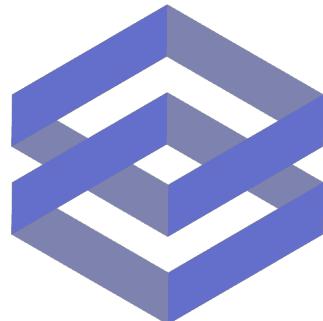


INSTITUTE FOR DIPLOMACY AND ECONOMY

**instituDE Article Series
on the July 15 Coup Attempt**



instituDE

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Who We Are

Institute for Diplomacy and Economy (institude) is a platform established by a group of former Turkish diplomats. After serving at various posts in different parts of the world, we were dismissed from public service within the scope of the massive purges against the opponents of Erdogan regime in the aftermath of the coup attempt in July 2016.

Deeply concerned by Turkey's continuing descent into autocracy and motivated by the persecution and most recently the torture that our colleagues were subjected to in Turkey, institude aims to contribute to the efforts in ending grave human rights violations and restoring democracy in Turkey.

institude members are also worried about

Turkey's divergence from its historical western alliance to the extent of questioning its NATO membership. We firmly believe that embracing democratic norms and values, along with restoring the rule of law, is the only way to achieve a peaceful and stable Turkey. To this end, the accession process with the EU must immediately be reinvigorated by genuinely ensuring freedom of the press and the independence of the judiciary.

In this regard, institude features analyses and commentaries on foreign policy, economy and the situation of human rights in Turkey. We also share with our readers the articles of our members within their broad areas of expertise on world politics, economy and law.

On the Present Article Series

It has been five years since the failed coup attempt in Turkey and no one has any clear idea yet what actually happened that night. While the complete narrative and evidence about the failed coup have yet to be clarified, the scope of the reaction by the Turkish government to the coup attempt was quite horrifying. Beyond any doubt, the coup attempt dramatically transformed Turkey's domestic and foreign policies.

Domestically, Erdogan used the attempt as an excuse to purge tens of thousands of military and civilian government officials accused of links to the Gulen Movement. While the failed putsch has accelerated

democratic backsliding and further curtailed freedoms and human rights in the country, on the foreign policy front, there has been a major shift in the actions and vision of the government. The atmosphere of uncertainty in the wake of the coup has enabled the Erdogan government to structurally transform the foreign policy decision making.

This collection consists of the opinion articles authored on the 4th anniversary of July 15 coup attempt in 2020 by members and fellows of institude. In these pieces, authors analyze and delve into the attempted coup from various aspects and challenge the official coup narrative of the Erdogan government.



How Anti-Westernism Institutionalized in Turkey After 15/7

by Bahadır Gülle*

Turkish contribution to the lexicon of political discourse is not very glittering. But a concept invented by the Turks in the 1990s gained worldwide currency and already increasing its popularity which is "Deep State." Leaving aside its conspiracy theory implications the term refers to a powerful bureaucratic elite that can keep the elected government within certain boundaries. Established on the legacy of a very centralized Ottoman bureaucracy and a weak civil society, Turkish State did not hesitate to chasten any social or political movement demanding "too much" independence. Some historians even trace back the roots of Turkish State's practices to the Eastern Roman Empire where the state never felt the deficiency of sharing its power with any feudal authority and later coalesced with the church into one and controlled every

aspect of life. This is best epitomized in the famous scolding the Governor of Ankara gave to the leftist youngsters in 1940s: "If this country needs Communism we will bring it, who the hell are you?"

The elites of the Turkish Republic have been representatives of a top-down modernization and nation-building project which alienated a substantial portion of the population. They have stuck to a 1930s version of Kemalism, which is an absolute, ultra-nationalist and ultra-secularist version. Which was comprehensible in the 1930s world became more and more archaic after the Cold War. Being pro-Western was an irrevocable fundamental of the Turkish Republic. It was an invaluable asset for the state elites at the early stage: It provided international

legitimacy and the support of the West and certainly provided security against the Soviet Empire. But after the Cold War, the tide began to turn. Integration with the West would lead to increasing internal demands for freedom and change which inevitably would result in the erosion of their power. The state elites who decided to leave Turkey's two centuries old perspective of being a part of the West for the sake of maintaining their ultra-nationalist and ultra-secularist ideological hegemony, especially the ones in the security establishment would later assume the title "Eurasianists."

When Erdoğan came to power in 2002, he was weak against the Eurasianists, and it was a grueling task for a religious party to find competent and reliable bureaucrats with enough experience for important ministerial and advisory posts. Erdoğan's chronic shortcoming is that he has not many followers among well-educated youth and by extension, he could not find enough supporters to place in the state institutions. Therefore he could not establish full control over the state. But AKP made an auspicious start. The so-called Gülenists, who are members of a religious, social movement inspired by the ideas of the charismatic preacher Fethullah Gülen, were eager to support the reforms that would transform the uncompromising ideological character of the state.

