

## Was the 2016 Military Coup in Turkey Staged?

Fred Aprim

August 12, 2023

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, of the Muslim brotherhood<sup>1</sup>, and Fethullah Gulen, a Turkish Sufi, a preacher and businessman became strong allies after Erdoğan came to power in 2002. Erdoğan needed Gulen's expertise in government. Gulen and Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) forged an alliance aimed to end the military's influence in Turkish politics. The military has long seen itself as the "guardian of Turkish democracy", which it defines as the staunchly secular state created by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the modern Turkish republic. Several times, the Turkish army generals have directly intervened in Turkish politics and overthrew governments via military coups.<sup>2</sup>

During those early days of alliance, Gulen was living his golden years, even though he never believed in a secular Turkey. According to Turkish journalist Nevşin Mengü, Gulen has claimed that the Turkish secular state of post WWI was established by the Balkan and Crimea migrants upon their arrival to Anatolia and who were against the old Anatolian Muslim conservatives. Gulen started his own new Sufi sect in order to save conservative Turkey, because he knew that the easiest way to organize ignorant crowd was by using religion.<sup>3</sup> Gulen has been living in self-imposed exile in the United States.

The early AKP-Gulen alliance turned into direct staffing of public positions. Many people in the bureaucracy and the army were removed without due process and replaced with Gulenists and Islamists. However, in December 2013, Gulenists publicly accused Erdoğan's family members, renowned business people and senior bureaucrats close to the AKP of corruption, including the prime minister, a strong ally of Erdoğan.<sup>4</sup> This gave way to an all-out war between Erdoğan's government and the Gulen's Hizmet movement.<sup>5</sup> From this point on, the AKP government was always open about its plans to eradicate Gulen and his followers from Turkish political life. The National Intelligence Organisation (MIT), a strong pro-Erdoğan conducted several investigations into Gulen and his followers.<sup>6</sup>

Hundreds of people lost their lives in 12 major attacks between June 2015 and July 2016. Turkey entered this spiral of violence after the June 7, 2015 elections, in which Erdoğan's ruling AKP lost the governing majority for the first time since the party came to power in 2002. Erdoğan first had used the Gulenists' bureaucratic expertise to run the country and then exploited their connections to get many of the military out of politics.<sup>7</sup> With the pressure from the Gulenists and the latter's accusations against the government in 2013, Gulen became a baggage for Erdoğan.

Here, Erdoğan needed a strong and convincing excuse to eliminate his Gulenists opponents within the Turkish society. Around 9:00 pm Friday night of July 15, 2016, a group of young cadets from the Turkish army started a blockade of the two bridges over the Bosphorus. Around 10:30 pm, five young cadets also entered the CNN Turk building and stood there without an aim; they did not know what

---

1 <https://english.alarabiya.net/features/2013/10/14/Turkey-s-relationship-with-the-Muslim-Brotherhood>

2 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/7/16/timeline-a-history-of-turkish-coups>

3 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XItjz3u0B1Q>

4 <https://stockholmcf.org/documentary-reveals-turkish-govts-reluctance-to-shed-light-on-coup-attempt/>

5 The movement - known as Hizmet, or service - runs hundreds of schools all over Turkey and around the world.

6 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/7/15/turkeys-failed-coup-attempt-all-you-need-to-know>

7 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-36855846>

they were doing. Then the police came and arrested the five military cadets.<sup>8</sup> The first group on the bridge did nothing as well; they never fired live ammunition. Soon, few peculiar attacks on few places in Istanbul and Ankara took place too. News spread quickly that a coup was underway. The powerful MIT officials admitted that they received the very first intelligence report about a possible attack on July 15, only hours before their own headquarters was under fire. They also admitted that the undersecretary of the MIT tried to reach Erdoğan to inform him about this initial report around 7pm local time, but failed to get him on the phone. Why the undersecretary did not call Prime Minister Binali Yildirim after he failed to reach President Erdoğan is part of many unanswered questions about the claimed coup. According to Erdoğan, he did not hear about the coup events from MIT officials, but from his brother-in-law,<sup>9</sup> which confirms MIT's undersecretary statement. But this is strange to happen in a country supposedly organized and a member of NATO.

