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## Erdogan Takes Control

*A phony coup is today's Reichstag fire*

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There has been some utter nonsense coming out about the Turkish coup of last weekend. Some **absurdly** see the hand of the CIA working together with Pennsylvania exile Fethullah Gulen to bring down the Turkish government of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, a hypothesis that greatly exaggerates the capabilities and intentions of both the Agency and Gulen's "Hizmet" Movement. Other analysts **have swallowed** hook line and sinker the narrative of heroic resistance against a military takeover being promoted by the government in Ankara. Surprisingly, these assessments come from observers who have previously in other contexts not hesitated to note how governments dissimulate and shape stories to suit their agendas. Today in Turkey we see developing the myth of the proud and devout Anatolian peasants standing up for their Man when confronted by the Turkish elites seeking to bring him down.

I have considerable respect for **those who believe** that a military coup to overthrow an elected civilian government is always wrong but Erdogan is no innocent and if anyone is paying attention at all he or she would note that the Turkish president has done more damage to democracy in Turkey than anyone living. Recep Tayyip Erdogan is an autocrat who might even better be described as a megalomaniac driven to promote policies that are both self-serving and erratic that rely on incendiary populist appeals to maintain power. He heads an increasingly corrupt regime and has ruthlessly sacrificed his own people to his own ambition, effectively declaring war on the Kurdish minority living in Turkey and secretly dealing with and even supporting terrorists while also, ironically, opening the door to a new wave of terror within Turkey itself. Erdogan has personally embroiled his country in an incomprehensible and ultimately disastrous fashion in neighboring Syria. The coup plotters appear to have been appalled by the domestic and international violence unleashed by Erdogan, calling themselves a “peace at home council.”

Erdogan has been jailing journalists for the past three years on charges of treason and has made it a crime to criticize himself. Turkish citizens who demonstrate against his grandiose building projects are called “terrorists” before being arrested, beaten and shot. He has fired judges and policemen who have tried to investigate various crimes connected to his family and key supporters. He has tried assiduously to “reform” the Turkish constitution to place all power in his hands. He has promoted his own particular brand of Islam and has introduced Islamic legislation in violation of the secular constitution. And most recently he has rounded up and arrested 20,000 Turks who have the misfortune of appearing on his “enemies” list, which clearly was prepared and ready before the coup. Some of those arrested are being tortured to produce confessions implicating others.

The Stalinist-style purge list includes a large part of Turkey’s educated elite and is being driven by both class and the rural-urban divide, with Erdogan’s own rock solid support coming from the deeply religious but poorly educated Anatolians who have in the past twenty years moved in large numbers from their farms to the cities. That means that both class and religion cards will be dealt by Erdogan over the next ninety days to enhance his support, creating a potentially explosive mixture as the traditional elite will not go quietly if it is being pushed into irrelevancy. Religiosity will surely become a litmus test to determine political reliability.

Many will get swept up as part of Erdogan’s revenge. For example, a businessman friend of mine from Istanbul has been “detained” during the past week. His crime? He is basically apolitical but a known supporter of a secular opposition party. Turkish democracy is being gutted by Erdogan while Western Europe and Washington look on, clearly nervous about what is developing.

Given the immediate and devastating government response to the coup, I feel confident in my belief that the uprising was basically a set-up. Erdogan and his government have been warning for months about the possibility of a coup, so the event itself should surprise no one. It is now certain that there was a military intervention in fact being plotted, apparently supported mostly by Kemalists in the military who advocate a secular state and are alarmed by aspects of Erdogan foreign policy, to include the collaboration with terrorist groups and the hostility towards Russia and Syria.

There was also surely an element of concern over the deteriorating Turkish economy with European fear of terrorism wrecking the tourism industry, an issue linked to Ankara's meddling in Syria and Erdogan's personal vendetta against the leading Kurdish political party the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP). Many observers and even government officials when speaking off the record have also been criticizing the Erdogan-driven breakdown in the truce that up until recently prevailed with the domestic Kurdish minority and its armed wing the PKK.

A cowed Turkish parliament has voted three months of emergency powers to Erdogan. He will use that authority to destroy his opposition in parliament and further muzzle both what remains of the independent media as well as the meddlesome foreign journalists reporting from Turkey. The social media are being shut down or censored and both emails and phone calls are being monitored by the formidably effective Turkish Military Intelligence Service (MIT). Demonstrators brave enough to go against Erdogan will be treated as enemies of the state and the once powerful Turkish military will be turned into some version of an Islamic militia with its leaders owing both their positions and loyalty to the president. Hundreds of schools and even universities that Erdogan has linked to Gulen, rightly or wrongly, have been closed and thousands of teachers have been fired. The schools will reopen eventually with a government approved religious curriculum being taught by approved teachers.

Erdogan had ten good years as prime minister but then he became convinced of his own political invulnerability and moved over to the dark side. Anyone who rejoices in his surviving a possible military coup should think twice about where he is taking Turkey since it is clear that the president will not let slip a good opportunity to eliminate all his enemies. And the average hard working decent Turk will eventually be the loser as the economy continues to slide and the trappings of a police state become ever more visible. Erdogan is frog marching his country down a road where there is only darkness at the other end.