The rapprochement between Erdoğan and Gülenists resulted in remarkable economic success and democratization reforms in AKP's first term between 2002-2007. AKP had begun its second term in 2007 with a landslide 47 percent popular victory and felt secure enough to target the Eurasianists. A series of legal cases, "Ergenekon" and "Balyoz" being the most known ones, neutralized the influence of the Eurasianists. That brought about a mood of optimism and hope that the country will eventually throw off the authoritarian straitjacket. After the Eurasianist cadres retired from the scene many chronic diseases of the country almost simultaneously

dissolved into the air. Unidentified political murders disappeared, organized crime almost wiped out, torture in police and gendarmerie stations ended. The state seemed to comply with the rule of law. But the sad thing is that chronic diseases cannot be prevented by vaccines or cured by medication; they require a change in lifestyle to be avoided. Extensive structural reforms were needed to consolidate democracy and the rule of law. Weakening the deep state only removed the obstacles for implementing such reforms. But it also removed Erdoğan's limits in exercising power. Rather than consolidating democracy, Erdoğan started to consolidate his own power.

Two sides were aware that they needed each other to topple Eurasianists, but they did not share the same vision. When the gloves came off in 2013 with a series of investigations on corruption against Erdoğan's inner circle and even his family, Erdoğan instantaneously allied with his previous archenemy, the Eurasianists, to topple the Gülenists. Gülenists had proved to be very effective with political back up, but they were not influential at the higher ranks, and when the state hierarchy and the political force turned against them, they collapsed. Erdoğan's challenge to the ideological hegemony of Kemalism ended up with his alliance with the ultra-nationalist Kemalists in the state, and with his submission to Turkish nationalism.

Erdoğan couldn't devise an ideology for creating a permanent social base in the society. Unlike the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt the ideological aspect of the Islamist movement in Turkey is very shallow and cannot compete with Kemalism or Turkish nationalism. Erdoğan had the luxury of challenging the representatives of the hegemonic ideology without challenging their ideology when he championed public's demand for democracy and freedom in his early terms. But, he couldn't apprehend that he must support his cult of personality with devising and spreading an ideology when he has started to become authoritarian and set out to transform

the state and the society. Well described by Robert Cox that "Hegemony is like a pillow: it absorbs blows and sooner or later the would-be assailant will find it comfortable to rest upon." Erdoğan soon found out how comfortable hegemony was.

On 15 July 2016, a coup attempt took place in Turkey. The plotters were easily overpowered. Erdoğan claimed that Gülenists orchestrated the coup and Gülenists claimed that it was a Reichstag fire perpetrated by Erdoğan. Erdoğan and the Eurasianists enormously benefited from the attempt. They decisively crashed the Gülenists. Erdoğan established the presidential system he desired, and Eurasianists who got out of jail reassumed their ranks in the military.

The witch-hunt against Gülenists started with [the lists](#) made by Eurasianists. While Erdoğan and Eurasianists were attacking Gülenists, an anti-Western propaganda machine was also working in tandem. Every step taken to overthrow the Gülenists also fueled resentment towards the West for supposedly helping the Gülenists. A closer look at the numbers shows that it is impossible for the majority of the purged people to be Gülenists, considering that it is highly improbable that a religious group could attain these rates in the state apparatus. Almost half of all the generals and admirals, a quarter of all the officers in the military, 77 percent of the staff officers who make the backbone of the Military, seventy percent of the pilots in the Air Force, majority of the police officers

in the counter-terror, intelligence, organized crime departments, one third of the career diplomats, thirty percent of the judges and prosecutors and people from many other institutions have been [expelled](#). After a while having [a good command of English](#) became a satisfactory criterion for being on the list. The government used decree-laws to purge the dissidents from the state. Decree-laws arbitrarily dismissed more than [150,000 public servants](#). Erdoğan and Eurasianists carried out a well coordinated attack against any person suspected to have a pro-Western mindset.

It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that anti-Westernism in Turkey has been institutionalized by the Eurasianist-Islamist alliance in the last six years through controlling media, politicizing education and using judicial procedures as instruments of oppression. Defending good relations with the US or the EU became almost equal to treason in Turkey. It is tempting to hope that Erdoğan era is an interregnum in Turkey's long march towards the West and the country will rotate back to the path of democracy and the rule of law. But Turkish Westernization is pioneered, carried out and mostly imposed by the state. Without any cadres in the state who has any such motivation, it is unrealistic to expect any shift in Turkey's new direction.

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Legal Disaster Resulted from Notorious State of Emergency in Turkey

by Mehmet Bozkaya*

The coup attempt staged on the night of 15 July 2016, which was carried out under an obscure, [bizarre and unexampled plan](#), was contained in just a few hours. However, it resulted in colossal adverse impacts in various domains including legal matters. Due to the excessive measures taken before and after the coup attempt, Turkey has not only disregarded certain constitutional principles and rules but also dishonored many of its international human rights commitments since the thwarted coup. This entails that the AKP government has not complied with its legal obligations vis-a-vis its own people and international community. Accordingly, lasting human sufferings, erosion of the justice system and weakening of the rule of law have become primary subjects of debates on Turkey.

