

Coup in Turkey and Egypt: Internal and External Dynamics

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ABSTRACT *The failure of the July 15 coup attempt in Turkey gave rise to many comparisons between the coup attempt in Turkey and the coup in Egypt. This commentary compares the factors, which led to the success of the coup attempt in Egypt and the failure of the Turkish one. For this reason, it analyzes some differences in the social composition of the Egyptian and Turkish people, and the role of internal political actors, external powers, and the media in shaping the fate of the coup in Egypt and coup attempt in Turkey.*

Introduction

A coup is a sudden displacement of a country's government by a group belonging to an institution of the state, usually the military. A coup is successful only when the coup plotters manage to impose hegemony and take control over the situation; if a coup attempt is thwarted, either civil war ensues or the government restores democratic rule. Although there are many academic studies on dynamics leading to a successful coup, analyzes focusing on the factors that might cause a coup to fail once attempted are rare.¹ A comparative analysis of the Egyptian and Turkish cases has potential

to provide fruitful thoughts on the causes behind the success and failure of coup attempts. Those causes vary from rapidly increasing population to uneven industrialization, from economic dependency to ethnic composition, and from the degree of media freedom to economic wealth. Of them, the structure of armed forces is the most significant variable in explaining the success and failure of coup attempts in any country.

The recent military coups in Egypt and in Turkey respectively have different internal and external dynamics that led to the success of the former and the failure of the latter. In this commentary, I try to shed light

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The Egyptian nation went through more than 60 years of corrupt military rule that dominated the reins of government using security control and election fraud. On the other hand, the Turkish nation is unfamiliar with the culture of fraud, in spite of its history of successive military coups

on the internal structures of Egyptian and Turkish society, the role of the military establishment in the two coups and the role that political and religious actors in the two countries played in the military coup. Moreover, I discuss the media's role in the success of the coup in Egypt and in the thwarting of the coup attempt in Turkey, and conclude with an analysis of the role played by regional and international actors in both countries.

The Internal Structure of Egyptian and Turkish Society

The structure of Egyptian society includes a blend of several civilizations that have been hosted in Egypt over the ages, and a history interwoven with unique threads that carry the impressions of the people who have lived there and interacted on the land. Ultimately, the outcome is

a distinctive Egyptian character that is generally kind and religious, due to the nature of living in an agricultural environment. Traditionally, throughout the ages, this population has tended to comply with the ruler in most cases, especially if the ruler deals with the people in a manner characterized by violence, cruelty and control. Thus, Egyptian citizens fear their ruler, and often depend on the government for the administration of their lives.

Due to the nature of the Egyptian people's simple life, after the transition from monarchy to republic in 1952 and the military's predominance over the reins of power, the Egyptian people have declined in many fields. In spite of free education, there is still a significant rate of illiteracy in Egypt. This lack of fundamental education has helped the Egyptian rulers to reshape the consciousness of the Egyptian character, sometimes with high-sounding speeches, and sometimes through the media's influence over public opinion.

On the other side, the Turkish people treasure their nationality and language, tending to hold onto them as they have never been subjected to occupation by any foreign country. This historical factor makes them arguably less open and less interactive with other cultures,² unlike the Egyptian people who were subjected to French and British occupation before gaining independence.

It is important to note that there is a fundamental difference between the

recent histories of the two nations. The Egyptian nation went through more than 60 years of corrupt military rule that dominated the reins of government using security control and election fraud. On the other hand, the Turkish nation is unfamiliar with the culture of fraud, in spite of its history of successive military coups. Also, the illiteracy rate in Egypt is more than 40 percent, and people suffer from ignorance and poverty; while the Egyptian media conducts a pervasive and systematic distortion process on the consciousness of the Egyptians. In contrast, the Turkish people have one of the top higher education rates in the world, and the fastest growth in allocations for research and scientific studies. Turkey has more than 150,000 scientific researchers and 6 universities rated among the top 500 universities in the world. The Turkish people have gone through the scourge of four military coups (1960, 1971, 1980, and 1997), and know very well the disastrous effects of military coups on the economy; the media there cannot change people's convictions easily.

