

# The Turkish Military in Politics, and the Attempted Coup of 15-16 July 2016

William Hale<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>SOAS University of London, wh1@soas.ac.uk

## Abstract

After summarising some of the international academic literature on the nature of coups d'état since the 1950s and the reasons for their success or failure, this article outlines the history of military interventions in Turkey's politics since 1960. The following two sections recount the events of the attempted coup of 15-16 July 2016, and try to explain why it failed. Some unanswered questions arising from this story are then outlined, weighing up the rival claims of culpability. The article concludes by assessing whether any classic coup d'état could succeed in the conditions of modern Turkey.

**Keywords:** Turkey, military, politics, coup d'état, July 2016

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## **Türk Siyasetinde Ordu ve 15-16 Temmuz Darbe Girişimi**

### **Öz**

1950'lerden itibaren gerçekleşen darbelerin yapıları ve başarı veya başarısızlıklarının nedenlerine dair uluslararası akademik literatür özetlendikten sonra, 1960'dan itibaren Türkiye politikasına askeri müdahalelerin tarihi özetlenecektir. Takip eden iki bölüm 15-16 Temmuz 2016 tarihli darbe girişimindeki olaylara yer vererek, darbenin neden başarısız olduğunu açıklamaya çalışacaktır. Bu olayda bazı açıklanmayan sorular özetlenecek, karşı iddiaların kusurları tartışılacaktır. Makale, herhangi bir klasik darbenin modern Türkiye koşullarında başarılı olup olamayacağını değerlendirerek sona ermektedir.

## **1. Introduction**

A few months after he returned to office in November 1991, Turkey's then Prime Minister, Süleyman Demirel confidently predicted that the era of military coups in Turkey was over: '[F]or the time being', he opined, 'neither the atmosphere of Turkey nor the atmosphere of the world is suitable for a coup d'état' (Evans, 1992, p. 106). Demirel's prediction turned out to be too optimistic, but it has to be said in his defence that very few of the many observers of Turkish politics had expected the traumatic events of the night of 15-16 July 2016. The AKP government appeared to have made its peace with the generals, while President Erdoğan, in spite of his quest for personal autocracy, retained substantial public support. Hence, for most of us, the attempted takeover came like a bolt from the blue, and still requires explanation. It also offered important comparisons with previous coups in Turkey, both successful and unsuccessful, as well as with global trends. In an attempt to address these issues this paper starts by summarising some general theory on the nature of coups, as suggested in the academic literature. This is followed by an outline of Turkey's experiences with military interventions since 1960. The next two sections, respectively, relate the events of 15-16 July, as nearly as we currently know them, and try to offer explanations for the failure of the coup. The final section addresses some critical remaining questions, and speculates whether Süleyman Demirel's prediction has, at long last, been achieved.

## **2. The Coup d'état: a Typology, and Global Trends**

In 1972, looking back over the plethora of military takeovers in post-colonial states over the previous decade, Ruth First (1972, p. 13) concluded that 'coups have become a growth industry for academics as well as military men'. Not all the think-tank theories about the role of the military in politics are mutually consistent, or relevant to the Turkish case, but they do enable us to put coups in categories. The most obvious distinction is between failed and successful coups – that is, those which are suppressed and those that achieve their aims (the former being much less studied than the latter). Successful coups can be

subdivided according to the extent of their aims and results. ‘Takeover’ coups are those which result in a full assumption of power by the military group leading the coup, whereas a ‘veto’ coup (alternatively, a *pronunciamento* or ‘displacement coup’) merely install a civilian government to the military’s liking, and probably following its offstage directions – in effect, a sort of proxy civilian government. Within the category of ‘takeover’ coups, Eric Nordlinger (1977, pp. 21–27) also distinguishes between those resulting in ‘guardian’ regimes, which aim to return power to civilian hands within a reasonably short time (he suggests 2-3 years) and ‘ruler’ regimes, which have long-term ambitions and wide-ranging social and economic goals (see also Clapham & Philip, 1985, pp. 8–10).

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An additional typology may differentiate both successful and failed coups in terms of their degree of support within the armed forces, and the level within the command hierarchy at which they originate. On the first score, Turkish experience suggests a clear distinction between coups which are either contested within the armed forces (that is, opposed by all or a substantial proportion of the top commanders) or uncontested (that is, organised and led by the top of the command hierarchy, and carried out within the normal chain of command). Not surprisingly, coups in the second category have much better chances of success, since officers in the middle echelons simply carry out the orders of those at the top, in the standard military fashion. More recently, Naunihal Singh (2014, pp. 36–38) has suggested a parallel typology distinguishing between coups originating at the top, middle and bottom of the military hierarchy, that is, those planned and led respectively by (i) the generals, (ii) the majors, lieutenant-colonels and colonels, and (iii) lower-ranking officers, sergeants and corporals. By his calculation, worldwide, almost 70 percent of coups in his first category have been successful, compared with just over 40 percent in the second category, and under 30 percent in the third (Singh, 2014, p. 71, fig. 3.2.).

In historical perspective, as the calculations by Jonathan M. Powell demonstrate (Powell, 2012), , the incidence of coups worldwide showed a sharp rise between 1950 and the early 1960s, followed by

a steady drop until the early years of the new century, after which the figure has remained fairly stable at around three per year. These shifting trends have been especially marked in the Arab world, and notably in Turkey's neighbours, Syria and Iraq (see Be'eri, 1982, pp. 69–81; Picard, 1988, pp. 120–125). After attaining independence in 1946, Syria witnessed no less than eight coups d'état between 1949 and 1970, after which the Ba'hist regime under Hafiz al-Assad and then his son Bashar ruled continuously until the start of the current civil war in 2011. Similarly, Iraq saw five coups between 1936 and 1968, after which the Iraqi Ba'hist, under Saddam Hussein from 1979, ruled the country until overthrown by the US-led invasion of 2003. In the Middle East, what were originally military regimes, like those of Nasser in Egypt and the Ba'hist in Syria and Iraq effectively converted themselves into something else, by erecting single-party states, controlling the country through massive quasi-military security forces and clientelist economic networks. In effect, such regimes achieved 'coup-proofing' by favouring the military with spoils and benefits, dividing their militaries into mutually suspicious elements, and increasing the strength of paramilitary versus regular armed forces (Powell, 2012, pp. 1025–1029, 1036). Globally, the end of the Cold War, during which the USA and USSR had both promoted coups in third countries as part of their worldwide rivalry, and the international community's rejection of military takeovers, may have contributed to the decline of the coup as an instrument of political change (Friedman, 2014). What is also noticeable is that, as the total incidence of coups has fallen, the proportion of successful coups has increased, suggesting that the coup-plotters have become far more careful and skilled in their preparations and execution, having learned from experience.

