

January 2018

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### Recommended Citation

Sullivan, Amelia (2018) "Unconditional Surrender: The Rise of President Erdogan and the end of Kemalist Turkey," *History in the Making*: Vol. 11 , Article 5.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/history-in-the-making/vol11/iss1/5>

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# Articles

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## **Unconditional Surrender: The Rise of President Erdogan and the end of Kemalist Turkey**

By Amelia Sullivan

*Abstract: In October 1923, Mustafa Kemal, or Ataturk, became leader of Turkey. Over the next decade and a half, Kemal used his considerable political power to reform the nation. He modernized infrastructure, reorganized government, and led an aggressive campaign to westernize and secularize Turkish society. By the time Kemal passed in 1938, Turkey rose from the ashes of the Ottoman Empire and reestablished itself as a democracy. Almost eighty years later, Ataturk's legacy is in jeopardy. In 2017, the Turkey held a constitutional referendum to radically restructure the nation's government and place an unprecedented degree of power in the office of the presidency. The new constitution passed by a narrow margin in a referendum marred by allegations of fraud and intimidation. By closely examining sources such as the 1924 Turkish Constitution, the revised Constitution's proposed amendments, and Erdogan's past political history, this paper seeks to answer several questions: How will the revised constitution restructure Turkish government? What will a Turkey under Erdogan's leadership look like? Is this the end of secular Turkey as Ataturk envisioned it?*

Since the earliest day of the Republic of Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk (1881-1938) maintained that, "Sovereignty belongs unconditionally to the people," and for decades, this dictum laid at the very foundation of Turkish governance.<sup>1</sup> In October 1925, Kemal was unanimously elected the first President of the newly formed Republic of Turkey. His election marked the beginning of an era of sweeping social, political, and religious reform within the

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<sup>1</sup> Kursad Zorlu, "Yeni anayasada egemenligin cercevesi ne olmalı?," *Al Jazeera Turk*, March 20, 2016, <http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/gorus/yeni-anayasada-egemenligin-ercevesi-ne-olmali>.

nation. Ataturk shifted Turkey away from Ottoman systems of religious authoritarianism and created a new government based upon the principles of secular democracy. For nearly one hundred years, Ataturk's undying belief in democracy and secularism guided Turkish politicians as they amended the nation's constitution or created new laws. Recent events, however, conspire to bring an end to Ataturk's vision.

On April 16, 2017, Turkey held a referendum on a revised Constitution, proposed by the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP). The revised constitution is comprised of eighteen amendments, eliminating the role of Prime Minister, weakening the Parliament, and greatly expanding the authority of the Presidency. The document passed by a narrow margin, opening a schism in Turkish public opinion. The Constitution's proponents argue that the document's ratification prevents the return of the fragile coalition governments that have haunted Turkey's past.<sup>2</sup> In addition, a more powerful presidency would end conflict between various branches of government, allowing the nation to pull itself from political stagnation. Opponents of the proposal, however, argue that a strong executive branch could spell the end of the Republic of Turkey and the return to autocratic rule.<sup>3</sup> The nation's current President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan (b. 1954), is Ataturk's polar opposite. Erdogan is a devout Muslim, an ardent admirer of Turkey's Ottoman past, and once stated that "democracy is like a train... we shall get out when we arrive at the station."<sup>4</sup> Damning evidence of Erdogan's anti-democratic ambitions surfaced in the wake of the referendum. Videos showed referendum officials marking blank ballots in favor of the revised constitution, or some individuals voting more than once.<sup>5</sup> Testimony corroborating the videos' content emerged shortly thereafter. The opposition accused

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<sup>2</sup> Birce Bora, "Turkey's constitutional reform: All you need to know," *Al Jazeera*, January 17, 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/01/turkey-constitutional-reform-170114085009105.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Aram Bakshian Jr., "Erdogan, the Anti-Ataturk," *The National Interest* 127, (2013): 63.

<sup>5</sup> "Turkey: Videos show electoral fraud and ballot stuffing," *The Observers*, April 18, 2017, <http://observers.france24.com/en/20170418-turkey-videos-show-electoral-fraud-ballot-stuffing>.

the President and his officials of rigging the referendum and called for the constitution's nullification. Many fear that with nearly unlimited executive power, Erdogan will discard Ataturk's secularist policies, override the people's sovereignty, and transform the Republic into an Islamic dictatorship.

This paper will be divided into two broad categories: the first discussing the 1924 Turkish Constitution and its history, while the second focuses on Erdogan and his motivations. In its first section, this paper will discuss Turkey's Ottoman past, Ataturk's rise to power, and his subsequent reimagining of Turkey as a secular democracy. The paper will then examine the 1924 Turkish Constitution's provisions in order to establish the role of President, Parliament, and Prime Minister. In addition, this section will offer background on the revised Constitution, summarize its eighteen amendments, then compare and contrast the new document against the 1924 Constitution. In doing so, this paper will illustrate how the revised Constitution will totally restructure Turkish Government.

In its second section, the paper will offer background on President Erdogan and examine where Erdogan's ideological convictions deviate from Ataturk's. The paper will closely scrutinize Erdogan's tenure as President and examine numerous anti-democratic statements and policies espoused by Erdogan. Close analysis of Erdogan's words and actions will allow for an accurate estimation of where Erdogan will likely lead the nation and the threat he poses to the Republic of Turkey's survival as a secular democracy.

## **The Republic of Turkey and the Ottoman Legacy**

For nearly six centuries, the Ottoman Empire remained the dominant power in the Middle East. At the height of its power, the Empire's borders engulfed much of the Middle East, as well as parts of southeastern Europe and northern Africa. Within these territories, the Ottomans created a diverse, thriving society based upon systems of military-patronage, trade, and religion.<sup>6</sup> Islamic scripture formed the basis of government. Only the word of the sultan, the spiritual and political leader of the Empire, rivaled the

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<sup>6</sup> James L. Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 29.

importance of the word of the Qur'an. As such, a mixture of Islamic and dynastic law guided Ottoman courts and politics.<sup>7</sup> However, by the seventeenth-century, the Empire lapsed into a state of social, economic, and political decline. Newly industrialized European nations bested Ottoman armies and relentlessly chipped away at the edges of the Empire. Simultaneously, the rise of nationalism amongst numerous subject populations, such as the Serbians, Bulgarians, Greeks, and many others, embroiled the Ottomans in a succession of intractable rebellions. Ottoman leadership attempted to reverse the Empire's decline by westernizing the military, education systems, and various facets of government. These reforms came to a head under sultan Abdulhamid II (r. 1876–1909), who hoped the creation of a constitution and parliament might rejuvenate the Empire.<sup>8</sup> However, his hopes would prove to be short lived. Instead of reversing the Empire's decline, the newly elected parliament became paralyzed over the course of the government administration. Frustrated with parliamentary inaction, Abdulhamid II nullified the Constitution in 1878 and reclaimed political authority, putting an end to the era of reform.<sup>9</sup>

A group of young Turkish soldiers and intellectuals, however, grew increasingly dissatisfied with the Ottoman sultanate. They formed an influential movement called the Selanik Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), also called the Young Turks. In 1908, the Young Turks seized political authority by forcing the sultan to reinstate the Constitution.<sup>10</sup> From there, they attempted to modernize the nation. Their efforts, however, had little effect upon the overall health of the Empire. Political instability shook Ottoman territories as the Young Turks struggled to remain in power as those loyal to the sultanate rebelled against their rule.<sup>11</sup> The once powerful Ottoman Empire was hurtling towards collapse; under pressure from both external adversaries and internal political chaos. By the early twentieth-century, Ottoman political and social stability grew so weak, European

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<sup>7</sup> Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East*, 29.

<sup>8</sup> Donald Everett Webster, *The Turkey of Ataturk* (Philadelphia: The American Academy of Political and Social Science, 1939), 22.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

leaders joked that the Empire had become the “Sick Man of Europe.”

