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LETTER FROM TURKEY

## THE DEEP STATE

*The Prime Minister is revered as a moderate, but how far will he go to stay in power?*

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Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was elected in 2003, despite having been banned from holding office, and since then he has taken an increasingly harsh line against his opponents. In the past five years, more than seven hundred people have been arrested.

Photograph by Abbas.

Not long ago, at a resort in the Turkish town of Kızılcabamam, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan stood before a gathering of leaders of the Justice and Development Party to celebrate both his country and himself. Erdoğan, a tall, athletic-looking man of fifty-eight, with a receding hairline and a pale mustache, wore a blue Western suit and no tie. His wife, Emine, wearing a traditional head scarf, looked on from a nearby seat. Erdoğan recalled the milestones in Turkey's remarkable economic and geopolitical ascent since 2002, and the rise to power of the A.K. Party, as it is known by its Turkish initials. He pointed to the doubling of the gross domestic product; the sweeping transformation of the Turkish state and society; and the leading role that Turkey has come to play in world affairs. "With the A.K. Party, the whole world hears Turkey's words," Erdoğan said.

Erdoğan (pronounced *er-do-wan*) spoke with a vehemence that at times approached anger. When

he came to the European Union, an organization that Turkey has aspired to join for forty-nine years, he practically shouted into the microphone. Over the past decade, he has led an ambitious campaign to remake the Turkish state as the Europeans asked him to, overhauling the judicial system and expanding the rights of women and minorities, only to find Turkey still outside the gates. “Look at their state of affairs,” he said of the E.U.’s member states. “They are crumbling! Their currency is in disarray!” He gripped the lectern, jabbing the air with his forefinger. “Turkey is on its feet—no thanks to them but to its own people!” He flashed a sharp, joyless grin suggesting both triumph and resentment. “Actually, we have already met the E.U. criteria. Why haven’t we become a member? you ask. They know very well why we haven’t been accepted, and we also know. . . . It doesn’t matter anyway.” Erdoğan was referring to the widespread belief among Turks that the E.U. has rebuffed Turkey because its population, of seventy-four million, is overwhelmingly Muslim.

Erdoğan carried on, mixing his paeans with bitter allusions to enemies and slights. The starting point of his speech was the state of affairs he inherited nine years ago, when Turkey was in an acute economic crisis and under the rule of an entrenched secular élite. There was also a deeply personal subtext. As every Turk knows, Erdoğan was imprisoned, in 1999, for his Islamist leanings. Now, with Turkey’s economy booming, and the opposition in disarray, the need for the Old Guard had receded, he suggested—and so had the need for dissent. “Dear friends, to be one, to be together, to walk together toward the same future is the biggest strength of our people,” he said. “For this reason, the first priority should be to eliminate those who do not want Turkey to grow, develop, and advance. Everyone should be at ease—we will not let anyone disturb this harmony.”

When Erdoğan and his comrades in the A.K. Party came to power, there were widespread concerns that, as ardent Islamists, they were intent on foisting a religious regime on secular Turkey. Erdoğan, for his part, feared the resistance of what is commonly referred to as *derin devlet*, the “deep state.” The deep state is a presumed clandestine network of military officers and their civilian allies who, for decades, suppressed and sometimes murdered dissidents, Communists, reporters, Islamists, Christian missionaries, and members of minority groups—anyone thought to pose a threat to the secular order, established in 1923 by Mustafa Kemal, or Atatürk. The deep state, historians say, has functioned as a kind of shadow government, disseminating propaganda to whip up public fear or destabilizing civilian governments not to its liking.

Friends and colleagues say Erdoğan worried that the deep state would never allow him to govern. But, to the surprise of many, he has pulled Turkey closer to the West, opening up the economy and becoming a crucial go-between for the West with Palestine, Iran, and Syria. He has called on the Assad government, in Damascus, to step down, and has tried to help build a bridge between the West and Tehran in the current nuclear standoff. In the eyes of American and European leaders, Erdoğan has

fashioned Turkey into an indispensable Islamic democracy, offering a potential example for Egypt, Tunisia, and Syria.

Erdoğan has even dared to surprise his countrymen by reassessing painful chapters in Turkish history. In November, he told an audience of A.K. Party faithful about the massacre, in the nineteen-thirties, of more than thirteen thousand Alevis, members of a Shiite sect. “I am apologizing,” Erdoğan said, at one point holding up a sheaf of presumably damning documents. The moment encapsulated his attempt to force Turkey to confront its horrific record of persecuting its ethnic and religious minorities, including Kurds, Greeks, and Armenians, more than a million and a half of whom were massacred in the early twentieth century.

But Erdoğan’s rule has another, darker side, which the West seems intent on ignoring: an increasingly harsh campaign to crush domestic opposition. In the past five years, more than seven hundred people have been arrested, including generals, admirals, members of parliament, newspaper editors and other journalists, owners of television networks, directors of charitable organizations, and university officials. Some fifteen per cent of the active admirals and generals in the Turkish armed forces are now on trial for conspiring to overthrow the government.

The American response to this intensifying repression has been tepid. President Barack Obama has developed a close relationship with Erdoğan, whom he regards as a dynamic and democratically minded leader. A White House official told me that Obama has regularly voiced his concerns about the treatment of religious and ethnic minorities. On the rare occasion that an American official has made his criticisms public, Erdoğan has easily dismissed them. Last year, the American Ambassador, Frank Ricciardone, raised the issue of detained journalists. Erdoğan mocked Ricciardone, a veteran diplomat and a Turkish speaker, as “a rookie ambassador.”

One explanation for American passivity, repeated by a number of Turks, is that Obama is desperate for allies in the Muslim world and is determined to hold on to Erdoğan as a friend in an increasingly combustible region. When I mentioned this to a Western diplomat, he said that Erdoğan had proved to be a positive leader for Turkey. As the diplomat told me, “Turkey is Muslim, prosperous, and democratic. There isn’t another country like that.” And yet some Turks compare Erdoğan’s Turkey less to the democracies of the West than to the Russian and Chinese models, in which free-market economics are championed and domestic dissent is repressed.

