regime and the PKK. She decamped quickly with her three year old daughter for an interim academic post at the Free University in Berlin. Repeat that experience thousands of times over and you will see the magnitude of the paranoia upending academia

and free speech in Erdogan's Turkey.

Contrast that with this comment of 32 year-old US-trained assistant professor Sedat Gumus at the bastion of Turkish Islamism, Necmettin Erbakan University in Konya, who said:

Elitist professors are looking at the world with Western glasses—they're not really thinking about what the Turkish people want and need. The current situation might be a golden opportunity for Turkey to write a new constitution and with it reform the higher-education system.

The magnitude of the purge in academia is stunning. The *WSJ* noted:

The Education Ministry dismissed more than 27,000 staff and Turkey's Council of Higher Education forced all 1,577 university deans to resign, saying only those with no ties to coup plotters would be reinstated. The university watchdog also ordered each university to list faculty suspected of links to Mr. Gulen and has suspended 4,225 academics. The 15 Gulen-linked universities have been sealed like crime scenes.

Over the past decade under successive Erdogan governments, university and technical colleges have trebled, the preponderance favoring conservative institutions like Necmettin Erbakan University founded in the mold of the late Islamist Premier and Erdogan mentor.



Mustafa Kemal Atatürk

Is Syncretic Anti-Semitism behind vanquishing Kemalism?

A *New York Times* article, headline trumpeted, "[Erdogan seizes failed coup in Turkey as a chance to supplant Ataturk.](#)" The message is Erdogan is determined to stamp out secular Kemalism from the Constitution replacing it with a Sharia version making Islam paramount and him the virtual neo-Sultan of a revanchist Ottoman Caliphate. *This New York Times* article reveals the objective of Erdogan's coup or putsch of July 15, 2016, which is to supplant the secular Constitution of the founder of the Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. Ataturk had imposed draconian suppression of Islam, mosques, clergy and shariah compliant clothing for men and women and espoused secular education. The Turkish Constitution had a provision that established the country's military as the guardians of Kemalist democracy. Erdogan and his fervent AKP fundamentalist Muslim followers want to re-write the Turkish Constitution to embody Islamic shariah principles. Unlike ousted former Egyptian President and Muslim Brotherhood leader, Mohammed Morsi, Erdogan's purge may crush the Kemalists in the country's military.

However, there may be another reason for supplanting Kemalism and Ataturk: syncretic anti-Semitism, the Islamic equivalent of the Spanish Inquisition. The *Forward*, a national Jewish weekly, recently published a report on the dwindling Donme cult of 17th Century Jewish ancestors who converted to Islam as fervent followers of the false Jewish Messiah, Shabtai Zvi. See *Forward* article, "[Turkey Cracks Down and an Ancient Messianic Sect Burrows Deep.](#)" The largest contingent of Donme, Turkish for converts, was concentrated in Salonika under the Ottoman Empire. Ataturk had attended Donme schools in Salonika where he grew up; hence there was the suspicion that he may have been Donme. In the great population transfer of Greek Orthodox Christians for Muslims in Salonika following the Greco-Turkish War in 1919-1922, the Donme were deemed Muslims and sent with other Muslims in Greece to Smyrna. Thus, one motivation of Erdogan and his fervent AKP followers is to eliminate the taint of the alleged syncretic Jewish cultist influences on Turkish Republic founder, Ataturk. Bizarre as it sounds, then much about Erdogan is bizarre and decidedly paranoid.



Sheik Fethullah Gulen

Turning former ally Sheik Fethullah Gulen into a despised non-Turk enemy of Erdogan

Erdogan and Sheik Fethullah Gulen were allies back in 2002 when they conspired to win a super majority for the AKP party in the Ankara Parliament. In 2013, the Gulenists in the national police and prosecutors, with the aid of major news dailies controlled by Hizmat cultists, created the controversy over the Erdogan family corruption. Erdogan has used that traitorous act to purge Gulenists from the police, judiciary, military and the educational sector by the tens of thousands. He has endeavored to use legal resources in the US to discredit the charter schools operated by the Gulen movement and funded by American taxpayers. As we have seen, he has accused his former ally of being the eminence grise behind the coup demanding that the US Administration send him back to Turkey for prosecution.

Earlier this year, Erdogan had gone so far as to retain the services of a Washington, DC law firm, Amsterdam Partners, to file a complaint with the Texas Education Agency against the 40 charter schools of the Harmony network, controlled by Gulen movement émigrés and which receive more than \$135 million in

taxpayer funding. The complaint also alleged among other issues that many of the Turkish school administrators and faculty employed under H1B visas were unqualified. There are more than 160 Gulen movement controlled charter schools in the US. Globally, the Gulen movement has more than 1000 schools in 100 countries.