In 1914, World War I erupted following the assassination of the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, by Serbian Nationalist Gavrilo Princip. When Austria-Hungary and its ally Germany, hungry for revenge, declared war on Serbia, the Ottoman Empire made the unfortunate decision to side with them. The Ottoman military was ill prepared for war, despite efforts to westernize its structure. This weakness forced the Ottomans to withdraw from the conflict in October 1918.<sup>12</sup> Following Allied victory over the Central Powers later that year, the Ottomans hoped that the victors might show some respect for their power and allow the Empire to retain its remaining territories. Their hopes were dashed, however, when American President Woodrow Wilson called for the dismemberment of Ottoman territories along ethnic lines.<sup>13</sup> The rest of the Allied Powers, hungry for revenge against the Central Powers, offered terms that were little better. At the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, British Prime Minister Lloyd George demanded that the Ottomans be expelled from Anatolia. French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau spoke in similar language, stating that Ottoman rule should be withdrawn.<sup>14</sup> There seemed little hope that Ottoman territories would remain intact. In 1920, the sultanate signed the Treaty of Sevres, which divided the Empire between Turkish and non-Turkish regions.<sup>15</sup> In addition, the Allies divided western Anatolia between Greece, Italy, and France. The European powers immediately sent armies to secure these claims, aggravating the local Turkish populations and leading to rising levels of Turkish nationalism.<sup>16</sup> In unoccupied Anatolia, nationalist resistance formed to repel the occupiers. In response, the government dispatched a young Turkish general named Mustafa Kemal to suppress the rebellion.

Rather than carrying out his orders, Kemal rose to power as leader of the resistance movement. For the next two years, he

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<sup>12</sup> Sukru M. Hanioglu, *Ataturk: An Intellectual Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 86.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>15</sup> Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East*, 209.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 209-210.

repelled attacks from foreign troops in Anatolia. These victories earned Kemal and his resistance respect and prestige. Using this newfound power, Kemal ordered the creation of a Grand National Assembly, despite the Ottoman sultan's attempts to thwart its creation.<sup>17</sup> Though fiercely anti-Islamist, Kemal appealed to the religious authorities within the Assembly in order to gather further support from the Islamic population. By 1921, Kemal gained enough political leverage to introduce the Law of Fundamental Organization, a twenty-three-article document that created a new government in which sovereignty belonged "...without restriction to the nation."<sup>18</sup> This led to the subsequent abolition of the sultanate in 1922, thereby freeing Turkey from imperial control. In October 1923, Kemal further utilized this political favor in order to bring about the rebirth of Turkey as a Republic. The assembly unanimously accepted his proposal, then subsequently elected Kemal the first President of the fledgling Republic.

### **Ataturk: A Legacy of Westernization and Secularism**

Mustafa Kemal's election marked the beginning of an era of great social, political, and religious reform within Turkey. Before the Republic's birth, Kemal disguised himself as an ardent supporter of Islamic law and governance. In reality, however, Kemal believed that religion stifled progress and "...loosened the national ties of the Turkish nation."<sup>19</sup> Rather than studying Islamic scripture for guidance, Kemal turned to European political and scientific thought. He saw the Republic as a nation guided by scientism, and popularly held theories of Turkish racial superiority, based upon Darwinian evolutionary theory.<sup>20</sup> Kemal believed that this blend of western concepts formed the basis of a new type of nationalism, which would prove more crucial to the formation of Turkish identity than religion. Turkey could only survive if Turks "...dismissed religion as an obsolete institution devised in a bygone era."<sup>21</sup> Islam meant stagnation, and so Kemal sought to eliminate it from government.

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<sup>17</sup> Hanioglu, *Ataturk: An Intellectual Biography*, 102.

<sup>18</sup> Hanioglu, *Ataturk: An Intellectual Biography*, 115

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

In 1926, Kemal declared the Seriat, or Muslim codes which guided Ottoman legal processes, null and void.<sup>22</sup> The old laws, with their deep roots in Islamic scripture and tradition, were ill-adapted to modern life. In their place, Kemal's Grand National Assembly passed Civil Codes, Debt Laws, Penal Codes, and Commercial Codes based upon Swiss, Italian, and German law.<sup>23</sup> He further ordered the abolition of religious schools, as well as courts based upon the Seriat, and banned ecclesiastical garb outside mosques.<sup>24</sup> In their stead, Kemal instituted a westernized school system which taught a new Turkish script, courts based upon the new established secular Turkish law, and western garb.<sup>25</sup> In addition to education, legal, and clothing reform, Kemal pursued the liberalization of women's roles within the Republic. Ottoman government, with its firm basis in Islamic scripture, prohibited women from participation in government or some aspects of social life. Kemal believed that in order for the Republic to progress, women needed to be granted legal equality. Early in his presidency, he ordered the creation of a commission dedicated to granting women civil rights to achieve this objective.<sup>26</sup> When the Civil Codes were revised, legislators granted women a number of freedoms, including equal rights in marriage, property holding, and before the courts.<sup>27</sup> In 1930, Kemal pushed the envelope further by granting women the right to vote in elections and become village leaders or members of city councils.<sup>28</sup> National suffrage and the right to run for office in the Grand National Assembly followed five years later. As a result of these reforms, Turkish women finally possessed a formal voice in social and governmental affairs.

The secularization of Turkish law, education, and governance, were all major victories in Kemal's campaign to engineer a new Turkish identity. However, despite these successes, Kemal's transformation of the nation was not yet complete. This new identity, Kemal believed, must be celebrated. In 1934, Kemal determined that Turkish names, like the nation, should be

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<sup>22</sup> Webster, *The Turkey of Ataturk*, 107.

<sup>23</sup> Webster, *The Turkey of Ataturk*, 108.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 128-129.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 275.

westernized, and all Turkish citizens were required by law to adopt hereditary surnames. At first glance, the introduction of surnames may seem ephemeral compared to Kemal's legal and legislative reforms, but its cultural significance should not be ignored. Throughout history, the vast majority of Turks had simply been known by titles or first names. The introduction of surnames represented the wholesale adoption of a western cultural tradition into the personal life of every Turk. More importantly, new surnames were required to be Turkish, and not reference tribal or foreign origin, in order to help solidify the republic's nascent national identity. The Turkish people granted Kemal a surname that reflected his place in citizens' hearts—Ataturk, or “Father Turk.”<sup>29</sup> This act emphasized the liberation of the Republic from its Ottoman heritage, symbolizing a new beginning for the Turkish people.

In summary, Ataturk's rise to power marked an era of profound social, political, and religious reformation within Turkey. He drew on his study of western political and scientific thought in order to methodically build a framework for a new nation. Ataturk struck down Islamic religious code and ecclesiastical dress, replacing them with laws based on European systems of governance and Western garb. He closed religious schools, granted women legal equality, and pioneered the creation of a new Turkish script. These reforms resulted in both the creation of a new Turkish identity and the liberation of the Republic from its Ottoman roots.

### **The Republic of Turkey: Democracy and Parliament**

During the Turkish War of Independence, the Law of Fundamental Organization served as the unofficial Constitution of Turkey. By 1923, however, Ataturk knew the document needed expansion in order to delineate the powers allotted to each branch of the new nation's government. Thus, Ataturk and the Grand National Assembly used the Law of Fundamental Organization as the basis of a new code of laws that would serve as the Republic's permanent Constitution. In order to build a strong and lasting system of governance, Ataturk carefully examined the structural weaknesses of the Ottoman Empire. The first weakness, he

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<sup>29</sup> Vamik D. Volkan and Norman Itzokowitz, *The Immortal Ataturk: A Psychobiography* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 302.

determined, was religion. Religion, he believed, stagnated the technological and political progress of the Empire, thereby leading to its eventual downfall. Secularization of social customs and government solved this problem. The Empire's second weakness, Ataturk believed, was the fact that Ottomans did not allow the common individual a voice in the nation's future. Under the old system, the sultan possessed absolute authority over the governmental and spiritual direction of the Empire. Next in power were the social and religious elite, whose authority was, in turn, determined by their proximity to the sultan. At the bottom of Ottoman society were the Empire's citizens, separated from the sultan by a vast social and bureaucratic divide. They possessed no voice in Ottoman governance and lived in accordance with laws set not by themselves, but by the elite. Because the Empire took little interest in the common people, they eventually became dissatisfied by the established order and rebelled. The Republic could not make the same mistake. Common men and women needed to be engaged in government. This meant the system not only needed to be a secular one, but one that allowed the Turkish people a voice in their nation's future. Therefore, in Ataturk's estimate, democracy was an essential cornerstone to ensure the success and longevity of the new Republic.

