Back in 1984 the CIA had termed Perincek – a figure little known in the U.S.- a terrorist and designated his organization, the Workers’ and Peasants’ Party of Turkey, TIKP, as a terrorist organization.

This report investigates a new alignment within Erdogan’s political movement towards Russia and Putin along with Iran and China, through former leftist terrorist leader Dogu Perincek’s facilitation¹ of Erdogan’s relationships with Putin.

I was assigned to arrest Perincek, now 77, in 1999, as a counterterrorism police sergeant, and at the time I learned of his surprising ties to the upper levels of the Turkish military. I didn’t know, and it did not come out until this year, that back in 1984 the CIA had termed Perincek – a figure little known in the U.S.- a terrorist and designated his organization, the Workers’ and Peasants’ Party of Turkey, TIKP, as a terrorist organization.² We will see that Perincek’s ties with leftist military school students and mid-level officers developed from the early 70s during the cold war era. These ties have blossomed into alliances with top generals that make Perincek invaluable to Erdogan.

But to understand the Perincek saga, we need to go back to the corruption investigation that almost brought down Erdogan in December 2013 – an investigation that continues to resonate in Turkish politics. It was the main cause of Erdogan’s alliance with Perincek and remains a threat to Erdogan and his circle.
Erdogan, now 65, had a vision in 2002 when he first established his mainstream conservative party, the Justice and Development Party, known as the AKP for its Turkish initials (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi). Erdogan, who was the mayor of Istanbul between 1994 and 1998 as the right-hand man of Necmettin Erbakan, the leader of the Welfare Party (Refah Partisi), and the Islamist Milli Gorus movement (National Vision Movement); was popular because he claimed to be an honest politician, fiercely against corruption. According to Erdogan, who is from a working-class background, he did not have any wealth but his wedding band when he was running to be the mayor of Istanbul in 1994. He proudly announced, “Look at this ring, if you hear one day Erdogan became rich, know that there is something wrong.”³ Yet he ended up as one of the world’s richest politicians;⁴ with estimates of his wealth ranging from several billion dollars.⁵

While establishing his political party after leaving Erbakan in 2002, Erdogan claimed that he had departed from his former political Islamist ideology, promising more democracy, justice, and development. This was an effort to persuade skeptical voters about his real intentions. Erdogan claimed in 2003 that he took off his Milli Gorus shirt, referring to his ideology, to seek the support of the Turkish people⁶ after being imprisoned for four months in 1999 for reciting a poem during a political rally in 1997 with the provocative words, “The minarets are our bayonets. The faithful are our soldiers. God is great. God is great.”⁷

Up until December 2013, Erdogan was happy; he had been in power for over ten years, and he safely got over almost all of the political and legal hurdles he faced. These included the infamous closure case against his party due to their support for the legalization of headscarves by the Turkish Constitution Court in 2008⁸ and the Gezi Park protests and civil unrest at Istanbul’s Taksim Gezi Park⁹ in May 2013.

The Gezi Park protests were a response to an illegal construction project Erdogan wanted to start at historic Taksim Square, one of the few remaining green areas at the heart of Istanbul. Erdogan’s defiance of a court ban and city-dwelling plan with suspicions of corruption lead¹⁰ to a wave of demonstrations and civil unrest in Turkey beginning on 28 May 2013. The protests continued until August 2013. The Gezi or Turkish Spring demonstrations sparked a series of protests around Turkey against the AKP, and Erdogan feared losing control. This lead him to crush the demonstrators harshly, arresting over five thousand people all over Turkey¹¹ and going after many prominent community figures charged as planners and financiers of the Gezi demonstrators with the intention of a coup against Erdogan.¹² As we will see below, there were supporters of Perincek among the demonstrators.

₁. “Explain it like I am Bilal”
These were directed against his inner circle and family members including his son Bilal Erdogan¹³ with the arrest of a total 80 people.¹⁴ The Istanbul Police Financial Crimes Investigation Department was able to provide hard evidence of cash exchanges and illegal activities with phone conversations and video recordings, which initially lead to the resignation of the four Erdogan ministers who were associated with the cases.¹⁵ Erdogan was upset, he felt extremely vulnerable, and he had to act fast to stay in power. On December 17, 2013, Erdogan was in Konya.¹⁶ According to the leaked wiretaps,¹⁷ Erdogan immediately called his son Bilal. Initially, Bilal was not able to comprehend the situation and asked his father several times for clarification which led to the creation of a proverb in Turkish¹⁸ “Bilal’e anlatir gibi anlat” or “Explain it like I am Bilal.” Erdogan promptly ordered his son to better conceal the cash they hid in their Istanbul villa which was over one billion US dollars, and some thirty million euros. These leaked phone wiretappings¹⁹ became infamous as the “Zero the cash wiretapping” referring to Erdogan’s orders to Bilal.²⁰ Erdogan, realizing that he could not trust Bilal, sent his daughter Sumeyye to handle the issue. In one day, Bilal, Sumeyye and her husband Berat Albayrak (who is now Erdogan’s heir and Turkish Treasury and Finance Minister) managed to disperse the cash with several trucks; according to a financial crimes department officer the author spoke under the condition of anonymity. However, they were not able to dispose of thirty million Euros because they could not find a suitable place for that many euros in cash. Bilal, on the phone reporting to his father, was heard saying “they decided to purchase eight villas from the prestigious Sehrizar Villas project on the Bosporus with the euros they could not hide.²¹ Of course, Erdogan furiously denied the wiretaps and claimed that they were fabricated. However, as the time passed by, ample evidence surfaced confirming the validity of the Erdogan and Bilal phone conversations including the purchase of the villas with the receipts for the payments and registration of the villas in Bilal and his family member’s names.²² As if these problems were not enough for Erdogan, the Istanbul police carried out another operation a week later. On December 25, 2013, Erdogan’s son Bilal Erdogan was summoned by a criminal court prosecutor as a suspect in a corruption investigation involving forty one businesspeople who were known to be close to Erdogan.²³ Bilal also leads TURGEV, Erdogan’s controversial education foundation, which receives extensive government and private funds for its activities. The Erdogan family similarly leads the TURKEN Foundation²⁴ in the U.S., a sister organization of TURGEV which was recently in the news for over $65 million in donations it received in 2016 and 2017.²⁵ Just as Erdogan thought his troubles with the Gezi demonstrations around the country were over so he could relax and focus on the next elections in 2014, he woke up to the December 17, 2013 corruption operations.
Erdoğan had to act fast and make radical decisions, realizing the political and legal atmosphere in Turkey were rapidly turning against him with the December 17 and 25 corruption operations. He knew he could not survive if he had accepted the corruption allegations. Similarly, he was also aware that he could not trust the judiciary, police, and military. Erdoğan was also very much aware that he could not rely on the West and get his Western allies’ backing to save himself from the legal troubles surrounding him at home.

With all these details in mind, Erdoğan made three critical decisions. The first was denying the December 2013 operations allegations against him and his inner circle regardless of the evidence. He claimed that the operations were a coup against him and that the evidence was fabricated and was all fake.

His second move was to fire and purge all police officers, prosecutors, and judges involved with the anti-corruption operations claiming they all were the members of the opposition Gulenist movement and that they acted deliberately by producing false evidence to take him down.

