

# Turkish-style democracy at crossroads

Istanbul, where remnants of the glory of the Ottoman Empire can still be seen, has long been a favorite tourist destination among Japanese. As such, the ancient city helped Turkey earn more than \$30 billion a year from tourism in the recent years up to 2015.

However, a recent string of terrorist bombings and attacks occurring within Turkey concomitantly with its battle against the militant group the Islamic State of Iraq and the

a horrifying pace.

The collapse of the coup attempt in Turkey reminds me of what happened in August 1991, the last year of the Soviet Union. A huge number of Moscow citizens took to the streets confronting Soviet hardliners to defend politically formative liberty from an attempted coup. In July, citizens in Istanbul stood in front of military tanks mobilized for the coup attempt.

It is noteworthy that renegade Turkish troops surrounded by citizens chose to surrender because they were reluctant to turn on unarmed civilians. This showed how mature Turkish democracy is. The result differed greatly from a series of tragic consequences of the Arab Spring uprisings, as symbolized by Syria's ongoing calamity.

Shortly after the coup attempt broke out, Erdogan connected to a private TV station — with state broadcasters occupied — via the FaceTime video conference application to speak directly to the people. He exhorted Turks to defy the coup and stand up for parliamentary democracy. He thus showed that he has both the ability and courage to lead a democracy.

## Secularism vs Islamization

Nonetheless, the West does not necessarily give high marks to Erdogan's leadership. This supposedly reflects how governments and people in the West perceive Turkey and its president. First, they "misconstrue" the Turkish military as a guardian of democracy because it has long assumed the role of protecting secularism from Islamic intervention in politics. Second, they regard Erdogan as a leader distant from democracy because of his perceived closeness to Egypt's ousted President Mohammed Morsi and his Muslim Brotherhood party.

Indeed, in their coverage of the botched coup and its aftermath, some Western news media outlets showed sympathy toward the coup plotters, who said they wanted to protect secularism, while stereotypically displaying distrust in Erdogan because of his authoritarian push for the Islamization of Turkey.

What Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, founder and first president of the Republic of Turkey, advocated as secularism to separate church and state also amounted to an authoritarian policy aimed at ensuring one-party rule by his Republican People's Party, which sided with the military as its power base.

After the end of World War II, Turkey introduced political pluralism, allowing the presence of multiple parties. At the same time, the Turkish Armed Forces strengthened its sense of mission as the guardian of secularism to the extent that the military became wary of the Islamic faithful in the country. The military then emphasized the ethical values of Islam in the political sphere, intervening in politics. When

a regime veered away from secularism and caused political chaos, the armed forces staged coups almost every 10 years.

The armed forces resorted to military coups in 1960, 1971, 1980, 1997 and 2007, occasionally dismissing prime ministers and declaring a state of emergency. Such military intervention conducted on the pretext of protecting secularism was actually meant to protect privileges enjoyed by the armed forces. Further, the military thus denied the will of the people as shown in elections, the very basis of democracy.

In this respect, the idea of secularism, which embodies both Ataturkism, the founding ideology of the Republic of Turkey, and nationalism, is quite different from the democratic political platform shaped in the European Union, which is based on majority-backed secularist liberalism.

It should be noted that it is Erdogan who, as president, initiated civilian rule in Turkey. To that end, he has solidified his power base by increasing voter support on the one hand. On the other hand, he has revoked the military's elitist authoritarianism — which kept the armed forces superior to political authority and the will of the people — for the first time in Turkish history.

Since Erdogan came to power in 2002, his Justice and Development Party (AKP) has consecutively won national elections. In November 2015, the governing party secured 49.5 percent of the vote, but this means that a majority of Turkish people — 50.5 percent — voted against Erdogan. It is true that he has become more of an authoritarian leader and that members of his family are alleged to have been involved in corruption.

## Biggest threat

However, the biggest threat to Turkey today is the possibility that terrorist attacks could develop into civil war, involving the PKK and ISIL, to the extent that its nation-state framework would be destroyed. If the coup plotters among the Turkish Armed Forces — who were neither well-disciplined nor well-organized — had succeeded in taking over power in their July coup attempt while disregarding the democratic process of electing people's representatives, it would have only forced Turkey to return to its past.