Democracy, however, could not exist without a proper governing body. Political authority could not belong to one individual, such as the Ottoman sultan. During the Turkish War of Independence, the Grand National Assembly served as wartime government, with Ataturk serving as its political leader. Ataturk decided, the Assembly would continue to be the nation's governing body, with powers delineated by new laws. Members of the Assembly would not be members of the aristocracy or chosen by proximity to Ataturk. Instead, the Turkish people elected representatives. This reflected the new government's dedication to not only democracy, but to the sovereignty of the people. There existed no social or bureaucratic distance between citizens and their elected officials. Turks were now directly involved with the social and political future of the nation in a manner that had not been possible under the Ottoman system of governance. These objectives, would ultimately become the ideological basis of the 1924 Constitution.

### **The 1924 Constitution: Role of the President, Parliament**

## and Prime Minister

The 1924 Constitution of the Republic of Turkey represents the nation's revolutionary transformation from the rigid, religious monarchy of the Ottoman Empire to the secular democracy of the Republic of Turkey. In order to better understand the significance of 2017's revised Constitution, one must examine elements of the original Constitution in detail, namely sections pertaining to the President of the Republic, the Turkish Parliament, and the Prime Minister. In essence, the 1924 Constitution transformed Turkey into a parliamentary republic.

The 1924 Constitution provides detailed instruction on the selection of the President as well as the powers attributed to the office. Section one of the Constitution states that legislative and executive powers are vested in the Grand National Assembly. The Assembly exercises executive authority through the President of the Republic and his Cabinet.<sup>30</sup> The President, therefore, is not the center of executive power—the Grand National Assembly is.<sup>31</sup> Section three summarizes the President's selection and his role. The members of the Assembly elect the President for the period of a parliamentary term. The President cannot take part in discussions or deliberations of the Assembly or vote upon any issue. Furthermore, it is the President's duty to promulgate laws voted by Assembly, as well as to veto any laws which he does not consider favorable for Turkey's future. The Assembly may, however, overrule the President's veto through a majority vote.<sup>32</sup> Though the Grand National Assembly possesses supreme command of the military, it exercises its command over the armed forces through the office of the President. In times of peace, however, the military resides in the care of the Chief of Staff. Though the President nominates the Chief of Staff, the nominee cannot assume office without the approval of the Grand National Assembly.<sup>33</sup> The President also chooses the President of the Council of Commissioners (the Prime Minister) from the members of the

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<sup>30</sup> Edward Mead Earle, "The New Constitution of Turkey," *Political Science Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (1925): 89.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 92-93.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

Grand National Assembly.<sup>34</sup> In accordance with its founding principle of democracy, the 1924 Constitution grants a majority of executive power to the Grand National Assembly, not the President. The Presidency was, therefore, a largely ceremonial head of state. True legislative and executive power rested in the hands of the Parliament and Prime Minister.

In addition to clearly delineating the powers granted to the Presidency, the 1924 Constitution outlines the selection of members of the Turkish Parliament, or Grand National Assembly, as well as the duties and limits of its power. In section one, the Constitution states that the Grand National Assembly is “the sole lawful representative of the nation, and exercises sovereignty in the name of the nation.”<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, legislative and executive powers are “vested and centered” in the Assembly.<sup>36</sup> The electorate, therefore, grants the Assembly its considerable political power.

Section two states that Assembly members are elected in accordance with electoral law. This means they cannot be individuals who are in service to a foreign power, those condemned to penal service, those acknowledging foreign nationality, those condemned for bankruptcy, those deprived of their civil rights, or those who cannot read and write in Turkish.<sup>37</sup> The Grand National Assembly also possesses the power of “interpellation” and of “conducting investigations and parliamentary inquiries.”<sup>38</sup> This tenant of the Constitution gives the Assembly the right to submit questions to the government. In cases where an authority such as the President acts in an undesirable way, the Assembly may hold a vote of confidence or institute a change in government. Article twenty-six states the Assembly “makes, amends, interprets and abrogates laws” and “concludes conventions and treaties of peace with other states.”<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, the Assembly is responsible for declarations of war, examining and ratifying documents by the Commission on the Budget, coining money, and accepting or rejecting contracts or concessions

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>35</sup> Mead Earle, “The New Constitution of Turkey,” 89.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

involving financial responsibility.<sup>40</sup> Under the 1924 Constitution, the Grand National Assembly held the majority of legislative and executive power as well as control over economic, judicial, and diplomatic affairs. Due to their status as elected representatives of the Turkish people, the concentration of power within the Assembly reflected one of the Constitution's key principles—democracy.

The Prime Minister's selection process as well as the powers and limits of the role are, like those of President and Parliament, detailed within the 1924 Constitution. In Mead Earle's translation, he refers to the Prime Minister as the "President of the Council of Commissioners." In the Constitution's third section, it states that the President of the Republic chooses the President of the Council "from among the deputies," or members of the Assembly.<sup>41</sup> After being selected by the President, the Prime Minister nominates other members of the Council. The President must then approve these choices. If the President approves of the selection, he presents the list of prospective candidates to the Assembly. The Assembly deliberates over the list for a week, then determines whether or not it will accept or reject the nominated individuals.<sup>42</sup> The Constitution then goes into detail about the duties of the Prime Minister. According to article forty-six, the Council of Commissioners is "collectively responsible for the general policies of government."<sup>43</sup> Additionally, each member is "responsible within the scope of his authority for the general character of his policy and the actions of his subordinates."<sup>44</sup>

This means the Prime Minister and the rest of the Commissioners are responsible for the smooth function of government administration. The end of section three states that, in tandem with a Council of State, the Council of Commissioners shall "promulgate regulations for the administration and execution of the law, provided that such regulation shall not contain new clauses."<sup>45</sup> The 1924 Constitution paints the role of Prime Minister as one responsible for the function and maintenance of

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 91

<sup>41</sup> Mead Earle, "The New Constitution of Turkey," 94.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 95.

government. While the President represents the nation on the national level, the Prime Minister works to ensure that the Republic functions according to the letter of the law. Due to the nature of the office, the Prime Minister holds a more active role in the governance of the nation than the President. The Prime Minister like the President, however, is still beholden to the Grand National Assembly, and in turn, the people of Turkey. The Prime Minister, like President and Parliament, ultimately derives its power from the citizenry.

The 1924 Constitution clearly defines the role of President, Parliament, and Prime Minister within the nation. The Presidency possesses a minimal role within Turkish government. The President's duty is to promulgate laws voted on by the assembly, veto any laws considered unfavorable for Turkey's future, and select the Prime Minister from amongst the members of the Grand National Assembly. He cannot discuss important issues, nor can he vote on them. The Grand National Assembly, unlike the Presidency, plays an active role within Turkey's government. The Grand National Assembly may conduct interpellation, make, amend, interpret, or abrogate laws, declare war, coin money, or accept or reject contracts or concessions involving financial responsibility. The Prime Minister, like Parliament, plays a larger role in the Republic's governance than the President. The Prime Minister oversees the smooth function and maintenance of government as well as promulgating regulations for the administration and execution of the law.

### **The Referendum and the Revised Constitution**

In December 2016, Turkey's AKP unveiled a new Constitution, henceforth referred to as the revised, or 2017 Constitution. The document introduced eighteen amendments, which drastically alter the structure of the Turkish government.<sup>46</sup> To understand changes to the Turkish Constitution, it is necessary to examine the revised Constitution's background, and its eighteen amendments, in comparison to its 1924 predecessor. The revised Constitution eliminates the role of Prime Minister and transfers the office's executive power to the Presidency, greatly expands the President's authority, and weakens the Turkish Parliament. This drastic

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<sup>46</sup> Bora, "Turkey's constitutional reform: All you need to know."

departure from the 1924 Constitution threatens to greatly amplify the power of the Presidency whilst simultaneously weakening other branches of government, particularly the legislature.

