



## ARTICLES

### **July 15: The Glorious Resistance of Turkish Democracy**

ATILLA YAYLA

### **A Historical Perspective on the July 2016 Coup Attempt in Turkey**

TIM JACOBY

### **Turkey's Civil Rights Movement and the Reactionary Coup: Segregation, Emancipation, and the Western Reaction**

ŞENER AKTÜRK

### **Measuring Social Perception of the July 15 Coup Attempt**

NEBİ MİŞ

### **July 15: Political Economy of a Foiled Coup**

SADIK ÜNAY and SERİF DİLEK

### **Culture, Social Contestation and Turkey's Failed Coup: The Rivalry of Social Imaginaries**

FARHAN MUJAHID CHAK

# July 15: The Glorious Resistance of Turkish Democracy

ATILLA YAYLA\*

**ABSTRACT** *On 15 July 2016, Turkey experienced a milestone in its political history. An entity, judicially and officially recognized as the Gülenist Terror Organization (FETÖ), operating through a group of its disciples nested in the Turkish military, attempted to overthrow Turkey's legitimate and elected government. Several important and unprecedented factors prevented the coup d'état. Among them, the determined and courageous approach of the ruling AK Party, in solidarity with its opposition; the heroic resistance of the people of Turkey, the Turkish police, and members of the Turkish armed forces; the anti-coup stance of the judiciary; and the democratic posture of the mainstream media. The foiling of the coup attempt will contribute tremendously to Turkish democracy in many respects. In short, the democracy in Turkey in the post-July 15 period will emerge stronger than ever before.*

## Introduction: Turning Points in the History of Turkish Coups

**T**he history of Turkish coups is a long one. Turkey experienced several military interventions in the Ottoman era, which either resulted in the elimination of colleagues close to the Sultan and meeting the demands of the rebels, or the dethroning of the Sultan. While some of the dethroned Sultans were put away to prison, others were killed. And even though the old military was replaced with a military of European standard during the reign of several sultans, this still did not prevent military interventions. Indeed, in 1876, at a time when it was said that a coup was not possible, Sultan Abdülaziz was dethroned by a military coup. According to some historians, this was the first coup of modern Turkey.<sup>1</sup>

The dissolution period of the Ottoman Empire totally removed political authority from some areas and diffused it in others, placing the current lands of Turkey, namely Anatolia and Thrace, into a political authority vacuum. England, France, Italy and Greece invaded some parts of Turkey. However,

\* İstanbul  
Medipol  
University,  
Turkey

## **After the victory of the DP in 1950, Turkey ushered in a wave of coups that has plagued almost all of the country's subsequent experience of democracy**

with the War of Independence that started in 1919 on its own accord and was later led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, Turkey defeated the regional invasions. After the War of Independence, the Republic of Turkey was established on 29 October 1923. The establishment of the Republic meant a radical political

transformation and a sharp separation from the past. The newly formed Republic started to break its historical and cultural connections with the Ottomans and adopted an introvert policy, which was the complete opposite of their former policy. The founding fathers not only made political reforms, they also sought to change Turkish social life with the aim of virtually re-creating individuals and thus Turkish society. However, since the essence of culture is not discontinuity and revolution but durability and reproduction of itself, the aim of crafting a new society was not completely successful. Thus, the political culture and tradition, including the vulnerability to coups which had plagued the Ottomans, continued in the Turkish Republic.

In 1923, “modern” Turkey emerged as a partial pluralist political structure. Before long, in 1925, it inclined towards a one-party regime. During the one-party period between 1925 and 1945, there were no military coups. This situation has been analyzed in two ways. According to the first analysis, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his successor, İsmet İnönü, were experienced in the painful consequences of the military rebellions among the Ottomans and thus kept the military away from politics and under very strict political control. For this reason, the military did not or could not execute a coup. The second analysis posits that the soldiers were under the control of leaders who were from their profession and reflected their mentality, so they considered a direct intervention in politics unnecessary. We can consider the latter as an institutionalization of the pro-coup mindset, ironically preventing a coup. In my opinion, both factors were effective and explain why there were no military coups during the one-party period.

At the end of World War II, Turkey had to make a decision regarding its place in the world: either be part of the democratic western bloc or be a part of the eastern bloc lead by the Soviet Union, which at the time was an ally of the West against Germany. In terms of its official ideological imposition, witnessed in the pruning and suppression of civil society, and the state's control over the economy, Turkey bore more resemblance to the Soviet world rather than to the west. However, two factors influenced Turkey in deciding not to ally with the Soviets: the west seemed more powerful, and the Soviets had tried to bully Turkey into giving them land in eastern Turkey and a base in the Bosphorus.



At the time, Turkey seemed to be in a position where it could not resist the Soviets on its own, thus it was in a way forced to side with the west. Hence, Turkey's dictator İsmet İnönü initiated a transition period for Turkey's political system. The establishment of opposing political parties was permitted, control over media was loosened, and suppressions and limitations on religious freedom were eased. This process, which started in 1945-46, was completed in 1950. The first of the multi-party elections, which was conjured by judicial control, led by the liberals of the era, was held on 14 May 1950. In this election, the Republican People's Party (CHP) – which claimed to have built the state but was in fact formed by the state as a mechanism to control Turkish society, and had held power over the state since 1923 – unexpectedly lost. The surprised CHP leaders had considered themselves as the benefactor of the society; thus, they believed that the people had a debt of gratitude toward them and in return would keep them in power. However, it was clear that the people were not going to return the so-called favor, since the one-party regime did not go beyond a dictatorship that extorted freedom, and also caused widespread poverty with its statist economic policy all over Turkey.

After 14 May 1950 elections, the Democrat Party (DP) took power, and the Kemalist military bureaucracy was not happy with the results. They laid plans to interfere and made İnönü an offer to eliminate the Democrat Party as soon as possible. However, İnönü prudentially refused the offer and transferred power to the DP. This moment was an important democratic victory, both for Turkey and the Islamic world at large.

Unfortunately, the conflict between pro-democracy forces and the Turkish military was far from over. After the victory of the DP in 1950, Turkey ushered in a wave of coups that has plagued almost all of the country's subsequent experience of democracy. Although some were complete coups, there were other military interventions of a smaller scale that demanded ruling constitution provisions or political changes. The traditional coups of 1960, 1971, 1980 and the post-modern coup of 1997 can be considered as the main military coups of Turkey's democratic period. There were also coup attempts during this time; Colonel Talat Aydemir, as an active officer in 1962 and as a retired officer in 1963, attempted twice to make a coup with the excuse that the 1960 *coup d'état* did not reach the goals it aimed for, and was inconsistent with Kemalist ideals. He gave up his first attempt under the condition that he would not be put on trial; however, his second attempt ended with his execution. We can list these two coups as the unsuccessful and prevented coups that occurred before 15 July 2016. An important factor in the failure of these earlier coups is the fact that these coups were attempted against İsmet İnönü, who was both a historical figure and a former military general. İnönü managed to prevent these coups, and catch and put the culprits to trial, with the help of his loyal troops.

**During the ongoing and highly publicized struggle between the military and the AK Party in Turkish political life, only a handful of people noticed that another power was quietly, patiently, deeply, and determinately trying to establish a state within a state that would eventually lead to a coup attempt**

The coups and coup attempts prior to 15 July 2016 were all seemingly based on Kemalist ideology. In every coup and coup attempt, the plotters stated their loyalty to the Kemalist notion and sought to legitimize their actions by attributing their work to Atatürk's principles and his aims. Many civilian groups also supported these interventions and claimed to act on behalf of Atatürk, or used his name along with the army. The Kemalist leaders considered military intervention a last resort against politicians that they did not like, and who did

not share the same worldview with them, and could not be beaten in the political arena.

The military coups were sometimes carried out by juntas inside the army, as in the case of the 1960 *coup d'état*, or sometimes by the chain of command inside the whole army, as in the case of the 1980 coup. According to the statements of the coup plotters, the coups were carried out with such aims as, "protecting secularism, reaching to a level of a modern civilization, fighting against communism and reactionism; preventing commotion, disorder, anarchy, internal conflict; protecting and establishing democracy." However the coups were more about fighting against the center-right conservatives and in opposition to conservative liberal political power.

### **Military Tension in the AK Party Era**

The AK Party, led by the former mayor of İstanbul Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, was established in August of 2001, in a political system overshadowed by the military. Although the AK Party was founded by religious leaders and was based on a political tradition that gave importance to religion, it joined the race with more democratic values than its precursors. While it was only 2 years old, the party managed to win an unexpected election victory by gaining 36 percent of the votes in 3 November 2002 elections. Due to the 10 percent election threshold, the AK Party managed to win the right to form a government with the majority, since the rest of the parties, with the exception of the CHP, were unable to win a single seat in parliament. Once imprisoned and deprived of his political rights by the Kemalist regime leaders for reciting a poem, Erdoğan was elected a member of parliament and took office as Turkey's Prime



The Turkish PM Binali Yıldırım, makes the first official statement on the morning of July 16, along with Gen. Hulusi Akar (Chief of General Staff) and Efkan Ala (Minister of Interior Affairs).