For years, Erdoğan's Islamic party has developed a large pool of well-trained, easily deployed, and effortlessly disposable proxy militia forces.<sup>10</sup> Just after mid night, Erdoğan used face time with his phone to give orders to his followers (people of Turkey, as he called them) to take to the streets and confront those who started the coup against the Turkish Republic, as he put it. Those who responded were the special Islamic militia group that he and his AKP had trained. Erdoğan claimed that those behind the coup were the Hizmet (Service) movement of Gulen. On the early hours of Saturday, Erdoğan's militias, appearing as common people, headed towards the bridge. They began to get closer to the cadets. The cadets surrendered to the police that were standing by. The police failed to stop the people from getting closer. The police retreated without arresting the cadets or protecting them from the people (militias). Erdoğan's militias armed with kitchen utensils, bats, swords, etc. began to attack the cadets. Many of the young cadets were murdered by these Islamic militias, few were murdered in the most barbaric manner.



Erdoğan's militias attacking Cadets on the bridge

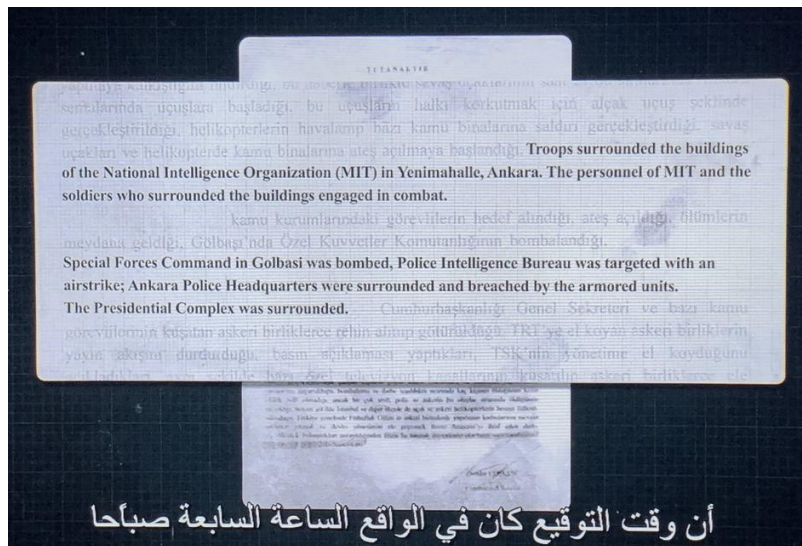
The question is, who ordered the young cadets to be on the bridge or go to the CNN Turk station? If someone wants to have a coup, he will put a plan in place to arrest the country's leaders for example and not simply close traffic on a bridge.

8 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XItjz3u0B1Q>

9 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/7/15/turkeys-failed-coup-attempt-all-you-need-to-know>

10 <https://ahvalnews.com/turkey-middle-east/long-read-how-Erdogan-built-his-own-private-military-and-paramilitary-system-dr>

An order issued at 1:00 am of July 16, by the Turkish government ordered the arrest of thousands of people. How did the Turkish prosecutor's office get a detailed list of thousands of people in a couple of hours? Later, the prosecutor's office claimed that there was a typo, and that the list was prepared at 7:00 am. It is obvious that the list was prepared ahead of time.



At the same time when the cadets were ordered to go to the bridge, the navy received orders to move the battle ships out from their ports to the Sea of Marmara for safety reasons. They did not receive any other orders until later on Saturday July 16, at 9:06 am., when the ship commanders were ordered back to port. They were later accused of being part of the coup. The ships did not fire any weapons at any target and they moved to safety as ordered with 50 personnel on board without waiting for the full crew of 200 personnel for each ship. If they were part of a coup, they would have attacked important targets in Istanbul, but they did not. What is strange is that few navy captains who were part of a NATO assignment in Norway and not even present in Turkey, were called in for investigation.