The 2017 Constitution radically changes the manner of Presidential election as well as the manner in which the office functions. Instead of the Grand National Assembly electing the president from among its members, the President is now elected by direct popular vote. Presidential elections must be held in conjunction with the Assembly's elections.<sup>47</sup> The 1924 Constitution states that legislative and executive power are vested in the Grand National Assembly.<sup>48</sup> The 2017 Constitution changes this. Article 104 states that "executive authority belongs to the President."<sup>49</sup> Further, the revised document transfers the executive authority, and duties formerly invested in the office of Prime Minister to the Presidency. This includes power to appoint and dismiss ministers, high level public executives, and senior public officials. The 2017 Constitution further strengthens the Presidency by granting it the power to issue presidential decrees or by-laws to ensure the implementation of law.<sup>50</sup> More ominously, the document also contains a section pertaining to the administration of states of emergency, which does not exist in the 1924 Constitution. According to article 119, the President may issue a state of emergency in the event of war, situations necessitating war, uprisings, spread of violent and strong rebellious actions, or the widespread acts of violence aimed at the destruction of the order established by the Constitution.<sup>51</sup> Additionally, the Presidency is no longer bound by law to remain politically neutral, meaning that a President may retain ties to his political party.<sup>52</sup> The 2017 Constitution enormously expands the powers allotted to the President of Turkey. It transfers much of the executive authority granted to the Grand National Assembly and Prime Minister under the 1924 Constitution to the President. In essence, the President

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<sup>47</sup> Zeynep Yanasmayan and Canan Pour-Norouz, "2017 Amendment Proposal to the Turkish Constitution," *Politics and Law in Turkey* (blog), January 27, 2017, <https://politicsandlawinturkey.wordpress.com/2017/01/>.

<sup>48</sup> Mead Earle, "The New Constitution of Turkey," 89.

<sup>49</sup> Yanasmayan and Pour-Norouz, "2017 Amendment Proposal to the Turkish Constitution."

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

has ceased to be a ceremonial office, and has become the unrivaled center of executive authority.<sup>53</sup>

The 2017 revised Constitution also changed the manner in which members of the Grand National Assembly are chosen, and severely limited the scope of its powers, particularly its role as a watchdog against corruption and counterbalance to presidential power. The Grand National Assembly's longstanding powers of interpolation, and parliamentary investigation have been removed.<sup>54</sup> Consequently, the Assembly no longer possesses the power to check the Presidency or root out corruption within the governing administration. Likewise, the Assembly's power to override Presidential vetoes has been strictly curtailed. The 1924 Constitution enabled the Assembly to overrule a President's veto through a majority vote of all present members.<sup>56</sup> Conversely, the 2017 Constitution requires an absolute majority of all members of the Assembly to overcome a veto.<sup>57</sup> Thereby effectively nullifying the Assembly's ability to overturn a Presidential veto in the foreseeable future, given the ruling AKP's substantial parliamentary majority.

In addition to its overt efforts to limit the power of the Assembly, the 2017 Constitution also places new restrictions on who is eligible to seek election to the Assembly. The 1924 Constitution barred criminals from running for office, as many nations do, but the 2017 document also bars individuals with ties to the military.<sup>58</sup> To outside observers, this stipulation may seem strange. However, in light of Turkey's long history of military involvement in politics, the provision is clearly intended to limit the political influence of the military, and by extension its ability to oppose the ruling party.

To summarize, the 2017 Constitution radically reshapes the Turkish political landscape. The Grand National Assembly has ceased to be a political powerhouse and has been reduced to a largely ceremonial body. Meanwhile, the President has become a

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Mead Earle, "The New Constitution of Turkey," 91.

<sup>55</sup> Yanasmayan and Pour-Norouz, "2017 Amendment Proposal to the Turkish Constitution."

<sup>56</sup> Mead Earle, "The New Constitution of Turkey," 93.

<sup>57</sup> Yanasmayan and Pour-Norouz, "2017 Amendment Proposal to the Turkish Constitution."

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

powerful executive, beyond the reach of parliamentary checks and balances, and the AKP's grip on power has been strengthened considerably. In light of these reforms, it is readily apparent just how far modern Turkey has departed from the legacy of Atatürk. The spirit of democracy and popular sovereignty that underpinned the 1924 Constitution is in full retreat. Erdoğan's new political order controls the future of Turkey.

### **The Dangers of the Revised Constitution**

With Erdoğan's new order in full ascendancy, the question remains, what are the dangers posed by the President's expanded executive authority, and the commensurate decline of parliamentary checks and balances? The first problem posed by the new Constitution stems from the President's ability to appoint and dismiss vice presidents, ministers, high level public executives, and senior public officials. This power allows the President to clear important offices of political rivals and replace them with members of his own political party. The President then holds direct sway over these new appointments, thereby creating powerful pawns in critical government departments. The 2017 Constitution creates further difficulties by no longer requiring the President to maintain political neutrality. This means the President may act as the leader of a political party.<sup>59</sup> This is dangerous since, under the Turkish political party system, it would enable the President to decide who runs on his party's ticket in parliamentary elections. If the President's party controls the majority of seats in the Grand National Assembly, the President could, in effect, control the Assembly as well as its agenda. The end result is the total deterioration of governmental checks and balances.<sup>60</sup> The greatest threat posed by the revised Constitution, however, originates from the President's ability to make decrees that carry the full force of the law. So long as the President makes decrees that are not in conflict with "the provisions of the law," he can make any decree he wishes.

In addition to the threats posed by the expanded role of the Presidency, the revised Constitution further undermines Turkish democracy through the weakening of the Grand National

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<sup>59</sup> Bora, "Turkey's Constitutional Reform: All you need to Know."

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

Assembly and its decreased capacity to check the Presidency. The revised Constitution abolishes the Assembly's right to interpellation. In the past, interpellation allowed the Assembly to routinely monitor the function of government. If the Assembly discovered illegal or corrupt activity, they could hold a vote of confidence and remove a corrupt official from office.<sup>61</sup> The loss of interpellation means that the Assembly has been stripped of its watchdog role within government. This, in turn, enables corrupt officials to abuse their power without fear of reprisal. Some Turkish politicians state that interpellation is not necessary since the people of Turkey directly elect the President. They argue that any action undertaken by the President is, therefore, the will of the people.<sup>62</sup> This argument is flawed. Just because the Turkish people grant the President executive authority does not mean that the President will act in the best interest of the nation. It is important for the Grand National Assembly, whose members are also appointed through direct election, to possess the ability to expose and punish the abuse of executive power. Another problem posed by the revised Constitution is the fact that in order to overcome a President's veto, it is now necessary for an absolute majority of all members of the Assembly to vote to overturn the veto. This new tenant of the Constitution weakens the Assembly's ability to stop controversial legislation. So long as the President's party holds the political majority in the Grand National Assembly, it is nearly impossible to overturn a veto.

The passage of the revised Constitution exposes Turkish democracy to a host of new challenges. The document grants unprecedented executive power to the President, allowing him to retain party ties, make sweeping presidential decrees, dismiss and appoint powerful officials at will, and potentially dominate the Grand National Assembly's agenda. The Assembly now lacks the power to check the President's expanded authority. The removal of the right to interpellation prevents the Assembly from routinely probing the government for corruption and illegal actions. In addition, the revision of the conditions needed to overturn a veto

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<sup>61</sup> Michael Nevradakis, "The Turkish Referendum And Descent Towards Absolute Rule: Interview with Journalist Gurkan Ozturan," *MintPress News*, April 20, 2017, <https://www.mintpressnews.com/the-turkish-referendum-and-descent-towards-absolute-rule-interview-with-journalist-gurkan-ozturan/227015/>.

<sup>62</sup> Bora, "Turkey's Constitutional Reform: All you need to Know."

makes it difficult for the Assembly to overrule the President's decision should his party possess a political majority. This system allows for the exploitation of the people of Turkey, should the public elect a corrupt individual to serve as President.

