

# The Middle East Pivot: Erdoğan's Turkey Seven "Deadly Sins"

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*Multiple wars ravage the Middle East. Turkey has inserted itself into the middle of most of these regional conflicts and ended up a loser.*

Under **President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan**, Turkey has intervened and formed alliances with a rogue's gallery of imperial warlords, terrorists-mercenaries, Zionist expansionists, feudal potentates and obscure tribal chiefs, with disastrous economic, political and military consequences for the Turkish nation.

In this paper we will discuss Turkey's domestic and foreign policies and behavior over the past decade. We will conclude with lessons for middle range powers, which might help in future decisions

## **President Erdogan's Domestic Disasters**

Throughout the early decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Erdoğan made a strategic alliance with an influential semi-clandestine organization led by a cult-leading cleric, **Fethullah Gülen**, who was conveniently self-exiled in the US and under the protection of the US intelligence apparatus. This marriage of convenience was formed in order to weaken the leftist, secular and Atatürk nationalist influenced opposition. Armed with the Gülenists' treasure trove of forged documents, Erdoğan purged the military of its Atatürk nationalist leadership. He proceeded to marginalize the secular Republican Party and repressed leftist trade union, social movements and prominent academics, journalists, writers and student activists. With support from the Gülenists movement, 'Hizmet', Erdoğan celebrated his successes and won multiple election and re-election victories!

Initially, Erdoğan failed to recognize that the Gülenists/Hizmet operated as a subversive political organization, which permeated the state apparatus through a dense network of bureaucratic, military, judicial, police, and civil society organizations, with ties to the US military/CIA and friendly relations with Israeli policy makers.

By 2013, Erdoğan felt intense pressure from the Gülenists/Hizmet which sought to discredit and oust his regime by revealing multi-million dollar corrupt practices involving him and his family in a 'Turquoise Color Revolution' - remake of other 'regime changes'.

Having discovered his internal vulnerability, Erdoğan moved to curtail the power and reach of the Gülenists/Hizmet controlled media. He was not yet prepared to deal with the immense scope and depth of the elite links to Gülenists/Hizmet. A Gülenists-led military coup was launched in July 2016, with the tacit support of the US military stationed in Turkey. This was

foiled by a major popular mobilization with the support of the armed forces.

Erdoğan then moved to thoroughly purge the followers of Hizmet from the military, public administration, schools, business, the press and public and private institutions. He extended his purge to include secular and nationalist political leaders who had always opposed the Gülenists and their attempted coup d'état.

As a result of the coup attempt and the subsequent purge, Erdoğan weakened and fractured every aspect of the state and civil society. Erdoğan ended up securing control of a weakened state with a degraded business, educational and cultural world.

The Gülenists coup was authored and led by its supremo Fethullah Gülen, ensconced in his 'secret' private estate in the United States. Clearly the US was implicated in the coup and they rejected Erdoğan's demands to extradite him.

Erdoğan's subservience to the US/NATO leadership have undermined his attempts to strike at the roots of the coup and its internal and external power structure. The US/NATO military bases still operate in Turkey and retain influence over its military.

In the aftermath of the coup, the decline of Gülenist influence in the economy contributed to economic reversals in investments and growth. The purge of the military and civil society reduced Turkey's military preparedness and alienated the democratic electorate. Erdoğan had already nearly lost his bid to the presidency after his earlier purges in 2014.

### **Erdoğan's Foreign Policy Disasters**

Perversity is when a ruler weakens its military and represses its citizens and launches a series of risky foreign adventures: This is exactly what Erdoğan has done over the past several years.

First Erdoğan backed a terrorist uprising in Syria, providing arms, recruiting overseas 'volunteers' and providing them with unrestricted passage across the Turkish border. Many of the terrorists proceeded to join forces with Syrian, Iraqi and Turkish Kurds in establishing military bases on Ankara's borders.

Secondly, Erdoğan ran a scurrilous electoral campaign among the millions of ethnic Turks living in Germany - violating that powerful nation's sovereignty. As a result, Erdoğan increased tensions and animosity with what had been its closest ally in its quest for EU membership - effectively terminating the process.

