



Conference Report

**The Impact of the
July 15th Coup Attempt**

**on Turkish State
and Society**

Conference Report

The Impact of the July 15th Coup Attempt

on Turkish State and Society

This is a report of a closed session titled 'The Impact of the July 15th on Turkish State and Society Coup Attempt', held as part of the TRT World Forum 2017. Being an off the record session, it allowed speakers and participants to freely use the information received. However, neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speakers, nor that of any other participant, was to be revealed. The views, themes and discussion points expressed in this conference report are those of participants and speakers present at the TRT World Forum 2017, and do not reflect the official view of TRT World Research Centre.

© TRT WORLD RESEARCH CENTRE

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

PREPARED BY

MUHAMMED ALİ UÇAR

SELÇUK AYDIN

PUBLISHER

TRT WORLD RESEARCH CENTRE

JANUARY 2018

TRT WORLD İSTANBUL

AHMET ADNAN SAYGUN STREET NO:83 34347

ULUS, BEŞİKTAŞ

İSTANBUL / TURKEY

www.trtworld.com

TRT WORLD LONDON

PORTLAND HOUSE

4 GREAT PORTLAND STREET NO:4

LONDON / UNITED KINGDOM

www.trtworld.com

TRT WORLD WASHINGTON D.C.

1620 I STREET NW, 10TH FLOOR,

SUITE 1000, 20006

WASHINGTON DC / UNITED STATES

www.trtworld.com

The views, themes and discussion points expressed in this conference report are those of participants and speakers present at the TRT World Forum 2017, and do not reflect the official view of TRT World Research Centre.

Summary

In this session, a distinguished panel of speakers and participants convened to explore the origins, impact and lasting legacy of the brutal coup attempt in Turkey, in which many innocent civilians lost their lives and thousands were injured. During the night of July 15, 2016, a group of soldiers attempted to overthrow the democratically elected government in Turkey. Thousands of ordinary men and women took to the streets to oppose the coup. The confessions of some of the putschist soldiers and key evidence during the night of the coup, indicated that Fethullah Gülen - a Turkish cleric living in the US - and his followers were directly involved in the coup attempt. Within this framework, the session explored the roots of the coup in Turkey on the basis of civil military relations, development of the FETÖ and the impact of the coup attempt on national and international politics of Turkey.

The after-effects of the failed coup attempt and the nations' continued shock and grief was the subject of intense discussion during the session. One of the speakers emphasised the link between the military tutelage in Turkey and the development of the FETÖ and coup attempt. He evaluated how 15th July influenced the state system and triggered the institutional transformation of Turkey to prevent

potential coup attempts. The next speaker addressed the role of the Turkish people in preventing the coup, emphasising the social, economic and political changes during the AK Party period. Participants contributed to the session by discussing various issues such as disputed understanding of the coup by international actors, FETÖ activities in the USA and the rest of the world, influence of the coup on national and international politics of Turkey and finally the post-coup era in Turkey.

While Turkey presented the entire evidence that linked FETÖ with the coup, the disputed understanding of the FETÖ by international actors was the most highlighted issue in the participants' comments. One of the participants emphasised the importance of Turkey's investment in clarifying and presenting the illegal activities of FETÖ within the state as well as in other countries. Furthermore, questions arose on the reasons behind the failure of the coup and how it differed fundamentally from the countries long and bitter history of successful military takeovers. Towards the end of the session, the participants discussed how ordinary citizens - regardless of race, culture and political affiliation - were crucial in defeating the coup and that their public display of unity have emerged as factors that underpin Turkey's democracy.

Introduction

There is no generation without any memory of a coup d'état in Turkey was a significant statement by one of the speakers of the session in determining the history of coup attempts in Turkey. From a historical angle, Turkey was formed under the strong Western-oriented perspective of the Turkish military during the 1920s. The military cadre and single party regime (CHP - Republican People's Party) dominated the state and civil politics for almost three decades and their legacy was maintained until the AK Party government came into power. The multi-party period of Turkey started legally in 1945 and in practice in 1950, however this democratic process was interrupted by the following military interventions: 1960 coup d'état, 1971 military memorandum, 1980 coup d'état, 1997 soft coup, 2007 e-memorandum and finally the July 15th 2016 coup attempt. Nevertheless, the July 15th coup attempt has

differentiated from the previous coups in terms of its actors and the response of the people, which was the prominent discussion theme of the closed session.

In the session, politicians, bureaucrats, diplomats, academics, regional experts, and journalists came together to discuss the impacts of the coup attempt on Turkish state and society. History of civil-military relations in Turkey and the infiltration of FETÖ members into state institutions and their links to the coup attempt were addressed. Moreover, domestic and international reactions during and post-coup attempt process were discussed through historical, social and political points of view.