AA PHOTO /  
ERÇİN TOP

Minister in spring 2003. Since that time, except during a transitional government between 7 June 2015 and 1 November 2015, the AK Party has managed to remain in power as a single-party government. The AK Party is thus considered one of the most successful political parties in the history of Turkish democracy.

For much of its tenure, the AK Party endeavored to continue its power despite military oppression and threats. Turkish soldiers felt no need to hide their discontent and frustration with the AK Party: not only did military officers verbally bully AK Party politicians, they also hindered the political activities of the AK Party government. Military generals attacked the AK Party and its administrations, sometimes anonymously, through the media. According to these officers, the AK Party did not fit the image of a “modern, secular Turkey.” The military generals constantly expressed skepticism toward the AK Party’s activities and intentions, making it clear that they wanted it to lose power, and would prefer the party’s complete elimination.

Ongoing tension and conflict, sometimes on screen and sometimes off, proliferated between the AK Party government and the military, with the biggest crisis erupting in 2007. At that time, Kemalist President and former president of the Constitutional Court Ahmet Necdet Sezer’s presidential era had ended, and a new president had to be elected. According to the constitutional order based on Turkey’s unusual parliamentary system, the president of the coun-

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try was to be elected by Turkey’s General Assembly. Since the AK Party held the majority in parliament, it was certain that AK Party would select its president in the fourth round.

The Kemalists and the military were on edge. The Çankaya Mansion, the residence of the President, was considered a valuable memory of Atatürk; thus, the Kemalists abhorred the idea that a religious and pious person who regularly prayed and was married to someone who wore a headscarf would be residing in the place that had once belonged to the secular Atatürk. Hence, operations stirred to prevent the AK Party from choosing the president. Instead of attempting a direct coup, the Kemalists tried more indirect and discreet methods. The laicist media began to pressure the AK Party, through both requests and threats, to choose a candidate with secular ten-

dencies. Along with the media’s efforts, retired generals who were supported by active officers secretly organized “Republic demonstrations” in Ankara, İstanbul, and İzmir, with the aim of prompting the groups that strongly support secularism into action. Thousands of people who believed that protesting the AK Party was a way to protect the country’s secularism took part in these demonstrations. On 27 April 2007, a manifesto that stated the requisition for a president who is “not nominally but essentially secularist,” and assumed to be written by General Yaşar Büyükanıt, was published on the Turkish Armed Forces website. Most read this as a memorandum of the military for the AK Party and its administrators. The sound of combat boots and tank pallets began to rumble.

However, the AK Party did not stand down and thus, for the first time in the history of the Turkish Republic, the government published a manifesto reminding the military that they are subordinate to the government and cannot interfere with politics. This was an important step to break the military dominance. Still, the AK Party could not choose their president despite having the majority in parliament. The party’s opponents obstructed the election of the AK Party’s candidate, Abdullah Gül, via a loophole in the law rather than an open military intervention. Instead of opening the congress with an electoral quotient (276/550), as is stated in the bylaw, Kemalist lawyer and former Supreme Court of Appeals prosecutor Sabih Kanadoğlu alleged that the presidential election congress is opened with a qualified majority rather than the electoral quotient (367/550). The Supreme Court agreed with Kanadoğlu and the AK Party’s chance to choose a president within the party was blocked. Although the former president Ahmet Necdet Sezer’s term of office was over, he

refused to vacate his office in order to support the operations aimed at stonewalling the AK Party.

Although short of a military coup, the civil and military partnership undoubtedly implemented an undemocratic political intervention against the AK Party. For its part, the AK Party did not delay in responding to these interventions. Firstly, it changed the presidential election system in the constitution based on its majority in the parliament in which the citizens would directly elect the president. Thus, on 27 October 2007 the people voted ‘yes’ to this change in the referendum. At the time, neither the AK Party nor its opponents realized that this change would bring about a radical transition in the Turkish political system. The AK Party decided to bring the date of the general elections four months forward in order to have the required majority in the parliament to choose the president from the AK Party members. Although it had won the general elections in July 2007, the AK Party still did not have the required number of 367 for the presidential vote. After the MHP, which had not been in the parliament in previous elections, decided to join the session of the Grand Assembly, the crisis was over and AK Party candidate Abdullah Gül was elected as the new president.

Although the Kemalist military could not prevent the AK Party from winning the presidential election, they continued to give it a hard time, in conjunction with their cooperating civil institutions and other groups. Not long after, in 2008, at the suggestions – or maybe the order – of the military, Supreme Court of Appeals prosecutor Abdurrahman Yalçınkaya took a case to the Constitution Court to close down the AK Party. After long debates the case was dropped in the Court on a vote of 6 to 5, although the AK Party could not escape a fine for being a “focal point for anti-secular activities.” Thus at the last minute and with a bit of luck, the AK Party, which had come to power with the majority, managed to rescue itself from the state establishment.

During the ongoing and highly publicized struggle between the military and the AK Party in Turkish political life, only a handful of people noticed that another power was quietly, patiently, deeply, and determinately trying to establish a state within a state that would eventually lead to a coup attempt. These few, including this writer, noticed the growing threat and warned against it.

## **The July 15 Coup Attempt**

Around 10:00 pm on the night of 15 July 2016, while most people were slowly getting ready to go to bed, they witnessed an unpleasant surprise: “A coup attempt that lost track of time.” The Turkish people have experienced a coup almost every ten years; thus, they had become familiar with a pattern wherein



coups were committed in the early morning hours of the day. This time it was different. This time, people were able to follow every step of the coup attempt live on television and social media.

From an outside perspective, the July 15 coup attempt may seem similar to prior coups, which was in fact supposed to be the case. The coup manifesto, which was announced live on TRT near midnight, with the signature the “Peace at Home Council,” had Kemalist associations, as “Peace in the Homeland” is Atatürk’s quote.<sup>2</sup> This coup signature was thus specifically chosen to win the support of Kemalist groups, along with a special emphasis on secularism, to justify the coup in the international arena as well. The latter effort was clearly successful when one analyses the reaction of the outside world during and after the coup attempt.

However, the July 15 coup only resembled other Turkish coups in terms of its style. Those who plotted and carried out the coup were not secularists, but in fact soldiers who were members of a religious sect. Unlike the other coups, their motivation was not to protect secularism but to obey the orders they received from their “all-knowing” leader, Fetullah Gülen. Gülen was never a supporter of secularism and was literally hated by the Kemalist groups. In fact, he was always compared to Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in this sense. He was the main agent behind the legal cases that, since 2008, have aimed at eliminating Kemalist soldiers from the military. In other words, although the coup was made to look like the work of the Kemalists, it was in reality the work of a radical Islamic group.

Why did the coup plotters organize the coup on July 15, and why late into the night and not after midnight as was the case of with other coups? Several answers to these questions have come to light. The National Intelligence Organization (*Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı*, MİT) and the judiciary had been watching the machinations of the Gülenist group within the military. They had discovered that some of the Gülenist soldiers had played a part in the military spy case conspiracy that took place in three major cities. The MİT had requested the Chief of Staff to take legal action against a list of soldiers several times. Similar requests also came from judicial offices. However, the authorities in the General Staff did not take these requests seriously. Finally, the İzmir Public Prosecution Office decided to take a large number of soldiers into custody on 18 July 2016. In addition, the government was preparing to give an early retirement to almost 2,000 Gülenist military officers during the Supreme Military Council that was going to take place in the beginning of August. This meant that Gülen’s power in the military would soon be partially weakened. For this reason, these military officers took action pre-emptively, and perhaps prematurely, with the information, confirmation and order given by Gülen based on long years of preparations.

Several “accidents,” which were bad for the coup plotters, but good for Turkish society and democracy, help to explain why the coup time had changed. A military officer who was going to take part in the attack on MİT, informed MİT about the attack but not the coup, and this information was passed to the Chief of Staff by MİT. The coup plotters, who were carefully checking key offices, accelerated the coup that was supposed to take place on July 16 at 03:00 am to the night of July 15, due to concerns that the information had been leaked. Pieces of the coup began to be put in action within the military in the final hours of daylight. The public learned about the coup attempt at around 09:30 pm after a group of soldiers with tanks blocked the Bosphorus Bridge – now renamed the Martyrs Bridge.