The Islamic-oriented government have therefore able to take advantage of the democratic climate in the country to gain civilian support for their electoral platform – addressing and serving a well-educated populous who understand the adverse effects of living under military rule – instead of solely depending on rhetoric to whip up crowds. In Egypt on the other hand, where military rule has been present for decades, the Muslim Brotherhood could only depend on

crowd mobilizations, as seen during the 25th January revolution which propelled Morsi to become the President, and during the November 2012 constitutional declaration which triggered strong opposition.³

In terms of affiliation, the Egyptian nation can be divided into four segments: the first is the Islamist segment, which represents the largest segment of the Egyptian people, due to the religious nature that characterizes ordinary Egyptians, despite the 10-15 percent proportion of Copts; the second biggest segment is the national stream, which believes in Pan-Arab nationalism; the third segment is the liberal stream that is smaller than the previous two segments; the fourth segment is the left-wing, the smallest and weakest among them, especially in the recent period.

Looking at the structure and division of the Turkish nation, we find that it is divided into five segments; each one is different in composition. Firstly, the secular segment includes a high proportion of the Turkish population, as most of the Turkish people were born and grew up after the Atatürk revolution, thus, the principles of secular thought are rooted in their minds by educational, cultural and informational means. The Islamic-oriented segment is the second largest segment in terms of influence and population; it includes different ethnic groups, although most of them are from the Turkish ethnic group. This segment believes that the Turkish government and nation are

As coup plotters tried to enter Atatürk Airport in Istanbul on the night of July 15, Metin Doğan, a university student, lies down in front of the tanks to stop the coup plotters from entering the airport.

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an integral part of the Islamic nation, arguing that Turkey ruled the Islamic world for several centuries, before secularism penetrated the Turkish political structure. This segment has widened in recent years, as a result of the remarkable activity of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party).

Thirdly, there is the Turkish nationalist segment whose supporters consider themselves to be the alternative to the secular segment, and consider Atatürk in a positive light as the Lenin or Mao Zedong of the Turkish nation; in other words, they believe that Atatürk established the modern Turkish state with an orientation towards the revival of Turkish nationalism, culture and heritage, emphasizing separation from the Islamic world, maintaining Turkey's independence and full sovereignty

over its territory, adopting an economic socialist ideology, establishing a powerful army and military arsenal enabling it to consolidate these basic principles and to protect Turkey from foreign interventions both from the Western bloc and the Eastern bloc. The fourth segment is that of Kurdish nationalism, representing the largest ethnic minority in Turkey, they believe that the Kurds are an Aryan Muslim nation, speaking their own Kurdish language, and representing their own, distinct nationality. The last segment is that of other minorities. It comprises a small percentage of the Turkish population structure with heterogeneous affiliations such as Arabs, Circassians, Armenians, Turkmens, Uzbeks and others, as well as religious minorities such as the Alawites, Dervishes, Sufis, and finally ideological minorities such as Marxists and socialists.⁴

The differing structures of Egyptian and Turkish societies contributed in one way or another to the outcome of each country's respective coup attempt. Egypt's military rule, in effect since 1952 (the one exception being the one-year rule of President Morsi), prepared the way for the coup there, and its quick control over situation; meanwhile, the Turkish people have experienced alternating civilian and military rule for long periods of time since Kemal Atatürk's rule in 1924. They had indeed suffered from military coups in different periods, however, we can say that, "for many years, the Turkish people experienced civilian rule that solved issues in a democratic way, while the first Egyptian civilian experience did not have the chance to solve issues democratically."⁵

The Military Establishment and Its Role in the Egyptian and Turkish Coups

The military establishment in both countries has played a vital role and exerted a prominent influence on the public. This is particularly true of political life in Egypt, starting from 1881 during the Orabi Revolution, when Ahmed Orabi stood with all sections of the Egyptian people before the Abdeen Palace to present the people's demands to the Khedive Tawfiq. This military role continued for successive periods of time including the Free Officers Movement, which sparked a military coup in 1952, which later turned into a political revolution, and has been the most prominent

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milestone concerning the role played by the Egyptian military in political and public life.⁶ The military establishment continued to play this role in Egypt in different eras: from Sadat and Mubarak, who resigned and handed over the reins of power to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), to the "defense coup" led by Minister Abdel Fattah al-Sisi on 3 July 2013.