### **3. Coups in Turkey, 1960-97**

Before summarising the Turkish republic's previous history of military interventions,<sup>1</sup> a brief outline of the command structure of the

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<sup>1</sup> In principle, this could have been stretched backwards into the Ottoman era – in fact, the Ottoman empire can be described as a 'praetorian state' (see Perlmutter,

Turkish armed forces as of 15 July 2016 seems in order. At the top of the pyramid, the Chief of the General Staff had overall command of all the armed forces, under the President. Under him were the commanders of the four armed services – that is, the army (‘land forces’), navy, air force and gendarmerie, each commanded by a four-star general.<sup>2</sup> Under the Commander of Land Forces are four geographically organised Armies, with four-star generals in command of each. In a structure originally deriving from the Cold War, the First Army is based in Istanbul, to defend Turkey’s territory in Europe, the Second in Malatya, responsible for operations in the south and south-east, and the Third in Erzincan, to defend the north-eastern frontier. The Fourth, or Aegean Army, based in İzmir, is classified as a training unit. Two other crucial commands are those of the elite Special Forces, based in Ankara (directly under the General Staff) and of Turkey’s biggest air base, at İncirlik, near Adana, which has a Turkish commander, but with use shared with the US air force and those of other NATO countries.

Since the Second World War, Turkey’s history of coups d’état has followed global trends quite closely. On 27 May 1960, the Turkish armed forces launched the first military takeover of power since 1913, when Enver Pasha led the ‘Raid on the Sublime Porte’, seizing power and then dragging the Ottoman Empire into the First World War. Between 1960 and 1980, there were five successful or attempted coups or an average of one every four years. Between 1981 and 2016 there were just two (or, arguably, only one, and that unsuccessful), or at most an average of one every eighteen years. The attempted coup of 15-16 July 2016 came as a surprise, if only because there had been no full military takeover for the previous 36 years. In most of these cases, an underlying cause of military activism was the military’s stern

1981). However, Ottoman conditions, especially in the pre-modern era, were so different that comparison seems pointless.

2 Under reforms enacted after the failed coup of 2016, control of the Gendarmerie (which acts as the police force in rural areas) and of the Coast Guard, was transferred from the General Staff to the Ministry of the Interior. The Chief of the General Staff was also made answerable to the Minister of Defence, rather than the Prime Minister, as formerly (see “Turkish gov’t introduces new decree law to overhaul army,” 2016).

commitment to Kemalist secularism, in the face of alleged attempts to undermine it by populist-conservative governments. The story of each of these interventions points up some interesting comparisons with global trends.

The events of 27 May 1960 can be classified as a successful takeover coup which, unusually, was contested within the armed forces. It originated among a group of middle-ranking officers, who at a late stage recruited four Generals to their cause, one of whom Cemal Gürsel, retired as Commander of Land Forces just days before the coup. Nonetheless, they were opposed by the Chief of the General Staff, General Rüştü Erdelhun, who was sternly loyal to Prime Minister Adnan Menderes, the victim of the coup, with the views of the other Force Commanders unknown. Since Menderes had declared martial law in Istanbul and Ankara shortly before, the attitude of the martial law commanders in the two cities was crucial: of these, General Fahri Özdilek, in Istanbul, took no active role in the coup, but was known to be sympathetic to its aims, whereas in Ankara General Namik Arguç was a loyal Menderes supporter. Away in Erzurum, then the base of the Third Army, General Ragıp Gümüşpala sat on the fence until the last moment. Nonetheless, the conspirators were able to take over all strategic points in the capital during the early hours of 27 May, arresting General Erdelhun, President Celal Bayar and other leading supporters of the Menderes government. Menderes himself, who was on a pre-arranged visit to Eskişehir, in western Anatolia, was followed by air and arrested in Kütahya, some 80 km. to the south, later in the day. Having taken over the Ankara radio station, the new military leaders announced their takeover to the nation at 4.36 a.m. During the following months there were conflicts within the ruling junta between moderates, led by Gürsel, who wished to establish a 'guardian' regime, by returning power to an elected civilian government at a reasonably early date, and the radical would-be 'rulers', allegedly led by Colonel Alparslan Türkeş, whose booming tones had announced the coup over the radio on 27 May. In this contest, the first group won out and the military regime was formally dissolved in November 1961 (Hale, 1994, pp. 103–110, 131–147).

Unfortunately, the return to civilian power did not go unchallenged, since over the next eighteen months there were two unsuccessful and contested attempts to re-establish military rule by minority factions within the armed forces. The first of these, on 22 February 1962, was led by a maverick Colonel, Talat Aydemir, who had the support of crucial units in the capital, and at once point seemed poised to take over the presidential complex in Ankara and arrest leading members of the government. However, the rebels were resolutely opposed by the Chief of the General Staff, General Cevdet Sunay and the veteran Prime Minister, İsmet İnönü, as well as the main part of the armed forces. Hence, Aydemir decided to back down rather than provoke a civil war. Aydemir's quixotic second attempt to seize power, on 20 May 1963, was far less threatening, since it was thinly supported and fairly easily suppressed. It led to the execution of Aydemir, along with one of his fellow-conspirators, in June 1964 (Hale, 1994, pp. 156–162, 167–169).

In 1964, Turkey settled down to seven years of elected civilian government under Süleyman Demirel, but this democratic interval was broken by a fourth intervention on 12 March 1971. This can be classified as a partly-contested 'veto' or 'displacement coup', since the armed forces issued a 'memorandum' demanding Demirel's resignation, and his replacement by a 'powerful and credible government... within the democratic rules' which would end the 'present [allegedly] anarchic situation'.<sup>3</sup> Failing this, an outright military takeover (for which no preparations had actually been made) was threatened. The moving force behind the intervention was the Air Force Commander, General Muhsin Batur who, by his own account, favoured an outright takeover and was supported by the Commander of Land Forces, General Faruk Gürler and the Navy Commander, Admiral Celal Eyiceoğlu. However, he was opposed by the President, ex-General Cevdet Sunay, as well as the Chief of the General Staff, General Memduh Tağmaç. The memorandum was thus a compromise between the conservatives and radicals at the top of the armed forces. In the run-up to the coup, Demirel's government

3 Text translated from *Cumhuriyet*, 13 March 1971.

had been shaken by a series of terrorist attacks from the ultra-left, but he retained substantial public support, so the Generals had to tread carefully. The result was a series of nominally civilian governments, in which Demirel's Justice Party participated without its leader, which lasted until March 1973. At this point, Gürler's bid to succeed Sunay as President of the Republic was defeated in parliament,<sup>4</sup> and the way opened for general elections and a return to full civilian government in October 1973.<sup>5</sup>

