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## Turkey's permanent crisis - Ümit Cizre



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In the second in a series of four articles on the nature of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's regime, Ümit Cizre looks at Turkey's state of permanent crisis.

*Read part one, The unmatched scale of Erdoğan's crackdown, [here](#).*

A compelling feature of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's regime is its strategy of permanent crisis. More than five years after the July 2016 coup attempt, the country still awakens each morning to a new wave of "dawn raids" to detain and charge an ever-growing number of people accused of crimes against the state, a process reminiscent of Joseph Stalin's Great Purge of all opposition in Soviet Russia between 1936 and 1938.

Erdoğan's own description of the coup attempt as "a God-given opportunity," supports the view that the president and his security bureaucrats were in fact engaged in a possibly

© copyright Ahval 2017-2021 premeditated strategy to consolidate a one-man rule





Institutionalising injustice, compromising the courts, turning the indictments and trial verdicts into simple copy-and-paste texts may simply have all been part of the real plan.

This unceasing campaign also reveals the true nature of a strategy to create and sustain a permanent crisis, with no public pledge to restore normalcy as past civilian and military leaders had been careful to promise after previous military interventions.

Sustaining a permanent crisis explains why Erdoğan continues to reject any restitution of rule of law and due process, even after the Gülenist movement, the religious organisation the government accuses of instigating the coup attempt, has been broken.

In fact, through a skilful power calculus, Erdoğan has managed to obscure the motives and identity of the people involved on the night of July 15, 2016, through an impartial judicial process. In the absence of a clear account of the role and responsibility of Erdoğan's security agencies, the failed coup can be manipulated by those who continue to use it as a pretext to undermine the rule of law.

Above all, it needs to be acknowledged that this is the first failed coup in Turkish history, and therefore has profoundly different implications. As Oxford academic and democracy theorist David Runciman argues: "A failed military takeover does not mean that the threat of a coup d'état is real. It could mean that democracy faces no such threat, in which case the real risk to democracy is of being subverted from within."

When Erdoğan took national office in 2003, he did not immediately set an authoritarian tone, nor did he seem to be a leader with personal hubris and aspirations to achieve unmatched personal power. Erdoğan's early days in office were occupied with courting the European Union through liberal

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reforms, while removing Islamic symbols from his party and establishing its credentials as a conservative-democrat movement in the European mould.

Among his 'good deeds' were restoring freedom of religion by ending the ban on headscarves in the public sector, delivering economic growth, elevating the status of his conservative-religious constituents, starting an ambitious housing plan, reforming public services, and making Turkey a major player in the region. Through these reforms, the ruling party and its leader built some affinity with Turkey's sizeable population of liberal- and social-democrats.

Yet Erdoğan now rejects the trail-blazing democratic reforms of his early years to affirm a dark and divisive vision which criminalises any opposition, criticism or dissent. He has turned a EU candidate country that was once a regional model, friendly with Islam but distant from jihadi militancy, into a byword for autocracy. He has installed a permanent crisis, all as a means of securing his own power.



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