

# Coup and Counter-Coup in Turkey and Kurdistan - Documents



Edited by Sarah Parker and Phil Hearse

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# 1. Coup and counter-coup in Turkey and Kurdistan

By Sarah Parker and Phil Hearse

30/07/2016. The dramatic events of 15/16 July created an international shock wave: this was, contrary to some initial opinions, a very serious coup involving large sections of the armed forces. Both the parliament and the presidential palace were attacked by fighter planes. Hundreds were killed, both demonstrators and police killed by pro-coup soldiers and helicopter gunships, and young conscripts lynched by the anti-coup crowds. The coup showed the deep rifts that exist inside the Turkish ruling class, and its aftermath showed the growing drive towards the creation of an Islamist dictatorship.

## Not so democratic resistance

Immediately the coup was known much of the media went into overdrive about mass popular resistance to the coup. Some left wing journals have followed suit. Tens of thousands did indeed come out to confront the armed forces engaged in the coup. But was this really simply a mass outpouring in a favour of democracy?



*HDP co-chairs Selahattin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ denounced the coup*

In fact we now know that the overwhelming majority of those who came onto the streets were the supporters of Erdoğan's AKP (Justice and Development) Party. People on the ground say also that the fascist MHP party members also came out. It is true that the

Left wing HDP (Peoples Democratic Party) and main opposition CHP (Peoples Republican Party) condemned the coup, but with perhaps a few exceptions their members were not on the streets, and with good reason.

As Defne Kadioğlu Polat has argued: "Friday night, the night of the attempted *coup d'état*, was the first time in the recent history of the Turkish Republic that such a large segment of conservatives and religious citizens went out to own the streets (apart from party meetings) in the name of democracy, or at least for their definition of democracy.

Though some commentators and politicians have argued that different segments of society averted the coup together, displaying a rare show of political unity in Turkey, it is probably safe to say that most of the protestors at the scene of the attempted coup were either AKP voters or at least ideologically close to the AKP”.

The AKP zealots attacked the headquarters of the HDP, the attacked people in bars and restaurants consuming alcohol and they attacked areas of Istanbul where the ethnic minority Alevis – often seen as supporters of the Left – live. Theirs was an eruption of reactionary nationalist and Islamist fervour aimed blows first and foremost against the plotters, but sporadically at others seen as enemies of the AAKP. It was only after a week of post-coup terror that the opposition CHP, supported by members of the HFP and other left wing groups, felt able to organise their own rally, condemning the coup but also defending democratic rights.

### **Who were the coup’s authors?**

The regime has been keen to portray the Hizmet movement of exiled imam Fethullah Gülen, as the dark force behind the coup. Gülen’s movement which has around 4 million followers worldwide, does indeed have many supporters inside the army, the civil service and the judiciary. However is now obvious that the coup supporters inside the armed forces went way beyond the Gulenists. A total of 109 generals (at last count) have been arrested. Former air force commander Akin Ozkurk was arrested and eventually ‘confessed’, certainly under torture, to being at the centre of the plot. Of course no confessions in these circumstances can be taken at face value. Nonetheless the scope of the arrests certainly indicates widespread support among senior officers. The commander general of Turkey's second army, one of the country's most senior military officials, has been arrested, according to the Anadolu news agency. General Adem Huduti is the most senior officer to be detained so far in the wake of the attempted coup. Lieutenant General Erdal Ozturk, the commander of the Third Army, was also arrested.

Some of the commanders of the army which carried out the onslaught against rebel Kurdish towns and villages between September 20125 and April this year have been arrested, as have the two pilots responsible for shooting down a Russian bomber over northern Syria earlier this year.

Erdoğan and his prime minister Mesut Yilmaz stress the alleged role of the Gülen movement, both as a way of targeting Hizmet but also of obscuring the huge support of the plotters in the state apparatus. This represents the titanic struggle that has been taking place inside the state apparatus, and in the ruling class, since the AKP came to power in 2002. The issue between the contending factions is the Islamisation of the Turkish state.

People who supported the coup represent the old 'Kemalist' ideal of a secular, pro-Western, pro-NATO capitalist state. They do not represent 'democracy', they are fiercely nationalist and completely opposed both to the workers movement and Kurdish self-determination. They are opposed however to an Islamisation of the state which potentially puts Turkey in conflict with the west and especially the United States. It is noticeable that the US government did not take any position on the coup until it became clear which side was winning. While they probably didn't organise the coup, they probably would not have been unhappy if it had succeeded.

Behind the contending coup and anti-coup forces however is not just different ideas – Islamist or secular, pro-Western or leading the Muslim world – that the different sides support. There are different class interests at work. The old 'Kemalist' political parties and state represented a strongly pro-Western, pro-American capitalist ruling class. Erdoğan's ruling AKP party was backed by a section of the urban and especially rural poor, but also by initially by a section of the provincial ruling class which felt pushed aside by the wealthy, pro-Western, capitalists in the major cities. Turkish political scientist Sungur Savran puts it like this:

"The other part is the rise of what was a provincial bourgeoisie, aspiring to become rich and powerful like their earlier dominant Westernized class brethren, but, feeling like the underdog, produced a different kind of political movement which posed an alternative program of Islamic unity, not only politically but economically as well. This wing had grown beyond a provincial wing of the bourgeoisie into finance capital by the 1990s, and they strove for power.

"The AKP is the expression of this class fraction. However, since Erdoğan is an extremely strong figure and has been so successful at the polls, many from the earlier Westernized wing have also joined him over time. Yet Erdoğan's obsession of becoming the "Rais" (Chief) of the Islamic countries of the Middle East and beyond has not subsided as a result, but on the contrary reached new heights.

"So the AKP is incontrovertibly a party of the newly rising fraction of the Turkish bourgeoisie that draws its strength from the support extended to it by the poor masses, long time alienated by the Westernized wing of the same class. It must be added that the AKP is extremely hostile to the organized working class and has been administering the neoliberal class assault on behalf of the Turkish bourgeoisie all along. Naturally, it is not this aspect of its political practice that the Westernized wing detests, of course. It is Erdoğan's resolute drive towards Islamizing the country, the corollary of which is, in the last analysis, Turkey's divorce from the Western alliance that gives the Westernized wing chills. That is the logic behind the 'civil war of the bourgeoisie', which, despite several episodes of extreme tension, remained bloodless

until 15 July.”

This ongoing conflict has been shown through on the one hand attempts by Erdoğan to identify plots against him, and the periodic sacking of army officers, judges and police officials. This conflict has also been complicated by the tensions between the AKP leadership and the Gülen network. Gülen’s philosophy, based on the Sufi interpretation of Islam, calls for religion to be a personal guide and moral compass, but not the organising principle of practical politics. The imam is not just pro-neoliberalism in general, but pro-USA specifically. Undoubtedly he is in a constant and friendly dialogue with the United States government, although for the moment it seems unlikely the United States was directly involved in the coup plot.

### **Counter-coup**

Despite their opposition to Erdoğan’s drive towards dictatorship, neither the HDP, other left wing groups nor the PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party) supported the coup – and with good reason. Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP) Co-President Selahattin Demirtas denounced the coup and said “The nationalist and racist war bloc has split into two”. The PKK said:

“The AKP fascism drove the army into Kurdish cities and towns, made them burn the cities to the ground and massacre hundreds of civilians. Furthermore, it enacted laws to disallow the trial of the military for the crimes they have committed. There already existed a military tutelage before the coup attempt made yesterday; which makes the current case an attempt of coup by a military faction against the existing military faction.”

Turkey has a brutal history of military coups, which happened in 1960, 1971 and 1980, while in 1997 the military carried out a ‘postmodern’ coup – they told the first elected Islamist government to leave office or face being thrown out by force. They left office.

Most devastating for the left and progressive forces was the 1980 coup. It crushed powerful left wing organisations and trade unions, and forced tens of thousands into exile, and is the one of the main reasons for the large Turkish and Kurdish diasporas in Britain and Germany.

Six hundred and fifty thousand people were arrested, 1.6 million people were driven out of their jobs and ‘red listed’, 517 people were sentenced to death and 50 actually hanged, 300 people died from torture or on hunger strikes in prison, newspapers were shut down, hundreds of thousands were denied a passport and hundreds of ‘people were ‘disappeared’ and many are still missing. Is there any wonder that the coup plotters of 2016 were not supported by the left? The coup represented a deadly threat

to all progressive forces in Turkey and the Kurdish resistance. However what has defeated the coup is not democracy. Erdoğan himself is reported as saying that 'Allah sent us this coup' as an opportunity to deal with all opposition. The coup has been followed by a counter-coup, aimed at eliminating all opposition to the creation of an Islamist dictatorship.

Obviously the counter-coup goes way beyond those who were directly involved in the coup. At the time of writing, just ten days after the coup, the figure for those arrested or dismissed is astonishing.

### **A Purge to Islamise the State**

The day after the coup Prime Minister Binali Yildirim announced on that 2,839 soldiers of various ranks had been arrested. Among those arrested were at least 34 generals or admirals. A number of students of the Kuleli Military High School, enough to fill five buses, were also arrested. It is absolutely impossible that such a large number of people could have been identified and arrested on the very night of the coup. Like all the other categories arrested or sacked, these soldiers were on a pre-prepared list of people who were to be eventually 'dealt with'. By 18 July 2016, a total of 103 generals – now 137 -and admirals have been detained by Turkish authorities in connection with the coup, fully one third of the generals and admirals in the TSK (Turkish armed forces).

The purge has gone very deep. A state of emergency has been declared and Turkey has temporarily suspended its adherence to the European declaration of human rights. At the time of writing the extraordinary figures are:

- At least 10,000 arrested, including 6,039 military personnel including at 103 generals and admirals, accounting for a third of the army leading officers;
- 49,000 government workers fired;
- 21,000 private teachers licenses revoked;
- 15,200 teachers fired;
- Arrest warrants have been issued for 89 journalists and more than 40 taken into custody.
- All academics banned from international travel. This is a very nasty item, designed to prevent dissident academics from going into exile and becoming long-term critics of the regime.
- 300 presidential guards arrested;
- 30 governors dismissed;
- 9,000 police officers fired;
- 2,745 judges dismissed;

- 1,577 Turkish university deans asked to resign

It is absolutely inconceivable that the huge lists of those fired or arrested could have been rapidly drawn up. The arrests and sackings have come from pre-prepared lists. Erdogan thanked Allah for sending him the coups so he could act; he was waiting for the opportunity to act against those thought of as enemies or potential enemies. It is hitting wide groups of people who have nothing to do with the coup plotters.

According to Amnesty International prisoners have been held in stress positions for up to 48 hours and "...detainees have been denied food, water and medical treatment, and been verbally abused and threatened. Some have been subjected to severe beatings and torture, including rape."

A particularly threatening item is that all leave for civil servants has been cancelled and those on leave instructed to return to their posts, so that their whereabouts are known in case of dismissal or arrest. According to a government spokesman this has now been extended to civil servants: "Those travelling from any of the country's international airports will now have to provide proof of their employment. Civil servants as well as their spouses and children will need authorisation by their employer to travel. "Meanwhile other employees will have to prove that they work in the private sector and are therefore not civil servants".

The government has announced that 20,000 new teachers are to be hired, and these are likely to be proven Islamists who will replace the sacked, suspect, teachers. The teachers at private schools whose licenses have been revoked are mainly teachers in schools run by Hizmet, the Gülen network. These schools are Islamic, but obviously not the right kind of Islamic.