In democracies, voters do not always make "right decisions." Rather, the advantage of democracy is that it is capable of fixing mistakes made by political parties or leaders. It is common for any election, be it in Turkey or in the United States, to produce results different from those seen four years or so earlier. In Turkey's case, the endorsement by voters of the continuity of Erdogan's leadership is better than the emergence of a "police state" ruled by a covetous

dictator or a "totalitarian state" ruled by the military.

Nevertheless, it is feared that Erdogan's sweeping purge imposed across Turkish society after he spectacularly thwarted the mid-July coup attempt will damage Turkey's national interests and even democracy itself.

Meanwhile, he has managed to quickly end Turkey's isolation from the international community thanks to his move to normalize relations with Russia and Israel in June — before the coup attempt took place. Earlier this month, he visited Moscow to talk with Russian President Vladimir Putin and repair bilateral ties. In contrast, Ankara's relations with Washington remain precarious because of Turkey's demand that U.S.-based moderate Turkish imam Fethullah Gulen, whom Erdogan accuses of being behind the attempted coup, be extradited.

Gulen used to be a friend and ally of Erdogan, maintaining that a secular approach could be compatible with the spirits of Islam as long as it was not anti-religious. In demanding the extradition of Gulen, the Turkish president said the self-exiled cleric was suspected of establishing a "parallel state" — a parallel political structure — within Turkey with the involvement of various groups of elites in the military and civil services as well as the judiciary, academia and media. Erdogan has ruthlessly purged tens of thousands of military officers and civil servants allegedly loyal to Gulen. It must be pointed out, however, that those who have been and will be "politically" appointed to fill such a large number of vacant positions are not necessarily adequately competent.

Since he circumvented the coup attempt, the president has been pressing ahead with a paradoxical approach of weakening both the governing structure and the armed forces in order to strengthen his power base. In addition, Erdogan has advocated reviving the death penalty and asking the court to apply capital punishment to coup plotters retroactively. If this happened, he would be renegeing on his own promise to comply with the conditions of accession to the European Union.

If Erdogan's struggle to cement his leadership backfires, ironically ending Turkey's peculiar form of democracy, the country's national strength will unavoidably plummet. This would extensively change the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East — where Iran and Saudi Arabia have been intensifying rivalry in their quest for regional hegemony — and tremendously affect the regional order in Europe.

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## INSIGHTS into the WORLD

By Masayuki Yamauchi

Levant (ISIL) and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) has prompted many Japanese tourists to avoid the country. Just two months ago, on June 28, ISIL staged a gun and suicide bombing attack at Istanbul's Ataturk Airport, Turkey's busiest gateway, killing more than 40 people.

After Turkey shot down a Russian military jet close to the Turkey-Syria border in November last year, Ankara-Moscow relations deteriorated. As a result, an annual inbound flow of about 4 million Russian tourists abruptly stopped, badly damaging the Turkish tourism industry, while Russia imposed a package of economic sanctions against Turkey.

On July 15-16, members of the Turkish Armed Forces staged a coup attempt, bringing Turkey to a major historical crossroads. If renegade troops had toppled the government, Turkey might have become another Syria, Iraq, Yemen or Libya, chronically plagued with internal antagonism, ethnic strife and sectarian conflict. If the military spun out of control, Turkey would have become incapable of dealing with the Kurdish ethnic issue and ISIL's terrorist campaigns and found itself in the awkward position of allowing internal antagonism to develop into a Syrian- or Iraqi-style civil war.

The worst scenario would have been for the situation in Turkey, which currently shelters about 2.7 million Syrian refugees, to become tumultuous, forcing Turks to seek refuge abroad. Under such circumstances, the multiple crises in Europe would have become much more complexly tangled with those in the Middle East.

Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was elected by Turkish voters. If such a popularly elected government had been replaced by a 20th-century-type military regime, imposing dictatorial rule, the country would have emerged as an infamous "model" for the Middle East of the 21st century, where civil war and terrorism have been spreading at

## If Erdogan's struggle to cement his leadership backfires, national strength will plummet

Yamauchi is a professor at Meiji University and a professor emeritus at the University of Tokyo, where he used to head the University of Tokyo Centre for Middle Eastern Studies (UTCMES). His latest book, "Islam and America," an updated edition of the book of the same title originally published in 1998, was released by Chuokoron-Shinsha Inc. on Aug. 19.



