

**POLI TURCO**

**R E P O R T**

**THE ROOTS OF  
ANTI-AMERICANISM IN  
TURKEY**

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**Number 3 \* April 2018**

# **POLITURCO**

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## THE ANTI-AMERICANISM IN TURKEY

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For the last several years, it is no secret that Anti-Americanism has reached a new peak in Turkey. While Turkish political figures consistently use harsh anti-American rhetoric, Turkish pro-government media disseminate parallel conspiracies about the U.S. The vast majority of the Turkish public believe that almost entire animosity against Turkey is rooted in American policies. Thus, it's essential to analyze the dramatic rise of anti-American sentiment in Turkey in the historical and ideological context to further see the potential risks in the future for the American-Turkish relations and the world.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The significant rapprochement between the two countries begun with the famous symbolic gesture when the remains of the then-Turkish Ambassador Munir Ertegun who passed away in Washington during his active duty carried out to Turkey by the battleship Missouri which was also used by General McArthur for the peace agreement between the U.S and Japan.

On April 5, 1946, Missouri was welcomed by the Turkish battleships Yavuz, Demirhisar, and Sultanhisar in Gallipoli and saluted in front of the Maiden's Tower which is still a famous symbol of Istanbul, Turkey. Turkish Post Office published three series of new stamps for the memory of Missouri.

The American containment strategy towards Turkey began on February 12, 1947. President Harry S. Truman proclaimed his vision about Turkey stating that it would be the policy of the United States "to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressure," apparently referring the Soviet threat against Turkey. It is evident that strategy and security were at the very basis of this emerging alliance between the two countries. This new security paradigm has also led Turkey to change its constitutional design from one-party to multi-party-political system. Thus, it is also evident that it is this security environment that led Turkey to start her Democracy not the demands of the people. While Turkey distanced itself from Germany and USSR during this geopolitical shift, Turkey was merely flowing to the orbit of the U.S. after the II. World War.

The Turkish-American alliance has created its dissidents and Anti-Americanism in the upcoming years. After that sharp geopolitical shift in Turkey, the Soviet Government started a robust campaign to spread anti-American and anti-imperialist sentiments in Turkey. The Soviet Government, however, was aware of the fact that Turkey as a Muslim country with Ottoman past could never end up with a Communist rule. However, Soviet

Government is also cognizant of the fact that they could have political and ideological alliances in Turkey by anti-Americanism. In this way, the Soviet Union would be able to influence

Between 1945 and 1960, Turkish officials applied harsh policies against the left wing political organizations in Turkey; sometimes, they did this to emphasize the “communist threat” in Turkey. The left-wing political parties and organizations used this treatment to empower the Anti-American sentiment in Turkey.

Turkish politics as well. Right after the war, the Soviet Union tried to boost democracy and free elections in Turkey attempting to benefit from the dark atmosphere. Therefore, after the II. World War, the Turkish government, was labeled as “reactionary” and “fascist” by the Soviet Union and Balkan states.

Soviet efforts in Turkey led to the strengthening of the left-wing political organizations and anti-American sentiment in Turkey. Between 1945 and 1960, Turkish officials applied harsh policies against the left wing political organizations in Turkey; sometimes, they did this to emphasize the “communist threat” in Turkey. The left-wing political parties and organizations used this treatment to empower the Anti-

American sentiment in Turkey. The military coup in 1960 and adoption of a new constitution provided more freedom to the political parties that also led to clashes between the leftist and rightist groups in Turkey which eventually resulted in another military coup in 1980.

### **PRESIDENT JOHNSON’S LETTER**

In 1964, President Johnson wrote a strong-worded letter to the Turkish Prime Minister Inonu which increased tension between the two countries. The President Johnson’s letter which aggressively reacted to Turkish ambitions to militarily intervene Cyprus in 1964 to protect Turks in the Island also played a vital role in the development of the anti-American sentiment in Turkey.