One means of discrediting former allies is to create the myth that they are not Turks, but Armenians and Jews. That is evident in the xenophobic attacks on Sheik Fethullah Gulen and reflected in the bizarre allegations against him by Erdogan's AKP loyalists in an *A-L Monitor* article, "[Is Gulen an Armenian?](#)" They are excoriating him on the trumped up charge that he is the son of an Armenian father and Jewish mother – defaming him that he's not a real Turkish Islamist.

Note these examples of the xenophobic paranoia promulgated by AKP loyalists seeking to suggest that Gulen is neither an Islamist, nor a Turk:

On June 6, the pro-AKP Ottoman Clubs (Osmanli Ocaklari) proclaimed Gulen an Armenian, citing branches in his family tree and his background. Others claimed that the so-called Fethullah Gulen Terror Organization, a term Ankara uses to refer to Gulen followers, was influential in the German parliament's June 2 decision to recognize the Armenian genocide.

[...]

Yeni Soz columnist Can Kemal Ozer wrote... He is not a Muslim, but a member of the Vatican Council." Another columnist made mention of a few terror organizations, including the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), and argued that they are "Armenian establishments."

The largest rally in Turkish history at Yenikapi, Istanbul, on Aug. 8, 2016 witnessed these excesses by political leaders. Nationalist Action Party leader Devlet Bahçeli referred to those deemed to be the (non-Muslim) enemy and a threat to Turkey as "Byzantine seeds." Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım resorted to "crusaders' army," and Erdogan described them as a "flock of infidels." Also in attendance was Kemal Kilicdaroglu, head of the CHP, Republican party in the Ankara Parliament.

Thus, Erdogan, not unlike Stalin during the Great purge of the 1930's, is turning Turkish Sheik Gulen into a despised non-Muslim, an Armenian, the object

of Ottoman genocide, and, lest we forget, a despised Jew, allegedly on his mother's side.



Kemal Kilicdaroglu, leader of the Republican (CHP) Party in the Ankara Parliament

Even the secular Parliament opposition isn't safe in Erdogan's Turkey

The July 2016 coup has spawned an assassination attempt on the head of the leading opposition. On August 25, 2016 CHP leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu and entourage traveling in the Northeastern Black Sea region of Turkey came under attack. A security vehicle preceding his motorcade was shot. In the ensuing shootout three police officers were injured, two critically. Turkish Interior Minister Efkân Ala confirmed the attack, saying, "My friends told me certainly that [it is] the PKK and the operation against them has started." Kilicdaoglu, who attended the monster solidarity rally at Yenakapi, August 8th had earlier been advised by Ala that there might be assassination attempts. Kilicdaroglu had also called for the extradition of Sheik Gulen.

Conclusion

The chronicle of Erdogan's purge in Turkey is still open. No one who opposes his quest for an Islamic Republic and dismantling Kemalist democracy will stand. The country is riven by suspicion and fear of arrests in the middle of the night, eerily similar to those carried out by equally paranoid Stalin during the

1930's. The paranoia and xenophobia are splitting the country asunder. No dissenting minority will be tolerated. Symbolism of that is everywhere. On Friday, August 26, 2016, President Erdogan and Prime Minister Binali Yildirim attended the dedication of a third bridge across the Bosphorus, another public display of contempt for the failed coup. The bridge dedication was troubling to the significant Sufi minority in Turkey, the Alevi, as [noted](#) by *The National*:

Back in 2013, the government announced that it was naming the bridge after 16th century Ottoman sultan Yavuz Selim, also known as Selim the Grim. The news infuriated Turkey's Alevi community, thousands of who were killed on Selim's orders. Adhering to a Sufi-influenced form of Shiite Islam, Alevi make up around 15 per cent of Turkey's population.

Add the egalitarian Alevi to Turkey's Kurds and secularists, you will begin to see the contempt for minorities under the conservative Sunni Islamism promoted by Erdogan and his legions of AKP followers.

Also see Jerry Gordon's collection of interviews, [here](#).

To help New English Review continue to publish timely and interesting articles like this one, please click [here](#).

If you have enjoyed this article and want to read more by Jerry Gordon, please click [here](#).

Jerry Gordon is a also regular contributor to our community blog. To read his entries, please click [here](#).