

A dramatic scene with red curtains, a helicopter silhouette, and a crescent moon and star symbol.

WHAT WENT WRONG WITH TURKEY?



EDITORIAL

Asli recounts how her mother-in-law recently caught her six-year-old son stealing a pomegranate from the neighbour's tree. When she asked her grandson why he was stealing, he replied: "I'm stealing this pomegranate so that the police arrest me and take me to prison, so I'll be with Daddy. I will return it as soon as Daddy leaves jail."



A blind journalist, a teacher with major physical disability, a NASA scientist, an American Christian Pastor, the Amnesty International

director, and a deceased prosecutor. What could have brought these otherwise unlikely figures to share the same fate? Last year's coup attempt in Turkey. The Turkish government says these individuals plotted to top-

ple the state on July 15, 2016. Assisting them, according to the government, were new mothers and their babies, children and the infirm. Unfortunately, this is not a tall tale nor is it a dark comedy; these people

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are now behind bars on charges of being a member of a terrorist organization.

While the mystery over the coup attempt on July 15, 2016, still clouds what really happened that night, the cold reality of the pain suffered by hundreds of thousands of Turkish citizens is hard as steel. As in the example above, there are thousands of kids who are separated from their parents, who, before purged, served as decent civil servants, teachers, doctors, professors, or journalists. Thousands of

women have been jailed, including hundreds of new mothers. Despite its long-standing state culture and established institutions, Turkey is now effectively under the rule of one man: Erdoğan. The country appears more like a failed state with each passing day.

How did we get here?

A true analysis of the coup and the ensuing purge would be deficient without taking a few steps back, to try to understand the dynamics that paved the way for Erdoğan's absolute rule over the

state. His political activism, used to abuse the religious sentiments of the masses, is one of those key dynamics. The failure of the Kemalist *ancien régime* of the Republic has been another factor; the former Republic, so to speak, did not only fail to provide efficient civic services to the general public, but also undermined their basic human rights, as in the case of Kurdish communities and the Muslim headscarf ban. When this "former republic" brought the nation to a complete economic bankruptcy in



Istanbul, Turkey July 16, 2016: AKP supporters are cheering after the attempt of a military intervention in Turkey, in Atatürk International Airport.

2001, Erdoğan's new AKP was the only alternative for Turks who were already exhausted of the former, failed administrations. As prime minister, Erdoğan made use of this popular support and even carried it forward with reforms in healthcare, public transportation, and other civic services. His government's serious steps toward European Union accession broadened his popularity beyond conservative circles and secured the support of many liberal, pro-European intellectuals.

Erdoğan was exceptionally suc-

cessful in reaching out to the grassroots. He used the privileges of being in office and channeled public funds to establish an efficient top-down network, where he ensured his message and directives could reach every corner of his constituency, many of whom were made beneficiaries in one way or another, either through financial support or status within the party.

All these factors played a role in what Turkey has become today. Almost an almost a decade-long rise in international standing, Tur-

key could have served as regional role model. But in the last half-decade the country's stature has fallen sharply. The beginning of this downfall can be traced to the signs of Erdoğan being corrupted by power during his third term as prime minister. The Gezi Park protests and the corruption probes in 2013 revealed Erdoğan's true identity. To suppress the protests and to cover up the probes, he initiated an unprecedented crackdown on the free press in 2014 and 2015, and did everything he could to polarize the

country. The coup attempt was the final nail in the coffin for Turkey's image as a hopeful of an Islamic-majority democracy.

Of course, there were hints along the way that Erdoğan had a darker, more authoritarian side. Two decades ago, he revealed his true feelings when he said, "Democracy is a tram; we get off when we arrive at our destination. Democracy is not a goal; it is a means."² These words were ignored during his first two terms, when he and his party appeared to work hard to reform the state apparatus and liberate the country from military tutelage. But as in the classic parable, those who went to hunt the dragon sitting on the treasure were mesmerized by the treasure and became the new dragon. After the military was sidelined, Erdoğan could not hide his secret aspirations to be the new Sultan of Turkey or even a Caliph over all Muslims. He believed he had the sole authority to rule and decide on the fate of the nation. He did not even feel the need to hide the fact that he ordered the police to fire on the Gezi Park protestors, nor did he abstain from calling anyone he disliked a "traitor."

The trap

Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım said when he and President Erdoğan blamed the Gülen movement for the coup, it was based on their own judgment; they did not even know who was involved. Based on this "judgment," instead of ensuring the security of his citizens, Erdoğan provoked them to take to the streets and confront soldiers many of whom thought they were out for an extraordinary exercise. This action resulted in hundreds of deaths. It is very likely that the president rallied his grassroots network of party members and the snipers of his "revolutionary guards" – SADAT – to turn the night into a bloodshed. Many can speculate how the night could have ended without people in

the streets, but it is very likely that there wouldn't have been as many deaths if citizens had stayed home. But from the recent revelations, we now understand that the coup was already planned to fail. It seems increasingly like a trap set by Erdoğan and his clique, designed to uproot all the opposition in the army and the wider society. For him to be able to cleanse all his opponents, especially the Hizmet movement, he needed a brutal event to demonize the opposition in the eyes of the nation. He needed public approval for the persecution he has committed. Hence, the coup was "a gift of God" – his own words – to remove all obstacles to his march to become the absolute monarch. The coup, for that matter, was not really *against* Erdoğan, but *for* Erdoğan.

