

TURKEY

AN OVERVIEW OF THE FAILED COUP ATTEMPT



On the evening of 15 July 2016 a coup attempt was launched against the Turkish government, on the basis of protecting democracy. Turkey has a long history of military coups taking power on the basis of protecting Turkey's democracy from its elected leaders. Since 1960 the military has seized power four times.

BACKGROUND

The modern Turkish Republic was founded by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk in 1923 after he helped Turkey gain independence from Western powers. Ataturk changed the old ways of ruling (Sultans and Caliphs during the Ottoman era) and dedicated the new Turkish Republic to the sovereignty of the nation's will, a state for and of the people. Ataturk implemented bold changes in what was a conservative Muslim nation. Modernisation of government and education came first, resulting in a secular government allowing religious faith to be a matter of individual conscience. In his attempt to modernise Turkey, Ataturk undertook a complete language reform whereby the Turkish written language, Arabic, was replaced by the Latin alphabet. Ataturk also championed woman's rights, something, that to other Muslim-majority nations, was viewed as an aggressive move towards Western values and away from Islamic values.

In broad terms the coup can be interpreted as a response to what Kemalists (those who adhere to Ataturk's form of governance) saw as the undermining of democracy by the current government under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Erdogan in turn blamed the coup on supporters of Fethullah Gulen, a charismatic Islamic preacher, who he blames for running a parallel state within Turkey with the goal of overthrowing the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP). The AKP, described by its members as a conservative democratic party, has been labelled as an Islamist party seeking to undo democracy, and as such, for some, a reason for its removal.

WHY THE COUP, AND WHY NOW?

International news media portrays President Erdogan as an authoritarian, focussing on his censorship of the press, arresting of political opponents, violent crackdowns on protests, and attempts to accumulate even greater powers to his office. To appease the people he has publically denounced radical Islamist movements and reaffirmed secularism, while at the same time placing religious education above all, moving Turkey closer to an Islamic state and further away from its secular roots. Although protests against his authoritarian rule is nothing new, it's interesting to note how quickly people came to his "rescue" once called upon. A loyalty that was a deciding factor in putting down the coup attempt.



In 2013, mass protest erupted against the government in response to the creeping Islamization that increasingly influenced society. Other complaints included media censorship, violation of democratic rights, government corruption and the excessive use of force by the police. Begging the question, how popular is Erdogan really?

There are three theories as to the origin of the coup.

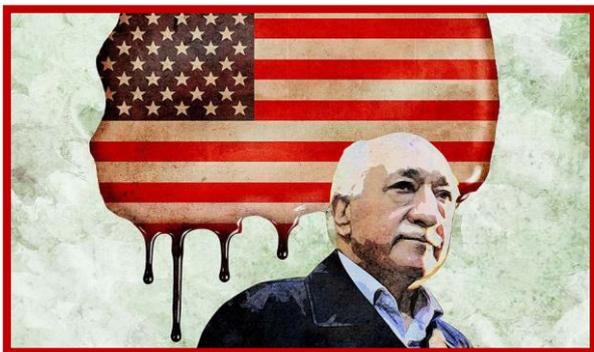
THE FIRST THEORY is that it was an attempt by Gulen supporters to strike first before being purged. Metin Gurcan, an ex-Turkish Military advisor, and now independent security analyst reporting for Al-Monitor, says that the coup was an attempt by Gulen supporters within the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) to save their lives.

According to Gurcan's analysis, "the indictment of July 14 against the Gulenists within the TSK, as part of the Izmir espionage case, facilitated the coup attempt. According to reliable sources who spoke to Al-Monitor on condition of anonymity, had there not been a coup attempt July 15 there would have been massive detentions on July 16-17, prompted by the espionage case. These sources claim that the prosecutor of the espionage case in Izmir had already secured Erdogan's approval to order mass arrests before the approaching Supreme Military Council meeting on August 1-4, which would have decided on the next round of promotions and appointments within the TSK. The plotters learned of this plan and launched their sloppy and uncoordinated attempt hastily. In other words, the coup attempt that was planned for a future date was moved up. One theory is that the followers of self-exiled cleric Fethullah Gulen knew that they were going to be purged and decided to strike first."

THE SECOND THEORY, which seems plausible yet borders on a conspiracy theory, is that Erdogan arranged his own failed coup to reinvent himself overnight as the popular "hero" of his nation's 80 million strong population. On Monday, two days after the failed coup, Erdogan arrested over 6,000 of his opponents in the Turkish military and Turkish legal system in a nationwide purge. By Tuesday that number extended to 20,000, with security police and teachers being arrested or suspended.

In the days following the failed coup, President Erdogan called it a 'gift from God' with analysts comparing the coup to the 1933 Reichstag fire that gave Adolph Hitler a final excuse to take absolute power. Erdogan, who in the past said he admired Hitler's reforms, is also being blamed for orchestrating the coup with the goal of accumulating absolute power by means of purging government and military ranks of Gulen supporters. Whether this theory holds true or not, the reality is that the only beneficiary of the coup was Mr. Erdogan himself.