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in Cyprus negatively affected their feeling towards the United States. In the following years, negative public sentiment against the United States grew even stronger, especially among the left. They viewed American policy towards Turkey as imperialistic. The critics voiced their anger by claiming that Turkey had ceded its sovereignty to the United States over the NATO and American military bases. They even went so far as to say that the United States determined Turkish domestic and foreign policy. They publicly demanded that the Turkish government

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should expel American forces, which was believed to be nearly 30,000 people. In 1966, when U.S. Secretary of State Dean Rusk came to Turkey for a Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) meeting, some university students and workers' unions gathered in Ankara and shouted anti-American slogans for the first time.<sup>1</sup>

Left wing protestors protested the visit of the U.S. 6th Fleet in 1968, and some American sailors were thrown into the sea by some university students. This particular incident remains a vital source of pride in the memory of the leftist generation of the time. In 1969, the protestors burned the car of the U.S. Ambassador in Ankara. All these events signaled a strong anti-American sentiment in Turkey.

### **SOVIET EFFECT**

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<sup>1</sup> Durmaz, M. (2014). The US arms embargo of 1975--1978 and its effects on the development of the Turkish defense industry. Diss. Monterey, California: Naval Postgraduate School.

impact of this period was widespread in the upcoming years. After all, the ambivalent and supportive attitude of the left to February 28, 1997, military intervention shows that such approaches could not be explained by only conjectural developments (as has been argued by the participants of the movement in the 1960's) and the opportunity for a left-inclined intervention in 1960.<sup>2</sup>



### PRO-RUSSIAN EFFECT

The anti-American and pro-Russian rhetoric led by Homeland Party under Perincek leadership in recent years is the continuation of this political climate of the 70's which provides a good illustration of this historical timeline. Homeland Party increased its publications through its publishing house, Kaynak, on the history of the Turkish Revolution, military's progressive role, and Kemalist – Bolshevik relations. The Kemalist reorientation did not lead the party to repudiate its Marxist–Leninist–Maoist ideology, as Kaynak

continued to publish the works of Lenin, Stalin, and Mao. Homeland Party also boasts international connections and affiliations in line with its anti-American, nationalist–socialist ideology. For example, in the past, they published a letter from Slobodan Milosevic in *Aydinlik*, their weekly publication at the time and signed a protocol of cooperation with Saddam Hussein and most recently arranged many meetings with President Assad of Syria.

On the 3rd of March, 2015 the Turkish Delegation, led by Perincek, met with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to discuss the topics such as developing economic cooperation and solidarity between the two countries and ceasing ethnic and religious conflicts and terrorism in the region.<sup>3</sup>

Along with Perincek, the Lt. Gen. Ismail Hakki Pekin, the former head of the Turkish Armed Forces' Military Intelligence Pekin and other retired senior Turkish officers who are also members of the Homeland Party, Rear Adm. Soner Polat and Maj. Gen. Beyazit Karatas, subsequently visited Damascus three times. Pekin said that during these visits the delegation met with several of the most influential security chiefs, diplomats, and political officials in the Syrian government.

In December 2015, the same delegation paid a visit to Moscow to meet the Russian Intelligence and security

<sup>2</sup> Mutlu Ulus, O. "The Army and the Radical Left in Turkey." (2011): 21.

<sup>3</sup> <http://vatanpartisi.org.tr/english/news/patriotic-party-chairman-perincek-met-syrian-president-bashar-al-assad-12989>

experts to warn the Russian Government not to back a potential military coup attempt in Turkey since a potential coup in Turkey could possible serve American interests.<sup>4</sup>

Perinçek also stated that he and Russian strategist Alexander Dugin, who is known for his proximity to the Kremlin, told vital Erdoğan advisors about unusual activity in the Turkish army on July 14th, 2016, a day before the failed coup attempt.<sup>5</sup>

It is noteworthy to emphasize that even though Perinçek and his Homeland Party is an entirely insignificant actor in Turkish public and political scene, Perinçek has disproportionate influence over the elite and in Turkish Military and bureaucracy.

In an interview with the NY Times, on July 4, only 11 days before the attempted coup in Turkey Perinçek claimed that they even had control over President Erdogan. ‘Erdogan today has been captured by the patriotic forces of Turkey.’<sup>6</sup> “There’s no reason for us to fight. We became side by side. They are now following our program,” he said, referring to Mr. Erdogan’s government.<sup>7</sup>

The Foreign Policy described this cooperation as a marriage made in hell which Erdogan is aware of.

