

Why does half of Turkey “hate” Erdogan?



Notice those expensive ads and paid supplements in major US newspapers placed by the government of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan? They extoll his foiling of the faux coup in Turkey one year ago this weekend. They praised "peace and democracy", and threw open the doors to foreign direct investors to the perils of corruption. See our *NER* August

2016 article: "[Erdogan's Faux Coup](#)" and our May 2, 2017 *Iconoclast* post, "[Erdogan's Faux Coup may have been Turkey's Reichstag Fire](#)".

This is tantamount to Orwellian propaganda to promote a myth of his own making while he unveiled a monument in Ankara in memory of 270 killed in the episode. There was an alleged [march of "millions"](#) to offset the over 1.5 million who oppose his regime at the finale of the Justice March in Istanbul last Sunday. He was in the limelight of international commendation of Turkish people power "courage" in a [statement](#) from NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg. US Secretary of State Tillerson, [commented](#), "things were getting a little bit better" in bi-lateral relations.

The reality as portrayed in this *Atlantic* op ed "[The Loneliness of Recep Tayyip Erdogan](#)", by Sonar Cagaptay, the astute Turkish American expert at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy and author of an acclaimed bio of Erdogan, [The New Sultan: Erdogan and the Crisis of Modern Turkey](#).

Note Cagaptay's explanation of what drives Erdogan's paranoia:

As I explain in my book, [The New Sultan](#), Erdogan was born in 1954 to a poor family in Kasimpasa, a gritty neighborhood along Istanbul's Golden Horn, then a polluted waterway overflowing with sewage. He grew up in a deeply religious family at a time when Turkey had a staunchly secularist system, which banished all forms of religiosity to the private sphere, and in which people like Erdogan and his family felt profoundly marginalized.

[...]

When Erdogan entered politics after graduation, his marginalization did not end. The country's secularist courts, in decisions backed by the secularist military, businesses, and media, shut down three Islamist parties he

joined between the mid-1970s and the late-1990s. The courts also sent Erdogan to jail in 1998 for reciting an allegedly incendiary poem, which they said undermined Turkey's secularist system.

In 2001, Erdogan established the AKP as a reformed Islamist party. It took advantage of the implosion of the country's secularist parties, which stemmed largely from the Turkish economic crisis of the same year, to win the 2002 parliamentary elections. Even then, Erdogan's troubles with the secularist system did not end: he was barred from becoming prime minister because of his jail term. In 2003, this penalty was finally lifted, and Erdogan took office as head of government. Subsequently, he delivered economic growth, building himself a power base among conservative Turks.

In 2014, he became Turkey's president. This past April, he won a referendum to become an executive-style president, assuming the offices of president, prime minister, and head of the ruling AKP party. He has thus become the most unassailable leader in Turkey since the country's first multi-party elections in 1950.

Still, Erdogan carries a chip on his shoulder: a deep grudge against secular Turks, as if to remind them of how unkindly they treated him for nearly five decades as a poor, pious youth from a gritty Istanbul neighborhood and later as an Islamist politician.

[...]

Erdogan fears that if he allows democracy to flourish in Turkey again, his opponents could vote him out and then make him pay for his transgressions against them. Maybe they will not do the latter, but Erdogan is so deeply molded by his past that he will not take the risk. This is why Turkish democracy is in deep trouble: it is stuck in

Erdogan's authoritarian chamber.

Cagaptay was [interviewed](#) on a *PBS Weekend News* program about how dangerously divided Turkey is following Erdogan's stunning purge of 150,000 ordered by him under a state of emergency declaration. More will be consigned to his gulag, as 7,000 alleged opposition in the civil service are being detained. Opposition, who he brazenly accuses as members of the FETO, the Fethulleh terrorist organization. This is a reference to his former ally in self-imposed exile, Sheikh Fethulleh Gulen and his Hizmet "service" cult. Gulen in an exclusive *Wall Street Journal* [interview](#) on the first anniversary of what he termed Erdogan's staged coup urged the West to oppose the demise of democracy in Turkey. An increasingly Islamist Turkey that he had a hand in helping by getting Erdogan elected in 2002. He expressed what can only be termed buyer's regret for having spawned the rise of his former ally:

I never thought that he could go so bad. [He] said that the Turkish president was unleashing mass hysteria inside the country. Some parts of Turkish society have lost their ability to think.

Among those jailed in Erdogan's 2016 staged coup of 50,000 are the leadership of the Kurdish led People's Democratic Party (HDP) political opposition in the Ankara parliament. Then there are tens of thousands of jailed secular military, police, prosecutors, educators and journalists.

Erdogan's Turkey is akin to Stalin's paranoid great 1930's terror purge with a difference. "Half of Turkey adores him, the other hates him", said Cagaptay about Erdogan's paranoid conundrum. That is reflected in the 49 percent who voted against the disputed national referendum with allegations of fraudulent balloting on April 16, 2017 granting Erdogan with sweeping dictatorial powers as a virtual President for life.

[Watch](#) this *PBS Weekend News* interview with Sonar Cagaptay:

The wrongful conviction and sentencing to 25 years of Enis Berberoglu, an editor of the opposition *Cumhuriyet* daily and deputy of the leading opposition party in the Ankara parliament, the Republican People's Party (CHP) that provided the opportunity for the Justice march. Bereroglu had the chutzpah to disclose a video of Erdogan's intelligence service transferring weapons to Islamist opposition in Syria.

CHP opposition party leader Kemal K?l?çdaro?lu in the Ankara parliament organized the Justice March that culminated last Sunday in more than 1.5 million who showed up at the end of the 256 mile journey from the Turkish capital. He and those who joined the march represented the half of Turkey that hates Erdogan for destroying secular democracy, free speech and diversity.

Erdogan simply dismisses them all as "traitors, spies and terrorists." Even among the other half that supports him, there is the lurking danger of disaffected nationalist allies. They were among the throngs that included Alevis, Kurds and secularist defenders of the Kemalist constitution in that long march from Ankara to Istanbul that Erdogan is on the verge of sweeping into the Islamist dust bin of history.