

Policy Brief

Failed Turkish Coup: Dynamics and Implications

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The failed coup attempt in Turkey will have long-reaching ramifications on the country despite the government's swift response and popular protests against the coup [EPA]

Abstract

The military coup attempt that unfolded in Turkey on the night of 15 July 2016 was successfully put down by popular protests across the country responding to President Erdogan's calls for citizens to stand for democracy. Despite this, the coup attempt will have domestic, regional and international implications. This policy brief is a preliminary analysis of the reasons the coup failed, the paths Turkish politics may take after this coup and the regional and international reactions to the coup.

*Please note that this policy brief is a summarized version of the Arabic policy brief which appeared here:

<http://studies.aljazeera.net/ar/positionestimate/2016/07/160720103630108.html>

The Turkish government's reaction to the 15 July 2016 military coup attempt has yet to end. So far, thousands of military members, employees of state institutions, including university professors and judges, and others suspected of participating in the coup, have been arrested by the government. It is clear from these campaigns and the declaration of emergency law that the current government is intent on erasing any elements of the deep state loyal to the US-based cleric Fethullah Gulen. This policy brief examines reasons the coup failed, the scenarios for Turkish politics after this coup and regional international reactions to the coup.

Why the coup failed

Dozens of generals and commanders took part in the military coup attempt, and at one point the Akinci, Diyarbakir and Balikesir military bases were under the control of the coup plotters, with Akinci air base in Ankara acting as their central command. The

network of those involved in the coup, including a limited number of police personnel, was clearly not a product of mere months of planning but rather a culmination of years of conflicts with the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP). While many were supporters of exiled cleric Fethullah Gulen, not all were.

The coup plotters had apparently planned to begin the attempt on the morning of 16 July rather than the evening of the fifteenth, but when Turkish intelligence services (MIT) picked up on this, they set the coup in motion earlier than planned. This negatively impacted the coordination between parties to the coup. Another mistake on the part of the coup plotters was that they did not seek political support for their actions, thus support was limited to the military and police who took part in the attempt. The strikes on the parliament by coup plotters seemed to have been the final nail in the coffin, because these strikes were seen as a serious error in judgment by all segments of the population.

In terms of response once the attempt was discovered by the MIT (Turkey's intelligence agency), the following factors were instrumental in ensuring the coup failed:

- First, the head of MIT, Hakan Fidan, immediately called a meeting with the country's commander of the armed forces, who in turn ordered all military personnel to remain in their barracks.
- Second, President Erdogan responded by an appearance on the private channel CNN Turk, prompting popular protests against the military coup across the country. Serious physical altercations occurred between the coup plotters and ordinary Turkish citizens on the Bosphorus Bridge as well as across the capital city of Ankara. Citizens did not only protest the coup, but also used themselves and their vehicles to block tanks and other heavy machinery being used by military members involved in the coup.
- Third, Prime Minister Binali Yildirim publicly denounced the coup, as did several members and ministers of the parliament in Ankara, including those belonging to opposition parties. This united response was fortified by a statement released by members of parliament who were in the building when the coup plotters attacked it from the air.
- A fourth factor that pushed back at the coup attempt was the lack of any political or civil society support for the coup. Even media outlets, regardless of their political stance towards the AKP, denounced the coup and gave a platform to President Erdogan and Prime Minister Yildirim when the coup plotters overtook the government's official channel.

- Fifth, even after arresting and threatening the chief of staff and commanders of the air and naval forces, the coup plotters were unable to gain their support for the coup.
- The sixth factor was more pre-emptive in nature – since 2013, the Minister of Interior, Efkan Ala, had worked to expel Gulen loyalists from the ranks of the police and intelligence services, and the stance of these institutions with Turkish citizens against the coup plotters seems to have been a product of this purge.
- Finally, when all the mosques began to make the call to prayer (the athan), this boosted the morale of the citizens to protest the coup but also served as an alert to military members who were being coerced or tricked into participating in the coup.

Possible paths for Turkey

Given that this coup is the first of its kind to be stopped in Turkey, the reality is that it will have a definite and noticeable impact on the country's governmental structure. In the short term, the government's priority will be restructuring the state, including the judicial and military institutions. This attempt will also likely push towards consensus between political actors to establish the new constitution Erdogan has been advocating for since before he took the presidency. Other major issues that may be impacted by this latest coup attempt include the Kurdish issue that the state has yet to settle.

In terms of foreign policy, the Turkish state will probably continue its recent efforts to smooth ties over with other nations, including Russia and Israel, while lessening its insistence on joining the European Union and increasing its policy-making independence in any relationship with the US and the EU.

Regional and global responses

Egyptian, Syrian and UAE state media initially welcomed the coup attempt. However, after the coup threat reasonably passed, the UAE joined Saudi Arabia and Iran in expressing support for Erdogan's government. Egypt did not comment the coup's failure, save its protest in the UN Security Council against a statement condemning the coup attempt. Jordan simply issued a statement expressing lukewarm congratulations because the coup had failed.

Russia did not show any support for the coup, perhaps because this could harm the ties it has recently been trying to restore with Turkey. The US and EU were reserved in their response to news that a coup attempt was underway in Turkey until it became clear the attempt was failing, at that point congratulating the victory of democracy and freedom. And while there are speculations that other nations may have had prior information

about a coup attempt in Turkey, the Turkish government has so far avoided making any public announcements to that effect.

As it stands now, there continues to be a serious campaign in western media and government circles decrying the mass arrests Turkey has made after the coup attempt, accusing the AKP of seeking revenge from anyone who is opposed to it. Western nations, particularly those in the EU, have also sent a strong message to Turkey, warning it that returning to the punishment of capital punishment would jeopardise their bid to join the UN.

To conclude, a particularly interesting phenomenon observed during the coup and its continuing aftermath has been the Arab world's extreme preoccupation with events in Turkey. While the impact on Arab political environments will not be immediate, the example found in the Turkish people defending their freedoms is in the interest of revolutionary change forces in the Arab world that are currently battling anti-revolutionary forces on many fronts.