In Turkey's military history, Atatürk, together with some Ottoman army leaders, led the Turkish National Resistance Movement (1920-1922) against the occupation armies. The War of Independence, which evolved from the Movement, brought a strong mixture of the political and military role to the concept of military function. Atatürk utilized this background in taking over the reins of power in Turkey. Thus, the role of the Army was not limited to transferring power to the Kemalists, but rather involved turning the Army itself into an active agent in the structuring of the Turkish Republic.⁷ It is generally stated that, "since its establishment, the Turkish army was the protector of

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the republic's secular values and the faithful guardian to guarantee commitment to these values.”⁸

Military intervention in the guidance or orientation of Turkey's political life has been demonstrated in several different ways, but most notably through military coups. Turkey's generals have derived the legal legitimacy of military coups from Article 35 of the military service law that gives the military establishment the right to intervene to protect the six principles of the Turkish Republic (six arrows) when they seem to be violated. During the era of the Republic, the military establishment conducted four coups, the first three of which were straight-out military take-overs (May, 1960; March, 1971; and September, 1980); the last successful coup, which occurred in February 1997 and is known as a post-modern coup, differed from the previous three coups in terms of its framework, since it did not directly intervene into political affairs.

If we look at what happened on the 3rd of July 2013 coup in Egypt, we find that the army, or rather the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF),

could not bear for the elected civilian president Muhammed Morsi to remain in power until the end of his first term. Therefore, obstacles were put in his way, and problems were created for him; all of the state institutions were put under SCAF control, so that the president could not properly administrate Egypt's state affairs. The armed forces as a whole, with all its branches and their leaders, were involved in the coup against the president, under the pretext of preserving the state and protecting it from civil war. This pretext was a major and important reason behind the success of the coup in Egypt. Not only did the SCAF play the abovementioned role in the coup, but also military intelligence, from the very beginning, actively worked to turn public opinion against President Morsi.

As for the Turkish case, despite the push and pull that has taken place over the years between President Erdoğan and the military establishment, Erdoğan has excelled in the last ten years in neutralizing the army's role in politics, a factor which contributed significantly in the incomplete involvement of the military establishment in the coup attempt of 15 July 2016. The majority of the Turkish military establishment “thwarted the coup attempt that came from inside with an iron fist, as they put the interest of Turkey and its security and stability above all other considerations, and thus unite[ed] with the people to achieve these goals.”⁹

The coup attempt in Turkey lasted only a few hours, starting and ending

abruptly. The main reason that led to the thwarting of the coup was that a strong segment within the military, present in all of its components and units, did not support the idea of a coup against the elected authority. There was a split in the army concerning the democratic process, one that reduced the coup plotters' powers – a fact which prompted them to execute the detention of Hulusi Akar, the Chief of the General Staff, who was Erdoğan's confidant, and many of the generals who refused to comply with the coup attempt.

The Role of Political and Religious Actors in Egypt and Turkey's Military Coups

Given the role of political parties and political actors in both Egypt and Turkey, we find that there is a clear contrast in attitudes toward military coups in both countries. In Turkey, the political attitudes towards the failed coup attempt on 15 July 2016 were all intended to achieve one goal: that of protecting the Turkish nation which embraces all its citizens of various beliefs, affiliations and colors. It was clear to observers on the scene that Turkish society, including both secularists and Islamists, journalists and intellectuals, men and women from all ranks, expressed their full support to President Erdoğan and the democratic experience, standing as one bloc against the coup attempt. This was opposite to the way that the political parties dealt with President Morsi. Their first reaction was to settle old scores with the Muslim

Brotherhood, disregarding national interest and people's rights, as if they had been conducting a coup against democracy even before the military did. Some Islamists, who shared the same Islamic reference with Morsi, even hastened, before some other secularists, nationalists, and socialists, to bless and embrace the coup. This included the alNour Party and some religious leaders, not to mention the support that al-Azhar and the Church provided for the coup.¹⁰

It is worth noting that the opposition parties' determination not to support the coup attempt in Turkey does not mean that they stood by Erdoğan and the AK Party government. It implies, rather, their awareness of the current political situation in their country, and their refusal to replace the legitimate political framework with another that lacks democracy and involves military intervention in authority.