Thirdly, Erdoğan needed new allies to protect himself from the wrath of the Turkish military and judiciary. At that point, Erdoğan’s former arch-enemy, an aged former leftist terrorist leader named Dogu Perincek, entered the picture. Perincek, who is known as “the shadow defense minister” due to his ties to high military officials, suddenly became his new supporter and ally. As a long-time Communist with ties to both Russia and China dating back decades, the 77-year old Perincek’s influence tilted Turkey’s and Erdoğan’s face slowly but surely from the West towards the East while working to reshape, particularly, the Turkish military. The former president of Erdoğan’s AKP’s Istanbul branch Selim Temurci, one of the most important positions within the party, described this situation as “Erdoğan showed us the door and embraced (hugged) Perincek as his new ally.”

It’s worth noting that the 2013 arrests have never fully gone away. One of the detained suspects on December 17, Reza Zarrab, a dual Iranian-Turkish citizen, (whom Erdoğan described as a “charity loving” person to the media) was arrested by the FBI on March 19, 2016, in Miami due to his role in evading Iranian sanctions. Eventually, Zarrab revealed during the trial in Federal Court in New York that “Erdoğan personally ordered to evade the Iranian sanctions through Turkish banks.” Zarrab confirmed the accounts of the Turkish National Police with the additional evidence the prosecutors and the FBI presented during the trial which also lead to the arrest and sentencing of the deputy CEO of Turkish Halkbank arrested in NYC by the FBI during a business trip. Zarrab is now under federal protection as the star witness of the government pending his sentencing.
First of all, Erdogan was never a pro-Western and democratic leader. Once he infamously said on July 14, 1996, “Democracy is like a train: when you reach your destination, you get off.” He was never shy about his views of Western values and democracy. In 1997 as the mayor of Istanbul while he was addressing his followers in the U.S., Erdogan openly said: “democracy was never his objective, but rather a tool for him to advance Islamist Civilizations.” Erdogan’s rhetoric at the beginning of his career and during his terms as the leader of the AKP and the Prime Minister of Turkey was consistent with his anti-Western sentiments stemming from his former and current political Islamist party’s ideologies.

While Erdogan was not outspoken about his anti-Western stance up until 2014, his animosity towards the West, particularly the United States, has been a major part of his thinking. It is based on the teachings of Necmettin Erbakan who was the founder of the Welfare Party where Erdogan started his political career. It is also imperative to understand that the background of this hostility and mistrust dates back to some Turkish intellectuals’ reaction to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, portraying the West as the demolisher of the Islamic Caliphate. Additionally, throughout the early seventies, first Necmettin Erbakan and then Erdogan and his inner circle had close interactions and collaborations with a variety of political Islamist groups including the Muslim Brotherhood who deeply affected their belief systems. According to Dr. Lorenzo Vidino, the Director of the Program on Extremism at George Washington University and an expert on political Islamist movements, “Erdogan’s ties to the Brotherhood go back to the 1970s, when he was one of the more trusted political pupils of Necmettin Erbakan, the father of Islamism in Turkey. According to Vidino, Muslim Brotherhood branches in the Gulf helped support Erbakan and Turkey’s Islamists in this era when they faced repression from the secular establishment.”

Therefore, for Erdogan, the West was never trustworthy, and he only needed them to further his political and ideological goals by using their tools like democracy and economic incentives until he reached his destination or felt powerful enough to counter them. This is what happened after the December 17, 2013 corruption operations and July 15, 2016 coup attempt.

Secondly, Erdogan knew that he had to appeal to the “Anatolian People” or so-called non-white Turks to ensure continuous domestic victory. Erdogan continuously uses the term “white Turks” to refer to the secularist elite Turks who support Ataturk, the founder of modern Turkey and to the rest of the populations as the “black Turks” who represent the conservative and less educated rural Anatolian base of his party. It was not an easy task for Erdogan to rally the Turkish people behind him for over a decade and a half. For that, he used several different tools beginning with the constant reminder of Turkey’s one-party rule periods. He reminded the people that the former ruling CHP party was against Islam with ultra-secularist policies including the banning of the Islamic holy book, the Quran and the banning of the call to prayer or Athan in Arabic, the ban on wearing headscarves in state institutions and universities, the closure of some mosques and the suffering of Islamic scholars. Erdogan’s continuous efforts used the false assumption, “if I do not stay in power, CHP will return, and you will lose your religious freedoms.”
So, for Erdogan, the use of religion to further his objectives was the only way to ensure the continuing support of the Turkish population. However, Erdogan chose to counter the West by portraying it, particularly the U.S., as the enemy of the Turks and Islam and addressing them as the causes of the problems he was facing including the corruption operations against him and the July 15, 2016 coup attempt.

With the above thinking in mind, Erdogan has successfully driven his base, almost half of the country, away from the West. He has divided Turkish society openly through a variety of tools including the media which he controls exclusively, the Turkish Religious Authority (Diyanet), the Turkish National Intelligence (MIT) and a number of NGOs such as Ottoman Youth Society, TURGEV (Turkey Youth and Education Service Foundation) and IHH (The Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief).

Erdogan was successful in radicalizing the country against the West. According to a Yeni Safak survey (a paper that supports Erdogan blindly and is owned by his son-in-law’s family) “97% of the Turks considered the U.S. as their enemy, and 95% stated that the NATO Incirlik airbase should be closed.” While Erdogan’s media constantly pumped anti-Americanism in Turkey, other surveys revealed similar results including that 90 percent of Turks see the United States as “behind” the enemy that Turkey is fighting in Syria.

According to a Yeni Safak survey, 97% of the Turks considered the U.S. as their enemy, and 95% stated that the NATO Incirlik airbase should be closed. Other surveys revealed similar; 90% of the Turks see the United States as “behind” the enemy that Turkey is fighting in Syria in 2018.

“Democracy is like a train: when you reach your destination, you get off” - Recep Tayyip Erdoğan
Moreover, it wasn’t only the resentment against the West, but also the rapprochement towards Salafi-jihadi terrorists which resulted in the increased numbers of Turks who joined ISIS and AQ affiliates in Syria and Iraq (up to 10,000 since 2011) and an increased approval of those terrorist organizations. For example, according to a PEW survey, eight percent of Turks indicated that they have a favorable view of ISIS. Over nine percent of Turks responding to Turkey’s 2016 Social Trends survey believed ISIS was not a terrorist organization, and over five percent said they supported its actions.

While all these radical changes were happening in Turkish society, Erdogan also publicly maligned the West, especially the United States, as Turkey’s arch-enemy, at an increasing pace after the July 15 2016 coup attempt. He openly named the United States as the power behind the coup attempt, charging the coup was directed by the American General John F. Campbell and the CIA. Many Turks from all parts of the political spectrum agreed. Erdogan also claimed the Europeans were supportive of the coup.

When Erdogan accused the U.S. military of supporting the coup in 2016, Pentagon spokesman Peter Cook stated that, “Turkey has been an extraordinary and vital partner,” in the fight against the Islamic State, and “any suggestion anyone in the [defense] department supported the coup in any way would be absurd.”

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>9% of Turks believed ISIS was NOT a terrorist organization.

>5% of Turks said they were supporting actions of ISIS.

~10,000 Number of Turks who joined ISIS and AQ affiliates in Syria and Iraq since 2011.

Erdogan was never shy about his rhetoric, and often Western leaders were reluctant to publicly counter his accounts which in return presented Erdogan as one of the few Islamic leaders who could openly oppose the West. So the Western strategy empowered Erdogan as the only Sunni leader in the Islamic World who could stand up against the United States and Israel.
3. From Rhetoric to Action: Erdoğan’s Support for ISIS

Finally, Erdoğan’s anti-Western views have translated into killings.

Erdoğan has the blood of thousands of innocent people on his hands: those who were killed by the Salafi jihadist terrorist organizations beginning in 2011 through his direct and indirect support to ISIS and AQ affiliates in Syria and the region.

