

## Despite Lavish Public Praise, U.S. is Deeply Troubled by Erdogan

Written by armenians.hu

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Some months ago I wrote a column titled "Obama is Exploiting Turkish Leaders' Craving for Flattery," explaining that the U.S. President is able to persuade Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan to do his bidding by taking advantage of his weakness for lavish praise!

Those aware of Erdogan's authoritarian streak — on full display during the recent brutal attacks on protesters in Istanbul and other Turkish cities — have been deeply troubled by U.S. officials' repeated mischaracterization of the Prime Minister's dictatorial regime as 'a role model for the Islamic world.'

The insincerity of such assessments was exposed when WikiLeaks made public thousands of confidential diplomatic cables from the U.S. Embassy in Ankara, indicating that American officials' real opinion about Erdogan is the exact opposite of what they have been stating in public.

The Embassy dispatches, published by the German magazine Der Spiegel, described the Turkish Prime Minister "as a power-hungry Islamist surrounded by corrupt and incompetent ministers." In a May 2005 cable, the U.S. Embassy surmised that Erdogan never had a realistic

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view of the world and believes he was chosen by God to lead Turkey. A knowledgeable source told American officials that "Tayyip believes in God ... but does not trust him."

U.S. diplomats report that the Prime Minister gets almost all his information from Islamist-leaning newspapers, ignoring the input of his own ministers. The Turkish military and intelligence services no longer share with him some of their reports. He trusts no one completely, surrounding himself with "an iron ring of sycophantic (but contemptuous) advisors." Despite Erdogan's macho behavior, he is reportedly terrified of losing his grip on power.

Although the Turkish leader declared war on corruption when he first assumed office, informants told U.S. Embassy officials that corruption exists at all levels, even within the Erdogan family. A senior government advisor confidentially told a journalist that the Prime Minister enriched himself from the privatization of a state oil refinery. An Energy Ministry official alleged that Erdogan asked Iranians to sign a gas pipeline deal with a Turkish company owned by an old schoolmate. Furthermore, two American sources claimed that the Prime Minister had eight Swiss bank accounts. Erdogan has denied all such allegations, insisting that his wealth is mostly derived from gifts received at his son's wedding, and acknowledging that an anonymous Turkish businessman has been paying the expenses of his four children to study in the United States. Such explanations are viewed by the American Embassy as "lame."

The Embassy's cables contain many other startling accusations against Erdogan. Informants have told U.S. officials that when his political party's candidate lost the Trabzon mayoral race, the Prime Minister allegedly funneled millions of dollars from a secret government account to his close friend Faruk Nafiz Ozak whom he had named as head of the local Trabzonspor football club. The money was for hiring top players so that the soccer team's victories would overshadow the accomplishments of the elected mayor.

According to a cable sent by former U.S. Ambassador Eric Edelman, Erdogan's appointees lacked "technocratic depth." While some "appear to be capable of learning on the job, others are incompetent or seem to be pursuing private ... interests." High-ranking Turkish officials have informed the American Embassy in Ankara that they are appalled by the Prime Minister's staff. Erdogan reportedly appointed as his undersecretary a man exhibiting "incompetence, prejudices and ignorance." The Women's Minister Nimet Cubukcu, an advocate of criminalizing adultery, obtained her position because she happened to be a friend of the Prime Minister's wife. Another minister is accused of "nepotism, links to heroin smuggling, and a predilection for underage girls."

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Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, highly-praised by U.S. officials in public, also comes under private scrutiny and criticism. According to confidential American Embassy cables, Davutoglu "understands little about politics outside of Ankara." In fact, U.S. diplomats are alarmed "by his imperialistic tone ... and his neo-Ottoman vision." In a January 2010 dispatch, the American Ambassador reported that Turkey has "Rolls Royce ambitions but Rover resources." Former Defense Minister Mehmet Gonul was also critical of the Foreign Minister, warning American officials about his "Islamist influence on Erdogan," and calling him "exceptionally dangerous."

Having spoiled Erdogan through lavish public praise, despite privately acknowledging his character flaws, U.S. officials must now assume full responsibility for the Prime Minister's reckless behavior at home and abroad!

By Harut Sassounian

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