The fifth coup in this series came just under seven years later, on 12 September 1980. It came after years of highly unstable coalition government, followed by mounting and violent conflict between armed gangs of the extreme right and left, and economic breakdown. All of this severely eroded support both for Demirel and his main opponent, Bülent Ecevit, then the leader of the Republican People's Party. The intervention, which can be classified as an uncontested takeover coup, was met at the time with general relief. In this case, the military chiefs, headed by the Chief of the General Staff, General Kenan Evren, set themselves up as a five-man junta, known as the National Security Council,<sup>6</sup> which then appointed a puppet civilian cabinet headed by ex-Admiral Bülent Ulusu. The 12 September regime restored order and put the economy back on the rails, besides producing a new constitution, increasing the powers of the military and restricting civil liberties. In November 1982 this was passed in a referendum of dubious legitimacy, which also elected Evren unopposed as President for the following seven years. However, when elections were held on 8 November 1983, the party favoured by the military, led by ex-General Turgut Sunalp, failed miserably. Instead, the race was won by the Motherland Party, led by Turgut Özal, who had previously been written off by Evren as

4 Until the constitution was changed in 2010 the President was elected by parliament, not the voters.

5 This must be regarded as greatly simplified summary of a very complicated and frequently contested story (Hale, 1994, pp. 184–211). It rests fairly heavily on Batur's memoirs (Batur, 1985) and the writer's conversation with him in 1981.

6 In Turkish, Milli Güvenlik Konseyi. This is to be distinguished from the Milli Güvenlik Kurulu (MGK) which was set up as a regular body under the 1982 constitution: confusingly, the English translation is the same.

a serious contender. The result was a sometimes uneasy cohabitation between Evren and Özal, which lasted until 1989, when Evren retired and Özal was elected his successor (Hale, 1994, pp. 246–269, 276–283).

The final intervention in this series, prior to 2016, occurred in the spring and summer of 1997 (Hale, 1999, pp. 31–33). In 1983, Turgut Özal had died suddenly of a heart attack, and was succeeded as President by his old rival, Süleyman Demirel. In parliament, Tansu Çiller took over as leader of the True Path Party (*Doğru Yol Partisi*, or DYP) founded by Demirel, becoming Turkey's first - and so far, only - woman Prime Minister. In June 1996, following serious losses in the previous elections of December 1995, she formed a highly controversial coalition government with the pro-Islamist Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*, or RP), led by Necmettin Erbakan, which was now the biggest party in parliament, with Erbakan as premier. Throughout its one year's existence, the 'Refahyol' coalition was wracked by infighting in its constituent parties, and rampant corruption scandals, mainly in the DYP. Combined with the RP's apparent attempts to undermine Atatürk's secularist legacy, this provoked widespread opposition from the firmly Kemalist state structure (the army, judiciary and civil service) as well as civil society – the latter being represented by the business community, trades unions, the mass media, and large public demonstrations of angry citizens. Matters came to a head on 2 February 1997 when the RP mayor of Sincan, an outer suburb of Ankara, organised a 'Jerusalem Night' meeting, at which calls for *jihad* were issued. In response, two days later, the military rolled its tanks down the main street of Sincan during the morning rush hour. On 28 February, the military chiefs who sat on the reconstituted National Security Council, now a regular body established by the 1982 constitution, presented Erbakan with a long list of 'recommendations', including legal measures to ban Islamic fundamentalist propaganda, strict adherence to the secularist principles enshrined in the constitution, and reforms to the school system to limit religious (i.e., Muslim-based) instruction. Formally Erbakan accepted these demands, but did very little to implement them. Following resignations from the DYP, Erbakan resigned on 18 June 1997, expecting

to reconstruct his government with the help of a minor opposition party, but Demirel exercised his right to appoint an alternative candidate. As a result, Mesut Yılmaz, now the leader of the Motherland Party (founded by Özal) formed another coalition, which duly implemented the ‘28 February measures’.

These events have been described in some detail, mainly because classifying the ‘post-modern coup’ of 1997 is hard. It was not a conventional takeover, since its success depended on the support of large groups in society, as well as the sitting President, and not just on military action, or the threat of it. Even the date can be queried – should this be fixed as 4 February, 28 February, or 18 June? At best, it might be described as a quasi-coup, uncontested (within the armed forces), but with limited ‘veto’ or ‘displacement’ aims, and not wholly dependent on military intervention.

Summing up, it can be said that over this 37-year period, Turkey experienced five coups and one ‘quasi-coup’. Of these, two, the second and third, failed: of the remainder, the first was a rare example of a contested takeover coup; the fourth was a partly contested ‘displacement’ or ‘veto’ coup, while the fifth was a straightforward uncontested takeover. In international perspective, the Turkish experience has parallels with those of other countries, but differs from them in two respects – first, that none of the interventions originated with the bottom of the military hierarchy, and, second, that all of them had ‘guardian’ rather than ‘ruler’ outcomes. Putting it briefly, it can be suggested that the first peculiarity relates partly from Turkey’s highly hierarchical, Prussian-based military structure (see Birand, 1991, pp. 39–41), and partly from the fact that Turkey’s armed forces are huge by the standards of most coup-prone countries.<sup>7</sup> The fact that the armed services are both large and geographically dispersed makes it hard to organise a successful coup without the support of the top commanders, one of whose prime subsequent concerns is to prevent a ‘coup within a coup’ by the middle ranks of the officer corps (a concern

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7 As of 2016, 410,000 ‘active frontline personnel’, plus 186,000 ‘active reserve personnel’ (“Turkey Military Strength,” 2016).

amply demonstrated by the experiences of the first military regime of 1960-61). The longer the military stays in power, the greater this risk: hence, all Turkey's military regimes have voluntarily withdrawn after a relatively short period, and limited their role to that of 'guardians' rather than 'rulers'. Voluntary withdrawal can also be seen as the result of the relatively well developed civilian political institutions, notably political parties, in Turkey, compared with most other states where the military has seized power. Finally, Turkey's international alignments, especially its membership of the Council of Europe and its aim of EU membership, together with the integration of its relatively industrialised economy into the global economic system, have almost certainly limited the soldiers' ambitions as rulers.

