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#### The End of Erdogan's Islamization?

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Big-time trials in Turkey are rarely without some kind of political intrigue, but by now it has become clear that the vast corruption scandal involving several dozen people close to the very top of the Turkish power elite, including members of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's personal coterie, could well end up a watershed event in modern Turkish history.

Informed observers generally agree on its significance, but there is a curious silence about the events from the mainstream media and the pinstripes at Foggy Bottom.

This is understandable in part because the corruption scandal has also laid bare the dismal failure of the Obama administration's policy toward Ankara -- a policy based on the wishful assumption that Turkey is a successful Islamic democracy and a model for other Muslim countries to follow. This sanguine, delusional hope had Secretary of State Hillary Clinton praising the Erdogan government for having made "tremendous progress in freedom of speech and freedom of religion and human rights" in March 2009, just as Turkey was in the midst of the world's largest campaign of jailing journalists.

Revelations from the investigations confirm beyond a doubt the transformation of our NATO ally into both a sponsor of jihadis in Syria and an accomplice of Tehran's regime. Just this week, on January 14, Turkish police units raided the offices of the Turkish Humanitarian Relief Foundation -- a group linked to Syrian jihadis and, via its involvement in the infamous Gaza flotilla, known to be friendly with Erdogan. Among the arrested were said to be two major al-Qaeda operatives, including a former Guantanamo Bay detainee. Hours after the arrests, the two police chiefs directing the raids were dismissed from their jobs by Erdogan's government (just the latest of more than 500 police officials and prosecutors fired since the corruption probe began).

The event is enough to confirm the still-powerful Erdogan's sympathy for radical Islamism and jihadi terror, but it also hints at a serious problem for him: The coalition that's promoted his Islamizing campaign could be splitting into two.

Unexpectedly, on December 25, the minister of environment and urban planning, Erdogan Bayraktar, was forced to resign and pointed the finger directly at the prime minister, claiming that it was Erdogan himself who had "ordered all the construction projects that are questioned by the probe."

Erdogan, as is his wont, angrily denied all accusations and fingered "external conspirators" and their domestic "subcontractors," all as part of a sinister anti-Turkish plot.

It is the "subcontractors" that present the thorniest problem for Erdogan, because unlike the "external conspirators," they are real, powerful, and on the warpath. Observers of the Turkish political scene have known for a long time that the Fethullah Gulen movement plays a crucial role as a reliable partner of the AKP in the steady Islamization of the country. It was also widely known in Turkey, though not in the West, that Gulen followers were a huge presence in the security organs, the justice system, and the police -- according to U.S. diplomats, as early as 2006, 80 percent of senior police posts were filled by Gulen supporters. They played a dominant role in key Erdogan achievements, such as suppressing the military, curtailing freedom of speech, and brutally putting down the Gezi protests.

And yet much of the current commentary on Turkey in the West paints a bogus, politically correct picture of the Gulen movement. A recent Wall Street Journal op-ed described it as "an opaque, Sufi-inspired group known for its Islamic piety." In fact, there is nothing opaque about the intents of the Gulenists, nor do they practice Sufism, a mystic, esoteric, apolitical, and peaceful practice of Islam that encourages the devout to seek a personal knowledge of God. Instead, Gulen's movement is akin to a modern religion such as Scientology that demands total lifelong dedication and complete obedience to the "master teacher." It preaches a radical version of Islam and ultimately aims to destroy the secular order in Turkey and beyond. It is easy to see all of that if one goes behind the movement's carefully cultivated façade, with its pious verbiage of interfaith dialogue, peace, and Islamic enlightenment, and looks directly into the writings of Gulen that inform his movement's ideology.

For instance, in a book describing the brilliance of Mohammed as a military commander, the master teacher explains that Islamic enmity toward the infidels is actually a form of compassion toward them, because by being non-believers they commit injustice. This type of "compassion" evidently justifies Muslims' conquering and killing the infidels. It is, writes Gulen, "incumbent upon those who believe in One God and worship Him faithfully to secure justice in the world. Islam calls this responsibility jihad." There is no doubt as to what the ultimate purpose of jihad is in Gulen's view: "It seeks to convey the Message of Islam to all human beings in the world and to establish a model Islamic community on a worldwide basis." Less-sophisticated jihadis call this simply the Caliphate.

Gulen is also quite specific about the tactics to be employed by his followers, instructing them in internal communications how to infiltrate the government: "With the patience of a spider, we lay our web to wait for people to get caught in the web." In a 1999 movement video, he advises: "Wait until such time, as you have got all the state power . . ."

The Gulenist movement is, then, hardly less radical than Erdogan's AKP, but the falling-out between the two groups is real. It's most evident in Erdogan's decision to do away with the thousands of lucrative private schools, known as dersane in Turkish, that prepare students for university-admissions exams. The Gulen movement is said to control 75 percent of these schools, which reportedly number 3,100, employ 100,000 Turks, and educate 2 million students at a time. They represent huge opportunities for recruitment and indoctrination for Gulen's movement and, with tuitions over \$11,000 a year, a huge source of income, too.

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The war between the two Islamist camps is thus much less about ideology, as many Western pundits aver, than it is about power and money. This is more like a turf fight between two Mafia dons than a feud between two different sects of Islam. The stakes are particularly high for Erdogan: He is, in effect, the real target of the corruption probe the Gulenists launched, and there is more than a kernel of truth in his characterizing it as a "political assassination attempt." It is often forgotten that, as the American Enterprise Institute scholar Michael Rubin has noted, Erdogan is still the subject of a dozen corruption investigations from his tenure as Istanbul's mayor -- they have been suspended because of parliamentary immunity, but could quickly be reopened once he is out of power. The prospect of facing jail time from the corruption probe would at least partially explain his willingness to use all manner of harsh extrajudicial and unconstitutional methods against the Gulenists.

No less is at stake for Gulen. Erdogan's far-reaching purges of top police and judiciary officials have already weakened the movement, even before a widely expected second massive assault on the movement's members and the closing of its prep schools takes place. In case one is tempted to empathize with Erdogan's targets, it is worth remembering that the Gulenists were the prosecutors and police thugs that sent hundreds of journalists and military members to jail on trumped-up Ergenekon and Sledgehammer charges and suppressed 2013's peaceful Gezi protests with unprecedented brutality.

A new and important twist to the conflict: A few days before the end of 2013, the top political adviser to the prime minister, Yalcin Akdogan, accused the Gulen movement of supporting the trials of the "Ergenekon" and "Sledgehammer" conspiracies, which sent hundreds of top military members and veterans, along with many journalists and civilians, to jail on completely bogus charges. Only three days later, in the military's first overtly political act in a long time, it filed a criminal complaint for a retrial of these officers, contending they had been convicted with fabricated and manipulated evidence. While this is undoubtedly an AKP gesture designed to win the support of the military, few in Turkey have forgotten Erdogan's eager support of the Ergenekon and Sledgehammer trials, and his full support for the kangaroo courts that sent the military "conspirators" to prison.

Though we're still at an early stage in the feud, two conclusions could already be safely drawn: With a wide fault now open in the AKP between Erdogan and Gulen supporters, it is very unlikely that the party will in the future get anywhere near the 50 percent of the vote it got in the last elections, which gave him a level of political strength unparalleled in modern Turkish history. Erdogan now has little hope of changing Turkey into a presidential republic with himself in charge for another decade or so. Second, and perhaps more important, with the exoneration of the military establishment now seemingly just a matter of time, the corruption scandal and the earlier abuse of judicial power could do lasting damage to the Islamist ideology in Turkey.