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The Politics between the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the Gülen Movement in Turkey: Issues of Human Rights and Rising Authoritarianism

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Abstract: I examine the rising tension between two Islamic movements in Turkey: The Justice and Development Party (AKP) and Fethullah Gülen's Hizmet Movement within the context of increased human rights abuses by the government in Turkey. I argue that Gülen and Hizmet are a continued concern for Recep Tayyip Erdogan and AKP because of Hizmet's social services, primarily in the realm of education. Furthermore, their influence in public ranks further troubles Erdogan. However, it seems that because of Hizmet's disinterest with electoral politics, along with an absence of other challengers to the ruling government party's electoral success, Erdogan and the AKP will continue to hold political power, at least for the short term. Furthermore, this case illustrates Erdogan's willingness to carry out increased authoritarian actions, as well as a willingness to violate the human rights of civil society actors in Turkey.

Keywords: Turkey, justice and development, Gülen, Hizmet, political Islam, democratization, human rights

Introduction

There has been a great deal of discussion with regards to the trajectory of Turkish politics in recent months and years. Namely, some have wondered about the relationship between President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and those in civil society that may pose a threat to Erdogan's power. And related to this, a highly publicized story in regards to the politics of Turkey in late 2013 and early 2014 was the relationship between Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Fethullah Gülen and the Hizmet Movement. This paper looks to answer a couple of research questions: Namely, what is the relationship between Erdogan and Gülen and by extension Erdogan and Hizmet? And related to this, what can this relationship

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tell us about current situation with regards to human rights in Turkey, as well as potential future trends with regards to these issues in Turkey? I aim to show the history of their relationship, how their relationship became more hostile, and the implications from these developments with regards to modern day politics and human rights in the country. I hope that scholars, policymakers, and others interested in the politics of Turkey will be able to see the events that led to tensions between Erdogan and Gülen, and the effects that this has had on human rights in Turkey today, namely the rights of freedom of speech, as well as other political freedoms such as due process. Erdogan's approach towards Gülen and Hizmet is a primary example of the regression of human rights in Turkey. I argue that what was once a rather strong rapport between the two leaders has now become a series of open public spats between them and their respective followers, and that the tension has led Erdogan to continue to stifle the human rights of the Gülen Movement in Turkey, which further suggests the increased authoritarian trend of the government.

It is important to examine this question from an issue of human rights in Turkey, for the current situation is much more than mere tension between two of Turkey's most influential individuals. Namely, Erdogan's opinion of Hizmet, and the government's actions against Gülen and his supporters illustrates a continued decline of civil and political rights in Turkey under Erdogan and the AKP. The government's actions against Gülen are a prime example of how Erdogan is further attempting to remove any threats to his government. As I shall argue, Erdogan has continued to move away from notions of full civil liberties and has clearly violated the rights of not only Gülen, but also of journalists, and others who may pose a threat to his power. As I shall show, Erdogan's concerns about Gülen are not new, but have culminated with the recent arrest warrant for Gülen.

Rising Human Rights Abuses in Turkey

The Turkish government, under the leadership of Erdogan has moved towards what many see as "rising authoritarianism." In the recent years, Erdogan has embarked upon a series of actions that have severely moved Turkey from a democratic state to one that seems to be rather repressive. In fact, the string of repressive action after repressive action by the AKP government has led one to note that "[t]he once-popular idea that contemporary Turkey could serve as a model for Middle Eastern democracy is no more" (Eissenstat 2015, 1). This statement is not off base, as there are many examples of just how oppressive the Turkish government under Erdogan have become in recent years. For example, in the summer of 2013, Turkish authorities, in response to protests at Gezi

Park and Taksim Square, used violence against civilians speaking out against government actions. During the protests, the police used tear gas canisters, along with water hoses against civilians, which led to the injuries and deaths (Roth 2014). It did not help matters, nor Erdogan's reputation that in late 2014, human rights groups such as "Amnesty International called... on South Korea not to ship a Turkish order of nearly 1.9 million tear gas cartridges and grenades, heavily used in a crackdown on protests last year, warning it would 'risk fueling further repression.'" However, the negative publicity from the Taksim Square protests has not stopped the government from their increasingly authoritarian actions. In fact, the government has actually aimed to give police additional powers since the Gezi Park protests, such as the greater ability to conduct searches (Tattersall 2014). Plus, it was evident from the protests, and the subsequent police response that Erdogan and the AKP led government did not have any intention of allowing peaceful assembly, given the various charges brought against protesters. The government has actually made it much more dangerous to protest in Turkey, not only with increased police powers but also additional legal recourse against citizens who decide to speak out against the state (Amnesty International 2014). One case that illustrates this is related to the group "Taksim Solidarity, an umbrella group of more than 100 organizations, set up to contest the redevelopment of Gezi Park and Taksim Square, started in Istanbul. Five prominent members stood accused of 'founding a criminal organization', punishable by up to 15 years in prison, while all 26 defendants were charged with 'refusing to disperse from an unauthorized demonstration' under the Law on Meetings and Demonstrations..." (Amnesty International 2014).

One of the other major elements of Turkish society that has suffered in terms of human rights has been the freedom of the press. Under Erdogan in recent years, there have been many instances of crackdowns on independent journalists. For example, in a report by Freedom House on freedom of press in Europe, among the 42 countries examined, Turkey was seen as the country with the largest decline of media rights (Nielson 2014b). In addition, the government also went after social media and sharing sites such as YouTube, when, in late March of 2014, the government blocked the site in the country (Nielson 2014a). They also blocked Twitter; it took the Constitutional Court to reverse these decisions (Amnesty International 2014; Roth 2014). Furthermore, the government, under Erdogan, has continued its targeting of journalists. For example, as Kenneth Roth (2014) of Human Rights Watch explains: "the AKP-dominated parliament adopted a new intelligence law that criminalizes not only the leaking of secret official information but also its publication, punishable by a prison term of up to nine years... The law also gives the intelligence services unfettered access without a court order to ordinary people's private data, while immunizing from prosecution any intelligence agent acting

in the course of his official duties.” Moreover, Amnesty International (2014) explains that the situation continues to be difficult for those looking to speak and report freely, where “[t]he independence of the mainstream media continued to be undermined by its close business links with the government. More independent-minded journalists were forced out of their jobs by editors fearful of upsetting government and media owners. Press Law gagging orders were used to ban the reporting of several news stories, including the capture of 49 hostages from Turkey’s Mosul consulate, on ‘national security grounds’”. These sorts of actions by the government have led some such as Howard Eissentat (2015) to say:

