

ERDOGAN SEEKS GREATER ROLE FOR ISLAM IN TURKEY AND  
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TURKEY ISLAMIZES DENMARK WITH MORE MOSQUES

*Judith Bergman*

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*[Gatestone Institute](#)*, Nov. 20, 2017

**"Islam cannot be either 'moderate' or 'not moderate.' Islam can only be one thing," Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on November 9. "Recently the concept of 'moderate Islam' has received attention. But the patent of this concept originated in the West... They are now trying to pump up this idea again. What they really want to do is weaken Islam..."**

**Erdogan is working on strengthening Islam in the West, something he does, among other ways, by building Turkish mosques in Western countries. It is hardly surprising that he does not want the West to "weaken Islam", but at the moment there seems little risk of that happening. The establishment of Turkish mosques in Western countries appears to be proceeding apace with very little opposition. Conversely, building Western churches in Turkey is inconceivable.**

**Erdogan clearly sees Turks living in the West as a spearhead of Islam. "Yes, integrate yourselves into German society but don't assimilate yourselves. No one has the right to deprive us of our culture and our identity", Erdogan told Turks in Germany as early as 2011. This year, he told Turks living in the West: "Go live in better neighborhoods. Drive the best cars. Live in the best houses. Make not three, but five children. Because you are the future of Europe. That will be the best response to the injustices against you."**

**Erdogan is evidently working to ensure, by continuously building new mosques and expanding old ones across Europe, that Muslims will indeed be the future of the continent. One Western country where Erdogan is ramping up Islam is Denmark. Two new Turkish mosques are about to open in the Danish cities of Roskilde and Holbæk; in the past year, two Turkish mosques opened in the cities of Fredericia and Aarhus. New Turkish mosques were opened in Ringsted and Hedehusene in 2013; and in Køge the existing mosque opened a cultural center. There are 27 Turkish mosques in Denmark; eight of them are expanding or wish to**

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expand.

The new mosque in Roskilde, complete with minarets, is owned by Turkey's Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet). The inclusion of minarets is due to second- and third-generation Turkish immigrants, who wanted the mosque to look like a "proper mosque". "It is a general trend in all of Europe that Diyanet is expanding physically with new mosques, and through [the mosques] also religiously, politically and culturally" said professor Samim Akgönül, of the university of Strasbourg. He has analyzed the Friday sermons that Diyanet sends to mosques all over Europe; his analyses show that the sermons are full of political and nationalistic messages favoring Erdogan's regime.

According to Tuncay Yilmaz, chairman of the board of Roskilde's Ayasofya Mosque, "Diyanet is not political, I can promise you that. Obviously they belong to the Turkish state, but they are independent of the government". That statement is false. Diyanet is an agency of the Turkish government — and an extremely active one. As Gatestone's Burak Bekdil has noted:

"In a briefing for a parliamentary commission, Diyanet admitted that it gathered intelligence via imams from 38 countries on the activities of suspected followers of the US-based preacher Fetullah Gülen, whom the Turkish government accused of being the mastermind of the attempted coup on July 15... Diyanet said its imams gathered intelligence and prepared reports from Abkhazia, Germany, Albania, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Switzerland, Italy, Japan, Montenegro, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Kosovo, Lithuania, Macedonia, Mongolia, Mauritania, Nigeria, Norway, Poland, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, Tanzania, Turkmenistan and Ukraine".

In Denmark, nonetheless, the newest Turkish-state mosque was welcomed with open arms. The mayor of Roskilde, Joy Mogensen, who knew that the Turkish

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government owned the mosque, participated in the ceremony of laying the foundation stone in February 2016. She claims that the very fact that she and the city's bishop were invited to the ceremony meant that there were "good people" in the mosque working for "integration" — otherwise they would not have allowed "a Christian woman like myself without a headscarf" to participate in their ceremony...

