‘SILENT MAN’ PROTESTS VOICE LONG-SIMMERING TURKISH SECULAR/ISLAMIST DIVIDE; ERDOGAN BLAMES ISRAEL

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UNDERSTANDING THE TURKISH DEMONSTRATIONS

Harold Rhode
Gatestone Institute, June 10, 2013

Turkey, although nominally part of the West, is in most ways culturally closer to the Middle East. Turks live with pent-up grievances -- as do we all -- but with virtually no way to resolve them. People in a supposedly democratic Turkey are reluctant to air their grievances even in public surveys out of fear their government might take revenge on them. During the past few years, people in Turkey have been saying that they are petrified to speak to others, write things, or talk freely on the telephone for fear they will be arrested. At present, Turkey has more journalists in jail than any other country.

The ruling AKP government has set up countless apparatuses to monitor dissent; these cause those who disagree with the government to fear not just arrest but interrogation. People and groups have therefore chosen largely to suffer in silence. Moreover, in the culture of the Middle East, there is no such thing as a win-win compromise. Turks, like their neighbours, consider backing down or apologizing dishonourable. Consequently, they spend much time blaming each other and looking for scapegoats -- but almost never admitting responsibility for problems. As a result, tensions -- with no means of being put to rest -- constantly seethe below the surface.
This is the context through which to understand the riots and demonstrations against the government which have spread across Turkey.

Before Erdoğan came to power in 2002, with his unspoken promise to reinstate Islam as a central part of the state, many observant Muslims complained that the state discriminated against them. Under Islam, there can be no separation of religion and state. The state must be ruled by Muslims, and must be guided by Islamic law and culture. Observant Muslims felt oppressed by the secular Kemalist government in place since the 1920s, after the Ottoman Empire had been disbanded and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk had come to power. Atatürk established policies condemned by Islamic fundamentalists such as education for women, separation of religion and state, and Western dress.

His supporters and he said they wanted to relegate Islam to the realm of the private, and teach individuals to make decisions for themselves instead of blindly following religious leaders. Those who wanted the state to remain Islamic said they felt under constant pressure to keep their views to themselves; doing otherwise, they feared, might bring down on them the wrath of the secular state. Some of Atatürk's people were personally religious, but kept their religion separate from activities related to the state. Atatürk did not invade the realm of the private -- unlike what Erdoğan has been trying to do.

Since Erdoğan and his AKP ["Truth and Reconciliation Party"] came to power, they have slowly but resolutely done their best to dismantle the secular apparatus of the state and have been trying to impose their version of Sunni fundamentalist Islam on everyone, especially the non-Sunni Alevis who make up approximately 30% of Turkey's population.

As soon as Erdoğan came to power, he started systematically dismantling Atatürkist institutions. These included recognizing religious elementary schools as equal to regular Turkish government secular schools, massive building of new Sunni mosques, even in areas where there are no Sunnis, a huge attempt to indoctrinate the young people in Sunni Islam, weakening the secular military though fraudulent accusations followed by show trials, and creating a media that followed his orders without questioning. The Turkish state secretly videotaped people it regarded as opponents in compromising situations or arrested them for fabricated crimes, including accusations that they were members of conspiratorial groups planning to overthrow the government.

Erdoğan's re-Islamification program entailed removing Atatürk and secularism from as many aspects of Turkish life as possible. Now the secularists and non-Sunnis felt oppressed. The Alevis, for example, have undergone an aggressive, imperialistic attempt to coerce them into abandoning their religion and become Sunnis. Even though, for example, the Alevis do not attend mosques, the regime ordered them to be built in Alevi towns and villages and then began forcing Alevi children to undergo Sunni religious instruction, which became mandatory in schools....

Unlike some other Middle Eastern societies, Turkey is, by and large, orderly. People line up for the bus and usually patiently wait their turn to board. The moment, however, someone pushes and tries to break into the line, what one moment looks completely orderly can instantly descend into unrest -- like one lit match igniting all the others. As with the fruit seller in Tunisia, who set himself on fire out of frustration at not being able to obtain a license to sell fruit, an outside observer might get the impression that actions often seem disproportionate to the provocation and that people are avenging deeply held grievances that have little to do with the subject at hand. Turkish governments have historically known this to be a possibility, and have therefore created strong security apparatuses to handle these situations.

