

THE DÖNMEH: THE MIDDLE EAST'S MOST WHISPERED SECRET (PART I)

by Wayne Madsen | Strategic Culture Foundation

There is a historical “eight hundred pound gorilla” lurking in the background of almost every serious military and diplomatic incident involving Israel, Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Greece, Armenia, the Kurds, the Assyrians, and some other players in the Middle East and southeastern Europe. It is a factor that is generally only whispered about at diplomatic receptions, news conferences, and think tank sessions due to the explosiveness and controversial nature of the subject. And it is the secretiveness attached to the subject that has been the reason for so much misunderstanding about the current breakdown in relations between Israel and Turkey, a growing warming of relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia, and increasing enmity between Saudi Arabia and Iran...

Although known to historians and religious experts, the centuries-old political and economic influence of a group known in Turkish as **the “DönmeH”** is only beginning to cross the lips of Turks, Arabs, and Israelis who have been reluctant to discuss the presence in Turkey and elsewhere **of a sect of Turks descended from a group of Sephardic Jews who were expelled from Spain during the Spanish Inquisition in the 16th and 17th centuries.** These Jewish refugees from Spain were welcomed to settle in the Ottoman Empire and over the years they converted to a mystical sect of Islam that eventually mixed Jewish Kabbala and Islamic Sufi semi-mystical beliefs into a sect that eventually championed secularism in post-Ottoman Turkey. **It is interesting that “DönmeH” not only refers to the Jewish “untrustworthy converts” to Islam in Turkey but it is also a derogatory Turkish word for a transvestite, or someone who is claiming to be someone they are not.**

The Donmeh sect of Judaism was founded in the 17th century by Rabbi Sabbatai Zevi, a Kabbalist who believed he was the Messiah but was forced to convert to Islam by Sultan Mehmet IV, the Ottoman ruler. Many of the rabbi's followers, known as Sabbateans, but also "crypto-Jews," publicly proclaimed their Islamic faith but secretly practiced their hybrid form of Judaism, which was unrecognized by mainstream Jewish rabbinical authorities. Because it was against their beliefs to marry outside their sect, the Dönme created a rather secretive sub-societal clan.

The Dönme rise to power in Turkey

Many Dönme, along with traditional Jews, became powerful political and business leaders in Salonica. **It was this core group of Dönme, which organized the secret Young Turks,** also known as the Committee of Union and Progress, the secularists who deposed Ottoman Sultan Abdulhamid II in the 1908 revolution, proclaimed the post-Ottoman Republic of Turkey after World War I, and who instituted a campaign that stripped Turkey of much of its Islamic identity after the fall of the Ottomans. Abdulhamid II was vilified by the Young Turks as a tyrant, but his only real crime appears to have been to refuse to meet Zionist leader Theodore Herzl during a visit to Constantinople in 1901 and reject Zionist and Dönme offers of money in return for the Zionists to be granted control of Jerusalem.

Like other leaders who have crossed the Zionists, Sultan Adulhamid II appears to have sealed his fate with the Dönme with this statement to his Ottoman court: "Advise Dr. Herzl not to take any further steps in his project. I cannot give away even a handful of the soil of this land for it is not my own, it belongs to the entire Islamic nation. The Islamic nation fought jihad for the sake of this land and had watered it with their blood. The Jews may keep their money and millions. If the Islamic Khalifate state is one day destroyed then they will be able to take Palestine without a price! But while I am alive, I

would rather push a sword into my body than see the land of Palestine cut and given away from the Islamic state.” After his ouster by Ataturk’s Young Turk Dönme in 1908, Abdulhamid II was jailed in the Dönme citadel of Salonica. He died in Constantinople in 1918, three years after Ibn Saud agreed to a Jewish homeland in Palestine and one year after Lord Balfour deeded Palestine away to the Zionists in his letter to Baron Rothschild.

One of the Young Turk leaders in Salonica was Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the founder of the Republic of Turkey. When Greece achieved sovereignty over Salonica in 1913, many Dönme, unsuccessful at being re-classified Jewish, moved to Constantinople, later re-named Istanbul. Others moved to Izmir, Bursa, and Ataturk’s newly-proclaimed capital and future seat of Ergenekon power, Ankara.