**T**he Palace, a café in the working-class Istanbul neighborhood of Kasımpaşa, is on the same noisy street where Tayyip Erdoğan spent his youth. A concrete-block building occupies the spot where Erdoğan’s father, a seaman for a state shipping company, brought the family after migrating, when Erdoğan was a child, from the Black Sea town of Rize. The street is treeless and bordered by cemeteries, where the tombstones are adorned with Ottoman script. When trucks rumble past, they

rattle the Palace's big front window.

When I went into the café not long ago, a group of men were sitting at a table playing cards. There were no women there, and none of the men could recall the last time one had ventured in. "I win!" one of them yelled, slamming his hand on the table. "I win again."

On seeing me, some of the cardplayers came over to talk. Affecting the same sort of tough-guy swagger as the Prime Minister, they were happy to discuss Erdoğan. He was one of them, a champion and a native son. Erdoğan, they said, was the most serious, the most pious, the most respectful young man that Kasımpaşa had ever produced. "He was a flower in the marsh," one said. As a boy, Erdoğan would climb onto an elevated platform at Sinan Paşa, a sixteenth-century neighborhood mosque that was restored by the government two years ago, and read Koranic verses aloud to the assembled. "If a bunch of guys started staring at a girl and teasing her, Tayyip would always shut them up," one of the men said.

Erdoğan bypassed the local state-run secondary school to attend what is called an Imam Hatip school; technically, this is where young men prepare to become imams, but in practice, in a country where the display of religious devotion was officially discouraged and sometimes forcibly suppressed, it was one of the few places where parents could send their sons to receive a religious education. The men admired Erdoğan's toughness, as well as his piety. He played as a striker for Erokspor, a local soccer club. Yaşar Kırıcı, the owner of the Palace, said, "I'll tell you one thing—he never backed down from a fight."

The Palace, whose walls are crowded with old photographs, is a shrine to both Erdoğan and Atatürk, who, having established the modern Turkish nation, abolished the Caliphate, the sacred seat of the Muslim world for four hundred years. Seventy-four years after Atatürk's death, portraits of him still hang in almost every restaurant and tea house in the country. The Palace has more than a dozen.

The café also features many photographs of Erdoğan throughout his public career: as mayor of Istanbul, as Prime Minister. There is even a picture of the prison where he was incarcerated. Erdoğan has returned to Kasımpaşa many times since he was elected Prime Minister but has never entered the Palace; possibly, the men said, because of the card playing, which conservative Muslims associate with gambling.

The largest picture of Erdoğan in the café shows him at a meeting of the World Economic Forum, in Davos, in 2009, angrily jabbing a finger at Shimon Peres, the Israeli President. The poster reads, across the bottom, "One Minute! One Minute!" The moment came during a panel discussion about the Israeli military campaign in Gaza. "One minute!" Erdoğan, whose command of English is minimal, shouted. He turned to Peres and said, "When it comes to killing, you know well how to kill." Then he stalked off the stage and headed for the airport. For years, Turkey's leaders had charted a lonely course

in the region by forming a close relationship with Israel. Erdoğan was theatrically demonstrating to the audience, and to the world, that Israel could no longer take for granted its friendship with Turkey. When he landed in Istanbul, he was greeted by crowds waving Palestinian and Turkish flags.

“No one in the Muslim world has ever stood up to Israel like that,” Kırıcı said proudly. “Tayyip’s not afraid of anyone.”

Erdoğan was elected mayor of Istanbul in 1994, and he governed as a non-ideological and highly competent technocrat. He modernized much of the city’s antiquated water system, introduced eco-friendly buses that ran on natural gas, and expanded the city’s network of roads. By 1997, however, Turkey was on the verge of one of its periodic political convulsions. The Prime Minister, Necmettin Erbakan, a committed Islamist (and a mentor to Erdoğan), had proved to be erratic and ineffectual, especially in the eyes of the country’s secular establishment and the military. Erbakan alienated the secular élite by opposing plans to enter the European Union, vowing to pull the country out of NATO, and moving closer to Islamists across the Middle East.

On June 18, 1997, following a series of ultimatums from the military, Erbakan resigned. His party, the Welfare Party, was banned, as were three other Islamist parties that Erbakan and Erdoğan had once belonged to. No shots were fired: the generals stood back and the civilians sheepishly slinked off the political stage. The event is still referred to as the “postmodern coup.”

Around the same time, a group of military officers calling themselves the Western Working Group began to reassert their authority and tried to remove any traces of what they regarded as undue Islamist influence. Public servants, even university professors, were required to attend lectures by military officers on the menace of political Islam. The generals aimed at getting rid of Erdoğan, who, as the mayor of Istanbul, was regarded as the most powerful local leader. Their opportunity came in December, 1997, when Erdoğan went to the city of Siirt and read aloud an Islamic-accented poem:

The mosques are our barracks  
The domes our helmets  
The minarets our bayonets  
And the faithful our soldiers.

In fact, the poem was written by Ziya Gökalp, one of the country’s most famous secular nationalists, in 1912. Nevertheless, Erdoğan was charged with “incitement of religious hatred,” sentenced to ten months in prison (of which he served four), and banned from politics. “He was the most popular politician in the country,” Cüneyd Zapsu, a conservative pro-Western businessman who became one of Erdoğan’s closest advisers, told me. “That’s why they went after him. Everyone knew the charge was unjust.”

Erdoğan's arrest and Erbakan's humiliation were emphatic assertions of the military's self-appointed role as the steward of Kemalist, secular Turkey. In the first eighty years of the republic, the military has intervened four times to remove civilian governments that were thought to have lost control of the country or to have strayed from the principles of secularism or anti-Communism. In 1960, the generals arrested and later executed Prime Minister Adnan Menderes. In 1980, after a coup that resulted in the deaths and detentions of tens of thousands, the military rewrote the constitution to grant it the explicit right to overthrow civilian governments. The military often acted on behalf of a class of elected officials and civil servants. These people and the institutions they belonged to—including newspapers, such as *Hürriyet*; the sprawling family-owned holding companies that sometimes received favorable treatment from the government; and the heads of the country's leading universities—represented roughly thirty per cent of the population. They are still referred to, often dismissively, as the White Turks; everyone else is a Black Turk.