Erdoğan’s awareness of his guilt and consequent vulnerability is another reason he needs Perincek on his side.

Initially, Erdoğan openly allowed over 50,000 ISIS foreign fighters to pass through Turkey without being stopped up until the end of 2016, which continued at a lesser pace until ISIS was finally defeated in Iraq and Syria.

Beginning in 2013, I personally observed how the southern border of Turkey particularly was overwhelmed with the flow of ISIS foreign fighters and how the Erdoğan government pressured the regional governors not to interrupt the flow of the jihadists. In fact, due to the relaxed and uninterrupted flow of foreign fighters through Turkey, the new terminology of “the jihadi highway” was introduced by several investigative journalists including the New York Times, which termed the situation “Turkey, a Conduit for Fighters Joining ISIS.”

In addition to this uninterrupted flow of thousands of foreign fighters who became the backbone and striking power of the terrorist organization, Turkey had become the main supplier of the explosive materials used by ISIS to produce its IEDs (Improvised explosive devices), one of the main tools of ISIS atrocities. ISIS operatives were almost never stopped from acquiring their explosive materials from the Turkish market and transporting them to Syria and Iraq. In fact, according to the December 2016 report of Conflict Armament Research (CAR), an institute which investigated the weapons and explosive supplies of ISIS, “ISIS had a major acquisition network operating in Turkey and, second, a clear supply route from Turkey, through Syria, to Iraq.”

Furthermore, Salafi jihadist terrorist organizations were also supported by Turkey through a variety of channels. This included a continuous flow of supplies and armament through NGOs such as the Humanitarian Relief Foundation (IHH), the group that organized the notorious Mavi Marmara ship; and the Turkish National Intelligence agency (MIT) supplying the terrorists with weapons secretly. In fact, a clandestine MIT operation was interrupted by the police on the Adana highway on January 19, 2014, where three trucks operated by the MIT were stopped. They were loaded with military-grade weapons hidden underneath medicine boxes. This made Erdoğan extremely upset and eventually led to the firing and arrest of the police officers, prosecutors, and judges who were involved in the operations. Even the prominent journalist Can Dundar who published the pictures of the weapons in his Cumhuriyet Daily was arrested because he dared to write about the incident.
Erdogan needed new allies to protect himself from the wrath of the Turkish military and judiciary. At that point, Erdogan’s former arch-enemy, an aged former leftist terrorist leader named Dogu Perincek, entered the picture. Perincek, who is known as “the shadow defense minister” due to his ties to high military officials, suddenly became his new supporter and ally.

Besides several examples of weapons and logistical support of Erdogan’s Turkey, the Erdogan family supported the ISIS terrorist organization by purchasing its oil via Erdogan’s son in law, Berat Albayrak’s front company named Powertrans. This provided the terrorists $3 million a day at the height of ISIS’s oil production, according to the leaked emails of Albayrak and the satellite images provided by Russia after the shooting down of the Russian warplane by Turkey. The illicit ISIS oil trade did not stop there. Erdogan’s son Bilal’s oil transportation company, BMZ Group, sold the ISIS oil as Turkish and Iraqi oil in the world market.

Because of the well-documented evidence of his illicit activities directly or indirectly supporting terrorist organizations recorded above, Erdogan knew that he could not trust the West in the long run. He had to look for new tactics to ensure his and his family’s future - both to be protected and to be immune from prosecution - by staying in power. At that point in 2014, Erdogan’s alliance with Perincek offered an opportunity to interact with Putin which eventually became a useful counterweight to the West. (He also passed a constitutional amendment to provide himself and other politicians immunity from prosecution.)
4. Eurasianism in Turkey: the Perincek/Dugin/Putin Triangle

Erdogan quickly realized the only way to survive politically after the infamous corruption operations in December 2013 was to receive the backing of pro-Russian Eurasianists in Turkey.

These happened to be extremely powerful inside the Turkish military and judiciary. Michael Rubin, a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, described Perincek as “a former Maoist turned ultranationalist who has backed Erdogan only so far as the Turkish president takes on their mutual enemies: Kurds, Gülenists and liberals. By infiltrating hundreds of his followers into the military, Perincek has ensconced himself as its behind-the-scenes power broker.”

Eurasianism is a political theory developed by Putin’s advisor Alexander Dugin, as the “fourth political theory; beyond left and right but against the center,” to “replace and counter the liberal globalist theory and to end Western hegemony, and capitalism. It aims to create an alternative to Western Civilization under the banner of Russia, through a massive eastern bloc comprising the former Soviet Union states, Eastern Europe, Central Asia, Iran, Turkey and China. “The core idea of Dugin’s Eurasianism is that “liberalism” (by which is meant the entire Western consensus) represents an assault on the traditional hierarchical organization of the world.”

Perincek and his Patriotic Party are the champions and chief supporter of Eurasianism in Turkey who also happen to frequently meet with Dugin, both in Turkey and Russia. Because Perincek is known for his close ties to Russia and openly argues anti-Americanism, Turkish generals who assume leftist ideals and support Perincek and his political party are also supportive of Eurasianism as an alternative to NATO. They often argue Turkey should become part of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization - which was publicly considered by Erdogan in 2016. It is well documented that Euroasianism has been presented by Perincek and his generals as an alternative to NATO at least for the last two decades. In fact, an April 2003 cable by the U.S. Embassy in Ankara released by WikiLeaks described the “Eurasianist clique” “as a group of officers within the Turkish military who, without understanding the Russia-dominated nature of the ‘Eurasia’ concept, have long sought an alternative to the U.S. and are considering closer relations with Russia.”

A Russian perspective and Dugin’s ideas are also in line with what Perincek has been arguing. Speaking to the Turkish media in 2017, Dugin said that he respects Perincek, who is very wise and does not receive the respect he deserves. He also added that Turkey’s alliance with the West and NATO has come to an end, he was the one who persuaded Putin to accept Erdogan’s apology after the downing of the Russian jet in 2015 based on his meetings with Turkish generals whom Perincek sent to meet him in Russia. He added that he was in Turkey the day of the 2016 coup attempt and he reported to Ankara that there was going to be a coup.
5. Perincek: A Former Maoist Terrorist Leader and Shadowy Figure for all Seasons

Perincek’s Aydinlik media group and ultra-secularist leftist group OdaTV are the leading establishments among Erdogan’s new partners.103

Since 2014, there was a sudden shift in these two groups’ media and journalists’ approach towards Erdogan, whom they formerly criticized. Perincek has been very close to Russia and China since the cold war. His son Mehmet Perincek had his education in Moscow State Institute of International Relations and spent over fifteen years as a researcher in Russia104 while his daughter Kiraz works as a producer at China Radio International (CRI).105 Perincek currently leads the tiny Patriotic Party (Vatan Partisi106) and Aydinlik107 media group in Turkey. (Vatan means “Fatherland” but the party deliberately translates it “Patriotic” in English).

Born in the eastern Turkish city of Gaziantep to an elite family of lawyers, Perincek graduated from Ankara University Law Faculty in 1964. Immediately after his graduation, he started to work for the same university as a teaching assistant at the Department of Public Law, where he graduated with a Juris Doctor degree in 1968.108 While Perincek was a student at Ankara University, one of the centers of the left at the time, he was very active among the leftist movements with leadership positions.