The mainstream Turkish press has been effectively brought to heel. There is little meaningful difference between the celebrations of Erdoğan’s every action and utterance by the semi-official Anatolian Agency and that found in a mainstream paper like Sabah. Pressure on advertisers or other business interests are usually enough to force publishers to keep their writers in line (or simply sack them). When this proves insufficient, government prosecutors can rely on an array of statutes, including generous anti-libel laws and vague anti-terrorism statutes, to attack critical voices. Having decided for the moment that outright bans on social media are impossible, the government has chosen to intensify prosecutions, including prosecution of journalists, for tweets and Facebook postings. Anti-libel laws have similarly been used against protesters. A placard calling the president “thief” is enough to land one in court” (4–5).

Having outlined various human rights abuses by the Turkish government since the Gezi Park protests, I will now turn to examine the government’s response to one key actor in civil society, namely, the Gülen Movement, showing how this case is a clear (and important) example of Erdogan’s repressive authoritarian regime against actors who are seen to pose a threat to his power in the country. Furthermore, the case of Erdogan’s response to Gülen and Hizmet is similar to his authoritarian actions against others in Turkey. By examining how Erdogan views Gülen, we can see that he is willing to move further away from human rights in order to solidify his control of Turkish politics. In order to understand how the relationship between the two got to where it is today, it is important to examine the history of Gülen and Hizmet, and the relationship between them and Erdogan, and the AKP, as well as how this case illustrates a rising authoritarian state in Turkey.

The History of the Gülen Movement

Fethullah Gülen was born in the village of Korucuk (Bakar 2005), of Erzurum (what is Eastern Turkey) on April 27, 1941. He received a Quranic education from his parents early on in his life. His mother first taught Gülen the Quran, and his father taught him Arabic, as well as the works of Islamic scholars (Saritoprak

and Griffith 2005). Along with the education from his parents, Gülen also studied under Qadiri Sufi sheikh Muhammad Lutfi Efendi, who is said to have profoundly shaped Gülen's life and outlook on Islam (Saritoprak and Griffith 2005). In addition, Gülen and his movement also came out of the influence of Said Nursi and the Nursi movement.¹

In 1958, Gülen began working as a *vaiz* (state-paid religious imam) in the city of Edirne. After having worked in this role for many years, in 1966 he was given the job of being the DIB preacher (The Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs) in Izmir. Along with serving in this role, he also devoted time to the Kestanepazari Qur'an School in the city (Yavuz 2003b, 181). Specifically, he began educating students on his ideas about Islam, the role of community, as well as civic engagement. Here he ran summer camps where children would be taught secular as well as religious subjects. These camps functioned as much more than mere classrooms for the dissemination of knowledge. As Yavuz (2003b) explains,

[o]ne sees the process of deepening private religious consciousness and the development of new and narrow Islamic fraternization among the participants of the camps. The students lived together within an atmosphere of sincerity and were tutored in a shared language of Islamic morality to form a common map of action. These camps... were spaces for deepening inner consciousness for public use and were the networks of the formation of a powerful sense of religious brotherhood in order to bring Islamic values into the public. The first generation followers of Gülen internalized Islamic values of responsibility, self-sacrifice, and dedicating oneself to the collective good of the Muslim community (182).

Thus Gülen began to educate a group of students who – following their education with him – would go onto dispersing such ideas in civil society (Yavuz 2003b, 182).

While he was actively teaching these students, the politics of the state affected him; during the 1971 coup, he, along with many other followers of Said Nursi were arrested for “the violation of article 163, which criminalizes ‘unwanted’ religious expression and association” (Yavuz 2003b, 182–183). While he was not found guilty, he did end up spending seven months in jail, until the verdict was reached. After his arrest, he continued to focus on his message of education. He did this by organizing the “Foundation of Turkish Teachers”, as well as the “Foundation of Middle and Higher Education” in Akyazi in 1976. He also concentrated on writing. In 1979, his *Sızıntı* magazine was first published (Yavuz 2003b, 183), and the newspaper *Zaman* came out beginning in 1986 (Yavuz 2003a). However, Gülen found more freedom to operate in the 1980s,

¹ For a discussion on Said Nursi and the Nursi movement, see Yavuz (2003a, 2003b).

when he began working with politicians (such as Prime Minister Halil Turgut Özal) on education, as well as social and cultural issues in Turkish society. And in 1983, the opening of the education system allowed the Hizmet movement to increase their education-based activities. This, coupled with support from Özal (who removed the arrest warrant for Gülen years back) (Yavuz 2003a, 37), allowed Gülen to increase his activities in education (Yavuz 2003b, 183).

With the movements increasing popularity in society, despite Gülen's attempts to not weigh in on controversial issues (Yavuz 2003b), to not minimize the role of the state in the country (Yavuz 2003a), as well as having the increased support by President Demirel, along with Prime Minister Ecevit (Yavuz 2003a, 43), nevertheless the movement attracted the attention of some members of the military, as well as some secular currents in the state. Specifically, in 1999, Gülen was a major concern for some members of the military, as well as some of the secularists, when they began to see some of Gülen's recordings being played on national television. Overall, there were a number of concerns with Gülen and the Hizmet movement by the military and others, which Özdalga (2005) "summarizes as follows:

1. Fethullah Gülen is trying to infiltrate important state institutions like the judiciary, the police and the military.
2. The purpose behind that is to prepare the ground for a seizure of state power.
3. The struggle for the final takeover of the state has been going on for a long time and takes place in great secrecy.
4. Fethullah Gülen's strategy is to pretend that he and his adherents fully favour Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and the existing regime, while in reality he is preparing himself and his followers for an Islamist revolution.
5. What is so disturbing about Gülen is that he has been so skilful in hiding his real purposes from the public.
6. Fethullah Gülen controls "gigantic" (korkunç) sums of money. How and where these resources are appropriated is unknown. Since he lives in the United States, it is hinted that he is supported by this superpower (allegedly to undermine the interests of his native Turkey).
7. In the schools, dormitories and home-like student houses (ıfık evleri) set up in the name of Gülen, students are pressured to accept his teachings (brainwashed).
8. Gülen and his adherents constitute a greater threat to the regime than either the Kurdish "terror organization" PKK and Abdullah Öcalan or the Welfare Party and its most militant demagogue İevket Yılmaz. The fact that the Welfare Party functions openly must count in its favor compared to Gülen's secretiveness" (439–440).