The Kemalist order was also sustained by the dynamics of the Cold War. Beginning in the nineteen-forties, Western intelligence agencies, including the C.I.A., trained Turkish soldiers and civilians to operate as resistance forces in the event of a Soviet invasion. These groups, known as “Gladios” and “stay-behind” forces, received military and intelligence training, and hid weapons caches to be recovered in the event of an attack. According to Gareth Jenkins, an independent researcher in Istanbul who has written about the subject, these groups were the genesis of the deep state. Beginning in the nineteen-eighties, they also established connections to individuals involved in organized crime.

Few people in Turkey contest the notion that something resembling a deep state existed, but its scale, its nature, and its life span are not entirely clear. According to Kerem Öktem, a research fellow at Oxford University, the courts and the police protected the operatives of the deep state. “These people carried out assassinations and acts of sabotage, and they staged events that were designed to instill fear,” Öktem told me. “And they always got away.”

Prosecutors, historians, and journalists say that the deep state was responsible for the deaths of thousands of people, including dissident political leaders, intellectuals, and journalists. It played a central role in combating the Kurdish insurgency of the nineteen-eighties and nineties—the so-called dirty war—when tens of thousands of guerrillas and civilians were killed or disappeared. Death squads in predominantly Kurdish cities like Diyarbakır operated with near-impunity, even using a signature vehicle: a white Renault sedan, in which military-age Kurdish males were often taken away. “Whenever you saw a white Renault, the streets would empty,” Selahattin Demirtaş, the head of the Peace and Democracy Party, the main Kurdish political party, told me. “I’ve been inside the Renaults. A lot of people I know never made it out of them.”

According to Turkish politicians and journalists, the Kemalist élite and its allies in the deep state employed the press to exaggerate threats to the state—from leftists, from ultra-nationalists. Provocateurs carried out assassinations and other acts calculated to cause a backlash. Then the military, with the claim of suppressing anarchy, would take harsh action, often with the public's approval. "Until 2002, most of the newspapers and television stations were pro-military, and they would run the stories they were asked to run, targeting people and discrediting people as the military wanted," Yavuz Baydar, a columnist for the English-language paper *Today's Zaman*, told me. "It was a rotten system."

For decades, the deep state was whispered about, but its existence was never quite proved; then, in November, 1996, its outlines started to come clear. A car travelling near the city of Susurluk crashed, killing three of the four people inside: a notorious ultra-nationalist gunman and drug trafficker who was carrying several false identities; his girlfriend; and a former deputy police chief from Istanbul. The fourth person, the only survivor, was a member of parliament. Authorities promised to investigate how such disparate characters had come to be riding in the same car, but the incident was never fully explained.

Erdoğan's allies and friends say that the 1997 coup, and his subsequent arrest, had a profound impact on his thinking. When Erdoğan and his associates gathered to discuss the political future, they concluded that trying to lead an Islamist movement identical to those of the past would be futile. The moment had come, they believed, for an Islamist party that would speak for the majority of the Turkish people and yet refrain from insisting on a prominent role for religion in the state. Dengir Mir Mehmet Fırat, who for a time was one of Erdoğan's closest advisers, told me, "Our view had always been that leaders could be secular but that the system needed to be Islamic. But, every time we tried that, we were closed down. We learned from our experience. We had to water it down." According to Fırat, Erdoğan and his allies agreed on something close to the opposite of the old dream: Turkey's new leaders could be pious in their personal behavior, but they would leave the secular order untouched. The organization they founded, Justice and Development—the A.K. Party—put forward candidates who had moderate views. The most ardently Islamist candidates were excluded.

Erdoğan was still legally barred from running in the 2002 election. He campaigned anyway, implying that if the A.K. Party won he would return to politics. An implosion of the Turkish banks in 2001, along with raging inflation, gave the Islamists their opening. Voters swept away the old order, banishing nearly every incumbent in parliament. The A.K. Party's victory transformed the country by opening up the political system to the majority of Turks, who were moderately religious, and the economic system to greater integration with global markets. "Turks are like Americans," Zapsu said. "They're conservative and they're pro-business. We just gave voice to that."

Despite the scale of Erdoğan's victory, he never forgot the humiliations he had suffered. Nuray

Mert, a former columnist for the newspaper *Milliyet* who used to be an ally of Erdoğan's, told me, "He was traumatized, I think—by the military, by the people who tried to hold him back." Last June, when, again, Erdoğan led his party to a resounding victory in parliamentary elections, leaving the opposition scattered and leaderless, he nevertheless played the underdog. "We are the voice of the voiceless!" he said to a throng of supporters in Istanbul. "They sent me to prison from this city!" Most of the time, friends say, Erdoğan keeps his resentments under control, but occasionally they surface. "Whenever Tayyip got really mad at me," Zapsu said, "he would call me a White Turk."

Few people personify Erdoğan's Turkey, with its mixture of social conservatism and free-market economics, better than Mehmet Dursun, a wiry, intense businessman from Istanbul. Seventeen years ago, Dursun, sensing that the aspirations of the country's conservative majority were coming to the fore—and that, most important, those Turks had more money to spend—decided that he would become the world's leading designer of women's head scarves. He founded Armine, a high-end clothing company for conservative Muslim women willing to pay premium prices. As he put it, "Conservative women want to look stylish, too."

Dursun describes himself as a pious Muslim, but he dresses like a New York advertising executive. As a businessman, he said, he sought a balance between the chic and the respectable: his head scarves are of the highest quality, but the models on billboards advertising Armine clothing never reveal more than their faces—never a strand of hair, never a glimpse of the neck. The models in Armine's catalogues rarely look at the camera, as if resisting their own appeal. (Most are not Turkish.) "We are not trying to make a woman beautiful," Dursun told me. "Elegant and chic, yes. But not beautiful."