The issue which immediately arises is whether through this kind of purging the nature of the state itself can be changed – without a civil war or successful counter-revolutionary coup – from parliamentary democracy to Islamist dictatorship. In fact of course Turkey before the coup can only be described as a parliamentary democracy with extreme limitations. In 1997, as explained above, the army revised the result of the elections by threatening a coup. Since the advent of the AKP government in 2002, despite the pretence of 'liberal Islam', a more and more dictatorial regime has been introduced. Erdoğan has repeatedly purged the state apparatuses and the military and arbitrary detentions and imprisonments have become common. The war against the Kurds has been resumed and the parliamentary immunity of opposition deputies, particularly those from the HDP, removed.

However the counter-coup is profoundly deepening this process. History has shown that reactionary mass movements are quite capable of installing dictatorships while

maintaining the trappings of an apparent parliamentary democracy. When Mussolini came to power in Italy in 1922 parliament was maintained but all the Communist deputies expelled and arrested. Gradually the fascists, through state manoeuvres and the use of mass violence, expelled their opponents from the state apparatus and in 1925 Mussolini declared himself dictator. It is most unlikely that now Erdoğan and the AKP will move towards abolishing the forms of parliamentary democracy, but it will be a hollowed out parliamentarism with – probably – HDP and other opposition deputies arrested and suspended from parliament.

Today there is a climate of fear for oppositionists in Turkey and Kurdistan. They can be seized from the streets, at work or from their homes at any moment. Nineteen trade unions have been closed by the government. Already before the coup repression against workers in struggle was mounting with for example the police mobilised against striking workers at the Oyak Renault plant in the city of Bursa.

Erdoğan and the AKP will use the counter-coup to push the Islamisation of the state. The situation of women is particularly threatening. Just five weeks before the coup Erdoğan made a speech denouncing the use of contraception as ‘impossible for Muslims’. The number of reported honour killings has skyrocketed, as have the reported levels of rape and domestic violence. New laws make divorce much more difficult, especially for women, who now have to go through a process of seeing an Islamic family advisor who will try to rescue the marriage. Some women report being abused for not wearing Islamic dress.

Erdoğan and the AKP are using the coup to consolidate their rule and push through changes which will gut parliamentarism and create a presidential government with dictatorial powers. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan wants Turkey, with him at its head, to become the leader of the Sunni Muslim world. His counter-coup is a threat to the Kurdish people, workers, women, journalists, academics and oppositionists of all kinds. A nasty and brutal regime is being put in place.

## **Solidarity**

Tens of thousands of ‘people have been arrested, prevented from travelling or driven out of their jobs in the aftermath of the coup. Some have been brutalised, tortured and even raped.

Few people will have sympathy for the generals and admirals who were willing to plunge Turkey into the nightmare of a military dictatorship. But Erdoğan’s purges go way beyond that, victimising journalists, civil servants, lawyers, teachers, university lecturers and many more. They deserve our solidarity and support.

## **2. Turkey coup aftermath: between neo-fascism and Bonapartism**

CIHAN TUGAL 18 July 2016. FROM OPEN DEMOCRACY

**Predictions about the consequences of Turkey's failed coup focus on how it fulfils Erdoğan's desire for an omnipotent presidency. But the danger that awaits is much greater than that.**

By crushing Friday's coup – with the death toll rising close to 300 – the Turkish government has now started its greatest purge campaign so far: cleansing the military and civilian bureaucracy of thousands of opponents. The situation is full of ironies. The Gülenists (the world leaders of a modernist, tolerant Islam, according to some) are accused by president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan of staging *the* major coup attempt against a regime once celebrated as the model of Islamic democracy.

But most importantly, this antidemocratic attempt against an antidemocratic regime is most likely to push it in the worst possible direction. The Turkish regime has, for a while now, been shyly experimenting with mobilising the masses to repress its enemies. It can now shed its coyness.

### **A lame coup**

It is impossible to get all the relevant facts at this point, but Erdoğan has accused Gülen followers in the military of starting the coup, counting on support from other soldiers and civilians. However, even some military personnel known for their pro-coup tendencies, as well as the three opposition parties in parliament, criticised the attempt in a matter of a few hours. And it seems that the number of Kemalist soldiers who declined to join the coup outweighs those who participated by a great margin. On realising just how isolated they were, some soldiers started to surrender. In utter desperation, some others committed heinous acts which no other (failed or successful) Turkish junta has ever contemplated, including bombing the parliament.

The fragility and near insanity of the coup bloc appears to have resulted from panic: Ahmet Şık, a top Gülen expert and investigative journalist, argues that the government had scheduled major operations for 16 July, when hundreds of Gülen supporters in the military were to be arrested. Did the Gülenists learn of the plan too late to build major alliances and concoct a more systematic coup?

Still, the coup attempt was so poorly executed and so little interested in elite or popular support that various conspiracy theories cannot be entirely ruled out (many Kemalist military sympathisers believe that the government itself organised the coup to create an excuse for wholesale repression). Such details about the exact mechanics of the coup can be nothing but speculation for now, especially because all sides are heavily invested in finger-pointing. But what are the most likely outcomes of the failed coup?

**The dreams of an Islamic Reformation are now gone**

The link between Gülenists and the failed coup does not come as a surprise for anyone who has followed the Gülen community closely and resisted the global hype about its democratic credentials. The founder of the movement, preacher Fethullah Gülen, had wholeheartedly supported the bloodiest junta in Turkish history (September 1980 – 1983) and had also welcomed the civilian government created by another military intervention (February 1997). There are more reasons to be suspicious of Gülen: it is believed that his followers have systematically but surreptitiously infiltrated major official institutions. Moreover, after Erdoğan emptied the military of Kemalist soldiers as far as he could, the regime played into Gülen's hands by staffing it further with his followers.

Academics, journalists, diplomats, and politicians have ignored Gülen's statism for decades, choosing instead to market him as the most civilian face of Islam in Turkey. Others have gone even further in presenting him as the greatest reformer in Islamic history: a Muslim version of Martin Luther.

It had already become harder to believe in this hero after he split with the Turkish regime in a quite unpleasant way, with Gülen followers exposing themselves as power-grabbers rather than principled democrats. Even if Gülen is not directly involved in 2016's coup attempt, his image is now so tarnished that no one will seriously call him a Martin Luther any more. Dreams of an Islamic Reformation have, once again, crumbled.

### **Towards neo-fascism?**

The Turkish regime has been swinging dangerously between an extreme version of right-wing Bonapartism and (what I have recently called) neo-fascism over the last few years. Bonapartism is a top-down dictatorship that only occasionally deploys mass action. Bonapartist masses are disorganised and do not have a coherent ideology. Fascist regimes, by contrast, depend on the masses more organically. Their masses are organised and are more ideologically in tune with the regime.

Compared with the classical fascist regimes, inter-war Italy and Germany, the Turkish regime had a much more troubled relation with its (Islamist) civic roots (the Erdoğan government publicly disowned Islamism in its first few years). Yet the new regime gradually re-incorporated and re-mobilised the masses and civic circles it had previously demobilised.

In the last couple of months, the Turkish regime had been shifting once again in a Bonapartist direction, de-emphasising mass mobilisation. It was also incorporating elements of the third entrenched form of modern authoritarianism (military dictatorship): especially after the pro-Kurdish HDP's election victory in June 2015, Erdoğan started to relentlessly utilise the military against opponents. But now, given the pro-regime numbers on the streets (and soldiers once again declared an enemy of the nation), the fascistic actors within the regime have the opportunity to sustain mass mobilisation and take the country in a more totalitarian direction. As of yet, they have not squandered this chance.

After president Erdoğan's invitation to people to flood into the streets, and face down the military rebels, mosques across the country also urged citizens to thwart the coup. In city centres, provincial towns, and inner cities, people climbed onto tanks clutching Turkish flags. The captured photography and video are likely to become as iconic as images of tank-blocking Chinese students in Tiananmen Square.

But these masses have done much, much more. They have attacked the pro-Kurdish party HDP (which has nothing to do with the coup attempt) in several towns. They have harassed alcohol consumers. Several clashes have broken out in Alevi (a religious minority) neighbourhoods and towns. This is the dark side of what has been celebrated by some as the democratic defence of the regime by the people.

This new 'anti-militarist' mass mobilisation in Turkey has been building up (as counter-revolt) ever since the anti-government Gezi protests in 2013, targeting minorities, alcohol consumers, and all kinds of opposition, as much as military personnel. In October 2015, close to 100 pro-Kurdish activists in Ankara were massacred in an ISIS-linked bombing. Witnesses saw police deploying tear-gas against survivors, and blocking ambulances trying to reach the injured. That tragedy is now coupled with mass action against the dead: during the recent anti-coup celebrations, 'pro-democracy' masses destroyed a monument to the Ankara victims. There is no question about where the sympathy of *these* masses lie.

Most of the pessimistic predictions about the aftermath of the failed coup have focused on how it will fulfil Erdoğan's desire for an omnipotent presidency. The danger that awaits Turkey is much greater than that.

### **3. Interview with Selahattin Demirtaş. Co-chair HDP (Peoples Democratic Party)**

**From Peoples Democratic Party (HDP) website:**

<https://hdpenglish.wordpress.com/2016/07/19/and-then-he-would-end-up-just-like-morsi-ocalan-had-said/>

**Selahattin Demirtaş, co-chair of Peoples' Democratic Party, defined the attempted coup as “the coup attempt of putchists against putchists” and added: “A clear attitude must be adopted against both pro-coup mindsets and the struggle must be stepped up because the coup mindset that tried to seize power through military forces using tanks and cannons is illegitimate and so is ruling the society through an election that takes place with war, violence, and bombing of the cities, it also is a civil coup.”**

Demirtaş, reminding that Kurd Leader Abdullah Öcalan had warned Erdogan about the “mechanics of coup” throughout the dialogue process, said that Kurdish Freedom Movement did not “take advantage of the attempted coup” when it took place: “Kurdish

guerrillas could have taken advantage of this attempt and seized many cities but this would be playing into the hands of the pro-coup mindset. Kurdish movement, by not making a choice between the two pro-coup mindsets, maintained a dignified stance that insists on the democracy struggle of the peoples. However, people like Erdogan do not have the capacity to understand this dignified stance.”

The co-chair of HDP called for “solidarity” by mentioning that the racist and jihadist groups that took to the streets after the coup attempt are in danger of lynching and massacring others.

We talked with Demirtaş about the attempted coup that took place on July 15.

### **What happened still needs a general definition. What was exactly we went through?**

First of all, it is obvious that there has been an attempt of military coup since the army undertook a military activity that extended up to bombing the parliament building in order to overthrow the government and seize the power of the parliament. That this is done by the army, by the force of arms requires that it be defined as an obvious coup attempt. Once it is defined different, it gets hard to address it.

However, the conditions under the coup attempt carried out, those who triggered the coup attempt, the position of the AKP government, these are actually those that needs to be defined because the current power is the power which is ruling via a civilian coup. Coup attempt of the putschists against putschists... If this is not precisely defined, the point cannot be made. Then, the position taken will also be wrong and such a mistake would play into AKP’s hands under an “anti-coup” slogan.

It is necessary to take a clear-cut position against both pro-coup mindsets and a struggle accordingly should be carried out. It is a civilian coup to govern the society by means of an election that was held in the sequel of war, violence, bombing the cities and it is as much illegal as the coup forces that tried to overtake the power via military means, with tanks and guns.

We have already been resisting the AKP coup for more than one year. The AKP, who extorted the power since last year, cannot be acquitted just because a clique inside the army has just tried to usurp the power. We are against the coup principally; we put forward our position as such and say full stop. It is necessary to work up a policy based on a perspective that will not whitewash the coup done by the AKP as well. In our briefs, we have pointed out a democracy league against both the pro-coup mindset inside AKP and the pro-coup clique developing inside the army. The alternative is the democracy league because the forthcoming developments will determine the future of the country. Either the AKP will entirely go away and the forces of democracy will take

the power or the AKP will make its own coup permanent by institutionalizing it, taking advantage of this military coup attempt.