#### **4. 15-16 July 2016: the Drama Unfolds**

The immediate events which led to the attempted coup of July 2016 apparently began on the afternoon of 15 July, when an army helicopter pilot whom we know only as Major H.A. and was stationed at the Army Aviation Training Centre at the Güvercinlik air base in the Ankara suburb of Etimesgut, visited the headquarters of the National Intelligence Organisation (MİT) in Ankara. Interviewed by the MİT director Hakan Fidan, H.A. said he had been a member of the rebel organisation until 2014, but had then quit. He had been told by a Colonel at the base that he would 'have a night flight tonight, and at the end of the flight we would "take" Hakan Fidan'. The MİT agents interrogated him at length, and cautiously, since they had previously had numerous false reports of impending coups. MİT informed the Deputy Chief of General Staff, General Yaşar Güler, at around 4.00-4.15 p.m. The Chief of the General Staff, General Hulusi Akar, later said that he had been given this information at around 5.00-6.00 p.m. by Güler. At around 6.15 p.m. Akar and Güler held an emergency meeting with Fidan and the Land Forces Commander, General Sali Zeki Çolak, at which orders were issued to halt all flights by the army aviation units until further notice, with those aircraft currently airborne to return to base. All movements of tanks and other units were to be halted. General Çolak was then sent

to the Güvercinlik air base, but reported that there was nothing unusual he could see (Fırat, 2016, pp. 46–49; Özkök, 2017; Yazar & Bozkurt, 2016, pp. 17–21).<sup>8</sup>

So far, neither Fidan or Akar had discovered exactly when or where the blow would come. According to their later statements, a rebel hit squad consisting of Akar’s aide de camp, Lieutenant-Colonel Levent Türkkan, a Captain and four NCOs, had originally planned to meet at Akar’s residence at 2.30 a.m. on the following morning (17 July). They would ask him ‘will you be [our] Kenan Evren or not?’ and if he refused they would ‘render him powerless’. However, according to the court indictment at the trial of the conspirators in March 2017, one of their number, Lieutenant-General İlhan Talu, saw Hakan Fidan enter Akar’s office in the General Staff headquarters (apparently, around 6.15 p.m.). Realising their plans were compromised, the rebels brought forward the start of their operation to the evening of 15 July. As Akar later related it, shortly before 9.00 p.m. he was visited by Major-General Mehmet Dişli, who warned him, in a state of high excitement that ‘the operation is beginning’. Türkkan then burst into Akar’s office, accompanied by Akar’s own security detail and a group of heavily armed soldiers, apparently from the Special Forces Command. At pistol point, gagged and handcuffed, Akar was kidnapped and taken to the Akıncı<sup>9</sup> air base, near Ankara, which the rebels were using as their headquarters. Here he was later joined by Generals Gürel and Çolak. The Air Force Commander, General Abidin Ünal, was abducted from a wedding in Istanbul, and taken to Akıncı by helicopter. But for the Navy Commander, Admiral Bülent Bostanoğlu, who escaped the net, the rebels now had all the top commanders in their hands (Yazar & Bozkurt, 2016, pp. 22–32, 70–71; Fırat, 2016, pp. 49-55, 127; see also Benli, 2017).

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8 Some of the details in these various accounts differ: for instance, Özkök, which is based on Güler’s later court testimony, puts the time of H.A.’s arrival at the MİT as ‘around noon’, whereas Fırat (2016, p. 46) puts it at 2.45 p.m. However, the main points do tally.

9 Formerly known as Mürted: since the failed coup it has reverted to its previous name.

At this stage, the conspirators apparently still believed that General Akar was on their side, and that he would take over as the nominal leader of the coup. According to a later statement by Türkkan, a self-confessed member of the underground network set up by the Islamist ideologue Fethullah Gülen, who was living in exile in Pennsylvania, ‘what we were told was that General Yaşar [Gürel] was not a Gülenist, but Hulusi [Akar] liked the Gülen organisation, that he was a sympathiser and would not harm the organisation’ (Bozan & Günday, 2016). In his court testimony, Türkkan added that ‘[Gülenist] community brothers liked Hulusi Akar. They thought he would accept and command the coup’.<sup>10</sup>

In fact, the conspirators had no known evidence for this, and Akar was anything but supportive. According to his later testimony to the public prosecutor, after his capture Akar had a sharp argument with Mehmet Dişli. As he related it ‘Dişli said “the action has already begun... and there is no turning back”. I couldn’t make sense of it at first, maybe he mentioned planes, but then I understood that it was an operation that can be called “an uprising”. I got angry and said “What the hell are you talking about? What operation? Are you nuts? Don’t do it” (“I told coup plotters not to spill blood,” 2016). In Akıncı, Akar was interrogated by Commodore Ömer Harmancık and Brigadier-General Hakan Evrim. According to Akar, Harmancık read out a two-page statement, then handed it to him saying ‘Commander, just read this, and if you sign it and read it out on television everything will be just fine, we will take in everybody, we will bring in everybody’. Akar related that he rejected this proposal ‘violently and furiously’ and shouted ‘Who do you think you are? Who are you? Who is your head, your buttocks? [sic].’ General Akar continued, ‘at this Hakan Evrim said something like “if you want we can let you call<sup>11</sup> our opinion leader [*kanaat önderimiz*] Fethullah Gülen”. “I’m not calling anyone” I responded’ (“Genelkurmay Başkanı Orgeneral Akar’ın savcılık ifadesi 1-2-3-4 (Anadolu Ajansı metinleri),”

10 There is now a large literature on the Gülen movement (but see Yavuz & Esposito, 2003; Yavuz, 2013).

11 In Turkish, görüşürüz: literally, ‘to meet with’, but frequently used to mean ‘talk on the telephone’.

2016). Faced with a blunt refusal, which was supported by the other force commanders whom they hauled in, the conspirators were left to go it alone, but for safety kept their hostages captive at the Akıncı base for the rest of the night.

While this drama was being played out in Akıncı, the rebels were trying to take hold of Turkey's main cities. At around 7.30 p.m., before Akar's abduction, rebel tanks in Istanbul blocked the bridges across the Bosphorus, and rebel fighter jets and helicopters were crossing the skies above Ankara. In response, senior members of the government and state bureaucrats began to organise resistance. At around 10.00 p.m. the Speaker of parliament, İsmail Kahraman, five cabinet ministers, senior members of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and civil servants gathered in the government complex in Ankara's Çankaya district to set up a 'Coordination Centre'. Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım was in Istanbul when the rebellion began: he left by car for Ankara, but was forced to halt half-way by rebel gendarmes. However, he kept in touch with Çankaya by telephone. At 11.05 p.m. he gave a telephone interview with the national broadcaster NTV in which he described the action as a 'rising' rather than a coup, and made it clear the government would resist it (Yarar & Bozkurt, 2016, pp. 163–169).