Historical Perspective of Civil-Military Relations in Turkey and the July 15th Coup Attempt

The Turkish military has historically acted as the protector and executor of the Kemalist regime. The roots of the regime were determined by the growing political identities of the Westernised military cadres under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal. This put the Turkish military in a superior position over other institutions, which is regarded as a military tutelage in Turkey. Therefore, one of the speakers identified the Turkish military as a 'bonapartist structure.' This term identifies Turkish military as a supra-political since it acts superior to democratic institutions and bases itself as the founder and protector of the state. As a result of this understanding, to get rid of the unnecessary political divisions in society, Turkish military should control the political area.

Within this framework, in order to be a dominant power in Turkey, FETÖ infiltrated into bureaucratic institutions, with particular emphasis to the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) in order to control state and society. While the method of Gülenists were the same with the Bonapartist ideology, their worldview is completely different. FETÖ believes that they are a community selected by God and identify themselves as the 'Golden Generation.' This generation is supposed to govern Turkey and consequently other parts of the world. Moreover, FETÖ followers believe that they do not need to obey any rules except the words of their ideological leader. Therefore, being a member of the organisation is seen as a great privilege.

This perception of being the selected community has led its followers to replicate Kemalist methods in dominating state institutions and thus governing Turkey. Their methods are followed by people from almost all walks of life, regardless of their worldview, beliefs, and lifestyles. More specifically, educated people are strong advocates of FETÖ because of the oppression they faced from Kemalists who in the past prevented educated conservatives to enter state institutions. When the FETÖ members consolidated their power within the state, they

oppressed the other groups in the bureaucracy. Another significant analogy between FETÖ and Kemalists is their intentions in mobilising the individuals and society towards becoming 'more civilised', which according to them can only be achieved via their ideology.

According to one of the participants, the 1997 soft coup was also another significant step to empower the FETÖ, in which the Kemalist regime curbed the activities of conservative groups. Since then, their schools, universities and foundations have grown across major Turkish cities and easily spread to other corners of the world. During the AK Party era, they followed their main characteristic to do 'tedbir', which means to hide their real purpose and identity until they have obtained full power in the judiciary, bureaucracy, and military fields of the state.

One of the participants articulated that the most important lesson we should take from the coup is the importance of democratic legitimacy of socio-political groups. Because it is a circle when undemocratic political attempts happened in a country that led other undemocratic political events. As in the case of FETÖ, they realized that they could govern Turkey through the domination of bureaucratic institutions without entering elections, since forming a party and attending the democratic elections was very risky. Instead, FETÖ surreptitiously infiltrated into the state institutions, specifically the military, to govern Turkey, regardless of who was in power. As a result of this process, Gülenists took over the Kemalist tradition of coup d'état.

Upon making a comparison between FETÖ and Kemalist cadres, the speaker emphasized that compared to previous coups, the July 15th coup attempt was completely different. This is because for the first time in Turkish coup history soldiers opened fire on civilians and bombed the Turkish Parliament. This was a traumatic experience for Turkish people and one of the most catastrophic events in modern Turkish history.

The July 15th Coup Attempt and the FETÖ Link

The link between FETÖ and the July 15th coup attempt is proven by the profile of the coup plotters and their confessions, and subliminal messages of the FETÖ followers and its leader before the coup. For instance, one month before the coup attempt, FETÖ member Osman Özsoy made headlines for statements he made on a TV show, announcing that: 'Good times are just around the corner. How I wish I were a colonel today and not a professor, then I would have much more to contribute to this process.' The presenter then asked: 'How exactly would you contribute?' Özsoy's reply: 'I just said what I said and won't be commenting on it more. If I were to be a colonel today, I would have a bigger chance of service.' Moreover, Hulusi Akar, the chief general of Turkish Armed Forces testified that the coup plotters who detained him the night of the coup offered to put him in touch with Gülen. In addition, during the coup night, FETÖ's 'civilian imams' (political commissaries who were in charge of FETÖ followers in the TAF) were in the military bases.

From the early days of the republic, Turkey has been a security-conscious state, with domestic stability and territorial integrity often at the top of its agenda. Every month, high-ranking military officers and top executives of the Turkish government come together for the regular National Security Council (NSC) meetings. They would discuss significant issues of the state such as security, domestic and foreign politics. However, the Turkish military used this sense of constitutional authorisation in an undemocratic way by justifying interference in the political realm. The AK Party governments under the EU accession process have democratised the NSC through the introduction of several reforms. As a result, decreasing the number of soldiers in the NSC and restructuring the NSC was a significant step for Turkish democracy.