Some texts suggest that the Dönme numbered no more than 150,000 and were mainly found in the army, government, and business. However, other experts suggest that the Dönme may have represented 1.5 million Turks and were even more powerful than believed by many and extended to every facet of Turkish life. One influential Dönme, Tevfik Rustu Arak, was a close friend and adviser to Ataturk and served as Turkey’s Foreign Minister from 1925 to 1938.

Ataturk, who was reportedly himself a Dönme, ordered that Turks abandon their own Muslim-Arabic names. The name of the first Christian emperor of Rome, Constantine, was erased from the largest Turkish city, Constantinople. The city became Istanbul, after the Ataturk government in 1923 objected to the traditional name. **There have been many questions about Ataturk’s own name, since “Mustapha Kemal Ataturk” was a pseudonym. Some historians have suggested that Ataturk adopted his name because he was a descendant of none other than Rabbi Zevi, the**

self-proclaimed Messiah of the Dönme! Ataturk also abolished Turkey's use of the Arabic script and forced the country to adopt the western alphabet.

Modern Turkey: a secret Zionist state controlled by the Dönme

Ataturk's suspected strong Jewish roots, information about which was suppressed for decades by a Turkish government that forbade anything critical of the founder of modern Turkey, began bubbling to the surface, first, mostly outside of Turkey and in publications written by Jewish authors. **The 1973 book, The Secret Jews, by Rabbi Joachim Prinz, maintains that Ataturk and his finance minister, Djavid Bey, were both committed Dönme and that they were in good company because "too many of the Young Turks in the newly formed revolutionary Cabinet prayed to Allah, but had their real prophet [Sabbatai Zevi, the Messiah of Smyrna]."** In The Forward of January 28, 1994, Hillel Halkin wrote in The New York Sun that Ataturk recited the Jewish Shema Yisrael ("Hear O Israel"), saying that it was "my prayer too." The information is recounted from an autobiography by journalist Itamar Ben-Avi, who claims Ataturk, then a young Turkish army captain, revealed he was Jewish in a Jerusalem hotel bar one rainy night during the winter of 1911. In addition, **Ataturk attended the Semsî Effendi grade school in Salonica, run by a Dönme named Simon Zevi.** Halkin wrote in the New York Sun article about an email he received from a Turkish colleague: "I now know – know (and I haven't a shred of doubt) – that Ataturk's father's family was indeed of Jewish stock."

It was Ataturk's and the Young Turks' support for Zionism, the creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, after World War I and during Nazi rule in Europe that endeared Turkey to Israel and vice versa. An article in The Forward of May 8, 2007, revealed that Dönme dominated Turkish leadership "from the president

down, as well as key diplomats . . . and a great part of Turkey's military, cultural, academic, economic, and professional elites" kept Turkey out of a World War II alliance with Germany, and deprived Hitler of a Turkish route to the Baku oilfields." In his book, *The Donme: Jewish Converts, Muslim Revolutionaries and Secular Turks*, Professor Marc David Baer wrote that many advanced to exalted positions in the Sufi religious orders.

Israel has always been reluctant to describe the Turkish massacre of the Armenians by the Turks in 1915 as "genocide." It has always been believed that the reason for Israel's reticence was not to upset Israel's close military and diplomatic ties with Turkey. However, more evidence is being uncovered that the Armenian genocide was largely the work of the Dönme leadership of the Young Turks. Historians like Ahmed Refik, who served as an intelligence officer in the Ottoman army, averred that **it was the aim of the Young Turks to destroy the Armenians, who were mostly Christian. The Young Turks, under Ataturk's direction, also expelled Greek Christians from Turkish cities and attempted to commit a smaller-scale genocide of the Assyrians, who were also mainly Christian.**

One Young Turk from Salonica, Mehmet Talat, was the official who carried out the genocide of the Armenians and Assyrians. A Venezuelan mercenary who served in the Ottoman army, Rafael de Nogales Mendez, noted in his annals of the Armenian genocide that Talat was known as the "renegade Hebrew of Salonica." Talat was assassinated in Germany in 1921 by an Armenian whose entire family was lost in the genocide ordered by the "renegade Hebrew." **It is believed by some historians of the Armenian genocide that the Armenians, known as good businessmen, were targeted by the business-savvy Dönme because they were considered to be commercial competitors.**