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The coup plotters tried to invade governor’s offices and police headquarters in all the cities starting with Ankara and İstanbul, and attempted to take control of the civil airports in İstanbul and Ankara and to disconnect television publications and the Internet. They attacked Turkish National Television and forced the news speaker, at gunpoint, to read a manifesto similar to ones read in the previous coups. The manifesto stated that the coup plotters had taken over the government to protect secularism and bring peace, that all parties would be closed down, that a curfew had been placed in effect, and that the agents of the coup would adhere to Turkey’s international agreements.

The July 15 coup attempt stands out in history for its use of physical violence, unlike the coups preceding it, which had relied on psychological violence, the threat of using violence, and the display of violent tools instead. The July 15 coup attempt witnessed violence never seen before against public individuals and the civilians who fought against the coup. In this sense, the violence not only reached a peak of terror, but also reflected the terrifying characteristics of the one who masterminded it.

The coup plotters tried to assassinate Turkey’s President and Prime Minister. They tried to eliminate the police forces that stood against them. They bombarded the area around the presidential complex. They would have certainly bombed the building if they had known the president was inside. The coup plotters did not hesitate to attack the parliament when some MPs of the four parties came together to stand up against them. Police and security buildings in Ankara and İstanbul were attacked with helicopters and tanks. Gülenist soldiers opened fire on thousands of civilians and terrorized them with the exploding noises made by F-16 fighter jets flying low. In other cities, the coup

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plotters attacked certain strategic places with armored vehicles. As a result, the July 15 coup attempt ranks as the most violent coup in the history of Turkey.

Another monumental factor of this coup attempt is the role of the citizens. As mentioned above, in the failed coup attempts of 1962 and 1963, Talat Aydemir's attempts were prevented by military intervention; the public was not involved. In the

coup attempt on July 15, 2016, however, civilians were the main force that fought off the coup. Millions of people took to the streets to protest and fight against the coup without any regard for their safety, political ideas or lifestyles.

### ***Characteristics of the July 15 Coup Attempt***

In order to understand the identity of a coup, one must analyze these factors: the characteristics of the leader of the coup; the ideology of the coup plotters; their organizational structure and operations; the reasons behind the coup attempt; the principles and aims of the coup plotters' statements; the internal and external connections; the plotters' allies and enemies.

All of the available data – including intelligence data, historical records, court-house confessions, social media confessions, cryptic communications, direct and indirect messages etc. – proves that the July 15 coup attempt is the work of a familiar and recognized organization.<sup>3</sup> Until recently this group was popularly known as the Gülen Movement, although its members refer to themselves as the Service Movement (*Hizmet Hareketi*). After the 17/25 December operations, pejorative names such as the “Gülen gang” and the “Fetullahists” (*Fetullahçılar*) were used to describe them. While I liked to call it the “Autonomous Structure,” others call this organization the “Parallel” or the “Parallel State Structure.” The supporters of the movement and the Autonomous Structure they created within the State were called Disciples or Fetullahists.

The name Fetullahist Terrorist Organisation (FETÖ) was given to the group after the failure of the 17/25 December incidents' so called “democracy trials” (*Ergenekon* and *Sledgehammer*), and military conspiracy cases (*kumpas davaları*). These cases were all conducted by Gülenist cadres within the state bureaucracy. Some people, like myself, were unsure about the appropriateness of the term terrorist organization, as the group had engaged in no visible acts of terror. However, Turkish judiciary bodies were persistent in using this term, and drew attention to the public officers (policemen and soldiers) who were

members of this organization and used weapons in its name. This determination was confirmed after July 15. The Supreme Council of Judges and Public Prosecutors (HSYK) resolved FETÖ's basic characteristics after thousands of Gülenist jurisdiction bureaucrats were removed from office.<sup>4</sup>

In order to analyze the FETÖ, one must study its leader Fetullah Gülen, the members' characteristics and their relations with the organizations leader. According to the literature, leaders such as Fetullah Gülen fall under the list of cult leaders or gurus, and the groups belonging to these leaders are variously referred to as cults, closed groups, sects, factions, heretic groups, charisma groups, and utopia groups. Although they have minor differences, they have a lot in common. For this reason, with the aim of simplifying the matter, we will refer to Gülen as a guru and the FETÖ as a sect, charisma group or cult.

### ***Fetullah Gülen: A Guru***

Fetullah Gülen is a retired clerical preacher, and his organization dates back almost 50 years. Gülen formed the sect as a small group in İzmir, and developed it into a network that has spread across many parts of the world. Although Gülen tries to portray himself as otherworldly he is very much dependent on this world. He loves being in power and enjoys using his worldly power. His knowledge and interest in Islam takes the role of being the means as well as the cover for his power. This fact is strongly proven by his determination to not only inform people about religion and morals, but also to create a network that operates under his command. Although this network has caused a lot of damage, Gülen is persistent in keeping it alive and managing it, which is also a strong proof of his love for power.

It is understood that Gülen considers himself the *Mahdi* (expected religious saver), and encourages his followers to believe this too. This designation helps him control his sect and obtain their full obedience. According to religious terminologies, the *Mahdi* is the savior of mankind. He is never mistaken, never wrong. Those who disobey the *Mahdi* disobey god, thereby putting their hereafter in jeopardy.<sup>5</sup> This belief may help us understand why educated people such as professors, generals, and lawyers obediently follow the path of a man whose education ended after primary school.<sup>6</sup> Gülen's beliefs and the position of these beliefs in Islam belong to a theological discussion and, as such, lie outside the interest and expertise of this writer. However, Gülen's leadership style and the FETÖ's characteristics can be seen in non-religious structures as well as religious structures. Thus we can make use of scientific research regarding the organizational structures, leadership skills, and followers mentioned above.

After determining the characteristics of Gülen as a guru (or invincible leader), we can now move on to cults. According to Marc Galanter, a cult is a minor religious sect that follows its own rituals.<sup>7</sup> He also refers to secular cults



or “charismatic groups,” which can include a wide range of participants. To him, some religious sects, high-level coherent self-help groups, political action groups and some terrorist groups can be considered cults.<sup>8</sup>

Galenter, who has carried out a large number of empirical and theoretical researches on cults, states that such groups have 4 psychological factors: (1) The group has a common belief system, (2) the group preserves a high social coherence, (3) the members of the group are highly affected by the behavioral norm of the group, (4) members of the group attribute charismatic (and sometimes divine) power to the group leader.<sup>9</sup>

Cults are usually attributed to classic or new (modern) religions in western literature. However, it is important to emphasize once more that cults can be seen in secular societies as well. Cults can also be described socially as closed structures. A closed structure is also a sign of closed mindsets. In other words, the cult or charismatic group is usually closed to the outside world except at times when the outside world is necessary for their aims. The closed structure constitutes an inner world for the group’s members and it is this world that members live in. Any time spent in the outside world is considered a journey carried out in the name, and on the behalf of the inner world. Those operating within these structures believe that everyone on the outside is in the wrong, and that only they are on the right path.

Within these structures, all members’ individuality is eliminated and they are turned into mere robot-like creatures with mechanically programmed behaviors. There are only collective aims in a cult; individual aims are only allowed as mediators for collective aims. A person’s life is completely controlled in all areas including financial, physical, ideational, and even emotional. Thus, when a person joins a cult his/her character changes in time.

The abovementioned information regarding cult structures and behavioral patterns can easily be applied to the FETÖ. It is a closed, totalitarian cult formed by Gülen, who has god-like prestige and authority within the group, in which his decisions are never questioned by his followers. From the size and characteristics of the organization it can be understood that Gülen enchains his followers by influencing them; he has the talent, power and authority to manipulate and mobilize them, from the most minor to the most major actions.<sup>10</sup>

## **FETÖ’s State within the State**

When analyzing FETÖ’s history and sociology, it starts collecting members at the earliest possible age. They not only brainwash the children that they collect, but they also take control over their religious beliefs, careers and social

life as well. They make their followers dependent on them in every way possible, and they take this as far as controlling their marriage, which is managed with the caste system so as to control the family. One example of FETÖ's social control that has recently emerged is the case of cheating on civil service exams, university entrance exams, and so on, or taking illegal measures with the aim of placing their members in high positions.

FETÖ members exist in every sector; however, they tend to cluster in certain sectors, which can be official as well as civil or partially civil. FETÖ takes measures not simply to place workers there, but to place them in monopolistic positions, sometimes by bringing their members to every area of the field to take complete and utter control. Thus they form a strong, unyielding power circle in every institution. To explain how they achieve this, I will give an example.