### **Who is Recep Tayyip Erdogan**

It is necessary to delve into President Erdogan's personal beliefs, statements, and political history to understand why the unchecked expansion of executive power under the revised Constitution poses a threat to the Republic's status as a secular democracy. Erdogan, like Ataturk, came from relatively humble origins and gained authority through political savvy and determination. Erdogan's political career began in the early 1990s as part of the Islamist Welfare Party.<sup>63</sup> The citizens of Istanbul elected him to the office of Mayor in 1994, after he promised to improve sanitation, increase water quality, and decrease traffic congestion. In 2001, Erdogan founded the Justice and Development party (AKP).<sup>64</sup> The AKP gained remarkable traction under his leadership, claiming victory in the 2002, 2007, and 2011 elections. Shortly thereafter, Erdogan was elected Prime Minister of Turkey. As Prime Minister, he promised to combat corruption, open the Turkish economy to competition, and improve schools as well as sanitation in the Republic's poorest areas.<sup>65</sup> On the whole, Erdogan kept his promises. He directed billions of dollars toward development projects and led the Turkish economy to become the eighteenth largest in the world.<sup>66</sup> Corruption, however, remains rife within Turkey's government, though it has been "democratized." These political victories made Erdogan popular with the Turkish public and carried him to the office of the Presidency in 2014. Erdogan's meteoric rise to power and popularity with the Turkish public are a strange mirror to Ataturk's own political story. This parallel, however, is where similarities between the two men end.

Unlike Ataturk, who saw Turkey's Ottoman past as a shameful footnote in Turkic history, Erdogan ardently admires the

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<sup>63</sup> Hillel Fradkin and Lewis Libby, "Erdogan's Grand Vision: Rise and Decline," *World Affairs* 175, no. 6 (2013): 43.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Bakshian Jr., "Erdogan, the Anti-Ataturk," 62-63.

Ottoman Empire. Following the AKP's 2011 election triumph, Erdogan called the election a victory for Turkey and its Ottoman heritage.<sup>67</sup> A year later, he praised the contributions of those who would raise a generation that would "reach the level of our Ottoman and Seljuk ancestors."<sup>68</sup> During 2015 general elections, Erdogan even ordered the commission of a "Conquest Unit." This unit, dressed as Ottoman Janissary soldiers and nearly five hundred strong, accompanied Erdogan on May 30<sup>th</sup> during a campaign speech in Istanbul's Yenikapi square. An Ottoman *Mehter*, or military band, accompanied the soldiers.<sup>69</sup> In addition to verbal and visual displays of his admiration for the Empire, Erdogan is politically aligned with a number of Turkish politicians seeking to recapture Turkey's Ottoman past. One such individual is Ahmet Davutoglu, Erdogan's former foreign policy advisor. In 2001, Davutoglu published a book called *Strategic Depth: Turkey's International Position*, which argued that Turkey's strategic depth is derived not from its geostrategic location and historical legacy as the Republic, but that of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>70</sup> In addition, upon his election to the office of Prime Minister, Davutoglu swore to "bring the order and justice of the Ottoman Empire to today's world."<sup>71</sup> His controversial statements and questionable foreign policy led the opposition to brand Davutoglu, and by extension, Erdogan, neo-Ottoman or imperialist.

The differences between Erdogan and Ataturk do not end in their conflicting perspectives regarding Ottoman history. Though Ataturk initially presented himself as an ally of Islamic governance, he was, in reality, the opposite. The integration of Islam into law and governance, Ataturk believed, led to stagnation. This stagnation made the Ottomans unable to keep up with westernized nations and led to the Empire's eventual collapse. This reasoning, Ataturk believed, justified his secularization of the

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<sup>67</sup> Fradkin and Libby, "Erdogan's Grand Vision: Rise and Decline," 44.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>69</sup> "Surrounded by Ottoman soldiers, Erdogan toughens rhetoric against New York Times," *Hurriyet Daily News*, May 30, 2015.

<sup>70</sup> Ted Piccone, *Five Rising Democracies: And The Fate of the International Liberal Order* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2016), 164-165.

<sup>71</sup> "Turkish PM promises to bring 'Ottoman order, justice,'" *Hurriyet Daily News*, July 17, 2015, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-pm-promises-to-bring-ottoman-order-justice.aspx?PageID=238&NID=85581&NewsCatID=338>.

Republic's government, courts, education systems, and social customs. Not only is Erdogan a devout Muslim, but his past and present political history indicates his support for the integration of Islamic law into Turkey's governmental system. In his youth, Erdogan joined the Islamist National Salvation Party, or MSP. When the party was forced to rebrand itself as the Welfare Party following the 1980 Turkish coup, Erdogan followed.<sup>72</sup> Erdogan became the party's rising star and was the star pupil of the party's leader, renowned Islamic politician Necmettin Erbakan. During his tenure as Prime Minister, Erbakan challenged the Republic's pro-Western, secular roots and attempted to draw closer relations with Arab states. Erbakan's fiery criticism of the established government led to his subsequent removal power by the Turkish military in 1997.<sup>73</sup> Erdogan was caught in the crossfire when he voiced protest against his mentor's removal, reciting a poem declaring that "the mosques are our barracks, the domes our helmets, the minarets our bayonets, and the faithful our soldiers."<sup>74</sup> Authorities arrested Erdogan, then tried him shortly thereafter. The court, believing his speech a threat to the established secular order, sentenced Erdogan to ten months in prison.

Following his release, Erdogan rebranded himself as a politician able to successfully reconcile Islam with democracy. His supporters state that Erdogan is no longer a young, Islamist radical. Rather, he aims to liberate religious Turkish peoples from the constraints and discrimination inflicted upon them by Ataturk's secular legacy.<sup>75</sup> The truth is, however, that Erdogan merely became more skilled in concealing his true convictions. During his tenure as Prime Minister, Erdogan steadily promoted Islam throughout the Turkish bureaucracy and education systems. He called on schools to raise a "new religious generation" and promote a more religious Turkey.<sup>76</sup> In 2004, Erdogan stated that he sympathized with Palestinian terror organization Hamas. When

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<sup>72</sup> Mustafa Akyol, "The making of Turkey's prime minister," *Hurriyet Daily News*, Oct. 31, 2010, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/default.aspx?pageid=438&n=the-making-of-tayyip-erdogan-2010-10-31>.

<sup>73</sup> Akyol, "The making of Turkey's prime minister."

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> Fradkin and Libby, "Erdogan's Grand Vision: Rise and Decline," 45.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

Hamas won the Palestinian elections, Erdogan warmly welcomed its leadership to Turkey.<sup>77</sup> Hamas, however, is not the only Islamist organization that Erdogan supports. Over the years, Erdogan repeatedly voiced his approval of the Muslim Brotherhood. When the Brotherhood's leader, Mohamed Morsi, won in the Egyptian elections, Erdogan received warm reception in Cairo. In the years after, Erdogan worked closely with Morsi, signing a one billion-dollar loan to Egypt. When the Egyptian military overthrew Morsi in 2013, Erdogan called the move "unacceptable" and demanded Morsi's release as well as his restoration to power.<sup>78</sup> Erdogan's support for radical Islamist organizations, however, is not the only indication that his convictions remain unchanged. Despite this fact, the Republic made little effort to expand the rights of religious minorities. Government authorities aggressively utilize Turkish Penal Code to silence critics of Islam.<sup>79</sup> In one such case, a twitter user named Ertan P. received fifteen months in prison for tweets mocking Islam.<sup>80</sup> Many individuals see Erdogan's support for Islamist organizations and his government's use of Turkish law to silence critics of Islam as an indication of his dedication not only to Islam, but also its integration into law.