It has been suggested that some were also worried about the possibility of Gülen bringing attention to issues regarding state violations of human rights, whereas others thought that he was attempting to increase his movement's influence in various state institutions (Yavuz 2003a, 44). As a result of such concerns raised by some, Gülen imposed on himself a self-exile, leaving Turkey and moving to the United States. However, despite the fact that he has been living abroad since 1999, the Hizmet movement has continued to be highly supported from Turkish citizens.

But what makes the movement arguably even more influential today is not the political power held by supporters in these positions, but their great influence with regards to social services (such as the education system) in Turkey and throughout the world. Again, these social services often include education, as well as various forms of charity work. Overall, Hizmet is said to have over 3 million supporters (Balci 2013). As an organization, they are “concentrated around four main clusters of activities: economic enterprises; educational institutions; publications and broadcasting; and religious gatherings (sohbet toplantıları, i.e. conversation meetings)” (Özdalga 2005, 435). Here they engage in zikr or the remembrance of God, and a great deal of attention is given to the written word (Özdalga 2005). Furthermore, Gülen's popularity also stems from his strong promotion of interfaith dialogue. Gülen has continued to advocate ideas of peace and compassion for others (Saritoprak and Griffith 2005).

Yet while the organization focuses on spiritual reflection and discourse, as alluded to earlier, one of the cornerstone activities of the Hizmet movement is their system of private schools. Millions of children in Turkey (and around the world) are educated in these private schools, which “usually boast hi-tech facilities, and many students are on scholarships funded by inspired businessmen” (Gulf News 2013). Boris Karaagac (in Jay 2014) says that according to some, the Gülen movement is said to control anywhere from 400 to over 600 schools throughout the world. In fact, Gülen's movement has opened up a number of outlets outside Turkey. Citizens have generally reacted favourably to them, in part because of the locations where Gülen has chosen to establish the schools. For example, as Zeki Saritoprak (2005) explains, “[Gülen] gives special importance to the areas where ethnic and religious conflicts are escalating, such as Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia, the Philippines, Banda Aceh, Northern Iraq, and Southeastern Turkey. The schools have played remarkable roles in decreasing levels of conflict in these areas” (423). These programs do not discriminate based on faith or nationality, and thus, have been helpful in countries with conflict (423).

And domestically, the movement is said to have hundreds of private schools for children to attend, or more specifically, where they go to study for the exams needed to get into university (Jay 2014). At these schools, the Hizmet movement focuses on combining Islamic principles with what are traditionally referred to as “secular” subjects such as science and mathematics. The organization believes fully in the integration of these different subjects. The goal of the organization is not merely to educate, but to educate with the goal of transforming the citizens, and in turn, shaping the future of Turkish society. Related to this, the movement focuses heavily on elite education. Balci (2013) explains that a number of former student have went on to hold very high political and judicial positions in the Turkish government. While this is the case, the Gülen movement stresses that the intention is not to run these schools for increased political power. In fact, maintaining a non-political stance may in fact be helping maintain the cohesiveness of the group, as political divisions could bring about tension (Balci 2013), a problem many other religious organizations have also faced.

And yet while much of the attention on the Hizmet movement has been their private schools, they continue to be active in the promotion of Islam as it relates to the West, as well as the relationship between Islam and democracy. In fact, Hizmet’s popularity is at least partly due to the commitment the group has in fostering dialogue on issues such as Islam in society, secularism, democracy, and human rights. For example,

“To promote their views, Gülen’s followers have set up a wide range of organizations. The Turkish Teachers’ Foundation, for example, publishes a monthly journal, *Sizinti* (Disclosures) and two academic journals, *Yeni Umit* (New Hope) and the *Fountain*. It also organizes national and international symposiums, panel discussions, and conferences. Another foundation, the *Journalists’ and Writers’ Foundation*, brings secularist and Islamist intellectuals together in what are called *Abant meetings*, putting forward the view that no individual or group has a monopoly on interpreting Islam and that secularism does not mean being anti-religious. The foundation has organized conferences and has invited prominent intellectuals to talk on various issues such as on dialogue among civilizations” (Aras and Caha 2000, 34).

And yet, even his schools do not directly promote Islam outside of the context of secularism. For example, he focuses more on democratization (Aras and Caha 2000) rather than direct teachings of Islam. Aras and Caha (2000), cite Elisabeth Ozdalga (1999), who explains how Gülen is able to advocate Islam without directly promoting Islam by saying that “[o]ne basic idea of Gülen’s followers is that ethical values are not transmitted openly through persuasion and lessons but through providing good examples in daily conduct” (35). In addition, Gülen also set up an organization entitled *The Journalists and Writers Foundation* (*Gazeteciler ve Yazarlar Vakfi* (JWF) in Turkish), which has played a key role

in the Turkish civil society by bringing different groups together to talk about issues in Turkey and elsewhere (Saritoprak 2005, 423). The Gülen Movement seems to operate quite clearly within democratic institutions and advocates the rule of law. This civil society organization has called for the human rights of all individuals and operates within this space. It is evident that Hizmet's role in Turkish civil society is quite extensive, whether it is through their schools, or their advocacy on issues of dialogue with regards to acceptance of different faiths, or with regards to ideas of democratization.