**How could this coup clique believe that their attempt would be successful? In whom or what did they trust in?**

It is unknown. A coup clique that has no political support is probably the first to come out in the world. It has been said that the coup was held without leaning on some alternative political frontier. There is only one thing that I know: it is by no means a clique that relies on HDP or the forces that HDP represents. That is the only thing that we are sure of. However, did the clique had any contacts with other political powers or was the coup planned through some other political forces? We cannot know these. It might get clear in the coming weeks or months. Yet in Turkey some always has an understanding that hopes for help from coup. There has always been a pro-coup mindset that believes that no force except the army can consolidate democracy in the country but I cannot know with whom such people have political relationships.

**Did you anticipate such a coup attempt prior to this one? Have you received any speculations or have you foreseen such a thing?**

Of course making such a prediction would be hard but while during the interviews in İmralı, Mr. Öcalan described the coup mechanics and properly illustrated it with historical examples. He very well explained how the so-called coup mechanics works in Turkey. Thus, he envisaged that the coup mechanics would be implemented once the resolution process was over. And in that regard, he warned Erdoğan many times. He was saying "Tell him, he doesn't understand, he is acting like an idiot." He continually warned him, saying "I could keep him alive by maintaining the resolution process. Once the process is over, the coup mechanics will step in and then he would end up just like Morsi".

**How did that coup mechanics practically step in after the process was over?**

Yes, we could notice and very well understood that coup mechanics during those discussions. When the process was over, the so-called coup mechanics was already in function somehow. The war against Kurds, the destruction in Kurdistan, the effort of army to take the initiative again, Erdoğan's giving of his store away to the army, his resigning of his power to the army, his proposal of alliance to the nationalist-fascist block and his surrendering of his will to that block on a large scale, his almost doing everything that this block wants just to win the war against Kurds have been actually the signs of the coup mechanics in function.

**Did the Turkish State Bloc, which was formed as a consequence of the war against Kurds, lead this?**

General Staff had gotten all the promises from Erdogan before entering the city battles. That is to say, the presidential system would be given up, and at most there would be presidency with political parties, Erdogan would give up the idea of seizing all the powers of the state by himself; he would pass the law of impunity and there would be no way back to negotiations during the resolution process. Such promises were made and thus the army started fighting in cities.

If you remember, it was mentioned in the beginning that this was a war of the Palace and people were reacting strongly against Erdogan at the funerals of soldiers and police officers. The army also doubted fighting in cities and delivered an opinion on not entering the cities. For the first time tanks entered the city in Silvan and in a short time they removed the battle tanks, the army expressed Erdogan that it would not enter the city. After that, Erdogan surrendered his will to them in order to make an agreement with the army and make the army fight in cities and enter the cities with battle tanks and guns.

International relations and mechanisms also started to put pressure on Erdogan, thus leaving him gasp for air.

This was completely the coup mechanics Mr. Öcalan defined. It was working perfectly. As long as peace and agreement were not made and an alliance was not formed with Kurds, war against Kurds triggered the coup mechanism just like a wounded clock when the time comes.

### **In this case, you should not be surprised at the attempted coup, right?**

No, I'm not surprised. We were expecting such a process but of course it was impossible for us to guess, predict or provide intelligence about the coup. However, we were not shocked when it happened because it was openly approaching. How this would take place was only a mystery. Would it be a postmodern coup like February 28, or would the army complete the coup by seizing Erdogan step by step via implicitly enduring the government as the army slowly gains the war initiative in the field? That was not known. Nevertheless, it was also known that there was not only one clique in the army. Communitarian, chauvinist, nationalist, Americanist structures have been separating into cliques. It is not possible to say that these groups agree among themselves 100% and agree with Erdogan.

It was known that there was tension before Military Council and that there were disagreements before the appointments. Some of these were out-pictured whereas some of them were not. The Military Council was very important this year. Each military council in the recent years has been very important but this years' military council was historical for them. It was expected that the tension would rise. However, no one was expecting this to turn into an attempted coup.

**After the coup attempt, did anyone from the government called you or tried to make contact with you?**

No, nobody did. Our colleagues exchanged information but nobody from the government made contact.

**What will happen next? For example, can there be a change of politics about the Kurdish war? Can peace be on the agenda? Or will the politics of violence continue to increase?**

Of course this depends on the attitude that will be adopted by Erdogan and AKP wing. In fact, an opportunity showed up. Mr. Öcalan, during the negotiations, perpetually talked about the parallel structure in the government. "This pro-coup mindset has always been an obstacle to resolution" he warned. If this pro-coup mindset will really be dissolved and if we have reached a point where civil politics and the resolution of Kurdish problem will not be approached provocatively; if Erdogan really pays attention to Mr. Öcalan's warnings, a healthy and lasting process towards peace might continue. Ultimately, the weakening of the pro-coup mindset and the pro-coup tradition in the army, civil life, judiciary, and bureaucracy is for the benefit of democracy. However, since there is another pro-coup mindset like AKP against us, a real understanding of democracy will not arise.

**What is required for a development in a different direction?**

This can turn out to be an opportunity if Erdoğan comes into his senses and those around him has the least cleverness to realize the magnitude of the danger and that the coup mechanics haven't disappeared and comprehend that the coup threat does not come to an end as long as the Kurdish question is not resolved in peace; an institutional democracy and a libertarian constitution is not in action. Yet I think this is a very small probability because the AKP has always used such opportunities in favour of consolidating, strengthening its own power, not in favour of democracy. [Negotiations with the] European Union, ceasefire, the guerrillas' withdrawal process [withdrawal from the Turkish borders], the AKP tried to benefit from all these.

The election results on 7 June 2015 was indeed an opportunity for democratization and reconciliation and AKP didn't want to use it, either. AKP wanted to strengthen itself again by an instrumentalisation of war towards the next elections on 1 November 2015.

That is to say, there exists an opportunity to commence a new democracy move upon a failed coup attempt; however, AKP is not a party capable of doing such a thing and Erdoğan is not a leader capable of doing it, either. Therefore, instead of being in an

expectation of AKP and Erdoğan, we need to enlarge the democracy league and further afford a much tougher struggle against both pro-coup mindsets. The tension will increase at each step since the crowds that are poured into the streets by Erdoğan are not in a struggle for democracy or something. The prime minister is talking about some kind of rejoicing but this has simply been a festival of some reactionaries.

**Several circles are telling that there is a movement in the streets, which is worrying and about to commit lynchings...**

Yes, a pro-ISIS mind, pro-ISIS groups, including those from HÜDA-PAR [an Islamic political party organized in Northern Kurdistan], AKP, all the religious, reactionary groups are doing a tour de force in the squares and are displaying what they understand from democracy as well. They do not want to see anyone even as citizens. Especially during the coup attempt, you have seen even what they did to the poor, innocent buck privates. Up until yesterday, those who were shouting “martyrs are immortal, homeland is united” when those private soldiers died at war are now lynching and torturing those soldiers, cutting their throats.

In that regard, this reactionary group is a major threat, let alone being promising for democracy. It is necessary to afford a struggle against them as well because they will get more impudent and free-wheeling in all the fields. In all the fields they will try to act more recklessly. They might hold lynching campaigns against Kurds, Alevites, leftists, progressive forces; they may even attempt massacres since these heaps will be feeling themselves much stronger from now on. This will be a delusion of them but they are not capable of realizing their own delusions. This reactionary mindset is bereft of any historical analysis; bereft of doing correct political evaluations; bereft of understanding the inner equilibria of the society. A mindset that has no idea of all these things thinks that it can change everything based solely on brute force.

In fact, the coup attempt has been disabled thanks to the fellow stance of all the political parties including us. Of course, we didn't do this to support AKP but AKP will try to evaluate it like that and will want to take the advantage of it. Yet if they were a bit ethical and smart, AKP would realize how invaluable anti-coup stance of HDP and Kurdish Freedom Movement is. They would direct toward democratization and reform, deducing that we do this not for themselves. But they don't have such a mind.

**What was the counter stance of the Kurdish Freedom Movement against the coup?**

Erdogan has been accusing the Kurdish movement to be plotting against him together with the parallel structures. He is trying to explain the termination of the cease-fire with this view. This coup attempt clearly demonstrated that it is not the case. Kurdish movement showed no act of crudeness during the hours the coup attempt was in practice. This should be noted in history books. Such an extensive war is still going on,

but not even a single guerrilla of the Kurdish movement shot even a single bullet that night. The guerrilla did not take sides with putschists. Kurdish people did not take sides with putschists. Kurdish guerrilla could take advantage of this attempt and penetrate into several cities. But this would be playing into the hands of putschists. Kurdish movement did not choose between two pro-coup mentalities, demonstrating an honourable stance, persistent in the peoples' struggle for democracy. But mindsets such as Erdogan's do not have the capacity to understand this honourable stance.

We have to be prepared for a tougher challenge in any case. We need to be prepared for a much more difficult struggle in all areas. Erdogan and his mentality has been conducting "bag operations" since they have come into power. In KCK operations they have arrested thousands and then announced to have arrested tons of wrong people. Later in Ergenekon operations, it was the same. In operations against the Gulenist community, they are arresting random people. Now upon the coup attempt AKP is again arresting or dismissing anyone who they see as a threat. There is no room for justice or equity in Erdogan's world. Now, all opposition sections who seem to be opposing Erdogan shall be tried and purged from the army and the jurisdiction. This requires attention. Putschists of course should be put to trial, arrested, and put to account before the law. But in disguise of anti-coup operations, opposition sections might be further oppressed, TV channels and news media might be closed. These all require further attention. We should not remain silent against unjustly policies toward innocent circles.

And of course, organizing the people in the meantime is a must.

**But how? A confusion is common both in the Kurdish society and the democracy front. In short, what can be done to interfere in the process?**

The coup attempt is so recent and it is still not entirely under control. There are still missing helicopters and army commanders whose locations are unknown. Their whereabouts is not certain. Therefore, Erdogan and his front-line are still nervous. Apparently the coup is not entirely quelled. The systematic and broad part of the coup is stopped, but its focal points are not pinpointed. As far as we can see, this is the picture. The society is also somewhat uneasy. Of course the society is against the putschists, but the crowds AKP is letting out on the streets is performing reactionary demonstrations, and bear resemblance with jihadists, ISIS members, so the broader society cannot demonstrate their anti-coup stance on the streets and squares. Only the crowds organized as mobs by AKP are flooding into the squares.

Of course the waters will clear in a couple of days. We should not leave the public space into the hands of those reactionary mobs. We should take the squares, saying "neither the palace coup, nor the military coup," "there is no option but democracy," and take to the streets against all putschist mentalities. Because streets are legitimate. AKP takes advantage of this when it is about their gain, and when it is not, they try and

block the streets, terrorize the streets. We should not fall for this plot, this oppression by AKP anymore. One thing is clear now: The streets are not legitimate only for AKP. When the opposition takes to the streets in the future, if AKP tries to oppress and overwhelm the streets, everyone should remind AKP of the legitimacy of the streets.

Lynches are common on the streets; poor buck privates are being slaughtered. Erdogan does not mention any one of them. Please remember, when we have called the people to the squares for the Resistance of Kobanê, we did not call for violence, and 48 HDP member were murdered among a total of 55 people. AKP tried to put even this blame on us. Today, they are lynching people on live television, they are killing young, innocent conscripts who were drafted by the force of mandatory military duty, while the Prime Minister calls it a “festival of democracy” and the President of the Republic calls it “the right to demonstrate.” The people should watch out for them. If these mobs keep ruling the country and strengthen themselves, their desire is to lynch whomever. They would like to rule with this mentality and we need to take the streets to stop them feel this false power.