Despite their reservations about Erdoğan and the AK Party government, the Turkish opposition parties do not deny the renaissance Turkey has experienced since its transfer of power to a civilian government. In addition, they acknowledge that the Turkish civil authority has accomplished several acclaimed democratic practices, such as giving the Kurds a precious chance to play a role in the political scene, by letting the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) into political life, after the army's withdrawal from power and the rise of civilian authority.

The two opposition parties in Turkey, namely HDP and the Nationalist



Representatives of Islam, Christianity and Judaism with members of different NGOs signed the "Declaration of Democracy" to condemn the coup attempt.

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Movement Party (MHP), considered the coup attempt abortive due to its absence of leadership and, specifically, its lack of support from Turkish military leaders from the beginning, as well as the Chief of the General Staff's rejection of the coup. In addition, the lack of international support for this coup has been noted, in contrast to previous military coups in Turkey, which were supported by NATO and had obvious international approval.¹¹ The religious establishment stood completely with President Erdoğan, and warned against the military coup and the risk it posed to the country; during the attempt, Imams broadcast verbal

glorification of Allah and called upon people to mobilize and stand against the coup.

In the Egyptian case, Mohammed Morsi became the President of the Republic through a free and fair election unprecedented in Egypt's modern history. This followed a period in which the SCAF had managed the affairs of the country, subsequent to the fall of Hosni Mubarak, who had reined for 30 years, yet stepped down after 18 days of the demonstrations that started on January 25, 2011. The Tamarod Movement was founded in April 26, 2013, after ten months of Muhammed Morsi's rule.

This movement collected Egyptians' signatures to withdraw confidence from Morsi and call for early presidential elections. The movement announced the collection of 22 million signatures¹² to withdraw confidence from Morsi, and invited signatories to demonstrate on June 30, 2013. It turned out that this movement was subordinate to State agencies, especially military intelligence. Among the leading supporters of this campaign were Muhammed al-Baradei, Hamdeen Sabahi, Amr Moussa, al-Sayyid al-Badawi Shehata, the president of al-Wafd Party, and the movement was supported by many journalists and intellectuals. It is noticeable that the Egyptian opposition in this period prioritized their own interests over the interests of Egypt. Most of the opposition leaders considered themselves more eligible for the presidency than Morsi, although they had no tangible popular support; and many of them were funded by Gulf or Western countries, and took advantage of the frustration that had spread among some Egyptians to pursue their own bids for power.

When Muhammed Morsi invited the opposition to engage in dialogue and proposed the formation of a constitutional amendment and national reconciliation committee, the opposition promptly declined the offer. Muhammed al-Baradei read the statement of the National Salvation Front, saying that Morsi's speech reflected a clear lack of acknowledgment of the difficulties ordinary Egyptians were experiencing due to his failure to skillfully manage the country's

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affairs since taking office a year ago. The National Salvation Front insisted on calling for early presidential elections.

When it comes to the religious actors in Egypt, in a statement, the Grand Imam of al-Azhar Ahmed al-Tayyeb called every Egyptian to take responsibility "before God, history, and the world," and warned of drifting towards a civil war, which seemed to be looming with threatening consequences for the history and unity of Egypt, an impending tragedy that subsequent generations would not be able to forgive. The Coptic Orthodox Pope Tawadros II called for Egyptians to think together and have dialogue together, and asked them to pray for Egypt.¹³

All these interactions were collusively masterminded by the military coup leader Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, the defense minister at the time, who gradually paved the way for the opposition to President Morsi. There were numerous signs of his disloyalty, most notably Sisi's invitation

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of political opposition to political dialogue without the knowledge of the President. Strangely, Morsi, supported by the Muslim Brotherhood, showed confidence in the military commanders led by Sisi until the very end.¹⁴

The Media's Role in the Success of the Coup in Egypt and the Thwarting of the Turkish Coup Attempt

The media of any country plays a key role in the formation of public opinion through satellite TV, press, radio, and social networking sites, which are now considered one of the most important means of mass communication. These influential means work together in consistency to form public opinion in different areas, circumstances, situations and issues that arise in relation to various political, social, cultural, or economic events.