Let us presume that FETÖ will try to organize themselves in X ministry, which has 50.000 employees. Since it is not possible (or meaningful) for every employee to be an FETÖ member, the aim will be to take control of the important and high positions so as to exercise complete power over the institution. These positions include the adjutant general's office, the supervision office, the IT office, and the high-level administration, including the positions of private secretary, secretary and staff car drivers. After placing their members strategically, the FETÖ takes full control of that ministry. FETÖ can then easily provide jobs to their own members and place them in any position it wants. FETÖ people can prevent administrative inquiries through the supervision office; if these inquiries move to a law organ they can prevent them from going further by means of their members there. They can also use the supervision office to eliminate any employee that poses a threat to them.

If you find this hypothetical strategy alarming, it is important to point out that FETÖ placed as an even more sinister organization inside Turkey's security and jurisdiction departments. FETÖ had been staffing inside the police institution since the early 1980s, using the aforesaid method, and giving special importance to intelligence. It is known that by 2013, FETÖ had managed to seize control over the intelligence agencies and Turkish national police of every province. The Minister of the Interior, in a statement after the victory over the July 15 coup attempt, stated that FETÖ members, as of 17 December 2013,

**Not only did FETÖ found associations and foundations with its members, it also followed, tried to take part in, and manipulate other prominent civil society organizations. For example, the brain behind the radical *Türk Solu* (Turkish Left) magazine that threatened Erdoğan with execution, was a FETÖ member**

A woman holds a placard bearing the words "People said 'STOP' to the Parallel Coup" referring to the infiltration of FETÖ into the army and government as "the parallel state."

AA PHOTO /  
HAYATİ İKİZOĞLU



had administered 74 national police quarters out of Turkey's 81 provinces. A similar case was discovered in the judicial bureaucracy. FETÖ had managed to take complete control over the High Council of Judges and Prosecutors (*Hakimler ve Savcılar Yüksek Kurulu*, HSYK) after the 2010 referendum that sought a change in the HSYK, by using their members in the judiciary to increase their numbers in the Supreme Court.

This circle of happiness started with FETÖ member police officers inside the security forces and the intelligence agency. They collected data and documents, or made up fake documents on persons and/or groups in response to an order given inside the hierarchy to build up a criminal case against certain people and send it to member prosecutors. Most of these cases were filled with criminal charges and were dispatched to courts where FETÖ member judges were in charge. However, it is important to note that FETÖ lawyers defended some of those who were charged, probably as a smokescreen. When the trial ended and a conviction was given the victim would apply to the Supreme Court of Appeal but his/her application would then be sent to a court member in the relevant office, who was also a FETÖ member. So the whole thing was in fact futile. Thus, the FETÖ was invincible and, worst of all, they managed to operate this powerful mechanism without anyone noticing it.

FETÖ managed to invade or to take control over many civil society organizations as well. It became an important power in all parts of the media, such as newspapers, starting with *Zaman* and following with *Bugün*, *Taraf*, *Millet*, *Mey-*

dan, *Özgür Düşünce*, *Yarına Bakış* and *Yeni Hayat*; monthly magazines such as *Sızıntı*; the weekly news magazine *Aksiyon*; and finally television channels such as *Samanyolu*, *Kanaltürk*, *Bugün*, and *Mehtap*. Having a massive presence in the media was important both for the group's operations and its efforts to gain legitimacy. The media also served to protect FETÖ members. The media worked in coordination with FETÖ police and judiciary bureaucrats during the Sledgehammer, Ergenekon, and similar cases. As a result of functioning like an intelligence agency, FETÖ managed to manipulate and use media organs that were not under its control. For example, they used the secular *Milliyet* to leak the Oslo meetings between the Turkish state and the Kurdish movement, the leftist *Radikal* for the MİT lorry raids, and the republican-Kemalist *Cumhuriyet* newspaper to indict Turkey as a supporter of ISIS.

**The first attempt to “finish Erdoğan,” as FETÖ put it, was managed by leaking the official reports of the meetings between Turkey and the PKK in Oslo through *Milliyet*, which is not a FETÖ media outlet as mentioned before**

Not only did FETÖ found associations and foundations with its members, it also followed, tried to take part in, and manipulate other prominent civil society organizations. For example, the brain behind the radical *Türk Solu* (Turkish Left) magazine that threatened Erdoğan with execution, was a FETÖ member. FETÖ bribed many Democrat, sometimes Liberal writers with high wages to write for their press, and made them feed distorted information to the public to further their aims. They wanted to carry out an operation in Turkey's main liberal foundation, the Association for Liberal Thinking (*Liberal Düşünce Derneği*) as well. However, they were unsuccessful in manipulating this oldest and most influential liberal foundation; thus they tried other methods to prove that they were liberal or supported by liberals.

At the beginning of 2010, FETÖ, which by that time had an immense national and international power network, was becoming impatient to reach the ultimate power. However, the AK Party, which unknowingly sped up the formation of the network, began to get suspicious. Erdoğan was especially uncomfortable with FETÖ's monopoly in the bureaucracy, particularly its control over HSYK and the Supreme Court. FETÖ's request that the AK Party grant more than 100 MP positions to their members in the Grand assembly in the 2011 general elections was the final straw. If Erdoğan had acquiesced, Turkey's fate would have been left in FETÖ's hands.

Once it figured out that their power area within the bureaucracy would be limited, FETÖ started operations against Erdoğan.<sup>11</sup> It was almost impossible to realize the dimension of the operations planned and conducted by FETÖ,



## **FETÖ's most violent blow against Erdoğan came on 17 and 25 December 2013, just 6 months after the Gezi revolts, and was executed with police-judiciary-media cooperation**

since it was a secret structure that could turn into any shape, and assume any ideology. FETÖ's operation against the government was mainly carried out in two ways. The first and long-term strategy was to use their international influence to paint a bad picture of Erdoğan so that he would be besieged from the outside. The second strategy was to purge Erdoğan with "open secret" operations.

The first attempt to "finish Erdoğan," as FETÖ put it, was managed by leaking the official reports of the meetings between Turkey and the PKK in Oslo through *Milliyet*, which is not a FETÖ media outlet as mentioned before. Immediately following this leak, they attacked the MİT on 7 February 2012 to

arrest Hakan Fidan on charges of working with terrorists; Fidan had been designated chief of the agency instead of the person that the organization wanted. However, the real aim here was Erdoğan. If Hakan Fidan had been arrested, Erdoğan would have been next in line to face arrest for associating with terrorists. After recognizing this plot, Erdoğan not only ordered Fidan to physically protect himself against the FETÖ police chiefs – with weapons if necessary – he also prompted parliament to pass a law that protected the chief of MİT against probable operations carried out by judicial bureaucrats. Thus, another important step was taken in solving the Kurdish problem and in preparing a legal base for the meetings carried out with the leader of the PKK, Abdullah Öcalan.

FETÖ made a second attempt to depose Erdoğan at the end of May 2013 with the Gezi revolts, which lasted until mid-July.<sup>12</sup> The Gezi park revolts were initially sparked after the debate regarding the future of a park located in Taksim; specifically, whether to keep Gezi as a park or rebuild the Ottoman-era Taksim Military Barracks there. The Left, as well as Kemalist groups opposing the government took advantage of the extreme force of the police against the protestors to begin a series of protests against the government and create mayhem. The revolt spread across the country, continued for more than a month, and resulted in the deaths of 8 people. It is clear that FETÖ played an important role in the Gezi Park unrest, but the dimension and the exact position of the group's involvement has yet to be confirmed. For example, the police officers who ordered the tents of the groups that had occupied the park to be burned down, which caused an outburst against the police and government, turned out to be a FETÖ member. The chief of the police force, police intelligence, and the governor of the city turned out to be FETÖ members as well. Thus it was impossible for FETÖ not to have interfered with the events.

FETÖ wanted the Gezi protest to be the civil riot that dethroned Erdoğan, but was disappointed. Erdoğan succeeded and became even stronger after the revolts. The strong pressure from the Gezi events made Erdoğan aware that oncoming conflict between the government and FETÖ was inevitable. But he was not going to simply give up the legitimate political authority to an illegitimate bureaucratic power. Erdoğan considered FETÖ's machinations as an invasion of the state and viewed the impending conflict as a new war of independence.

By this time, signs that FETÖ was becoming a state within a state were growing. FETÖ had seized control of many of the state institutions and ruled the state's bureaucracy. Determined to take a firm and effective stance against FETÖ, Erdoğan decided to close down their chain of private teaching institutions, which was a decision that many, including myself, opposed. This step was untenable for FETÖ, which considered these institutions the main source for human and financial resources. Erdoğan's move galvanized FETÖ to put an end to his reign.

FETÖ's most violent blow against Erdoğan came on 17 and 25 December 2013, just 6 months after the Gezi revolts, and was executed with police-judiciary-media cooperation. Their move was presented as an operation against corruption. On 17 December, FETÖ indicted four ministers, and on 25 December they attacked Erdoğan and his family. The signals of this attack were given months previously, for example in the daily *Taraf*, which was FETÖ's operation newspaper. Gülenist newspapers began to claim that they had documents that would "finish the government," and they openly stated that they were going to personally handcuff Erdoğan in the İstanbul Police Force Headquarters.