Thirdly, Erdoğan backed NATO's invasion and bombing of Libya, killing **President Gadhafi**, who had been an independent voice, capable of serving as a possible ally against imperial intervention in North Africa.

Fourthly, Erdoğan backed the brief government of **Mohammed Morsi** and the Muslim Brotherhood after its electoral victory in 2012 following the 'Arab Spring' uprising in Egypt of 2011. He backed a formula similar to his own Turkish policy of excluding the secular, democratic opposition. This led to a bloody US-backed military coup led by **General Abdel Sisi** in July 2013 - a lesson not lost on Erdoğan.

Fifth, Erdoğan's *de facto* friendly relations with Israel - despite verbal criticism - in the face

of Tel Aviv's assassination of nine non-violent Turkish protestors trying to break the starvation blockade of Gaza - undermined relations with the pro-Palestine Arab world and nationalists in Turkey.

Sixth, Erdoğan developed lucrative ties with Iraqi Kurd dictator-warlord, **Masoud Barzani**, facilitating the flow of oil to Israel. Erdoğan's own illicit oil deals with Barzani strengthened the cause of Kurdish separatism and exposed the widespread corruption of Erdoğan's family dealings.

Seventh, Erdoğan provoked military tensions with Russia by shooting down a warplane in Syria. This led to an economic boycott, which reduced export earnings, devastated the tourism sector and added Moscow to his list of adversaries, (Iraq, Syria, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, US, Germany, Hezbollah and Iran).

Eighth, Erdoğan backed the tiny oil-state of Qatar, sending supplies and soldiers to oppose a threat from Saudi Arabia, the other royal oil statelets and Egypt, US allies and followers.

Despite his many disastrous domestic and foreign policies, Erdoğan learned nothing and forgot nothing. When the Israelis backed the Iraqi Kurds in organizing an independence 'referendum' aiming to ultimately annex the rich oil fields of Northern Iraq, Erdoğan took no action despite this threat to Turkish national security. He merely made verbal threats to cut off the Kurd's access to Ankara's oil pipelines. He took no concrete steps. Erdoğan preferred to pocket transit taxes from the oil, antagonizing Iraq and Syria and strengthening the links between Kurdish Iraq and its secessionist counterparts in Syria and Turkey.

Because of Erdoğan failure to close down the US military base following its support of the Gülenist-led coup, the Turkish army is still heavily under US influence, opening the possibility of another uprising.

Erdoğan's lip-service to 'nationalism' has served mainly as a political tool to repress domestic democratic political parties and trade unions and the Kurdish and Alevi communities.

Erdoğan's initial support and subsequent opposition to the jihadi terrorist groups seeking to oust the secular-nationalist government in Damascus has caused 'blowback' - with ISIS terrorist cells bombing civilian targets Istanbul and Ankara with mass casualties.

## **Conclusion**

Erdoğan's unprincipled, opportunistic and pro-imperialist NATO alliance demonstrates the inability of an aspiring regional power to find a niche in the US Empire.

Erdoğan believed that being a loyal 'ally' of the US would protect Turkey from a coup d'état. He failed to realize that he had become a disposable pawn in US plans to instill more servile rulers (like the Gülenist) in the Middle East.

Erdoğan's belief that Turkey's collaboration with the US to overthrow Syria's **President Bashar Assad** would lead to a successful territorial grab of Northern Syria: instead Erdoğan ended up serving the US-backed Syrian Kurds tied to the Turkish Kurds. By working to break up Syria and destroy its state and government, Erdoğan strengthened Kurdish cross border expansionism.

Erdoğan failed to recognize the most basic rule of imperial policy: *There are no permanent allies there are only permanent interests*. Erdoğan thought Turkey would be 'rewarded' by acting as a US surrogate with a share of power, wealth and territory in the Middle East. Instead, as a 'normal' imperial power, the US used Turkey when it was convenient and would then dispose of Erdoğan - like a used condom.

Anti-imperialism is not just an ideal and moral/ethical principle - it is a realistic approach to safeguarding sovereignty, democratic politics and meaningful alliances.

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