Unequivocally, the State of Emergency (SoE)

evidently steamrolled a large group who had been previously blacklisted and then removed from public office with decree laws without observing prescribed legal procedures and guarantees.¹ Furthermore, these people and their relatives have also been severely subjected to [a number of additional sufferings](#) i.e. stigmatization, exclusion, demonization and deprivations of civil, social, economic and cultural rights such as proscriptions related to performance of certain professions, travel ban, denial of some public services and exposure to discriminations in private relations. Therefore, many of them have had to leave the country crossing Evros River to avoid civil death in Turkey and to seek asylum in western countries. Nevertheless, given the mentioned unmerciful treatments, it is a travesty that the predominant portion of these persecuted people has nothing

to do with the coup attempt, opposes any kind of military interventions and abstains from conducts undermining public order and public security. Hence, one can infer from this posture and the arbitrary practices of AKP in the last years that the main objectives of the AKP government that deems these arbitrary punishments proper are to eliminate these perceived dissidents who have been regarded as hindrance before unlawful and hidden master plan of the ruling party and to tame rest of the citizens who might potentially disapprove and rise up against AKP's undemocratic and transgressive policies and measures.

Submissiveness of the judiciary, which has substantially lost its independence and neutrality in relation to the AKP government especially by virtue of the massive purge within SoE, is another calamity for the whole country. Considering the judicial proceedings initiated within the SoE and up to now, members of Gülen Movement, which has been blamed for being behind the coup and designated as a terrorist organization by AKP, Kurds including the former leader, elected mayors and executives of HDP, dissident journalists and thinkers who harshly criticize the incumbent government constitute the ill-fated victims of the justice system. Most of them are being indicted for bogus charges, arrested under the specially designed closed circuit-system of criminal peace judgeships, not able to properly enjoy right to defense and right to fair trial and some of them, if acquitted, released or obtained favorable rulings from ECtHR, are being rearrested on the ground of new sham accusations. These entail that post-coup climate and massive purges, which have mercilessly been exploited by AKP, rendered the judiciary a convenient apparatus to realize certain political goals, to dissolve organizations and formations that are not obedient, in explicit or implicit way, to AKP and to eliminate critics and contenders, who might hit the achilles' heels of AKP.

Among severe non-compliances by AKP

government with domestic and international obligations are also practice of torture and enforced disappearance. It was very shocking that video footages of tortured top army generals and a major who was tormenting alleged putschists were disseminated by state-run news agency and pro-government TV-channels on the following days of the foiled coup. Apart from this, many reports and testimonies, in which torture by law enforcement or intelligence agencies, were revealed. Hence, respectable human rights activists and civil society organizations point out that torture in Turkey has become widespread and systematic in the sense of crimes against humanity. Besides, since the coup attempt more than 30 persons have been subjected to enforced disappearances by Turkish intelligence. Their whereabouts were unknown for months. Some of them exposed, at court hearings, the kidnappings and the torture by the secret service. Such a defiance by the AKP government to a non-derogable *jus cogens* norm of the international law can only indicate that the justice system of the country is not functioning properly and is inadequate to fulfil its task within the limits of the law. Such transgressions also imply that a circle within the administration might be desiring to fabricate evidences to sustain the ambiguous official stories of the government regarding the inexplicable incidents.

On top of the abovementioned legal and judicial deviations, the most perilous and striking element of the current degenerate legal order of Turkey is specially adopted impunity laws. One of these is the provision² that grants the guarantee of eluding the investigations for members of intelligence and other public officers, who are specially assigned by the President to fulfil a certain task, in regard to their acts in performance of the said assignments. Considering the covert operations, like enforced disappearances and extraterritorial abductions, carried out in the last years by Turkish intelligence, this rule not only has been giving a carte blanche for their wrongdoings but also has been providing the

government for a formula to realize its envisaged illicit operations. Furthermore, the judicial shield designed for public officers and civil persons involved in suppression of July 15 event is the other indefensible legislation.³ Under this law, no legal, administrative, financial or criminal liability may arise in regard to persons acted in the context of the suppression of the coup attempt and incidents that were connected to it. Thereby, one can fairly conceive following two points regarding these provisions, in addition to their dreadful characteristics. One is that the AKP government does not want the official narrative of the coup attempt to be challenged. The other is that such impunity rules constitute implicit derogations from the right to life and right to freedom from torture, which are not permissible under international law.

In the grand scheme of the above points, it can be inferred that, despite the formal end of SoE,

it remains to be de facto governance model of Turkey. Especially in the legal sphere it has deeply destructive effects by virtue of arbitrary purge practices amounting to civil death, confinement of judiciary under effective control of the AKP government, employment of severe tortures and kidnappings and impunity laws shielding certain wrongdoers from being held responsible. It seems that July 15 coup attempt, the so-called victim of which was the AKP government, has appeared as the ‘God’s gift’ vesting opportunities and powers in AKP to be able to design the state as it desires, notwithstanding social, administrative and humanitarian ramifications.