During the 17/25 December operations, FETÖ police, prosecutors and judiciary members played an active role along with FETÖ member journalists. A huge media campaign against Erdoğan's alleged corruption had started. This was a very smart operation since corruption was not something to be taken lightly by anyone. Those who ordered the operation were lawyers who were respected and obeyed; disobeying them meant disobeying the law. There is a common saying in Turkey that the sword of justice has no scabbard. Thus an assassination attempt was carried out against the government where the law was the gun, the lawyer was the gunman and the corruption claims was the silencer: in other words, a police-judiciary coup was attempted.

Erdoğan, who was presented to the West as a dictator, just managed to escape from the hands of FETÖ police. If Efkân Ala, who was the Prime Ministry Undersecretary at the time, had not undertaken a wide re-assignment of police personnel and changed their place of duties, FETÖ might have succeeded on 25 December, and Erdoğan would have been arrested. At that time, few people realized that almost half of the police force were FETÖ members, and almost

no one knew of the situation in the judiciary, and it would not have helped if they did since it was impossible to interfere with the judiciary bureaucrats. The July 15 coup attempt was FETÖ's last chance to use its power in the military, after the failure of all of the above-mentioned attempts, such as 7 February 2012 MİT Operation, the 2013 Gezi Revolts, and the 17/25 December police-judiciary plot, which aimed to bring down the government.

It was known that FETÖ had been organizing in the military, as in all institutions, with the aim of having a monopoly over the state. However, no one knew the dimension of the organization within the military.<sup>13</sup> The military's role in the MİT lorry incidents on 1 and 19 January 2014 and in presenting Erdoğan as an ISIS supporter who cooperates with terrorists was an indication of FETÖ's existence within the military. The government's intelligence data had identified several FETÖ members in the military; the failure of the espionage cases organized by FETÖ in three big cities, along with the efforts of the attorneys and aggrieved lawyers who had pursued the plotters, facilitated the identification of more FETÖ members in the army.

Despite MİT and the attorneys' information transcription to the General Staff, however, the appropriate officials neglected to take action against FETÖ members, either because of negligence, or to keep professional solidarity or due to the obstruction of FETÖ members in important positions. The military jurisdiction was already in FETÖ's power, so those who would have made inquiries against the persons indicted by MİT and the civil attorneys were also FETÖ members. Seeing that no measures were being taken against the FETÖ member soldiers, the İzmir Public Prosecution Office made plans to take the FETÖ officers into custody on the 18 July 2016. What is more, news quickly spread that the Supreme Military Council meeting, which would take place at the beginning of August, planned to order almost 2,000 FETÖ soldiers to be removed from the military. This meant that FETÖ's power in the military would soon be weakened. And so FETÖ began to prepare for a coup. The general plan was ready. The public was already aware of the former coup plans such as *Balyoz* (Sledgehammer), *Ayışığı* (Moonlight), *Yakamoz* (Sea Sparkle). FETÖ members in the military and the civil preachers knew these plans and some had even participated in the preparation. These plans, which went back a few years, were revised in July 2016 and the roles and positions of each officer during the coup was determined and set forth.

However, as mentioned before a surprise turn of events caused the coup time to be changed. If things had gone according to the original plan the coup would have taken place on 16 July at 03:00 am while everyone was asleep, and the Turkish people would have woken up to a new Turkey reigned by FETÖ. However, after one of the officers, who was part of the group ordered to attack the MİT building, informed on it, MİT noted abnormal movement within the

military. The General Office was warned. After realizing that their coup plan was no longer a secret, the coup plotters decided to act instantly and thus the attempt took place on July 15 at around 09:00 pm. At first no one understood exactly what was going on, but by around 11:00 pm everyone was aware that a coup attempt was taking place.

The coup plotters attacked police buildings, Turkish national television (TRT), and the general staff office. They succeeded in having a coup manifesto read live on TRT.

The manifesto was read on behalf of the “Peace at Home Council.” It tried to present the coup as an act against radical Islam in the name of secularism. Although no one in Turkey believed it, unfortunately the western world fell for it. The coup plotters were members of a totalitarian religious group that carried prayers in their pockets. They believed that it was religiously correct to attack innocent people with the state’s weapons, and plan to assassinate the president.

**On the night of July 15, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım decided to fight against the coup even if it was going to cost them their lives. This meant that they added something that was never seen before in any coup attempt: the resistance and retaliation of political leaders**

## **Why was the July 15 Coup Attempt Unsuccessful?**

It seems that due to many successful past coups in Turkey, FETÖ leaders thought that their coup would be successful as well. This expectation was understandable, given their power in the military, their secrecy, and the devotion and determination of their followers. However, in analyzing this coup attempt, it becomes clear that FETÖ failed to take two important factors into account: the characteristics of a successful political leader, and the dimensions of Turkey’s social development.

### ***The Resistance of Political Will Against the Coup***

After the 1960 military Coup, the Prime Minister of the time, Adnan Menderes, was tried in a sham court. He was sentenced to death on the basis of false accusations and was held in prison under horrendous conditions until his execution, which took place on a gloomy September day. This situation gave rise to a trauma, especially among conservative politicians, who constantly reminded themselves of Menderes’ fate. They understood that being a politician meant walking around with a death wish. For this reason, they believed that they could not resist military interventions and they never did.



**For years the public had internalized the fact that the leaders they chose became the military's whipping boys. All of these incidents added up to a deep sense of anger and injustice that needed a trigger**

It can be assumed that the FETÖ coup plotters anticipated that Tayyip Erdoğan would not behave as his predecessors had, as his character was different from those who had surrendered to the coups in the past. An important sign of this difference was Erdoğan's resistance against the military memorandum on 27 April 2007. Because of his strength in this regard, the coup plotters wanted to

eliminate Erdoğan straight away. They planned to assassinate Erdoğan and his family – including his wife, children and grandchildren – while he was on holiday. They sent trained military soldiers to the hotel in Marmaris where they were staying, to carry out this assassination. It was sheer luck that Erdoğan managed to escape this attempt.

On the night of July 15, after consultation with one another, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım decided to fight against the coup even if it was going to cost them their lives. This meant that they added something that was never seen before in any coup attempt: the resistance and retaliation of political leaders. Their decision was declared and spread across the nation via media and AK Party organization, inspiring and calling out for public resistance, which became the most important factor in defeating the coup.

The political resistance against the July 15 coup attempt was not limited to Erdoğan and Yıldırım. The leaders of the opposing parties also fought against the attack, with MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli being the first leader to speak out against the attack in the clearest way. He also called the Prime Minister to show his party's support. This affected the main opposing party the CHP, which also stated that they were against the coup. This was important as it showed that the two parties were not only protecting the chosen government, but standing up for democratic politics. Their statements refuted the coup plotters' manifesto that had been published on behalf of the "Peace at Home Council," which stated that all parties were shut down.

The courage of the AK Party leaders and the democratic stance of the CHP and MHP were commendable. By resisting the coup, the AK Party broke new ground. The resistance of the leaders prompted party alignments as well; the opposing parties helped society resist the coup attempt, and helped eliminate justification for the coup. Whereas in the past coups and interventions – such as the 27 May 1960 and 28 February 1997 coups – the opposing party tried to gain power by fighting alongside the plotters instead of supporting the po-

litical actors, the democratic stance of the opposition on July 15 contributed immensely to foiling the coup. The *Saadet* Party, the *Hüda-Par* and the *Hak-Par*, who are not represented in the parliament, also claimed a part in this, with their firm stance against the coup.<sup>14</sup>

### ***Society's Riot against the Coup***

Former coups in Turkey have always had supporters, even if only a small group and these were usually CHP members. The majority of the population, who opposed the coup, would either stay quiet or show their anger through democratic voting by choosing the party they wanted. Just like the politicians, the citizens were also caught in a posture of learned helplessness. The notion that coups cannot be defeated had been rooted into their conscious and was internalized. However, the Turkish public was also sick and tired of this situation. Military domination had taken away the main power of democracy and used its elected officials as mere players.

Those who had witnessed the military's brutal treatment of Adnan Menderes had wept tears of despair for years. Demirel had also been humiliated and worn down by soldiers. Turgut Özal, a political leader who was close to the public, was also exposed to many accusations by the military, from corruption to dictatorship. For years the public had internalized the fact that the leaders they chose became the military's whipping boys. All of these incidents added up to a deep sense of anger and injustice that needed a trigger.

