

COUP ATTEMPT OF JULY, 15: TURKEY'S FIGHT FOR DEMOCRACY AND TO RE-CONFIGURE CIVIL- MILITARY RELATIONSHIP

Göktuğ SÖNMEZ

Göktuğ Sönmez received his bachelor's degree in International Relations from Bilkent University, his master's degree in International Relations at London School of Economic (LSE), and is a PhD Candidate now at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London. His research areas are International Relations Theory, Turkish Foreign Policy, Energy Politics, and Radicalization and Violent Extremism. He conducted research on these areas at several think-tanks including the Center for Strategic Research of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey and the Centre for Middle Eastern Strategic Studies (ORSAM). He is currently a visiting researcher at ORSAM.

July 15, 2016 proven to be one of the major turning points in the modern Turkish history. First time in the republican era, a coup attempt was thwarted with the involvement of the people along with most of the security forces who displayed a brave anti-coup stance and defended it with their lives. Leaving more than two hundred and thirty martyrs and more than two thousand injured including not only the people but also anti-coup police and military officers, the incident would surely be an important topic for future research. Still, based on the data we have so far, following the successfully thwarted heinous coup attempt, several points need a closer look; how it started, and how Turkey as a country vocally showed its deep-rooted commitment to democracy, and the counter-measures that are already being taken by the democratically elected government. Focusing on these points will not only let us see the process from a broader angle, but also help find out the ways how to avoid such an incident in the future.

On the night of July 15, 2016, the coup attempt started with the gunfire in the headquarters of the Chief of Staff. Almost simultaneously jets started their low altitude flights and some military personnel and vehicles blocked the Bosphorus and Fatih Sultan Mehmet bridges in Istanbul. At first, rumours were about a stolen plane which might attack the parliament or a similar key strategic building. However, blocking the bridges raised questions which tried to be addressed by referring to the possibility of multiple terror attacks which might be carried out by ISIS and/or PKK. However, within less than an hour, thanks to several video recordings on Twitter as well as PM Binali Yıldırım's statement on live TV broadcast, it became clear that a small radical clique affiliated with FETÖ within the military was carrying out a coup attempt acting outside of the chain of command. Around early mid-night, coup plotters occupied the state-owned TV channel and

broadcast their coup statement, reminiscent of previous coups in the past where TRT was one of the first key targets since broadcasting a coup statement would mean not only the coup succeeded, but also that there would not be any chance of resistance. In a very short span of time, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, against whom an assassination attempt was just carried out, via *FaceTime* talked with several private TV channels, succeeded not only to show that he is aware of the situation, he is fine and the state apparatus is taking the situation under control. He also found the chance to reach out the people in order to encourage them to stand against the putschists. Even though before Erdoğan's call for resistance there were already thousands of people on the streets, it significantly increased the amount. Along with the AK Party's and President Erdoğan's public support, opposition parties' harsh criticisms about the coup attempt, critical statements coming from top brass,

deceived privates' gradual realisation of what they were pushed to be a part of, and the people's traumatic memories of the previous coup attempts and their impact on both political and economic landscape of Turkey contributed to the formation of an unprecedentedly broad front with various profiles, ideologies and occupations. The following hours up to almost noon of the following day was like a nightmare for the people, who, to the surprise of many, seemed quite ready to face it. On the one hand, jets and helicopters attacked the parliament, the national intelligence service headquarters, police headquarters and special forces headquarters. Thus, along with the buildings to which attacking have been beyond imagination even in the case of a coup attempt, the headquarters of military and police special forces were also targeted. Attacking the latter in order either make them join the attempt or to eliminate them as a resisting force, where Turkey's some of the most elite

security forces who actively engage in its fight against terrorism showed the Machiavellianist nature of the attempt, to say the least. On the other hand, they also brutally attacked ordinary citizens without any hesitation. Helicopters even used thermal cameras in order to locate and shoot unarmed citizens, hidden behind trees or walls just in order to be able to survive. What kind of a damage such heavy ammunition inflicted on people is beyond the words, something people on the streets would tell you if you sincerely ask what they lived through that night. Make sure that they will do so –since I personally witnessed- without their felling of sadness triumphing over their pride even when they are talking about their much beloved friends and relatives deformed due to expectable impact of an helicopter fire on an ordinary person. These were the very people, in spite of their friends and/or relatives being brutally martyred by these attacks, who faced tanks, helicopters

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and automatic rifles with an unprecedented courage and commitment to democratic norms and values. More than two hundred people were martyred and more than two thousand people injured in the people's fight for democracy. The people's resistance, grievances, injuries, the moments they bravely stood against the coup attempt can still be felt while walking through the particular streets of Ankara where the attacks were quite intense. It is not so different from walking in the streets of Sarajevo where a sworn enemy, indifferently, by using every military means it has at its disposal,

but specifically making use of snipers, tried to cleanse a particular portion of the population just because of their belief system. You can still see bullet holes, bombing marks and destroyed and then rebuilt buildings. The difference is, this time in Turkey, it was not a war; the attackers were serving in our own army, they were educated and trained by the people's taxes, they attacked our own people with our own guns and machinery. Moreover, it is happening in 2016, when we are talking about such an undemocratic, outdated, and brutal attempt, after numerous EU-*acquis*-related

reforms were carried out over the years in order to avoid such an attempt.