The first leftist party in Turkey during the cold war was the Workers Party of Turkey (Türkiye İşçi Partisi, TIP) which was established in 1961 in Istanbul.109 Following the TIP, Perincek and his friends established the Federation of Idea Clubs (Fikir Kulüpleri Federasyonu) FKF on December 17, 1965.110 Perincek began as the assistant president of the FKF, and he eventually became the president of FKF in 1968.111

FKF defined itself as the “the umbrella organization for the anti-imperialist and socialist youth associations,” and as the federation, it was the point of contact and organizer of the mass socialist and leftist movements and demonstrations during the sixties. Perincek also established the Turkish Revolutionary Workers’ and Peasants’ Party of Turkey (Türkiye İhtilalci İşçi Köylü Partisi, TİİKP) in 1969,112 a Maoist communist terrorist organization, which later on became one of the reasons for his twenty-year prison sentence.
In October 1969, FKF held its fourth congress and renamed itself the Revolutionary Youth Federation of Turkey, (Türkiye Devrimci Gençlik Federasyonu) or DEV-GENÇ. As the founder of several splinter Marxist groups, DEV-GENÇ was behind several terrorist attacks in Turkey. This began with conflicts with rival student groups where in 1969 twenty-one students were killed and the U.S. Ambassador Robert Komer’s car set on fire while he was visiting the Middle East Technical University in Ankara. It continued with the 1969 bombing of the U.S. military headquarters in Ankara, mass student-led violent protests against the visit of the U.S. Sixth Fleet in Istanbul on 17 July 1969 where two students were killed, and the wounding of thirteen Americans after they were attacked during the visits of the Sixth Fleet to Izmir in 1969.114

In fact, DEV-GENÇ115 was the dominant and driving force behind the actions of the Marxist and leftist students who became extremely anti-Western. This included the 1970 bomb attack against the USAF Officer’s Club in Ankara and the kidnapping and killing of three NATO civilian technicians in March 1972.116 In addition to the attacks carried against U.S. interests and personnel, DEV-GENÇ was also behind the kidnapping and later assassination of the Israeli Consul General Efraim Elrom (an interrogator of Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann)117 in March 1971.118

On 12 March 1971, the Turkish military issued a memorandum threatening military intervention to address the wave of domestic violence and Marxist terrorist activities, eventually ousting the Demirel government.119 This brought three and a half years of military rule. With the military intervention, Turkish authorities cracked down on the Marxist and leftist terrorist movements, including Perincek and his group120 Perincek received a twenty year prison sentence on August 20, 1974 due to his involvement in establishing and leading terrorist organizations.121 However, Perincek was released in May 1974 after the general amnesty, having served only three years.122
Perincek was also a suspect in the trials of the “Land Forces Revolutionary Officers Organization” (Kara Kuvvetleri Devrimci Subaylar Örgütü) and “Twilight Officers Group” (Şafak Subaylar grubu). Forty two military officers were arrested and tried by the Ankara First Military Court Martial in 1973. The only civilian suspect in those trials was Perincek. Perincek was charged with “infiltrating into the military” according to the former Turkish National Police Central Intelligence Department Chief Bulent Orakoglu. Those forty two military officers were labeled as the “Perincek’s officers who infiltrated into the Turkish Military.” However, they were not alone, and maybe it was only the tip of the iceberg, and more importantly and surprisingly, forty two military officers who were suspects during these trials were found guilty – but the only civilian suspect, Perincek, was acquitted.

Furthermore, after the 12 March 1971 military memorandum, the Turkish military published a book “We Should Take a Lesson,” (Ders Alalim in Turkish) detailing and explaining how Marxist and Maoist terrorist organizations infiltrated the Turkish military structures through young military officers and staff members. The book revealed their tactics and the names of the suspects along with the military officers who were involved. In addition, former Turkish National Police Central Intelligence Department former Chief Cevdet Saral’s book “The Secret Bosses of the Terror” in Turkish “Terorun Gizli Efendileri” provided the testimonials of former military officers (members of the Dev-Genc organization and other FKF- affiliated Marxist and Maoist terrorists) on how they were carrying out their operations secretly inside the Turkish military’s different branches.
Perincek continued his terrorist activities after he was released from prison in 1974 and became the president of the Workers’ and Peasants’ Party of Turkey (Türkiye İşçi Köylü Partisi, TIKP) which was the continuation of the Turkish Maoist Revolutionary Workers’ and Peasants’ Party of Turkey. Perincek re-established the Aydinlik media group in 1978.130 (Perincek was first involved in Aydinlik in 1969, but it was closed when he was imprisoned.) He became an editorial writer, but he was again arrested during street fighting between leftists and nationalists that led to the 12 September 1980 Turkish coup d’état.131 (The military intervention in 1980 was the third coup d’état in Turkey.)

Perincek’s Workers’ and Peasants’ Party of Turkey, TIKP, was listed as a Maoist terrorist organization by the CIA in a September 1984 intelligence report along with the recognition of Perincek as the leader of the group under “Turkey’s major terrorist groups.”132 CIA characterized Perincek’s organization as a “principal pro-Chinese revolutionary group” confirming Perincek’s Maoist approach133 in carrying out the Communist revolution through his movement. CIA’s report was released on February 2, 2011 and has not been reported since then until OdaTV reported it on September 7, 2019.134

Perincek was sentenced to eight years of prison after the September 1980 Turkish coup d’état due to his and his group’s terrorist activities, and he was released from prison in 1985.135

Perincek was again arrested on April 1990, and he was released after three months imprisonment in Diyarbakir prison where many Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) members were confined. After his release from Diyarbakir prison in 1990, Perincek started to get involved with the PKK, listed as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) by the U.S. State Department since 1997.136
Perincek visited the leader of the PKK, Abdullah Ocalan, at his compound in the Beqaa Valley in Lebanon\textsuperscript{137} in October 1989\textsuperscript{138} and April 1991\textsuperscript{139} where he saluted the PKK terrorist, received a rose under the PKK banner and spent a lot of time with Ocalan as his special guest. This was very uncommon due to the security precautions that the PKK and Ocalan applied to maintain the camp’s secrecy.

In 1991, Perincek established and led the Socialist Party, which was closed by the Constitutional Court in 1992, leading Perincek to establish the Workers’ Party (İşçi Partisi) in 1992 with collective Maoist ideology along with hardline Kemalism inherited from Perincek’s past movements.\textsuperscript{140}

Kemalism refers to the principles and ideas of modern Turkey’s founder Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who argued for a secular state and introduced a series of radical changes with the establishment of the new Turkish Republic in 1923. These included the abolishment of the Ottoman Caliphate, the ban on wearing the fez and the change of the Ottoman alphabet to a Latin-based alphabet. Eventually, after Atatürk’s death it also led to the banning of the public call to prayer or Athan in Arabic, Quran, and closure of some mosques.\textsuperscript{141} Atatürk’s laicism, harshly applied by the ruling party CHP, led to decades-long resentment between the ruling party and rural Anatolians who embraced Islam and considered the principles of Atatürk as un-Islamic.

Perincek was arrested again in September 1998 due to his involvement with and assistance to the PKK and its leadership and stayed in prison until July 1999.\textsuperscript{142} Perincek was arrested again in March 2008\textsuperscript{143} during the Ergenekon trials due to his role in an illegal cell structure under the Turkish Military Air Force called “Headquarters Cell” (Karargah Evleri) along with twenty military officers, according to the Turkish National Intelligence (MIT).\textsuperscript{144} Given a life sentence, Perincek was released six years later in March 2014\textsuperscript{145} after the 2013 December corruption operations as he agreed to work with Erdogan.\textsuperscript{146}
The Ergenekon trials, which started in 2007, were high-profile political operations and cases brought against 275 suspects including members of the military, academics, and journalists, who were accused of planning a coup against Erdogan's government. At the time, the Ergenekon case was very divisive in Turkey as Erdogan openly came out and announced that he was “the prosecutor of the Ergenekon cases” in an effort to extend his support to the case and to present his disapproval of the opposition who were against the operations and trials. Erdogan also considered the case as an operation against Turkey's deep state. The Ergenekon trials lasted around five years; the final verdict was delivered in 2013, convicting the suspects and sentencing them long prison sentences including life imprisonment. It took around an additional five years for Erdogan's new judiciary to overturn the initial Ergenekon verdicts, seemingly to make sure the former suspects would keep behaving and cooperating with Erdogan.