To many Turkish politicians who still believe in secular government and Ataturk's legacy, President Erdogan represents an existential threat to Turkish democracy. His admiration for the Ottoman past, radical Islamist leanings, as well as ties to neo-Ottoman and Islamist politicians deviate profoundly from Ataturk's pro-western, secularist tendencies. Though their policies may differ, both men are surprisingly similar not only in their respective rises to political power, but in their charisma, skilled oration, and political cunning. In the words of one Turkish citizen, if Ataturk had an evil twin, it would be Erdogan since his "views are mirror opposites of Ataturk's" and that he is "the first overwhelming, larger-than-life figure in Turkish Public life since the Ghazi [Ataturk] himself."<sup>81</sup> In many ways, Erdogan is the Turkish Republic's Anti-Ataturk.

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>78</sup> Fradkin and Libby, "Erdogan's Grand Vision: Rise and Decline," 46.

<sup>79</sup> Piccone, *Five Rising Democracies: And The Fate of the International Liberal Order*, 173.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>81</sup> Bakshian Jr., "Erdogan, the Anti-Ataturk," 62.

## Erdogan's War: The 2016 Coup and Purge

In order to accurately forecast Turkey's future under Erdogan, it is not only necessary to examine where Erdogan's personal convictions deviate from Ataturk's in regard to Turkey as a secular nation-state, but to examine Erdogan's respect or lack thereof for the freedom, democracy, and sovereignty of the Turkish people. Nowhere has Erdogan made his position clearer than in his handling of alleged political dissidents in the wake of the 2016 Turkish coup.

On July 15, 2016, a flight of Turkish fighter jets took off in the skies over Ankara while Turkish Army tanks stopped traffic on the bridges linking the European and Asian portions of Istanbul. Rebels launched raids on a number of critical government compounds, including the General Staff Headquarters and police Special Forces base.<sup>82</sup> At 11:00 p.m., the Turkish government declared the raids an act of insurrection. An hour later, Erdogan called on the public to rally against the insurrectionists and take back Ataturk Airport. In response, eighty-thousand mosques urged their attendees to action.<sup>83</sup> Citizens threw their bodies in front of tank treads and called for the rebels to put their weapons down. In some areas, the insurrectionists gave up their arms. In others, protesters were shot, run over by tanks, or violently beaten. On July 16, the rebels attempted to seize the parliament building, the National Intelligence Agency, as well as Erdogan's hotel in Marmaris. They found the establishment empty, as Erdogan had already departed for Istanbul.<sup>84</sup> The insurrectionists attempted to maintain control over captured areas but failed as resistance grew. Police rallied to the public's cause and subdued a majority of the rebels. By the coup's end, five anti-coup soldiers, sixty-two police officers, and one hundred seventy-three civilians lay dead while thousands more suffered injuries.<sup>85</sup>

In the coup's wake, the Turkish government placed blame for the coup on Fethullah Gulen, a Turkish preacher and

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<sup>82</sup> Berk Esen and Sebnem Gumuscu, "Turkey: How the Coup Failed," *Journal of Democracy* 28, no. 11 (2017): 61.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

businessman living in exile in the United States. Gulen was once Erdogan's close associate and was instrumental in the AKP's struggle to end military influence in Turkish politics.<sup>86</sup> As a result, many of Gulen's followers gained key positions in Turkish government, despite the fact that Gulen himself was not a member of the AKP. However, Gulen's tremendous influence and Erdogan's boundless ambition soon drew the two men into conflict. In 2013, a corruption investigation resulted in the arrest of many business people and bureaucrats tied to the AKP by Gulenist police officers.<sup>87</sup> Tensions rapidly escalated between the AKP and Gulen's followers, resulting in the mass arrest of Gulenists as well as Gulen's flight to the United States. The conflict angered Erdogan, who claimed that those behind the corruption investigations sought to overthrow the established order. From that moment onward, Erdogan and the AKP devoted a massive amount of resources to eradicate Gulen and any remaining Gulenists from the Turkish political sphere. In the years following the Gulenist Uprising, the Turkish National Intelligence Organization (MIT) conducted numerous investigations into Gulen and his disciples.<sup>88</sup> In addition, Erdogan attempted to negotiate with United States authorities for Gulen's extradition to Turkey, though his efforts proved a failure. Members of the Erdogan administration claimed that the 2016 coup materialized as a result of Gulenists' fears that the government investigation into their questionable actions came to an end, and that members of the movement would soon be arrested.<sup>89</sup> Gulen, however, denied any culpability, stating that Erdogan intended to use the coup as an excuse to seize power and "build a dictatorship."<sup>90</sup> Erdogan, Turkish intelligence agencies, and even the AKP's opposition denied Gulen's accusation. Instead, they continued to place blame upon Gulen and various intelligence failures in the months leading up to the coup.<sup>91</sup>

The attempted coup shook the Turkish public to its core and created an atmosphere of fear and insecurity across the nation.

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<sup>86</sup> "Turkey's failed coup attempt: All You Need to Know," *Al Jazeera*, December 29, 2016, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/12/turkey-failed-coup-attempt-161217032345594.html>

<sup>87</sup> "Turkey's failed coup attempt: All You Need to Know."

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

For his part, Erdogan preyed upon these fears, seizing the opportunity to claim more power. On July 22, 2016, the Turkish government declared a state of emergency “to be able to remove swiftly all the elements of the terrorist organization involved in the coup attempt.”<sup>92</sup> The state of emergency expanded the scope of Presidential power within Turkey considerably, effectively allowing Erdogan and his officials to crack down on those they deemed responsible. Although a number of citizens spoke out against the expansion of Presidential power, the general public possessed little recourse against the massively expanded emergency powers of the AKP government. Attempting to ease the people’s concerns, government promised life would be no different than it was before. The state of emergency would simply allow for a peaceful transition to normality.<sup>93</sup> Reality, however, was the opposite.

Over the next several weeks, Turkish courts placed tens of thousands of suspects under arrest on charges of links to Gulen. These suspects, however, were not corrupt businessmen or Gulenist politicians. The accused ranged from military officials, pilots, police officers, and civil servants, to academics and teachers.<sup>94</sup> By December 2016, the government sacked or suspended more than one hundred thousand individuals, with thirty-seven thousand more arrested. When the public questioned the government’s speedy arrest of those related to the coup, officials claimed that the nation’s intelligence agencies investigated Gulen and his followers for more than two years, allowing for the swift identification of guilty individuals.<sup>95</sup> In addition, officials stated mass arrests were necessary in order to “root out all coup supporters from the state apparatus.”<sup>96</sup> For a time, Erdogan’s declared state of emergency and the subsequent arrests of suspected Gulenists seemed justified. Erdogan appeared to practice extreme caution, detaining only those he perceived as a threat to the stability of the Republic. However, a number of disturbing reports emerged, detailing Erdogan’s abuse of the powers granted to him by the state of emergency. Suspected

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> “Turkey’s failed coup attempt: All You Need to Know.”

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

Gülenists were not the Turkish government's only victims. The crackdown widened to target media outlets, the Turkish intelligentsia, and even ordinary citizens critical of Erdogan and the established government. Erdogan's internal security campaign had become a purge of all elements within Turkish society who resisted his political agenda, regardless of their actual ties to Fethullah Gülen.