To understand whether or not a revolt has staying power, one might ask if a regime has the will and ability to do what is necessary to restore calm. In the past, this was relatively easy. There was no easy access to the international media. Tyrants, dictators, and other strongmen such as Erdoğan could get away with violently suppressing riots and demonstrations, while the outside world had no way of knowing what was happening. Leaders had a free hand to act as they wished.
Where Turkey's demonstrations will lead depends much on the reaction of Erdoğan's friends and allies, most notably U.S. President Barack Obama's Administration. Secretary of State Kerry publicly chastised the Turks for using too much force against "the demonstrators, most of whom are law-abiding citizens," although it is not apparent how the American administration could judge whether or not this was true. In response, the Turkish Foreign Minister publicly criticized his American counterpart Kerry for interfering in Turkish internal affairs.

What one can know is that the U.S. Administration's reaction seems to have emboldened the demonstrators; they know that the outside world is watching Erdoğan, and that even his closest ally, the current U.S. administration, has criticized him.

Will Turkey descend into chaos like most of its Arab neighbours? In terms of security forces, Turkey is better organized than its Arab neighbours -- even Egypt -- so it is difficult to see Turkey in a similar chaotic situation. Nevertheless, there are sectors inside Turkey who are fed up with Erdoğan; demonstrators keep chanting, "Erdoğan resign! Government – resign!" Erdoğan responded by labelling the demonstrators Çapulcus [pronounced Chapulju] meaning "lowlifes," vandals, looters. The demonstrators have now turned this epithet into a badge of honour.

In short, the events of the past few weeks have forced onto the Turkish agenda all sorts of issues the government had pushed underground. Whatever happens, Turkey has shown that it is not the stable island of calm and democracy its allies had hoped it to be. Iran and Russia will certainly benefit here, as will Assad of Syria: all three have become adversaries of Turkey.

The Kurds could also benefit: if the Turkish state proves weak, its weakness could help Turkey's Kurds on the way to establishing a more autonomous region within Turkey, possibly to join in the future an independent Kurdish entity.

The Turkish people could be the biggest beneficiaries: they might even once again have the chance to make decisions for themselves instead of being forced to follow Islamist leaders and Shari'a-oriented laws that many do not want.

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**ERDOGAN'S WAR ON ATATURK'S LEGACY**

*Hillel Fradkin & Lewis Libby*

*Real clear World, June 25, 2013*

Recently, a single man stepped into the mass demonstrations and counter-demonstrations that have roiled Turkey for weeks. The man stood still and silent, staring at an image on a wall. Soon scores of his countrymen, concerned about their freedoms, stood silently beside him, not just in Gezi Park, but in parks and squares across Turkey. It was a potent symbol in a war of symbols. In the Middle East, it may one day rank beside another standing man -- the man who stood before the tanks of Tiananmen. Time will tell if it will prove equally futile.

The protest in Istanbul's Gezi Park marks another round in a battle for Turkey's future. Among the silent stand those who seek a return to the moderate, secular path set by modern Turkey's founder, Kemal Atatürk. They face down not the tanks, but the bulldozers of Turkey's Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. In the narrowest sense, Erdoğan plans to bulldoze the last remaining green square in Istanbul (another weighty metaphor) to rebuild an Ottoman barracks. In the larger sense, he hopes to bulldoze the modern legacy of Atatürk, amend Turkey's constitution to create a presidency more powerful than even Atatürk ever held and then restore the glory of Ottoman Turkey and the caliphate that once bound the Sunni Islamic world together….

The protesters, Erdoğan's allies claim, conspire with Turkey's external enemies and other nefarious forces to undermine the high estate that is Turkey's regional birthright. So Erdoğan sponsored a counter-demonstration
to answer the crowds in Gezi Park. Where? At Kazlicesme, just outside the ancient walls of Constantinople, the site from which the 15th century Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror launched the attack that captured Constantinople and drove the last western influence from Turkey. (How like Erdogan's recent call that Turkey's youth embrace the 11th century battle in which the Seljuk Turks first fought their way into then-Christian Anatolia.) At Kazlicesme and other rallies, Erdogan's supporters sing the Ottoman Army's marching song.

Erdogan's bulldozers seek to remake not just Gezi Park, but the face of Ataturk's Turkey. Erdogan has just broken ground on a massive new bridge across the Bosporus to be named for Ottoman Sultan Selim I, often known as Selim the Grim. As all Turkish school children know, Selim's conquests in 1517 first won Ottoman sultans the title of Caliph. Ottoman rulers bore this title for the next 400 years, until Ataturk abolished it.

On an elevated headland on the Asian side of Istanbul, facing Europe, Erdogan now undertakes to build the largest mosque in the world. Highly visible almost everywhere in Istanbul, it will resemble and surpass the great, celebratory mosques built over centuries by the Ottoman sultans. No such mosque has been built since Ataturk ended the caliphate. Thus, the square, the bridge, the mosque, the marching song are each a repudiation of Ataturk's legacy. They herald the caliphate over the republic, Erdogan's vision over Ataturk's.