The trials and evidence presented by the prosecutors were highly criticized due to irregularities in the operations. After the December 2013 corruption operations, as Erdogan allied with Perincek, he started to accuse the judiciary and police of being Gulenists and accused the fired officers of plotting the Ergenekon cases and trials with fabricated evidence. In 2016, the appeals court overturned the previous Ergenekon verdicts, basically dropping all of the charges.

However, surprisingly, in 2019, another verdict was issued by the Istanbul 4th Higher Court, indicating that there was no evidence to support the claims of fabricated evidence by the police in the Ergenekon trials.
6. Perincek as “Shadow Minister of Defense”

The strange connection between the military and Perincek’s establishments became a question for the counterterrorism police on May 17, 2006, when a lawyer, Alparslan Arslan, carried out an attack against the council of state when the high court was in session, killing one and wounding four of the senior judges.\textsuperscript{154}

At the time this attack was immediately portrayed as an Islamist attack on the secular democracy, and many believed it would be a spark for a coup. However, the perpetrator was caught by a careful police officer and immediately brought to the Ankara Police Department Counterterrorism and Operations Division, where I was working as a police major. I started to interrogate the suspect in the designated interrogation room where all activities were video and audio recorded 24/7. This was both to be used as evidence during investigations and to be immune from torture allegations as required by the state.

As I started to interrogate Arslan with the presence of the Deputy Chief of the division and a police officer, I immediately realized that he was extremely relaxed and comfortable for a man who had killed a judge and wounded four others a few hours ago. Arslan was also responding to our questions in a way by teasing us, but at the same time making it clear that he was open about what he had just done and that he did not have any regrets. As I pressured Arslan to find the motive behind his attack, Arslan said, “That is enough, OK, I killed them. That is all you need to know. I will go to prison, serve for six months and there will be a military coup, and after that, I will be a free man.” Arslan’s shocking statements were recorded in our interrogation room. We all knew that Erdogan was very concerned about a coup as the military did not hide their distaste for his government; however, Arslan’s capture seemed to have prevented that threat.

Fast forward to March 21, 2008, when Perincek was arrested during the Ergenekon operations and his Worker’s Party was searched. The police found detailed schemes of the Turkish Supreme Court of Appeals (Yargitay in Turkish) with coded notes\textsuperscript{155} in a CD-ROM found in Perincek’s secretary’s office in a file labeled “Yargı-Nusret Senemden” which looked extremely suspicious from the eye of police as an attack plan; particularly after the Danistay attack in 2006 (another high court in Turkey).\textsuperscript{156} While Perincek and his lawyers alleged that the schemes didn’t mean anything, the evidence found in his office was confirmed and found reliable by the judges appointed by Erdogan to clear Perincek in a guilty verdict in August 2019, years after Perincek was released. This made him and his supporters extremely upset.\textsuperscript{157}
As a counterterrorism police sergeant, when I was investigating leftist terrorist organization activities between 1995 and 1998 in Ankara, I was never able to understand why someone like Perincek would have incredibly high-level military connections and open support coming from the higher cadres of the Turkish military. Then, in September 1998, when we in the Ankara Police Department Counterterrorism and Operations Division carried out an operation against the PKK, I learned why.

I was assigned to arrest Perincek and search his house and offices due to his ties to the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) by the orders of the notoriously harsh counterterrorism prosecutor Nuh Mete Yuksel.

When I arrived at the house of Perincek in the heart of Ankara in the early morning, I realized he was not shocked at all, he was very comfortable, and he was extremely respectful as he kept calling me “Mr. Sergeant” or “Amirim” in Turkish. When I asked him about the illegal and banned publications of the PKK we found at his house, he calmly said “so what?” All this was contrary to my previous experiences, and it was the first time I saw someone extremely comfortable as the suspect and subject of a counterterrorism operation. However, his attitude changed instantly when we were leaving his house after the search as he saw the media and his lawyers. He suddenly attempted to portray himself as resisting his arresters and yelling at them like a real “revolutionary!”

In 2015, Perincek changed his Workers’ Party’s name to “Patriotic Party” (Vatan Partisi) of which Perincek said, “Republicans, nationalists, populists, socialists, and revolutionaries all unite in one party, the Patriotic Party.” Astonishingly, several former retired high-level Turkish generals and colonels including İsmail Hakkı Pekin, Saldıray Berk, Hasan Atilla Uğur, Naci Beştepe, Beyazit Karataş, Soner Polat, Semih Çetin, İker Güven, and Ayhan Taş were among the founders of the Patriotic Party with Perincek.

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During the searches, I carried out in Perincek’s residence and offices, I was shocked to find photocopies of top-secret Turkish Supreme Military Council (YAŞ) documents in his safe. Those documents bear the highest secrecy level in Turkey, and only a handful of high-level generals and the president, prime minister, and defense and interior ministers can see them in special secure locations, let alone have a photocopy.

These top-secret documents prompted me to look into Perincek’s archive files, and I was further shocked to see the names of the suspects when Perincek was arrested and sentenced to prison after the March 12, 1971 coup in Turkey as the leader and suspect of several cases involving the Turkish Revolutionary Workers’ and Peasants’ Party of Turkey” (TIİKP) and the Revolutionary Youth Federation of Turkey, (DEV-GENÇ).

In Perincek’s trial documents and the court-martial prosecutor’s indictments, I saw that there were hundreds of suspects who were Turkish military academy students or officers, most on active duty then in 1998, mostly as colonels. With that, I finally understood why Perincek was always welcomed by very high-level military officers and also why he was extremely comfortable during his police detention, unlike the other suspects. Perincek had considerable ideological support within the military.

Immediately after he was arrested and detained at the Ankara PD counterterrorism detention facilities, Perincek said that he was going on “hunger strike” like all the other leftist terrorists. This meant he would not eat anything during his police detention. However, his lawyer kept bringing him food which he was eating when he met with his lawyer. His lawyer brought food from outside again on the last day of his detention with the other detainees and gave his food to him in front of them. This made Perincek extremely upset and prompted him to curse his lawyer saying for his little audience, “Don’t you know I am on hunger strike! Why are you bringing me food?”
7. Who are Perincek’s Generals?

What I realized after studying Perincek’s trial documents and the court-martial prosecutor’s indictments in the dusty and dark basement of the counterterrorism division was the fact that hundreds of active duty high-level military officers’ names were in those documents as suspects along with Perincek.

One of the most famous officers was then Colonel Husnu Dag, who was the possible source of the top-secret YAS documents as he was the special secretary of the secretariat general of the National Security Council.

However, we were never able to carry out an investigation towards that direction as the chief prosecutor of the case Yuksel told me “I will look into that and get back to you, don’t worry” as he was chatting in his room with a military judge, Colonel Judge Tanju Guvendiren, who was also a member of the three-judge State Security Court.

Fast forward to the 21st century: when we look at Perincek’s present political and media establishments, several high-level retired ultra-secularist Turkish generals and military officers became associated with Perincek after they retired.