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#### ERDOĞAN'S KURDISH GAMBIT

*Burak Bekdil*

[BESA](#), Nov. 15, 2017

In 2015, soon after the Turkish people went to the ballot box, the main Kurdish insurgency group, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), ended a ceasefire it had declared two years prior. Just a few months earlier, there had been hope for peace. Even Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's fiercest critics praised him when he bravely launched a difficult process meant to finally bring peace to a country that had lost 40,000 people to ethnic strife. His government negotiated with the Kurds and granted them broader cultural and political rights, which his predecessors had not. The PKK would finally say farewell to arms.

Instead, it took up arms once again. Since July 2015, Turkish (and Turkey's predominantly Kurdish) cities have again become battlegrounds in an almost

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century-old Turkish-Kurdish dispute. Kurdish militants have attacked security forces countless times since then, while the Turkish military has buried fallen soldiers and raided Kurdish guerrilla camps in northern Iraq as well as inside Turkey. Reports of casualties on both sides are a regularity most Turks now grudgingly ignore.

Erdoğan, an Islamist, had miscalculated again. He had thought he could solve the dispute through his usual “religious lens.” He would use Islam as the glue to keep Muslim Turks and Muslim Kurds united, because after all, why should they fight? They are all Sunni Muslims. Erdoğan believed Islam had to take a central role if a historic end to the conflict was to be achieved - one in which the Kurds would surrender their arms and live peacefully with their Turkish Muslim brothers. He wished, accordingly, to restructure Turkey along multi-ethnic lines, but with a greater role for Islam. But he relied too much on religion to resolve what is essentially an ethnic conflict. The experiment resulted in sprays of bombs, suicide attacks, bullets, rockets, and coffins.

The parliamentary elections that took place on June 7, 2015 marked a radical shift for Erdoğan from his usual religious nationalism to ethnic nationalism (both of which have always been part of his ideological policy calculus, to varying degrees). On that date, his Justice and Development Party (AKP), after having sought peace with the Kurds for the previous two years, lost its parliamentary majority for the first time since it came to power in November 2002. With 41% of the national vote (compared with 49.8% in the 2011 general elections), the AKP won eighteen fewer seats than were necessary to form a single-party government in Turkey’s 550-member parliament. More importantly, its seat tally fell widely short of the minimum number needed to rewrite the constitution in such a way as to introduce an executive presidential system that would give Erdoğan almost uncontrolled powers.

Amid a fresh wave of Kurdish violence, Erdoğan gambled on new elections, calculating that the uptick in instability and insecurity would push frightened voters towards single-party rule. His gamble paid off. The elections of November 1,

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2015 gave the AKP a comfortable victory and a mandate to rule until 2019. His new ethnic nationalist and anti-Kurdish policy won hearts and minds among Turkish nationalists. They then proceeded, two years later, to support constitutional amendments that paved the way for Erdoğan's ultimate goal of one-man rule.

Between June 7 and November 1, 2015, Erdoğan's AKP increased its votes by nearly nine percentage points. More than four points of that rise came from votes from its nationalistic rival, the Nationalist Movement Party, which shares more or less the same voter base with the AKP. Even some Kurds, weary of renewed violence, shifted from a pro-Kurdish party (for which they had voted on June 7) to the AKP (on November 1).

Since 2015, Erdoğan has been enjoying the fruits of his newfound ethnic nationalism. He has ordered the security forces to fight the PKK "till they finish it off," and has pursued hawkish politics via the judiciary he controls. Several leading Kurdish MPs are now in jail on terrorism charges. More than 1,400 academics who signed a petition "for peace" have been prosecuted and/or dismissed from their universities. Talking about Kurdish rights is now almost tantamount to bombing a square in Istanbul.

Across Turkey's Syrian and Iraqi borders, Erdoğan has also recalibrated his policy in line with a reprioritizing of security threats. A Kurdish belt along Turkey's southern borders is now perceived as the top threat - worse than ISIS, or Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's pro-Shiite (and therefore anti-Sunni, anti-Turkish, and anti- Erdoğan) regime in Damascus, or the growing Shiite military presence in northern Iraq (Hashd al-Shaab). In the hope of countering what he considers the worst of all possible threats, Erdoğan is now a reluctant partner in the Russia-Iran-dominated Shiite theater in northern Iraq and Syria.