This trigger came on 15 July 2016. A political leadership which had risen triumphantly in every election was on the job. The relationship of this leadership with the people was deeper and wider than that of all the political leaders in the country's history. What is more important, the AK Party, a political movement that carried the periphery to the center, had made Turkish society considerably richer and freer than ever before.<sup>15</sup> Many groups that had been considered second-class citizens became equal in status and regained their rights under the AK Party's governance. These groups knew that if the government were overthrown with the coup, they would lose all their rights and freedom. Hence, it was only natural that these groups would not stand passively by and allow the coup to be successful.

For this reason, many citizens who heard that a coup was taking place ran to the streets even before the call of the President. After the president's appeal, millions of people of all ages, status and political identity ran to the streets to fight against the coup and protect democracy shouting "enough is enough!" and "you can win no more!" with the Turkish flag in their hands. These unarmed people single-handedly fought against machine guns, tanks, helicopters, and even planes. They ran to police headquarters, government buildings, the building of the general staff, the bridges on the Bosphorus, and the airports

in order to prevent the coup from taking over. Human walls assembled in front of military barracks. Ordinary and humble people in their daily lives turned out to be heroes. They lay down in front of tanks or climbed upon them with the hope of stopping them. They blocked bullets and bombs with their chests. They seized guns from the coup plotters stating “that is mine, give it!” They shouted at the soldiers to “go back to your barracks” and shot back with slogans like, “no space for coups.” This resistance from the public surprised FETÖ members and severely demoralized them. The soldiers and cadets that FETÖ had deceived and used for its own purposes were made to see sense. The public’s reaction to the coup spread across the country, and the public, as well as the police who supported them brought in many coup soldiers.

This unprecedented, unique public resistance revealed the Turkish people’s determination and stability, courage and insight joined with sharp wit. These unarmed people managed to render the heavily armed soldiers ineffective through practical methods. Blocking the pallets with stones and steel rods stopped the tanks. In some places, people plugged the exhaust pipes of the tanks with their clothes to shut them down. In instance, a tank’s window was painted to block the soldiers’ view. Another incident involved throwing an opened fire extinguisher into the tank. In Kazan, a town close to Ankara, villagers not only invaded the Akıncı Air base, they also set straw and old tires on fire to decrease the range visibility of the planes in Ankara. In Malatya, oil was poured onto the air base track and cars were deliberately parked on the runway. In many places, municipalities drove heavy construction vehicles in front of the barracks and parked them there.

The Turkish people risked their lives to fight against the coup plotters. More than 240 people were killed and thousands were injured. In the aftermath of the events, during interviews the injured people humbly stated that they did what they had to do and would do it again if needed. Thus during the July 15 coup attempt the people carried out a coup on the coup plotters.

### ***The Judiciary’s Stance against the Coup***

Another factor that has not been emphasized enough was the judiciary’s swift actions against the coup plotters. Historically, the judiciary, like many other parts of society, tended to take a passive stance against the coups, and to obey the coup management when the coup was successful. In fact, judiciary members would visit the coup plotters to show their respect and loyalty – as in the case of Constitutional Court after the 12 September 1980 coup.

During the July 15 coup attempt the opposite happened. Despite the large number of FETÖ members, ridding the HSYK of FETÖ paved the way for attorneys and judges with different ideologies to come to the fore. The HSYK had been restricting and pacifying FETÖ member attorneys; the FETÖ mem-

ber attorneys who had carried out the bogus spy cases had recently been identified and placed under scrutiny by other attorneys who had been following the cases. In short, the judiciary was already in the process of slowly eliminating FETÖ members. This process encouraged the attorneys to fight against FETÖ. Using the coup as an opportunity, attorneys in İstanbul, Ankara and İzmir ordered the police to capture the coup plotters. This order was announced via media organs and thus further demoralized the coup plotters.

### ***The Police's Armed Intervention against the Coup Plotters***

Although both the police and military are responsible for security, and although both work under the state, there are differences between them. Responsible only for the scope of internal security, the police do not have the right to arm, as do the military. They can only use simple weapons.

After the 1960 coup the police were purposely given a lower official status than the military in the hierarchy of Turkey's bureaucratic guardianship. The police force tends to be belittled in Turkish political culture as well. The police are taught that soldiers are higher in rank and thus they cannot, should not, and will not be resisted. Hence the police were left in a state of learned helplessness in relation to the military.

During its tenure, the AK Party government had systematically, if unintentionally, increased the status of the police against the military. The number of police and the quantity of their equipment had increased. Most importantly, the reasons for degrading police officers relative to soldiers diminished. Legislative regulations were undertaken to change the rule regarding compulsory military service for police who have been on the task force for 10 years. All of these changes made the police stronger.

FETÖ had managed to organize a massive existence within the police force since 1980. Gülen used his control over the force actively during the Sledgehammer, Ergenekon and Espionage (*Casusluk*) cases. However, the FETÖ member police became most visible in the December 17/25 operations. After realizing the dire magnitude of FETÖ's presence in the police force, the government began putting up an administrative and judicial fight against them. If the December events had not occurred, the FETÖ bloc within the force would not have been discovered and thus these officers would have joined the military during the



**The coup plotters knew that the non-FETÖ police would resist them, which is why they viciously attacked the police headquarters. They sprayed the police with bullets and bombs from planes, helicopters, and tanks**





Approximately 5 million people waving Turkish national flags as they gather at Yenikapı, Istanbul during a rally against the failed military coup.

AFP PHOTO /  
TURKEY'S  
PRESIDENTIAL  
PRESS SERVICE

coup and increased the plotters' chance of victory. However, the opposite happened. Many police chiefs and police officers fought against the coup plotters with small weapons. The police did not have tanks, war helicopters or planes. However, they had moral supremacy. The police had a legitimate position in the democratic and constitutional regime; their moral legitimacy and loyalty to the constitutional order prevailed over the conspirators' weapons.

The coup plotters knew that the non-FETÖ police would resist them, which is why they viciously attacked the police headquarters. They sprayed the police with bullets and bombs from planes, helicopters, and tanks. In some places they openly massacred them. However, no matter how vicious they were, they could not break polices' spirit, which was further raised by the public's support at police headquarters. Indeed, the police engaged in a legendary struggle against the coup plotters that night. The task force played an especially pivotal role, since they succeeded in either nullifying the coup plotters with guns or persuading them to lay down their arms. If it had not been for the police's bravery, the coup might have succeeded.

### ***The Media's Support for Democracy***

In former coups, the media had almost always sided with and supported the military coup plotters, the 28 February coup being the best example of this. Even if we leave aside the fact that the Turkish media has always taken an opposing stance against the democratically elected governments in favor of the

**The media showed that they sided with democracy by spreading the president's and other high ranking officers' messages to the public, opening their screens to politicians, and informing the public of the vicious attacks of the coup soldiers**

secular state, their opposing policies during past coups were destructive and undemocratic. Since many of those in charge of Turkey's mainstream media were raised during the Kemalist brainwashing era that internalized the justification of the coup, it would not have been a surprise if the newspapers and televisions had supported the coup.

However, here again Turkey witnessed a surprise turn of events. The main media channels all stood strong against the coup. It was one thing for the government supporting media channels to take this stance, but Hande Fırat of CNN and Oğuz Haksever on NTV literally carried out a digital war against the coup plotters along with *Habertürk*. Those who support the AK Party naturally stood firmly against the coup with A-Haber, TV-Net TV24 and TGRT Haber being especially effective during this stage. Thus the coup plotters were faced with a media outlet that did not stop broadcasting. The media showed that they sided with democracy by spreading the president's and other high ranking officers' messages to the public, opening their screens to politicians, and informing the public of the vicious attacks of the coup soldiers. Social media also contributed to this spread of information. The variety and decentralization of the media were important contributions to the media's stance against the coup. Despite the cruel propaganda regarding Turkey's (lack of) freedom of the press, and accusing the government of taking control of all the media organs, over the last 10 years the variety of media has increased and become multi-centered. Members of almost every major social stratum can find a media organ that appeals to them. And with this plethora of voices, the government is criticized more severely and in wider areas than the western media thinks.

In contrast to the past, the media of 15 July 2016 overcame its uniformity and became multi-dimensional and multi-centric, which helped any coup-supporting channels to be evaluated within the framework of democracy. Any media organ that had supported the coup would have stood out to be ridiculed by society for years to come. This awareness on the part of the Turkish public was what pushed the media organs, which in the past had openly supported coups, towards a more democratic approach.

### ***Resistance within the Military***

Several days after the coup attempt, the Turkish General Staff stated that only 1.5 percent of army personnel were involved in the coup attempt. This statement may have been made to protect the reputation of the army, but it was in vain. If we are to estimate how many soldiers took part in the coup attempt we must take into account the pro rata of the authority map rather than simple cadets or officers with no authority. According to this calculation, almost half of the soldiers were coup supporters. More than half of the general staff are under arrest or suspected criminals on the run. It is said that there is an even higher degree of FETÖ organization within the ranks of colonel and below. In order to understand the scope of FETÖ's presence within the military, one has to simply look at the Prime Minister's exclamation that almost all the military schools were in FETÖ's hands. In other words, the situation is more severe than the military office presents to the public.