In most cases, they officially worked for Perincek’s establishments. One is Ismail Hakki Pekin, the former Commander of the Turkish Military Intelligence Department, one of the most critical posts of the Turkish military, becoming Perincek’s deputy as the General Deputy Director of the Patriotic (Vatan) Party. Pekin, a Russophile and Eurasianist, has been invited to speak at US think tanks who are under the illusion that he supports liberal democracy. Another is retired colonel Hasan Atilla Uğur, who was the director of the Turkish Gendarmerie Intelligence, the most important position after the general commander of the Turkish Gendarmerie. Then there is the retired rear admiral and also former Commander of the Turkish Military Intelligence Department Soner Polat who is now the deputy director of the Patriotic Party as Perincek’s assistant. Finally, Ahmet Zeki Üçok, former Air Force Prosecutor, aligned with Doğu Perincek and his Patriotic (Vatan) Party. All these ultra-secularists have started to support Erdogan and his policies.

Of course, it is still a mystery “or maybe not” how all those high-level top-secret intelligence position holders and “patriotic” Turkish generals can ally themselves with a former Maoist/Marxist terrorist who openly supported and led many leftist terrorist organizations and the PKK who fought against the Turkish military and killed thousands of its members (up to 8,000 officers).
For example, in December 2012, 12 Turkish retired military officers including generals and colonels openly joined in Perincek’s Workers Party (now called Vatan Party)\(^{174}\) This drew media attention to "Perincek’s Generals." Similarly, in March 2014, after Erdogan decided to work with Perincek, 114 retired Turkish military officers, including 15 generals and 81 colonels, under the leadership of Ismail Hakki Pekin, joined Perincek’s Workers Party through a ceremony, which was in a sense an open and undisputable announcement of Perincek’s followers inside the Turkish military to support their leader with the list of their names and a manifesto published in the news.\(^{175}\)

One could easily think the enrollment of 114 high-rank officers in Perincek’s parties as an opportunistic political move as those generals argue; however, Perincek’s political parties’ vote count was usually between 0.18% and 0.36% between 1995 and 2007 and 0.23% during the 2018 elections\(^{176}\) which clearly meant none of those generals would be elected from the marginal party they were joining. This indicates ideological and philosophical commitment and connection.

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8. As Erdogan Starts to Get Along with Perincek

Until the December 2013 corruption operations, while Perincek would openly and publicly vilify Erdogan and the AKP, Erdogan would not directly target Perincek. The furthest Erdogan went after Perincek was when he told the media the fact that “he was the prosecutor of the Ergenekon trials” where Perincek was a suspect.

Perincek astonishingly kept hammering Erdogan and his policies even after 2014 while insisting that Erdogan and AKP came to his Patriotic Party’s position (“mevzi” in Turkish, referring to a military battle location). He claimed that he never changed his position or ideology. However, at the same time he added that “we are already with Erdogan” by constantly giving mixed messages to Erdogan and claiming he was the one who wanted to work with him as he told to the Iranian media in 2017 “AKP came to our site, and we are happy,” which was not denied by anyone from the AKP.

Furthermore, several times Perincek and his supporters openly and publicly bullied or maligned Erdogan and to nobody’s surprise, Erdogan kept his silence. For example, when Perincek supporter ex-Air Force colonel and head prosecutor Ahmet Zeki Ucok openly said that “there will be a new coup, but with full buy-in from all levels of the Turkish military” Erdogan never said anything to retaliate.

Erdogan keeps his silence against Perincek, but only against him, and Putin.

Anyone who follows the Turkish sphere knows and understands that Erdogan will go after anybody in this world who speaks, writes or posts anything he does not like, including the retweets or speech of a 16-year-old kid – whom he will arrest.

But it all comes back to the Ergenekon trials. Very upset with the fact that his high-ranking generals were being sidelined during the Ergenekon trials, Perincek decided to support Erdogan in an effort to bring back his disgraced, jailed supporters.
Erdogan had the “God-given opportunity” with the help of the Turkish National Intelligence (MIT) and his cooperation with Perincek to reshuffle the Turkish military after the July 15, 2016 coup attempt, initially by preparing a list of over 1600 generals and high-level military officers with their current and residence addresses, who would be purged and sent to prison in a few hours. This clearly indicated advance preparation by the MIT before the coup happened for the aftermath of the coup attempt. Therefore, Erdogan was able to completely overhaul the Turkish military with the help of the MIT and Perincek and assign new commanders to lead the military force.

Erdogan and Perincek’s cooperation in most cases did not extend to the bases of these two opposite ideological and political spectrums. However, apparently through the orders of Erdogan, the Ottoman Youth Society (Osmanli Ocaklari) established by Erdogan with branches in every city and town in Turkey announced an official alliance with Perincek’s Patriotic Party’s youth wing (Vanguard Youth). The cooperation between the Ottoman and Vanguard youth would be, under normal circumstances, impossible and no one in Turkey even dreamed the idea of bringing the members of these two ideological rivals side by side in the same room let alone working together for the same objectives.
With this mass purge and arrest campaign, Erdogan was able to sideline over 160,000 public servants first by firing them and then arresting over 90,000 of them and sending over 50,000 of them to Turkish prisons. The shift in the Turkish bureaucracy, particularly in the Turkish military, was clearly an anti-Western one as the people who had any connections with the West, especially with the United States, found themselves all of a sudden as the enemies of the new Turkish state. The benefactor of this shift was the at first Erdogan’s base, who received promotions. However, Erdogan lacked sufficient supporters with high military ranks, which initially forced him to assign generals who were known for their closer stance towards Russia and Perincek to the positions vacated by the purged generals.

The new shift inside the Turkish military very swiftly yielded to a harsher opposition to the U.S. and particularly towards NATO as most of the new generals were not even shy about their distaste for America and NATO. For example, General Zekai Aksakalli was assigned as the general commander of the special forces who is known as Turkey’s Qasem Soleimani with his harsh anti-U.S. rhetoric. From this fashion, seeing the new anti-American trend within the Turkish military, U.S. Gen. Joseph Votel, the head of the U.S. Central Command, said, “The purge of the Turkish military is “something to be very, very concerned about.” He added, “We have certainly had relationships with a lot of Turkish leaders, military leaders, in particular, I am concerned that it will impact the level of cooperation and collaboration that we have with Turkey, which has been excellent, frankly.”

Similarly, many NATO commanders raised concerns after the purges and arrests which involved their cadres. For example, Curtis Scaparrotti, the U.S general as the NATO Supreme Allied Commander in Europe said: “Some 150 military staff, or half of the Turkish military under his command at NATO, had been detained, recalled or retired from the alliance after the July 15 coup attempt.” When asked if he thought they might have been involved in the planning of a coup, Scaparrotti said, “No ... These officers served well here in NATO.”

Reuters wrote on October 12, 2016, that “the dismissals at NATO raise questions about Turkey’s strategy after the failed coup, as Erdogan seeks closer ties with the alliance’s Cold War foe Russia.”

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9. The Post-Coup Turkish Military

As thousands of Turkish military officers were purged and arrested - up to 20,000 officers since July 2016 - it was clearly understood that Erdogan was going after any military officer, or in this case any public servant including judges, prosecutors, and police officers, who would oppose him and whom he would deem a threat.
As all these NATO officers were being fired, Erdoğan’s media and Perincek’s generals started to go after the NATO establishments in Turkey. For example, the above-mentioned retired rear admiral and former Turkish Military Intelligence Department Commander Soner Polat who is now the deputy director of the Patriotic Party as Perincek’s assistant recently spoke to Turkish media claiming that Turkey will soon leave NATO, NATO Incirlik Airbase will be closed, and that it was a great step that Turkey purchased Russian S-400 missiles. Polat also said the fact that Turkey and Russia were cooperating with each other was very promising in terms of their geopolitics and that the Russian-made SU-57 warplanes were superior to American-made F-35 warplanes as he encouraged Turkey to purchase the SU-57 warplanes from Russia.

