

U.S. Sanctions Could Hurt Turkish Economy but Strengthen Erdogan

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An economic meltdown may simply push his supporters to dig in on a worldview that posits unending Western assaults against the Turkish nation and wider Muslim community.

Washington slapped sanctions on two Turkish cabinet ministers on August 1, freezing their assets in response to the arrest of Pastor Andrew Brunson and other U.S. citizens. Meanwhile, the lira has continued its slide, shedding 6% of its value in less than a week.

The big picture: The Turkish economy, already in a fragile state before sanctions, could well melt down. But while the sanctions might cripple Turkey's economy, they are unlikely to pose a threat to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's power.

Erdogan's populism has polarized Turkish society since he came to power in 2003, with his support splitting the country roughly in half. However, Erdogan has effectively neutered his opposition, using the national police to crack down on opposition rallies and lock up dissidents, as well as rigging elections to secure electoral victories.

What is more, the failed attempt on Erdogan's life in July 2016 has unequivocally altered the country's politics, transforming him into a Turkish Muslim savior in the eyes of his right-wing supporters. As far as they are concerned, the attempted coup was not only a domestic assault on Turkish constitutional order, but also an attempt by Western "foreign powers" scheming for his overthrow. In this view, it was simply the latest in a series of historical attacks [the West has launched against the Turkish nation and the Muslim community](http://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/ibrahimkaragul/artik-turkiyenin-buyuk-oynama-vakti-gelmistir-2037423)

<http://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/ibrahimkaragul/artik-turkiyenin-buyuk-oynama-vakti-gelmistir-2037423> (*umma*) stretching back to the Crusades.

The bottom line: Erdogan's supporters believe Turkey cannot fulfill its historical mission of making Turkey great

and globally restoring the dignity of the *umma* without him. So if the Turkish economy suffers a meltdown as a result of U.S. sanctions, do not expect Erdogan to be weakened domestically. In fact, his base is likely to band around him even tighter.

Soner Cagaptay is the Beyer Family Fellow and director of the Turkish Research Program at The Washington Institute, and author of The New Sultan: Erdogan and the Crisis of Modern Turkey (<https://www.newsultan.info/>). This item was originally published on the Axios website (<https://www.axios.com/us-sanctions-could-hurt-turkish-economy-but-strengthen-erdogan-22800d16-b0a4-4976-ba01-15d303c9c554.html>).



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