Gülen, Hizmet and the AKP Government

At the time that this article is being written (mid-2015), the rift between the two organizations is quite high. However, the dislike between these two groups dates back much earlier than the recent events may suggest. In fact, some argue that Erdogan has been politically worried about the Hizmet for over a decade. Interestingly, even many in the governments preceding the AKP led state had concerns about Gülen becoming involved in politics. For example, in 2000 the President at the time, Suleyman Demirel was quoted as saying: "I think that a man of religion should not have political targets. Being a man of religion is a hard task, but being a respected man of religion is only possible by being in compliance with the rules of our religion; that is, it is possible by giving good advice to humanity rather than being involved in worldly affairs" (Anatolia, June 19th, 1999), in Aras and Caha 2000, 35). This sort of language seems to illustrate the concern that leaders have with popular religious figures. In this case, the government was concerned that Gülen's popularity would be a threat to their hold on power.

According to a report by Taraf (in Edel 2013), in 2004 Erdogan (and others such as President Abdullah Gül) supported a National Security Council (MGK) "action plan" that was specifically focused against Gülen and Hizmet. The report covered a number of topics related to Gülen. For example, they called for the monitoring of the Gülen schools in Turkey and elsewhere, and that any actions that may be of concern should be brought to the attention of the state. They also called for keeping tabs on Hizmet's religious activities in the context of student housing, bothered by the Gülen movement using student housing for furthering their Islamic education (Taraf 2004, in Baransu 2013). The MGK also called for monitoring where donations for Hizmet came from (Taraf 2004, in Baransu 2013).

The MGK was carried out by the "Board of Monitoring and Coordination" (BUTKK) (Edel 2013). This board was connected to the Prime Minister position,

and the group continued to update Erdogan on Hizmet's activities for years, until the board was dissolved in 2010 (Edel 2013). Now there has been a question of just how involved and willing Erdogan himself was to sign this document, compared to interests from the military on monitoring Gülen. One argument has been that the military has been so strong in Turkish politics that Erdogan himself really didn't have as much of a choice, whereas others suggest that the military was indeed weaker at this time, and that Erdogan actually had a good relationship with the commander in chief, Hilmi Özkök (Edel 2013). Those from AKP have argued that while Erdogan knew of the document, he did not have plans to put it in play (Edel 2013). This seems to be an example of the extended powers of key actors such as the military, who had a strong interest in monitoring and controlling actions of those in Turkish civil society, often without offering a fully liberal human rights system.

Regardless of how much of a role Erdogan had with the 2004 MGK plan, there are current events that have elevated the dispute between the two groups. As mentioned earlier, much of the more recent hostility between the two organizations has come from Erdogan planning to shut down a number of Hizmet schools (Gulf News 2013). These schools are private, and thus, many Hizmet supporters in Turkey and elsewhere took issue with what they saw as blatant government over-reach. What is interesting to note is that the current status of their relationship is a departure from years past, where Hizmet helped shore up support for the AKP in elections (Gulf News 2013). Furthermore, the Gülen movement provided backing to Erdogan in his attempts to reduce the strength of the military (Reynolds 2013). Erdogan historically has an uneasy relationship with the military. Much of this stems from decades of military strength – given to them by the constitution – which gives the military a special place in Turkey, as it is marked to protect the legacy of Atatürk and more specifically ideas Kemalist principles of secularism. However, a 2002 AKP victory and their subsequent rise in popularity left the military looking to return their hold on power. Concerned with the AKPs influence – and possibly increasingly Islamist agenda – some in the military accused the AKP of going against the secularist state. In 2008, the military attempted to have the AKP banned (they were unsuccessful, although the vote was quite close). In turn, the AKP has tried to find ways to reduce the military's strength. They were able to deal a major blow to the military this in the form of a 2010 national referendum based on constitutional amendments that severely limited the military's control of politics and the judiciary – including but not limited to increasing the Supreme Court to 17 seats instead of 12, with the AKP appointing the additional judges.

Erdogan's Concerns about the Gülen Movement

While the two groups have worked together in the past against rising military power, Erdogan seems to make no secret about how he views Gülen and the Hizmet movement, seeing it as an organization that is attempting to wield significant power from the AKP and the Turkish state. In fact, in remarks shortly after the corruption arrests in late December of 2013, when speaking about Gülen and Hizmet, Erdogan said:

Those who want to establish a parallel structure alongside the state, those who have infiltrated into the state institutions... we will come into your lairs and we will lay out these organizations within the state (Hürriyet Daily News 2013).

Currently supporters of Gülen are said to have high positions throughout the government ranks in the police force, security, as well as within the judicial system (Hürriyet Daily News 2013). In terms of the level of support for the organization throughout Turkey, while different figures are mentioned, it is difficult to know exactly just how many people in Turkey and elsewhere are followers of Gülen and Hizmet is difficult to ascertain, particularly since there is no "official" membership into the organization. However, the Gülen movement does have support throughout different sectors of Turkish society, and particularly amongst doctors, lawyers, students, and business segments of the population (Aras and Caha 2000). In fact, Gülen has held political influence in Turkey well before the AKP came to power in 2002. It is said that he has contacts with government leaders and top businesspersons in the country. He would also frequently meet with the media (Aras and Caha 2000).

Gülen himself has been mindful of the complaints that others have, and has often tried to mitigate concerns about politics. For example, Gülen, referencing Said Nursi continues to stress the idea of a "spiritual victory" (Saritoprak 2005: as opposed to other types of victories. In fact, he has spoken about historical events in Muslim history such as that of Tariq bin Ziyad, who, when taking over Spain, was careful to focus too much on this victory, understanding that eventually death would also reach him (Saritoprak 2005, 424).

In terms of Gülen's relationship with the Islamist parties, interestingly, some members of the Refah (Virtue) party, the precursor to the AKP, were not in favour of close relations with Gülen. They were concerned that pro-secular individuals were using the Hizmet movement to counter the rise of the Islamists (Aras and Caha 2000, 36–37). In fact, the leader at the time even suggested that the reason Gülen has ties to the state is to challenge Refah (Aras and Caha 2000, 37). But while this was the case, post-Refah Islamists

did in fact stand by Gülen against those who were critical of him and Hizmet (Aras and Caha 2000, 37).

