



Whither Turkey

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Executive Summary

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* For Erdogan, winning the elections amounts to a mandate to single-handedly lead Turkey into implementing his vision for regaining her long-lost Glory of the Caliphate-Empire. The elections are the beginning of a global-historical ascent of Turkey. The coming transformation of Erdogan's new-old Turkey will have major impact on the greater Middle East, the greater Central Asia, and Europe.

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Analysis

“Democracy,” Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has repeatedly told his acolytes, “is like a bus/tram. You get off once you reached your destination.”

On 24 June 2018, Erdogan and his AKP won the crucial presidential and parliamentary elections in Turkey. Most important, Erdogan received a clear mandate to implement the transformation of Turkey into a Presidential Republic that will give him - Erdogan - unprecedented powers till 2023, and, in all likelihood if he is alive, even till 2028. The coming transformation of Erdogan’s new-old Turkey will have major impact on the greater Middle East, the greater Central Asia, and Europe. The outcome of the elections reflects accurately the popular trends in Turkey for the voter turnout was extremely high even for the politically active Turkey. The voter turnout in the presidential election was 86.82% and the turnout in the parliamentary election was 87.0%.

The outcome of the presidential election was predictable for it reflects accurately the polarization of the population within Turkey. Erdogan won 52.6% of the votes in most of Turkey - the areas inhabited by what Erdogan calls “the Black Turks”. Chief rival Muharrem Ince, the Kemalist social-democrat candidate, won 30.6% of the votes mostly from “the White Turks” in the country’s western-most urban areas and from the urban-economic elite of Tunceli (the economic capital of Turkish Kurdistan). The Kurdish leader Selahattin Demirtas, who is in jail, won 8.4% of the votes - all in Turkish Kurdistan. The rest of the votes went to minor, fringe candidates none of whom carried even a single voting district.

Five parties crossed the 10% threshold and entered parliament. They compose three distinct alliances cemented and signed prior to the parliamentary election. Because of Turkey’s complex districting procedures - the numbers of seats each party is allocated in Turkey’s 600-member parliament does not reflect accurately the number of popular votes received.

The parties and their showings are:

- The AKP - 42.6% and 295 MPs. The Justice and Development Party, Erdogan’s party, is an Islamist-chauvinist conservative party whose ideology is based on the teachings of the Muslim Brothers.
- The CHP - 22.6% and 146 MPs. The Republican People’s Party, Ince’s party, is a Kemalist social-democratic party but with a strong nationalist-chauvinist streak.
- The HDP - 11.7% and 67 MPs. The Democratic Party of the Peoples, Demirtas’ party, is the Kurdish party that has recently won support from other oppressed minorities - mainly the Alavis and Armenians.
- The MHP - 11.1% and 49 MPs. The Nationalist Movement Party is a conservative party that supports Westernized-secularist domestic policy and economy, pan-Turkic ultra-nationalist foreign policy, and outright hostility toward the EU.
- The IYI - 10.0% and 43 MPs. The IYI Party is a new (established in October 2017) party that focuses on nationalist, liberal and secularist political policies for Turkey. The party is an amalgam of the survivors of Turkey’s Westernized-liberal social and political movements that were cracked down by Erdogan.

The three political blocs are:

- The People’s Alliance that is comprised of the AKP and the MHP for a total of 344 MPs.
- The Nation’s Alliance that is comprised of the CHP and the IYI for a total of 189 MPs.
- The Kurdish HDP with 67 MPs.



Thus, while Erdogan's AKP does not have the absolute majority of 301 MPs they yearned for (they have 295) - the People's Alliance has a comfortable majority to push their policies. Moreover, the Kurdish MPs threaten to boycott parliament until Demirtas and several other Kurdish leaders (including elected MPs) are released from jail. AKP leaders have already proposed to leaders of other parties a new law according to which all parliamentary seats that are vacant due to boycott be seized by the parliamentary leadership and be distributed among the other parties in accordance with their relative strength in parliament. The AKP is most interested in such an arrangement because it will give them about 30 additional seats and propel them over the magic 300 seats to absolute majority.