In Erdoğan's view, the emergence of a near-state Kurdish actor in Mesopotamia would be an existential threat to Turkey. Hence his radical retaliation against the

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Iraqi Kurdish referendum of September 25, along with his reluctant alliance with Tehran and Tehran-controlled Baghdad. But there is more for Erdoğan to calculate. When he devises his policy calculus towards the Iraqi and Syrian Kurds, he must also keep an eye on the Turkish Kurds, whose votes he will need in 2019 when Turks go once again to the ballot box. Election 2019 will be the most historic race in Erdoğan's political career - an election he knows he cannot afford to lose. He needs every single vote, from Islamists to liberals to nationalists to Kurds. And that makes things tricky...

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## IN ERDOGAN'S POST-COUP TURKEY, ANTI-SEMITISM IS ON THE RISE

*Sophia Pandya*

[Tablet](#), Oct. 19, 2017

On a visit to Turkey in 2011, I visited the Belek “Garden of Tolerance,” where a diminutive mosque, church, and synagogue are housed close together in an emerald-green park, apparently a testament of Turkey's acceptance of other faiths...At the garden's inauguration ceremony in 2004, then-Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan promised that he would “remove any remaining obstacles to religious freedom in Turkey,” and stated that Turkey would be “the guarantor of peace and brotherhood in its region.” Unfortunately, that was a blatant lie.

According to the recently published US State Department's Turkey 2016 International Religious Freedom Report, Turkey, along with China and Saudi Arabia, represses its religious minorities. Since the July 15, 2016 coup attempt in

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Turkey, the Turkish-Jewish community has been grappling with an uptick in anti-Semitic acts. This reflects populist (now-president) Erdoğan's power-hungry pivot towards fascism and nativism, which involves unifying Turks through identifying scapegoats (Jews, Kurds, Alevis, and the Gülen Movement) to blame for the country's problems. While he immediately blamed the Sufi-inspired Gülen Movement for the plot, social media users and journalists also pointed at other religious minorities, including the Ecumenical Patriarch, and, unsurprisingly, the Jews. In fact, the tension has caused many Jews to leave Turkey for Israel or elsewhere, or at least to apply for foreign passports in case a quick departure becomes necessary.

This is tragic, given the long and stable presence of Jews in the Anatolian region, which served as a haven for small confessional groups such as the Jews, who were granted refuge there by Ottoman Sultan Bayezid II during the 1492 Spanish Inquisition. During the Ottoman period, Jews, Armenians, Greeks, Bosnians and other minority communities, lived under Ottoman rule as part of the millet system, in which non-Muslim minority groups had separate legal courts and thus were able to govern themselves. During WWII, Turkey served as a safe transit and refuge for Jews fleeing the Holocaust, saving lives. Given that the global Jewish population is estimated (as of 2016) at around 14 and a half million, it is significant that approximately 18,500 Jews still reside in Turkey today, especially since Turkey is a Muslim majority country. Most live in Istanbul, and are Sephardic Jews, whose Ladino-speaking ancestors were allowed refuge during the Spanish expulsion, although a few are Ashkenazi.

Yet anthropologist Marcy Brink-Danan refers to the prevailing myth—that Jews have always lived free of discrimination in the Anatolian region—as the “tolerance trope.” During the Ottoman period Jews were respected, along with Christians, as “people of the book,” or *ehl ul kitab* in Turkish. However, this did not grant them equality to the Muslim majority, but rather religious accommodation, as “different yet protected” people. While the treatment of non-Muslim citizens was better than that of minorities elsewhere, it was not equitable. While Muslim men received the title of “Sir” or “Pasha,” (*efendi* or *paşa*), non-Muslim men were referred to simply by their trade. In 1942, Jews and other non-Muslims in Turkey were forced to pay a “wealth tax,” which functioned to financially weaken and thus marginalize them.