Dursun's entrepreneurial vision landed him in the middle of one of the most politically charged and emblematic conflicts of modern Turkish life. Head scarves are worn by the great majority of Turkish women, yet for many secular Turks they are the embodiment of the anti-modern. In the nineteen-nineties, after the coup against the Erbakan government, Turkish authorities explicitly prohibited the wearing of head scarves in universities and other public buildings, beginning a decade-long struggle between the emerging religious majority and the secular élite. Female students had to use special changing rooms outside university gates to remove their scarves; some donned wigs. At Istanbul University, young women often arrived for class accompanied by the chants of demonstrators protesting the ban, who gathered at the Beyazıt mosque, across the street. Some religious Turkish parents kept their daughters out of college or sent them to study abroad, where they were free to cover their hair. Tayyip and Emine Erdoğan sent their two daughters to college in the United States and the United Kingdom—even while he was Prime Minister. "I am a father who suffers," Erdoğan told a French television station eight years ago. "My two daughters are doing their university studies abroad simply because they can't do them in Turkey while respecting their own beliefs."



During Erdoğan's first term, senior leaders of the Turkish military, and also President Ahmet Necdet Sezer, a staunch secularist, hosted receptions and ceremonies to which the wives of A.K. Party members, including Emine Erdoğan, were not invited, lest the head-scarf ban be violated. "It was a ridiculous thing," Nazlı Ilıcak, a former member of parliament, told me.

Although Erdoğan rarely invoked Islam in public—he initially left the head-scarf ban intact—his conservatism sometimes seemed to cause him embarrassment. His wife never shook hands with other men. In 2002, at a gathering of Erdoğan's supporters, one of the guests told him that his wife's habit was a liability. "She told Erdoğan, this is not modern, this is embarrassing to you," Ilıcak said. "He was very upset. I don't think he had noticed." Soon, Emine started shaking hands with men. "I think Erdoğan has become much more sophisticated since those early days," Ilıcak said. "It was just a matter of travelling abroad. He'd never been anywhere."

When Erdoğan came to power, he embarked on a series of reforms aimed at modernizing the economy. A small number of families dominated industry and government contracting, and he set out to break their stranglehold, and to expand opportunities for Turkish entrepreneurs, especially construction firms, across the Middle East and Central Asia. The A.K. Party also began to push for admission to the European Union, and the legal and institutional reforms demanded by the E.U. started to weaken many of the authoritarian remnants of the Kemalist state.

"Erdoğan used the prospect of joining the European Union to dismantle the old order," Eric Edelman, the American Ambassador from 2003 to 2005, told me. The Turkish economy began an unprecedented period of growth. The new wealth showed itself everywhere, from the textile factories of cities like Gaziantep to the showroom floors of Istanbul, where the waiting list for a new BMW was four months.

Erdoğan's Turkey is also the scene of an ominous and increasingly bitter political battle, where there is constant talk of coups and counter-coups. In 2007, Erdoğan began a series of investigations of his enemies that reveal a repressiveness and paranoia that belie his international reputation as a reliable moderate. The strategy seems designed to secure his hold on power for years to come.

On June 12, 2007, a Turkish laborer named Ali Yigít opened a crate stored in the attic of a house he had been renting in Ümraniye, a gritty district of Istanbul. Inside were twenty-seven hand grenades. Yigít called the gendarmerie, the Turkish paramilitary police.

Officers looked into the background of the house's owner, a retired Army officer named Mehmet Demirtaş, and determined that the grenades had come from the same cache as those used the previous year in a series of mysterious attacks on the offices of *Cumhuriyet*, a prominent Kemalist newspaper. Grenades from that cache had also been used, the same year, in an assault on the Council of State, an

administrative court in Ankara, killing a senior judge and wounding four other people. Prosecutors believed that these attacks were intended to create chaos and lay the groundwork for a possible coup.

Investigators uncovered plans, organizational charts, and other documents belonging to a mysterious group called Ergenekon. The name, prosecutors say, was taken from a mythical homeland in the Altai Mountains, in Central Asia, that featured prominently in the fantasies of some Turkish ultra-nationalists. Initially, Ergenekon appeared to be made up of current and former military and intelligence officers, many of whom had fought against the Kurdish insurgents in the nineteen-eighties and nineties. But the web of suspects kept expanding. “Every person and piece of evidence we found led us to someone else,” a Turkish official with knowledge of the case told me.

To date, more than three hundred people have been arrested in the investigation. Prosecutors maintain that Ergenekon is the deep state itself—not merely a cabal of reactionary officers within the military but a shadow government that aims at making Turkish democracy permanently unstable.

The documents conjure an organization of astounding reach and sophistication. Ergenekon, prosecutors say, had placed its members inside the judiciary, academia, and the press. And at the time of the first wave of arrests it was allegedly plotting to assassinate a number of prominent Turkish citizens, including Orhan Pamuk, the Nobel Prize-winning novelist; the Patriarch of the Greek Orthodox Church; and Erdoğan himself. One of the particular strengths of Ergenekon was its propaganda wing, which was said to have planted phony stories in newspapers and on television stations, and stirred up public fear of presumed enemies. It also had a section that worked exclusively with organized crime—trafficking narcotics, among other things—to finance its activities. Ergenekon even had a meeting place—a defunct religious building in Istanbul’s Karaköy neighborhood known as “the Turkish Orthodox Church.”

Of the hundreds of people who have been detained for their alleged roles in Ergenekon, perhaps the most terrifying is Veli Küçük, a retired three-star general from the gendarmerie. Prosecutors say that Küçük, linked to both organized crime and the military, helped found Ergenekon and ordered the attacks on *Cumhuriyet* and the Council of State. Many of the documents outlining Ergenekon’s strategy and structure were seized from Küçük.