Within this structure, the FETÖ linked soldiers have always hidden their real identity in the military while some of them were compromised and consequently sacked. The FETÖ members were not able to easily rise to top military positions as the high-ranking military officers were stronger in the NSC. However, they were dominating the mid-level of the army. Therefore, profiles and positions of the coup plotters fit FETÖ

and there was almost no hierarchy among those who carried out the coup. History shows us that executing a coup by a group of mid-level soldiers does not mean that the coup is doomed to fail. The 1960 coup was conducted by midlevel soldiers and what differentiated this coup from previous ones was the resistance coming from ordinary people against the coup plotters. The July 15th coup was also prevented by the power of civilian people who took to the streets and stood up for their rights and liberties. Yet the overall price of victory was high: 249 people were martyred and another 2000 people were injured. In addition, hundreds of thousands of people marched against the coup soldiers that night, not only in Istanbul and Ankara but also in Diyarbakir and Cizre, where Kurds constitute a great majority of the population as specifically emphasised by one of the participants.

This picture laid the groundwork for FETÖ in order to cover their real identity in coup hiding behind the Kemalist discourse during that night. That night, they were expecting to receive the support of other soldiers but this did not happen. The coup plotters presented a statement on state television TRT. In this statement, it was announced that a council called 'Yurtta Sulh, Cihanda Sulh' (Peace at Home, Peace in the World) staged a coup. Nevertheless, it was not clear exactly who was in this council because FETÖ planned that other groups in the army would also attend the coup

It was emphasized during the session that all political groups in Turkey agreed that FETÖ was behind the coup attempt. There is a consensus in Turkey that FETÖ was the planner of the coup d'état.

attempt that night. The most interesting point about the name of the council was that it was coined by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in 1931. One of the speakers stated that the coup was a conventional coalition of old powers, including some Kemalists and nationalist-secular groups in order to defeat the AK Party. On the other hand, speakers and participants agreed that most of the people did not recognise the power of FETÖ within the army because they were very successful in concealing themselves. Yet after the investigations, it was revealed that coup plotters were predominantly FETÖ members.

One of the key factors in the infiltration of FETÖ members into the state and the difficulties in determining its members was that they used code names, rather than their own names. Moreover, they did not use their personal phones in their contacts with other FETÖ members. Therefore, it was hard to prove their links with FETÖ.

It was emphasised during the session that all political groups in Turkey agreed that FETÖ was behind the coup attempt. There is a consensus in Turkey that FETÖ was the planner of the coup d'état. While Turkey presented the entire evidence that linked FETÖ with the coup, the disputed understanding of the FETÖ by international actors was the most highlighted issue in the participants' comments.

One of the participants mentioned that while the reality is quite clear, it is hard to convince America since FETÖ members have good relations with its politicians and institutions. Therefore, the participants emphasised the importance of Turkey's investment in clarifying and presenting the illegal activities of FETÖ within the state as well as in other countries.

International Political Atmosphere

The position of international actors on the 15th July coup attempt is another significant theme of the session. In this regard, one of the participants questioned why it is so hard to make a judiciary case on FETÖ and its leader Fethullah Gülen in the US, despite the fact that Turkey officially presented all the evidence to the American authorities. This indicates that the lack of evidence is not the issue here. The fact that the United States does not start any investigation on FETÖ after the coup attempt shows that the relationship between Gülen and US is still strong. It is emphasised that this is the result of the lobbying activities of FETÖ in the US, which has allowed the organisation to build good relations with the American authorities, bureaucrats, civil organisations and high-level academics in order to run a negative campaign against Turkey. It also appears that there is a collaboration among Gülenists and pro-PKK groups and the Armenian lobby against Turkey in the US. This cooperation emerges as an anti-Turkey campaign in the US, which consequently makes it difficult to bring a case against FETÖ.

Another participant stressed that FETÖ is still active not only in the US but also in Africa, which has been a source of influence and revenue for the organisation.

Some of these African countries have not started their investigations against FETÖ, with one participant stating that FETÖ members are married to people from the local community in African countries, which makes their lobbying more easy and gives them access to the bureaucracy.

Some suggestions were offered by participants which would help start investigations against FETÖ in the US and African countries. The most prominent of these was that Turkey should explain itself better and conduct lobbying activities in order to present the illegal activities of FETÖ within the state as well as in other countries. This long-term approach - in which more investment is made in establishing good relations between countries - was highlighted as a key factor and a successful step forward.

FETÖ is still active not only in the US but also in Africa, which has been a source of influence and revenue for the organisation.

Conclusion

On July 15th 2016, Turkey experienced one of the most important events in its history. FETÖ, which has infiltrated into Turkey's military, bureaucracy and political institutions in the last 40 years through education, humanitarian aid and dialogue, staged a coup attempt. This night was one of the bloodiest days in Turkey's history of coups but also the first coup that was stopped by the resistance of the people. Civilians, police officers, politicians, and head of the state President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan were all targets of the coup. At this night 249 civilians, soldiers and police officers were martyred and over 2000 people were injured. The resistance of the civilians against the military coup marked a turning point in the history of democracy.

Finally, it was highlighted that Turkey survived the economic impact of the failed coup because it had already established a well-functioning financial system prior to the coup attempt. In order to prevent a repeated coup in the future, it was stated that coup plotters must be punished by law and their trials should be followed closely by the Turkish public.