As of now, the result was taking our democracy back from a group with a radical ideology and an outdated reading of the world which glorifies coups with a ridiculous belief that it can be done via reading out a statement in the state-owned TV channel, at a time where TV channels are numerous and social media and internet became *the real* mobilisers. Even though the puschists tried to cut all the TV and internet communication by attacking TÜRK-SAT, brave resistance over there prevented them from cutting the link between the people and the ongoing fight and the putschists' brutality. Speaking of social media and internet, the incident, once again proved that they undoubtedly play a key role in today's world in terms of resistance, conveying messages and organising people. At the end of the day, the coup attempt was orchestrated via *WhatsApp* and the

resistance was encouraged by *FaceTime*, organised by social media, publicised via websites and video sharing platforms.

About the putschists affiliation, each new confession and testimony as well as statements of the soldiers previously tried in the Balyoz case of which forged and fabricated evidence-based nature has been widely known for some time, there seems to be no doubt about *the* group or at least the *leading* group. From testimonies confessing decades old involvement in the group to the Chief of Staff's statement that the putschists who took him hostage "offered" him to speak with Gülen, to the 1 dollars with particular serial numbers found in the residences and offices of Gülenist officers, and in the schools controlled by Gülenists, several key points were already surfaced, and probably much more to come. With respect to the radical clique and its affiliations, FETÖ, with each and every new confession

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by the people arrested, more evidently stand out as the organisation which did not only have Turkish people live such a nightmare, but also put a great deal of effort to lay the ground for such an attempt by infiltrating the army since 1971, with increasing infiltration capacity with each following decade. There were numerous intelligence reports as well as newspaper articles about their infiltration starting from the 1980s. FETÖ leader Gülen's video footages encouraging his followers to infiltrate as many state institutions as possible without

being detected and wait there before making a final move to "hijack" the establishment have been in circulation since the 1990s. Their control over the entry exam mechanisms of police and military colleges, and their involvement in the previous cases against top brass in order to easily promote their affiliates within both institutions as well as their strong presence in the judicial institutions, have not been a secret. Custody, arrest and suspension numbers are and will keep changing for some time but they accumulated to a vast amount more than fifty thousand, showing

the organisation's deep presence in judiciary, police, academy, military, and bureaucracy due to its years-long efforts.

A key point, an important moment of disappointment, also needs to be mentioned here. In an environment where a country as a whole, with all its political parties, most of the military and almost all of its people rise for democracy, reactions from the leading Western newspapers and TV channels were regarded as quite disappointing. Their analyses of the coup attempt covered a wide range of spectrum from even supporting such an attempt, to criticising people's stance against it for their ideology and from analysing why the coup plotters could not succeed to being indifferent and to claim that it was just a staged drama. Considering the attempt as a drama where hundreds of people were brutally martyred and thousands injured by heavy military machinery live on TV, where thousands of people agreed

beforehand to be arrested once they failed, and where the ruling figures risked their lives due to armed attacks against their cars, helicopter strikes against their residences, and jet bombings against the Parliament seems quite questionable. Comparisons with the Gezi protests were made by the people on the streets due to the lack of Western press and capitals' support this time. The response from the Western capitals were also regarded as being too late and too weak as if statements were not to be made earlier in order to see the "winner". With "but"s, and "although"s, Western coverage after the attempt was again mostly focused on how religious language prevails among the resistance (even though all the opposition parties were there and the following week, the main opposition party CHP organised a meeting in Istanbul where the AK Party announced it will be there, too and the municipality which is led by AK Party announced that transportation will be

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free) and how the ruling party can tighten its grip. The principle of objecting a coup immediately in a country in order to support democratically elected government and the will of the people even if you disagree with the ideology and/or policy choices of that government seems compromised. Even though the language used was to a great extent revisited after the attempt failed, considering the brutality of the incident, the fact that Fetullah Gülen still resides in the US, and some unfortunate statements about the arrested military officers including referring to them as “interlocutors”, people’s possible tendency towards

an anti-Western and anti-US position needs to be closely monitored in the foreseeable future. Within this context, many analysts are also impatient to see what Putin-Erdogan meeting in early August 2016 would bring, also considering the fact that the pilots shooting down the Russian jet in late 2015 are also arrested based on accusations about their links to FETÖ. Amidst renewed debates about Turkey’s Atlanticists and Eurasianists, Alexander Dugin’s (who might not be the most popular political figure in Russia but still a key figure for Eurasianist circles in Turkey) visit to Ankara Mayor Melih