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**Despite celebrating (in 1992) 500 years of refuge in Turkey from the Spanish Inquisition, the Jewish community has continually faced degrees of discrimination in Turkey, also due largely to the legacy of ethnocentric and nationalistic Kemalist policies. The Republic of Turkey (established in 1923) was constructed on ideas of ethnic Turkish superiority. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the nation's founder, used social engineering strategies towards unifying the state, which emphasized its homogeneity and "pure" Turkishness. This included the systematic violation of minority rights, expulsions, population exchanges, and the suppression of language, minority religions, and non-Turkish ethnic identities. In 1930, Atatürk's Justice Minister Mahmut Esat Bozkurt (1882-1943), stated, "Those who are not of pure Turkish stock can have only one right in this country, the right to be servants or slaves."**

**Indeed, even today many Jewish institutions in Istanbul are unmarked and protected by barbed wire and armed guards. When Turkish Jews wear or display Judaica they often do so privately, i.e., wearing a Star of David inside clothing, or hanging mezuzot inside their homes. Their indigenoussness and loyalty to Turkey are challenged, and they are increasingly vulnerable to anti-Semitic attacks. For example, in 1986, twenty-two Jews were killed by Palestinians at Neve Shalom (ironically, this translates from Hebrew to "oasis of peace"), the largest synagogue in Istanbul. Subsequent attacks on synagogues include the 1992 Quincentennial anniversary attack, carried out by Hezbollah, which again took place at Neve Shalom (but with no casualties). In 2003, two car bombs exploded, one outside of Neve Shalom while approximately 400 people were inside, and the other at the back of Beit Israel Synagogue, while filled with 300 people. The blasts killed at least 20, and injured around 300 others. As recent as April of 2013, Turkish police foiled plots by al-Qaeda to bomb a synagogue in Istanbul's Balat district. According to a 2014 poll carried out by the Anti-Defamation League, as much as seventy percent of Turkish citizens hold anti-Semitic attitudes towards Jews.**

**After July 15, the source of new anti-Semitic attacks does not emanate externally (i.e. Hezbollah) but from ordinary Turks, many of whom, newly emboldened to**

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transcend “holding an attitude,” have loudly engaged in fomenting a toxic and dangerous environment for ethnic and religious minorities. The Turkey 2016 International Religious Freedom Report cites numerous instances of anti-Semitic discourse, including threats of violence, in social media and even in government-friendly media. The Neve Shalom Synagogue was again attacked by ultranationalists on July 22, 2017. Ironically, when Erdoğan attributed the putsch attempt to Islamic cleric Fethullah Gülen and the Gülen Movement he inspired, this only made things worse for Jews. Some anti- Gülen forces have labelled the Muslim cleric a “crypto-Jew,” whose mother is a Jew (she is not). In December, 2016, a columnist from the government-backed Sabah, a prominent newspaper, wrote that Gülen “quickly smells of money and power. Because he is a Jew.” According to former parliamentarian Aykan Erdimir, the situation for religious minorities has “gone from bad to worse within the last year...”

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#### PORTENTS OF QUAGMIRES IN SYRIA

*Caroline B. Glick*

[Jerusalem Post](#), Nov. 23, 2017

Is the war in Syria won? The images broadcast this week from Sochi, the Russian vacation town on the Black Sea coast, were pictures of victory - for the bad guys. On Tuesday, Russian President Vladimir Putin stood beside his Syrian client, President Bashar Assad, who licked Putin’s boots, as well he should have. Assad owes his regime and his life to Putin.

The next day, Putin was joined by his allies - the presidents of Iran and Turkey. Hassan Rouhani and Recep Tayyip Erdogan made the pilgrimage to Sochi to stand

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at Putin's side and declare victory in the war and dedicate themselves to the cause of "peace and reconciliation" in post-war Syria. To achieve their lofty goals of peace and reconciliation, Putin and his partners declared that, in the near future, Sochi will be the sight of a peace conference where all the relevant factions in Syria will be represented. The parley they described is set to take place parallel to - and one assumes at the expense of - the sixth round of Syrian reconciliation talks scheduled to take place under UN auspices next week in Geneva.