Gülen also took issue with Refah and was careful to not be associated with them. This was quite uncharacteristic of Gülen, who made it a point to dialogue and work with other groups in Turkey. He also did not seem to mind when the military overthrew Refah in 1997 (Aras and Caha 2000). And in regards to Gülen's relationship with Erdogan, Gülen criticized Erdogan while he was the mayor of Istanbul. During the time of Refah, the military was worried about the intensions of the Islamists. Erdogan didn't help matters when he read a poem in which stated "the minarets are our bayonets, the domes our helmets, and the mosques our barracks". This actually led to his criminal charges. Erdogan was not a supporter of such ideas, and as mentioned, did not protest the banning of Refah (Aras and Caha 2000). But despite this, Hizmet continued to work with the AKP against the military. In fact, their relationship was rather strong during the initial years of Erdogan's position as Prime Minister. As Kutahyali (2013) explains:

In 2003, charismatic Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who had nothing to do with the Gülen Movement, but had his own religious identity, became prime minister. This was the beginning of a new era for the Gülen Movement. Kemalists and ultranationalists continued their campaign against Gülen, but Erdogan always stood by Gülen and protected his movement, allowing them to operate in civil society. Gülen supported Erdogan against the military. In the two major legal cases, Ergenekon and Balyoz, that wiped out the military's power in politics, Gülen adopted an uncompromising position. His media outlets were even tougher than Erdogan's against the army. The military reacted by claiming that the Gulenists in the police and judiciary were manufacturing fallacious charges.

In fact, both Hizmet and the AKP have had a lot to gain by working with one another in the past decade. For Hizmet, having a government that openly supports their programs is of course useful (Balci 2013). This is no small point, particularly in Turkish society, where there has historically been tension between secularist and Islamist agendas. Plus, with a secular military, having the elected government speak out in favour of your work is beneficial. In fact, some see their relationship in this case as "an unwritten pact" against the power of the military (Balci 2013). The AKP in turn, also benefits from this relationship. Not only does it give them a partner against the secular military, but it also helps their popularity in Turkey due to Gülen's influence in civil society, as well as Hizmet's strong ties with media outlets (Balci 2013). Lastly, they networks are from similar sectors of the population: "[t]he AKP and the Gülen movement also share the same social base – the rising Anatolian middle classes, which are morally conservative, economically market-oriented, and open to globalization" (Balci 2013).

And because of all of this, some are more hesitant to suggest a long conflict between the two groups. Yet, despite this “decade-old” argument since the early 2000s, many seem to pinpoint the differences of the two groups to a later period of time, namely to 2010. Again, up until that point, despite the distance between Gülen and the Islamist Refah, as well as comments about Erdogan, Hizmet still did help the AKP. However, some suggest that things started to change in 2010, when Erdogan started to shift away from ideas about Turkey entering the European Union (Baydar 2013). This seems to have bothered Gülen, who has spent much of his life attempting to bridge ideas of Islam and the West.

Tensions continued with the two men later that year in relation to the flotilla incident. A boat that was part of a flotilla was traveling from Turkey to the Occupied Palestinian Territory of Gaza. This boat was intercepted by Israeli authorities. A dispute occurred on the flotilla, which led to the loss of nine lives, all Turkish citizens. This event seems to have altered Turkish-Israeli relations. However, Gülen was actually critical of the flotilla (Baydar 2013) because it went to Gaza without first getting approval from Israel (Lauria 2010). Speaking of the flotilla in 2010, Gülen was quoted as saying that the flotilla action without Israeli state support “is a sign of defying authority, and will not lead to fruitful matters” (Lauria 2010).^{2,3} This was a sharp difference from Erdogan, who called the Israeli response “bullying”, as well as saying that their actions were “a ‘historical mistake’” (Lauria 2010). Again, this seemed to put the two men at odds, and that “[Gülen’s] blunt criticism, it was reported, was never ‘forgiven’ by Erdogan” (Baydar 2013).

But along with the shift in Erdogan’s policy regarding the European Union, as well as the differences regarding the flotilla incident, the two have also disagreed on the best policies regarding the improvement of relations with the Kurdish minority population in Turkey. As Baydar (2013) explains:

... a deep division emerged on Erdogan’s choice to conduct the so-called “Kurdish Peace Process”. Erdogan’s methodology was to negotiate directly with the PKK, both with its leader Abdullah Ocalan, and its “military command” in Iraq’s Qandil Mountains. But, Gülenists, who see the PKK as the main adversary in the mainly Kurdish regions – as the

2 According to some, there that may be another possible reason for his criticism of the flotilla. Namely, Bayram Balci (2013) states that, “Gülen’s disapproval may also reflect the fact that the NGO that organized the flotilla, the Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief, was close to the AKP and to some extent in competition with the Gülen movement’s own activities in the social sector.”

3 In fact, on the issues of Israel, Gülen is quoted as saying that “[t]hey [the AKP] try to portray us as a pro-Israeli movement, in the sense that we have a higher regard for them than our nation”. He went on to say “[w]e are accepting them as a people, as part of the people of the world” (BBC 2014c).

PKK considers them – were discreetly dismayed. They argued reasonably, that Erdogan could and should focus on broader political reform, push for a civilian constitution and grant all the rights the Kurds of Turkey demand, such as recognition of ethnic identity, education in their mother tongue, and endorsement of local governments – without talking to the PKK. This approach, Hizmet’s supporters argued, would weaken the PKK, because it would “disarm” the armed movement from all the reasons it continued to wage guerrilla warfare. The AKP and the Gülen Movement have never recovered from this difference of opinion. (Baydar, 2013)

In fact, Gülen even mentioned the issue of the PKK in the 2014 interview with Franks. Gülen discussed how Ocalan was concerned about the influence of Hizmet and their educational programs in the Kurdish region. He said that “[t]hey didn’t want our activities to prevent young people joining the militants in the mountains. Their politics is to keep enmity between Kurdish and Turkish people”, and thus, he believes that the schools were often framed as serving a harmful effect on the possibility of peace (Franks 2014).