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(1) In addition to formally purged officers, many people, who were working at education institutions, NGOs, media outlets that were shut down with SoE decree laws, have lost their jobs and been subjected to similar deprivations.

(2) Article 17 of Law No 2937. Those officials can only be investigated with prior assent of the President.

(3) Article 37 of Law no 6755. This provision also stipulates that those, who acted in the context of the matters related to the social security rights of dismissed officers and officers being investigated in the context of affiliation to terrorist organizations, will have no liability.



Turkish Foreign Policy in the Shadow of Massive Purges and Eurasianist Turn

by İmdat Öner*

It has been four years since the failed coup attempt in Turkey and no one has any clear idea yet what actually happened that night. While the complete narrative and evidence about the failed coup have yet to be clarified, the scope of the reaction by the Turkish government to the coup attempt was quite horrifying. Beyond any doubt, the coup attempt dramatically transformed Turkey's domestic and foreign policies.

Domestically, Erdogan used the attempt as an excuse to purge thousands of military and government officials accused of links to the Gulen Movement. While the failed putsch has accelerated democratic backsliding and curtailed freedoms and human rights in the

country, on the foreign policy front, there has been a major shift in the actions and vision of the government. The atmosphere of uncertainty in the wake of the coup has enabled the Erdogan government to structurally transform the foreign policy decision making.

First and foremost, Erdogan has steadily stepped up his efforts to tighten his grip over the foreign policymaking process. With the transition from a parliamentary system to a centralized executive presidency in Turkey through a referendum in 2017, the foreign policy decision-making process has been mostly transferred from the traditional institutions to Erdogan's hand. In particular,

the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which long played a key role in decision-making, has turned into a simple implementer of decisions made by the president, based solely on his preferences.

The massive purge of the Turkish diplomats following a coup in 2016 has further weakened the prestigious “Hariciye” which long served to guide the implementation of Turkish foreign policy. No less than 550 diplomats, whose very presence was indispensable for the day-to-day running of the Foreign Service, saw their careers upended by the brutal post-coup crackdown. Needless to say, their departure created an immense vacuum within the Ministry at a time diplomatic expertise is needed more than ever.

As much as its significant quantity, the atmosphere of fear that unprecedented purge generated among the Turkish diplomats has undermined the balancing role of career diplomats. While Erdogan's administration has driven the foreign policy disastrously off the rails, the seasoned diplomats adopted silence to simply avoid a similar dismissal. The purge and subsequent politicization of the ministry endangered the Foreign Service's constant balancing act and nonpartisan service, which has for years mitigated the fallout of the government's reckless policy course.

While pro-NATO and pro-EU officials were losing their previous influential positions, the government appeared to increasingly align its post-coup foreign policy with the Eurasian bloc. The alliance of the AKP with the Eurasianists in domestic politics has also manifested itself in Turkey's new foreign policy orientation. As Doğu Perinçek highlighted several times, after the coup attempt the AKP has been transformed to adopt the strategic position of this clique.

In the new era, Turkey's increasing detachment from the West underscores a major shift in Ankara's strategic thinking. With the Eurasianist ideology increasingly

emboldened in foreign policy decision-making, Turkey's relations with the West have grown more strained, and anti-American and anti-Western sentiment among the country's ruling elite has dramatically ramped up. Erdogan's tacit approval of this strategic re-orientation in foreign policy has become even more pronounced in the decision of his government to purchase the Russian S-400 defense system, pursue assertive posturing in the Eastern Mediterranean and keep silent in the face of China's suppression of Uighur Muslims.

Amid Ankara's increased isolation in the region and beyond, Russia took advantage of deepening anti-western anger among the Turkish people to build its influence on the Erdogan government. The Russians even promoted some stories highlighting that Russian intelligence had saved Erdogan by providing him advanced warning of the coup. After the abortive coup attempt, the relations between Turkey and Russia have highly intensified. Amid the rapprochement between Ankara and Moscow, the Eurasianist clique within the Turkish bureaucracy which long aspired to be closely aligned with Russia emerged holding key positions. It was not a simple coincidence that while pro-Russian Eurasianists filled the vacuum in the bureaucracy in the aftermath of unprecedented purge, Turkey has been spinning out of NATO orbit.

Moving forward, it is difficult to foresee how long the de facto alliance between the government and Eurasianist will remain in stage. Yet, one thing is crystal clear that this alliance of convenience in the aftermath of massive purge has already created serious damage in Turkey's foreign policy that will take generations to heal.