It is not, therefore, the desire to protect the Israeli-Turkish alliance that has caused Israel to eschew any interest in pursuing the reasons behind the Armenian genocide, but Israel's and the Dönme's **knowledge that it was the Dönme leadership of the Young Turks that not only murdered hundreds of thousands of Armenians and Assyrians but who also stamped out Turkey's traditional Muslim customs and ways.** Knowledge that it was Dönme, in a natural alliance with the Zionists of Europe, who were responsible for the deaths of Armenian and Assyrian Christians, expulsion from Turkey of Greek Orthodox Christians, and the cultural and religious eradication of Turkish Islamic traditions, would issue forth in the region a new reality. Rather than Greek and Turkish Cypriots living on a divided island, Armenians holding a vendetta against the Turks, and Greeks and Turks feuding over territory, all the peoples attacked by the Dönme would realize that they had a common foe that was their actual persecutor.

Challenging Dönme rule: Turkey's battle against the Ergenekon

It is the purging of the Kemalist adherents of Atatürk and his secular Dönme regime that is behind the investigation of the Ergenekon conspiracy in Turkey. Ergenekon's description matches up completely with the Dönme presence in Turkey's diplomatic, military, judicial, religious, political, academic, business, and journalist hierarchy. **Ergenekon attempted to stop the reforms instituted by successive non-Dönme Turkish leaders,** including the re-introduction of traditional Turkish Islamic customs and rituals, by planning a series of coups, some successful like that which deposed Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan's Refah (Welfare) Islamist government in 1996 and **some unsuccessful, like OPERATION SLEDGEHAMMER, which was aimed at deposing Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in 2003.** Some Islamist-leaning reformists, including Turkish President Turgut Özal

and Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit, died under suspicious circumstances. Deposed democratically-elected Prime Minister Adnan Menderes was hanged in 1961, following a military coup.

American politicians and journalists, whose knowledge of the history of countries like Turkey and the preceding Ottoman Empire, is often severely lacking, have painted the friction between Israel's government and the Turkish government of Prime Minister Erdogan as based on Turkey's drift to Islamism and the Arab world. Far from it, **Erdogan and his Justice and Development Party (AKP) seem to have finally seen a way to break free from the domination and cruelty of the Dönme, whether in the form of Kemalist followers of Ataturk or nationalist schemers and plotters in Ergenekon.** But with Turkey's "Independence Day" has come vitriol from the Dönme and their natural allies in Israel and the Israel Lobby in the United States and Europe. **Turkey as a member of the European Union was fine for Europe as long as the Dönme remained in charge and permitted Turkey's wealth to be looted by central bankers like has occurred in Greece.**

When Israel launched its bloody attack on the Turkish Gaza aid vessel, the Mavi Marmara, on May 31, 2010, the reason was not so much the ship's running of the Israeli blockade of Gaza. The brutality of the Israelis in shooting unarmed Turks and one Turkish-American, some at point blank range, according to a UN report, indicated that Israel was motivated by something else: vengeance and retaliation for the Turkish government's crackdown on Ergenekon, the purging of the Turkish military and intelligence senior ranks of Dönme, and reversing the anti-Muslim religious and cultural policies set down by the Dönme's favorite son, Ataturk, some ninety years before. **In effect, the Israeli attack on the Mavi Marmara was in retaliation for Turkey's jailing of several top Turkish military officers, journalists, and academics, all accused of being part of the Ergenekon plot to overthrow the AKP**

government in 2003. Hidden in the Ergenekon coup plot is that the Dönme and Ergenekon are connected through their history of being Kemalists, ardent secularists, pro-Israeli, and pro-Zionist.

With tempers now flaring between Iran on one side and Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the United States on the other, as the result of a dubious claim by U.S. law enforcement that Iran was planning to carry out the assassination of the Saudi ambassador to the United States on American soil, the long-standing close, but secretive relationship between Israel and Saudi Arabia is coming to the forefront. The Israeli-Saudi connection had flourished during OPERATION DESERT STORM, when both countries were on the receiving end of Saddam Hussein's Scud missiles.