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jump-starting a peace process with the PKK, the Perinçek group was viewed as a spent force, a vestige of Turkey’s hard-line secular past. The Perinçek goose was further cooked during the Ergenekon trials when Erdogan made allies with the Gulenists to purge the military of the old secularists allegedly cooking up a coup against the AKP government. But then the

<sup>4</sup> <http://vatanpartisi.org.tr/genel-merkez/basin-aciklamalari/rus-yetkili-bizi-vatan-partisi-ikna-etti-20242>

<sup>5</sup> <https://ahvalnews.com/patriotic-party/erdogans-advisors-were-warned-impending-coup-attempt-perincek>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/05/world/europe/turkey-erdogan-new-enemies-frustrating-friends.html>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/12/world/europe/turkey-erdogan-purge.html>



Gülenists made the fatal error of digging into corruption allegations against Erdogan's inner circle, including the president's family. With the launch of an intra-Islamist green-on-green war between the AKP and the Gülenists, Perincek was suddenly released

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This also coincided with a sweeping government crackdown and a witch-hunt against the entire dissidents in Turkey which posed a severe risk to NATO, relations with the United States and Turkey's long-term stability.

from jail — where he had been serving a life sentence for an alleged coup plot against the Islamist AKP government — and was back in business.<sup>8</sup>

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### **FLYNN CONNECTION**

A few minutes after the coup attempt in Turkey, Dogu Perincek claimed that the coup was an American conspiracy. It is noteworthy to remember that at the very same moments, the former lieutenant general Michael Flynn was giving a speech in Cleveland just as soldiers were taking over the bridges and airports of Istanbul. "There's an ongoing coup going on in Turkey right now—right now!" Flynn told his audience. The Turkish military, he continued, was a secular institution, whereas the country was heading "toward Islamism" under the leadership of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. His audience broke into applause; the event was hosted by a local branch of the ACT for America, a national security group with strong Islamophobic tendencies. "Yeah," Flynn said, "that is worth applauding."<sup>9</sup>

The pro-Government Turkish Media extensively used General Flynn's speech as evidence for the U.S support for the coup spreading anti-American sentiments in the Turkish public opinion.

The coup attempt was successfully used to increase the anti-Americanism in Turkey. A recent survey revealed a worrying result

<sup>8</sup> <http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/07/13/turkeys-post-coup-purge-and-erdogans-private-army-sadat-perincek-gulen/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://ahvalnews.com/tr/node/1768>



regarding the relations between the US and Turkey.

When asked the question in the ODPAR research, ‘Which countries should act with Turkey in foreign policy?’ The respondents replied as “the U.S.” by 23.1 percent in 2015, today the rate is 13.6 percent. In the meantime, while the request for the cooperation with the United States is declining, the demand for the cooperation with Russia and China is increasing.<sup>10</sup>

However, the recent findings of the Mueller’s Russian investigation revealed that General Flynn was not only under investigation with his ties to Russian Federation but also the Turkish Government and his pro-Russian allies in Turkey.

According to some new findings, the relations between General Flynn and his Turkish counterparts began even long before the coup attempt. This makes Flynn’s

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initial statements about the Turkish coup more suspicious. The question is whether Mr. Flynn made these statements by his pro-Russian counterparts in Turkey to make it look like a pro-American coup in favor of the anti-American camp in Turkey?<sup>11</sup>

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### **KEMALIST, ISLAMIST AND NATIONALIST ANTI-AMERICANISM**

The Soviet-infused interpretation of the United States resonated well with the country’s two main (and opposing) groups, secular Kemalists and conservative Islamists. According to conventional Kemalist thinking, modern Turkey is defined regarding its struggle against imperialists.<sup>13</sup>

Islamists, on the other hand, tend to believe Israel or Zionism in general mostly determines the U.S foreign policy. Thus, for the Islamists in Turkey, American systems, and Zionist conspiracies are almost identical. The Islamism in Turkey had two primary sources. One is Necmettin Erbakan’s first Islamist party, National Order Party (Milli Nizam Partisi - MNP) which took different names in the future

<sup>11</sup> <https://ahvalnews.com/tr/node/1768#>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p163Xcd6v0A>

<sup>13</sup> <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/turkeys-anti-americanism-isnt-new-17448?page=3>

such as, the National Salvation Party (Milli Selamet Partisi - MSP), Virtue Party (Fazilet Partisi - FP) and The Felicity Party (Saadet Partisi - SP). These Islamist parties were broadly supported by various Sunni Sufi orders and Islamic societies in Turkey.