No surprise, then, that the image on the wall at which the Gezi Park protesters silently stare is Ataturk's. Moderates across Turkey have brought out images of Ataturk. In the prior, nosier demonstrations, the protesters sang the Republic's unofficial anthem, the "Tenth Year March," honoring the first decade of Ataturk's rule. Indeed, in the 1990s, when an earlier Islamist Party, the forebear of Erdogan's AKP, first came to power, moderate Turks sang this song then as well. They even made disco versions and danced to it, to hold at bay a conservative vision of Islam that challenged Turkey's modern course. A verse in the song hails the youth of Turkey, "15 million strong," and Ataturk: "Our leader and commander in chief is respected throughout the world."

The Gezi protesters know that Erdogan, at the end of his first decade in power, has accomplishments as well. He remains the dominant figure in Turkish politics. But while Ataturk's first decade pointed ever upward, Erdogan now faces greater challenges than he has before.

Erdogan's inevitability is increasingly in question. He blames the slowing of Turkey's once robust economy on nefarious interest rate lobbies. His attacks on the rule of law have undermined his image abroad. A year ago, a Council on Foreign Relations report labeled Turkey more democratic than ever before; suspect then, the Council would likely avoid such formulations today. His foreign policy has tacked one way and then the other, and both are now in shambles. His appeals to Iran have been rewarded with defiance. His efforts to intervene in Syria have been ineffective and unpopular. By attacking peaceful protests in his own capital, many Turks believe he has forfeited whatever weight his moral arguments about Assad may have held.

Most importantly to him, Erdogan's hopes to create and win a powerful new Turkish presidency are no longer foreordained. His hopes to woo Turkish Kurds -- a substantial voting group -- into a grand coalition may lay victim to Gezi Park, as Kurds were among the protesters, and Kurdish leadership has criticized Erdogan's heavy hand. The protests have shaken as well his government's most important support: the Gulen movement that determines many parliamentary seats and places its hopes in ongoing growth and stability. So far, Erdogan has shown no sign of shifting course, as he continues to polarize. If, as expected, he responds to these challenges, as other politicians before him, by solidifying his base, he will lean even more toward Islamist and neo-Ottoman interests.

The protests have shaken Erdogan's image of stability, and it was stability and progress on which Erdogan had staked his image. Erdogan's tight grip has loosened, and so the battle of images will continue. Given Turkey's prominence, past success and prior secular path, this may be the most telling, if least noted, battle underway today for the soul of modern Islam. So far, Erdogan's Ottoman Army marching song still swells above Ataturk's Tenth Year March. It remains to be seen which tune will in time prevail.
Hillel Fradkin is a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute. Lewis Libby is a senior vice president at the Hudson Institute.

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IS TURKEY'S GOVERNMENT SEEKING ISRAELI SCAPEGOAT FOR PROTESTS?
Arad Nir
Al-Monitor Israel Pulse, June 24, 2013

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan apparently finds it difficult to put the Marmara flotilla affair behind him and overcome his aversion to the government of Israel. This was evident even in the violent demonstrations that broke out this month (June 2013) in Istanbul. And even though Israel was not explicitly mentioned by name in the rallies that took place in Gezi Park and Taksim Square against the heads of the Turkish regime, the media outlets closely associated with the latter insist on accusing Israel of “fanning the riot flames.”

Following years of overt anti-Israeli sentiment in mass demonstration where the slogan “Israel is a murderer” — Katil Israil — had been commonly used in Turkey, it was strange to encounter on the very same streets and squares demonstrators calling, and banners proclaiming, “Erdogan is a murderer” — Katil Erdoğan. As a rule, the protest movement recently sparked in Turkey has refrained from making use of Israel to further its goals.

On two occasions alone I noticed, in Gezi Park, posters alluding to Israel — the one, drawing an analogy between Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, punning, in Turkish, on the names of the two; the other featuring a picture of Israeli President Shimon Peres as a football player standing guard alongside President Barack Obama and Fethullah Gulen (the moderate Turkish Islamic leader living in a self-imposed exile in the United States, who advocates a dialogue between religions and who has become in recent years a political rival of Erdogan), while Erdogan scores a goal.

Israeli officials closely following the events in Turkey assessed that those posters were inspired by none other than the ruling party, the AKP, which sought to drag Israel into the dispute — in an attempt to both delegitimize the protest and strengthen the traditional political power base of Erdogan.