Several Israeli commentators viewed Putin's Sochi talks precisely as he wished them to. Ehud Yaari, Reshet/Keshet's veteran Arab affairs commentator declared: The US is finished in the Middle East! The capital of the Middle East is now located in Sochi, he proclaimed in back-to-back newscasts. In certain respects, Yaari is right. Things are looking good these days for the axis of evil. Wednesday was a particularly good day for Iran. Not only did Rouhani do his victory dance with Putin and Erdogan, but as they were showering themselves in triumph in Sochi, Iran's Lebanese puppet, Saad Hariri, was returning to Beirut after his misadventures in Saudi Arabia. As expected, Hariri canceled the resignation he announced dramatically a week-and-a-half earlier in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, after accusing Iran and its Hezbollah army of controlling Lebanon. On the surface, Hariri's return is a boon for Iran. If he had remained in Saudi Arabia, Iran would have lost its fig leaf. Hariri's duty as prime minister is to snow the West into believing that his government and the Lebanese Armed Forces are a counterweight to Iran and Hezbollah, even though they are controlled by Iran and Hezbollah...

As for Erdogan, he arrived in Sochi a spent force. Erdogan is perhaps the biggest loser of the war in Syria. He was the principal sponsor of the anti-Assad opposition that morphed into Islamic State. Erdogan's cooperation owes mainly to his lack of better options. The US stopped supporting his campaign in Syria two years ago. Since the failed military coup against him in July 2016, Erdogan has become ever more hostile to the US. This hostility informed his recently concluded deal with Putin to purchase Russia's S-400 anti-aircraft system. The S-400 threatens every fighter craft in the US arsenal. US officials have responded to his move by seriously considering the possibility of canceling the sale of 100 F-35s to Turkey.

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Turkish expulsion from NATO - once a taboo subject - is now regularly discussed in Washington policy circles. The main reason Erdogan has sided with Putin in Syria is because the US has sided with Syria's Kurds. Erdogan views the Syrian Kurds as a threat to the stability of his regime. He expects Putin to support his determination to destroy Kurdish autonomy in Syria. If Putin fails to meet his expectations, Erdogan may abandon his new friends. Or he may stick with them and just become ever more dependent on Putin. Whatever the case, he won't be empowered by his membership in Pax Putin...

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[Turkey: Trial of Banker is Plot Schemed by US-Based Cleric: Suzan Fraser, Fox News, Nov. 30, 2017](#)—A senior Turkish government minister on Thursday branded the New York trial of a Turkish bank executive on charges of violation of sanctions against Iran as a new attempt by U.S.-based cleric Fethullah Gulen to harm Turkey's government.

[Turkey Rejects "Moderate Islam": Uzay Bulut, Gatestone Institute, Nov. 30, 2017](#)—At a conference on women's entrepreneurship, held in Ankara on November 9 and hosted by the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan rejected the concept of "moderate Islam".

[Some Urgent Questions About Turkey: Editorial, New York Times, Oct. 13, 2017](#)—Turkey has been a vital ally of the United States since World War II. It fields NATO's second-largest army, after America's, and anchors the alliance's eastern flank. It hosts military bases that are central to American operations in the Middle East, including Incirlik, where some 50 tactical nuclear weapons are stationed, and

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serves as a bridge between the Muslim world and the West. After Recep Tayyip Erdogan took office in 2003 and began reforms, Turkey seemed on course to becoming a model Muslim democracy.

**[Turkey's Bluster Exposes its Delusions of Grandeur](#): Simon Waldman, *Globe and Mail*, Oct. 11, 2017**—Turkey is embroiled in yet another spat with a western country. This time, Turkey arrested a U.S. consular employee for alleged links to the Gulen movement, followers of Turkish Islamic preacher and U.S. resident Fethullah Gulen, who Ankara claims is behind last July's attempted coup. Calling the move arbitrary, the United States suspended non-immigrant visa applications, and Turkey reciprocated.