Similarly, Ismail Hakki Pekin, the other former Commander of the Turkish Military Intelligence Department, who was the General Deputy Director of the Patriotic (Vatan) Party as the assistant of Perincek, recently claimed that Turkey must never give up the purchase of Russian S-400 missiles and added that described what the Americans were doing in opposing the purchase as impudent and unmannerly.

Retired Brigadier General Ahmet Cengiz Aycan, who joined Perincek’s Worker’s Party in 2012 along with twelve other generals and colonels said that “the U.S. wants Turkey to be separated through the war in Syria.”

Finally, Perincek himself during an interview after claiming that the U.S. pushed the start button of the July 15 coup attempt; but, “America’s powers inside the Turkish military has been crashed unexpectedly from the U.S. perspective, American’s influence inside the Turkish military does not exist anymore, and they (U.S.) will try to take down us not through a coup but with a domestic conflict involving terrorist organizations.”
10. The Russian Connection

Coincidently, Erdogan’s rhetoric had also shifted through the new alliance as Turkey started to become closer to Russia, and Erdogan had developed a better relationship with Putin.

The Turkish-Russian relationship was deeply scarred in November 2015 after the shooting down of a Russian warplane over the Turkish Syrian border by Turkish F-16s. This led to an intense reaction from Russia and Putin towards Turkey and Erdogan, particularly when Erdogan’s Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu came out and said he was the one who ordered the downing of the Russian warplane.

With Erdogan starting to feel the heat of Russian sanctions as a result of this incident and looking for ways to get along with Putin, Perincek became very handy due to his connections with and inside Russia.

From his university student days until today, Perincek has always been a passionate supporter and ally of Russia (the Soviet Union then) and China. His stance about Russia and China has never changed, and he was never shy about it which would be an impossible task as the terrorist organizations he established always adopted Marxist-Leninist ideology. Perincek found Mao’s way of revolution to be more applicable in Turkey. He always argued against the Western Alliance and NATO and insisted that Turkey should be closer to Russia and China claiming that “wise Turkish Nationalism points us towards a friendship with Russia and China.” Perincek always had close relationships with Russian and Chinese government authorities including his buddy Alexander Dugin. He has been one of the continuing invitees to Russian and Chinese events both in Turkey and in their respective countries, always showing up in those receptions proudly confirming his alliance with those countries and maligning the West, United States, and NATO. He is also known for his press releases supporting Russian interests, such as his press release to Putin to offer condolences after a Russian submarine sank in July 2019. Anyone who knows Perincek in Turkey understands he is an aggressive supporter of Russia and China and that he promotes these countries along with Iran in his media and speeches as the future saviors of Turkey.

Perincek’s activities were described in a 2017 Wall Street Journal article as seeking “to reposition Turkey into a new “Eurasian” civilizational alliance with Russia, China and Iran—and to break off traditional bonds with West.”
Perincek was not shy about his alignment with Erdogan and also how he managed to bring Putin and Erdogan together. He openly claimed that it was he and his party who arranged the meetings with Putin and helped Erdogan to overcome the shooting of the Russian fighter jet.

In addition to arranging the reconciliation between Erdogan and Turkey, Perincek continued to speak to the public openly by bragging about his success in several key issues. One was his claim that including “the purchase of S-400 missiles is our success (referring to his party)”. Another, that “the Turkish military is today under the control of Kemalist officers.” (From Perincek’s perspective those Kemalist officers represent him, and we witnessed how the retired top cadre of Turkish military officers joined Perincek’s party). He also says, “Turkey’s friends are not NATO countries or America anymore; rather Russia, Iran, and China are.”

One could easily think that Perincek was exaggerating or lying; however, it is borne out by what Russians close to Putin said. Alexander Dugin, a far-right Russian theorist close to Putin, and Konstantin Malofeev, president of Katehon, a right-wing think tank and a wealthy Orthodox businessman who is called “Putin’s Soros” speaking on Russian TV said that “General ismail Hakki Pekin and Admiral Soner Polat along with other representatives from the Kemalist Patriotic Party came to visit us in Moscow. Even though they were imprisoned in the past by Erdogan, they called us to work with Erdogan, which we didn’t expect as those three generals were in prison for a long time during the Ergenekon trials. They explained that any attempt at a coup would be an American-initiated move. These people were arrested because they were close to Russia, and they were arguing a euroasianist approach.” Malofeev, at the end of the video, said that “the visit was extremely important and eye-opening and based on what they were briefed the Russians decided that they should work with the Turks if Erdogan makes a former apology for the downing of the Russian warplane” which happened soon after this meeting. When Perincek was asked about this visit, he confirmed that he sent four former Turkish generals and two civilians to Russia and they carried out positive steps to get over the Russian warplane crisis.

The close relationship with Putin and Erdogan also became handy for Turkey as Turkey’s involvement in the Syrian civil war escalated and Turkey needed Russia’s approval to operate in Syrian airspace. Turkey also increased its activities in Syria and became one of the three guarantors of the Astana talks along with Russia and Iran, further trying to push the United States and the other Western allies out of the process.
11. Perincek, Russia and Iran Triangle

Considering Perincek’s Marxist and Maoist rhetoric combined with ultra-Kemalist approaches, being aligned with Russia and China seems acceptable, but often people would have a hard time figuring out how Iran and Perincek can get along. Well, they do!

C
oincidentally, both Erdogan and Perincek love Iran. Erdogan called Iran his second home when he met with the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on January 29, 2014. Similarly, Perincek recently has called Iran “one of the most powerful castles fighting against the American imperialism and Israel in West Asia.” This warmth is almost unheard of due to the historical conflicts between the countries stemming from Ottoman times beginning in the 1500s. The Ottomans never trusted Iran, always keeping a distance and imposing sanctions. Similarly, after the Turkish Republic was established, the secularist Turkish State has not had close relationships with Iran, particularly after the 1979 Islamic Revolution and until Erdogan came into power.

Perincek and his team have been working closely with the Iranians. One of the best examples of their cooperation was revealed during the Gezi Park protests in May 2013 just before Perincek and Erdogan allied. It came out when the police investigated supporting protests in Erzurum in Turkey’s east.

The Chief of Erzurum Police Department Counterterrorism and Operations Division said, “We were surprised that there were frequent demonstrations in Erzurum, a city known for its conservative viewpoint and not supporting the Gezi movement. There were a handful of people who would carry out demonstrations by blocking the main highway, which became a huge problem for the city.

“When we decided to see who those people were, the first surprise was the fact that their leader was Mustafa Ilker Yucel, who was the president of the Turkey Youth Union, Türkiye Gençlik Birliği (TGB), established and led under the influence of Perincek, representing Kemalist and revolutionist ideas among the youth. The problem was Yucel was not a resident of Erzurum, and he was normally living in Istanbul as the editor in chief of Perincek’s Aydinlik Newspaper.” Apparently, Yucel rented a room in an apartment in Erzurum. One day, after he was arrested, when the police asked him what he was doing in Erzurum, he told the police that he came to Erzurum to sell donuts.
“When the police checked his house to see who was staying with him, another surprise: Yucel’s roommate was an Iranian prosecutor studying at Erzurum University and carrying out demonstrations with Yucel in Erzurum. This situation was very new to the police, and the counterterrorism chief decided to check the university to see how many other Iranian students were attending university and living in his city. To his surprise, the numbers of graduate students, including Iranian masters and doctoral students were astonishing for a small city like Erzurum.”