This assessment was reinforced toward the end of the second week of the protest, when Prime Minister Erdogan was cited as saying, after watching documentation of the massive destruction caused to shops and businesses in Istanbul: “Those whom we told ‘one minute’ are happy now.” The phrase “one minute” is the one Erdogan used in Davos on January 2009, when bursting out at Shimon Peres. Every child in Turkey understands the meaning of the phrase and knows who are “Those whom we told ‘one minute’” — and to put it explicitly, it is Israel.

It seems that Erdogan took his cue from the banner headline published that morning by the Turkish pro-ruling party daily Yeni Şafak, which read as follows: “Israel wishes that the Gezi Park events will bring about the fall of Erdogan.”

Underneath, a large picture of Knesset member Reuven Rivlin was featured. Rivlin, whose name was erroneously spelled “Livnin,” was presented as speaker of the Knesset — a position he had to give up several months ago with great regret, following the establishment of the new government in Jerusalem. The “plea for the fall of Erdogan” was attributed to Rivlin, while the same news item went on to quote former Foreign Minister and current Chairman of the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee Avigdor Liberman — who had strongly objected at the time to an Israeli apology for the killing during the takeover of the Mavi Marmara flotilla — as having stated that he “did not lose sleep over the developments in Turkey.”

When I checked with Knesset member Rivlin, as well as with Liberman's bureau, both emphatically denied the allegation! Rivlin stressed the importance he attached to the relations between Israel and Turkey, under any
circumstances whatsoever, while Liberman reiterated his position that Netanyahu's apology to Erdogan was a mistake, but denied any association with the statement attributed to him.

Later on in the week, similar allegations were made by other Turkish media outlets close to Erdogan. That time around, the “plea for the fall of Erdogan” was attributed to Knesset member Moshe Feiglin, the far-right Likud party member who is serving as the Knesset deputy speaker. I asked Feiglin whether he had made any such statement, and he, too, denied having ever said anything of the sort. (In fact, no allusion to such statements may be found in Hebrew search engines.)

The leak concerning the visit to Ankara of Mossad chief Tamir Pardo on June 10, at the height of the protest wave, is another instance of this discourse, which seeks to attribute responsibility to Israel for fanning the flames of protest in Turkey. Pardo's visit to Ankara was supposed to be secret. However, there apparently were elements interested in tying him to the protest demonstrations. According to reports on the visit, the Israeli Mossad head and Hakan Fidan, chief of the Turkish Intelligence agency (known also as the “secret police”), discussed the goings-on in Syria and Iran, and even … the Gezi Park events.

One may wonder what Pardo had to do with the Gezi Park protest. Well, the answer is quite simple: Erdogan wants to disassociate himself from the riots and lay the responsibility for the unrest on “foreign elements.” To achieve this aim, he goes as far as to use the familiar anti-Semitic rhetoric and, for instance, points the finger at “interest groups that stand to benefit from the increase in interest rates.”

Israelis are closely following the developments in Turkey. And many yearn for the success of the thousands that are calling for the resignation of Erdogan and his government. It seems, however that the decision to send Tamir Pardo to meet with Fidan — who is a close confidant of Erdogan — in the midst of the protest wave shows that the Israeli government does not expect any deterioration in the standing of the incumbent Turkish prime minister…..

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**ON TOPIC**

*Tayyip Erdoğan, "God's Gift to Turkey":* Robert Ellis, *Gatestone Institute*, June 19, 2013—The Turkish Minister for EU Affairs, Egemen Bağış, has declared that Prime Minister Erdoğan is a gift sent by God to Turkey and to humanity. But what do half the Turkish electorate do – as well as the rest of humanity – when the gift is unwanted?

*EU Agrees to Open New Chapter With Turkey: Hurriet Daily News, June 25, 2013—*The European Union has agreed to open a new chapter with Turkey but postponed negotiations until after the presentation of the Commission’s Annual Progress Report and a discussion of the General Affairs Council (GAC) in October.

*A Country Divided: Where Is Turkey Headed?:* Daniel Steinworth and Bernhard Zand, *Spiegel*, June 25, 2013—The uprising against Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan clearly shows the deep divide between modernity and tradition in Turkey. Economic growth had long disguised the cleft. But now, the country must decide what its future will hold.

*Greek Cyprus Signs Energy Deal With Israel in Defiance of Turkey:* Zach Pontz, *Afgemeiner*, June 21, 2013—The Greek Cypriot cabinet defied Turkey earlier this week, approving plans to sign a deal with a US-Israeli partnership to build a liquefied natural gas plant on the island to exploit untapped energy riches, AFP reported Friday. Turkey has objected to the plan, saying the resources should be divided between two sides of the separated island.

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