Erdoğan used this staged coup to initiate a sweeping purge of all his opponents of Turkish army, police, academics, judicial system, journalists, civil servants, university professors, soldiers and others.<sup>11</sup> In a press conference, He stated, “*the coup is a great gift from God, because it provides for us the opportunity to purge and clean the Turkish army*”.<sup>12</sup> [See Arabic subtitles of Erdoğan’s words below]



11 <https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2017/07/11/536011222/cleric-accused-of-plotting-turkish-coup-attempt-i-have-stood-against-all-coups>

12 <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt11646412/>

Erdoğan 's great purge included: 189 media shut down , 130 generals and admirals were either dismissed or suspended, 319 journalists arrested, 3000 schools and universities shutdown, 2500 Navy officers or personnel fired or imprisoned, 10484 academics and lawyers fired, 34253 military personnel fired (22,920 according to Defense Minister Fikri Işık)<sup>13</sup> , 96885 citizens detained or arrested (102,000 according to the BBC)<sup>14</sup> , 150,000 judges, teachers, police and civil servants suspended or dismissed<sup>15</sup> , 500650 citizens investigated.

Today, Erdoğan is the red line. Erdoğan used the coup to create an authoritarian state in Turkey. Most media outlets are pro Erdoğan and majority of the Turkish high ranking army officers are Erdoğan ists.<sup>16</sup> The Turkish army that once was the guardian of secularism has turned into an Erdoğan ist army. Most importantly, the July 15 so-called coup changed Turkey's attitude towards the US. Today, the US is seen as an imperialist and Turkey is leading to a shift in its alliances in the world. Erdoğan is building the "New Turkey", which he began to build in order to form his own legacy and not that of Atatürk. The coup gave Erdoğan the foundation for this mythical New Erdoğan ist Turkey<sup>17</sup>.

The Turkish-Chinese-Indian-Russian alliance is growing at the expense of the Turkish-American alliance. In 2017, Turkish President Erdoğan brokered a deal reportedly worth \$2.5 billion with Russian President Vladimir Putin for the S-400 mobile surface-to-air missile system and cared less about US sanctions in the process.<sup>18</sup> The Turkish leaders argued that if and when needed, Turkey cannot defend itself against the "imperialist" US using US defense systems, because the US can disable any weapon within the NATO system. Thus, Turkey sought alternative defense systems.

Many argue that Erdoğan has secured his grip on power in Turkey for life and it is all because of his purging process and new enacted policies post 2016 coup and he will not lose in any elections no matter how close the results were. Most adherents to liberal democracy want Erdoğan to step down, because his defeat would be good for Turkey, to supporters of democracy in Turkey and around the world.<sup>19</sup> How long can the Turkish economy and Turkish lira devaluation crisis survive under Erdoğan ?

In his film, *The Announcement*, Turkish Film maker, Mahmut Fazil Coskun made sure that politics was obvious in his film and that the film's most telling commentary is the use of violence, which is directly related to the present climate of fear in Erdoğan 's Turkey. Coskun said, "*Violence is always here, but it's not on the surface.*" Coskun's criticism is not targeted towards the military per se or the followers of Atatürk, the founder of the Republic of Turkey, but rather the entire Turkish political establishment which has failed time and time again to come up with constructive, tangible solutions to the problems at hand. For example, Coskun adds, "... *it's the same group of men, be they the military or MPs, who decide what's good and what's not for Turkish women without even letting them have a say in the matter.*"<sup>20</sup>

Turkey is without a doubt very important for the geopolitics of the Middle East just as it is very important for the West. While change is good for Turkey and the world, but that seems implausible, not in the near future at least.

13 <https://stockholmcf.org/hero-of-july-2016-coup-attempt-in-turkey-says-linked-to-gulen-movement/>

14 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-37517735>

15 <https://stockholmcf.org/hero-of-july-2016-coup-attempt-in-turkey-says-linked-to-gulen-movement/>

16 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XItjz3u0B1Q>

17 <https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20210715-turkey-marks-fifth-anniversary-of-failed-coup-against-Erdogan>

18 <https://www.cnn.com/2020/12/14/us-sanctions-turkey-over-russian-s400.html>

19 <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2023/08/18/Erdogan-manages-to-secure-his-presidency-by-playing-dirty/>

20 <https://www.middleeasteye.net/features/shooting-film-about-coup-turkey-then-real-shooting-started>