

# THE JULY 15TH FAILED COUP ATTEMPT IN TURKEY

Causes, Consequences,  
and Implications in  
Comparative Perspective

July 2016 | **ÖMER ASLAN**





# **The July 15th Failed Coup Attempt in Turkey: Causes, Consequences, and Implications in Comparative Perspective**



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## Executive Summary

- On July 15th a group of soldiers inside the Turkish military—ordinarily an expert executioner of military coups d'état - carried out the seventh coup attempt in Turkey's checkered history.
- Post-coup investigations have revealed more and more details that confirm the initial allegation that the defeated coup attempt was masterminded by officers loyal to the Gülen movement, a shady group designated as a terrorist organization in 2014 by Turkey, which not only has huge representation within the Turkish state structure but also has strong international networks.
- 'Classical' military coups d'état during the Cold War were characterized by four main features that enabled them to overthrow a government: speed, secrecy, extra-legality, and army officers as its primary actors. As the military was then the most powerful political actor in many different parts of the world, it had the most capacity to lead action against unwanted incumbent governments.
- It has become increasingly apparent over the two decades after the Cold War that in many places, coups will no longer succeed if carried out in the old fashion.
- From any perspective, July 15th was a wild attempt ending in colossal failure, with no ultimate resemblance to any of the coups that preceded it.
- The coup plotters seem to have believed that the coup would have been completed by early morning through a quick, forceful course of action, as required in a classical coup. This was why the Gülenist prospective junta named their coup operation 'Operation Thunderbolt'.
- What doomed this classical coup attempt was Turkish intelligence picking up on the conspiracy. Once the coup plot was exposed, those opposing the coup had the time, courage, and tools at their disposal to mobilize in opposition to the coup and resist it.
- The General Staff in 1980 began their coup d'état at 03:00 and finished it by the early morning, experiencing no resistance from any quarters.
- It was enough for the coup plotters in 1960 to send a captain with two foot soldiers to the radio station in Ankara and tell about 50 soldiers on duty there that they were taking over the radio and that these soldiers must just go home. It must have taken about 10 minutes to acquire control of the sole important broadcast.
- The proliferation of TV channels from the early 1990s onwards and their increasing presence in Turkish households were the causes of the unorthodox coup method used in 1997.
- The July 15th military junta did not underestimate the nature, quality, and power of Turkey's new media environment, because if they had started the coup attempt at 3 am as first planned, they probably could have taken control of the vast majority of the Turkish media.
- However, once their plans were disrupted by intelligence services, they had little chance of "convincing military actors that the success of the coup had the support of almost everybody in the military and that any possible resistance was minor": a factor crucial for coup success.
- The fact that the July 15th military junta still went ahead despite clear orders from the General Staff to stop all movements (flights, tanks, soldiers, and trucks) indicates that they were zealous 'crusaders' willing even to risk civil war in order to take over the country.
- Despite the bloodshed and violence after the 1960 and 1980 coups d'état, those behind these coups were hesitant to resort to guns to make their coup attempt successful.



■ Military officers plotting a coup are usually aware that coups carried out without clear narrative often find themselves lacking 'legitimacy' in the wider society. Several of the mid-ranking officers behind the 1960 coup, including its leader General Gürsel, wanted to wait for the right time at which people would consider a coup legitimate even before military intervention.

■ It was the prevailing chaos all over the country that led people to largely welcome the 1980 coup with open arms in many places. The pre-coup disorder provided the necessary context for another coup. In 1997, several civil society organizations and political parties, first and foremost the CHP, clearly supported the coup process. In fact, their cooperation with the military was a sine qua non for the coup to be carried out—not as a classical coup, but as a new type, carried out by a network of secularist allies.

■ A striking feature of the July 15th coup plot was the absence of any pretense of neutrality. In this sense, the July 15th coup plot diverges from the 1960 and 1980 coup attempts but maintains the spirit of the 1997 coup attempt though it is a far radical version.

■ The July 15th coup plotters also relied on instability in the European Union in terms of its internal coherence, problems with economic and political power projection, and its ethical sway. More importantly, they may have thought Obama was unlikely to take radical steps to initiate sanctions on Turkey in the case of a coup in his final five months in the White House.

■ Coup d'état attempts are most fragile in their early moments. The ambivalent American message at a time when a democratically-elected government was still battling a vicious coup attempt almost felt like a clear support for the coup plotters.

■ The government must take the news that the Turkish Military Academy in Ankara and Air Force Academy as well as Kuleli Military

High school in Istanbul were involved in the coup attempt. Addressing the post-coup environment in all these schools (not only in Ankara and Istanbul and not only the Military Academy) is key to rehabilitating the Turkish armed forces in the long term, especially if it is remembered that the interventionist mentality in the army about the politics spreads through military schools.

■ The government must also be careful and vigilant not to allow the military to revert to its old ways of closing the army's doors to certain segments of society. The unacceptable extent of Gülenist infiltration into the military should not be used to justify blocking more conservative-minded citizens from entering military schools and other echelons of the army.

■ Though it looks certain that the coup attempt was initiated and carried out largely by Gülenist officers, it remains possible that it rode on the crest of a 'neo-nationalist' grievances within the officer corps.

■ With the news that former defendants in the Balyoz military trials have now been reinstated to important positions within the Turkish armed forces, the problem from now on may not be having a 'fractured military' but instead having a 'lack of balance' between fractions within the military.

■ Military reforms need to be redesigned and then brought back onto the government's short and long-term agenda. The AK Party has addressed this issue largely through formalities such as removing Article 35 which the military had used to legitimize its interventions, from the Internal Service code of the Military. AK Party should rather address the essence of this issue through a long-term strategic restructuring and transformation plan for the army.



## Introduction

On July 15th 2016, a group of soldiers within the Turkish military—ordinarily an expert executioner of military coups d'état—carried out the seventh coup attempt in Turkey's checkered history. This was also the 3rd time a military coup attempt had failed in Turkey.<sup>1</sup> On the night of July 15th, fighter jets and helicopters flew low over Istanbul and Ankara, while coup plotters on the ground closed down both Bosphorus bridges and tried to occupy key corners of Istanbul and Ankara. Tanks rolled through the streets and shut down major avenues. Jets and helicopters attacked the Turkish National Assembly, the Presidential Complex, the Turkish Intelligence Headquarters, the Police Headquarters, and the Police Special Forces Command in the capital. The coup plotters stormed the headquarters of public broadcaster TRT and had a coup memorandum read out on behalf of the 'Peace at Home Council'<sup>2</sup>, in reference to Atatürk's famous slogan 'Peace at Home, Peace Abroad'. Post-coup investigations have revealed more and more details that confirm the initial allegation that the defeated coup attempt was masterminded by officers loyal to the Gülen movement, a shady group designated as a terrorist organization in 2014 by Turkey, which not only has huge representation within the Turkish state structure but also has strong international networks.<sup>3</sup>



*Picture: The prospective junta forced one TRT news anchor to read out a coup memorandum live on TV*

On February 7th, 2012 a police operation by Gülenist public prosecutors accused the Turkish intelligence agency MiT of commit-

ting a crime by talking to the PKK (a terrorist organization recognized as such by the EU as well as the U.S.) despite being under instruction to do so by the government. This began the exposure of the Gülenist network, which had infiltrated the state and regularly violated the bureaucratic hierarchy, not in pursuit of the public good, but in pursuit of their inner - group interests and hierarchy. Additional asymmetrical operations against the government under the guise of a 'corruption probe' on December 17th and 25th, 2013, confirmed these suspicions about a hidden agenda to control the whole of the machinery of the state. Since that time, the AK Party government has been trying to deconstruct this network by attacking its crucial segments through a number of police investigations. The government has been able to undertake a major overhaul within the Turkish police, but the Turkish military remained virtually untouched. The group's affiliates the army were expected to be targeted in the annual Supreme Military Council meeting due this August. It was expected that hundreds of officers suspected of Gülenist links would be purged from the army.<sup>4</sup> The recent trajectory of domestic developments leading up to this coup attempt point to the Gülenist network as being the primary group spearheading the attempt, but it is yet to be seen which other groups joined them. From any perspective, July 15th was a wild attempt ending in colossal failure, with no ultimate resemblance to any of the coups that preceded it. These past coups in Turkey is given in the table: (Next Page)

***The coup plotters stormed the headquarters of public broadcaster TRT and had a coup memorandum read out on behalf of the 'Peace at Home Council', in reference to Atatürk's famous slogan 'Peace at Home, Peace Abroad'.***