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For Erdogan, winning the elections amounts to a mandate to single-handedly lead Turkey into implementing his vision for regaining the long-lost Glory of the Caliphate-Empire. The elections are the beginning of a global-historical ascent of Turkey under his leadership. "The people have given us a mandate to govern," he declared once the initial results were announced, and the new process will be implemented "rapidly". "I will make Turkey a superpower," Erdogan declared. His initial goal is to make Turkey a "top ten" world power.

Regionally, Erdogan specified, Turkey would "act more decisively" against "terrorist organizations", would continue to "liberate Syrian lands," and commit to helping actively the Palestinian cause. On election day, 24 June, the Editorial of the pro-Erdogan *Yeni Safak* elaborated on Erdogan's view of the region. "As Turkey heads to the polls ... the Middle East holds its breath in anticipation of the results that promise to shape the future of the region. The oppressed people of Palestine, Syria, Iraq and Libya, who look to Turkey as a beacon of hope in a region rocked by turmoil and instability, hope that the ... elections will tip the balance in favor of the disenfranchised people of the Middle East."

Erdogan's soul-mate, Ibrahim Karagul, the editor of *Yeni Safak*, analyzed the long-term meaning of the elections. Erdogan's victory, he wrote on 25 June, "paved the way for the giant steps to be taken from now on and revealed once more that there is no other option for this country but to advance and grow." Erdogan will now lead Turkey's "great transformation, the first power buildup after the Ottoman Empire," Karagul stressed. "This is Turkey's victory. This is the victory of a millennium-old history." The outcome of Erdogan's electoral victory is a global event with widespread ramifications. "This joy [of Erdogan's victory] was felt not only in Turkey, in this country's cities, villages and streets, but in the depths of Skopje, Sarajevo, Baku, Crimea, Africa, and in the cities and hearts of the people of Far East Asia. It was felt in Arab streets, in the hopes of those who are stateless. Because if Anatolia rises, the region will rise - they knew this, and we knew this. ... There is now going to be a geography-building Turkey that expands out to the region, the world."

On 27 June, Karagul elaborated on the historic significance of Erdogan's new powers. Under Erdogan, Turkey "positioned itself in the center-most part of the global domain and activated great changes and big steps." Turkey no longer considers itself a part of any alliance or agreement. Turkey "took the decision to exist on its own without being under the patronage of any power, any country, any alliance's protection, without taking refuge in any protection shield, to lift the history-maker will that has prevailed on these lands for a millennium back up on its feet, and to give prominence to the future-oriented local resistance and mind. From now on Turkey itself is a protection shield. It is an axis in itself. It is a power chain in itself. It is a claim, a plan, the future in itself. It is a huge umbrella for Anatolia, as well the entire region. It is going to build such a political mind, such a political identity, such a resistance center will build the geography and unite the entire region." This assertive ascent to global prominence, Karagul stressed, "is one that carries the continuity of the Seljuks,



the Ottomans, and the Turkish Republic to the future.”

Karagul emphasized that granting Erdogan unprecedented powers through the elections is the key to the future of Turkey as a leading great power. “The era of ‘strong leaders’ has started [and] countries like Turkey, the US, Russia and China are producing strong leaders and history-maker personalities,” Karagul explained. “In this aspect, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is one of the leaders of our millennium-old political history; he is the ‘Great Traveler,’ the ‘Great Leader.’ Under his leadership, Turkey is again a history-maker country, the country of the new rising era after the 20th century. This country is now one that produces claims, power and discourse from the depths of Africa to the middle of Asia, from the Balkans to the Far East.” Erdogan’s Turkey “can no longer be slowed down, prevented or stopped. This is what will be deemed as the third great rising period of our political history. ... Get ready, we are now going to march with bigger steps!”