### **So you foresee a threat of lynch and massacres?**

AKP may direct those masses, those groups to attack certain neighbourhoods. Everyone needs to watch out. Kurdish neighbourhoods, Alevi neighbourhoods, and leftists may turn into targets. Everyone has the right to necessary defence against any such attack. In case of such a situation, a power of legitimate resistance is required to be organized to act regardless of who is assaulted.

We are going through critical days and hours. The coup is not entirely avoided. Other cliques too, may take action for a coup. AKP is abusing social sensitivities, provoking them, trying to take our anti-coup stance for a political yield, and this might trigger other social movements as well. We have no other option than being well organized and careful, ready for anything.

## **4. Turkey’s Failed Coup and Erdogan’s Anti-Kurdish Agenda**

### **Kurdish National Council**

**July 21, 2016** -- Kurdish Question -- On 15 July 2016 an unsuccessful attempt at a coup happened in Turkey. Even at this early stage, the post-coup process obviously will have important consequences. It is important to understand that this process was started on 7 June 2015, when Erdogan lost the elections and made an anti-democratic intervention into the results. It is important to make a comprehensive analysis of the coup in order to understand the potential outcomes.

Initially, it is important to specify that this coup was not undertaken by Gulenists. Due to the conflict between the AKP and the Gulenists, sympathisers of Gulen may have taken part in the coup attempt. But by saying “the Gulenists attempted the coup” AKP-Erdogan are trying to create a platform on which they can suppress Gulen’s supporters even more. By labelling the coup as Gulenist (who many people see as worse/more reactionary than them), they are hoping to rally support in order to take revenge on the putschists. In other words, they are trying to kill two birds with one stone.

It is evident that this attempt was backed by a large part of the army. If they had planned and executed it more professionally, it may have succeeded. In this regard, it cannot be said that it was undertaken by Gulenists or a minority; there isn’t enough of a Gulenist presence in the army to pull off a coup.

Maybe many of the putschists who are waging the war against the Kurds in Kurdistan were not practically involved, but it has been understood that many of the generals in the region supported the coup. They were careful because their participation would have hampered their war effort against the Kurds. However, many of the generals in the war against the Kurds have been detained as supporters of the coup.

### **An insistence on war strengthened the putschists**

When the AKP couldn’t solve the Kurdish question, it veered towards a war of destruction against the Kurdish Freedom Movement in the past year. Especially towards the end of 2014 and after the 7 June 2015 election, the 'coup mechanism' was in place and resulted in a fascist coalition [Erdogan-AKP, the army and ultra-nationalist]. When Erdogan veered off towards war, the army became the main player. Erdogan and the AKP were dependent on the army in their war against the Kurdish Freedom Movement.

As Erdogan decided to intensify the war and sent the army to destroy Kurdish towns, the coup mechanism was set in place. During the war, the army strengthened its own hand against Erdogan. This is because the army can only become a central player in Turkish politics while it is at war against the Kurdish Freedom Movement. So after a period in which the army had lost its centrality in Turkish politics, through Erdogan’s notion that “we won the war in the cities, we destroyed the PKK”, the army once again gained the confidence to attempt a coup. This coup wanted to redesign Turkish politics. The statement by the putschists clearly points towards this.

### **'We fought the four, we should do the politics'**

The coup-plotters are a new nationalist wing, separate from the Ergenekonists [traditional nationalist statist]. This new trend has been shaped by an opposition to the policies of the AKP. We might even say that the changes made in the AKP’s foreign

policy (renewing relations with Israel and Russia, and a change of policy towards Egypt, Iraq and Syria) may have stimulated this new formation. This putschists, who can also be called 'neo-nationalists', have closely witnessed the cooperative relationship between the AKP and ISIS. Due to the fact that they are on the frontlines where this relationship is being implemented, they have learnt how the relationship between the AKP and ISIS is handled. If the coup had been successful, with backing from the West, they would have prosecuted the AKP for supporting ISIS.

It seems as though the coup-plotters' approach was: "Turkey's main political problem is the Kurdish question, and we are the ones on the front line, so we should shape the politics of Turkey." When civilian governments do not have any policies in solving the Kurdish question, the coup mechanism is always functioning. The fact that they named themselves "The Council of Peace in the Country" is a reflection of their thinking that "we will conduct the politics when it comes to the Kurdish question". In short, their approach was "whoever is fighting the PKK should dominate politics and own Turkey".

### **After the coup attempt: Sectarian nationalism will create a Turkish ISIS**

After the coup was defeated, the AKP and its allies declared themselves as the "will of the people" and "democratic forces". The AKP now hopes to strengthen its grasp on power and their anti-Kurdish, anti-democratic system. In this regard the presentation of the AKP, its supporters and its allies as the defenders of democracy is a dangerous development; the AKP can more easily implement its anti-Kurdish, anti-democratic policies.

Given that the AKP's allies are the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) and chauvinist nationalists, a rise in anti-Kurdish sentiment and anti-democratic approaches can be expected. These forces have become even more tight-knit after the coup attempt; this will lead to a deepening of genocidal policies against the Kurds. Just as this coup attempt has emboldened the AKP, its allies and the nationalists, it has also radicalised the sectarian nationalist circles close to the AKP. This will lead to a new breed of Turkish ISIS-like formations, such as Osmanli Ocaklari (Ottoman Alliance), a paramilitary group organised by Erdogan himself. They are already organising in European countries; links between them and ISIS are already being discussed. These sectarian nationalist trends will further radicalise and become repressive forces against any opposition to the AKP. Many of the people who took to the streets during this period were from these organisations. It can be expected that these groups will step up their attacks against the Kurdish people. The freedom forces of the Kurdish people and the democratic forces of the country should prepare themselves against these attacks.

### **What the AKP will do — and the responsibilities of democratic forces**

There are statements that say "this coup attempt should be turned into an opportunity and platform for democratisation". These calls are made with good intentions but need

to be followed up. All attempts at a coup can be blocked by democratisation. However, the anti-coup rhetoric of some is not grounded in a democratic mentality; rather it is more to do with the ongoing power struggle. These people aren't democrats or anti-putschists! These people had already taken power through a coup against democracy. For this reason, democratisation cannot be expected of these people in order to hinder possible coup attempts. These people will use this coup attempt in order to cover their real faces and intentions. They have already started doing this.

In this regard, to expect that the AKP will take steps to democratise the country in response to this coup attempt is nothing but self-deception. One needs to take a closer look at Erdogan and the alliances of his Gladio. Nothing other than anti-Kurdish sentiment and anti-democratic development can be expected from this coalition. And when the AKP eventually discards these allied groups, the sectarian nationalist groups will radicalise and become Turkey's version of ISIS. Under the ideological and political umbrella of the AKP, a more radical version of the Muslim Brotherhood will be formed in the region. Erdogan will see this coup attempt as an opportunity to make preparations and take steps towards this end. There are already sectarian nationalist factions within the police force. Erdogan saw the actions of these groups during this coup attempt. Turkey will become a police state. The police will become an alternative armed force to the army.

The forces of democracy must re-analyse the situation after this coup attempt. The fascism of the AKP will seek to suppress all democratic forces. They will try to get all factions of society to obey its rule. Any opposition will be labelled as 'coup-supporters' and will be brutally suppressed. If the forces of democracy do not act to change this situation, Erdogan will force everyone into submission. In this regard, the forces of democracy must understand the reality of the AKP and its allies and must form a new front for resistance.

## **5. The AKP, Army, and the Gulen Movement: Anatomy of the Failed Coup Attempt in Turkey**



**Deniz Cifci**

Kurdish Question - On 15 July 2016, Turkey witnessed an unexpected coup attempt, which seemed to have been coordinated by more than one clique within the country's own army. It has been said that the coup was organised by several senior military officers, including generals, admirals and lieutenant colonels, alongside support from many lowly enlisted officers. What is surprising about the coup is that it was believed that the AKP had successfully eliminated its most severe opponent officers within the army and alternatively were in cooperation with the main body of the army. Such cooperation was seen not only between the AKP and the army (or at least the main command echelon) but also those that held strict secular and Kemalist political ideals such as the Dogu Perincek group-also known as

Ergenekon group. However, the coup has confirmed these perceived alliances were not what they seemed to be. Because, despite the command echelon of the army and Ergenekon group's support to the government and challenge to the coup, a significant body of the military were involved in this failed coup. This also revealed that there is a severe split within the army.

Nonetheless, that is not the only reason for considering this coup as unusual. Another reason why the coup was unexpected was because the majority of people assumed that the Turkish military would have taken away significant lessons from the past military coups, which strongly damaged the army's reputation. This factor alongside the fact that Turkey has become a significant member of NATO only further distanced the idea of a possible military coup today. In addition to this, Turkey's on-going battle with the PKK, as well as the Syrian and Iraqi wars and the re-design of the Middle East through proxy wars, are also certain factors which led many to believe that no one would dare, or even take the risk of carrying out a military coup. As a result of all these conditions, it was logical to assume that a coup in Turkey was an unlikely event. Therefore, the Junta's attempt shocked many, both at home and internationally.

However more than the attempted coup, the methods used by the Junta were what shocked so many. Such methods and tactics included the bombing of the Turkish assembly and Special Operations Command in Ankara, opening fire on civilians, kidnapping and arresting the chief of general staff Hulusi Akar as well as chief of air staff and naval forces, and the bombing of Recep Tayyip Erdogan's hotel in Marmaris. Such ruthless methods were unusual in comparison to the previous military coup d'états that were not carried out in the same manner. These points naturally lead to further questions on Junta's motives. This failed coup as well as later developments, will be discussed further to distinguish it from the previous coups.

### **The Causes of Failure**

First of all, the country is relieved that such a Junta's coup attempt failed. In the case of their success, the coup would further slide Turkey into chaos. Considering both groups' harsh stance against the Kurds and their power fetishism, many of whom were arrested as Junta members (as noted before were in high positions in the Kurdish region and involved in human rights violations), it is not hard to guess that they would not bring democracy to the country. Beyond this, overthrowing a government through violent means will never be a real or liberal-democracy. Instead it would be a militarist democracy.

A few hours after the coup, the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan joined a TV channel via FaceTime and called on people to resist the attempt. Erdogan highlighted that this attempt was not taking place in the chain of the command, so the main body of the army was behind the government and opposed the coup. Erdogan's call was followed by appeals from other ministers for people to take to the streets to prevent the coup. Opposition leaders and some army commanders also joined TV channels and declared their support to the government, and opposed the coup. This strongly encouraged people to believe that not all the army was behind the coup and the government was resisting it, which soon mobilized thousands and gathered them in the city centres, particularly Ankara and Istanbul. Considering the many previous military coup d'états or attempts, it is a fact that all of them caused long-standing trauma, tragedy, including collective arrests, torture, human rights violation, and authoritarianism. It is not so hard for ordinary people to guess that this attempted coup would have only further worsened the situation in Turkey. However, a large number of people took to the streets in demonstration against the coup, which contributed to the reasons as to why the Junta failed.

On the other hand, further questions arise such as; how did the Junta, which organised the coup so well, not anticipate such a reaction from the public, or if they were expecting it why did

they not take any measures to combat their influence? The Junta probably expected to receive some support from those people who disliked the AKP, by taking to the streets to celebrate the coup. However, they overestimated the amount of support they had amongst the public and this did not happen. On the contrary, the AKP supporters took to the streets and in turn this physically blocked/prevented the Junta's ability to move forward.