Coups d'état	Casualties (during the Coup)		Method	Chain of Command Maintained?	Popular Support	American Reaction	Target	Army Divided?	Success/Failure
	Police/Soldiers	Civilians							
27 May 1960	1 junta member died.	2	Classical coup	No	Divided	Support	Democrat Party and pious strata of society	Yes; deeply	Success
22 February 1962	None	none	Classical coup	No	NA	No Support	Military government	YES	Failure
21 May 1963	8 dead; 26 wounded		Classical coup	No	NA	No Support	Military government	YES	Failure
1971 <sup>5</sup>	-	-	Preemptive coup	Yes	NA	full CIA knowledge	The left	YES	Success
1980	None	None	Classical coup	Yes	Yes	Support	Both left and right	NO	Success
1997 <sup>6</sup>	-	-	Network coup	Yes	Divided	Support	Welfare party and pious strata of society	No at the top brass; Yes at the lower ranks	Success
15 July 2016 coup	62/5 initial no of coupists dead 24.	170 dead 2185 wounded (total)	Classical coup by the Gülen Network	No	No	Ambivalent	Government and allied conservative social groups.	YES	Failure

This study will first offer a brief summary of events that took place on the night of the July 15th coup. It will then provide a much-needed, in-country comparative assessment of the failed coup attempt from several different angles. Finally, it will offer short-term and mid-to-long term recommendations for dealing with the post-failed coup environment and addressing the associated challenges.

***The government has been able to undertake a major overhaul within the Turkish police, but the Turkish military remained virtually untouched. The group's branch in the army was expected to be targeted in the annual Supreme Military Council meeting due this August. It was expected that hundreds of officers suspected of Gülenist links would be purged from the army***

#### **A Close-Up Photo of the Night of the July 15th**

It is becoming increasingly clear that the July 15th coup attempt was not an “amateur affair” as some hurriedly portrayed it.<sup>7</sup> Despite initial confusion and underestimation by external experts and analysts of the coup plan<sup>8</sup>, the Gülenist prospective junta did plan to capture President Erdoğan. The coup plotters planned to start the coup at 03:00 am on a Friday night-Saturday morning and attack critical units of infrastructure as well as the security and communications networks to neutralize potential sources of resistance. However, once Turkish intelligence somehow picked up on the coup (either information was leaked from inside the junta, or intelligence managed to infiltrated it), they were forced bring the time of the coup forward to 9 pm, which significantly disrupted their plans. Ordinary people began to understand that something was not right when fighter jets

began flying extremely low over the skies in Istanbul and Ankara, frightening people and damaging some buildings. At the same time, soldiers closed down both bridges in Istanbul, allowing people to leave the city but not enter it. As these initial moves were taking place, first PM Yıldırım appeared on a private TV channel to inform the public that there had been a coup attempt by junior officers in the military. The coup plotters in the meantime had planned to take control of the city by occupying AKOM (the Disaster Coordination Center) and the Istanbul Governorship. As expected, tanks rolled through the streets to shut down Istanbul Atatürk Airport, Turkey's largest, while other soldiers raided the TRT (public broadcasting company) building to have a newsreader broadcast the coup memorandum and spread the news. Around the same time, President Erdoğan appeared on private channels as well, confirming PM Yıldırım's statement and calling people to the streets to resist the tanks and soldiers. As different forces swiftly foiled the coup attempt, the coup plotters attacked MiT headquarters, Turkish Security Directorate, Headquarters of Police Special Operations Forces, Turkish National Assembly, and later the Presidential Complex with helicopters and fighter jets. Politicians from all over the spectrum denounced the coup attempt more or less immediately, while the rest of the army spoke and acted against it. If one traced the process from the start of the coup attempt to its failure, the coup attempt by the Gülenist network was countered by a quickly-formed loose network of intelligence, politicians, ordinary people, the police, the judiciary, anti-coup TV channels, and anti-coup officers.



Picture: Tanks at the gate of İstanbul Atatürk Airport shut it down to air traffic.



### An 'Old' Coup in the age of Networks and Networking

'Classical' military coups d'état during the Cold War had four main features that enabled them to overthrow a government: speed, secrecy, extra-legality, and army officers as its primary actors. As the military was then the most powerful political actor in many different parts of the world, it had the most capacity to lead action against unwanted incumbent governments. As Hobsbawm pointed out decades ago, "coups are made by armed forces and practically never by anyone else."<sup>9</sup> The coup actions also used to finish fast in the past as the speed of the action was considered critical to a coup's success. As General Ocran in Ghana pointed out, 'the success or failure of [...] coups has been dependent on certain factors, amongst which are: secrecy, surprise, simple but sound planning . . . [and] ruthless offensive action.'<sup>10</sup> Since the coups had to occur fast, pre-coup preparations also had to be careful and slow because coup plotters knew that coup-making would be a very costly business in case of failure. The fact that armed forces stood at the forefront of the coup action did not mean that civilians, including politicians, were entirely passive. In several cases from Pakistan to Latin America and Turkey, civilians asked khaki officers to intervene and depose incumbent governments on their behalf and credited them with legitimacy in advance. They also often staged mass protests and demonstrations for this purpose. As the coup plotters rolled into action, however, civilians would be neutralized through curfews and bans on public meetings, because public resistance needed to be avoided at all costs. A coup attempt resisted by people on the streets could ignite a vicious civil war, the outcome generally feared most by the coup plotters.<sup>11</sup> As Goodspeed argued, "...no coup can succeed if the armed forces loyally support the legal government and are prepared to use the force at their disposal to that end. Civil war might result in such a case, as it might result

from the converse situation when the nation resolutely opposed a military coup. But when the civil war comes, [coup] conspiracy as such has failed."<sup>12</sup>



*Picture: Tanks positioned on the Bosphorus Bridge, where soldiers shot civilian protesters.*

It has become increasingly apparent in the fifteen years after the Cold War that in many places, coups will no longer succeed if carried out in the old fashion. For instance, in the 'February 28th coup process' in 1997, the Turkish military decided not to carry out a classical coup to heed to the US Administration's position<sup>13</sup> and the pluralized domestic media environment.<sup>14</sup> Instead, it chose to transparently carry out an unconventional coup that stretched over a process, mobilized several civilian sectors against the government and finally forced it to resign.<sup>15</sup>

In 2007, on the contrary, when the tenure of the incumbent and fiercely secularist President Ahmed Necdet Sezer was up, the new president had to be chosen by the Parliament. Given the AK Party's supremacy in the parliament, it became clear that AK Party's candidate Abdullah Gül, whose wife wore the Islamic headscarf, was poised to succeed Sezer as the new President. Concerned about Gül's wife's headscarf and seeing him as not being genuinely and adequately secular, the military issued a stern and threatening electronic memorandum to foil Abdullah Gül's presidency. In the process, the military tried to mobilize the anti-government segment of society against the prospect of a Gül presidency through 'Republican meetings'. The



civilian government's bold rejection of this stance the next day by setting a date for a snap election and calling for a referendum to empower people to choose the next president rendered this e-memorandum null and void. In brief, the Turkish military broadcast of an electronic memorandum in 2007 to threaten a civilian government immediately exposed the military's anti-democratic attitude to the people.

In Pakistan and Egypt too, armed forces left aside their old coup playbook, and found and adopted new ways of intervening in politics and cornering politicians rather than blunt, old-style hard coups.<sup>16</sup> Several people, including the author of this study, had thought that it has become impossible to stage any type of coup under Turkey's current structural conditions, yet alone a classical coup of a bygone era. A retired Force Commander had told the author in an interview that 'it was easy to mount coups during the Cold War. There were only a few items to review in the 'coup-checklist' before attempting one. Now there are tens of items to go over before leaving the barracks for a coup. Besides, the entire Western emphasis is on civilians and civil-society organizations now. In the past, military officers were on the forefront of coup action but now civilians must come to the first row of the attack with the officers being only in the third or fourth row at best'.<sup>17</sup> Other senior generals interviewed in the course of this research spoke along the same lines, it's now not only impossible to mount a coup in Turkey, but also unwise, because it was very difficult and dangerous for the army to rule a country like Turkey today without making a mockery of itself.<sup>18</sup> Even older coup plotters thought that it was no longer possible to carry out a coup in Turkey.<sup>19</sup> The botched July 15th coup attempt both confirmed and belied these predictions and showed how far the threat from Gülenists in the military had been underestimated.