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Erdogan's Coup Attempt Narrative Falling Apart

by Mehmet Çelik*

In one fable of Aesop, a man and a lion were once travelling together and boasting of their respective strength. As they passed by a statue that showed a man choking a lion, the man pointed to it and said: "See! What more proof do you need?" The lion replied: "This is your version of the story. If lions could erect statues, you would see twenty dead men under the paw of that lion."

Aesop's fable is quite relevant also in understanding the events of the coup attempt in Turkey on July 15, 2016. So far, a one-sided official narrative has dominated the scene and many people bought this version at face value without feeling the need to check its reliability.

Four years have passed since the coup attempt; however, it still remains "controversial" as it has not been fully exposed to reveal the real perpetrators of the dark night that claimed the lives of 251 Turkish citizens and left more than two thousand people wounded. The clouds of

suspicion have not been lifted yet. Almost no real effort has been made to shed light on it. Rather, it seems that a thorough investigation has been obstructed by President Erdogan even though he has always portrayed himself as the number one target of the putschists.

An inquiry commission composed of lawmakers was set up at the Turkish Parliament to probe the events of the July 15 attempted coup. Nevertheless, the parliamentary commission proved to be inept and the developments surrounding the procedures and workings of the Commission indicated the existence of an intervention from outside, casting doubts on the objectivity and reliability of its work.

First, due to the late appointment of its members from President Erdogan's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), the Commission had to wait for 75 days until October 4, 2016 to commence its work after its mandate had been adopted on the 27th of July, implying a sense of unwillingness on the side of the government.

Second, the Commission ceased to hold hearings and wrapped its work up abruptly on January 4, 2017, a month earlier than its scheduled deadline. The opposition parties' calls for extension were rejected by Erdogan's AKP. Not surprisingly, the unexpected early dissolution of the Commission came soon after President Erdogan's statements requesting the ending of its operation.

Third, the Commission did not hear the key figures of July 15, in particular, the Chief of General Staff Hulusi Akar and the Chief of Intelligence Organization (MIT) Hakan Fidan, thus, leaving many questions unanswered. Without a doubt, these two officials had the most intimate knowledge of the events prior to and on July 15. Had they been invited to the Commission to testify, their first-hand information would definitely have given way to the illumination of many dark areas. Yet, President Erdogan blocked their testimony at the parliament. How could the truth do harm to Erdogan if he was the plaintiff in this case? Ironically, despite their failure to prevent the coup, Akar and Fidan were not even asked to resign, they both maintained their posts and Akar was later even promoted to Minister of Defense.

While War College students and even privates were sentenced to life imprisonment for their alleged role in the coup attempt, despite the fact that they were not aware of where they were heading and did not have any option but to follow the orders of their commanders, is it reasonable not to hear army generals and the Chief of General Staff?

Fourth, the fate of the Parliamentary Inquiry Commission Report remains mysterious. [The report](#) was handed over by the Chairperson of the Commission to the then Speaker of the Parliament, Ismail Kahraman on July 12, 2017. Nonetheless, two years after the submission of the Report, Mustafa Sentop, Speaker of the Parliament and AKP deputy, stated that "[no finalized report did exist in](#)

[their possession](#)." The mysterious evaporation of the Commission Report was met with widespread criticism from the opposition. Ozgur Ozel, MP of main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), commented on it as "a hand extended out from the Palace (referring to President Erdogan) and [blocked the investigation of some facts about July 15](#)."

Besides, the opposition's subsequent proposals at the Parliament to investigate the political collaborators of the attempted coup were also rejected by the MPs of the AKP and its ally Nationalist Movement Party (MHP).

Erdogan has pursued a zero-tolerance policy against any critical perspective challenging his narrative of the coup attempt. Turkey has been the number one jailer of journalists for the last years in parallel to Erdogan's rising authoritarian rule with sweeping new powers, alienating the country from the long aspired Western democracy path.

Despite the massive propaganda of Erdogan's government to impose a one-sided narrative of the July 15 coup attempt, promising counter arguments have been raised particularly by the Turkish journalists, ex-military officers, experts, activists living abroad. These findings put forward a challenging alternative narrative of the thwarted coup.

For instance, the government's narrative of the bombing of the Parliament and the Presidential Palace on the night of the coup attempt has been challenged by [a persuasive counter narrative](#). It was claimed that, inter alia, the damages in the Turkish Parliament building would have been more devastating and the roof would have been torn inward; had it been hit by a fighter jet bomb. It was also asserted that the images and videos distributed by the government indicate that pre-installed C4-type explosives might have been used from inside rather than a bomb from a fighter jet, given the fact that even a highly fragile TV screen remained intact, the books stayed on the bookshelf, no burning trace had been

seen on the curtains or couches, that would otherwise not remain untouched if the site had been hit by a jet.

Moreover, in the last four years, statements of some senior government officials have also supported the claims that it was in fact a "[controlled coup](#)" staged on the basis of a pre-planned scenario as described by Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, leader of the main opposition CHP. For instance, Binali Yıldırım, the then Prime Minister at the time of the coup attempt, said in a mocking way, in response to a question at an interview with a group of like-minded journalists, that "[the July 15 coup attempt was the project he liked the least](#)."