But these issues have not been the only points of contention between the two individuals. For example, there have been reports about Gülen’s office being tapped (Baydar 2013), which has led to an escalation of public dislike for each side. In addition, their reliance on each other against the military has not been nearly as important as it has in the past (Balci 2013). Much of this could be attributed to the 2010 constitutional referendum that severely lessened the power of the military. Erdogan, victorious in his efforts with changing the constitution, has been able to increase the number of judges in the Supreme Court, as well as reduce the power of the military courts. Because of this, one has to wonder just how necessary it is for Hizmet and AKP to work together compared to the previous years.

Moreover, the government’s approach towards the protesters during the May and June protests in 2013 have led to increased criticism from Gülen supporters. While Erdogan was willing to sent the military – with tear gas and water hoses, some within the government (particularly Gülen followers President Abdullah Gul, as well as the Deputy Minister Bulent Arinc) did not take such a position, instead, they called for a much less direct response (Alfroy 2013).⁴ Furthermore, the AKP and Hizmet have called each other out publicly in the newspapers (Kutahyali 2013). For example, shortly after the protests, “the Journalists and Writers Foundation (GYV), an organ of the Gülen Movement, issues an 11-article

⁴ Arinc challenged the idea that Erdogan was trying to eliminate Gülen followers from the government, and did call Gülen “Honorable Learned Master”. However, he also made it clear that Erdogan runs the government with the AKP, and that Turkish citizens follow what the government is asking (Kutahyali 2013).

communiqué full of strong innuendos against the Erdogan government. It said that the Gülenists were being purged from the Turkish bureaucracy and judiciary” (Kutahyali 2013).

Human Rights Abuses Against Hizmet and Gülen

It was not long after the protests that Erdogan called for the shutting down the Hizmet-run private schools. This was one of the indications of increased rights abuses against the Gülen movement. Furthermore, Erdogan fired and moved a number of police that were said to have ties to Hizmet and Gülen. Hizmet did not go away quietly however, “when Turkey’s top court on Friday blocked implementation of a government decree ordering police to inform their superiors before launching investigations issued by public prosecutors, local media reported” (Alfroy 2013).

The secularists on the other hand have had a mixed position towards Gülen and Hizmet. Many have been worried about him and his organization, and namely, concerned that he has underlying Islamism objectives. Some have even questioned the structure of the organization, suggesting a non-democratic system with Gülen at the top. For example, Araf and Caha (2000) explain the structure of the organization, saying:

the organizational structure of the movement is seen as hierarchical and somewhat non-democratic, which is somewhat unexpected given the community’s liberal attitudes and tolerance of differences. Gülen is the sole leader of the movement and the hierarchical order extends from the top to the bottom through an increasing number of abiler (elder brothers). The ranking is very strict and each rank’s abi (elder brother) obtains only a certain amount of knowledge of the activities occurring or under discussion while agreeing to refrain from asking questions or seeking more knowledge about the higher ranks. An abi or someone under his supervision may, however, talk to other abi’s informally and also talk to those assigned to overseeing the activities (38).

Others however were quite supportive of Gülen in the late 1990s because of the rising power Islamists such as Refah. Many others still view Gülen’s message as a positive one, and believe that his message of dialogue and working with others for a commonly agreed outcome (Aras and Caha 2000, 37–38). Others are quite comfortable with the type of Islam that Gülen talks about. This “soft” Islam (Aras and Caha 2000, 38) is one that is seen by many as quite different than the Islamist currents in Turkey and elsewhere.

One of the most important reasons why it seems that Gülen is supported even by those who are not Gülenists or part of Hizmet is because of his lack of

direct involvement in politics. Again, they are able to criticize the state, all the while being able to gain favour through their extensive social service work. This is quite common in many other political cases as well. Leaders are concerned about staying in power, and rising organizations that threaten their control are often seen as suspect. With Gülen, the secularists have an Islamic movement that to them is viewed as the “good” Islam, and specifically one that doesn’t challenge the political system: “The Gülen movement does not encourage bringing down the government or even challenging the *status quo*” (Aras and Caha 2000, 39).

Erdogan’s Response to Gülen Following Government Corruption Allegations

As mentioned, although Gülen was critical of how Erdogan handled the demands of citizens during the May 2013 Gezi Park protests, the more recent public quarrel centers around events in November of 2013, where Erdogan announced the idea of shutting down Turkish private schools, many of which are run by Hizmet (Reynolds 2013). Then, on December 17, 2013, a three-year investigation culminated in the arrest of 24 individuals on corruption charges. Amongst them were three high level ministers, their sons, and the Chief Financial Officer of Halkbank (BBC 2013). As reported in a December 23rd, 2013 Wall Street Journal story on the corruption scandal, in response to the allegations, Erdogan specifically called out journalists, certain elements of the financial sector, the United States Ambassador, and Fethullah Gülen and the Hizmet Movement (Peker 2013), where Erdogan seems to believe that those police and judges sympathetic to Gülen were involved (Reynolds 2013). Gülen denied having anything to do with the investigation, and also responded to the ‘liar’ term used by Erdogan by himself stating, “God sees who is in a lair.” He went on to say that “[s]eeing the narrowness of some people, who want to spend their lives in the narrowness in order not to beg from people or not to be unfair to others, as a lair means not knowing what a lair is” (Hürriyet Daily News 2013). In a later interview with Tim Franks of the BBC (2014b), speaking on the issue, Gülen was quoted as saying that “[i]t is not possible for these judges and prosecutors to receive orders from me. I have no relation with them. I don’t know even 0.1% of them”. He then went on to take a verbal jab at Erdogan, following this up by saying “[p]eople in the judiciary and the police carried out investigations and launched this case, as their duties normally require. Apparently they weren’t informed of the fact

that corruption and bribery have ceased to be criminal acts in Turkey” (Franks 2014).