Gökçek several days after the attempt, and both people's and politician's repeated calls for the Western diplomats and politicians to pay visits to damaged state buildings, especially the Parliament, and convey their condolences, it is clear that more vocal and visible EU and US support and commitment in the post-coup environment would be required. It cannot go without mentioning though, that some promising steps were taken including the ambassador of the UK to Ankara Richard Moore's interview with the *Hürriyet Daily News* (which was not only the first, but also the most positive comprehensive statement due to both its timing and content), US Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman Joseph Dunford's visit to Turkey, and ECFR's co-chair and former Swedish PM and Foreign Minister Carl Bildt's several comments mostly available online. Within Turkey, similarly, reaction from intellectuals and academics were quite modest comparing to some major social

developments Turkey experienced recently, causing a significant amount of public criticism directed against them, questioning both academics' and intellectuals' performance in terms of their moral responsibility to stand against such an attempt. Even though this list of silence or insufficient and hesitant positioning can be extended, just to mention a few to see how they performed for future reference would suffice.

Now, it is the turn of the democratically elected government and the state establishment to try and punish the people who took part in this coup attempt within the boundaries of the "rule of law". Investigations, arrests and custody processes need to be conducted with a delicate attitude in order to avoid any unlawful and counter-productive consequences. The process might also be used for FETÖ affiliates who succeeded not to be exposed to put the guilt on the people they need to eliminate. Thus, a quite strict commitment to

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the rule of law and independent legal procedures based on authentic and sufficient evidence is a must. It is also clear that without successfully detecting as many as possible supporters of the organisation within the boundaries of the rule of law, repetitive waves could be possible after decades of infiltration. Along with the start of legal process, the military and intelligence structures will be subject to major restructuring. As several first but very

significant steps, in line with the state of emergency decrees, military high schools were shut down, war academies will be brought under a new National Defence University, land, air and naval forces under the Ministry of National Defense, and military hospitals under the Ministry of Health. Regarding the leader of FETÖ, extradition of Gülen was demanded from the United States with required legal files about him were transferred. Additional

ones will also be sent based on new testimonies and trial processes. Exams for entry to state organs, bureaucracy, police and military colleges -of which questions were seemed to be stolen beforehand for achieving stronger presence by FETÖ- will be under close scrutiny. Financial resources and broadcasting machine of the FETÖ organisation as well as its schools as the main source of its human capital have been also on the state's radar. Simultaneous, multi-dimensional efforts seem to be the way to go as well as the recently announced state of emergency (SoE), which would help the state to take necessary steps fast and more effectively, and leave these days behind as soon as possible. Considering the fact that just in one year Turkey suffered from more than a dozen terrorist attacks by several groups as well as a coup attempt claiming hundreds of people's lives and left thousands injured, and compared to France's response to two major tragic terror attacks

by extending its 6 months SoE for another 6 months, Turkey's decision to declare 3 months SoE seems more than understandable. Criticisms about the decision coming from the very same press and individuals which were deadly silent or shyly supportive of the coup attempt speak for itself. The people's commitment to democracy and its defence of its will as well as the state's repeatedly stated commitment to the rule of law without compromising its security and stability would act as major control mechanisms regarding the legal process.

In short, Turkey's display of how deep-rooted democratic values are in the society, political parties, and the majority of its military won the day. On the other hand, coup plotters and their supporters, as well as their instigators have to bear this shame of attempting to impose their will over the democratically elected government without any hesitation to use violence and terror to achieve their

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goal as the self-appointed guardians of whatever distorted values they believe (or were made believe) they fight for. Without forgetting the fact that the country has numerous martyrs and injured people who are the real heroes of the night including the patriotic military personnel and police forces who stood against putschists, the people have all the right to celebrate what they achieved

and to show how the people can defend their democracy to the world. For the long term, Turkey's strict commitment to the rule of law and merit and competence-based approach to employment, appointment, and promotions in each and every institution including the military would be the key to avoid similar tragedies and consolidate this achievement.

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Ortadoğu Stratejik Araştırmalar Merkezi (ORSAM)

Süleyman Nazif Sokak No: 12-B Çankaya / Ankara

Tel: 0 (312) 430 26 09 Fax: 0 (312) 430 39 48

www.orsam.org.tr