Yıldırım's remarks brought about further suspicions on the government narrative.

Furthermore, a [video](#) posted on social media has also indicated that the incidents on the Bosphorus Bridge had been planned in advance. In the video, a person with a large Turkish flag on his back was telling the others what the upcoming developments would be at the night of the coup attempt, including where the sniper would be installed. The same person was seen on the images and videos from the bridge on the night of the July 15 and he was in the mob lynching and beheading the defenseless military cadets.

Last but not least, perhaps the most

devastating blow to Erdoğan's narrative came from a [document](#) found in the indictment of the Akıncı Base case. It was an official trial report (minutes) written by a prosecutor and used as a basis for the first investigation about the coup attempt. What makes this document unique and important is that some events which had not taken place yet were written in the document as if they had actually happened. The document was signed by the prosecutor at 01:00 on July 16 but it included the events that would take place the next morning. The prosecutor must have had "nostradamus" skills to predict what would happen in the upcoming hours.

Simply put, those who challenge Erdoğan's official July 15 narrative have already developed a robust alternative that would eventually completely destroy the government's one-sided approach. When the fog over July 15 is lifted, it will not be surprising if today's heroes and traitors swap places. Therefore, a truth-seeker never takes events at face value! As underlined by Aesop twenty-six centuries ago, "facts speak plainer than words."

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The July 15 Coup Attempt: Foundation of Erdogan's Authoritarian Regime

by Hüseyin Konuş*

When Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan came to power in 2002, his political course and rhetoric were mostly democratic, Western-oriented and liberal. This provided him with support not only from different segments of the Turkish society but also from many countries and their leaders, including U.S. President Barack Obama and most of the European leaders.

However, after the firm consolidation of political power within the span of a decade in government, Erdogan has, from 2012 onward, gradually shifted to an authoritarian path. The first major turning point that could be cited for this authoritarian turn manifested itself during Gezi Park protests in summer 2013. Frustrated by Erdogan's illiberal rule, people from a wide spectrum of political backgrounds channeled their discontent through the month-long protests to stymie a controversial urban project detrimental to the environment. Secondly, a

sprawling corruption investigation that implicated Erdogan's ministers and his family members in December 2013 constituted another major milestone in Erdogan's steady departure from democracy.

These high-profile social and legal incidents animated Erdogan's counter-campaign to further tighten his grip on power. To thwart the judicial process that would edge closer to him, then-Prime Minister Erdogan subjugated the judiciary to executive power through a combined strategy of purge and intimidation in the police department, judiciary and public service, long before the terror of 2016 post-coup purge swept through Turkey's bureaucracy. What emerged since then has been a permanent politics of insecurity driven by fear and mistrust, paranoia and witch-hunt.

No matter how disorienting the post-2013 shift, the political climate was still not enough

to lend Erdogan what he increasingly sought: consolidation of one-man rule with little need for democratic procedures.

Finally, on July 15, 2016, a coup attempt took place. Erdogan called the riddling coup “[a gift from God](#)”. Immediately after, he declared a state of emergency, by-passed the parliament and turned the political system into a one-man rule.

Some analysts and scholars described the coup attempt as the “[Reichstag Fire](#)” of modern Turkey, which has set the ground for Erdogan’s current authoritarian rule. What exactly happened and who was behind the coup remain still mysterious in many ways. Erdogan has no tolerance against those who dare to ask critical questions about the coup attempt. Everyone in Turkey has to embrace the official narrative of the coup attempt, at least pretend to do so in the public realm in order to avoid being labeled as a terrorist.

Like many others, Selahattin Demirtas, leader of the pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic Party, the third largest party in the Turkish Parliament, was imprisoned after questioning Erdogan’s coup narrative. [In his speech in the Parliament Demirtas said](#), “Erdogan is lying. He had actually prior knowledge of the coup attempt; but purposefully he did not prevent it, because his plan was to rule the country at will under the state of emergency, using the coup attempt as a pretext”.

Although the putsch was thwarted in just a few hours, the emergency rule lasted two years. During the emergency rule, Erdogan has radically changed the political system that bestowed his new presidential office with unparalleled powers, that literally removed the last vestiges of checks and balances, that enabled him to rule the country with presidential decrees at will, and that allowed him to run for additional two five-year terms. These drastic changes, which would normally face much stronger opposition, could have been accomplished during the emergency rule.

After securing these political gains, mainly through the constitutional referendum in 2017 and the presidential election in June 2018, Erdogan ended the state of emergency in July 2018, only one month after his electoral triumph.

Since the coup attempt, around 150,000 [public servants](#) have been dismissed; more than 70,000 people have been arrested, the great majority of whom are civilians, including housewives, the sick, elderly and pregnant, who played obviously no role in the coup attempt. Arresting nearly 200 journalists, Turkey has become the number one jailer of journalists. Around 200 media outlets were shut down. More than one thousand schools, 15 universities and other education facilities were shut down as well. Torture and ill-treatment have become commonplace as reported by numerous reports of international human rights organizations, such as [Amnesty International](#) and [Human Rights Watch](#). Many lawmakers from opposition parties have been imprisoned.