Similarly, the former chief of Turkish National Police central counterterrorism and operations department (TEM) who was in office during the Gezi Park protests told me over a phone interview on August 27, 2019, about Perincek’s and Turkey Youth Union, TGB’s role. According to the former chief, TGB was the main organizer of the Gezi Park protests chiefly in Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir and they sent teams to smaller cities to lead the demonstrations so there would be protests all over Turkey. When the movements of the TGB members were investigated, the former chief started to receive reports from different local counterterrorism departments that TGB members were the driving force behind the protests. While this was not shocking for the counterterrorism departments, what surprising was the fact that none of the TGB members were prosecuted by the Erdogan government even though there was enough evidence tying the TGB members to Gezi protests when Gezi trials started in 2017 with the arrest of sixteen people who really were not among the organizers. This situation alone, not prosecuting Perincek’s TGB members for their role in Gezi protests, while there is ample evidence to prove their leadership roles raises a lot of questions in Erdogan’s attitude towards Perincek. Additionally, the former chief of TEM also said that they realized during the investigations the TGB members were very actively interacting with Iranians, including several visits to that country which was extremely odd from an ideological perspective.226
The numbers of Iranian students kept increasing as the AKP policies openly evolved as more supportive of Iranians. There are several reasons behind the scenes which caused the Erdogan government to cooperate closer with Iran up to calling the country Erdogan’s second home.

Like Erdogan, some of AKP’s top leaders had close relationships with Iran. Among them, Besir Atalay and Hakan Fidan are the most prominent figures who kept close ties with Iran for a long time.

Besir Atalay, 72, was among the founders of AKP; he was the Deputy Prime Minister from 2011 to 2014 and the Minister of the Interior from 2007 to 2011. Atalay is known with his warm rhetoric about Iran, and his ties to Iran go back decades. In April 1983, Atalay was arrested in Erzurum, due to suspicion of espionage during an operation targeting an Iranian spy network in Turkey while he was working at Erzurum Ataturk University. He had to leave his job due to his arrest and moved to Kirikkale where he started to work for Kirikkale University as an academician and eventually got fired in 1997 through an investigation of the Council of Higher Education.

Besir Atalay’s operation files still exist at Erzurum Police Department counterterrorism and operation divisions archives according to a chief who led that division in the past.

Another police chief spoke to the author under the condition of anonymity to illustrate the connection of Atalay to Iran.

A police chief working at the Turkish National Police Foreigners Department went to the office of Atalay, then-Interior Minister, with a delegation to demonstrate newly developed software to register and connect Turkey’s border gates real-time so no criminal or terrorist would be missed if they attempt to leave or enter the country.

When the project was presented, Atalay said to the chief “it looks good, let’s see how accurate it is” and asked the presenter to run his Turkish National ID number, which the presenter did. The system returned hundreds of entries over the years, when they sorted the countries, Atalay asked how many times to Iran, which in return the system indicated Atalay went to Iran 180 times. Atalay then said to the presenter and other officers present in the room ‘that is about right, good; the system works.” Going to Iran 180 times meant Atalay went to Iran 90 times in his life after he got his passport which would be impossible to explain if someone did not have a business in that country. Atalay being an academician and arrested in 1983 due to his involvement in Iran alone raises ample questions.
Another important and critical role player in Erdogan’s involvement with Iran and Russia is Hakan Fidan, who is Erdogan’s confidant and the director of the Turkish National Intelligence (MIT). Prior to his appointment as the MIT Director, Fidan was the undersecretary of the Prime Ministry (the highest bureaucratic position in Turkey) and before that position; he was the president of the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA). Before TIKA, Fidan was a military staff officer. Fidan is one of the most important actors in Erdogan’s playbooks, particularly his dealings with Iran and Russia and his role in the coup attempt in July 2016.

However, Fidan has another important association which makes his position unique besides Erdogan as his top spy chief. Fidan’s name was found in a terrorist cell as a connection during a counterterrorism operation by the Istanbul Police Department against a Turkish Hezbollah group carried out on January 17, 2000 where the leader of the Hezbollah İlim group was killed and two other high-level terrorists were captured along with the archive of terrorists and weapons and ammunition.

After the terrorist organization’s archives and the documents confiscated from the terrorist cell were examined as they were translated from Farsi, it was revealed that Hakan Fidan was listed as a possible connection with his bio and the phone number of his military office. The Turkish National Police general director sent a secret report to the Turkish Military Chief of Staff on January 15, 2001, concerning Fidan’s connections with the Turkish Hezbollah operation and the Jerusalem Army as it was named. Coincidentally, Fidan left Turkey immediately after this operation in 2001 and established residence in Europe.
12. Way Forward through a Union of a Communist and Political Islamist?

Erdogan’s capacity to produce policies incorporating the West and the United States is extremely low now as he has been alienating them since at least 2014, with an increasing pace after the 2016 coup.

Erdogan and his base believe that the U.S. was behind the coup attempt and that the West does not want him as the leader of Turkey; not because he is corrupt or anti-democratic, but because he represents Sunni Islam and is leading the Muslims to a better and more successful future as the caliph of the new Ottoman-like state. That, at least, is what Erdogan wants his story to be, and he’ll be sticking to it in an effort to keep his base intact.

On the other hand, Perincek knows he has leverage over Erdogan. He has infiltrated into Turkish military circles since the cold war and has the backing of many high-level generals (particularly almost all of the past commanders of Turkish Military Intelligence) who made sure they hired only officers who believe and think like them to ensure the continuity of their reign after they retire. He also holds his connection to Putin and Russia both ideologically and now through the purchases of Russian military equipment.

Yet, both Erdogan and Perincek know that the status quo cannot be kept for a long time. Erdogan does not like the fact that he cannot control the military completely as he does with the rest of the Turkish bureaucracy and more importantly, the judiciary.

For this reason, Erdogan took steps to diminish the influence of Perincek by retiring some of the top cadres on August 30, 2019, which also led to the resignation of his top five commanders in charge of Syria operations as a reaction. From the same perspective Erdogan recently made sure that the Ergenekon case was not completely closed. Through a verdict of the Istanbul 4th Higher Court in September 2019 on the legality of the shreds of evidence presented by the Ergenekon trial prosecutors, Erdogan holds a sword of Damocles over Perincek and his teams’ heads.

No one knows how this complicated relationship between Perincek and Erdogan will end; however, one thing is certain that this marriage cannot last forever, and one group will try to sideline the other eventually. This is an ongoing high-level chess game in which Erdogan is mum about his opponent and never says a word about Perincek. Perincek, however, keeps hammering Erdogan and openly threatens him by claiming “Erdogan’s days are numbered” while supporting him against the common enemy until Erdogan’s role is finished in this play.

At the end of the day, regardless of who believes what ideology in Turkey, with the involuntary marriage of Erdogan and Perincek, a union of a Communist and political Islamist, the Turks are losing their decades-old friends and commitments to NATO and the West. They are also ruining their economy. After the delivery of the Russian S-400 missiles, Turkey was kicked out of the F-35 warplane program losing over 12 billion dollars in weapons and further allowing the Russians to advance their interests over Turkey with Turks sailing to an unknown future. All this to save Erdogan and his family through dirty negotiations and deals.

“That, at least, is what Erdogan wants his story to be, and he’ll be sticking to it in an effort to keep his base intact.”
Ahmet S. Yayla

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