A crucial part in the resistance was also played by the Commander of the First Army, General Ümit Dündar, who remained loyal to the government. Although the rebels took over some units in Istanbul, without the full support of the First Army Command their bid for power was almost certainly doomed from the start ("1. Ordu Komutanı Orgeneral Ümit Dündar darbeyi nasıl bozdu?," 2016).<sup>12</sup> In Ankara and Istanbul, there was also fierce opposition from the civilian protestors,

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12 At 1.30 a.m. on 16 July Dündar, together with Admiral Bostanoğlu and the Special Forces Commander. Brigadier-General Zekai Aksakallı, all appeared on television to denounce the coup. Later, retired Brigadier-General Ahmet Yavuz tackled some soldiers in the street in Istanbul. He told them that Dündar had ordered them to return to barracks, and they obeyed. Naively, the rebels had apparently assumed that Dündar and Aksakallı, along with Generals Akar, Çolak and Güler, plus Air Force General Abidin Ünal and Admiral Bostanoğlu, were all on their side since they had included them in what is alleged to be a list of senior appointments they intended to make if the coup succeeded (Yarar & Bozkurt, 2016, pp. 269, 272, 485).

hundreds of whom, mobilised by social media, poured into the streets and squares to defy the rebel tanks and armour. They suffered some serious casualties in the process, although in many cases conscript soldiers, reluctant to fire directly at unarmed civilians, merely discharged their weapons into the air, and in some cases even gave them to the protestors (Yarar & Bozkurt, 2016, pp. 161, 221, 242–258, 263). It was also noticed that the crowds included supporters of all the main parties, including the Republican People's Party (CHP) and the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democracy Party (HDP), neither of which could be said to favour the AKP government, and that the opposition leaders all issued firm denunciations of the attempted coup ("Muhalefetten darbe girişimine tepki," 2016).

For the rebels, the high point came at 11.30 p.m. when they took over the state broadcaster TRT's studios in Ankara, although not the many private TV stations. At gunpoint, they forced the regular TRT television newsreader, Tijen Karaş, to read a proclamation from the 'Peace at Home Council', the name which the conspirators had chosen for themselves. This claimed, among other things that the armed forces had 'taken over the administration of the state', that martial law was declared throughout the country, that there would be a curfew until further notice, and that steps had been taken to close all airports, frontier posts and ports (see Firat, 2016, pp. 81–83; see also Yarar & Bozkurt, 2016, pp. 197–199). Significantly, none of the members of the 'Peace at Home Council' were named, leaving the audience with no clear idea of who had claimed to have taken over. The emptiness of these claims was also demonstrated by the fact that, not long afterwards, protesting crowds took over the TRT studios. The rebels also failed to capture either the headquarters of Turk Telekom in Istanbul, which controlled telephone and internet communications, or the Türksat installation at Gölbaşı, near Ankara, which controls the satellite through which Turkish television stations broadcast (Yarar & Bozkurt, 2016, pp. 272–273, 297–303). Most airports also remained open.

In all these events, a critical question was the fate of President Tayyip Erdoğan, who was on holiday with his family in a hotel in the

southern Turkish resort of Marmaris. Apparently, he first heard of the attempted coup at 9.30 p.m. on 15 July from his brother-in-law, Ziya İlgen, in Beylerbeyi, an Istanbul suburb near the northern entrance to the first Bosphorus Bridge, who reported that the bridge was blocked by troops. He was able to establish contact with Prime Minister Yıldırım by telephone, and then, at 10.00 p.m., with Hakan Fidan, so was aware of events. Soon after midnight, he was telephoned by Hande Fırat, news anchor for CNN Türk television (Yarar & Bozkurt, 2016, pp. 123–126; Fırat, 2016, pp. 81–83, 99–100). Through a smart-phone which Ms Fırat held up in front of a television camera, he gave a live interview which, according to the Andy-Ar polling organisation, 84 percent of their respondents later claimed to have watched (Şenerdem, 2016).<sup>13</sup> In it, Erdoğan admitted that the military chain of command had broken down, due to the kidnapping of the top commanders, but stated that the rebels were only a minority of the armed forces and would be brought to justice. Above all, he called on the people to go out into the streets in protest.

Erdoğan's impromptu broadcast was almost certainly the turning point in the drama, since it made it clear that the rebels were not in control of the state structure, which would resist. However, it did not mark the end of their action. In Ankara, the headquarters of the elite Special Forces was held for the government by their commanding officer, Brigadier-General Zekai Aksakallı, but at 2.15 a.m. the building was attacked by a group of Special Forces soldiers under Brigadier-General Semih Terzi, who flew in from the eastern city of Erzurum. While approaching the building, Terzi was shot in a gunfight by Aksakallı's bodyguard, Sergeant Ömer Halisdemir, who was himself immediately shot and killed by one of the rebels (Yarar & Bozkurt, 2016, pp. 304–310, 313–317). The loss of Terzi, and the failure to take over the Special Forces unit in Ankara, was a serious loss for the rebels, since Terzi had been one of their key leaders. In later court evidence, it also emerged that Terzi's team had brought with them a laser designator and

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13 The front cover of Fırat, 24 Saat, has a dramatic picture of the event.

range-finder device which would have been used to guide missiles fired from F-16 jets. This would have caused far more serious damage and casualties than the cannon fire and rockets from the Cobra helicopters which were used for attacks on the parliament and other buildings. The list of targets for which this was to be used included the headquarters of the Ankara police and MİT, followed by the parliament, the presidential palace and the Prime Minister's residence. Fortunately, the soldier detailed to use this device defected to the government side, preventing what would probably have been a far more serious death toll ("Coup attempt plan to pound key Turkish state buildings with high-tech device failed, testimony shows," 2016; see Fırat, 2016, pp. 100-103).<sup>14</sup>

Away in the southern province of Adana, at the İncirlik air base, the commanding officer, Brigadier-General Ercan Van and nine of his officers gave important support to the rebels, since planes from İncirlik took part in the bombing of targets in Ankara, and tanker-planes from the base refuelled rebel jets in flight. After the failure of the coup Van unsuccessfully sought asylum in the United States, effectively admitting his guilt (Nasi, 2016). Among the rebels' targets in Ankara was the building of the Grand National Assembly, Turkey's parliament, where around 100 Deputies of all parties had gathered. At 2.40 a.m. the building was bombed by rebel helicopters, causing some serious damage to the building (Yarar & Bozkurt, 2016, pp. 330–337). The attack was quite pointless, since by this stage it should have been clear that the coup attempt would fail, but it indicates the scale of disorganisation on the rebel side.

After his dramatic broadcast, Tayyip Erdoğan and his team prepared to leave Marmaris – originally, either for Ankara and Istanbul – and boarded a helicopter for the nearby airport at Dalaman at around 2.00 a.m. Here they boarded the President's official Gulfstream aircraft, TC-ATA, which took off at around 2.30 a.m. The pilot flew a roundabout route to Istanbul, to evade possible attack by rebel fighter aircraft. Apparently, two pairs of F-16 jets took off from the rebel base at

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14 My thanks to Colonel William Bache for advice on this point.