### **Intelligence as the Key Factor**

The coup plotters seem to have believed that the coup would be complete by early morning through a classical coup-style quick and forceful intervention. This was why the prospective Gülenist junta called their coup operation 'Operation Thunderbolt'.<sup>20</sup> They failed to coordinate it properly among themselves because an intelligence tip-off from MİT (Turkish Intelligence) derailed it.<sup>21</sup> It would be naïve to assume that having chosen to continue the conspiracy even after being exposed, that they could not have predicted that their attempt would cost so much blood. The fact that they still went on and killed hundreds of resisting citizens indicates that they were ready to replicate the Egyptian mass-killing scene. In other words, they must have thought that "coup attempts generally transpire very quickly and, with a few noteworthy exceptions, are over before civilians can mobilize in opposition."<sup>22</sup> However, once the coup plot was exposed, those opposing the coup had the time, courage, and tools at their disposal to mobilize in opposition to the coup and resist it.

***The coup plotters seem to have believed that the coup would be complete by early morning through a classical coup-style quick and forceful intervention. This was why the prospective Gülenist junta called their coup operation 'Operation Thunderbolt'***

Only coup plotters, acting outside the chain of command, could initiate such a 'ardent' coup under these new circumstances. What doomed this classical coup attempt was Turkish intelligence picking up on the conspiracy, which many early commentators failed to mention as the key factor.<sup>23</sup> Though it is unclear how the various intelligence services (in the army, police, and MİT) remained unaware of the conspiracy until relatively late,



their belated success disrupted the plot. In doing so, it allowed for the PM to name the 'events' a coup attempt, thus paving the way for the formation of an anti-coup bloc. From then on, the media, the people, President Erdoğan, the police, and anti-coup officers could all play their parts in repulsing the coup attempt.



Picture: Turkey's Tiananmen moment. A civilian lays down in front of a tank at the gate of Istanbul Atatürk Airport.

Barring the intelligence tip-off, it may well have been too late for sufficient numbers of to confront the coup by 7-8 am. That being said, the magnitude of threat the coup attempt posed to Turkish democracy can be gleaned from the charts below, which show the staggering number of officers, both generals/admirals and lower ranks, who are either in custody or arrested:

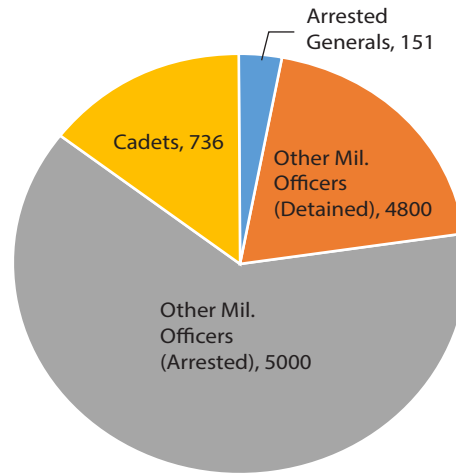


Chart II:<sup>25</sup>

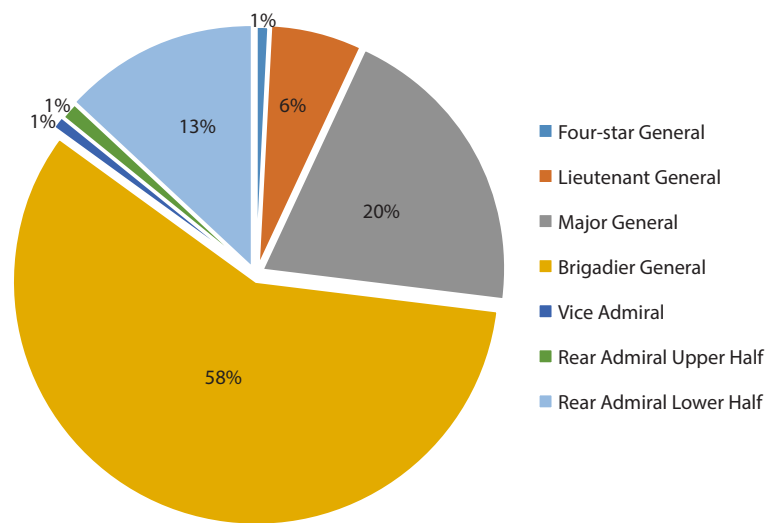


Chart III:<sup>26</sup>

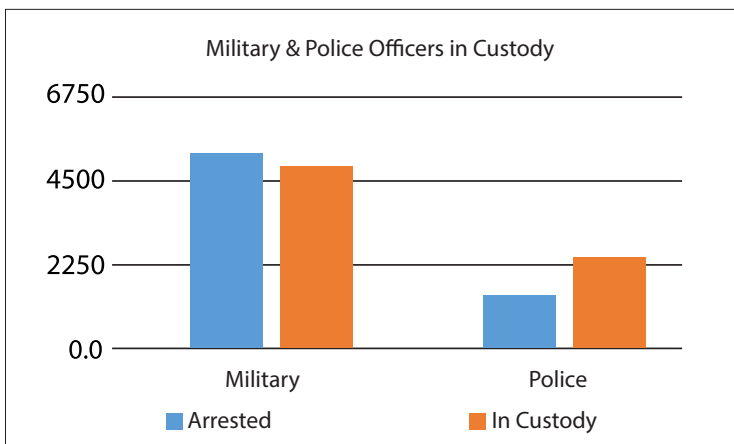


Chart I:<sup>24</sup>

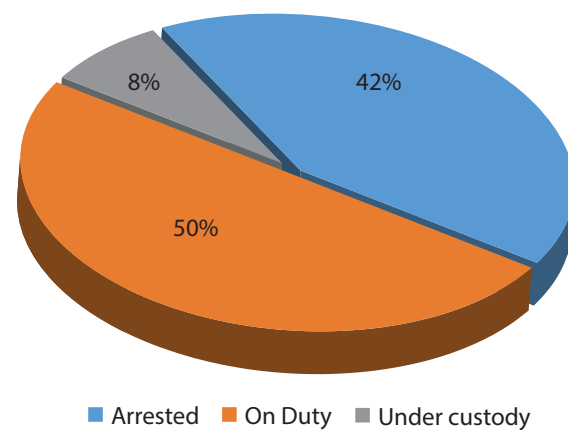


Chart IV:<sup>27</sup> Proportion of Arrested & Detained Generals/Admirals to overall number in the TAF





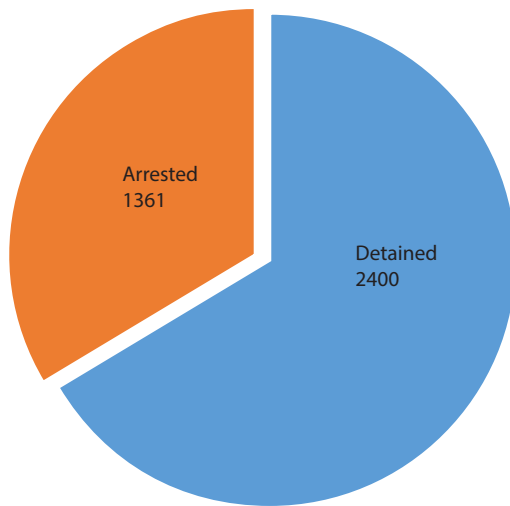


Chart V:<sup>28</sup> **Number of Police Officers Arrested and in Custody**

The approach, which emphasizes the importance of social media and plurality in traditional media outlets, also raises valid points about how the coup attempt was repelled. After all, even if intelligence picked up on the coup conspiracy but there was no TV channel other than TRT—which at one point during the coup attempt was seized by the junta—for politicians and opposing army generals to talk to, and social media did not yet exist, there would have been no chance for the people to learn about the coup on time to pour out onto the streets. In that case ‘an iPhone would have not been able to defeat the tanks’<sup>29</sup> either. If we were living in the 1960s or even the 80s, people and politicians would have lacked the mighty instrument of ‘new media’. Even if intelligence had had advance knowledge of coup conspiracies back then, the media environment would have made it impossible for politicians and civilians to put up an effective resistance to coup attempts. From the 1950s onwards, radio was the most common and convenient means of communication in Turkey, and ‘a coup d’état meant taking over control of the radio station and reading the coup memorandum’.<sup>30</sup> If it is correct that ‘getting other officers to believe that your coup attempt will be successful is key to coup success’<sup>31</sup>, then the radio provided the prime instrument to ensure

that this happened. In the case of the July 15th coup, if we were not living in the age of new media and people did not support the government, the intelligence picking up on the coup attempt would have made little difference. Under those circumstances, with the display of sheer force the military junta could still create an ‘aura of inevitability’ for and ‘bandwagon effect’ on the rest of the military for a successful coup.<sup>32</sup> A quick review of past coups will show how important this new media environment was after the intelligence services had picked up on the coup attempt.