These were evident moves by Erdogan to silence any criticism and consolidate his authoritarian rule, rather than to take measures concerning the coup attempt. It is no surprise that in just four years after the coup, Erdogan’s Turkey has sharply declined in indexes of democracy, press freedom, rule of law index, and others.

Almost each and every day new evidence comes out disproving Turkish government’s official narrative regarding the coup attempt. However, it is not possible to freely discuss them publicly in Turkey. Apparently, many foreign countries have noteworthy information about the coup contradicting Erdogan’s discourse, but, for obvious reasons, they do not release them against the strongman of the world’s 19th largest economy and a key country in the Middle East.

Whether it was a false flag operation with Erdogan’s involvement or not, it is clear that

the coup attempt has been skillfully exploited by him to establish his long-desired one-man rule.

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The Curious Love Between the UK and President Erdogan

by Ömer Güler*

Turkey has been rapidly drifting apart from the West after the failed coup attempt on July 15, 2016. In fact, this shift in the Turkish foreign policy dates back to Gezi Protests and especially 17-25 December 2013 corruption operations. Since then, Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and AK Party governments have steadily embraced anti-Western policies and undemocratic practices which culminated after July 15. Today, Erdogan is the sole power in Turkey who does not need to respect democracy or the rule of law.

President Erdogan, as a corrupted leader who has established an authoritarian rule, cannot afford to have normal relations with Western democratic countries. It has been a long time since he crossed the Rubicon in his bid to turn Turkey into a one-man ruled country, making return to democracy impossible. Therefore, Erdogan has no choice but to improve

relations with antidemocratic regimes such as Russia and China. And he is bound to remain in power at any cost in order not to be held accountable before courts. In other words, Erdogan has lost the luxury of becoming opposition after a democratic step down in Turkish politics.

Against this backdrop, Turkey's relations with the US and other Western democratic countries have deteriorated in the past seven years, especially after "15 July". Mainly due to the Syrian refugee card at Erdogan's hand, Western countries have failed to respond to his undemocratic practices as they would have wanted.

The strained relations with the Western countries and their suspicions concerning the true face of the coup attempt led to belated support for the Turkish government against the putschists. But there has been only one

outlier country in this broad picture all the while: the United Kingdom (UK). The UK has become one of the strongest allies of Erdoğan after the July 15 coup attempt. Alan Duncan, the then Minister of State for Europe and Americas was the first high-ranking European politician who [visited](#) Turkey after the failed coup attempt, at a time when Erdoğan desperately needed foreign support, as a source of legitimacy, for his official coup narrative and his massive crackdown after the attempted coup. The then British Ambassador Richard Moore, I believe, was the only Western country ambassador that [rushed to buy the narrative of the Turkish government](#), without questioning, that the Gülen Movement was behind the coup attempt. He and his successor, Ambassador Dominick Chilcott, have supported the July 15 narrative of Erdoğan on every occasion. Furthermore, the British government has turned a blind eye to the severest human rights violations in Turkey that have happened since then.

The UK's love for Erdoğan is rather complicated, and not much attention has been given to this odd relationship, except by the Foreign Affairs Committee of the UK Parliament. The Committee has [criticized](#) Foreign Commonwealth Office (FCO), the foreign affairs ministry of the UK, for its Turkey policy in the aftermath of July 15 in its report, the UK's relations with Turkey, of March 2017. This report eloquently articulates most of the deficiencies in the FCO's policy.

First of all, the Foreign Affairs Committee is not as eager as the FCO and British Ambassadors to Ankara to accept the July 15 narrative of the Turkish government. The Committee states:

"We found that the Turkish government's account of the Gülenists and the coup, which the FCO seems willing to accept broadly at face value, is not substantiated by hard, publicly available evidence, although as yet uncontradicted by the same standard."

Moreover, the Foreign Affairs Committee seems more vigilant against the human rights violations in the post July 15 period. The Committee disapproves the FCO for overlooking the human rights situation in Turkey and advises FCO to designate Turkey as a Human Rights Priority Country. The Committee also warns that "the UK risks being perceived as de-prioritising its concern for human rights in its drive to establish a 'strategic' relationship with Turkey." The Committee also challenges the FCO on the appropriateness of the measures taken by Turkey:

"More broadly, we disagree with the FCO's implication that the severity of the measures undertaken by the Turkish government after the coup attempt is justified by the scale of the threat."