Herein, what needs to be highlighted is that most of the soldiers that attempted the coup just performed the orders given to them by their commandants (senior military officers). Most of these ordinary soldiers either had been told that they would make a military manoeuvre on the streets or that there is an insurrection that had to be suppressed by the military. Most of these ordinary soldiers did not know they were part of a coup. It was only when the masses took to the streets, did soldiers realise that they had become part of a coup without their will and that they were lied to. Realising this most of the soldiers left their arms. Therefore, the people's challenge to the coup and taking of the streets, first physically, second psychologically, sharply reduced the coup's success. Nonetheless, that is not the only reason behind the failure of the coup.

Obvious failures such as the lack of control of the mainstream media and no arrests of politicians can also be seen to be contributing factors to the failure of the coup, which was coincidentally, the initial steps taken in previous coups. In previous coups, putschists initially arrested politicians and cut off their connection with both the media and also the masses. This in a way was an attempt to prevent the masses from organising and taking part in a counter-reaction against the coup. However, on the 15th of July, putschists just neutralised the state TV TRT for few hours while all other mainstream media continued their live broadcasts. Recep Tayyip Erdogan, many government ministers and opposition leaders, and most importantly the first army chief who stated quite firmly that this was not a military coup that took place in the chain of command were broadcast live. Therefore when Erdogan called the public to demonstrate on the streets, it became almost certain that the Junta would fail.

In comparison to the previous coups, this coup attempt was an outlier to the rest; therefore it has raised many questions. It has become apparent on social media forums such as Twitter and Facebook that some people believe that this coup was a conspiracy to eliminate all Gulen-affiliated officers from the army, or that the Junta had to start the coup earlier than scheduled since the government was aware of such an attempt - which was highlighted by the prime minister Binali Yildirim.

In conjunction to these factors, disorganisation to some extent was also a key element that hindered any possible success. Due to the AKP's potential counter attack and time to prepare, it seemed that putschists had to start the coup despite insufficient preparations. Furthermore, there are claims that some of the officers preparing for the coup at the beginning switched sides as soon as the coup began. This is also regarded as a causal factor behind the Junta's defeat.

### **The Putschists (Junta)**

It has become apparent that the government has shifted the blame onto the Gulen movement while the military, deliberately or at least is in no rush, to place all responsibility on the same movement. Furthermore, a considerable number of citizens also feel that officers affiliated with the Gulen movement coordinated this coup. Such beliefs are justified when considering the severe struggle between the Gulen Movement and AKP, hence to some extent; it seems rational to hold the Gulen movement to account. However, holding the Gulen movement solely accountable and as the mastermind behind the coup, therefore ignoring other cliques is rather dangerous and is an overly simplistic explanation for such a complex and violent coup. Such a

simplified overall approach that does not go into details, can lead to shrouding the competition between different groups, corruption within the army and also hide the local and regional political motivation behind the coup.

So, considering the daring attempt, the degree of violence, and most importantly the coup's failure to take precautions against the government's tough and extreme reactions, which included the declaring of state of emergency for three months, the arrest and/or dismissal of thousands of senior officers within the army, police force, judiciary and other state institutions, it seems that the coup attempt was not an overnight sensation. It is probable that the government realised that there were several cliques behind the coup and another attempt could be made, so began a comprehensive purge. Therefore, condemning only the Gulen movement will prevent us from seeing the bigger picture behind the failed coup attempt. Nevertheless, that does not mean we should trivialise or simplify the Gulen movement's contribution to the coup. The following paragraphs will touch on the many reasons why the Gulen movement may have potentially been involved in the coup.

### **From Alliance to the Coup: The Gulen Movement**

The military has always been a central power in determining Turkey's politics both domestically and in foreign policy since the formation of the Turkish Republic in 1923. The Army has always been at the forefront of politics, as evidenced by the number of coups since its formation, to name a few; The Coup d'état on 27 May 1960, 12 March 1971, 12 September 1980, and the post-modern military intervention of 27 April 2007. It is also notable to remember the two failed military coup attempts by Colonel Talat Aydemir on 22 February 1962, and 20 May 1963, which consequently resulted in his execution on 27 June 1964.

It was firstly and mostly during the AKP-Gulen Movement's alliance that the military's influence on politics was restricted to some extent. Such a relationship allowed the AKP and Gulen movement to weaken or at least in some aspects limit the military's potential involvement in politics. The Gulen movement's power was significant within the police force and judiciary, which led the AKP to arrest hundreds of military officers in high positions including former Chief of General Staff Army Ilker Basbug on 26 January 2012, on the charge of trying to overthrow the AKP government.

Amid the grave violations during the investigation and judicial process, the AKP, and its main ally the Gulen movement launched the Balyoz (Sledgehammer) and Ergenekon cases and severely punished many of these military officers, including generals, colonels, and admirals. This significantly damaged the military's reputation and weakened its overall power, or at least restricted the military's ability to carry out a potential coup d'état against the government, though not entirely.

However, the alliance between the AKP and Gulen Movement started disintegrating as the two former allies began to compete for power. Their relationship struck a turning point particularly when the Gulen-affiliated police force attempted to arrest the head of the Turkish National Intelligence Agency (MIT) Hakan Fidan on 2 February 2012.

Tensions between the AKP and Gulenists further escalated after the latter launched a corruption investigation against the AKP (17-25 December 2013), which resulted in the resignation of four cabinet ministers. In retaliation, the AKP carried out a cleansing operation against Gulen followers within government institutions, particularly from the police force and judiciary.

In addition to this the AKP constitutionally declared the Gulen movement as a terrorist organisation under the name of FETO/PDY or "parallel state." Things got even worse between

the two when the AKP, in response to the Gulen's soft power propaganda, especially in Europe and in the US, extended its operation against the movement by arresting many of its followers and by appointing trustees to confiscate the group's leading institutions: the Gulen movement's Fatih University, media organisations such as Zaman and Bugun Newspapers and Samanyolu TV channel. The Gulen movement also lost considerable authority in the judiciary, police force, education, and bureaucracy. This significantly limited the Gulen movement's activities as well as power in Turkey.

Despite all the cleansing from state institutions, the AKP did not touch any Gulen-affiliated officers in the army. On-going military operations in the Kurdish region against the PKK, the Syrian and Iraqi crisis, the competition within the army itself and most importantly the lack of sufficient intelligence are probably certain factors that delayed the AKP's potential operations against Gulen supporters in the military. Among these, the conflict with the PKK was probably the most significant motive that delayed the AKP's response against the Gulenists in the army. As the names of those arrested for being putschists shows, almost all of them were heading the fight against the PKK. One example among many is the detention of the 2nd Army Division Commander General Adem Huduti, who ran the military operations in Cizre and Sur/Diyarbakir. Such military operations resulted in the destruction of both places and the death of hundreds of civilians. Furthermore, the conflict with the Gulen Movement, the resistance at the Gezi protests in 2013, the turmoil created by the Iraq and Syrian wars and Kurdish territorial gains in Syria (Rojava), pushed the AKP to cooperate with sections of the Army and their soft power in bureaucracy or politics, such as Dogu Perincek group. As a result the AKP released almost all of the military officers arrested during the Balyoz (Sledgehammer) and Ergenekon cases, and collaborated with the military against the Gulenists.

In response the Gulen movement further accelerated its attacks, particularly negative political propaganda against the AKP. This significantly damaged the AKP's reputation both domestically in Turkey and also to some extent internationally. However, it was the existence of Gulen-affiliated officers within the army and the rising discontent among secular officers against the AKP's policies, which intensified the AKP's concerns and fears. Therefore, despite the elimination of Gulenists from almost all government institutions, their existence in the military (even though there were not many of them) was still seen as a threat by Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Based on past experiences, Erdogan continued to demonise the Gulen movement and during public speeches mentioned potential action against the movement within the army. Based on this, many claim that Erdogan, by appointing Hulusi Akar as the General Chief of Staff, would have dismissed Gulenists at the Supreme Military Council (YAŞ) in August 2016. This they say pushed the Gulenists and allied cliques within the army to launch a coup before the government purge at the YAŞ. Aware of this the Gulen-affiliated military officers in the army wanted to make their "Golden Shot" by launching the coup.

Despite all the allegations, Fethullah Gulen refuses to take blame and responsibility for the coup and instead claims that Recep Tayyip Erdogan may himself be behind the coup as a way of establishing a presidential system and to further consolidate his power.

### **Are the Gulen-Affiliated Military Officers Capable of Launching Such a Coup?**

Considering the size of the coup, it is safe to say that there was more than one group or clique behind the attempted coup. It is also safe to say that, considering the Gulen movement's pragmatic stance, political aims, struggle with the AKP and extensive national and international networks, that they were involved in the coup. The Gulen movement has been infiltrating the military since the 1980s and this process was further expedited with the disposal of many senior military officers during the AKP-Gulen alliance years and the launch of the Ergenekon, Balyoz and other cases. After the arrest and imprisonment of many secularist officers through

these cases in 2009-2011, many of the Gulen-affiliated military officers were promoted and appointed to higher positions. So it was the AKP that opened almost all the doors to the Gulen movement within the army. To some extent, the group is more organised within the military at mid-level posts, which demonstrates a degree of strength.

However at this point what seems most likely is that those who are ideologically against the AKP and the officers that would not have been promoted in the coming YAŞ meeting cooperated with the Gulen movement and attempted the coup. This is because a large number of army members, including Chief of General Staff Hulusi Akar, and the 1st Army Commander Umit Dundar challenged the coup, which only leaves the above groups as potential putschists. Since both the Gulenists and those against the AKP would not have had the numbers, power and network to organise such a violent coup by themselves it is safe to assume that the coup attempt was carried out by a coalition. A coalition that knew it would be their last chance against the AKP government before dismissal and arrest at the August YAŞ meeting.

Also considering Gulen's reluctance in using violent methods in the past, it can be assumed that another group took on the duty of inflicting violence, while the Gulenists were more likely to be responsible for the organisation and planning of later phases.

## **Post-Coup Period**

### **AKP: More Doubts, Less Hopes for Democracy**

The prevention of the Junta's coup attempt is certainly a noteworthy development and a step in the right direction for democracy since people chose to side with the government. However, there are concerns as to whether the country will now take the necessary steps to keep on the path of democracy. Since 2010, the AKP's practice has given less hope to many people in believing that the party will increase the country's democratic values. This belief was further confirmed following the party's response to the 1 June 2015 elections, which resulted in the AKP's defeat (lack of majority), and turned the country towards chaos and bloodshed. Pragmatically, the AKP seized the opportunity to come to power by instigating chaos in the run-up to the 1 November snap-election. Since then the AKP has consistently ignored many democratic values. Although the same party asked the public to demonstrate in the streets during the attempted coup, this is not a sufficient indicator to believe that democracy has triumphed in Turkey.

The fact that some of the party's supporters' engaged in violent attacks against innocent soldiers, many of whom who had just performed the orders given to them as part of the chain of command; including lynching, insulting, and beheading, as well as chanting religious slogans on the streets, and calling for sharia, has further increased doubts amongst the many in believing that the AKP will turn the stance against the coup into a democratic process.

Doubts have also been strengthened by the AKP's intensification of security measures at the expense of ignoring democratic values, such as the declaration of the state of emergency. This will further intensify the party's power in Turkey and also its power and influence overseas, especially in the West. However, it will not be a sufficient condition in convincing the majority of the West to believe that the AKP takes democracy as its substance value. In order for the AKP to rectify its reputation it needs to do more on the ground, for example, it could start by releasing imprisoned journalists and politicians, end the war in the Kurdish region and all human rights violations and restart the resolution process of the Kurdish question.