Picture: President Erdoğan connects via FaceTime to CNN Türk on the night of the coup attempt.

### Media Environment and Previous Coups

It was enough for the coup plotters in 1960 to send a captain with two foot soldiers to the radio station in Ankara and tell the few dozen soldiers on duty there that they were taking over the radio. That was all it took to acquire control of the broadcasting media throughout the country.<sup>33</sup> When Colonel Aydemir failed twice to stage counter-coup attempts in 1962 and 1963, the sole reason for his failure in his second attempt was his inability to control the radio. He said in his memoirs that “I then understood how powerful a weapon the radio was on its own. It was the sole reason for our defeat.”<sup>34</sup> The media environment remained unchanged up to the time of the 1980 coup. Although the TV entered some houses, its penetration into Turkish households remained restricted, and the only TV channel available was the state channel, TRT. This prevented people from getting



an alternative story about the events as they had to receive the 'reality' that was given to them by TRT. The lack of private TV channels helped maintain unequal relations between soldiers and politicians and sustained their uneven access to this key tool. However, it all started to change under President Özal in the early years of the 1990s. Öncü had pointed out in 1994 that

***If it is correct that 'getting other officers to believe that your coup attempt will be successful is key to coup success', then the radio provided the prime instrument to ensure that this happened.***

*"In the context of the Middle East, Turkey is the first country...to reconcile itself to private broadcasting—via satellite from Europe. "Homegrown" commercial channels, beamed into Turkish markets via satellite, have managed to evade European regulations over content of broadcasting... In barely three years, Turkey has moved from a scarcity of images directly controlled by the state, to an abundance of them, fueled by the competition among increasing numbers of commercial channels. ... In a matter of three years, the symbolic landscape of commercial television has emerged as a major arena of cultural politics in Turkey."<sup>35</sup>*

It was partly for this reason that in 1997 the military junta a non-conventional coup used the willing subservience of many TV channels, labor unions, some politicians, and media groups, to put debilitating pressure on the Refah-Yol government in 1997, the coalition government of Refah (Welfare Party) and Doğru-Yol (True Path Party) founded in 1996.<sup>36</sup> The drastic change in the media environment, and how that could prove to be an influence on coups was nicely sketched in a skit, entitled *Olacak O Kadar*, on one of the new private TV stations. In the show, shortly

after Turkish generals take over and appear on TV to announce the coup, commercial breaks interrupt the leading General so often that he eventually cannot stand it, becomes exasperated, and leaves the scene in frustration, saying that 'they changed their mind; they are not taking over; they became sick of these commercial breaks; it has become very difficult to take over...'<sup>37</sup> The July 15th military junta did not underestimate the nature, quality, and power of Turkey's new media environment, because if they had started the coup attempt at 3 am, they probably could have taken control of vast majority of the Turkish media. However, once their plans were disrupted by intelligence forces, they then had little chance to "convince military actors that the success of the coup had the support of almost everybody in the military and that any possible resistance was minor,"<sup>38</sup> a factor which is crucial for coup success. This explains why they first frantically raided TRT, the public channel, then CNNTürk, a private channel. When that too failed, they attacked the TURKSAT compound, which Turkey's television channels depend on for satellite broadcasting, in an attempt to take out the entire satellite network.

***They first frantically raided TRT, the public channel, then CNNTürk, a private channel. When that too failed, they attacked the TURKSAT compound, which Turkey's television channels depend on for satellite broadcasting, in an attempt to take out the entire satellite network.***

#### **Deliberate Timing**

The Gulenist coup plotters seem to have known fully well that date (month, day, and hour) is crucial to success in coup attempts as well. To recall an earlier example, the best date for their planned coup also occupied the minds of the mid-ranking coup plotting officers during May 27th (1960) coup, carried out by Brigadiers and Lt. Generals. Despite



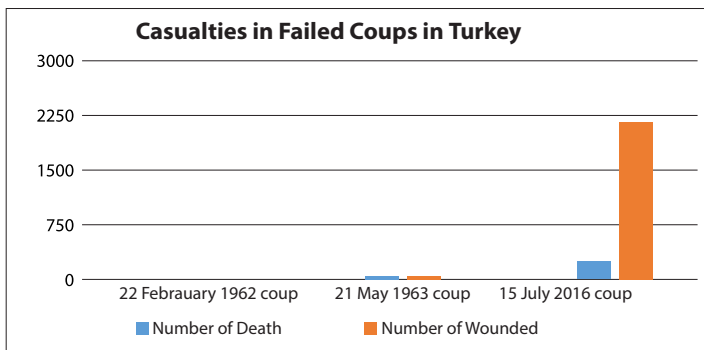
having almost been exposed only 2 years earlier in 1958, they continued to plot but with more circumspection.<sup>39</sup> When the time neared, they decided that they could not start it on 20 May 1960, when Indian Prime Minister Nehru was in town. They thought it did not make sense to start it when PM Menderes was on a visit to Athens on May 26th either, because in that case Menderes could have installed an alternative government outside Turkey and called for external assistance to help him reinstate his rule. The coup plotters therefore found themselves initially obliged to stage it between May 20th and May 26th when Menderes was in Turkey.<sup>40</sup> However, they later changed their plans again to stage it on May 27th. A similar thought process followed during the September 12th 1980 coup. The generals decided to intervene in July of that year and had prepared a coup operation, but domestic circumstances were not yet ripe. This was because when there was an unexpected show of confidence on PM Demirel in the Parliament in July, and the General Staff did not want to appear as stooges of the secularist opposition RPP (Republican People's Party) as had already been alleged by Demirel. The upcoming Supreme Military Council complicated matters as well.<sup>41</sup> Chief of General Staff Evren and his colleagues had contacted commanders stationed in Martial Law cities to weigh up the likelihood of resistance and asked them to make sure that people did not resist.<sup>42</sup>

***Despite the bloodshed and violence after the 1960 and 1980 coups d'état, these coup plotters were most hesitant to resort to armed force to achieve their purposes. The coup plotters of 1960 wanted to make sure that they did not cause a fratricidal conflict, so they avoided spilling any blood during the coup. Entering an armed conflict would have been a last resort***

Despite the bloodshed and violence after the 1960 and 1980 coups d'état, these coup plot-

ters were most hesitant to resort to armed force to achieve their purposes. The coup plotters of 1960 wanted to make sure that they did not cause a fratricidal conflict, so they avoided spilling any blood during the coup. Entering an armed conflict would have been a last resort.<sup>43</sup> In the 1980 military coup attempt—named 'Operation Flag'—all participants were ordered "to be careful not to spill blood unless they really had to. When obliged however, events shall be suppressed with force and resolution in the most violent manner. Precautions will be taken to prevent people's gathering and pro-government cheers."<sup>44</sup> We need to keep in mind though that neither 1960 nor 1980 coup plotters needed to execute this order for lack of resistance.<sup>45</sup> The fact that both coups, being classical coups, began and finished in a couple of hours without any visible resistance definitely reduced the chances of fighting, hence resulting in very few casualties.<sup>46</sup> The lack of any resistance boosted the morale of the junta members in 1960 as well, making them feel 'righteous' about their selected course of action.<sup>47</sup> The July 15th coup attempt, however, deviates from anything previously seen. The fact that the July 15th military junta disobeyed the General Staff orders<sup>48</sup> to cease all movements (flights, tanks, troops, and trucks) indicates that they may have been zealous 'crusaders' willing even to risk civil war in order to take over the country. Unlike the 1960 junta, they must have considered postponement impossible. This confirms the idea that when junior officers stage a coup, you never know what they will, and can do.<sup>49</sup> The high number of civilian, military, and police fatalities compared to previous failed coups in Turkey show how reckless and callous these coup plotters were. This fact is attested by the Whatsapp conversation between the plotters during their attempt, which shows that orders were given several times to fire on civilians.<sup>50</sup>





ChartVI:

### Against the People, Countered by the People

Military officers plotting a coup are usually aware that coups carried out without clear narrative often find themselves lacking 'legitimacy' in the wider society. Several of the mid-ranking officers behind the 1960 coup, including its leader General Gürsel, wanted to wait for the right time at which people would consider a coup legitimate even before military intervention came. They thought they should attempt the coup either when disruptive events follow new elections or political developments lead to severe chaos.<sup>51</sup> In fact, they did not just wait for favorable circumstances to emerge out of thin air. Several generals and officers visited the War College in Ankara and agitated the cadets; İsmet İnönü, chairman of the secularist Republican People Party (CHP), sent signals of support, and signaled that their coup would have legitimacy if they intervened at the right time, and so coup plotters distributed weapons to cadets for them to take part in the action.<sup>52</sup> It was the prevailing chaos all over the country that led people to largely welcome the 1980 coup with open arms in many places. The pre-coup disorder provided the necessary context for another coup. In 1997, several civil society organizations and political parties, first and foremost the CHP, clearly supported the coup process. In fact, their cooperation with the military was a sine qua non for the coup to be carried out—not as a classical coup, but as a new type, a coup carried out by a network of secularist allies.<sup>53</sup> The July 15th coup perpetrators must have

thought that domestic, regional, and global circumstances—with protracted war in Syria, the resurgence of the fight against the PKK after a years-long peace process, a rising number of ISIS terrorist attacks in Turkey, and several foreign policy issues that have distanced Turkey from the EU and the U.S.—would have bestowed legitimacy on the coup. However, they themselves did not seem to have actively tried to create pre-coup mayhem in cities and contacted political organizations to elicit promises of support in advance. Even if they did, they obviously failed, as no political party supported the coup attempt as it was unfolding.<sup>54</sup> This was indeed the first time in Turkish history that the people actively resisted a coup attempt in Turkey.

***The high number of civilian, military, and police fatalities compared to previous failed coups in Turkey show how reckless and callous these coup plotters were. This fact is attested by the Whatsapp conversation between the plotters during their attempt***

Once the neatly planned coup was disrupted, unacceptability of a coup and new media environment factored in. The raid on TRT and the broadcasting of the pirate coup memorandum was therefore of little importance when other TV channels took an anti-coup stance, immediately reaching out to the Prime Minister and broadcasting his announcement that there was a coup attempt in violation of the command chain. Then they reached out to the President, who called on people to come onto the streets to oppose the coup. While the Diyanet (the Religious Directorate) had willingly collaborated or did not have the wherewithal to resist the junta in any of the previous coups, this time the Diyanet resisted the coup, making use of all its moral assets by, for instance, having special prayers recited from mosques to inform



the citizenry of an existential attack against Turkey. The entire civilian resistance bloc was forged immediately, illustrating a case of “nonstate organizations’ “talking back” to resist a coup.<sup>55</sup>



*Picture: People on top of a tank resisting the coup attempt.*

A striking feature of the July 15th coup attempt was the absence of any attempt to broadcast an air of neutrality. While the military junta named itself ‘National Unity Committee’ after the coup in 1960 and legitimized itself on the theme of ‘unity’ against communism, the 1980 military government named itself ‘National Security Council’ and justified its existence with recourse to the need for security and order after years of chaos and disorder prior to the coup. In contrast, the name the 15th July military junta picked for itself, ‘The Peace-at-Home Council’, as well as the content of its coup memorandum revealed that this junta did not even care to pretend to act on behalf of the whole nation.. It rather saw the people in black and white terms. In this sense, the July 15th coup attempt diverges from the 1960 and 1980 coup attempts but maintains the spirit of the 1997 coup attempt though it is a more radical version. The 1960 coup memorandum read on the radio by Colonel Türkeş explicitly said that “this coup attempt is not against any party or personality”.<sup>56</sup> This was not a momentary attitude; some members of the 1960 junta continued to think after the coup that it was important to at least portray their action as not partic-

ularly directed against the Democrat Party, Menderes’ personality or the pious segment of the society. Not all members were in favor of turning over the government to İsmet İnönü either; there was no agreement among the junta that the coup was done for the sake of RPP’s sake either.<sup>57</sup> It was indeed true that the May 27th 1960 coup was a ‘veto coup’; “the ouster of the Menderes government in Turkey in 1960, for instance, was an effort to curtail the participation in politics of leaders supported by the more traditional and conservative rural masses.”<sup>58</sup> It was only after an internal battle inside the junta and formation of a counter-coup movement that those among the junta who wanted Menderes as their target won over the rest and had him hanged because they feared that if he survived, his lasting strong appeal to the conservative masses could have stirred up trouble on the streets.<sup>59</sup>

While the coup indicted a ‘mentality’ and its representatives,<sup>60</sup> naturally felt closer to the CHP and its historic leader İsmet İnönü,<sup>61</sup> some of the initial planners of the coup knew that ‘it was not possible to govern a country by the support of half of the people as against the other opposing half... Once the military took the matter into its own hands, its interlocutor was not political parties but the entire nation.’<sup>62</sup> Likewise, ‘the most significant aspect of the [1980] takeover was its lack of identification with any specific civilian or bureaucratic group.’<sup>63</sup> According to retired General Yirmibeşoğlu, former Chief of the Turkish Armed Forces’ Special Forces and Secretary-General of the National Security Council from 1988 to 1990, this neutrality between all political parties was the image the 1980 coup makers wanted to give by closing down all political parties without exception.<sup>64</sup> Indeed, Chief of General Staff Kenan Evren lamented the fact that while 1960 coup d’état received support for the CHP against the Democrats, they could not do the same because for them all political parties without





any exception were at the root of the problem.<sup>65</sup>

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The February 28th coup, on the other hand, was widely perceived as undermining a particular segment of society. It is for this reason that it left such a bitter taste and sow so deep divisions within the armed forces and undermined people’s confidence in state, politics, and the army.<sup>66</sup> As a high-ranking general told the author, the ‘1997 coupists’ thought that the entire officer corps was as atheistic as they were. Many lower ranking officers, he added, did not understand what was going on and why their senior generals were behaving in this way against Muslims, but they were unable to do anything because of the chain of command. He added that large number of officers remained resentful, however.<sup>67</sup>

When comparing the July 15th coup memorandum which was read out on TRT to the 1960/1980 coup memurendumsm, we see that neither of the latter coups indicted the incumbent government with ‘treason’. The July 15th junta, however, accused not only the President and the government but also

“all persons and institutions related to the government” of treason.<sup>68</sup> This shows that ‘self-defined’ Muslim Gülenist officers were targeting not only the incumbent government, which has clear roots in political Islam, but also large groups of people affiliated with it in some way. Their short term/immediate target would likely be a massive crackdown on conservative groups. Although the coup memorandum read out on TRT echoed ‘neo-nationalist’ sensitivities in an attempt to garner a cover of legitimacy, in fact the coup attempt had a clear political, social, economic and religious target.

Despite what some uninformed observers would like us to believe, this coup attempt may not muster as much support either from the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) or from the people as the February 28th coup did.<sup>69</sup> The ‘Gülenist-initiated’ label has already delegitimized the coup attempt in the eyes of Turkish society. While senior generals succeeding the February 28th junta took ownership of the coup process, intensified it and even said that it ‘would last for a thousand years if necessary’, the Gülenist identity of this junta should make it far easier for the TAF to disown this attempt, as is already happening.<sup>70</sup> Risking some level of speculation here, a counter-coup attempt could have been expected if the July 15th coup attempt was successful. In that scenario, the rest of the armed forces could have realized that the coup was initiated and carried out by a narrow clique of officers in the service of partisan interests alien to the ‘esprit de corps’ in the army and likely not shared by the TAF at large. This brings us to the question of whether the Turkish military has become fractured after the coup attempt.

### **The Useful Myth of the Fractured Military**

Moreover, approaching the claim of a ‘fractured/divided military’ from a more nuanced historical perspective may tell us that the TAF have always been divided. The idea of the TAF,



or almost any military for that matter, being absolutely unified is a myth. The first layer of usual division lies between the three services of land, air, and navy in terms of unequal resources allocated and 'political power' exercised. For instance, when one looks at military coups d'état attempts in Turkey and Pakistan, they rarely originate in the Air Force. It is the land forces that usually carry out a coup attempt. The influence of navy or Air Forces on the result of a coup d'état remain minimal and incidental. Indeed, the fact that the July 15th coup plotters had many members within the Air Forces and Navy but lacked as much and wide support from the Land forces directly reduced their chances. This automatically increased the number of 'strategic observers', who could go either way depending on the outcome of the attempt. It also happens that being more in number and resources required for a coup d'état land forces would have resented a coup initiated by 'snobbish' Air Forces.

