**Erdogan Won But Turkiye May Lose**

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After facing the toughest challenge of his political career to date, Turkiye President Recep Tayyip Erdogan got re-elected to a third term. Defeating Kemal Kilicdaroglu, presidential candidate of the six-party strong opposition alliance. Erdogan prevailed over Kilicdaroglu in a run-off election held on May 28 after the first round of voting did not produce a clear winner. President Erdogan ended with just over 52% of the vote; this clearly illustrates his declining popularity. Almost half the electorate in this deeply polarised country did not back his authoritarian vision for the country. Erdogan’s reelection does not mean that he is popular, or that his policies are approved by the masses. In reality, Erdogan ran for the Presidency for the third time in violation of the constitution. For the first time in his political career failed to win the election in the first round and won by a small margin in the runoff. Also compared to the previous elections five years ago, although the number of voters has increased by nearly 5 million, Erdogan’s personal vote increased only by 1.5 million. In addition to this, Erdogan’s party AKP lost 7% of votes. Although Erdogan regains executive power with a majority in parliament. However, the alliance he led in the parliament is more fragmented than in the previous period.

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While President may assume results as an approval for his domestic policies and his geopolitical course, but he should not get overconfident. The country is deeply divided and though a slim majority was swayed by his populist message, an economic reckoning looms on the horizon. This was evident from the freefall of Turkish currency after the final results were announced. The Turkish lira plunged to record lows, a sign that currency markets are not confident in the country’s economic future after the veteran leader’s victory. In the last few years Turkiye is going through one of the worst economic crises in its history. The cost of food, rent and other everyday goods has soared, exacerbated by the President’s refusal to observe orthodox economic policies and raise interest rates. The lira has hit record lows against the dollar and the central bank has struggled to meet surging demand for foreign currency.

On the political front as well things look pretty worse. In the last decade Erdogan has taken Turkiye down a more autocratic, one-man-rule style of governance. This has included restrictions on freedom of speech, freedom of the press and free assembly. For the sizable section of the society who voted against him, Erdogan is seen as an authoritarian. He has stacked the judiciary, monopolizes the media and jails perceived opponents including journalists and critics on social media. He’s accused of allowing corruption to flourish, leading to shoddy, unregulated construction that collapsed in the quakes. He’s replaced opposition mayors even though they won local elections. This approach undertaken by Erdogan is not new but it got more intensified in the last decade or so. Like in 2008, the constitutional court ruled that Erdogan’s party The Justice and Development Party (AKP) was guilty of seeking to undermine secularism in the country and imposed a fine, although the state prosecutor had sought a ban on the party and its leading political figures including Erdogan.

Turkiye has developed a neo-ottoman foreign policy under Erdogan which is turning out to be a disaster for Ankara. This has involved interventions in the Syrian civil war, support for Azerbaijan in its dispute with Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh, and support for government forces in Libya. There have also been increased tensions with Greece and Cyprus in the Eastern Mediterranean, notably over drilling rights. Erdogan has also backed Turkish Cypriot leaders in rejecting the UN-backed model of a unified federal Cyprus in favour of a two-state solution. Persuasion of this foreign policy has increased the country’s internal security threats and alienated itself geopolitically. In addition to direct military involvement, the Turkish President is also supporting terrorist and extremist outfits across the region. Erdogan’s dubious and murky links with various terrorist organizations such as Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Hezbollah, Al Shabab, Boko Haram, Hayat Tahrir-Al-Sham (Al-Qaeda affiliate in Syria), and the Islamic State have been brought out by various intelligence agencies time and again. Because of this only in the year 2021 Turkiye was placed in the grey list of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) which was deeply embarrassing for a G20 economy.

After this new victory there is little reason to believe that Erdogan who is emboldened by a fresh mandate, will reverse the trajectory of his disastrous policies. It is highly anticipated that the coming couple of years will see higher inflation and skyrocketing unemployment that could easily turn into uncontrollable public anger against the Syrians and the Afghans refugees. Even though economic and political crises await Turkey in the near future. These crises will not harm Erdogan if the opposition does not adopt the right policy framework. It’s a hard reality that the vision of the founder of modern Turkiye Mustafa Kemal Ataturk of creating a modern and secular nation has been thrown out of the window by Erdogan. But the nation will lose a great deal if it allows Erdogan to carry on with his flawed policies and destroy the military, social fabric, political, foreign and economic links of Turkiye.

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