These means of communication, especially the private satellite channels, played a major role in both the Egyptian and Turkish coups. They contributed in one way or another in the promotion and success of the first, and in the confounding of the second, supporting Turkey's democratic experiment against the failed coup attempt.

In Egypt, the media is dominated by either the state, or non-state businessmen close to the regime; both have worked in the interest of the existing political regime since the era of Mubarak until the period in which the SCAF ruled after the 25 January 2011 revolution. However, it is notable that during Muhammed Morsi's period in office, the media worked hard to tarnish the image of the President, crafting crises for him, showing him in an indecent image, and continually attacking him. This antagonistic bias was particularly obvious on the private satellite channels supported by businessmen.

The BBC published a lengthy report on the media's role in the coup against Egypt's ousted President, particularly with regard to the provocation of the Egyptians peoples' anger toward the government, as the media played a key role in highlighting Morsi's faults and mobilizing the demonstrations that took place against him.¹⁵ All of the media's efforts contributed in one way or another in the formation of a certain mental image of President Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood; these machinations have led people from many sectors of Egyptian soci-

ety to express discontent, and even rage, over the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood.

As mentioned by Rasha Abdullah, “many media outlets in Egypt have strongly supported the regime’s official narrative of events since the removal of the Muslim Brotherhood-backed President Muhammed Morsi from office, in July 2013. The voices of opposition were almost absent in newspapers and television programs, as the government has shut down the Islamists’ media outlets.”¹⁶

In Turkey, prior to the rise of the AK Party, the media played a similar role in dealing with the successive governments before the failed coup attempt, as “media organizations were devoted to incite the army against the government as happened in 1997, when the media attacked Necmettin Erbakan’s government to incite the people against it, preparing them to accept the coup later.”¹⁷ But during the coup attempt of 15 July 2016, the media played a different role, which can be summarized as follows: (1) Public condemnation and rejection of the coup attempt; none of the media outlets dared to promote or to find any justification for the coup. (2) Blaming the Gülen movement, calling state institutions to purge its members, and to hold the military network involved accountable for the coup. (3) Refraining from attacking the military institution, emphasizing that the army is a national institution and that the coup plotters are only a small group of the “parallel entity.”

(4) Glorification of the Turkish people, highlighting the heroic role that the people played in thwarting the coup. (5) Demonstrating to the outside world that Turkey stands strong and unified, while at the same time defending the measures taken by the government against the coup plotters, and emphasizing legality of such measures.¹⁸

It is clearly evident that most of the local media outlets refrained from supporting the coup. It is also obvious that the coup plotters lacked control over the different means of communication, and that the media in general remained outside of their control. In addition, al-Jazeera provided good coverage of the event, where people watched what was happening in the streets live, on air. There were also channels that were hostile to the Turkish regime, such as the Egyptian and Syrian media, al-Arabiya channel and Sky News.

The Role of Regional and International Actors in the Coup in Both Countries

Regional and international players always have interest in countries where a coup takes place, seeking to promote their interests in those countries, and dominate their resources on the other hand. Throughout history there has never been a coup without regional or international supporters or sponsors; this is a historical, political, and military postulate. Often, the military leaders who plot the coup have links to

Indignant at what the FETÖ affiliated soldiers did on July 15, people at a democracy watch meeting in Konya hold placards for the international audience, reinforcing the opinion of the public that an army is there to protect its citizens not persecute them.

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ORHAN AKKANAT



foreign entities, especially the intelligence agencies of Western countries, mainly the United States.

In Egypt, the regional role had the greatest impact in the preparation for the coup, and in supporting it later. Most remarkably, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia are known to have encouraged and contributed to the coup. The UAE played a more significant role because its leaders fear the legitimacy of an Islamic, democratically elected force in the region. This phobia may cause more problems in the foreseeable future when the democracy “infection” spreads to their country. In addition to this fear, some regional players supported the coup for economic reasons, such as the external orientation of the Republic of Egypt during the reign of Muhammed Morsi, which created a change in the map of the regional actors; generally, a change in positions has an impact

on the old political axes. The UAE considered these changes threatening to their geopolitical interests in the region.

