

AND NOW, A SULTAN-FOR-LIFE?

Tassos Symeonides
(RIEAS Academic Advisor)

Copyright: Research Institute for European and American Studies (www.rieas.gr)

Publication date: 18 April 2017

Note: The article reflects the opinion of the author and not necessarily the views of the Research Institute for European and American Studies (RIEAS).

Erdogan won the April 16 referendum by a narrow margin. How dangerous is he now as newly minted sultan-for-life, provided he lasts?

Erdogan is unpredictable, suspicious, and impulsive. He is also revengeful and ruthless when dealing with enemies, both true and fictional. He sees conspiracies coming from all points of the horizon. In other words, he clearly demonstrates the obsessive character traits which distinguish dictators from normal people. His paranoia is increasing proportionally to his recent revengeful, hostile rants against Europe. In a recent reshuffle of his spy agency, he [created](#) a unit of dark “special operations” to wage total war against enemies inside and outside Turkey.

When dealing with a person like this, all bets are off. Those who still insist Erdogan is a careful political manipulator, with a cool disposition masked behind his hateful charlatanic exterior, are making a mistake. The referendum result is far from the landslide in his favor he predicted. And the opposition won't be sitting with hands crossed on its chest. In the following weeks and months we will witness an expanded crackdown, with more arrests, more discoveries of supposed “conspiracies,” more purges, and an intensified war against the Kurds. In short, we're looking at instability and turmoil that can get out of hand. Today, Erdogan is more dangerous than ever before.

Brussels and Berlin have made clear that Turkey's attempt to join the EU could be terminated with Erdogan elevating himself to dictatorial power. Now that the chips are down, how fast could Turkey be booted out of the “European family?”

Europe's current troubles make a quick decision on what to do with the sultan difficult, to say the least. Thus, we are in for yet another round of confused to and fro as Berlin and its satellites are

wringing their hands on what to do. Looming elections in France and Germany, and steadily increasing anti-EU feeling across the Continent, complicate things even further. Erdogan holds a gun to Europe's head by threatening to let loose renewed waves of Moslem illegals seeking to reach the gold pot in northern Europe. Any such "accident" -- or, even, the mere mention of the possibility of one -- could shift the French election on April 23 and give a mandate to Marine Le Pen. Such potentialities would push Merkel et. al. to keep doing what the European "dis-Union" does best: procrastinate and postpone any action until "more details" about the "alleged" fraud emerge. In a [joint statement](#), Merkel and Sigmar Gabriel, her foreign minister, have said exactly that.

Turkish opposition leaders demand recounts and an investigation about fraud declaring, in effect, they do not recognize the legitimacy of the poll outcome. How could such action influence the Turkish political situation?

Monitors from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Council for Europe, in a preliminary statement, agreed with the opposition and delivered a "[scathing verdict](#)" on the conduct of the referendum. The news is hardly surprising. Erdogan has demonstrated he is an Islamic "democrat" with brass knuckles and a knack for destroying any opposition that might threaten the consolidation of his power. He made sure the referendum was "fair" and "just" but only according to his own political interests. He tiptoed on the very frontier separating an open dictatorship result of 99.90 percent, ala Saddam Hussein, and Turkish "democratic" traditions (which were never democratic) with success. With a state of emergency still in effect, he hounded his opponents, he deprived them of any real access to mass media, and he sent out his thugs to "persuade" *anyone* displaying an appetite to challenge his oncoming sultanate in any effective way.

Despite this massive intimidation campaign, however, Turkey ended up ***clearly divided*** between those who believe in secular government and democratic ideals and those of the aboriginal Anatolian Islamic mind. This division is not at all new. Kemal was temporarily successful in suppressing the Islamic element, but Erdogan succeeded in dismantling his military-secular legacy securing the Islam-free government. The referendum was thus the catalyst which brought back into sharp relief these deep cleavages in Turkish society and has painted the lines of the future internal conflict. Erdogan will accelerate his punitive action against the opposition now that he believes he has all of his enemies on the run. The opposition should not be expected to lie down and take it.

