

Erdogan the Magnificent

The mosques are our barracks
The domes our helmets
The minarets our bayonets
And the faithful our soldiers

By Nikos Akritas

Recep Tayyip Erdogan, prime minister of Turkey, continues his pursuit of becoming caliph of the Muslim world.



Having already cut ties with Israel over developments in Gaza, he now claims Hamas is Turkey's first line of defence against the Zionists. His provocative language, attempting to paint a Manichaeian world with Israel and Western countries on one side and Muslims on the other, has become routine.

As well as claiming the honour of being an enemy of Zionists carrying out genocide, he insists Palestinians will eventually return to their homes (an odd genocide) and likens Hamas to Turkish forces expelling foreign armies from what is now

Turkey in the 1920s. But the irony is lost on him. These forces included men who committed genocide and ethnic cleansing against indigenous peoples of Anatolia, leading to the creation of modern Turkey. The transition from empire to republic included 'removing' 20% of Turkey's population who did not adhere to the Muslim faith.

Erdogan's rhetoric becomes even more bizarre when, in reference to foreign occupiers, he complains the Ottoman (Turkish) Empire was forced to withdraw from Palestine by the British. Britain administered the Palestine Mandate for just 30 years; the Ottomans ruled the same area for 400. His mention of Palestinians fleeing to bordering countries in 1948 and living difficult lives as refugees, glosses over the fact their presence was and is unwanted in those countries; hence their continuing refugee camps and lack of integration. Syria and Egypt did not occupy parts of Palestine after 1948 to free the Palestinians but annexed those territories as their own. Still, at least they weren't Jews.

Erdogan cut his teeth in the political arena with the Refah Partisi (Welfare Party), an Islamist party that achieved some success before being banned for religious extremism. Immediately following this ban, Erdogan chose to publicly recite the above poem with its militant metaphors of Islamic resurgence. He subsequently received a short prison sentence for inciting religious hatred.

Immediately following his release, he distanced himself from his old party and in 2001 set up the AKP (Justice and Development Party). He has been in power since 2002 and in that time re-established religion as a potent force in Turkey, favouring religion over secularism.

Whether Erdogan is purely an opportunist, using the religious card to gain and hold onto power for the last twenty years or truly believes in putting Islam at the centre of Turkey's politics is a question on many people's lips. Regardless, the

outcome has been a serious destabilisation of regional security and Turkey's economy. Many of Turkey's neighbours see a renewed threat that Erdogan eagerly uses as part of his power politics.

He has overturned the ban on headscarves in government institutions, part of Ataturk's drive to remove religious influence from politics, re-opened thousands of madrasas, and implemented a huge mosque building program. To raise Islam's presence in the country still further, he has also publicly supported the conversion of ancient Greek churches serving as museums into mosques.

Erdogan has not only put Islam at the heart of Turkey's politics but sees its ancient Christian minorities, now miniscule in numbers (less than 1% of the population), as its natural enemies. These minorities are despised as second class citizens in Turkey and prejudicial stereotypes abound. Asked on a major Turkish television news channel if he had Georgian ancestry he replied he had been called worse than Georgian, he had also been accused of being Armenian. Turkey keeps records on all citizens' ethnic and religious identity.

When all else were attempting to find a peaceful solution and de-escalate the Azeri-Armenian conflict, Erdogan insisted the Azeris were brothers, provided political, financial and military support to Azerbaijan and threatened Armenia not to get involved. This is the result of a visceral hatred, very much akin to antisemitism, of Armenians in Turkey. Media Watch reports Armenians are consistently the most targeted group for hate speech in Turkey's media.

As for antisemitism, Erdogan's latest diatribes are not surprising. Not long before Israeli soccer player Sagiv Jehezkel was ejected from Turkey – for expressing support for the hostages held by Hamas – Erdogan, attempting to highlight his wisdom and how he would rescue Turkey's basket-case economy, said he had watched Jews, learned something of their

shrewdness and would use this knowledge to put things right. It's a shame he has learned nothing from Turkey's own economists, who opposed the asinine policies implemented by his relatives and cronies.