Iran also had a significant influence on Islamism in Turkey. After the Islamist revolution in 1979, Iran increased her efforts to influence Turkish Islamist movements. However, Iran was also aware of the fact that spreading 'pro-Shia' sentiments would not work in Sunni communities. Thus, Iran mostly focused on using anti-Israel, anti-Zionist and anti-American sentiments to influence Turkish Islamist realms. Iranian Revolution at its time was regarded as a real Islamic revolution among Turkish Islamist groups and envied as an example in Turkey.

The nationalist and right-wing parties on the other hand also tend to believe the U.S is committed to establishing

a Kurdish State in the Middle East including southeastern part of Turkey in alignment with Israel and Zionist conspiracies. These are some of the common elements which have been nourishing anti-Americanism in Turkey among both Kemalist, Islamist and

Nationalist circles. Both Islamist and Nationalist circles in Turkey tend to believe that the U.S hegemony in the world is the continuation of the British Empire which defeated the Ottoman Empire and resulted in Atatürk's abolition of the caliphate in 1924 and the enactment of a series of sweeping secularization measures significantly reinforced a robust trend toward secularization. Therefore, the hatred and distrust against British Empire in the past has been directed to U.S hegemony which is capable of dismantling Turkey. It is also argued that the right-wing political parties problematize the Jewish conspiracy to express their ontological insecurities emerging from the Sèvres

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It is evident that Erdogan not only is increasing the tension and strengthens the anti-American sentiment in Turkey but he is also exploiting it for political gains. Erdogan achieves to reinforce the set around himself and to gain a power that regenerates it's both internal and international sources through using the anti-American rhetoric.

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When Erdogan came to power, during the first years of his rule, he honored democracy by advancing judicial independence and the rule of law by a series of amendments. However, when his inner circle and he himself was threatened with prosecution on corruption charges in late 2013, Erdogan's government brought the courts back under the sway of the government through the introduction of the central administrative judiciary organ which reduced government accountability.

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One of the other significant reasons for Erdogan's increasing the anti-American sentiment is because of the potential impacts of the Reza Zarrab trial in NY which could end up with some severe economic sanctions against Turkey. By taking reciprocal measures, the Turkish Government arrested 12 Americans in Turkish prisons on spurious terrorism charges, including pastor Andrew Brunson who was accused of supporting Gülen. Erdoğan appears to be engaging in "hostage diplomacy," viewing these prisoners as useful bargaining chips for a prisoner swap. Zarrab has also featured highly on the list of bilateral irritants.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Nefes, T. S. (2013). Political parties' perceptions and uses of anti-Semitic conspiracy theories in Turkey. *The Sociological Review*, 61(2), 247-264.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2017/11/22/why-turkey-cares-about-the-trial-of-reza-zarrab/>

2013, Erdogan's government brought the courts back under the sway of the government through the introduction of the central administrative judiciary organ which reduced government accountability. While the prosecutors who started the corruption probe were discharged, the police officers who applied the orders of the prosecutors were imprisoned. Erdogan has been able to effectively replace the rule of law with his own order.

Since then, Erdogan has been demonizing the American Government and European Union, Gulen Movement, liberal intellectuals and other opponents accusing them of conspiring against him and his government.

## **CONCLUSION**

The anti-American sentiments in Turkey are not new and deeply rooted within the significant Turkish political and ideological spheres such as Kemalism, Islamism, and Nationalism for different reasons and motivations. Russia and Iran had played a crucial role in this development, as the historical geopolitical actors in Turkey. A potential Kurdish state backed by the U.S in the region also nourishes this development. Erdogan not only strengthens the anti-American sentiment but also exploits it for political purposes. Potential economic impacts of Zarrab case appears another significant reason for Erdogan to enhance the anti-

Americanism in Turkey. While Russia and Iran aim to pull off Turkey from NATO, for Erdogan, it's a matter of survival. The Government purges after the July 15 coup attempt is linked to this new geopolitical development which resulted in an authoritarian regime in Turkey.

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