In the case of Küçük—and the other Ergenekon suspects—prosecutors are focussing on crimes that have allegedly been committed since the late nineteen-nineties. Turkish officials say that this is where the evidence took them. But the emphasis on recent crimes has had the curious effect of overlooking what many people regard as the deep state’s worst abuses. Küçük, for instance, is widely believed by human-rights workers to have helped direct the savage campaign waged by the Turkish military and intelligence services against Kurdish insurgents in the nineteen-eighties and nineties. “Küçük was involved in the dirtiest actions of the deep state,” Ayşe Günaysu, a member of the Human Rights

Association of Turkey, told me. As many as forty thousand people were killed during the insurgency, and more than three thousand Kurdish villages were razed to depopulate the countryside. Military and intelligence officers engaged in widespread torture and extrajudicial killings, and deployed death squads, not only to crush the insurgency but also to seize control of the heroin trade in the region. None of these alleged crimes figure in the Ergenekon indictment.

Indeed, the charges laid out in the Ergenekon case often appear haphazard, and even preposterous. Under Turkish law, prosecutors are required to provide the bulk of their case in the indictment. The pages on Küçük, however, reveal little hard evidence about his involvement in either Ergenekon or the attacks that prosecutors say he orchestrated. But the indictment refers, in sometimes lurid terms, to an alleged plot by the C.I.A. and the Mossad to kill two Turkish journalists. Some human-rights lawyers say the omissions of the Ergenekon investigation appear to be intentional—that they were designed to avoid revisiting the worst crimes of the deep state, which are so vast that they could indict a succession of Turkish governments, and even the society as a whole.

Among the indictment's other fantastical aspects are the assertion that the American Mafia is an "ethnic terrorist organization" run by the Pentagon, and that the National Intelligence Organization, Turkey's premier spy agency, is under the "complete control" of the C.I.A. The most grandiose assertion is a claim that Ergenekon planned to "manufacture chemical and biological weapons and then, with the high revenue it earned from selling them, to finance and control every terrorist organization not just in Turkey but in the entire world."

**I**n October, 2011, Çetin Dogyan, a retired general charged, the year before, with plotting to overthrow the Erdoğan government, sat inside a gymnasium-size courtroom on the outskirts of Istanbul and chided the three judges, solemn and swathed in red capes, who stared down from their bench. Wearing a blue cardigan and a scowl, Dogyan looked more like an irate golfer than like a fearsome Kemalist commander. More than a hundred and fifty other officers, who were also charged, sat in the pews around him.

"Just finish the case," Dogyan snapped at the judges. "We have been in prison for two hundred and forty days," he said. "Convict us, or let us go. This case has affected our wives and our kids and our health. And we're bored. If the purpose of this trial is to keep us in prison forever, and never reach a verdict, then admit it. Make a decision."

The judges looked on in silence. Then one of them spoke. "You have said repeatedly that the evidence against you is fabricated," he said. "How do you know?"

The General shook his head, and his voice pitched upward: "I hope one day that a courageous police officer, or a journalist, will expose the conspiracy that is unfolding against us."

Dogyan's coup plot, the prosecutors said, was code-named Sledgehammer. It included plans to

blow up mosques, shoot down a Turkish fighter jet, and arrest scores of politicians and journalists. By 2003, the prosecutors wrote in their indictment, “the conspiracy to commit the crime had begun.”

Erdoğan’s former adviser Fırat told me that in the early years of Erdoğan’s tenure he received regular reports that elements inside the military were conspiring to arrest or even execute the Prime Minister and members of his government. “We knew there were preparations for coups,” Fırat told me. “Whenever I asked Erdoğan, he would say, ‘It makes me sleepless. I had better not tell you what I know, or you’ll be sleepless, too.’ ”

A focus of the prosecution is an unusual war game that was carried out in March, 2003, at the Istanbul headquarters of the First Armored Division, which Dogyan was then commanding. The American invasion of Iraq, which sits on Turkey’s southeastern border, was less than two weeks away. The Turkish parliament had just rebuffed an American request to serve as the northern base for the invasion.

The war game involved a full-blown uprising by Islamic fundamentalists. Robert Pearson, the American Ambassador at the time, told me that there was a lot of gossip about a possible coup but that he never saw any concrete evidence of preparations. One general, Pearson said, told him that he blamed the United States for the A.K. Party’s victory in 2002, because it wanted moderate Islam to succeed in Turkey. “The military was quite bitter about this,” he added.

Edelman, who succeeded Pearson as Ambassador, said that he was struck more by the level of paranoia within Erdoğan’s government than by any movement within the military. “I never received any reports that the military was going to overthrow Erdoğan,” he told me, “but I certainly had a lot of people around Erdoğan telling me that they were afraid there was going to be a coup.”

The three-day-long war game was conducted inside a heavily guarded auditorium. Despite the secrecy of the exercise, General Dogyan ordered that it be recorded. Most of the conversations that took place appear to have been theoretical. Still, at times the generals seem to be talking about Turkish realities. “The militant ranks of a particular party have been taking steps to spread their reactionary organization across the country,” General Dogyan tells the officers at one point. “Sometimes taking a step back, but sometimes—when they find an opening and an opportunity—making up for it by taking two steps forward.”

Most damning of all are discussions in which Dogyan and the other officers invoke the names of particular officials. In one instance, an officer tells Dogyan about plans to seize control of several cities. “All broadcast and press organizations in the region will be taken under control,” the officer says. “Any press that would provoke or raise public tension will be stopped. Those media opposed to the regime will be closed.” He speaks of plans to “replace” certain mayors, whom he lists by name.

Dogyan has professed his innocence, and he told me that the war game was only a useful fiction to

help the military prepare for a possible contingency. During a break in the trial, Dogyan blamed Islamists in the government for his predicament. “This is a comedy,” he said. “Everything being said here is a lie. I have always been opposed to coups. They are not good for the military. These people want to create an Islamic state.”

In fact, Dogyan was the head of the Western Working Group, the military body set up in 1997. Some Turks have charged that Dogyan helped orchestrate Erdoğan’s arrest when he was mayor of Istanbul. Dogyan, asked about this charge in a note sent to his prison cell, said that his actions were lawful.

However close the generals came to removing Erdoğan in 2003, their casual tone makes it clear that it wasn’t the first time they’d had the conversations. “This is what the military did—they sat around and talked about making coups,” Yasemin Çongar, the deputy editor of the newspaper *Taraf*, told me. “They didn’t realize the world had changed.” *Taraf*, a small, enterprising paper that opened in 2007, broke the Sledgehammer story.