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The victory of Erdogan is essentially the affirmation of his popular mandate for charting a new and assertive course for an Islamist-Chauvinist Turkey. This is the primary outcome of the profound transformation of Turkish society that has been going on since Erdogan and the AKP came to power back in 2002. By summer 2018, Turkish historian Dr. Can Erimtan points out, Erdogan represents a popular base that “is large and fully convinced of the fact that the current systemic change is on the right track and that the return of Islam to Turkish public life was long overdue.”

Indeed, Erdogan increasingly emphasizes the role of Turkey as the spearhead of Islam. When, in early June, Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz announced the expulsion of mainly Turkish Islamist Imams and the closing down of their mosques - Erdogan reacted with fury in the name of Islam. “These measures taken by the Austrian prime minister are, I fear, leading the world towards a war between the cross and the crescent,” Erdogan declared in Istanbul on 10 June. “They say they’re going to kick our religious men out of Austria. Do you think we will not react if you do such a thing? That means we’re going to have to do something.”

As he had done beforehand, Ibrahim Karagul articulated Erdogan’s goals most succinctly and accurately.

On 20 June, Karagul explained that since Turkey was “one of the central countries of the global power domain,” she no longer needed affiliation with alliances or acceptance of conventional policies. Erdogan’s Turkey is going to chart its own assertive course. “We are going to see a Turkey that destroys terrorism at its source, not one that tries to defeat it internally. We are going to see a country that directs its operation capability abroad, not a country that is subjected to operations; we are going to have a country that defends itself abroad, at the source of the threat, not inside the country or at its borders,” Karagul argued. With the elections there will begin a new era of greatness for Turkey.

“June 24 is going to be the date that this country, that the will in this country which has made history since the Seljuks, the political gene that rebuilt the Seljuk-Ottoman-Republic durability retakes action and the date that the final stage of the change targeting this this is completed. ... Therefore, support this new great rise. Join Anatolia’s ‘Third’ great history-maker will and march. Do not forget, when we march, the Balkans are going to march, the Caucasus is going to march, Mesopotamia is going to march, the entire region is going to march. When we march, history is going to change once more, the region is going to be built once more, the Seljuks, the Ottoman, the Turkish Republic is going to march once more. This is the way it has been for a millennium - it is going to be the same once more.”



It is impossible to understate the significance of the unfolding changes in Turkey, Karagul emphasized. "This is a historical reckoning, it is a civilization reckoning, a power reckoning. It is one of the greatest tests of our millennia-old history; it is a straight path that separates the right from the wrong." Erdogan's Turkey is about to impose a new global order in which "there is no longer the East or West for us. There is no North or South. There is no Europe or Asia. They all exist, but we are at the center, and so are our region, our plans, our claims, our memory, our ideals, our ebullience and struggle."

The quintessence of the new ascent of Turkey is the revival of its glorious heritage. "President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's march is a Seljuk march, an Ottoman march, a march of the Republic and the march of the future Turkey. Its foes know that this is the way it is as much as its allies do," Karagul wrote on 20 June. In a follow-up article on 23 June, he stressed the centrality of the elections to the awakening of Turkey's new power and glory. The elections are "the call of the country, the century!" The elections "are going to decide about how we are going to continue the tradition of the Seljuks, Ottomans and Turkish Republic, the continuity of states for another century and the centuries to come, how we are going to reflect that political gene onto the entire region, and how we are going to confront the threats heaped up on our border like in Canakkale [Gallipoli]. ... We are in the last stage of the march of the century that we have been sustaining for 15 years. We are tasked with moving this country forward, preparing the pledges that were left for us for the next step. This historical debt is on our shoulders. We are in the final stage of realizing the promise we shouldered like the oaths of our martyrs and future generations."