Akıncı, but either failed to find TC-ATA, or desisted from shooting it down. A likely explanation is that Erdoğan's pilot had changed his radio transponder to that of a regular Turkish Airlines flight, TK8456, and the rebel pilots – assuming they found it – decided that, in the dark, it would not be worth taking the risk of shooting down an innocent civilian aircraft.<sup>15</sup> TC-ATA was then left circling over Istanbul's Atatürk airport for some time, as it had been taken over by rebel soldiers, but Special Operations police units managed to recapture the runway and control tower shortly before Erdoğan's plane landed at 3.30 a.m. At 4.15 the President gave a victory press conference, at which he claimed that the rebels had 'taken orders from Pennsylvania' (read, from Fethullah Gülen) and praised all those who had resisted the coup (Axe, 2016; Yazar & Bozkurt, 2016, pp. 281–282, 345–348, 367,379).

The disorganisation on the rebel side was clearly demonstrated by their failure to capture the President in his hotel in Marmaris. A hit squad of Special Forces troops from Ankara, which was supposed to do this, had been assembled at Çiğli air base, in İzmir under Brigadier-General Gökhan Şahin Sönmezaş. He later claimed that he and his team only intended to capture Tayyip Erdoğan, not to kill him, but this remains an open question. The crucial factor was that the Çiğli team was evidently unaware of what was going on in the rest of Turkey, and did not leave by helicopter for Marmaris until 2.15 a.m. They arrived at around 3.30, to find the bird had flown. Clearly, the operation had been a fiasco (Yazar & Bozkurt, 2016, pp. 263–268, 357–361, 380–388).<sup>16</sup>

By daybreak on 17 July the drama had virtually ended. By around 6.00 a.m. the tank crews on the Bosphorus Bridge and elsewhere in Istanbul were surrendering to police. General Akar and his fellow commanders were released from Akıncı at around 9.00 a.m., and most

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15 Since the rebel hit squad which was sent to capture or kill the President did not arrive in Marmaris until 3.30 a.m., or over an hour too late, it is quite possible that the rebel F-16s did not leave their base until after Erdoğan's plane was already landing in Istanbul (see following paragraph). This would explain why they failed to find it.

16 According to several accounts, Tayyip Erdoğan and his family left Marmaris only a few minutes before the hit squad arrived, but the timings given by Yazar and Bozkurt, in their detailed account, do not bear this out. In fact, it appears that Sönmezaş and his team missed their quarry by about 1.5 hours.

of the rebel leaders gave themselves up during the morning (Yarar & Bozkurt, 2016, pp. 427, 432). Subsequent developments, with thousands of arrests, belong to a separate chapter.

### **5. Explaining the Failed Coup**

Although some of the details are unclear, and ongoing investigations and trials may uncover important new evidence, explaining why the July coup failed is not too difficult, since those responsible broke virtually every rule in the book on how to launch a successful coup d'état. Having the pro-coup forces of the right size – that is, big enough to take over essential strategic targets, but not so big that the conspiracy can be penetrated by ‘moles’ working for the government - is a fundamental problem for coup-makers. In the event, the July putschists failed on both counts. On the one hand, their operation was quite widely supported – more widely, for instance, than either of the failed Aydemir coups - since they had an important support-base in the air force, in the army aviation section, and elements of the First, Second and Third Armies, besides sections of the navy and gendarmerie. They also deployed highly sophisticated weapons, including front-line fighter aircraft, helicopter gunships, and advanced electronic equipment. In the aftermath of the coup, 99 Generals and Admirals were charged with involvement in the coup, or just under a third of the country's 356 top officers (although not all these were necessarily guilty as charged). When trials began in March 2017, 221 suspected ‘coup plotters’ were named, including 38 members of the ‘Peace at Home Council’ (“Prosecutors reveal junta behind Turkey's coup attempt,” 2017; “Turkey coup attempt: Charges laid against 99 generals and admirals,” 2016). To achieve these numbers, however, they had to spread their network widely - including, for instance, Major H.A., who then gave warning to national intelligence. As Jonathan Powell remarks ‘in the plotting stage, larger militaries are fraught with coordination obstacles’ – a point well demonstrated in the Turkish case (Powell, 2012, p. 1024).

At the same time, the forces at their disposal were not enough to take over what could be regarded as essential targets. Edward Luttwak

suggests that ‘Rule No.1’ for a successful coup is ‘seize the head of government before doing anything else, or at least kill him’, and the putschists spectacularly failed to do this. They also failed to capture other members of the government, and critical state buildings in Ankara such as the General Staff headquarters, as well as the headquarters of the Army, Navy, Gendarmerie, MİT and Special Forces. Luttwak’s ‘Rule No.2’ is that ‘any mobile forces that are not part of the plot – and that certainly includes any fighter jet squadrons – must be immobilised or too remote to intervene’ (Luttwak, 2016). Here again, the plotters failed signally, since the authorities had plenty of mobile forces available, including aircraft, at their disposal, and used them to oppose the rebels.

Resistance to the coup was almost inevitable, given that it was opposed firmly by the General Staff and the four Force Commanders. Naively, the conspirators had assumed that the top commanders were on their side, but they had no proof of this, and were quickly disabused of their illusion. Once they had discovered their mistake – and they must have done so before midnight - their best option would have been to call off the operation as quickly as possible, and try to evade arrest by fleeing abroad. Instead, they ploughed on, until they were forced to give up on the following morning. Fortunately, they decided to surrender rather than provoke a civil war. This was the only sensible decision they made.

The timing of the attempted coup was also fatally flawed. It is likely that the rebels had been preparing for action for some time, awaiting a suitable moment when political conditions were more favourable, but were forced to bring their action forward because the authorities had already uncovered all or a good part of their network. This included Brigadier-General Mehmet Partigöç, who was a member of the Gülen movement and a senior officer in the Personnel Office Directorate in the General Staff. The Directorate’s functions included preparing papers for the High Military Council (YAŞ), which was charged with making all senior appointments and dismissals in the armed forces, and due to meet in early August. Sometime before 15 July, General Güler had called Partigöç in and told him that he would be sacked. The high command

presumably concluded that the leak had been blocked. Unknown to Güler, however, the Director of Personnel, Lieutenant-General İlhan Talu, was also a Gülenist, and would have known that as many as 130 Generals were slated for dismissal at the YAŞ meeting. Hence, the conspirators must have suspected that if they did not act quickly they would all be removed from the forces, making a coup impossible. After the attempted putsch, a letter to his wife was found among Partigöç's belongings, in which he asked her to forgive him, since 'we had to launch the coup: if we had not, at the High Military Council meeting they would have blown all our heads off' (Fırat, 2016, p. 55).

On the afternoon of the coup the conspirators compounded their problem by bringing forward the start of the operation to early evening, when the streets would be full of people, who could be easily mobilised to resist by the social media – to say nothing of defiant broadcasts by the Prime Minister and President. The fact that the conspirators knew, thanks to İlhan's warning, of Hakan Fidan's visit to General Akar at around 6.15 that evening, was evidently critical here. Had they delayed their action to the early hours of 17 July, as they had originally planned, they might have landed the government and public with a surprise, as their predecessors had done in 1960 and 1980. Confusion over timing also probably accounted for the late departure of the hit squad in Çiğli which was supposed to abduct the President ("How they blew the coup," 2016).