## **Gulen Movement: Marginalisation, Isolation, and Partition within the Below**

The Gulen movement has existed for almost four decades, with a strong involvement in politics and a lack of transparency it has begun to lose its fight against the AKP, more specifically Recep Tayyip Erdogan. An affliction of the 'Hubris Syndrome' (Arrogance of Power), the group, or at least some cliques within the group, has now almost destroyed what they had constructed through forty years. Today all of the Gulen's 'castles' are occupied. What is more, the group is now being held responsible for launching a bloody coup, and to add to that, one that failed. As a result of this, the movement is in no position to run any public activities in Turkey, since the AKP's attempt to demonise them is working quite successfully. Naturally such a decline in support will heavily hinder the group's ability to recruit new members.

As for the upper strata within the group, they will most probably further radicalise and clamp together in an attempt to consolidate power, since they have all been severely weakened by this defeat. This can appear in different forms of coup against the government. The group's middle strata may also stay in interlock for a long time. However, the same may not be said for those that are new in the group or those that had pragmatic affiliations with the group; it is possible that they may break away from supporting the movement. A cleavage in that sense may develop in this line. It is not viable to say that this will lead to a split within the group, but it will further lead to isolation and marginalisation of some within the group. This, on the other hand, will further radicalise some followers.

Therefore, despite all these nightmares, the Fethullah Gulen movement will continue to re-take power and return to its golden days [2002-2010]. The group's support from the West and intellectual capacity can achieve this, but it will take quite some time. On the other hand, even if the group cannot nullify all the convictions against them regarding its involvement in the coup, it is not so difficult to predict that dark days are ahead for the group in the West as well.

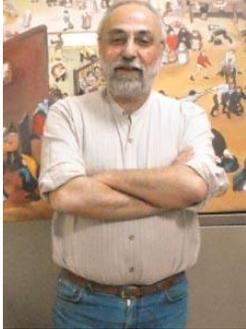
## **The Turkish Army: It is Time to Return to Their Barracks or Silivri Prison**

The Turkish military as briefly noted above has always found itself as the leading power in the protection of the Turkish Republic's values. Based on this, the military has regarded an involvement in politics as a natural right. Despite this though there has always been a split within the Turkish military to some extent. However, such a difference has never turned into an armed conflict until now. The failed Junta attempt in that sense is an indicator of the various cliques that are present in the army that are willing to cause conflict – this will impact the military in a series of ways. Alongside the physical effect, the army will be split into two divisions; those who are sensitive to secularism and support the coup and others who prefer to be in cooperation with the government. The 15 July coup attempt clearly indicated how the lines between these two groups had sharpened and will further be sharpened. This, on the other hand, leads to thinking that there is always a potential within some groups in the army for attempting coups.

In this sense, the existence of such severe secular groups within the military, and considering the extreme measures currently taken by the government, creates the potential dynamics for new coup attempts to take place.

## 6. Turkey: Atlanticism versus Rabiism

### Sungur Savran



The dramatic events that unfolded in Turkey on the night of 15 to 16 July have been excessively confined to the internecine struggle of two different Islamic currents, that of the AKP under the iron fist of Recep Tayyip Erdogan and its latter day nemesis the Gulen fraternity. This is misleading in two senses. On the one hand, it hides from view the distinct possibility or even more and more certitude that other tendencies within the Turkish armed forces (the TSK in its Turkish acronym) were involved in the planning if not the final execution of the failed putsch. On the other, it prevents us from seeing the more fundamental contradiction that besets Turkey today - a contradiction that relates to the country's position in the

world system.

We have already taken up the first question in an earlier article titled "Turkey: A War of Two Coups" (originally posted on the web site RedMed, but also published at [mrzine.monthlyreview.org](http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org)). We held there that, in addition to the Gulenists, the coup organizers included "a whole gamut of sensibilities in the armed forces which could be called pro-NATO and pro-U.S. for that is the common denominator that brings them together." We also added that, hence, "it is an alliance of the pro-U.S. seculars and the adepts of a religious fraternity under the protection of the U.S. that led the putsch. There is evidence to show that the defeat of the coup owes, partially, to the seeds of dissension within this alliance contre nature."

Additional evidence that has since surfaced not only confirms this observation, but in effect sheds new light on the coup that radically alters the earlier impression that the coup was organized outside the chain of command. In effect, both the intelligence agency (the MIT) and the top brass hid for hours on end intelligence regarding the coup that had reached the MIT by 4 p.m. and both also refused to respond to the phone calls made by Erdogan. The latter claims he learned about the coup around 8 p.m. from his "brother-in-law," probably short-hand for the intelligence agency of a friendly power, say Qatar. Erdogan's prime minister has also said that he learned of the coup from "friends and relatives." The commander of the air force, for that matter, claims he was alerted by his wife!

### Harsh State of Emergency

This obviously changes the whole nature of the failed coup. If, as seems to be the case, the chief of the general staff and at least some of the commanders of the principal services (army, navy, air force and the gendarmerie) were involved in the planning of the coup, but retracted their support at the last moment, and additionally, if the all powerful leader of the MIT, Hakan Fidan, were also involved, then Erdogan and the AKP government would today be standing in thin air, with no army or intelligence backing behind them. In effect, their whole policy stance since the coup goes to confirm this. Although a very harsh state of emergency was declared and ratified by parliament and torture and other breaches of the law are rampant, this is directed exclusively to the coup plotters, at least for the time being. And Erdogan personally has gone out of his way to establish a warm relationship with the opposition, a stunning turnabout when considered in the light of his perennial style of constant feud with his opponents. Moreover, he now, all of a sudden, seems to have developed a liking for Kemal Ataturk, the founder of the republic (of whom more below): the headquarters of the AKP are now adorned with a gigantic poster of Ataturk!

We will have to wait and see how the bewildering anomalies that have surfaced will be explained. However, there is no excuse any more for believing credulously the original AKP version of the unfolding of events presenting the Gulenists as the only culprit. This they continue to do, for reasons we have already explained in our previous article: "to ostracize the Gulenists and to hide from view that a much wider array of forces within the army have taken up arms." It is now incumbent on everyone who interpreted the coup in the light of this crass AKP propaganda to rethink the nature of the coup.

All this really strengthens our second point: that the coup is the expression of the more fundamental contradiction that has been tearing Turkish society and politics asunder in recent years. To put it succinctly, this is a war between the traditional Atlanticism of the Turkish ruling classes and what we would call the Rabiism of Erdogan and his cohort. Turkey has stood out in the Muslim world as the only such member of NATO for the entire historical period since World War II. However, under Erdogan and the AKP, the country has for the first time turned its face toward Muslim unity, to be reconstituted under Turkish leadership. This is what we call Rabiism for reasons that will become clear in a moment. It is this new orientation that is coming more and more into a clash with Turkey's entrenched Atlanticism.

### **What is Rabiism?**

The despotic drift of Erdogan and the AKP is there for all to see. In effect, the provocative title of our earlier piece, "Turkey: A War of Two Coups," was intended to draw attention to any misplaced conception that what was salvaged from the failed coup of the military was "democracy" in any meaningful sense of the term. Erdogan has ridden roughshod over the Turkish constitution by arrogating to himself powers that the constitution does not give the president, this being a largely ceremonious position.

His whole politics is obsessively concentrated on converting the parliamentary system into a supposedly presidential one, a euphemism in effect for autocracy. He has destroyed any semblance of independence for the judiciary, trampled unabashedly on the freedom of the press, practically banned the right to strike and almost entirely denied the freedom of assembly in protest. The wholesale destruction of Kurdish cities since last summer under conditions of round-the-clock curfews that last for months on end has left speechless all those who have witnessed the resulting rubble of whole neighbourhoods or even entire towns. Thus Erdogan's despotism is an incontrovertible fact.

The left in Turkey has been quick to label this "fascism" and Erdogan a "dictator." Photoshop images of Erdogan with a Hitler moustache abound on social media.

To call the current (i.e. pre-coup) Turkish regime "fascist" would be a travesty since it still has many features of bourgeois democracy alive. Such a label would also hide from view the fact that Erdogan and the AKP have to go a long way to achieve the establishment of the kind of regime they aspire to and thus would prevent us from seeing the concrete contradictions of the near future. However, in our opinion, it is not useful to call "fascist" even the accomplished form of that regime, if ever established fully. Leaving aside the complex question of the distinctive characteristics of fascist regimes, which would take us too far away from the topic at hand, we think that what is called for is a category peculiar to the Islamic world, since the whole political agenda pursued by Erdogan is clearly focused on that world. What facilitates the job for us is that Erdogan and the AKP themselves offer a solution for us.

The official symbol of the movement is now the rising of the right hand with the thumb turned inside, thus yielding the number four, in remembrance of the victims of the Cairo neighbourhood of Rabia al-Adawiyya, where the forces of General al Sisi gunned down reportedly hundreds of supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood protesting against the ouster of the elected Brotherhood president Mohammed Morsi during the Bonapartist coup of July 2013. (For details concerning the coup itself, see our "Bonapartist coup in Egypt.") Erdogan's regime

has thus found its symbol. It remains for us to create the label Rabiism out of the name Rabia, which means "four" in Arabic.

This symbol and name are appropriate for Erdogan's movement, for the whole idea behind the movement is revanchism that feeds on a kind of feeling of victimization in the Muslim world in general and Turkey in particular. We cannot but be schematic when explaining what lies behind this victimization. (Some of the ideas here explained are elaborated upon in a longer piece of ours: "Class, State and Religion in Turkey" in Nesecan Balkan/Erol Balkan/Ahmet Öncü (eds), *The Neoliberal Landscape and the Rise of Islamist Capital in Turkey*, NewYork. Berghahn Books, 2015.)

The Islamic world, in particular in its heartland that has always been the societies of the Middle East, experienced the rise of industrial capitalism in Western Europe and the subordination Islam suffered as a result in a manner quite different from many parts of the world. From the 7th century on, Islam had dealt with the Christian Western world, Europe for all practical purposes, on an equal to equal footing and even nibbled away at some of its territory for a time, Spain in the west and the Byzantine territory of Asia Minor and the Balkans in the east.

From the 19th century onwards, if not somewhat earlier, Islamic civilization fell under the domination of the West, mostly in the form of colonies established by Western powers, though, in the case of the Ottomans (Turks), Iran and Afghanistan, this took the form of semi-colonial oppression. This colonial or semi-colonial subjugation was experienced in differential manner by the various social classes. The cultural-religious humiliation was, of course, shared. Otherwise, the peasant, the humble artisan and tradesman, and later, the proletarian masses lived in abject poverty and experienced Western domination as straightforward plunder, while the ruling classes, even when they were made junior partners in the pillage of the wealth of these countries and the labour of working classes, grudgingly remembered their days of glory and splendour and yearned for a nostalgic return to those times when they themselves were the plunderers.

The Islamic religion, as in many other similar cases of the oppression of a people by another, remained the common medium of these very different grievances and very often acted as the vehicle of domination used by the ruling classes in Muslim societies in holding the labouring classes at bay, while at the same time being presented as the repository of a holy cause that binds the whole society in solidarity. This is, beyond all conjunctural factors, what explains the extremely strong appeal of Islam to the masses in this part of the world.

For historical reasons, Turkey has had a unique experience within this overall development. First, it is the only country in the whole Islamic world to have made a great leap toward secularism in undisguised manner. Even today, the word "secular" is taboo in the Arab world, the closest term used being "civil state." Even Erdogan had to learn this aversion at his own expense when he, exceptionally, lauded secularism on his visit to Egypt under Morsi (those were the days!). Turkey's secularism is not without its inner contradictions that really offset many of the gains this principle would normally bring, but, nonetheless, secularism has been a mainstay of the regime, at least nominally.