After the elections, Karagul asserted, the world will have to cope with a new and powerful "Turkey Axis" of global significance. "Turkey is going to be discussed globally, not locally. The world is going to witness a surprising rise of power." In this new era, Turkey is going to challenge the prominence of the current great powers. "We are not going to spend the 21st century seeking their approval. We carried that strong political gene to this century, we are now going to march with that. We are now the Seljuks, the Ottomans, the Turkish Republic, we are all of these. This is how the world will know us, this is how it has to accept us. We are the continuation of these three states, these three legacies; we are the founding generation of that future."

In his 20 June article, Karagul stressed that the implementation of Turkey's ascent to a global role is already manifested in the Turkey's posture and operations in the Middle East. Turkey's military operations are the foundations upon which the forthcoming surge of Turkey will be built. As such, these operations are "no different than the defense of Jerusalem, the defense of Medina, the defense of Canakkale [Gallipoli], and the War of Independence. It might seem exaggerated to some, but when we take into consideration the region, the world and Turkey's future, it is exactly like this. Because, unless we lay these foundations today, unless we decide for that powerful Turkey, if we turn into the playground of certain groups, those regions will not be able to be defended again. The decision we make today will lay the foundations of this defense."

On 23 June, Karagul explained that Turkey has already escalated its cross-border military operations, and that there would be a marked escalation after the elections. "We struck with the Euphrates Shield Operation, we hit with the Afrin operation, and recently, we are striking again with the multinational intervention front with the Qandil operation. We are going to continue after the June 24 elections. The entire anti-Turkey front between Iran and the Mediterranean is going to be collapsed; the multinational scenario positioned in those areas is going to blow up in their faces." Simply put, the war against, and the suppression of, the Kurds will escalate. Indeed, back on 20 June, Karagul put Turkey's anti-Kurdish regional operations in a wider context. Emboldened by the outcome of the elections, Turkey is going to unilaterally remake the entire region adjacent



to its borders. “Now, regardless of which country or organization is in that zone spanning the Iranian border and the Mediterranean, it is clear that we have no other choice than to be in that zone. That entire zone above the Mosul-Aleppo line is a security area for Turkey. It cannot be left unstable in any way. If it is going to remain unstable, Turkey must take control over it. The regional and global conjuncture will give this void to Turkey.” Karagul is confident, and so must be Erdogan, that the great powers will not be able to prevent Turkey’s regional and global ascent.

Indeed, these are not idle boasts. The alliance between the AKP and the MHP is based on their joint commitment to expanding the assertive ascent of Turkey and the spread of pan-Turkism worldwide. The entire nationalist-chauvinist camp - both Islamists and secularists - is motivated by the urgent imperative to restore Turkey’s historic glory and might. This means surging way beyond the recent escalation of Turkish military operations from the Idlib enclave, through Manbij, to eastern Syria and northern Iraq all the way to the gates of Qandil near the Iranian border. Ultimately, Erdogan sees himself restoring the Sunni-Ottoman hegemony over the entire greater Middle East including the Holy Shrines in Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem.

Most important to comprehending Ankara’s convictions and intent is the quintessence of Erdogan’s recent dealing with King Abdallah II of Jordan. Since the Istanbul Islamic Summit in December 2017, Erdogan has been cajoling the Jordanian monarch, ostensibly in order to help him withstand the spreading Islamist riots throughout Jordan.

The Islamist-driven socio-economic challenge to King Abdallah II is not new. Widespread demonstrations started already in 2013/4 as Jordanian economy began to sink, unemployment surged, and the huge numbers of Syrian refugees radicalized the susceptible population of northern Jordan.