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What will surprise those who may already be surprised about the Dönme connection to Turkey, is the Dönme connection to the House of Saud in Saudi Arabia.

An Iraqi Mukhabarat (General Military Intelligence Directorate) Top Secret report, "The Emergence of Wahhabism and its Historical Roots," dated September 2002 and released on March 13, 2008, by the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency in translated English form, points to the Dönme roots of the founder of the Saudi Wahhabi sect of Islam, Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab. Much of the information is gleaned from the memoirs of a "Mr. Humfer," (as spelled in the DIA report, "Mr. Hempher" as spelled the historical record) a British spy who used the name "Mohammad," claimed to be an Azeri who spoke Turkish, Persian, and Arabic and who made contact with

Wahhab in the mid-18th century with a view of creating a sect of Islam that would eventually bring about an Arab revolt against the Ottomans and pave the way for the introduction of a Jewish state in Palestine. Humfer's memoirs are recounted by the Ottoman writer and admiral Ayyub Sabri Pasha in his 1888 work, "The Beginning and Spreading of Wahhabism."

In his book, *The Dönme Jews*, D. Mustafa Turan writes that Wahhab's grandfather, Tjen Sulayman, was actually Tjen Shulman, a member of the Jewish community of Basra, Iraq. The Iraqi intelligence report also states that in his book, *The Dönme Jews and the Origin of the Saudi Wahhabis*, Rifat Salim Kabar reveals that Shulman eventually settled in the Hejaz, in the village of al-Ayniyah what is now Saudi Arabia, where his grandson founded the Wahhabi sect of Islam. The Iraqi intelligence report states that Shulman had been banished from Damascus, Cairo, and Mecca for his "quackery." In the village, Shulman sired Abdul Wahhab. Abdel Wahhab's son, Muhammad, founded modern Wahhabism.

The Iraqi report also makes some astounding claims about the Saud family. It cites Abdul Wahhab Ibrahim al-Shammari's book, *The Wahhabi Movement: The Truth and Roots*, which states that King Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud, the first Kingdom of Saudi Arabia monarch, was descended from Mordechai bin Ibrahim bin Moishe, a Jewish merchant also from Basra. In Nejd, Moishe joined the Aniza tribe and changed his name to Markhan bin Ibrahim bin Musa. Eventually, Mordechai married off his son, Jack Dan, who became Al-Qarn, to a woman from the Anzah tribe of the Nejd. From this union, the future Saud family was born.

The Iraqi intelligence document reveals that the researcher Mohammad Sakher was the subject of a Saudi contract murder hit for his examination into the Sauds' Jewish roots. In Said Nasir's book, *The History of the Saud Family*, it is maintained that in 1943,

the Saudi ambassador to Egypt, Abdullah bin Ibrahim al Muffadal, paid Muhammad al Tamami to forge a family tree showing that the Saudis and Wahhabs were one family that descended directly from the Prophet Mohammed.

At the outset of World War I, a Jewish British officer from India, David Shakespeare, met with Ibn Saud in Riyadh and later led a Saudi army that defeated a tribe opposed to Ibn Saud. In 1915, Ibn Saud met with the British envoy to the Gulf region, Bracey Cocas. Cocas made the following offer to Ibn Saud: “I think this is a guarantee for your endurance as it is in the interest of Britain that the Jews have a homeland and existence, and Britain’s interests are, by all means, in your interest.” Ibn Saud, the descendant of Dönme from Basra, responded: “Yes, if my acknowledgement means so much to you, I acknowledge thousand times granting a homeland to the Jews in Palestine or other than Palestine.” Two years later, British Foreign Secretary Lord Balfour, in a letter to Baron Walter Rothschild, a leader of the British Zionists, stated: “His Majesty’s government view with favor the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people . . .” The deal had the tacit backing of two of the major players in the region, both descendant from Dönme Jews who supported the Zionist cause, Kemal Ataturk and Ibn Saud. The present situation in the Middle East should be seen in this light but the history of the region has been purged by certain religious and political interests for obvious reasons.

