

Juan Cole: Shameless Opportunist

by Winfield Myers



Juan Cole

Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan's victory in the June 24th elections marks a major advance in his years-long march toward one-man rule. So clear is his progress, in fact, that over the past [year](#) or so, even Juan Cole has become a [former](#) Erdogan apologist and has taken to condemning the Turkish strongman.

It's a pity – though hardly a surprise – that this change of heart comes two years too late to help thousands of Turkish academics fired and jailed in the aftermath of the failed July, 2016 coup attempt against Erdogan. But when Turkey's professoriate was under direct attack from the government in the immediate aftermath of the failed July, 2016 coup attempt, Cole was hobnobbing with the Erdogan's academic supporters at

an Istanbul hotel.

In October, 2016 he joined other scholars from the U.S. and Europe for a regime-sponsored [conference](#) titled “Envisioning a Post-Crisis Regional Order for the Sharq [East] Region.” As Campus Watch Fellow A.J. Caschetta reported [at the time](#), the event featured no fewer than half a dozen members of Erdogan’s government, including his spokesman Ibrahim Kalin, a George Washington University Middle East studies Ph.D. and senior fellow at the Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Center for Muslim Christian Understanding at Georgetown University.

But that mattered not a whit to Cole, who was happy to accept Ankara’s largesse. He must also have known by then that his fellow American, Henri Barkey of the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, was among those blamed by Erdogan’s press minions for orchestrating the rebellion – a blatantly absurd charge.

At the Istanbul conference, Cole’s panel on “Discerning the Present through the Past” was immediately preceded by a luncheon titled “In Honor of Presidential Spokesperson Ibrahim Kalin.” Where was Cole’s moral backbone then?

Safely ensconced back home in Ann Arbor, Cole found his courage. His most recent attack on the Turkish president, on June 25 in [Common Dreams](#), ignores Erdogan’s Islamism (the core of his ideology) and purports to warn Americans that Trump has similar designs on the U.S. Even when finally stating the obvious, Cole stumbles over his own ideological blinders.

Cole acknowledges today what everyone knew as he and other regime lackeys mingled with Erdogan’s thugs in Istanbul two years ago: that the government “closed entire universities and fired their professors because they had Gülen associations.”

Worse:

“What margin had existed in the press or the universities for criticizing Erdogan and his policies was removed

systematically. Dissident or critical professors and journalists were fired or even sent to jail.”

When his condemnation of Erdogan’s brutal attacks on Turkey’s universities could have called attention to the plight of his fellow academics, Cole chose to participate in a conference staged to lend a veneer of legitimacy to the crackdown. Now that Erdogan’s grip on power has tightened, he channels Patrick Henry. Persecuted Turkish professors can rest easy, though: Juan Cole has got your back.

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