Amman sought to redress the Islamist challenge by highlighting the historic role, and Islamic legitimacy, of the Hashemites as the true Sharifs of Mecca. (This move constitutes a profound challenge to the legitimacy of the House of al-Saud as the Custodians of the Holy Shrines.) Back in June 2015, the King presented the Hashemite Flag that is rife with strong Islamic symbolism and religious meaning to the Jordan Armed Forces-Arab Army. “The Hashemite Flag’s colors and motifs combine elements of history, legitimacy, religion and Arabism found in the Hashemite family and the Great Arab Revolt,” explained the Decree issued by the Royal Court. Indeed, the Banner was first hoisted by Al-Sharif Abu Nami in 1515 during the liberation of Mecca and Medina that established the Hashemites as the historic Sharifs of Mecca. The Banner was also hoisted by Prince Abdullah in 1920, as he led the Arab Forces to Maan during the Great Arab Revolt. In June 2017, King Abdullah II ordered that the Hashemite Flag be raised at the main entrance of the Royal Court instead of the Jordanian Flag.

However, starting spring 2018, popular discontent has been rising in Jordan and Islamist-inspired calls for the establishment of an Islamic State (which means the toppling of the Hashemite monarchy) multiplied. Throughout, Erdogan reached out to King Abdallah II in several phone conversations, the last being in June 2018. Erdogan calls for the Hashemites to reassert their religious heritage and demand their historic rights as the Sharifs of Mecca and the rulers of the Hijaz, then ask for Turkish protection and accept ruling under Turkish suzerainty. Erdogan in effect argues for restoring the relationship that existed between 1517, when the Ottomans captured the Mamluk territories, and the Great Arab Revolt of 1920 and the formal collapse of the Ottoman Caliphate in 1923. Erdogan emphasized to King Abdallah II that such a demand would state in no uncertain terms the Islamic legitimacy of the Hashemites and make it difficult for any Islamist movement affiliated with the Muslim Brothers to challenge them. In reality, Erdogan wants to use the Hashemites as the instrument to destabilize and undermine the House of al-Saud as part of Turkey’s ascent as the regional and



all-Islamic leader. For his part, King Abdallah II prefers to accept the lavish financial support offered by Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States. But Erdogan would not stop or be dissuaded.

Throughout the entire elections campaign, Erdogan attended several hundred rallies where he addressed huge crowds. In all of them, he repeatedly gestured to the crowds with his right hand. His hand-message proves far more important than anything he said. As he was waving, Erdogan shifted between the Rabia/Rabaa and the Wolf salutes. The Rabia/Rabaa is the salute gesture of the Muslim Brothers, particularly since their demonstrations in Egypt starting 2013. In May 2017, the AKP adopted the gesture as a new article in its bylaws as part of the AKP's undeclared affiliation with the Muslim Brothers. The Wolf salute is a reference to the Bozkurt - the grey wolf of the steppes - who is the symbol of pan-Turkism. The gesture was originally introduced by the Grey Wolves (the underground paramilitary wing of the MHP) in the mid-1960's as a defiant hand signal identifying their members. Thus, by publicly and frequently shifting between the Rabia/Rabaa and the Wolf salutes - Erdogan left no doubt as to the core character and objectives of his new Turkey. Erdogan's Turkey will strive to dominate the Hub of Islam coveted by the Muslim Brothers and the vast Turkic lands of the greater Central Asia, Xinjiang and eastern Siberia. Erdogan is convinced the electoral victory of 24 June gave him the mandate to surge.

Remarks: Opinions expressed in this contribution are those of the author.

About the Author of this Issue

Yossef Bodansky has been the Director of Research at the International Strategic Studies Association [ISSA], as well as a Senior Editor for the *Defense & Foreign Affairs* group of publications, since 1983. He was the Director of the Congressional Task Force on Terrorism and Unconventional Warfare at the U.S. House of Representatives between 1988 and 2004, and stayed on as a special adviser to Congress till January 2009. In the mid-1980s, he acted as a senior consultant for the U.S. Department of Defense and the Department of State.

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Mr Bodansky is a Director at the Prague Society for International Cooperation, and serves on the Board of the Global Panel Foundation and several other institutions worldwide.