After World War I, the British facilitated the coming to power of the Saud regime in the former Hejaz and Nejd provinces of the Ottoman Empire. The Saudis established Wahhabism as the state religion of the new Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and, like the Kemalist Dönme in Turkey, began to move against other Islamic beliefs and sects, including the Sunnis and Shi’as. The Wahhabi Saudis accomplished what the Kemalist Dönme were able to achieve in Turkey: a

fractured Middle East that was ripe for Western imperialistic designs and laid the groundwork for the creation of the Zionist state of Israel.

Deep states and Dönme

During two visits to Turkey in 2010, I had the opportunity of discussing the Ergenekon “deep state” with leading Turkish officials. It was more than evident that discussions about the Ergenekon network and its “foreign” connections are a highly-sensitive subject. However, it was also whispered by one high-ranking Turkish foreign policy official that there were other “deep states” in surrounding nations and Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Syria were mentioned by name. Considering the links between Ergenekon and the Dönme in Turkey and the close intelligence and military links between the Dönme-descendent Sauds and Wahhabis in Arabia, the reports of close links between ousted Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and his intelligence chief Omar Suleiman and the Binyamin Netanyahu government in Israel may be seen in an entirely new light... And it would explain Erdogan’s support for Egypt’s revolution: in Turkey, it was a democratic revolution that curbed the influence of the Dönme. The influence of Wahhabi Salafists in Libya’s new government also explains why Erdogan was keen on establishing relations with the Benghazi-based rebels to help supplant the influence of the Wahhabis, the natural allies of his enemies, the Dönme (Ergenekon) of Turkey.

Erdogan’s desire to set the historical record straight by restoring history purged by the Kemalists and Dönme has earned him vitriolic statements from Israel’s government that he is a neo-Ottomanist who is intent on forming an alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood in the Arab countries. Clearly, the Dönme and their Zionist brethren in Israel and elsewhere are worried about Dönme and Zionist historical revisionism, including their role in the

Armenian and Assyrian genocide, and their genocide denial being exposed.

In Egypt, which was once an Ottoman realm, it was a popular revolution that tossed out what may have amounted to the Dönme with regard to the Mubarak regime. The Egyptian “Arab Spring” also explains why the Israelis were quick to kill six Egyptian border police so soon after nine Turkish passengers were killed aboard the Mavi Marmara, some in execution style, by Israeli troops. Dönme doctrine is rife with references to the Old Testament Amalekites, a nomadic tribe ordered attacked by the Hebrews from Egypt by the Jewish God to make room for Moses’s followers in the southern region of Palestine. In the Book of Judges, God unsuccessfully commands Saul: “Now go and strike Amalek and devote to destruction all that they have. Do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, and infant, ox, and sheep, camel and donkey.” The Dönme, whose doctrine is also present in Hasidic and other orthodox sects of Judaism, appear to have no problem substituting the Armenians, Assyrians, Turks, Kurds, Egyptians, Iraqis, Lebanese, Iranians, and Palestinians for the Amalekites in carrying out their military assaults and pogroms.

With reformist governments in Turkey and Egypt much more willing to look into the background of those who have split the Islamic world, Ataturk in Turkey and Mubarak in Egypt, the Saudis are likely very much aware that it is only a matter of time before their links, both modern and historical, to Israel will be fully exposed. It makes sense that the Saudis have been successful in engineering a dubious plot involving Iranian government agents trying to assassinate the Saudi ambassador to Washington in an unnamed Washington, DC restaurant. The Iraqi intelligence report could have been referring to the Zionists and Dönme when it stated, “it strives to . . . [the] killing of Muslims, destructing, and promoting the turmoil.” In fact, the Iraqi intelligence report was referring to the Wahhabis.

With new freedom in Turkey and Egypt to examine their pasts, there is more reason for Israel and its supporters, as well as the Saudis, to suppress the true histories of the Ottoman Empire, secular Turkey, the origins of Israel, and the House of Saud. With various players now angling for war with Iran, the true history of the Dönme and their influence on past and current events in the Middle East becomes more important.