Though dozens of media outlets were shut down on suspicion of links to the Gülenist movement, the global community grew increasingly concerned over Erdogan's actions as rumors surfaced regarding the arrest or elimination of individuals and establishments unrelated to the Gülenist movement. The government targeted and shut down a number of media organizations that expressed their dissatisfaction with the Erdogan or the AKP's policies. In addition, Erdogan jailed journalists or removed them from their jobs. Over 140 newspapers, magazines, and television channels were banned. In addition, the government detained over 150 journalists. One such individual is Asli Erdogan, a celebrated Turkish writer and member of the advisory board for a pro-Kurdish newspaper known as *Ozgur Gundem*.<sup>97</sup> In August 2016, Special Forces broke into Ms. Erdogan's house in the middle of the night. "They were dressed as if they were going to war. Bulletproof vests, automatic weapons," Ms. Erdogan recalled.<sup>98</sup> The soldiers arrested Ms. Erdogan on charges of disrupting the unity and integrity of the state, spreading terror propaganda, as well as being a member of the Kurdish militant group, the PKK.<sup>99</sup> Ms. Erdogan was flabbergasted. Though she wrote columns on torture, prison, Kurdish issues, and women's rights, she never expected to be arrested for expressing her opinion. She denied all charges, stating that she committed no crime other than "being an adviser to a newspaper."<sup>100</sup> The court refused to listen to Ms. Erdogan and jailed her. Prison conditions were hellish. Ms. Erdogan spent three days in an eight square meter cell with no facilities, after which officers moved her to solitary

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<sup>97</sup> Girit Selin, "'Open, police!' The day a Turkish writer's life changed," *BBC News*, February 8, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-38881053>.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

confinement.<sup>101</sup> There, the jailers neglected her care, declining to offer basic amenities such as drinking water.<sup>102</sup> Ms. Erdogan grew so weak, she was unable to walk. Though authorities eventually released Ms. Erdogan, she could still face life imprisonment if found guilty at her next hearing. Since her release, Ms. Erdogan has not written a single article. Memories of imprisonment silenced her pen. “I have been released but I do not feel free,” she confessed, “in Turkey, one would need to be very naïve to feel free.”<sup>103</sup>

Ms. Erdogan and the media, however, are not the only victims of the crackdown. At the start of his administration, President Erdogan and the AKP introduced a series of educational reforms, which led to the adoption of a more conservative curriculum.<sup>104</sup> These reforms included the removal of evolutionary theory, the inclusion of extensive religious classes, as well as the addition of the coup into social history classes.<sup>105</sup> The new curriculum placed less emphasis upon the founding of the Republic and the early Republican years, and more emphasis upon the transition to a multiparty democracy and the rise of center-right politics.<sup>106</sup> After the coup, universities dismissed over one thousand academics and accused them of being members of the Gulenist movement.<sup>107</sup> The truth, however, is that these dismissals were part of a “political witch hunt” intended to eliminate the AKP’s political rivals. In response to both the removal of valuable teachers and researchers from their positions, as well as academic censorship, Turkish professors and students joined in resistance against the government.<sup>108</sup> At Ankara University, a group of professors attempted to enter the campus. When the police stopped them, they took off their academic robes and laid them before the policemen.<sup>109</sup> In other areas, Professors opened tents to teach

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Nevradakis, “The Turkish Referendum And Descent Towards Absolute Rule.”

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Nevradakis, “The Turkish Referendum And Descent Towards Absolute Rule.”

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

courses not only to students, but to the community as well.<sup>110</sup>

In addition to his efforts to censor academia and the media, Erdogan also aims to silence citizens who criticize his policies, as well as those possessing vague connections to the Gulenist movement. One such victim is Sezgin Yurkadel, a ferry worker. One morning, Yurkadel's superiors called him to a meeting at the Greater Istanbul Municipality's ferry line administration.<sup>111</sup> They presented Yurkadel with a stack of documents from his daughter's school as well as copies of his bank statements. Yurkadel's employers pointed out that Yurkadel's daughter attended a school run by Gulen's followers.<sup>112</sup> In addition, Yurkadel was a patron of Bank Asya, an institution run by Gulenists until the government seized it in 2015. This close association with Gulenist institutions, the employers surmised, must mean that Yurkadel and his family were themselves Gulenists.<sup>113</sup> Yurkadel attempted to argue against these accusations, pointing out that the Ministry of Education certified his daughter's school and that his employer deposited educational assistance into his account at Bank Asya, which was one of Turkey's largest banks.<sup>114</sup> He stated that he chose Asya because it followed the traditional Islamic banking principles of not paying interest. Yurkadel's employers remained unconvinced and fired him. In the time since, Yurkadel applied for over twenty jobs without success. His supposed Gulenist ties, no matter how distant, exiled him to the fringes of Turkish society.<sup>115</sup> Sadly, Yurkadel is merely one of thousands of cases of state sponsored ostracization on the grounds of alleged Gulenist ties in Turkey today.

On the night of the coup, twenty-three-year-old air force trainee Yusuf Yamandag was stationed at a training camp located a few hours away from Istanbul.<sup>116</sup> In the midst of drills, one of Yamandag's superiors ordered the trainees onto a bus, armed them, then ordered them to Istanbul to help police counter the Gulenist

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Mehul Srivastava, "Erdogan's blacklist: Voices of Turkey's purge," *Financial Times*, May 4, 2017, <http://ig.ft.com/vj/turkey-purge-victims-voices/>.

<sup>113</sup> Srivastava, "Erdogan's blacklist: Voices of Turkey's purge."

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

threat. Protesters stopped the bus before it reached the city and arrested the trainees. The government later charged Yamandag and his comrades with the attempted assassination of the President as well as conspiring to dismantle the Republic.<sup>117</sup> Yamandag's family insists that their son is innocent, despite government allegations that the Air Force Academy was filled with Gulen sympathizers. Like Yurkadel, Turkish citizens labeled the Yamandag family as undesirable and ostracized them.<sup>118</sup> The family's neighbors and friends refuse to associate with them, while those on the street verbally abuse them.

The bloodshed and terror surrounding the failed 2016 coup spurred nationwide paranoia about Turkey's political stability. Erdogan harnessed these insecurities to initiate a massive power grab and enact an extensive purge intended to silence political dissent across the nation. Erdogan's actions demonstrate his flagrant lack of respect toward the rights and sovereignty of the Turkish people. One can surmise that with the expanded powers granted to him by the revised Constitution, Erdogan's purge will not only continue, but grow in scope.

### **The Writing on the Wall**

Erdogan's power grab in the wake of the 2016 coup, and subsequent purge are not the only indications of his blatant disregard for popular sovereignty. In his attempt to distance himself from his past as a fire-tongued pro-Islamist politician, Erdogan rebranded himself as a democratic reformer bent on eliminating entrenched corruption. This reinvention of his image was largely successful. Erdogan's rebellious past, including his criminal history, were erased from public memory. The Turkish public believed Erdogan to be a political moderate, far removed from the youthful radical arrested for reciting Islamist poetry in the wake of his Islamist mentor's removal from office. Regardless of his closely managed 'moderate' political persona, the truth is very different. Close analysis of a number of Erdogan's contentious statements following his political rebirth, reveal that Erdogan is not as far removed from his political past as he claims. Rather, they reveal a man with little respect for democracy and freedom of

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

speech.

Following the detainment of thousands of suspected Gulenists, academics, and Erdogan's political opponents by the Turkish police, Erdogan made several concerning statements regarding freedom and democracy in Turkey. In a speech to local politicians in Ankara, Erdogan criticized those concerned with the erosion of liberty and democracy as a result of his national state of emergency. Erdogan declare that "For us, these phrases [freedom and democracy] have absolutely no value any longer."<sup>119</sup> He went on to argue in favor of prosecuting journalists, lawyers, and politicians allied with the Gulenist movement or PKK as terrorists.<sup>120</sup> Nor is this the first time Erdogan vocalized his disregard for democracy. In the midst of the reinvention of his political identity, Erdogan stated that "democracy is like a train. We shall get out when we arrive at the station we want."<sup>121</sup> This statement demonstrates that Erdogan's present disregard for secular democracy is not a recent development, but an integral part of his political identity; skillfully hidden through careful posturing.

In addition to concerning statements regarding democracy, Erdogan also made clear his disdain for freedom of speech. In 2014, Erdogan, then Prime Minister, was the subject of a large scandal which uncovered corruption within his administration. The story spread like wildfire through social media platforms like Twitter and YouTube and dealt a severe blow to Erdogan's credibility. Erdogan, angered by the evidence, set out to wage war on social media. Later that year, Erdogan acquired a court order which allowed him to ban Twitter from the Republic.<sup>122</sup>

The Turkish people rose in protest against Erdogan's decision, claiming it infringed upon freedom of speech. Despite public protests, Erdogan remained unsympathetic. He argued that

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<sup>119</sup> Lizzie Dearden, "President Erdogan says freedom and democracy have 'no value' in Turkey amid arrests and military crackdown," *Independent*, March 18, 2016, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/president-erdogan-says-freedom-and-democracy-have-no-value-in-turkey-amid-arrests-and-military-a6938266.html>.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Bakshian Jr., "Erdogan, the Anti-Ataturk," 63.

