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Turkey

# After the elections, the storm

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### **Challenged by the victory of a unified opposition in the municipality of Istanbul and splinter movements in his own party, President Erdogan is now facing a major crisis in his relations with the United States.**

Would Erdogan be able to learn from his setback in the new elections of 23 June, after the arbitrary cancellation of the municipal elections on 31 March? Would he try to understand the reasons for the reaction to his policies within his electoral base, especially among young people? Erdogan's answers to these questions did not surprise anyone.

In addition to the various "revenge" trials against many journalists, activists, academics and leaders of the Kurdish movement, there was also the trial of Canan Kaftancioglu, the president of the CHP in Istanbul. Indeed, five days after the election, she appeared in court accused of insulting the president, terrorist propaganda, humiliation of the Turkish state and incitement of the people to hatred and adversity... due to tweets, most of which were written several years ago. But the real motive is obvious: to punish – she risks up to 17 years in prison – the one who is considered as the “architect” of the victory of Ekrem Imamoglu, the candidate supported by the opposition in Istanbul. The political authorities are also trying to obstruct the administration of the city council by the CHP, in particular by the refusal of the – AKP – leaders of the companies linked to the city council to resign from their posts. It was only last week that the resignations were finally submitted, but the majority held by the AKP-MHP block (far right) in the city council is a permanent obstacle to city management.

## **Disorder in the ranks of the AKP**

Former Minister of Economy and AKP Vice-President Ali Babacan finally resigned from his party to accelerate the construction of a new pro-Western political formation. Accused by Erdogan of wanting to “divide the Ummah”, Babacan, sponsored by former President Abdullah Gül, and supported by former party elders, intends to reforge a political movement that will be inspired by the pro-European discourse of the AKP from the beginning.

Babacan's relations with the Western world, and in particular with investors, are presented as a way out of the dual economic and political crisis with a liberal agenda for democratization and the restoration of international relations. This would be a realignment of the Turkish state with the interests of Western imperialism. It is currently difficult to measure the effect that such a party will have on public opinion. Especially since former Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu is also about to launch a new party. But if Erdogan fails to reverse the trend of disintegration at its base, which seems difficult given the deepening economic crisis, a Babacan with international support could strike a more or less severe blow at its former leader.

## **Military breach with the United States**

The purchase of Russian S-400 air defence systems finally resulted in a concrete response from the United States after several months of threats. After the delivery of Russian missiles began two weeks ago, the US Ministry of Defense decided to exclude Turkey from the F-35 military aircraft program. This means that Ankara will not be able to acquire the 100 fighter aircraft for which \$1.4 billion has already been paid, nor will it be able to continue to manufacture the several hundred spare parts (which was expected to bring in \$11 billion). This is the consequence of a change of position in foreign policy and a rapprochement of the Turkish state with Russia, initiated after the

attempted coup in 2016 – considered to be supported by the USA - and Washington's alliance with the Kurdish forces in Syria in the fight against DESH. Thus, Erdogan's strategy of pursuing its relations with the various international actors and using their conflicting relations to widen its room for manoeuvre (all accompanied by anti-imperialist discourse) seems to be reaching its limits. This break with the United States - even if Trump does not seem to be in favour of it - should accelerate Ankara's dependence on Moscow, which must probably be satisfied that it could have caused such a conflict within NATO.

PS:

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