The core of the prosecutors’ case is the Sledgehammer plan itself—a thousand-and-one-page document outlining the military’s strategy to take control of the country. The Sledgehammer plan, contained on a CD, had been stored in a top-secret area at division headquarters called the Cosmic Room. An unnamed military officer passed it to a *Taraf* reporter. Çongar said that she and her reporters read the relevant documents and concluded that the military had been preparing to take power. She said that the documents were “too detailed not to be real.”

Still, a number of experts have raised serious questions about the authenticity of the case, contending that the Sledgehammer prosecution is a politically motivated effort to neutralize the military. The most troubling aspect is evidence suggesting that the Sledgehammer plan was prepared long after the March, 2003, war game took place. One section of the plan lists a number of hospitals to be seized once the coup is under way, among them an institution in Istanbul called Medical Park Sultangazi. The hospital did not acquire that name until June, 2008, when it was bought by the Medical Park group—five years after the so-called coup discussions took place. Before that, it was called Sultan Hospital. The Sledgehammer plan also lists a number of vehicles to be seized, including a Range Rover Freelander with the license plate 16 BEB 33. Public documents show that that license plate was not issued until 2006. “It’s absolutely clear that these documents have been forged,” the researcher Gareth Jenkins told me.

The Turkish official with knowledge of the case said that he was unaware of the apparent anachronisms. But he insisted that the documents (seized from the *Taraf* reporter) were produced in 2003, and have not been tampered with. “We are quite sure of the case,” the official said. One of the unanswered questions is why, if the generals were discussing a coup, they never tried to carry it out.

Many Turks with little sympathy for the military speculate that the generals were worried about the reaction of the Turkish public and of the European Union. Still, the prosecutors are convinced that Dogyan and the other officers were planning a coup in 2003, and that they were foiled by Dogyan's superior, General Hilmi Özkök, then the Chief of the General Staff. Özkök has said little about the case in public, but he is considered a hero by officials overseeing it.

Erdoğan did not move against the military until he believed that he had achieved supremacy over it. In the spring of 2007, as he was nearing the end of his first term, he began considering whom to nominate as President. There was speculation that he would nominate himself, or that he would choose Abdullah Gül, an A.K. Party comrade who was Foreign Minister at the time.

On April 27, 2007, just before midnight, the office of the Chief of the General Staff posted an unsigned memorandum on its Web site, expressing concern about the possibility of an Islamist President, and about Islamist activities that appeared to be taking place under Erdoğan's government. The memo said, "It should not be forgotten that the Turkish armed forces are a side in this debate and are a staunch defender of secularism. They will display their attitude and act openly and clearly whenever necessary."

The next day, Erdoğan issued a statement that practically dared the generals to come and get him: "It is unthinkable that in a state governed by the rule of law the Turkish general staff—as an institution under the Prime Minister—would speak against the government."

Three months later, the A.K. Party won a resounding electoral victory, and Erdoğan secured Gül's ascension to the Presidency. In the eyes of many Turks, the military had been humiliated. The Western diplomat said that, for the military, the combined effect of losing the duel with Erdoğan and the mass arrests that followed was "the coup de grâce."

"The generals were living in a Kemalist museum," the diplomat said. "It rotted from within."

Late last year, Ahmet Şık, a well-known investigative journalist, entered an Istanbul courtroom for the first time since his arrest, eight months earlier, as an alleged conspirator in Ergenekon. The courtroom was jammed with Şık's supporters, including colleagues and a group of observers sent by the E.U., which had condemned Şık's confinement. Hundreds more stood outside the courthouse. Şık had denied the charges, and as he moved to take his chair he held up his hand to the people in the pews.

"Ahmet!" his friends yelled back.

Şık seems an unlikely candidate for membership in a reactionary terrorist group. He made his reputation as a journalist on the political left, and was an opponent of the military and of the secular Kemalist order. In the nineteen-nineties, Şık was so fearful that he would be targeted by the deep state that he fled with his family to France for a year. According to the indictment, Şık and another

journalist, Nedim Şener, were members of Ergenekon's propaganda wing. Şık was allegedly taking instructions from Ergenekon leaders to write a book tentatively entitled "The Imam's Army." Searching for copies of the manuscript, then unpublished, Turkish police raided the offices of a publishing house, Ithaki, and an influential newspaper called *Radikal*.

Şık's manuscript details the political activities of Fethullah Gülen, a Muslim preacher who oversees a worldwide religious and educational organization. Şık describes the rise of the Gülen movement, from its beginnings in the Mediterranean port of Izmir, in the nineteen-seventies, and what he describes as its current efforts to infiltrate and control the police forces. Gülen is considered one of Erdoğan's most powerful allies but is reviled and feared by much of Turkey's population. Born in either 1938 or 1941—publications distributed by his organization cite both dates—Gülen fled to the United States in 1999, as Turkish authorities were preparing to arrest him, for "trying to undermine the secular system." He now lives in Saylorsburg, Pennsylvania, in the Poconos, and has emerged as the leader of one of the world's most important Islamic orders, surpassed only by the Muslim Brotherhood in its reach and influence. His public message, in the books and glossy pamphlets his acolytes distribute, is almost entirely apolitical, but his critics suspect that his ambitions are deeply political.

Gülen's followers operate a network of schools in a hundred and thirty countries. They also run a network of for-profit college-prep courses, which some Turks say earns tens of millions of dollars in annual revenue. (A prominent Gülenist in Turkey told me that the courses were not that profitable.) Turkish businessmen donate money to build Gülenist schools in countries whose markets they are trying to enter, and the schools serve as beachheads of good will. According to the movement's followers, Turkish businessmen who are Gülenists often make deals with one another, sometimes in Turkey, sometimes in faraway lands that have nonexistent or weak governments. In person, Gülenists often come across as amalgams of Dale Carnegie and Christian missionaries: clean-cut, polite, and relentlessly cheerful.