Secondly, however, early republican Turkey under Kemal Ataturk did not only resort to secularism but launched a full-scale attack on the mores, values, practices and cultural forms of Islamic-oriental society, adopting wholesale alternative ones imported from the West, called "contemporary civilization" by the unrivalled leader. It was a kind of civilizational cleansing. To the mind of the whole society, it appeared that secularism and the civilizational shift were Siamese twins, inseparably linked to each other.

Thus, the profound dislike that the popular masses developed toward the civilizational shift also marked their attitude to secularism. The masses, peasants, the humble petty-bourgeoisie

of the cities and later the proletariat regarded the Western ways of the bourgeoisie as the cultural outward appearance of the class divide. Class and culture were identified and anything smacking of Western manners was suspicious in the eyes of (a majority of) the popular masses. The rise of a new fraction of the bourgeoisie from the 1970s on expressed itself in opposition to the firmly entrenched original fraction of the bourgeoisie resolutely tied to Western institutions, mores and ideas. For this reason, Islamism was to be its ideology. Erdogan, of humble origins although later turned capitalist merchant, seemed to the masses to be "one of us." This confluence of social (class) and cultural (religious) factors is what explains the enduring charismatic influence of Erdogan on the popular masses. Need it be added that this is no doubt a kind of deception on the part of the masses for classwise Erdogan is not "one of them," but is firmly anchored in the new wing of the bourgeoisie.

Thirdly, and most importantly for our discussion on what we have named Rabiism, being the heirs to the Ottoman Empire, the Turkish ruling classes also had the advantage of holding the Caliphate as a weapon. However, Kemal Ataturk did not only put an end to empire and declared a republic in 1923, but on the heels of this, abolished the Caliphate itself in 1924. A part of the ruling classes of Turkey have never forgiven this. In their eyes, the Caliphate was not only the personification of the unity of the umma, the worldwide community of believers, but also the key to Turkish glory and splendour in the bosom of the Muslim world. This is why Turkish Islamism has always also been very nationalistic, despite the overriding importance of the umma as the religious community.

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Rabiism is the ideological movement that strives to unify the Sunni-Muslim world around the leadership of Erdogan."

It is now this Turkish glory and splendour that Tayyip Erdogan wishes to revive and re-establish. He has posed his candidacy to being the "Rais" (leader, chief) of the whole Sunni-Arab world to begin with, although he also has claims on the Muslims of the rest of the world, starting with the Balkans and Transcaucasia. Rabiism is the ideological movement that strives to unify the Sunni-Muslim world around the leadership of Erdogan. Whether he will go so far as to take upon his shoulders the mantle of Caliph if given a chance is a moot point, though not unimaginable by any means. His most staunch followers have of late certainly started to treat him in reverential awe bordering on religious sanctification.

### **Objective Bases and Subjective Conditions**

Predictably, this kind of a socio-political programme is neither the product of one man's fantasies nor even the awakening of a long-dormant political idea. It has its material basis in the growing of the Turkish bourgeoisie into a force capable and in need of opening to the rest of the world for markets and investment. This does not yet mean that Turkey is becoming an imperialist power in its own right. It has rather joined that league of countries in the international system that occupies a midway position between imperialist countries and those that are still anchored in the underdevelopment of their productive forces and dependent on imperialism in the classical sense of the term.

We are here talking of countries such as Brazil, India or South Africa, which despite themselves being still beholden to many of the scourges of underdevelopment and dependency, nonetheless have started to distinguish themselves from what was once known, as a single totality, the "Third World." This is a process that is continuing, whose outcome is difficult to gauge. We should, however, beware taking a dogmatic approach that freezes countries into the categories of imperialist and dependent, without any intermediate shades and, even more importantly, without the prospect of countries moving up and down in the imperialistic hierarchy.

Turkish capitalism reached this important phase with the consolidation of the domination of finance capital (in Lenin's sense) under the military dictatorship of the early 1980s. This

development coincided with the crisis and then the final demise of the experience of socialist construction in Eastern and Central Europe and the Soviet Union, to be accompanied by the internal decomposition of the Maoist experiment in China.

Turkish capital turned its face to the new geography arising from the ashes of this experience and the Turkish bourgeoisie adopted a wholesale programme of extending its influence economically, politically and culturally to the new countries. Turgut Ozal and Suleyman Demirel, both leaders of the traditional centre-right serving successively as presidents of the republic from 1989 to 2000, turned their gaze to the Turkic world that was emerging in Central Asia and the Caucasus as a result of the decomposition of the Soviet Union, not neglecting the Balkans. Necmettin Erbakan, the historic leader of the Islamist movement made a different attempt, during his brief premiership in the mid-nineties, at forming an alternative to the G-8 group in the form of a self-styled D-8 (D for "Developing"), composed exclusively of Muslim countries.

So by the time the AKP of Erdogan, successor to Erbakan as leader of the Islamist movement, came to power in 2002, Turkey already had at least 15 years of experience in practical attempts to extend its sphere of influence. It may be added that, ironically, the system of educational institutions that Fethullah Gulen, who allegedly masterminded the military coup of 15 July single-handedly, has established around the world, including many poor African countries, was conceived in exactly the same spirit and was eulogised by the very people, starting with Erdogan himself, who now compete in vilifying the imam!

So in a very well-defined sense, Erdogan's Rabiism is a policy that caters to the needs of the Turkish bourgeoisie in gaining new spheres of influence in the less developed parts of the world in Asia, the Caucasus, the Middle East, Africa and the Balkans (in particular Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Kosovo and Albania). However, it is also a divisive policy for the Turkish bourgeoisie, based as it is on a clearly revanchist orientation vis-à-vis Kemalism.

As we have been emphasising over the years, the traditional and well-entrenched fraction of the Turkish bourgeoisie is entirely committed to the Western alliance, i.e. it is Atlanticist through and through. For the very same reason, it is an ardent partisan of the principle of secularism that is a hallmark of the state founded by Kemal Ataturk. Thus, the two fractions of the bourgeoisie, besides their struggle over resources, loans, markets, state procurements, public tenders etc. are also at loggerheads as to where the country will be heading in the 21st century. This, in its entirety, is what we have called the "political (bloodless) civil war of the bourgeoisie" that has dominated the scene throughout the 14 years during which Erdogan has been in power.

In this struggle between the two fractions, the closest allies of the Westernizing-secular wing are the United States and the European Union. Since the Turkish armed forces (the TSK) have been such a bulwark of NATO first against the Soviet Union and now against resurgent fundamentalist Islam, NATO is of pivotal importance in this struggle between the two fractions. As we have already pointed out on more than one occasion, the idea of Turkey's Pakistanization, i.e. the TSK becoming, as in the case of Pakistan, a vehicle for the promotion of Islamist politics, is premature, to say the least, simply because the TSK is a NATO army through and through. So the drive to establish a despotic regime in Turkey under the specific traits of Rabiism has to come into clash with this definite characteristic aspect of the TSK. The failed coup of 15 July was, in our opinion, a first showdown between these two contradictory forces. It was, as we said in the introduction to this article, in all probability, not the making of the Gulenist faction alone, but a product of the contradictory alliance between the secular pro-NATO forces in the TSK and the adepts of the Gulen fraternity.

## **Whither Turkey?**

We said "a first showdown." Now that the putschists have been defeated, it may legitimately be asked why the qualifier "first" is used. The trouble is that evidence implicates almost the whole officer corps, including the majority of the top brass, and the intelligence agency as the planners of the coup.

There are innumerable questions that are waiting to be answered and contradictions to be explained with respect to the behaviour of the top brass that night. So unless Erdogan and the AKP do not proceed smoothly and skilfully to eliminate the still existing risks, there remains the danger of a new attempt at the ouster of the government. Should that happen and the new putsch succeed where the first one has failed, the "success" will only be relative, since the resistance put up by the followers of the government has shown that the most likely outcome is a civil war. A first mini-civil war broke out on the night of 15 to 16 July. This will in all likelihood form the model of the more durable civil war that will break out if the country faces another attempt.

Turkey is a powder keg. This is where what we have called the (bloodless) political civil war of the bourgeoisie has brought the country. That political civil war now threatens to break out into the open, growing into the military form.

Articulated as it is to the progressive Syrianization of Turkey as a result of the government's complicity with ISIL and Erdogan's all-out war on the Kurds ever since he lost the June 2015 elections, this war threatens to immerse Turkey in a tragedy next to which the Syrian drama will pale into insignificance. And that is a lot to say.

Atlanticism and Rabiism are both reactionary by their very nature. Atlanticism has made the Turkish capitalist state the bulwark of the defence of imperialist interests in the Middle East. Rabiism, on the other hand, is no anti-imperialism. It is the political programme of a class (or class fraction) that wishes to restore its right to plunder a part of the world on the basis of a reactionary ideology and it is despotic through and through. Nonetheless, should war break out between the masters of NATO and Turkey, Marxists in our opinion are duty-bound to come out against imperialism, without a shred of political support to Rabiism and Erdogan and through independent military means of their own, if this is achievable.

So we are now facing two reactionary alternatives. Up until recently, there was certainly another alternative emerging on the horizon. Turkey was shaken by three momentous social movements in the space of two years: the people's uprising of June-September 2013, the Kurdish serhildan (revolt in Kurdish) connected to the defence of Kobanê in Syria against the forces of ISIL between 6-12 October 2014, and the metalworkers' wildcat strike that gripped tens of thousands of workers in May-June 2015. However, the deep divisions between these movements, the misplaced policies of the Kurdish movement and the deplorable lack of leadership of the working class movement have combined to lead to a situation where despite these remarkable episodes of social struggle, the exploited and oppressed masses have not been able to form an alternative organizational pole and an alternative programme.

Yet it is too early to say if the potential that burst forth in those memorable episodes is totally spent. Surely, the only way to save the country from internecine slaughter is to count on that potential and tirelessly build a third alternative to the twin dangers of Atlanticism and Rabiism.

*Sungur Savran is based in Istanbul and is one of the editors of the newspaper Gercek (Truth) and the theoretical journal Devrimci Marksizm (Revolutionary Marxism), both published in Turkish, and of the web site RedMed.*

## 7. Caught Between the Islamic State and Erdogan: Turkey's Most Important Opposition Politician Talks to VICE News

By John Beck

December 18, 2015 | 8:12 pm

Selahattin Demirtas looks weary. He's well-groomed as usual, navy suit, pressed shirt, and neatly trimmed black hair, but his dark eyes are red-rimmed, his broad face somber. As co-chair of the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), figurehead of the Kurdish political movement in Turkey, and perhaps the country's most important opposition politician, a restful existence was never likely, but the strain of the past few months has been particularly intense.

Demirtas, a former human rights lawyer, has been attempting to play peacemaker amid escalating violence between security forces and militants from the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) that has riven the country. More than 550 people, including 150 civilians have now been killed since a temporary ceasefire collapsed in July, according to the International Crisis Group, the worst toll in 20 years. In the southeast, the state response has involved military operations and implementing curfews on entire towns.

The ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), meanwhile, has grown increasingly intolerant of any form of dissent. Police have detained hundreds, including HDP members, as part of a broad crackdown in Kurdish areas and targeted opposition press. Demirtas is in danger too, a series of bombings linked to the Islamic State (IS) left dozens of mostly pro-Kurdish activists dead in recent months, and he says there's been at least one direct attempt on his life.

His own security has been increased as a result. VICE News met with the HDP leader in the basement conference room of an unremarkable hotel in Diyarbakir, the unofficial capital of Turkey's majority Kurdish southeast. Bodyguards sporting dark suits and earpieces were stationed around the otherwise empty lobby whispering into radios and eyeing up entrances and exits.