After the police made their arrests of the various individuals on corruption charges, as an example of responding to the allegations by curtailing human rights, Erdogan ended up either letting go or reassigning close to 70 police officers – along with Istanbul’s top police position (Hürriyet Daily News 2013) as they were believed to have ties to Hizmet and Gülen. Furthermore, according to some, “... [h]e [Erdogan] reportedly threatened Hizmet, by saying, in private conversations, that it may be charged as a ‘terrorist organisation’. Among his public accusations: There is a ‘parallel state’ and those in the police and media are involved in ‘spying’ (Baydar 2013). And this tension has only continued to escalate, with Erdogan, in late March of 2014, calling the Gülen movement a ‘spy ring’” (Hürriyet Daily News 2014).

However, increased attacks on Gülen did not end there. On December 16th, 2014, a Turkish court – namely the 1st Istanbul Penal Court of Peace (Today’s Zaman 2014) issued an arrest warrant for Fethullah Gülen, who, according to the court, has been accused of being a part of an “armed terrorist group” (BBC 2014b). And, according to a report by Today’s Zaman (2014), “The petition submitted by the prosecutor to the court claims that ‘there is tangible evidence showing that Gülen is the founder of an armed terrorist organization and he was involved in crimes of defamation and restricting a person’s freedom.’”

But since Gülen is not in Turkey, he cannot be held to stand trial. And despite calls by the Turkish government for the United States to send Gülen to Turkey, it does not seem that the United States will extradite him (BBC 2014b). Nevertheless, these developments are alarming and are further evidence for the continued decline in human rights in Turkey under Erdogan and the AKP government. And of course, it must be pointed out that the court, in issuing the arrest warrant, did not supply any evidence to show that he has any such role as part of a terror organization (Today’s Zaman), which only further shows the politicization of this action by Erdogan. In fact, in a piece in Hürriyet (2014), it was argued that “[t]he government appears bent on running its former Islamist allies in the Gülen group into the ground, forgetting how together they had closed ranks when the law and the police were being used – or rather abused – to hound Kemalists and other anti-AKP elements.”

In fact, this comes at the heels of hundreds of journalists were being monitored (EuroNews 2014), and dozens of “... journalists working for media outlets thought to be sympathetic to the Gülen movement were arrested...” (BBC 2014b), which occurred beginning on December 14, 2014 (Today’s Zaman 2014).

One of the outlets targeted was Zaman (or Today's Zaman), who was active in reporting on the December 2013 corruption case in Turkey. In addition, Hidayet Karaca, "[t]he chairman of Samanyolu TV, which also has links to Mr Gulen, was detained in a separate raid in Istanbul" (BBC 2014a). Regarding Zaman, for example, it was written in *Hürriyet* (2014), "[t]he warrants issued for Zaman's editor-in-chief and prominent columnists from the paper, as well as members of the Samanyolu TV channel – which is also part of the Gülen group – is clearly a fresh blow to the freedom of the press in Turkey, no matter how the pro-government media is trying to spin this now." In fact, police actually tried to raid Zaman's offices, but were blocked by protesters (BBC 2014a). And Karaca was also critical of the government's actions, and the direction Turkey has taken towards the treatment of journalists and media outlets in the country (BBC 2014a). Yet, despite all of these oppressive actions by the government, Erdogan not only did not apologize, but also said that the actions were necessary to counter what he called "dirty operations" by those he viewed as opposing the government (Pamuk 2014b). He also spoke against what he called "dark forces" who were looking to establish the parallel state in the country (Williams 2014). And continued by saying that "We are not just faced with a simple network, but one which is a pawn of evil forces at home and abroad," and "We will go into their lairs again. Whoever is beside them and behind them, we will bring down this network and bring it to account" (Williams 2014).⁵

Conclusion

Many have started to wonder what the future will look like in terms of the relationship between Erdogan and Gülen, and the AKP and Hizmet organizations. I specifically avoided placing Erdogan and all of the AKP in one category (and likewise with Gülen and all Hizmet members) because with any organization, the differences within groups could easily shift, particularly since it is unlikely that everyone in the AKP will hold the same position, and the same is true for Hizmet. In terms of their projected relationship, some have suggested that despite the increased differences between the two, that Gülen (and Hizmet) will

⁵ And more recently, Erdogan has continued to challenge the authority and influence of Gulen. For example, in late January of 2015, he revokes Gulen's passport (Daily Star 2015). According to reports, "Turkey had informed U.S. officials on Jan. 28 that it was revoking Gulen's passport because it was issued based on a 'false statement'" (CNN Turk, in Daily Star 2015). It is believed that these actions may indicate Erdogan's continued interest in having Gulen extradited from the United States to Turkey (Daily Star 2015).

continue to support the AKP. The reason some have said this has to do with their rather shared ideology; both have similar positions (Balci 2013). But along with this, Balci (2013), for example, argues that Gülen will continue to support AKP because “[t]he Turkish political chessboard offers Gülen sympathizers no alternative to the AKP...”. Meanwhile, Gülen’s international popularity offers Erdogan and the AKP something that they can use (Balci 2013).

While these are valid points, events like the 2013 response to the protesters, the major corruption scandal, the serious possibility of the closing of the Hizmet schools, and the recent arrest warrant against Gülen are major issues that clearly counter Gülen’s message of human rights. Thus, it is not in Gülen’s interest to be aligned with a group such as this, particularly as human rights continue to erode. Thus, in a way, despite the arrest warrant, the public spat may actually serve Gülen well. This rift suggests to the public that the two are not aligned, thus helping in terms of a public relations perspective, particularly in the context of what many view as a rising authoritarianism in Turkey. However, by not ending any formal relationship, it allows the Gülenists and the AKP to still work together on common issues, which will help both of their respective agendas in Turkey, although again, the likelihood of any reconciliation seems to becoming less and less likely as the arguments intensify.

Furthermore, there is a possibility that the division between the two will become much more pronounced in the near future, particularly if the AKP moves on Gülenist schools. If Erdogan challenges him, or continues to permit violence against protesters, then this may end any remaining relationship, since Gülen needs to maintain his message and reputation in Turkey and elsewhere. And thus, these events may just be too serious to ignore. And as mentioned, regarding school closings, one wonders if this is nothing more than a political show right before the 2014 March municipal elections (where the AKP performed well), or if this is a complete move against Hizmet.