## Cyber extortion is no way to get rich

By Elaine Ou  
Bloomberg

Once upon a time, a regular hacker could make decent money in the world of ransomware, malicious software that locks up parts of a victim's computer and demands payment to restore access.

Now those days are gone. I blame globalization.

Ransomware has only recently entered the public consciousness, thanks to the high-profile extortion of a Los Angeles hospital and breathless warnings from cybersecurity companies. Yet its history goes back decades, to a quaint time of homemade attacks aimed at individual computers.

The first known incident involved an anthropologist who mailed 20,000 floppy diskettes labeled "AIDS Information" to the subscribers of multiple business journals and the delegates of an international AIDS conference. It was 1989, the height of the epidemic, and victims threw away everything they knew about safety to insert an unsolicited floppy with nary a virus scan. The files on their computer drives were then encrypted, with a message demanding that \$189 or \$378 be mailed to a PO Box in Panama. The perpetrator was quickly apprehended.

Floppy-disk attacks never caught on. The initial outlay was too large, and the chances of being traced too high. Even after the internet lowered distribution costs, ransomware remained a domain of one-off hacks. National differences and a fragmented payment system complicated cross-border extortion: American malware demanded payment in e-gold or MoneyPak; Europeans preferred Paysafecard; Russians wanted mobile phone credits.

The riskiest part of ransomware was always the distribution, because it entails multiple contact points: Attempts to infect a computer, communication of ransom, and payment collection.

The rise of a universal digital currency —

Bitcoin — changed everything. Enterprising developers created ransomware-as-a-service, in which they license or sell their ransomware to operators. The operators then recruit affiliates to act as distribution partners all around the world. Affiliate networks specialize in local markets or modes of infection.

Ransomware aimed at Americans sometimes features a fake message from the FBI demanding a fine for viewing degenerate porn. A Japanese variant shows a cartoon official politely requesting ¥4,000 in Bitcoin.

By working through affiliates in foreign jurisdictions, ransomware creators avoid prosecution by local authorities. Russian-made malware, for example, often exempts internet addresses in former Soviet republics.

Distributors handle the tough job of getting the malware onto victims' computers. They do this through email attachments, ad networks, or compromised websites. Ransom payment goes to the operators, who transfer a commission of 50 percent to 70 percent to the distributor.

The new structure entails radically different economics. To turn a profit, an operator needs to attract a steady supply of distribution affiliates. Some offer incentives: Cerber, the largest ransomware network, offers affiliates a 5-percent payout boost for each new recruit. The media also provide plenty of free advertising. Each fresh report of corporations making big ransom payments reinforces the notion that fortune lies in the bottomless pockets of private capital.

Except those millions of dollars aren't really there to be made. The Hollywood Presbyterian Medical Center paid only \$17,000, not \$3.6 million. That could still be an attractive prospect for a second-world hacker — if you didn't have to multiply it by the near-zero odds of actually gaining control of a hospital computer system. In reality, most ransomware distributors don't make anything approaching a living wage.

A recent study of Cerber estimates that the operator does pretty well, earning \$78,000 in

the month of July. The average affiliate, by contrast, brought in \$726 in revenue. From that, subtract operating expense. The affiliate needs to buy an exploit kit — a piece of software that scans a victim's machine for known security holes. Before the kit can be delivered to a victim, it must pass through a crypter, which modifies malware to get it through virus filters. Both exploit kits and crypters must be updated every few weeks to stay ahead of security experts. Between tools of the trade and email spam campaigns, an attack could cost more than the expected income before a single ransom payment comes in.

Increasing ransom demands isn't really a revenue-boosting option: Higher taxation leads only to lower collection rates. Worse, there's no guarantee that the revenue will keep coming. Ransomware groups disappear all the time. Last month, a benevolent hacker broke into the server of a German ransomware network and released their source code and decryption keys, which antivirus companies used to disable the ransomware. The hacker then invited the orphaned distributors to join his new affiliate network.

The cutthroat competition could be a sign that the market is near saturation. For all the reports of attacks on hospitals and financial institutions, the reality is that cybercriminals with dreams of striking it rich far outnumber vulnerable corporations. It's like a pyramid scheme, constantly sucking in gullible recruits to maintain the flow of money to the originators. Only in this case the Federal Trade Commission probably won't be coming to the rescue.

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