Despite all this, we know that there was a group of people within the army who tried to resist and eliminate the coup attempt, by acting individually or in small groups. For example, Ömer Halisdemir's shot at the general who had been ordered by the coup leaders to seize control over the Special Forces played a vital role. Also, First Army Commander General Ümit Dündar's initial statement on television, and his subsequent press release condemning the coup, was an immense blow for the coup plotters.

There are many examples like this. Many soldiers remained loyal to the constitution, their job and oath, and actively or passively resisted the coup. Even if they did not openly confront the coup plotters, they did in some instances prevent them from arming up. In some places, the storage batteries of tanks and helicopters were removed. Loyal soldiers within the military prevented the coup plotters from getting fuel. In other instances, anti-coup officials fought with the coup plotters and seized the barricades or prevented the personnel from coming outside. All these actions, without a doubt, helped foil the coup.

### **The Results of the July 15 Coup Attempt**

What position would Turkey be in now if the coup had been successful? Would Turkey be a better democracy, or would we have become a dictatorship that deprives us of all of our rights and freedoms? To reach a satisfactory answer, we must once again look at FETÖ's mentality and the organization style, and the type of people they raise.

Many people and groups were unsuccessful in correctly identifying FETÖ's characteristics, as the organization behaved pragmatically, using whatever

helped them achieve their aims. FETÖ approached religious circles and inoculated its own people with religious discourse. However, in reality, FETÖ was run as an organization that worshipped power. Granted, it had to follow Islamic terminologies and use Islamic

references as the majority of their members live in Turkey and most of the people in Turkey are Muslims. But experts are aware that FETÖ was actually trying to develop a new religion that was a mixture of Christianity and Islam. And there were also some writers who pointed out FETÖ's immoral side. A necessity and result of a new religion requires a new prophet; within this framework, Gülen must have accepted himself as the new prophet and forced his members to believe that too. As such, some of his statements and behaviors, as well as his followers' attitudes towards him are signs of this. His devotees believe him to be perfect: "the awaited," "the honorable one," and even the "messiah."

**Foiling the coup attempt marks an epic and a monumental moment in our history that will be passed on to many generations to come**

If the coup had been successful, the actual ideas, belief system and structure that obtain within the organization would have been reflected in society. The result would have been a tyrannizing regime, devoid of rights and freedom. FETÖ's regime would have been similar to Iran's.<sup>16</sup> Although from the outside Turkey might still have appeared to have a political majority that is elected to govern, as well as a parliament, the real power would have been in FETÖ's hands. Gülen, as the ruler of the organization, would have reigned over the country with other co-preachers.

FETÖ's regime, by nature, would not have allowed basic rights and freedom. There is no need for variety in ideas and practices in a world where the ruler is the imam of the universe. Thus in a Gülenist regime plurality would not be allowed. In this regime, FETÖ would put its most devoted followers in charge to develop and promote people who think and act like them. There would only be one type of life style in the society and Gülen would have turned our world into hell in the name of heaven. Turkey managed to save itself from this terrible fate on 15 July 2016. It managed to evade the most sinister, systematic and bloody coup in its history.

### ***The Legend of Turkish Democracy***

Many people, both inside Turkey and abroad, cannot grasp just how important this coup attempt was. The reason for this is that it is still warm and many details have not yet been disclosed. However, foiling the coup attempt marks an epic and a monumental moment in our history that will be passed on to many generations to come.



**Unarmed people ran out to the streets to fight the coup plotters with the aim of protecting the country. Millions of people on the street, regardless of identity or political agenda, simply waived a single flag: The Turkish Flag**

Several modern, democratic countries have moments in history that are either the beginning of an era or a turning point. Such events include the Glorious Revolution of 1688 in England, the War of Independence in America in 1776, and the French Revolution. Turkey's resistance to the July 15 coup attempt is just as important as these events.

During the Glorious Revolution of England, there was an internal conflict between the parliament and the throne that ended with the victory of the parliament; from then on the king became a symbolic figure. The American war of independence took place against the English. After independence, a "representative republic" was established based on separation, control, and balance of power. The French Revolution erupted between ordinary civilians and the aristocracy supported by the king, and ended with

the dethroning of the monarch. Turkey's glorious resistance of July 15 now takes its place alongside these historical events.

FETÖ burst onto the scene as an opponent to the democratic regime but with an illegitimate governing request. Bureaucracy considered the power based on the organization stronger than the elected power and tried to make that power reign in the country. In this sense, Turkey's Glorious Resistance is similar to the English Glorious Revolution in terms of power division and conflict. Americans formed democracy by fighting for independence against the English, who were of the same culture. Turkey's Glorious Resistance was not only resistance against a typical coup, but it was also resistance against a domestic colonizer that had powerful international connections. Targeting all the state buildings and especially the parliament along with the government offices was a sign that FETÖ was attempting an invasion. The Turkish people stopped this invasion attempt with its Glorious Resistance.

Turkish democracy now has a legendary revolution. The people of this country, without regard for any differences, chose democracy and showed the world that they deserved it. This event is as important to Turkey as the formation of the Turkish republic itself. From now on, any emphasis on the republic without reference to democracy would be incorrect and unfair.

***Strengthening Turkish Society***

Coup attempts are usually carried out against the government and the state. However, coups also attack civil society. Coups tend to humiliate the public and shatter their confidence. They also damage the society's reputation in the



world. Hence, the coup attempt in Turkey was also an attack on Turkish society. As such, the coup plotters attacked unarmed civilians; Gülen's reference to the millions of people who were happy with the victory as "fools" can be taken as evidence of his attitude toward Turkish society.

Every open society includes people of different languages, races, lifestyles, beliefs, etc. Living together in harmony in these societies naturally brings about responsibilities, and simply having common laws is not enough, as naïve liberals would like to believe. Common values and symbols are necessary, including the love of one's country, and the sense of sharing a common fate.

The Turkish people's Glorious Resistance against the July 15 coup attempt helped us remember this. Unarmed people ran out to the streets to fight the coup plotters with the aim of protecting the country. Millions of people on the street, regardless of identity or political agenda, simply waived a single flag: The Turkish Flag. Because of the coup attempt, the notion of patriotism strengthened. Many people stated on social media that this was the first time that they had waved a flag or sung the national anthem with all their heart and soul. Those who took part in the Glorious Resistance were all there for a single reason: If Turkey were invaded and divided, and if democracy were demolished, we would all share the same fate.

### ***Strengthening Democracy***

They say that what doesn't kill you makes you stronger. The July 15 coup attempt aimed to kill democracy, but under fire democracy only became stronger. It defeated a well-planned, vicious coup attempt supported by strong inner and outer factors and conducted by a heavily armed military group.

Turkey's success in overcoming the July 15 coup attempt will affect every participant and every aspect of Turkish democracy. Thus it is vain to think that Erdoğan and the government will devolve into a more authoritarian system. If this were to happen, then the military/bureaucracy would have won. The July 15 coup attempt was defeated with solidarity, uniting even AK Party opponents. The government is aware of this. As such, after the coup attempt, the government began to get together with the opposing parties, providing them with information and taking their advice into consideration. President Erdoğan constantly repeated that no politician, including himself, will never be the same after July 15 and that a new style and tone must be embraced. Spokespeople for the ruling party underlined the fact that they consider this new era in politics a chance, and will do their best to protect it.

A softer approach to politics and an emphasis on common traits is also becoming visible amongst the opposing parties. The CHP, for example, had opposed the coup and its leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu openly stated this during the night

of the coup. The CHP organized two major demonstrations in İstanbul and İzmir where other party members were invited and took part. Kılıçdaroğlu also participated in the demonstration that took place on 7 August in İstanbul with more than 5 million attendants, and gave a speech. An important point that must be noted is the softening of the CHP's statements. The CHP's habit of constantly referring to the president as a dictator in the past was not based on any legitimate reasons anyway, but after the July 15 coup attempt it was obvious that these accusations had no basis. The president, who they had described as a dictator, saved himself and his family from the coup plotters at the last minute and by sheer luck. It would be strange to call someone who struggled to save the police and judiciary from invasion rather than taking control, a dictator.

The MHP also contributed to the consolidation of Turkish democracy by adopting a more constructive policy after the coup attempt. Due to its own internal affairs, the MHP had recognized the existence of FETÖ and its games earlier than the CHP. And thus they were by the government's side the minute the coup attempt took place. I think this solidarity played a vital role in the defeat of the coup. The MHP is currently playing its part to eliminate FETÖ during the state of emergency in the country.