In Turkey, Gülen's followers own the newspaper *Zaman* and the TV channel *Samanyolu*, which editorialize on behalf of the A.K. Party and the Ergenekon prosecutions. (While Erdoğan himself is not believed to be a Gülenist, President Gül is said to be one, as are several other senior members of the government.) Gülen is thought to have between two and three million followers in Turkey, including as many as sixty members of parliament—about ten per cent of the total.

The Gülenists insist that the organization is too diffuse to function as a political movement. But many Turks say that the Gülenists have ambitions and that these may or may not include Erdoğan. A former member of parliament who was once a confidant of Erdoğan's told me that, in 1999, he met Gülen in Pennsylvania. Gülen, he said, told him that he had a twenty-five-year plan to take control of the Turkish state, and that this would be accomplished by a group of followers he referred to as "the

Golden Generation.” “There isn’t any question that Gülen wants political power,” the former legislator told me. (A spokesman for Gülen denied that he had ever advocated “regime change.”)

The most widely held perception in Turkey is that the Gülenists have taken control of the Turkish National Police—and that they are behind the arrests in the Ergenekon and Sledgehammer cases. James Jeffrey, a former Ambassador to Turkey, wrote in a cable to Washington, revealed by WikiLeaks, that at least part of that proposition appeared to be true: “The assertion that the T.N.P. is controlled by the Gülenists is impossible to confirm, but we have found no one who disputes it.”

Gülen has cultivated some powerful friends in the United States. When U.S. officials were trying to expel him to face criminal charges in Turkey, he was able to call on Graham Fuller, a former senior official in the C.I.A., to help him remain. When he applied for permanent residency, Morton Abramowitz, another former Ambassador to Turkey, wrote a letter on his behalf. Fuller’s relationship with Gülen, in particular, has prompted conspiracy theories in Turkey about the C.I.A.’s involvement in Gülen’s rise.

The police got Şık but not his book. Shortly after Şık’s arrest, “The Imam’s Army” appeared on the Internet. As an act of protest against censorship, a group of writers and reporters arranged to print the book privately and sold copies, in November, at the Istanbul Book Fair.

“The cumulative impact of Şık’s reporting, including the way he detailed how the Gülenists have sought to manipulate the judicial process and put sympathizers in key positions, is devastating,” Gareth Jenkins told me. In a note from prison, Şık wrote that the case against him had been fabricated by the Gülenists: “The ongoing investigations are not a democratic process; they are an attempt to silence the voices of opposition.”

“Everyone knows that Ahmet was arrested in order to silence him,” Erdinç Ergenç, one of the journalists who helped publish the book, told me. “Erdoğan is the orchestrator, the leader. He is doing this to stay in power forever.”

About a month after Şık’s arrest, Erdoğan spoke to the Council of Europe, in Strasbourg, the organization that oversees the European Court of Human Rights. He dismissed concerns that he was repressing journalists. “It is a crime to use a bomb,” Erdoğan told the council. “But it is also a crime to use materials from which a bomb is made.”

**S**ome of those charged with membership in Ergenekon are former allies of the Prime Minister. One is Emin Şirin, who helped found the A.K. Party, in 2001, and won a seat in parliament in 2002. Şirin began to criticize Erdoğan after he became Prime Minister, accusing him of running the Party in an authoritarian way. Şirin served his term, and in 2007, less than a month after leaving office, he was arrested. The main evidence assembled in the indictment is a fifteen-page record of phone calls that he allegedly made to other Ergenekon members, yet nothing in the transcripts appears criminal in nature.



Some of the calls were to his girlfriend—and all of the calls were made after his arrest. When I asked the Turkish official about Şirin, he shrugged: “It’s not one of the strongest cases.”

Perhaps the most brazen attempt to use the Ergenekon label to crush Erdoğan’s critics is the example of *Aydınlık*, a newspaper known for its ultra-nationalist views. In October, 2009, *Aydınlık* published what it claimed was a transcript of a recorded conversation between Erdoğan and Remzi Gür, a wealthy textile manufacturer and a family friend. In the recording, the voice said to be Erdoğan’s instructs Gür to send Erdoğan’s daughter Sümeyye, who was in the United States at the time, what appears to be a sum of money. The details are not entirely clear. Gür said that the recording was fake. But two weeks after the transcript was published Deniz Yıldırım, the editor-in-chief of *Aydınlık*, was arrested and charged with membership in Ergenekon. He has been in prison for more than two years awaiting trial.

A spokesman for Erdoğan, Lütfullah Göktas, refused to answer a number of specific questions about arrests and prosecutions in Turkey, saying that they were the product of a “smear campaign” that was “without any evidence” and amounted to “no more than gossip.” He added, “All of the negative claims in your article are unjust, unfounded, and untrue.” Göktas asserted that Erdoğan had led Turkey to a period of unprecedented freedom and human rights, and noted, “The reforms realized by A.K. Party governments have certainly created discomfort for some circles that have been benefitting from anti-democratic practices in past decades.”

Prosecutors have shown no signs of slowing down. In January, they opened a separate criminal investigation into Kemal Kılıçdarogly, the leader of the main opposition party, the Republican People’s Party, after he criticized a group of judges for refusing to release two Party members who were imprisoned on Ergenekon-related charges. The same month, the police arrested General Ilker Başbuğ, the former Chief of the General Staff, on charges that he was a member of Ergenekon.

The Foreign Minister, Ahmet Davutogly, denied that the government bore any responsibility for the arrests of journalists or political figures, insisting that the judiciary and the police were acting on their own. “These people who are accusing our government of autocratic tendencies or authoritarian tendencies are making a mistake,” he told me. He did say, however, that the prosecutions had crippled the deep state and have purged the military of any political power. “There is only one state now,” Davutogly said.

The Western diplomat summed up what he thought of the Ergenekon and Sledgehammer prosecutions: they had started well, he said, but then became tools to destroy the opposition. “A lot of this stuff would never hold up in a Western court,” he said. “People are being put on trial for their beliefs.”