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Besides, the Turkish military accommodates these tacit divisions and has always functioned in full cognizance of them, not in denial of their existence. The TAF was very divided in the 1940s, when there were juntas formed within the military against İnönü's rule.<sup>71</sup> It was divided in the 1950s, when a rift developed and widened over time between the higher echelons and mid-ranks over the support for the Democrat Party, a centre right party that ruled the country between 1950-1960 after Turkey adopted a multi-party political system. The junior ranks, who had

been trained in and by the United States in most modern weapons and tactics, become alienated from the senior generals not only because they thought they were now trained in the most modern military tactics and strategy but also because senior generals blocked their upward mobility through the military hierarchy. These divisions continued into the 1960s and were silenced only by bouts of conflict with Greece on the issue of Cyprus. Even then the military dodged two counter-coup attempts and a major post-1960 coup purge from the army, all of which left deep scars. The serious anti-American movement in Turkey among the leftist-radicals in the 1960s and 70s found shocking levels of support within the TAF. A memo sent by the U.S. Consulate in Istanbul to the Secretary of State in Washington in 1967 indicated that the Consulate was aware of the leftist sympathies within the armed forces: "Turkish army officers allowed themselves be carried on the shoulders of demonstrators against the allied fleet. No need to point out the implications."<sup>72</sup> Holmes suspected that "opposition to the Sixth Fleet visits had spread from youth activists to the upper echelons of the Turkish Navy"<sup>73</sup> as well as the Air Force. The Air Force Command and the Navy were full of officers who thought that the 'noble' objectives of the May 27th, 1960 'revolution' remained unfulfilled.<sup>74</sup> Even later there is hardly a decade in which one can point to a firmly unified Turkish military. We have already mentioned the divisions caused by the February 28 coup within the army. The last decade has also witnessed deep rifts within the military, as many senior generals wanted to take a tougher stance toward the AK Party government while others resisted the pressure. That is to say, when the chain of command is firmly adhered to and the high command keeps good abreast of what goes on down the officer corps, mild divisions have been and can be covered.



### The External Dimension

Coup plotters consider both the internal and external situation at their planning stages. Because a coup is a risky venture in which ‘modern guillotines’ may await failed putschists, they usually take both into account before moving into action. The four successful coups d’état in Turkey’s past took into account the likelihood of both domestic resistance and external support. The United States has been the most significant external political actor to consider when juntas set out to dismiss governments. Since this became a standard pattern in the early Cold War, the U.S. has refined a particular policy of granting or refusing recognition to post-coup military governments. The now long-standing U.S. policy of recognition toward coups rests on four criteria:

- 1) Whether coup plotters have complete control over the domestic situation
- 2) Whether the coup is bloodless
- 3) Whether they promise to honor their international obligations
- 4) Whether the coup plotters are ‘known to the Embassy’ (which hosts the CIA, military intelligence, and military attachés): i.e., if they are pro-West or not.<sup>75</sup>

These conditions of recognition are not written in stone and, as often happened, the U.S. has sometimes nonetheless recognized post-coup military governments despite large-scale bloodshed, as in Turkey 1980, or in Egypt in 2013.

Turkey’s coup makers invariably heeded the third and fourth of these criteria even before they started the coup. To start with, the mid-ranking coup plotters in 1960 were very concerned about the bilateral US-Turkey agreement signed after the fall of the pro-Western Iraqi regime in 1958 and whether this agreement entailed a U.S. promise to come to Menderes’ aid in case of domestic trouble. They worried that their intervention

could trigger an American intervention just as it had in Lebanon in 1956, when Lebanese President Camille Chamoun invited American soldiers in the face of perceived threat from nationalist and Nasserite winds in the region and the Americans used Incirlik to come to Chamoun’s help without even notifying the Turkish military authorities.<sup>76</sup> Their worries proved unnecessary, because when the coup took place nonetheless the U.S. assessed that these mid-ranking putschists too were secular and Kemalist: they may have been less pro-Western but they were definitely not pro-Soviet either. This meant that although they were junior and mid-ranking generals, the 1960 coup plotters were very well known to U.S. agencies. Increasing levels of American economic and military assistance, Turkish participation in the Korean war, and the opening of American military schools to increasing number of Turkish officers meant that these officers were not unknown figures to the Americans. The fact that the coup did not immediately throw Turkey into chaos and was pulled off without bloodshed also helped.

***Although the coup memorandum read out on TRT echoed ‘neo-nationalist’ sensitivities in an attempt to garner a cover of legitimacy, with the coup attempt had a clear political, social, economic and religious target.***

In their first coup memorandum the plotters immediately signaled to the West that they were ready to honor their international obligations. They specifically stressed their loyalty to CENTO—the Central Treaty Organization, called the Baghdad Pact until a nationalist coup replaced the pro-Western regime in 1958—and NATO. In the aftermath of the coup, American assistance helped the post-coup military government to finalize a massive purge of 5,000 ‘unreliable’ officers and 235 generals from the Turkish armed forces.



The U.S. bankrolled the highly controversial and divisive purge by lending the government \$10 million. The U.S. also clearly turned a blind eye to the 1971 coup by memorandum as the CIA fully knew about the anti-left coup in advance but did nothing to stop it.<sup>77</sup> The 1980 coup makers did not even need to do as much to secure American support. The Turkish military had already 'proven' itself by then as 'efficient' deponers of governments without causing much blood or chaos in the streets, who would then speedily transfer power to 'trusted' civilians without creating any concern abroad. A hierarchical coup did not leave much to be worried about either, because there was no precedent in Turkey in which a coup from within the chain of command had failed, or was even resisted. Besides, the top generals had already received necessary signals of support from top US officials in advance.

In 1997, a classical coup appeared unlikely to gain the support of the U.S. Clinton Administration, which had learnt bitter lessons from its support for the bloody Algerian coup and thought it could not tolerate another one, much less one in Turkey, Being a NATO ally, the Clinton Admin showcased as model democratic Muslim country to the Middle East and post-Soviet space. When the junta waged an entirely different and pioneering type of coup attempt, forming a network of allies to pressure and threaten the Refah-Yol government to resign, the US supported the process. After Algeria, this was the second time in recent years when a U.S. administration was caught between two principles in clear conflict, namely democracy and secularism.<sup>78</sup> It would not be the last, as the Egyptian coup of 2013 amply demonstrated. For the sake of 'secular democracy', the Clinton administration supported the February 28th coup process in Turkey on the understanding that the operation would not begin to 'look like' a classical coup and remained theoretically constitutional.

This Gülenist junta seems to have followed in the past coup plotters' wake. In their own 'Peace at Home Council' memorandum, they said that 'all international agreements and obligations will be kept. We hope that we will have good relations with all countries.' Their meaning was clear: Turkey would remain in NATO and would cooperate with the West in external relations. In other words, no shift of axis loomed if the coup succeeded. There is also little doubt that coup makers were known to the U.S. Given the extent of US involvement with the Turkish armed forces and the participation of the Commander of the İncirlik Base, which has been a lynchpin of the Turkish-American bilateral relationship since the early 1950s,<sup>79</sup> it is highly likely that some U.S. agencies (army intelligence and the CIA probably not only knew the coup plotters, their political ideas and where their loyalty laid, however it maybe have also known of the coup plan. Here it must be kept in mind that the U.S. government is not a single entity; one American agency may know about coup plans somewhere and bask in the glow of its success afterwards without having shared its advance knowledge with other state institutions. American history shows us several examples of coups where the CIA and Pentagon rejoice in a coup while the State Department has been kept in the dark, leading the three institutions to openly clash.<sup>80</sup> Both the CIA and Army Intelligence must be true suspects in the case of the July 15th coup attempt. With the extent of penetration they have within the Turkish armed forces through NATO programs and education and training opportunities, it is highly unlikely that these two agencies would not have had prior knowledge of the coup.