An important factor explaining the strength of the resistance to the putsch was the overall political situation at the time. The erosion of popular support for the government is widely regarded as a prerequisite for a successful coup (Powell, 2012, p. 1021). In 1960, Menderes retained substantial popularity, but this was faltering, while in 1980 and 1997 the previous administrations had little remaining public sympathy, after years of political and economic failures. Turkey in 2016 was quite different, however. Tayyip Erdoğan had shown clear signs of abandoning democratic values and practices, but he retained wide popularity, thanks to his hawkish stands in foreign policy and the Kurdish question, as well as his government's successful economic policies over the years

(Bell & Powell, 2016). With his appeal to Islamic conservatives and a powerful grass-roots party organisation, he could bring thousands of protestors out onto the streets. This was not a purely pro-government movement, however since, as already noted, the demonstrators included many supporters of the opposition parties. What the protestors were trying to protect was not just the AKP government, but the democratic system as a whole.

The widespread public protests, and stiff resistance to the rebels by most of the police force and army, meant that, in contrast to Turkey's previous coups, the attempted putsch of 2016 caused serious casualties. When the rebels were put on trial, according to the court indictment 250 citizens had been killed, compared with earlier reported casualties of 290, implying that there were around 40 additional deaths on the rebel side (Kingsley, 2016; "Prosecutors reveal junta behind Turkey's coup attempt," 2017). Limiting the bloodshed is seen as an important condition for a successful coup, since high casualties risk driving uncommitted actors to the other side, maybe leading to civil war (Singh, 2014, p. 34). During the night of 16-17 July, as already noted, troops refused to shoot directly at demonstrators, so as to avoid killing innocent citizens. For the first time in the history of Turkey's coups, the conscript soldiers (who had apparently been duped into thinking that this was just a 'training exercise' (Yarar & Bozkurt, 2016, p. 263)) refused to carry out the orders of the rebel officers – another sign to the leaders of the attempted putsch that they had little chance of winning. We all remember the picture of the lone man standing up against a tank in Tiananmen Square in Beijing in 1989. One of the most remarkable features of the 2016 attempted putsch in Turkey was that the protestors actually succeeded, and the tanks surrendered.

In any coup operation, it is suggested, control of the media is essential, since the leaders of the coup need to create the clear impression that they are winning, on the grounds that the uncommitted will then fall into line with the winners. As Naunihal Singh explained when interviewed after the failed Turkish coup, the outcome was determined by the failure of the rebels 'to make it *seem* like they were going to succeed (Beauchamp,

2016). The ability to shape perceptions of success, often through media, is crucial in coups – basically, if people think a coup is going to succeed, they usually join up because they don't want to be on the wrong side of the guns' – the opposite of what happened in this case (see also Singh, 2014, pp. 27–31). Here, the conspirators conspicuously failed. The government's skilful use of the social media, besides television, was a key to its success, and stood in ironical contrast with its attempts to silence the media during the Gezi Park protests of 2013. Equally, the fact that the junta-in-waiting could not even produce one of their numbers to read their *pronunciamento* on television – a role apparently originally allotted to Hulusi Akar – fatally undermined their credibility.

As the last point, it needs to be noted that 'coup proofing' by the government does not seem to have played a role in the defeat of the attempted putsch. Unlike other Middle Eastern rulers, Turkish governments had not built up large paramilitary forces to counter-balance the regular armed forces and thus head off a coup. In fact it was only *after* the 16-17 July that the government removed command of the paramilitary gendarmerie from the control of the General Staff.<sup>17</sup> It was also announced that military barracks in Istanbul and Ankara which had been used by the rebels would be moved elsewhere, with the Akıncı air base demolished, to make future coups more difficult ("Turkish government to move main military bases out of Ankara, Istanbul," 2016). In thus appears that the coup attempt failed mainly because of chronic mistakes by the rebels, not previous precautions by the government. As the widely respected journalist Cengiz Candar (2016) concluded, '[A]s a veteran observer of military coups and coup attempts in Turkey, I have never seen any with this magnitude of such inexplicable sloppiness'.

## 6. Some Unanswered Questions

The defeat of the conspirators of July 2016 did not leave the military chiefs free of criticism, since there were bound to be questions as to

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<sup>17</sup> See above, note 2.

why they had not nipped the conspiracy in the bud at a much earlier stage, and why the President and Prime Minister had not been informed until the attempted takeover was well under way (and then, by a family member, not the state intelligence organisation). On the latter score, it was reported that Hakan Fidan had telephoned Tayyip Erdoğan's security chief, Muhsin Köse, in Marmaris, at 6.30 p.m. just before the putsch began, but was told that the President was 'resting' (Firat, 2016, p. 48). However, it would surely have been better to disturb him (assuming, of course, that Fidan was reasonably confident that the threat was real, and not just another false alarm). On the first score, it was later reported that, several months before the coup, MİT agents had discovered that the Gülenists were using the encrypted smartphone messaging application ByLock to maintain communications. The MİT had easily penetrated this and by May 2016 had identified close to 40,000 undercover Gülenist operatives, including 600 ranking military personnel. Once members of the network realised that ByLock had been compromised, they switched to the more secure application WhatsApp, and used this for planning the coup. Afterwards, MİT agents were easily able to penetrate WhatsApp by unlocking any of the 'phones of those detained, but could not do this before 16 July. Putting it simply, before the coup attempt Turkish intelligence could identify members of the network, but had no clear information about the coup preparations. For his part, Hulusi Akar had not previously thought that a coup was likely (Firat, 2016, pp. 72–73; "Turkey coup plotters' use of 'amateur' app helped unveil their network," 2016).

After the failed coup, the government had no hesitation in accusing Fethullah Gülen's network of having organised it. This was immediately denied by Gülen, who claimed that the attempt might have been staged by Erdoğan himself, so as to justify his subsequent crackdown on the opposition (Fontanella-Khan, 2016). It could also be argued that the AKP government had only themselves to blame for the rise of Gülen's movement, since, up to 2013 they had cooperated with it, in an attempt to undermine the control of the military and judiciary by hard-line Kemalists. Within the network behind the coup, there was

almost certainly a large group of officers who were not members of the Gülenist network, but (paradoxically) militant secularists who had always opposed the AKP government, and cooperated with the Gülenists. On the other hand, it was hard to deny the connection between the attempted coup and Gülen.