The Ergenekon arrests are part of a wider pattern of repressive tactics that have been deployed

against Erdoğan's critics. As of last month, ninety-four journalists were in detention, according to the Journalist Union of Turkey—more than in China or Iran. Over half of them are Kurdish, charged under a wide-ranging law that allows prosecutors to detain anyone who expresses views considered to be sympathetic to terrorism. Turkish officials claim (not convincingly) that most of the journalists they have detained are not real journalists at all but terrorists in disguise. “Westerners may find it difficult to understand the detention of some journalists and writers,” Göktaş wrote, in an e-mail. “However, there are no journalists or writers in Western countries who prepare ground for military intervention, provide logistics and even play a personal role in attempts at military intervention, and participate in bloody terrorist actions.”

Erdoğan seems less and less inclined to tolerate any but the mildest criticism. He has urged Turks to boycott newspapers that are unsympathetic to him, and attacks individual columnists. Nuray Mert, the columnist for *Milliyet*, told me that after Erdoğan criticized a statement she made in an interview, a public-affairs television show that she hosted was cancelled. Two weeks ago, she was fired from her job as a columnist. She now fears for her safety. “There are a lot of things that I don't do anymore because I am afraid,” she told me.

Another example of Erdoğan's tactics is an assault on Dogyan Holding, which owns newspapers and television stations and, until recently, was one of the country's most powerful companies; it also has extensive interests in energy and insurance. For decades, newspapers and television stations controlled by Dogyan Holding curried favor with the government and the Army; critics of *Hürriyet*, Dogyan's flagship newspaper, say that it often published fabricated stories that aroused public fear and allowed the government to justify taking repressive measures.

The dispute with Erdoğan became acute in 2008, after *Hürriyet* and other Dogyan outlets began running stories about an investigation by German authorities of a charitable organization that appeared to be illegally funnelling money to A.K. Party leaders. Erdoğan was enraged. “Don't buy newspapers that print lies!” he told a crowd of supporters. In 2009, his government opened a tax-evasion case against Dogyan Holding and fined the company \$2.5 billion. A prominent Turkish executive with knowledge of the case told me that the penalty was twice the market value of the company. Erdoğan has denied that the move against Dogyan Holding was political. A spokesman for the European Commission said, “When the sanction is of such a magnitude that it threatens the very existence of an entire press group, as in this case, then freedom of press is at stake.”

Dogyan officials persuaded the authorities to lower the fine to around six hundred million dollars, but not before the company replaced the editor of *Hürriyet* and sold both its main television station, Star, and *Milliyet* and *Vatan*, two of the country's largest newspapers. The government's actions have instilled fear not just in journalists but in anyone inclined to criticize the Prime Minister. A columnist

for a major newspaper told me, “We have been told that the Prime Minister is off-limits.”

Erdoğan’s campaign against journalists has coincided with a similar crackdown on the leaders of Turkey’s Kurdish minority, who for decades have been pushing for greater self-rule. (Kurds make up as much as twenty per cent of the population and live mainly in the southeastern part of the country.) Under previous governments, Kurds were prohibited from expressing their ethnic and linguistic identity in the most basic ways. Erdoğan, in the first seven years of his leadership, presided over an impressive expansion of Kurdish rights, including the opening of Kurdish-language centers, the dismantling of much of the security structures that had led to their persecution, and a partial lifting of the prohibition on Kurdish names for children. “We believed that Erdoğan was different,” Demirtaş, the head of the Peace and Democracy Party, told me.

But Erdoğan changed course. The catalyst was the breakdown, in 2009, of peace talks with leaders of the outlawed Kurdish Workers Party, or P.K.K. Government negotiators had arranged for a group of P.K.K. fighters to leave their sanctuaries in northern Iraq and cross into Turkey, where they would be granted amnesty. When the fighters arrived in Turkey, they were detained overnight and interrogated. The next morning, they were greeted by tens of thousands of exuberant Kurds, demonstrating the P.K.K.’s popular support. The peace talks collapsed, and Turkish authorities embarked on a campaign of mass arrests that has not abated. Kurdish leaders and human-rights groups say that as many as four thousand Kurds have been arrested over the past two years, including lawyers, aid workers, and at least twenty-six current and former mayors. The P.K.K., in turn, has stepped up its attacks, including the killing of twenty-four Turkish soldiers in October.

Kurdish leaders say that Erdoğan made a calculation similar to that of his predecessors: that he had more to gain politically by repressing Kurdish activists than by offering them concessions. They say that their situation is now more precarious than at any time since the dirty war, in the nineteen-eighties and nineties. “We were wrong about Erdoğan,” Demirtaş told me. “In the end, he is a Turkish nationalist.”

On a cold November afternoon, in the town of Erciş, in eastern Turkey, Erdoğan climbed onto the roof of a bus and looked out on a crowd. An earthquake had ravaged the area a few days before, leaving hundreds of thousands of people without homes. Help had been slow in arriving, and many of those assembled had spent the night in the open air.

“I am going to tell you a few truths,” Erdoğan said into a microphone. “I am your servant, and so are my colleagues. We did not come to be masters of the people. We came to serve.”

These days, the betting is that Erdoğan will run for President, possibly in 2014, under a revamped constitution that would most likely shift the bulk of political power to that office. With two five-year

terms allowed, Erdoğan could stay in power until 2024, which would make him the longest-running leader in Turkish history. One possibility often discussed is that Gül and Erdoğan will switch jobs, bringing to mind the Putin-Medvedev maneuver in Russia. After nearly ten years in power, Erdoğan has no coherent opposition; the conventional wisdom is that only a slowing economy could bring him down. His health could be another factor: late last year, he underwent what was officially described as routine surgery on his digestive tract. Since then, however, he has been rumored to have some form of cancer. An Erdoğan aide denied that.

Standing on top of the bus in Erciş, Erdoğan paused and scanned the crowd. “Think of where we were nine years ago, and where have we brought Turkey today,” he said. “This is just my analysis. We are going to bring Turkey to a better point. But of course in that time period we have made mistakes. As a people, we have made mistakes.”

Soon, the crowd began to clap, and Erdoğan and his ministers climbed down from the bus. ♦

PHOTOGRAPH: MAGNUM

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