In addition to support for Azerbaijan and bully-boy tactics towards Armenia, Erdogan has expressed the desire to tear up the Lausanne Treaty signed between Turkey and Greece in 1923. As a result of Greece's defeat in 1922, the Treaty saw lands with a Greek majority population handed over to Turkey to satisfy its security interests. Turkey's victory allowed it to dictate terms but these are no longer deemed generous enough by Erdogan. Eighty years on, he wants more of Greece's islands and refers to Turkey's *Blue Homeland* doctrine to assert demands over the territorial waters of others. This is not simply a desire for more *lebenstraum*, advancing the glory of Turkey and Islam, but is compounded by the *fear of missing out*. Greece's oil and gas exploration around its islands has prompted Turkey to want a piece of that cake too.

The discovery of natural energy resources around Cyprus has prompted Erdogan to demand Cyprus share any benefits with Turkey, as occupier of northern Cyprus. The pretext for keeping the country divided for the last fifty years, to protect the Turkish Cypriot minority, is disingenuous. Turkey's policy of settler colonialism has dramatically changed the demographics of the island. This policy of naked imperialism, in direct contravention to the Geneva Convention, has raised the Turkish population to much higher than the 18% of 1974 – ensuring not only that any negotiations are now influenced by the increased Turkish presence but that the northern part of the island is now, to all intents and purposes, Anatolian in character. These ensure there can be no solution amongst the Cypriots themselves, which has always been a cornerstone of Turkish foreign policy. The schizophrenia manifested through power is blatantly exposed in Erdogan's demands – the continued separation of the island

into two states by military force but at the same time any newly acquired wealth by the south to be 'shared' with the north; the dispatch of Turkish warships to the area of Cypriot exploration serving as a gentle reminder.

Erdogan regularly displays contempt and antagonism towards Europe. Aside from threats towards the former *dhimmi* lands of Greece and Cyprus, he has encouraged Germany's three million Turks to integrate but not assimilate, choosing Turkish identity first. He has also attempted meddling in the elections of Europe's leading economy, telling Turks living in Germany how they should vote. Although a NATO member Turkey has, under Erdogan's leadership, bought Russian military technology and he has no qualms employing refugee diplomacy, busing thousands of refugees to Turkey's border with Europe and assisting them to flood through as a political bargaining chip.

In another link to the events of World War I, when a lone gunman in New Zealand opened fire on worshippers at a mosque Erdogan used the atrocity to score points at political rallies. Appearing on national TV, holding a young child by his side, he warned Australians and New Zealanders they would return home in coffins, as their grandfathers did, if they came to Turkey harbouring anti-Muslim sentiments.

Erdogan's feigned disdain for the Israeli ambassador to the UN symbolically shredding its Charter is nothing other than farcical. Under his leadership Turkey continues the illegal occupation of Cyprus, has assisted in the ethnic cleansing of Armenians from Nagorno Karabakh, uses refugees to blackmail Europe, wants to tear up the Lausanne Treaty and refuses to be a signatory to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

With inflation riding at around 70%, Erdogan's disastrous economic policies, antagonistic foreign policy, emphasis on a religious resurgence and bread and circuses approach, have purposely empowered the most ignorant of society at the

expense of those who actually contribute to the good of the country. One of these beneficiaries recently exclaimed, "Erdogan has done great things. Twenty years ago we would go to the doctors and they would look down on us. Now we give them a beating."

Where will he go once out of power? He has single-handedly ruined Turkey's economy, re-established Islam's influence in the country (the repercussions of which will be felt within and beyond its borders for a long time to come) and ridden roughshod over its legal and constitutional framework. Many Turks, wanting to know where substantial missing government funds have disappeared to, believe he will escape to one of the oil-rich despots in the region.

Erdogan's seemingly delusional claims regarding Israel's designs on Turkey reveal one of two things, or both. Either he is not delusional, opportunistically expounding such rhetoric purely to win favour amongst Muslims around the world and boost his popularity within Turkey (anti-Israel and antisemitic sentiment is a cross-party staple). Or he is genuinely antisemitic. Although he has not gone as far as one of his party members who prayed for Hitler's soul in the aftermath of October 7th – yet.

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