Under the state of emergency rule and with no oppositional press left, the only narrative that is heard in Turkey is what the government has been propagating. In a post-truth Turkey, fact-checking about the coup has become possible – at least to a certain extent – only recently when the suspects started to testify in court after months of detention and, in many cases, torture.

Questions

Turkey has to move on from the "alternative facts" of Erdoğan to the realities of persecution. It needs to hear the voices of the hundreds of thousands of innocent, ordinary citizens who have suffered under an unjust regime. Why are the five pilots, who bombed the base where the putschists were, bringing an end to the coup, now in jail? If these pilots were Gülenists, then was the coup committed or prevented by Gülenists? Isn't it telling enough that not even a single one of the suspects accused of being affiliated with the Hizmet movement has shown any violent reaction despite being detained for months? They have been jailed for no reason, and had their properties con-

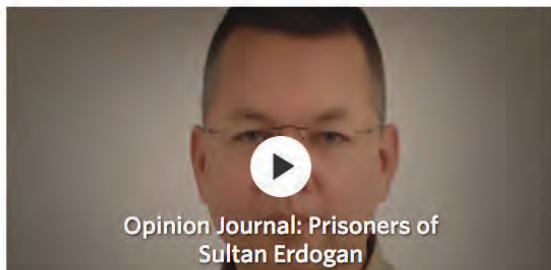


fiscated and bank accounts frozen. They've been dismissed from their jobs, and had their livelihoods taken away. Is Erdoğan accusing Gülen of plotting the coup attempt because he opposed the flotilla incident in 2010, when Erdoğan sent innocent people to death? Or does Erdoğan want to annihilate Gülen and the Hizmet movement because they did not comply with his autocratic whims and stood against his obscene corruption and the kleptocratic regime he set up over the years? Was this coup attempt meant to serve the regional goals of Erdoğan who wanted to invade Syria? If not, why are all the dismissed and jailed staff of

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Serkan Gölge, a Turkish-origin NASA scientist; Andrew Brunson, an American evangelical minister; Cüneyt Arat, a visually impaired journalist; Idil Eser and Taner Kılıç, directors of Amnesty International. The Erdoğan regime have arrested these individuals, who, they claim, have plotted to topple the Turkish government.

Officers and generals the ones who strictly aligned themselves with NATO and never dared to commit to a suicide mission like sending troops to Syria?

Lost values

All the persecution aside, what really hurts is the deterioration of values in Turkish society, especially among conservative circles who supported Erdoğan from the very beginning. With the rise of the AKP and Erdoğan, the conservatives, who had been pushed to the periphery by the Kemalist establishment, have made inroads to the center, by way of which they

discovered the treasures therein. Although they used to consider the secularist establishment “infidels” for their principle of statism, now dazzled by the new riches they have attained, these nouveau riche conservatives have started seeing state power as the ultimate goal. They will do anything to keep it in their hands. In the neo-religious nationalist discourse of Erdoğan, they act upon a sense of revenge against the *ancien régime* and whoever stands in the way of their victory. For them, this is a war. Under a wrong anachronistic – perhaps, prehistoric – rules of engagement

and jurisprudence, they believe they can rightfully loot the properties of their enemies, take their wives as concubines, produce fake news, throw the gravest possible slanders, and most offensively, they do so on the basis of a distorted interpretation of Islam. Prophet Muhammad's (pbuh) advice to act with a strategy in the case of a warfare to avoid conflict and not to cause bloodshed if war is unavoidable, has been abused in an effort to attain victory. Nothing is further from the true message of Islam. This nihilist hypocrisy is closer to Machiavellianism.

This publication aims to give voice to the thousands of innocent people persecuted by the state terrorism of the Erdoğan regime. You will read an alternative narrative to what really happened on the night of the attempted coup. You will also discover how the government's narrative is baseless and fails to be taken credibly outside of Turkey; how women and children are victimized in this crackdown; how civil liberties, justice, and state rationality are trampled; and what some scholars think of Fethullah Gülen and the Hizmet movement. The authors do not only share what they have observed and read about these recent developments, but they also articulate the great pain and disappointment they feel about what the once-beautiful Turkey has become. the great pain and disappointment they feel about what the beautiful Turkey has become. ▴

Notes

1. <http://webdoc.france24.com/turkey-referendum-purge-erdogan-cleansing/episode-1-asli/index.html>
2. Interview with Nilgün Cerrahoğlu in *Milliyet*, July 14, 1996.