The July 15th coup plotters also relied on the instability in the European Union in terms of its internal coherence, problems with economic and political power projection, and its ethical sway. More importantly, it is unlikely that Obama would take radical steps to initi-



ate sanctions on Turkey in the case of a coup in his final five months in the White House. More importantly, it is unlikely that Obama would take radical steps to start sanctions on Turkey in the case of a coup in his final five months in the White House. The immediate words Secretary of State Kerry used in reaction to the news of the coup were instructive. He hoped that 'stability and peace' would not be hurt.<sup>81</sup> After Kerry and President Obama spoke, and as several people started to say that the coup was failing, the message of support for the government came as late as 2:02 am, "The president and secretary agreed that all parties in Turkey should support the democratically-elected government of Turkey, show restraint, and avoid any violence or bloodshed."<sup>82</sup> This statement was too little too late. Coup d'état attempts are most fragile in their early moments. An ambivalent American message at a time when a democratically-elected government was still battling a vicious coup attempt almost felt like support for the coup plotters. What needed was a straight, blunt message that 'a coup d'état is unacceptable,' to damage the coup plotters' morale. Given these thoughts, it is possible to say that although this coup would have certainly caused bloodshed even if it was carried out at 3 am as planned originally, it is highly doubtful whether the U.S. would have refused recognition.<sup>83</sup> The substance and sheer number of comments, analyses, and immediate briefs by many 'tank liberals'<sup>84</sup> on the failed July 15th coup attempt in the West indicate clearly that if the coup had succeeded, it would have been immediately celebrated, at least in some influential quarters.





## Recommendations

### Short-Term

The government must know that even though this is a classical coup, it is undertaken by a network. At long last, this may expose the Gülenist network, which has been a designated terrorist organization in Turkey since 2014, and make it most vulnerable to a counter-attack. This is the first time in three years the government has rare policy window to deconstruct the whole of this network in its entirety instead of targeting one node of the network at a time, which has, as can be expected, proven unsatisfactory. While doing this, the government should be transparent and provide evidence and a rationale for its actions to its domestic and foreign audience.

The fact that the Turkish Military Academy in Ankara, Air Force Academy as well as Kuleli Military High school in Istanbul were involved in the coup attempt<sup>85</sup> must be taken very seriously. To recall, the Military Academy in Ankara was very instrumental in the 1960 coup's success. It was heavily politicized prior to the date of the coup, long before the school marched in the streets to protest the DP government.<sup>86</sup> It became even more politicized after the coup despite the coup's success, even scaring the post-coup military administration of the school.<sup>87</sup> While cadets at the Military Academy took part in the 1960 coup and played a very critical role, nobody really paid attention to cadets at the Navy schools that year, but the latter too were caught up in the coup zeal and armed themselves as well.

Addressing the post-coup environment in all these schools (not only in Ankara and Istanbul or the Military Academy) is now key to 'sanitizing' and rehabilitating the Turkish armed forces in the long term, especially if it should be remembered that the military interventionist mentality regarding domestic politics spreads through military schools.

Ever-Since the coup attempt AK party have been signaling that they will work to change military school culture.<sup>88</sup> The government can either restructure these schools in terms of curriculum, cadet admittance or student acceptance procedures, and change the duration of education, or choose to shut them down temporarily for a complete overhaul. The government successfully followed latter option with the Turkish National Police Academy after detecting that the mentality that governed police schools, their staff, acceptance procedures, and quality and duration of education had to be changed.<sup>89</sup>

The duration of training and education in new police-training centers has been shortened, the representation of women inside the Turkish police is increased, the Gülenist staff have been purged, and the acceptance age and rules have also been changed. Most importantly, however, the mentality about training given to future police officers was changed and serious efforts are underway to make the Turkish police more representative of the people.<sup>90</sup> Whether it is feasible to follow a similar path remains doubtful. The Turkish armed forces has many more and variegated military schools than the Turkish police. Resistance from inside the military can also be expected. A complete overhaul of these military academies may prove harder than the police. This requires a more sophisticated approach. If a broad consensus can be forged behind it, this would be very useful. These will have to be done as there are eminent threats in Turkey's backyard and at home, which will only aggravate the challenge at hand. This will require many new men to fill the great void that will open up after such a move.

On a related note, with the coup attempt repelled, the government must do some thinking on 'coup-proofing'. As part of long-term planning for coup-proofing, an organizational restructuring of the military barracks,



garrisons and commands in and around Istanbul and Ankara must be in order for the government, as PM Yildırım has also hinted since the foiled coup attempt.<sup>91</sup> It must be kept in mind that although there were many generals involved and now arrested in association with the July 15th coup attempt, it was not only the higher-ranking officers that allowed them to attempt a coup d'état in Ankara and Istanbul. In the past, the proximity of army barracks to the heart of Turkey's biggest urban centers allowed even mid-ranking officers to send tanks out into the streets, occupy bridges and other key places within a few hours.

When the army was bitterly divided after 1960 coup, military juntas were a heartbeat away from taking over the entire state machinery twice—once on February 22, 1962, and once on May 21, 1963—with the help of these barracks and military academies/schools. What if the Turkish Military Academy, where agitated students marched on the streets to deliver the final blow to the Menderes government and helped prepare the environment for the coup, and which had become the operational headquarters of both botched coups in 1962 and 1963, had not been located in Ankara but a place some hours away? This could have made a huge difference in terms of the pressure it would exert on the military. It could have also aggravated coordination problems that are always there to tackle for the coupists. One reason a former Pakistani foreign minister offered for lack of coups attempts started by lower ranks in violations of command-chain in Pakistan is that cantonments are so dispersed in Pakistan that such a mutiny will be suppressed even before coupists reach Islamabad.<sup>92</sup> Likewise, removing armored corps from the capital and Istanbul would make things a lot harder for coup plotters since 'no tank no coup.' In fact, the relocation of military barracks from metropolitan cities such as Istanbul and the capital Ankara has been intermittent-

ly on the government's agenda since 2005<sup>93</sup> shows the level of negligence displayed on this matter. Notwithstanding its renewed urgency though, even if one puts aside likely bureaucratic and political debates, building new army facilities outside cities to relocate existing ones will take some time and require sound military planning.

It is largely true that the Turkish military has drawn their members from all geographic regions and socio-economic backgrounds for decades. In doing so, however, the armed forces relied on its capability to socialize its cadets into prevailing western, modern, and secular norms of the military. As the cadets rose up in the military hierarchy, came into contact with Western counterparts more often, and worked in NATO headquarters or missions their mores had to change. In that sense, the Turkish military has been the major driver of Western modernization in Turkey. This was allowed by the fact that the military lives apart from society and can afford to remain alien to sociological changes. There is a stark contrast between the socialization practices of the armed forces and the police in that regard. The Police lives and works among the people and needs to reflect its values and lifestyle.

Now it is time to change the fact that while the military claims to be of the people it is distant from the people. Now it is perfect time to address this gap and a century-old rupture between the people and the army. The military must now come closer to society and allow its officers to reflect and represent the outlooks and values of society without viewing them as a threat. For this reason, the unacceptable Gülenist infiltration into the military should not be allowed to justify blocking the conservative-minded sections of society into military schools and military ladder. The government must ensure that the army represents the entire nation, accepts from all strata of the society, and broadens



its base. Allowing the painful ordeal of a coup attempt should not be a pretext to open a backdoor to old secularist reflexes.

### Long-Term

It has been claimed that a well-known social media account (Analizi Harbiyeli) was actually run by a general, now a coup suspect who could have taken the role of post-coup 'Martial Law Commander' in Kırşehir had the coup succeeded. If true, this should invite some serious thinking on the influence of the military, new media, and politics in Turkey. Are there other officers with social media accounts aiming to spread misinformation, agitate or disseminate hatred among the people on some of the most polarizing and sensitive issues, such as the Kurdish issue, Turkey's Syria policy or more narrowly domestic politics? Are these social media accounts held democratically accountable? Does anybody know who runs those accounts that exist? How many similar accounts are there? Did anybody follow the social media account used by a coup plotter? Should the armed forces be under scrutiny on this matter to see if any psychological operations are being carried out on social media, either directly or indirectly against the government?