Among the reasons why the UAE opposed President Morsi and the Brotherhood Government, and supported the opposition, is the Egyptian government’s application of a package of economic measures aiming to reduce Egypt’s dependence on foreign countries, in order to empower national resources and establish Egypt’s service economy. Egypt’s economy depends on tourism and the logistics of seaports, as well as the production of electronics, automobiles, and equipment, etc. Perhaps the most important project in Morsi’s package was the Suez Canal development project; this concerned the UAE, which assumed that this project would withdraw all its expected privileges from the investment structure. Therefore this project would have made Egypt

competitive in the foreseeable future with the investments of Emirate of Dubai, and provided an attractive environment for Arab, regional and international capital, ending the UAE's forefront place in the regional economy in the long run – a specter which the government of Dubai considers threatening to its present economic identity.¹⁹

There are other Arab and regional countries that have different attitudes towards the coup; among them was Qatar, which expressed reservations about removing Morsi from office, although it covered its bases by sending a congratulatory telegram to the interim president, expressing Qatar's understanding of the new reality in Egypt. In contrast, Tunisia described what happened as a military coup; Tunisian President Moncef Marzouki proclaimed the military intervention "totally unacceptable." Similarly, Turkey condemned the coup altogether. Meanwhile, Sudan and the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) have refrained from commenting on the event, emphasizing its being an internal affair.²⁰

As for international actors, the major countries and international institutions have expressed varied reactions to the Egyptian army's announcement of removing elected President Muhammed Morsi, and the consequent events. Immediately after the declaration of removing Morsi, U.S. President Barack Obama expressed concern over the decision, and called on the Egyptian army to quickly hand over power to an elected civilian

The opposition parties in Egypt supported the coup, while Turkey's opposition groups stood with the democratically elected government

president, ordering a review of U.S. aid to Egypt. Meanwhile, the European Union expressed awareness of the deep divisions in Egyptian society and the popular claims for political change, and urged all parties to return rapidly to the democratic process in a comprehensive way, so that Egypt would be able to complete the process of democratic transformation. On July 5, 2013, the African Union suspended Egypt's membership until the restoration of constitutional order.²¹

Turkey's geographical location and regional, strategic importance makes many countries try to manipulate the situation in Turkey in order to achieve their own interests, all the more so because there are American and Western troops in military bases on Turkish territory, and both U.S. fleet units and Western fleets in the Mediterranean Sea close to Turkey's coast; these forces must be supported by military in one way or another. It is hard to believe that the agencies or intelligence entities overseeing the U.S. presence in the region were ignorant of the coup. This suggests that the U.S. and Western countries

were completely knowledgeable of the coup attempt, if not backing and supporting it altogether.²²

At the regional level and after the coup attempt had taken place, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Iran delayed in issuing statements of support to the legitimate Turkish government until noon of the next day; Cairo kept silent, and the Jordanian government released an ambiguous statement that barely welcomed the failure of the coup attempt. The Egyptian representative in the UN Security Council rejected a draft of a council statement that expressed condemnation of the coup and support for the elected government,²³ while Qatar was one of the first regional and Arab states to reject the coup and fully support the elected government.

At the international level, as the failure of the coup attempt became fully evident, the U.S. president and U.S. Secretary of State issued statements expressing support for the democratic regime in Turkey, condemning the coup attempt and calling for restraint and avoiding bloodshed. The European Union also issued a similar statement that was followed by statements from European capitals in the following hours.

There are signs that Russia disappointed of the coup attempt, in spite of the tension that had marred Moscow-Ankara relations since November; the Russian leadership appeared pleased with the failure of the coup, possibly because President Vladimir Putin's administration saw the coup

attempt as an action closely linked to the United States.²⁴

Conclusion

The nature of the social structure of the Egyptian and Turkish peoples contributed significantly to the success of the coup in the former and the thwarting of the coup attempt in the latter. The military establishment in both countries played an active role in directing the course of events, while political parties and religious institutions played a key role in the preparation for the coup in both countries. The opposition parties in Egypt supported the coup, while Turkey's opposition groups stood with the democratically elected government. The media was influential in both cases, with different results: while the media paved the way for the coup in Egypt and was an effective tool in the hand of plotters, the media in Turkey stood against the coup attempt from the very beginning. Lastly, the regional and international actors in both countries were obviously influential in creating the coup. ■

Endnotes

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