In answering the question whether the coup was planned by Erdogan, Patrick Cockburn, award-winning journalist and author, says that "It is more likely that Mr Erdogan is taking advantage of a real coup attempt to rid the armed forces and key state institutions of all who do not give him full obedience. He called it 'a gift from God' in that it would allow him to do so. An argument against the theory that the coup attempt was a put-up job is that it involved too many people, including high-ranking military officers, and might even have succeeded if the plotters had been able to eliminate Mr Erdogan."



A THIRD THEORY is that Erdogan might actually be telling the truth that the United States and Gulen did actually orchestrate the attempt to remove him from power.

An article in the *Washington Times*, "**When moderation masks a radical agenda**" states that the controversial religious leader and multi-billionaire, Gulen, is worth an estimated \$25 billion; owns the largest network of charter schools throughout America and hundreds more throughout the world.

Since 1998 Gulen has lived on a large, remote compound near a small town, Saylorsburg, in Pennsylvania.

It has been reported that through three prominently known CIA officials, Gulen was able to receive permanent US residence status and his green card to evade prosecution for treason in his own country. According to the *Washington Times* Gulen is "a true, dyed-in-the-wool Islamist who wishes to transform the United States and Turkey into Sharia states."

World leaders have warned Erdogan not to use the uprisings as reason to crack down on his opponents in government. Yet that is exactly what Erdogan is doing, having already rounded up more than 80 000 people (at the time of writing) considered disloyal to the President, including military officials (9000), members of the judiciary (2700), teachers (22 000) and government employees (50 000). Whether Erdogan orchestrated the coup or not, the outflow will be to his credit, as the purging of disloyal Turks removes opposition to authoritarian rule.

WHY STABILITY IN TURKEY MATTERS

Although the coup was unsuccessful, the question of why stability in Turkey matters to the world, must still be asked. There is little doubt that if the coup had succeeded, Turkey would be in a bloody civil war right now, that would affect its (a) relationship with Europe, (b) its fight against Assad and Islamic State (IS) in Syria, (c) and a possible loss of territory to IS.

(A) Turkey's relationship with Europe, especially its goal to gain EU membership, would have suffered a huge blow if the coup had succeeded. To some extent the flow of refugees fleeing violence in the Middle East, to European countries, has slowed as a result of a deal brokered by the leader of Germany, Angela Merkel, and Turkey. Civil war in Turkey would result in an unprecedented number of refugees forcing their way into Europe. Turkey currently hosts more than 2.1 million refugees from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, and if the violence, insecurity and fear of war becomes a reality in Turkey (owing to civil war), it would force them to seek refuge in Europe. This would place Europe in a very difficult position after yet another terror attack (in France) blamed on a refugee. Europe would close its doors to new refugees, leaving millions in a state of non-existence.

(B) After months of passive observation, and having criticized the United States for not doing enough to remove Bashar Al-Assad from power, Turkey started a military campaign against the Syrian regime in July 2015. Facing increased threats from the Islamic State, Turkey extended their military campaign to assist the US-coalition in fighting IS. The Incirlik airbase in Turkey is currently being used by the US air force to conduct bombing sorties on IS positions in Syria. The airbase is home to 5,000 US air force personnel with the stated mission to "support and protect US and NATO assets and people throughout Turkey". If civil war erupted in Turkey it would directly affect the ability of the US to successfully strike IS, in effect placing the war against IS back months.

(C) One of the reasons the Islamic State was able to successfully take large areas of land from Iraq and Syria, is its ability to exploit political instability. From the start Turkey was included in a visionary map of what IS planned to achieve through its caliphate ambitions. A strong military presence on Turkey's borders and a strong government have deterred IS ambitions so far. Yet that would have changed if the coup was successful and Erdogan loyalists had started a civil war. Losing Turkey to IS (hypothetical) would have seen a strong response from NATO, which would have finally brought the world into a third world war.

FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

Turkey has been a central point from which different religions (including Christianity) have spread to neighbouring countries, due to its strategic positioning. Early Christian mission activities in Turkey played a major role in the spread of the Gospel to the rest of the world. Once known as the 'guardian of Christendom', Turkey was a Christian stronghold for more than 1,000 years, but following harsh persecution and massacres of Armenian and Syrian Christians by Turkish Islamists, Christians emigrated in their droves. Over the last century, the Turkish Christian population has declined from 22 to 0.21% today.

Yet Turkey remains highly strategic from a Christian perspective. It is 'home' to thousands of Christian refugees fleeing violence in the Middle East, and it is the link between a Muslim Middle East and a 'Christian' Europe. Turkey's economic ties to Europe, cultural ties to Central Asia and religious ties to the conflict-ridden nations of the Middle East continue to make it a major world player today, and from a missions perspective, it is a 'gateway' for missionaries to establish ministries in the Middle East and Asia.

Instability in Turkey would have huge implications on Christian endeavours throughout the region.

For prayer guidelines, click here: <http://incontextministries.org/index.php/involve/prayer>

For an infographic, click here: <http://incontextministries.org/index.php/investigate/infographics>

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