Aides withdrew as the co-chair settled into a leather chair, adjusted his suit and looked ahead. "We had," he began, "a difficult year... we faced heavy massacres organized by IS that they were possibly able to carry out with support from within Turkey."

He chooses his words carefully, avoiding the blustering rhetoric and aggressive speaking-style favored by many Turkish politicians, but clearly feels assailed from all sides.

"Our members are being arrested, our mayors are being arrested and relieved of duty, our members are getting killed in the streets, the graveyards and mosques are being set on fire and shelled," he said, adding that both the ruling party and jihadists share what he describes as a "monistic and fascistic" worldview. "In some ways, actually, AKP is Turkey's IS."

Things have not always been this bleak. Turkey's "Kurdish problem," as it is known, goes back decades. Successive governments have systematically marginalized the country's estimated 15 million Kurds, outlawed their language, and, at times, denied their very existence.

The PKK, designated a terrorist organization by both Ankara and Washington, was one of the consequences of this repressive treatment, and went on to wage a bloody three-decade insurgency against the Turkish state that left 40,000 dead.

But Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan — then prime minister — initiated talks with the group's jailed leader Abdullah Ocalan, leading to a 2013 ceasefire agreement, and period of fragile peace. Pro-Kurdish parties, once regularly dissolved by the Constitutional Court for failing to adhere to vague definitions of "Turkishness," were allowed to grow, including the HDP, which Demirtas helped found in 2012.

Since then, the party has broadened its appeal by portraying itself as the progressive face of Turkish politics, emphasizing women's rights and LGBT issues alongside a focus on pluralistic democracy. When the parliamentary election came round in June, it fielded more candidates from minority groups than any other faction. Suddenly young, urban Turks with no background in Kurdish politics were speaking breathlessly of Demirtas, engaged by the HDP's inclusive vision of Turkey, one at odds with Erdogan's strict notion of Turkish identity: conservative, Sunni Muslim, and fiercely nationalistic.

Those polls were widely seen as a referendum on the president's dream of gaining a large enough majority to alter the constitution and transfer executive powers to his office after 12 years as PM. In the end, the HDP crossed the 10 percent threshold required to gain a parliamentary presence, securing 80 seats and denying the AKP a majority of any sort for the first time since it took power.

Joyous crowds gathered in Diyarbakir and elsewhere in the country to celebrate this historic moment. In Istanbul, Demirtas and fellow co-chair Figen Yuksekdog addressed a room packed full of press shortly after the results were announced. It was, he said, a vote against Erdogan's presidential ambitions, the "end of dictatorship discussions," and a victory for all of Turkey's oppressed groups.

Demirtas was elated. "HDP's sun is enough, we don't need the lightbulb [AKP's logo]," he beamed, to cheers from supporters assembled outside.

Demirtas and fellow HDP co-chair Yuksekdog speaking after the results of the June 7 elections were announced. (Photo by John Beck)

The happiness was short-lived. On July 20 a suicide bomber killed 33 pro-Kurdish activists at a cultural center in the border town of Suruc. Most of the victims had been planning to cross the border into Kobane, the Syrian border enclave that became a symbol of Kurdish resistance against IS after fighters from the PKK-linked People's Protection Units (YPG) managed to drive off a mass offensive with the help of US airstrikes.

The Suruc attacker was trained by IS, but many Kurds blamed Turkish security forces for laxity or collusion, and in the immediate aftermath, the PKK shot dead two police officers in a nearby town, claiming they'd collaborated with IS.

Violence spiraled. Four days after the bombing, Ankara announced a two-pronged "war on terror," claimed to focus on both the PKK and IS, but concentrated almost entirely on the militant Kurds. Attack jets began an ongoing series of airstrikes on the group's positions in Turkey and neighboring northern Iraq that state media claims have killed hundreds, but PKK commanders say have had little effect. In turn, they launched a number of assaults on army and police targets, killing dozens.

Security forces simultaneously embarked on what Demirtas describes as a "shock doctrine" in the southeast, escalating military activity, arresting hundreds in Kurdish areas, and imposing strict curfews that left civilians trapped in their homes. In response, some residents dug ditches and built barricades to stop police vehicles entering, and armed youth known as the YDG-H, which PKK leaders have told VICE News are not under their control, fought police with guns, rockets, and Molotov cocktails.

Residents of the predominantly Kurdish town of Cizre, climb a barricade during a demonstration against the killing of 17-year-old Hasan Nerse by security forces. (Photo by John Beck)

Back in Ankara, with the AKP unable to form a majority government, coalition talks with the country's second and third largest parliamentary blocs — the secular Republican People's Party (CHP) and far-right Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) — were ongoing. They eventually fell apart and Erdogan called snap elections, gambling at being able to pull in a larger share of the vote.

Erdogan's government became less and less tolerant of dissent since his rebuke in the polls. Courts prosecuted journalists responsible for critical coverage, jailed dozens for "insulting" the president, and even arrested members of the HDP for alleged terrorism links. AKP politicians encouraged an ugly strain of nationalist sentiment that resulted in mob attacks on Kurdish businesses and HDP offices.

"There again needs to be a declaration of a will that "yes, we cannot solve this problem through conflict, we cannot solve this problem through war"

Tragedy struck again on October 10, when two IS-linked suicide bombers blew themselves up at a peace rally part-organized by the HDP in Ankara. 102 people lost their lives, including two of the pro-Kurdish party's parliamentary candidates.

It was the worst terror attack ever to take place in Turkey, but instead of bringing the country together, it highlighted the depth of its divisions. Kurdish activists blamed the state either directly or indirectly, and instead of striking a conciliatory tone, some officials accused the Kurds themselves. Ankara's AKP mayor Melih Gokcek even suggested that the PKK or one of its affiliates had carried out the bombing in an effort to boost HDP support ahead of the polls. That same day, the militant group's commanders declared a unilateral ceasefire, saying it wanted to avoid violence that might prevent a fair election.

A black-clad Demirtas was there the following morning, when crowds gathered to mourn in the city's central Sıhhiye square. Standing atop a bus-turned-stage, he expressed his sorrow at the loss of life and offered his condolences to the victims.

"They all came to Ankara with hope for peace, but we couldn't protect them," he said. "We are sorry for that, and we are sending them back home in coffins. But we will stand tall, we will continue singing our songs of freedom and dancing our *halays* [a type of folk dance]."

The mourners clutched roses and silently embraced as he spoke, but later broke into shouts of "Thief, murderer Erdogan" and held their fists aloft chanting "murderer state will be brought to justice."

The HDP subsequently canceled all scheduled election rallies for safety reasons. Erdogan and other AKP leaders campaigned on the message that only they could bring stability to Turkey. It worked, and the party won an unexpectedly decisive victory on November 1 — regaining a majority and securing another four years of unchecked power.

HDP once again passed the threshold, but by less this time, likely a result of religious Kurds reverting to the AKP or swing voters opting again for the more established CHP.

Demirtas sees the resumption of state violence against the PKK as a play to garner a larger share of the vote for the AKP. "All this created a concern for security in Turkish society all of a sudden, and AKP utilized this concern for security to shift the votes to their side," he said, adding that the November election results should be seen as invalid as a result.

"It was a campaign period AKP carried out by itself alone, and there were ballot boxes set up under state terrorism. We cannot say that all the results from it are legitimate and the outcome of democracy." Under these circumstances, he said, the HDP again securing a parliamentary presence is a huge success.

Things have hardly improved since then. His position secure, Erdogan vowed to "liquidate" the PKK, while the group has now scrapped its ceasefire and leaders say they will retaliate if Ankara doesn't soften its approach. The curfews have begun again too, as have the attacks by the YDG-H.

The HDP said in late November that Demirtas's armored car had been hit by a single bullet while traveling through Diyarbakir. Authorities examined the vehicle but said there was no evidence of gunfire and only that the damage had been caused by a "hard object." A few days later, also in Diyarbakir, the well-known Kurdish lawyer and human rights activist Tahir Elci was killed along with two police officers as gunmen clashed with security forces following a press conference.

Police investigations of both cases are ongoing, but Demirtas doubts that further information will be forthcoming on the facts of his, or whether Elci — who had received death threats after saying in a television interview that the PKK weren't a terrorist group — was killed deliberately.

IS has been able to target the HDP thanks in part to their presence just across the border in northern Syria. The YPG are still battling the jihadists there and have carved out an enclave for themselves, known as Rojava. But Turkey is wary of a strong Kurdish presence on its southern border, Erdogan has consistently labeled the YPG as "terrorists," and Kurds often accuse Ankara of providing help to, or at least tolerating, IS in order to contain the YPG.

'We are a huge society without a state, and the states that we live in do not treat us in way that would make us feel like we are in our own county'

Demirtas is more measured, but blames the policies of Turkey, along with what he terms "Sunni bloc" countries of Saudi Arabia and Qatar, for the extremist group's strength, as well as those of the US and its allies to an extent. "Obviously, the West also has its share in it, IS is a consequence of a collective sin," he said.

Speaking after Elci's death, Demirtas stated that the lawyer had been killed by "statelessness." Elaborating in response to a question from VICE News, he said the phrase had a double meaning: that the region's 30 million or so Kurds live without a country of their own, and that those in Turkey, Iraq, and Iran are often denied the freedoms, rights, and security that should come with citizenship.

"The state is not the Kurds' state, and also the Kurds do not have a state in the Middle East. I did not express this to mean there must be an independent Kurdish state in Turkey. However, the Kurds too have the right to form a state in the Middle East and everyone needs to respect this," he said mentioning the Kurdistan Regional Government in northern Iraq, as well as Kurdish-controlled areas of Syria.

"In Turkey, Kurds want autonomy. These are all types of states. They do not have to be independent, however, if they are to be independent, again the right of the people for self determination has to be respected. In the end, we are a huge society without a state, and the states that we live in do not treat us in way that would make us feel like we are in our own county."

In Turkey, this treatment, particularly over the past six months, will be difficult to forget. "The polarization [of society] has deepened far more... we won't be able to go back to normal as easily as before," he said, adding that the June 7 elections briefly created a now-squandered opportunity for resolution. And as a measure of the vast divide that exists even in political sphere, he said that the HDP has no contact whatsoever with either Erdogan or his ministers.

Demirtas now finds himself trapped between the Kurdish movement's violent elements, and the inflexible Turkish state, seemingly one of the few attempting to stop the bloodshed. His solution is simple — dialogue and negotiation. He advocates a bilateral ceasefire, the resumption of negotiations and peace process. "There again needs to be a declaration of a will that 'yes, we cannot solve this problem through conflict, we cannot solve this problem through war.' And the broken trust [between the two sides] needs to be strengthened and renewed again." he said, adding that NGOs and the international community, in particular the US, could play a facilitatory role.

He's doggedly confident that this can be achieved, even though neither side look conciliatory. The alternative, Demirtas warns, is yet more strife. "If the government increases the pressure, we foresee that the resistance in the neighborhoods will spread everywhere... The government approaches the young people with a policy of violence and the young people respond to this violence with violence, by armed resistance."

This cycle continued in the days after his meeting with VICE News. Two protesters died in Diyarbakir during clashes with police and another two policemen were killed elsewhere in the province by a roadside bomb, reported to have been the work of the PKK. A force of several thousand police and military personnel backed by tanks and helicopters then imposed a curfew on the southeastern towns of Cizre and Silopi, sparking heavy fighting that state-media claim left at least 55 militants and one soldier dead.

Peace, for now, seems distant. And for Demirtas and the HDP, the future seems likely to offer little respite.

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