The Committee does not accept the argument of the FCO that it empathizes and understands Turkey. In fact, the FCO's justification for its policy, 'understanding' or 'empathizing' sounds too personal. In this regard, I believe that Ambassador Moore may have played a crucial role in the design of the FCO's policy towards Turkey. A fan of Beşiktaş, a famous football club in Turkey, who tweeted about football extensively, Ambassador Moore endeavoured to fight against the [long-established perception of the UK in Turkey](#), especially in the Islamist circles. Labelling every international development as "İngiliz oyunu - English conspiracy" is a national sport in Islamist/conservative circles where Erdoğan receives most of his support and votes. Trying to demolish this perception, Ambassador Moore even once [wrote for daily Yenisafak](#), whose editor in chief İbrahim Karagül is the main conspiracy theorist in the conservative Turkish press, to persuade readers that the sun has indeed set over the British Empire and there is not anymore a British Empire.

Ambassador Moore, actively and casually using Twitter, once even [replied](#) to someone as "Ouch! Who is this idiot!!!", had an audience

bigger than any ambassador in Turkey at the time. But it is probable that he fell victim to the usual disease of being a diplomat: having too much empathy and understanding for the politicians of the country that you are following. Having excessive empathy can make you find justification for inexcusable acts of the country that you are serving in. Ambassador Moore might have thought that he understood Turkey better than anyone else but indeed he failed terribly to evaluate the current trends in Turkey in the best interest of his own country. In the end, he became one of the leading apologists of Erdogan.

The Foreign Affairs Committee further advocates that the UK should employ a more delicate policy so as to embrace all folks of the Turkish society, not only Erdogan and the AKP:

“The relationship that the FCO establishes with Turkey must not just be with the state apparatus, or with whichever party or person currently controls it. The UK should seek a deeper and therefore more durable connection with the Turkish people, whatever background they are from, while working to uphold the values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law, which will sustain the UK’s economic, security and values interests in the relationship.”

However, this very well written and wise report has fallen onto the FCO’s deaf ears. Though the Committee has continuously expressed its disappointment, the FCO has not designated Turkey as a Human Rights Priority Country so far.

The FCO and the UK Embassy in Turkey have failed, or more precisely have not even tried, to develop a nuanced Turkish policy. They have never voiced any serious criticisms against Erdogan. It would not be wrong to say Erdogan and his henchmen were emboldened and encouraged by the UK’s complacent or even supportive policies on Turkey’s human rights record. The Sabah newspaper has

become the most preferred press venue for the UK Embassy in Ankara. A quick note, Sabah is the propaganda mouthpiece of Erdogan which is owned by the brother of Berat Albayrak, Erdogan’s son in law. Since April 2017, UK politicians and ambassadors have published at least eight articles at Sabah. At the same period, their publications per other newspapers were much less than this. The British Embassy in Ankara has especially attached importance to publish articles at Sabah on the commemoration of July 15. It turned out that [the first commemoration article](#) written by the then Ambassador Richard Moore on 15 July 2017 had been blatantly [changed](#) by Sabah editors without his permission. But even this shameful act did not prevent the British Embassy from publishing commemoration articles on July 15 in [2018](#) and [2019](#) at Sabah. And the writer of those articles was even a more high-profile figure: the then Minister of State for Europe and Americas Alan Duncan. Strangely this year [FCO](#) and the [UK Embassy](#) in Ankara sufficed to tweet about July 15. I am curious to see whether this signifies a policy shift.

The main argument for the UK’s unwavering support for Erdogan seems to be forming new trade partnerships in the post Brexit era as [expressed](#) by Alan Duncan to the Committee: “we want a deep strategic relationship, which is of course political, but also based on trade.” This argument does not make sense as Turkey is in Customs Union with the EU, thus the UK’s trade deal with the EU will be the backbone of the trade relationship between Turkey and the UK.

The UK’s strong support for Erdogan is gradually attracting attention from different political and social circles in Turkey. In a recent [tweet](#) posted by the lawmaker Bülent Kuşoğlu from the main opposition party CHP, for instance, the UK is mentioned as a supporter of Erdogan. On the other hand, considering the close relationship between the UK and Qatar, Qatar’s support for Erdogan under almost any circumstances is curious as

well.

Consequently, the UK has been losing credibility in the eyes of broad segments of Turkish society by unquestioningly supporting Erdoğan. The policymakers in the UK should bear in mind that they are supporting a leader who has turned Turkey into an autocratic country full of grave human rights violations. It is beyond doubt that Erdoğan will lose power sooner or later. And if the UK continues with its current policy, it will miss the opportunity to develop a long-term and healthy relationship and pay a high price. The UK will be remembered as one of the strongest allies and accomplice of Erdoğan who has dealt a fatal blow to Turkish democracy and social peace. So, the UK is simply risking its future in Turkey with such a

myopic policy.

Having said all of these, the policymakers at the FCO and the British Embassy in Ankara have an easy task: they should just (re)read, but this time by leaving their unnecessary empathy and understanding of Erdoğan aside, the report of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the UK Parliament and follow the roadmap outlined in the report before it is too late. As a former Turkish diplomat who served in the UK, I believe this would be in the best interest of the UK and the Turkish people.

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