Some of the conspirators, like Levent Türkkkan, openly admitted to being members of the Gülenist network, and it is hardly likely that Hakan Evrim would have suggested to the captive Hulusi Akar that he should telephone Gülen in Pennsylvania if there had been no connection (see p.000). Admittedly, it is just possible that the conspirators acted independently of Gülen, so that he had no direct responsibility for planning the attempted putsch, but he still had some difficult questions to answer. His network ran a chain of schools and welfare activities, which had previously been widely appreciated. However, people were bound to ask why, if Gülen was completely innocent, it was an underground organisation, with no outsiders knowing who was in it or what they were doing, rather than a normal, open, non-governmental organisation. What had been the point of infiltrating large numbers of its supporters into the armed forces, the police and the judiciary, unless it aimed to take over the state, if necessary by force? Hence, it was hard to disprove the claim that Gülenists had played a central role in the conspiracy, even if they had apparently been joined by many other disgruntled officers. Equally, it is also difficult to believe that Gülen had absolutely no knowledge of the intended coup, or could not have stopped it if he wanted.

Of course, this was not the only widely-touted explanation for the attempted coup. Convinced that there must have been a foreign finger in the pie, and addicted to conspiracy theories, some senior members of the AKP and their supporters claimed that the US government had been behind the coup.<sup>18</sup> Their suspicions were naturally heightened by the fact that Gülen had long been resident in the United States, and that several commentators in the US media had favoured the conspirators,

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18 They included the Minister of Labour, Süleyman Soylu (see Demirtaş, 2016).

or at least strongly suggested that they did so. In March 2016, Michael Rubin, resident scholar at the neo-conservative think-tank American Enterprise Institute and a former senior official in the Department of Defence under George W. Bush, had asked in an article on the Institute's website 'if the Turkish military moves to oust Erdoğan and place his inner circle behind bars, could they get away with it? In the realm of analysis rather than advocacy, the answer is yes' he wrote (Rubin, 2016). While the attempted coup was under way, a commentator on the ultra-rightist Fox News TV urged that 'we should make no mistake, the people staging this coup are the good guys' (Elmasry, 2016).<sup>19</sup> The initial reaction of Secretary of State John Kerry was simply to call for 'stability and peace and continuity within Turkey'. Although President Obama later called President Erdoğan, confirming that 'all parties should support the democratically elected Government of Turkey' (Calabresi, 2016), many concluded that if the coup had succeeded the US government would have happily accepted it, as they had in the case of the overthrow of President Morsi in Egypt. On the other hand, it seems most unlikely that the US government played any part in organising the coup. As Professor Mohammed Ayoob of Michigan State University suggested soon afterwards, 'Turkey is far too important both to NATO and the United States, especially at this juncture, for Washington to engage in such machinations'.<sup>20</sup> He concluded that 'a coup against the elected government would be nothing less than moronic, especially since the chances of its success were minimal' (Ayoob, 2016). To this one should add the fact that none of the later interrogations of the suspected conspirators have so far produced any evidence in favour of the 'American plot' theory.

19 Before British readers escape with the idea that these reactions were confined to right-wing populists in the United States, they should be reminded that at the time the *Sunday Times* praised the plotters as 'a force for progress'. In *The Independent* the once-respected Middle East correspondent Robert Fisk claimed that 'Recep Tayyip Erdoğan had it coming': another coup in Turkey could soon succeed, his piece suggested (Fisk, 2016; see also Ghannoushi, 2016).

20 Referring to the American use of the İncirlik base for operations against the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, together with Turkey's ability to flood Europe with the 2.5 million Syrian refugees on its soil.

In the aftermath of the failed coup, there was little doubt that Tayyip Erdoğan was the main beneficiary. This induced some of his opponents, like Gülen, to conclude that the attempted putsch was a ‘false flag’ operation, crafted by the President to justify the mass arrests which followed. By itself, this *cui bono* argument does not seem convincing, however. Supporters of the theory point out that Lieutenant-General Mehmet Dişli, apparently a central figure in the conspiracy, is the brother of Şaban Dişli, an AKP Deputy and a Deputy Chairman of the party. As could be expected, Şaban Dişli vehemently denied any connection with the conspiracy, but it has to be added that the family relationship is far from proving the ‘false flag’ theory, since two brothers are quite capable of backing opposite sides in politics (“Şaban Dişli’den ‘darbeci kardeş’ açıklaması,” 2016). The fact that the rebel F-16s failed to shoot down the President’s plane on its flight to Istanbul is also used in support of the theory (Osborne, 2016), but as we have seen, his pilot’s subterfuge appears to have deceived the rebels, who may in any case have failed to find TC-ATA. The fact that the government had lists of the thousands of people who were detained after the coup shows that they were behind it, it is argued (Lusher, 2016; see also Osborne, 2016). As related earlier, the authorities had previously penetrated part of the Gülenists’ encrypted messaging application, but they did not have details of the coup plan, or who was behind it, so probably arrested all those on the ByLock system whom they could identify. Again, the interrogation of large numbers of suspects has not so far yielded any evidence in support of the ‘false flag’ theory. Finally, as Mohammed Ayoob concludes, ‘Erdoğan may be in overdrive in order to achieve a presidential system, but he is certainly not so desperate as to add a stage-managed coup to his repertoire of strategies. If the truth came out, with so many lives lost, it would end his political career’ (Ayoob, 2016).

In a broader perspective, the failure of the 15 July putsch also raises the question as to whether any classic coup d’état can succeed, in the conditions of modern Turkey. In 1960 a group of mainly middle-ranking officers was able to seize power swiftly and effectively, even though they were opposed by the most of the General Staff and much

of the command hierarchy. However, the Turkey of 2016 was very different from the Turkey of 1960, which was still classifiable as a third world country ruled over by a first world elite. Istanbul in 1960 had a population of around 1.5 million, compared with today's estimated 14.8 million, while Ankara's population has risen from 1.3 million to 5.4 million between the same dates, so taking over the two main cities was a relatively easy job. Within a few hours, a relatively small group of conspirators – around 40-50 officers - was able to capture the key installations in Ankara, such as the presidential mansion, parliament, and the main ministries, plus the sole radio station. Once they had done that, power was in their hands, with virtually no casualties. The Turkish air force was still in its infancy, compared with today, and failed to intervene on either side. The state TRT was the only broadcaster, and there was no television, let alone internet, social media, or even telephones in most places. Around 70 percent of the population lived in mostly isolated villages, and 67 percent was illiterate, so most people probably knew nothing of events in Ankara until well after the event. Admittedly, Adnan Menderes still had millions of supporters, but they were mostly rural folk, and he had no way of mobilising them.

The contrast with today's conditions is obvious. Of course, this does not mean that a coup organised from then top, and with strong public support, could not succeed in today's Turkey, but in other conditions it would be very difficult, even if the conspirators were more competent than those of 15 July. Comparison with the coups in Egypt and Thailand in recent years, both of which succeeded, would be an interesting and potentially illuminating research topic.

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