<sup>122</sup> Terrence McCoy, "Turkey bans Twitter—and Twitter explodes," *Washington Post*, March 21, 2014, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2014/03/21/turkey-bans-twitter-and-twitter-explodes/>.

the charges of corruption mounted against him were false, and that they never would have spread had it not been for social media. He expressed his desire to expand the ban to YouTube, Facebook, and other social media platforms.<sup>123</sup> Erdogan's Twitter crusade is not the only piece of evidence that displays his distrust, or even hatred, for freedom of speech. In the same year as his controversial Twitter ban, Erdogan addressed the Committee to Protect Journalists, or CPJ, at Ankara's International Press Institute. He defended his government's regulation of internet information, by stating that his laws made online media "safer and more free."<sup>124</sup> The day before, however, he told the CPJ that the "media should have never been given the liberty to insult." In addition, he stated he was "increasingly against the internet everyday."<sup>125</sup> This attack on social media, online information, as well as the press displays Erdogan's total lack of respect and distaste for free speech.

Though Erdogan succeeded in reinventing himself as a moderate Islamic politician, dedicated to the elimination of corruption and the defense of democracy within the Turkish government. Erdogan's political statements, continue to suggest the opposite. Erdogan holds little respect for democracy, naming it a "train" that Turkey may disembark from whenever it pleases. In addition, Erdogan believes that freedom and democracy are ideals that have "no value." Erdogan's statements also express a dislike of freedom of speech. He attempted to ban numerous social media outlets critical of his Presidency, declared that the media should never have been given freedom to "insult," and asserted his increasing opposition to the internet. These contentious statements and actions display Erdogan's antipathy towards democracy and freedom of speech in general. Both are barriers, which hinder his quest for absolute control over the Republic.

## **The Future of the Republic**

In light of Erdogan's clear hostility to secular governance and

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Damien Sharkov, "Turkey's Erdogan says he is 'increasingly against the internet every day,'" *Newsweek*, October 3, 2014, <http://www.newsweek.com/turkeys-erdogan-says-he-increasingly-against-internet-every-day-275014>.

<sup>125</sup> Sharkov, "Turkey's Erdogan says he is 'increasingly against the internet every day.'"

democracy, combined with the unprecedented powers now vested in him by the 2017 Constitution, Turkey's future hinges on one critical question: is this the end of Ataturk's legacy? Nearly one hundred years ago, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk created the Republic of Turkey as a secular democracy which placed the people's sovereignty above all else. This system of government, though not without flaws, accorded Turkish citizens a voice in their nation's future. The 2017 Constitution undoes Ataturk's legacy. It grants the President sweeping political powers, transfers the Prime Minister's duties to the Presidency, and weakens the Grand National Assembly's power to check executive authority. President Erdogan possesses a well-documented history as an outspoken advocate of Islamist government, with ties to fundamentalist Islamist groups and politicians, including the Palestinian terror network Hamas, Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, and the Brotherhood's leader Mohamed Morsi. Furthermore, Erdogan is an avid supporter of revising Turkey's educational system to include Islamic history classes, as part of a broader campaign to raise Turkey's newest generation to be more religious than the last. Erdogan is also an ardent admirer of Turkey's Ottoman past, even going so far as to dress Turkish soldiers as Ottoman janissaries during important political events in order to recapture the glory of the Empire. Additionally, he socializes with a number of neo-Ottoman politicians bent on the rebirth of the Ottoman Empire. With the increased executive power granted to him under the 2017 Constitution, Erdogan could eventually reintegrate Islamic law into Turkish governance. This would result in the death of the Republic as a secular power and the final destruction of Ataturk's legacy.

In addition to dismantling Turkey's secular government, the 2017 Constitution also opens the door for the end of Turkish democracy. Erdogan's political history and statements demonstrate that he desires absolute control over the Republic and will not hesitate to eliminate individuals who stand in his way. Following the 2016 Turkish coup, Erdogan carried out an enormous purge of media outlets, academics, and ordinary citizens opposed to his leadership. Many of these individuals committed no crime. They simply voiced their disapproval aloud or possessed ephemeral ties to Erdogan's enemies. Most ominously, Erdogan stated that liberty and democracy had little meaning in the Republic, and he is well positioned to act on his rhetoric. Indeed, Erdogan's actions and words suggest that he aims to strip the Republic not only of its

status as a secular nation, but as a democracy itself.

Bearing Erdogan's actions and newfound power in mind, Turkey's future rests firmly in the hands of the President. Given his record so far, it seems likely that Erdogan will use the expanded Presidency to make himself the absolute authority in the Republic of Turkey. Indeed, Erdogan now possesses all of the necessary tools and powers to govern as an autocrat. He has already abused the power to declare states of emergency in order to extend the current political purge, until he eliminates the opposition or terrorizes them into silence. Likewise, he will utilize the power to appoint and dismiss high office officials to rid the government of his rivals and replace them with cooperative puppets. In addition, so long as the AKP possesses a political majority in the Grand National Assembly, any Presidential decree Erdogan declares will pass, especially considering his dual role as President and party leader. Furthermore, if Erdogan builds strong Islamic support within the Republic, he could pave the way for the reintegration of Islamic law into Turkish government. Should Erdogan take this path, the Republic of Turkey will cease to exist as Ataturk intended and be transformed from a secular democracy into an Islamic authoritarian state.

## **Conclusion**

Nearly one hundred years ago, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk envisioned a new Turkey. He drew upon his experiences as a citizen of the Ottoman Empire, analyzing the failings of its political and social systems in order to create a nation that he believed would weather the test of time. Ataturk believed religion led to the social, political, and technological stagnation of the Ottoman Empire. Thus, religion was separated from government to the greatest degree possible in the newborn Republic. He saw the corruption created by a system of governance deaf to the voice of the common people as antithetical to the stability and prosperity of a modern nation. Consequently, Ataturk and his allies set about to create a representative system, defended by a series of institutionalized checks and balances. In order to solidify these reforms, Ataturk led a campaign of aggressive secularization and westernization. The end result was a government with a ceremonial Presidency and a strong Parliament that shared its executive authority with an equally powerful Prime Minister.

The passage of the revised 2017 Constitution reverses the nation's political balance of power, by empowering the Presidency, eliminating the office of Prime Minister, and weakening the Parliament's ability to check the executive branch's authority. Under this redesigned system, the nation's future is largely dependent upon the type of individual the Turkish people choose to elect as President. Thus, a corrupt President will not act in the nation's best interests. He will take advantage of the powers granted to him by the Constitution, using his immense political clout to dominate the Republic's political system and drive all opposition into exile, or worse.

President Erdogan's character, political history, and controversial statements seem to suggest that he will use the power of the revised Constitution to transform the Republic of Turkey into an Islamic authoritarian state. Erdogan is a supporter of the religious revision of Turkish education, communes regularly with neo-Ottoman politicians, and voiced his unwavering support for controversial Islamist organizations such as Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood. He abused the powers granted to him by the recent Turkish state of emergency to rid the Republic of his rivals. Finally, Erdogan waged war against social media platforms for uncovering government corruption and declared that Turkey no longer needed liberty or democracy. The 2017 Constitution grants Erdogan all the tools he needs to expand these policies, widen the length and scope of his political purges, and pave the way toward the end of secularism in Turkey. The Grand National Assembly now lacks the ability to stop Erdogan, should the Turkish people wish for it to intercede. Thus, Turkey is now at the mercy of Erdogan and the AKP. Atatürk's secular Republic is dead, all that remains to be seen now is just what form Erdogan's new, autocratic order will take, and whether it will attempt to re-assert itself as a neo-Ottoman power in the Middle East.

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**Author Bio**

Amelia Sullivan graduated from CSUSB in Spring 2017 with a Bachelor of Arts in History. She fell in love with history at a young age thanks to her family's passion for books. This led her to pursue an Associate of Arts in History at her local community college. In her free time, Amelia enjoys learning foreign language, practicing martial arts, and playing Jazz on her trumpet and saxophone.

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