The next obvious question is how to approach Turkey as NATO member after this referendum result.

There is little doubt NATO will bend over backwards to avoid expressing any justified criticism of the newly elected sultan and his vicious clampdown of all and sundry. The West, in general, has a long history of working with murderous dictators for “geo-strategic reasons” and “in the interest of national security.” Only last January, for example, a key NATO ally, Britain, sent PM Theresa May to Ankara [to sign a deal](#) with Erdogan for joint UK-Turkey building of fighter jets. Mrs. May also issued a thoughtful message to the Turkish leadership “to respect democracy,” which no doubt ended in Erdogan’s dustbin posthaste.

NATO is “pragmatic.” It would be all too hopeful to expect any substantive conceptual change in order to deal with yet another out-and-out dictator (NATO happily embraced the Greek colonels, too). From NATO’s standpoint, the stakes are too high for any rehashing of uncomfortable history and the moral obligations toward those in Turkey who are persecuted, imprisoned, and, even, killed for opposing the rising Islamic republic. And, of course, this is no time to recall Erdogan nursed the Free Syrian Army (along with Saudi Arabia and Qatar) aided and abetted ISIS, and [promoted](#) Jabhat al-Nusra, the Islamist terrorist group affiliated with al-Qaeda under the umbrella of the Islamist Jaish al-Fatah command structure -- or that he almost triggered a war between his country and Iraq.

NATO, therefore, is about to earn an added combat ribbon as the key Western security alliance harboring an emergent fundamentalist Islamic republic and its elected dictator. There is no doubt that NATO “traditionalists” will continue to lobby in favor of Ankara. That these “traditionalists” commit a fatal mistake will attract attention *only* when the sultan’s “devout” tactics and Islamist fanaticism cause a catastrophe that could have been avoided.

Greece is too close for comfort to Turkey and within Erdogan’s easy reach. Is there a “sound” way of approaching the Turkish threat “post-referendum?”

Greece is in the unenviable position of having zero “strategic depth” vis-a-vis Turkey. And as summer 2015 proved beyond doubt, illegal immigration is the perfect cost-free weapon of mass destruction in the hands of the sultan. Greece is not a sovereign state any longer, regardless of all claims (Greek *and* European) to the contrary, and it is being hammered into the ground by its European “partners” via debt bondage.

Therefore, all “pragmatists” need to accept Greece is easy prey not only for the sultan but for other “friends” in the Balkan neighborhood. A quick look at the government press releases is enough to give us a taste of the “planned” Greek “policy:” there’s plenty more on “friendship and cooperation,” more on “international treaties in force,” and more on “democracy and the rights of the Turkish people.” Party leaders, in turn, echoed this “sober” attitude underlining that

“stability” in Turkey, now that the referendum is over, will surely increase hopes for rational Ankara decisions.

All of the above, translated into plain English, says Athens *has no clue as to what to do with the burgeoning Turkish Islamist chauvinism and its war plans.*

Much will be decided by the US posture toward the elected sultan. So far, the Trump administration appears undecided on any particular course of action. On the other hand, both Defense Secretary Mattis and National Security Advisor General McMaster are “traditionalists” when it comes to alliance politics, which could give the sultan space for manipulation and carpet bazaar haggling.

Perhaps more importantly, McMaster [refuses](#) to use the term “radical Islamic terrorism,” which President Trump has endorsed, and is on record of claiming Islamist fanatics are “un-Islamic” presumably because Islam “is peace.” This view is purely Obama and has raised brows among many Trumpists.

Greece, exposed to the imminent threat of another wave of illegal Moslem “refugees,” operates with an unnerved government, clawing upon the fantasy life raft of Left “internationalism,” and a disjointed political elite fearful of *any* demonstration, verbal or otherwise, which may be construed as “non-pacific” toward the clear enemy next door.

With such leadership in place, Greek security, in the era of the sultanate, could face risks which will make previous Turkish behavior look like that of a true and dedicated friend.