It must be kept in mind that a coup d'état may not mark the end of interventionist activity, but may rather exacerbate it. This is why Aytekin has said that in the post-May 27th (1960) coup period, the military officers were all afflicted with 'the dangerous and contagious revolution [coup] disease'.<sup>94</sup> Interventionist activity was brewing inside the armed forces after the 1980 coup d'état as well. Although this has not been written about much, it has become clear that several mid-ranking officers thought after the initial years of the 1980 coup that the coup was an American-commissioned job to contain the left and promote 'political Islam' in Turkey. In the early 1990s a stream of 'neo-nationalist' thought developed in reaction and promot-

ed a 'Kuvay-ı Milliye' (National Forces) mentality—a grim reference to the post-World War I Turkey under foreign occupation as an invitation to fight a same siege decades later in today's Turkey. However, this belief was built upon the remnants of the idea that true Kemalist ideals of the 1960 'revolution' was hijacked by the coup plotters and therefore remained unsatisfied. 'The left in Turkey missed the chance to be 'national' because it had been under the control and influence of international socialist centers', so the hope was that now the left could be made a national movement.<sup>95</sup> The failure of two counter-coup attempts between 1960 and 1963, the preemptively-blocked left-oriented March 9, 1971 coup, and the 1980 coup, which many officers perceived as a heavy blow to the left while promoting Islamists, nurtured this feeling. An interview with a retired military source revealed that their 'rise' to critical positions within the armed forces had been closely watched by the U.S., which had urged their restraint by a counter-force. This neo-nationalist stream of thought had been blocked by the Ergenekon, Military Espionage, and Balyoz trials. However, a large number of memoirs by officers and generals jailed (and now released) in these cases reveal that a considerable number of officers still cling to these ideas and think, for instance, that there is no democracy in Turkey, and hence, it does not make sense to complain about military tutelage. The concept of 'military tutelage' itself is portrayed by many as a 'hideous tool' used to encircle the military, the last bastion of Kemalism in Turkey.<sup>96</sup>

The fact that almost all the Balyoz, Ergenekon and 'Military Espionage' convicts are now released and instead the Gülenist network is now under deep (and rightful) suspicion for having concocted the evidence against Kemalists in order to penetrate the state more deeply, things have and will continue to become more complicated. In simpler terms, the Balyoz, Ergenekon and Military



Espionage trials all put incredible pressure on the officer corps. Yet, as these political trials now stand as discredited, these officers feel that their claim that ‘the army was under asymmetrical attack’ has been confirmed by events and put them in a ‘righteous’ position. As a retired Brigadier General, who had been arrested during these political cases and recently got out of prison said to me, ‘this (2015) is a brewing period for these low and mid-ranking officers’ (though he added with no prevarication that coups are bad and to be avoided at all cost).<sup>97</sup> Add to these strains the restarting of hostilities with the PKK after much-touted ‘peace process’ with the group, an ordeal widely opposed but rarely voiced by the armed forces, and the very high number of military casualties since the restart of the PKK attacks.<sup>98</sup> Now, though it looks certain that the coup attempt was initiated and carried out largely by Gulenist officers, it is not yet fully known but remains possible that it rode on the crest of a ‘neo-nationalist movement’ within the officer corps. If correct, a detained officer’s testimony to the prosecutor after the failed coup may just show that some of these officers with their own ‘grievances’ unrelated to the Gulenists may have joined the coup without knowing exactly where it came from.<sup>99</sup> With the news that former Balyoz victims have now been reinstated to different positions within the Turkish armed forces<sup>100</sup>, the problem hereafter (with the purges and institutional reflexes and institutional psychological reverberations) is not a ‘fractured military’ but a ‘lack of balance between fractions within the military’. President Erdoğan and ministers in the government cabinet have given signs of their intention to ‘work on and restructure the armed forces’.<sup>101</sup> This makes a review of the internal-balance within the military a must for the long-term health of the Turkish armed forces.

It is commonly known that the U.S. relied on the Turkish armed forces as a bulwark, first

against communism and then against religious fundamentalism, for a long time. The only two exceptions have been the Democrat Party and AK Party eras, in which many officers believed that the U.S. had forsaken them for a newfound love-in with these Islamic-oriented governments for ulterior purposes. This tied the hands of the military vis-à-vis the AK Party government and increased the potential costs involved in trying to overthrow the government. Otherwise, as one retired general told me, the armed forces had definitely been planning something against the government around 2007 with their Republican meetings and the e-memorandum on the website of the Turkish General Staff against Abdullah Gül’s candidacy for presidential office. Their freedom of maneuver, however, was highly restricted because the Turkish economy was growing very well, which meant high approval ratings for the AK Party, and the U.S. stood firm behind the government. As explained previously, when the U.S. wanted the neo-nationalists, which it had considered a threat to the bilateral relationship in the long term, cleansed from the military, the Gülenists acted as their hit-man throughout the Balyoz, Ergenekon, and Military Espionage investigations. Which actor, as an alternative to the government, will the U.S. see as the ‘safe pillar’ of Turkish-American relationship now?<sup>102</sup> The questions to follow over the coming months are these: Can and will the U.S. mend ties with the secularist segment of the armed forces? Under what conditions can old wounds heal and mutual suspicions between the Turkish military and the U.S. be eliminated, and will they? If they do, what could that mean for the Turkish government?

Finally, the military as the epicenter and primary object of ‘democratic reform’ in Turkey will be back on the agenda after the failed coup attempt. ‘Civil-military reform’ made the headlines in Turkey from the time the AK Party government was formed to roughly





2010, when senior generals including the Chief of General Staff resigned from the military in protest. Thereafter, it was assumed that 'civilian supremacy' had been firmly established, with little prospect of a coup attempt. With this recent convulsion, however, military reform needs to come back onto the government's short and long-term agenda in a new form. The AK Party has addressed this issue largely through formalities, without appropriately targeting the essence of the matter through a long-term strategic restructuring and transformation plan for the army. This task, which may be far more difficult than it was a decade ago, will have to be carried out, again, while other equally urgent issues remain to be tackled. One may foresee that this will restrict the government's freedom in certain policy issues, such as the Kurdish issue in waiting or the ongoing war in Syria. It may be very difficult and risky to go back to talking to the PKK even if the government wanted to and the conditions (domestic and regional: that is, Syria) become ripe. A sudden policy reversal (again) may elicit reaction not just by the army but the police as well. A sudden policy swing from fighting the PKK militarily to returning to talks may be unwise under new circumstances. This may not go down well with the armed forces, especially in the short-term, as neo-nationalists may indeed run the show in the lower ranks, because as Rtd. Admiral Semih Çetin, who was also tried in the Balyoz trial and acquitted, pointed out, "it is not like pro-government generals and admirals are ready and waiting somewhere to be immediately appointed to the these ranks after the purging of Gülenist ones."<sup>103</sup> This unambiguously underlines the issue of 'imbalance among fractions inside the military', which requires immediate attention by the AK Party government.



## Endnotes

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- 4- Chief of General Staff Hulusi Akar confirmed in his reported testimony to the police confirmed this point. 'Chief of Staff Akar Confirms in Testimony Putschists Wanted him to Speak to Gülen', Daily Sabah
- 5- 12 March 1971 coup attempt was a military memorandum that unseated the democratically-elected government and in doing so, preempted an impending leftist coup attempt. The first thing the coupists did was to cleanse the army from the 'radical left' within the TAF. See Rifki Salim Burçak, *Türkiye'de Askeri Müdahalelerin Düşündürdükleri* (Ankara: Gazi Üniversitesi Basın Yayın Yüksekoku Matbaası, 1988), p.50. Because leftist coup attempt was preempted by the counter memorandum on March 12th, no hot-conflict occurred explaining no casualties.
- 6- The fact that there were no casualties during the February 28th 1997 coup was directly related to how it was carried out. The peculiar method the military junta pursued to carry out February 28th 1997 coup meant that there was no blood spilt. This did not mean that the coup was not violent; it was violent without blood spilt, as hundreds of people were sacked from university, forced to resign, prosecuted, and their right to education was violated.
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He received his B.A. degree in political science from Bilkent University. After finishing his MSc in International Relations at the London School of Economics and Political Science, he entered the PhD program in political science at Bilkent University in 2010. He is now a PhD candidate at the same university, working on his dissertation in the field of civil-military relations in Turkey and Pakistan during the Cold War. Among his publications are “A Turkish Muslim Between Islamism and Turkish Nationalism: Seyyid Ahmet Arvasi [1932–88]”, *Turkish Studies* 15 (3), (2014): 519-535 and “‘Unarmed’ we Intervene, Unnoticed we Remain: the Deviant Case of the ‘February 28th Coup’ in Turkey”, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 43(3), (2016):360-377. His current research interests are military and politics in the Muslim world, external actors and military coup d’états, radicalization and foreign fighters.



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## **THE JULY 15TH FAILED COUP ATTEMPT IN TURKEY**

Causes, Consequences,  
and Implications in  
Comparative Perspective

On July 15th 2016, a group of soldiers inside the Turkish military-ordinarily an expert executioner of military coups d'état through the usual chain of command-carried out the seventh coup attempt in Turkey's checkered history. This was also the 3rd time a military coup attempt had failed in Turkey. On the night of July 15th, fighter jets and helicopters flew low over Istanbul and Ankara, while coup plotters on the ground closed down both Bosphorus bridges and tried to occupy key corners of Istanbul and Ankara, and tanks rolled through the streets and shut down major avenues...



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