Now, this change regarding their relationship may not happen overnight. However, as Erdogan continues to move to what seems to be stronger authoritarianism, factions within the AKP, the seculars, as well as the Gülenists will become more open to challenging Erdogan. I believe this is especially so with the Hizmet movement, particularly if the AKP goes after their schools and social services. However, as long as Gülen and the Hizmet movement still operate the social stratus and education programs without much interference, it will be difficult to see them moving to electoral politics. It is simply not in their interest to do so. They continue to be popular in civil society, they maintain their ties to positions throughout the state, and they advocate Islam from the grassroots, all the while not inheriting all the issues that come from being a political party in the government. As mentioned, Gülen’s philosophy is not advocating change

from leadership to society, but rather, to focus on educating people in civil society first. Regarding this, he states, “I have always believed that education is the best way to nurture individuals and build a solid foundation for a society. Every social problem starts with the individual and can be solved for the long term at the level of the individual. Systemic, institutional or policy level solutions are destined for failure when the individual is neglected. Therefore, my first and foremost advocacy was for education” (Parkinson and Solomon 2014).

Furthermore, as some like Balci (2013) have explained that while the group clearly does not turn away from all political issues, the movement “must refrain from coming across as partisan, which could divide its members, many of them are attracted to Gülen’s religious discourse rather than to his ideas and political initiatives.” This may then be why Gülen rarely talks about his group as political, or being involved with political matters, other than general ideas about human rights and democracy. In a January 2014 interview with the Wall Street Journal’s Joe Parkinson and Jay Solomon, when answering the question about the state of Hizmet’s alliance with the AKP, Gülen noted that the alliance “was around shared values of democracy, universal human rights and freedoms – never for political parties or candidates.” He went on to say: “[a] broad spectrum of Turkish people, including Hizmet participants, supported AKP for democratizing reforms, for ending the military tutelage over politics and for moving Turkey toward in the EU accession process. We have always supported what we believed to be right and in line with democratic principles.” Furthermore, when he was asked if he thought about President Abdullah Gul leading the AKP, and the role he could play for Turkey’s future, Gülen continued to stress his detachment from specific political recommendations, saying that “[w]e have always tried to maintain the same proximity to all political parties. As a civil society movement, we have never advocated supporting a party or candidate. But individual Hizmet participants have found certain parties and candidates closer to their beliefs and values supported them out of their free will” (Parkinson and Solomon 2014). He affirmed this much when also asked about ties to the Republican People’s Party (CHP), stressing overarching principles of democracy and rights (Parkinson and Solomon 2014).

And I believe that these last points are what might be most troubling to Erdogan. In fact, I believe his calls for Gülen to form a political party (Hafizoglu 2014) may be a way to divide the Hizmet movement. But again, for Gülen, elections and politics are not in Hizmet’s interests, particularly as long as they are able to function and even flourish as the top organization in Turkish civil society. Thus, it seems that for now, the two will continue to co-exist in separate, but at times overlapping political space. However, this could easily change however if Erdogan and the AKP severely limit the cornerstone of Hizmet,

namely their education initiatives, or if the AKP moves much further towards complete illiberal authoritarianism, possibly through actually attempting to arrest Gülen, leaving Gülen and Hizmet little choice but to more directly challenge the party.

However, with regards to the future of human rights in Turkey, the case towards Gülen and Hizmet is one in which clearly shows the negative trajectory of Turkey with regards to human rights. The government has went after an organization that a very active and well-supported member of civil society. Yet, because of concerns to their power, the government under Erdogan have targeted Gülen. By doing this through the firing of Gülen supporters, as well as verbal and political attacks on Gülen himself, this case illustrates just how far Erdogan is willing to go to erode human rights against an individual or group who poses any sort of political or societal threat (in the sense of public support) to the government. Because the likelihood of Erdogan reversing course on Hizmet is small, sadly, Turkey may continue to move towards further authoritarianism, as Erdogan aims to ensure that all political and social threats are mitigated in the country.^{6,7} It seems that Erdogan is willing to further violate rights of assembly, free speech, as well as due process, although this may be a

⁶ Regarding this note about authoritarian leaders going after all challengers, it seems that while Gülen is receiving a great deal of attention from Erdogan, he and his group are far from the only ones on Erdogan's radar. For example, Idiz (2014) explains, "Erdogan's ever-growing list of domestic enemies is currently headed by the Gülen group. Erdogan is also targeting the Turkish Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists (TUSKON), the umbrella organization for prominent Islamic businessmen who are close to Gülen. The Turkish Industry and Business Association (TUSIAD), the umbrella organization for Turkey's secular and pro-Western businessmen and industrialists, is also high on Erdogan's list of enemies because it has called on the government not to undermine democracy and the rule of law. The independent media, which have been revealing facts that embarrass the government – as well as anyone, any group or organization that remotely supported last summer's Gezi Park protests or was involved with them – are also high on Erdogan's list of enemies to be reckoned with."

⁷ Interestingly, regarding the AKP and Hizmet, the issues between Erdogan and Gülen (and their respective supporters) have seemed to negatively affect both of their images. In a Turkish MetroPoll public opinion poll conducted in late January of 2014, 39.4% of those surveyed supported Erdogan (in Pamuk 2014a). This was a drop in support from 48.1% just a month prior, and 59.1% from a poll one year ago (Pamuk 2014a). However, Erdogan was not the only one whose poll numbers dropped; Gülen's image also took a hit. In this recent poll, 46.5% of the public approved, which declined from the December number of 63.3%, and is substantially lower than a year ago, where he was polling at 76% (Pamuk 2014a). Arguably even more troubling than his approval numbers is the number of people (57%) that agreed with the government rhetoric that Gülen's Hizmet is a "parallel state" in the Turkish system (Pamuk 2014a). This, coupled with 60% who saw Hizmet negatively (Pamuk 2014a), has hurt the overall image of Gülen and Hizmet in Turkey.

bit more difficult now, given the weak showing of the AKP in the 2015 parliamentary elections, and the rise of left parties such as the Democratic People's Party (Halkların Demokratik Partisi) (HDP).

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