### ***Opening the Path to State Reconstruction***

It is obvious that Turkey is not a third world country, since it is capable of providing basic services for its people. However, the transparency, pluralism, and efficiency of the country are open to debate. FETÖ's existence in the state is a major problem of its own.

It is known that FETÖ has created a secret state within the state. This means that the organization formed a structure amongst the state officials that was composed of FETÖ members, who work for FETÖ instead of the legitimate political authority, and use the state authority and equipment for their own aims instead of serving the state. Since it is clear that a secret state structure like this can damage both democracy and the internal affairs of the country, it must be eliminated. This elimination means protecting and strengthening democracy, and reconstructing the state.

Currently the state is going through a reconstruction with the support of the opposing parties, who are continually informed of the changes. The military schools have been shut down. Cadet schools have been collected under the roof of The National Security University. Force Commanders have been put under the control of the Ministry of National Defense, and the general staff has been put under the control of the Prime Minister. It can be said that these are steps to make democracy stronger. Taking cadets at a young age not only prepares them to become victims of criminal organizations like FETÖ, it also

inculcates them in a process of brain washing and imposes a certain career path upon them. Before choosing a uniformed occupation, a prospective cadet should spend time in civilian life so that he can be aware of different ideas and styles, and form his own idea and character through different sources.

**FETÖ is an organization that aims to gain power through secret methods instead of using the open and legitimate methods of the democratic process**

The claim that putting the Force Commanders under the control of the Ministry of National Defense would break the chain of command is unsubstantial. Since a junta, rather than a chain of command carried out the 1960 coup, the army tightened the chain of command themselves. But the 1980 coup occurred inside the chain of command. And although the 2016 coup attempt did not completely take place inside the chain of command, it was carried out by officers who controlled at least 50 percent of the authority in the army. In this case, increasing civil authority over the military is inevitable. Whether regular or retired, all soldiers must know and accept that their superiors are the politicians. Besides, being under the control of the Ministry of National Defense does not mean that the minister will constantly interfere with operations of the military. However the civilians must have this authority and opportunity.<sup>17</sup>

Some commentators believe that the failure to base assignment and employment within the state on qualification is one of the factors that sparked the coup. This evaluation and claim is partially correct, but it is not the main problem. Firstly, it is very difficult to define what qualification is. Secondly, requiring qualification would not prevent FETÖ members from getting jobs since it is possible that the FETÖ members in the state cadres had the right qualifications in order to carry out the work and tasks they were assigned correctly.

The problem is based more on political obedience. FETÖ is an organization that aims to gain power through secret methods instead of using the open and legitimate methods of the democratic process. The problem occurs when government officials pledge their loyalty to the organization instead of the political system.

The government had tried to decrease the number of Kemalists in the main public institutions by increasing qualified employment. Later, they used the same method against FETÖ. Now they aim to eliminate FETÖ completely from state institutions. Thus government officers are being employed to close the gaps. At this point it is important to be careful of two factors. The first one is increasing the personnel stock –and thus the state stock– with unnecessary employment of government officers. The second important factor is to focus

on diversity, which means disregarding religious, ethnic and cultural differences while employing personnel. Within this framework, it is important to not leave Alawite citizens out of public offices.

### ***Strengthening Democratic Political Culture***

Defeating the July 15 coup attempt will no doubt contribute to strengthening Turkey's democratic political culture. Firstly, politicians and the public have broken the cycle of their learned helplessness against military coups, as this presumed state of helplessness was one of the main advantages of any potential coup plotters. The tables have now turned. From now on, politicians and the public will easily and courageously fend off any coup attempts. They also have more practical knowledge and experience on how to resist against a coup with or without weapons. This is no doubt a vital advantage for the Turkish public in any future coup attempts.

Secondly, after defeating FETÖ's coup attempt, the information that emerged and the actions taken place to clean out FETÖ carry important messages for any religious and/or secular groups that wish to intrigue with the state: the state belongs to everyone; no single person or group can claim monopoly over it. All state office positions are open to every citizen. No one can be alienated from a position due to his or her language, religion, nationality, gender, socio-economic status, or group identity, etc. State officers are obliged to work within the unity of the administration, use the authority given by the constitution and law, and do the task given to them. Political loyalty must come above any group loyalty. An organization bureaucracy cannot overshadow democratic procedures. Those who do not like a politician can try to oust him or her through democratic means, and must enter politics through legitimate and open methods.

FETÖ's July 15 coup attempt helped democratic culture and behavior in society to revive. There is a difference between opposing the ruling party's government and opposing Turkey. FETÖ not only opposed the government, it opposed Turkey, and went as far as considering it the enemy. On the other hand, many parties inside and outside the parliament, along with millions of citizens, who are known for their opposition to the ruling party, stood up for democracy during the struggle. For example, Celal Şengör, an academic, and Nihat Genç, a writer, are opponents of both the AK Party government and Erdoğan, and yet they have stated that this coup attempt will not prevent them from partnering up with the government to protect the country's democracy.

After July 15 a large part of Turkish society stood watch in the streets in order to prevent any other attempt. Called as "democracy watch," this process continued for at least a month after the coup attempt in many cities and provinces and it can also be considered a source of lessons on democracy. These guard

duties strengthened Turkey's democratic culture. Especially considering the fact that most of those who took part had never participated in such guard duties, it seems clear that sensitivity towards democracy among the populous is spreading.


## Conclusion: Toward a Consolidated Democracy

Democracy, said Winston Churchill, is the worst form of government, except for all the others. Democracy is not putting the best in charge, or finding the best solution to every problem as it is usually touted. In other words, we cannot say that everything anti-democratic is bad and that everything democratic is good. Democracy does not need to cover every part of life, and it shouldn't. Democracy can only be evaluated within the political framework and in comparison with other political systems.

The only way to keep democracy alive and strong is through understanding it realistically instead of exaggerating it. If a common life means making public decisions, and common problems require public solutions, allowing those who will be affected by the results of the decisions and solutions to participate is more ethical than alternative methods, which is why we prefer democracy to anti-democratic systems.

If we are to approach the issue from a Popperian perspective, we will see that democracy is the best method to eliminate insufficient and unpopular administrators with minimum cost. Gaining and losing power in democracy occurs based on rules. These are called rules of procedure, and these rules are the most important aspect of a democracy in the long term. Eliminating bad administrators through polls instead of wars is not only low-cost, it is also civil. On the other hand, in order for democracy to thrive and to carry out what is expected of it, it has to be limited like all political governance systems. In other words, it should not invade all areas of life.

Democracy is a system that is arduous and costly; it requires social actors to be patient and rule-abiding. Democracy does not only have a roof, but it also has a foundation. If the roof is constitutional structure, then the foundation is political culture and behavior codes. Democracy cannot be established anytime and anywhere. And it cannot develop if there is no suitable political culture. Thus, the outcome of democracy is not only based on suitable constitutional reforms, but also social experience and history.



**Our history now adds  
15 July 2016 to these  
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From now on we can  
call this historical  
moment the Glorious  
Resistance**



We look up to stable democracies and we want that for our country too. However, as a result of our historical negligence, we tend to fall into the trap of believing that a stable democracy can be formed at no cost. In the wake of the July 15 coup, it can be seen that attaining a stable democracy is only possible by paying serious prices with revolutions, civil wars, chaos and inconsistencies.

As noted above, countries that are considered to have stable democracies, such as England, America, and France, all have revolutions in their history. These revolutions have penetrated both these countries' political systems and their culture at large. When looking from Turkey's perspective, we of course have monumental events in our history that we look up to. For example, the establishment of Turkey's first constitution in 1876 and the opening of its parliament, and the elimination of the one party dictatorship on 14 May 1950 can be considered proud moments. Our history now adds 15 July 2016 to these monumental dates. From now on we can call this historical moment the Glorious Resistance.<sup>18</sup>

Turkey's July 15 Glorious Resistance, in my view, is one of the most important events in the history of democracy. From now on the Turks have a legendary event which they will pass on from generation to generation for centuries. You can be sure that the July 15 Glorious Resistance will make an immense contribution to Turkey's path for a better democracy. ■

## Endnotes




1. For a brief overview of the coups in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey see: Süleyman Kocabaş, "140 Yıllık Darbeder Tarihimiz," *Derin Tarih*, (August 2016), pp. 26-39; Sinan Çulak, "Darbeli Osmanlı Tarihi: Padişah Ferman, Asker Ayar Verdi," *Bugünü Anlamak İçin Tarih*, (August 2016), No. 27, p. 3.
2. For the full text of the July 15 coup declaration, see: <http://www.uludagsozluk.com/k/15-temmuz-2016-trt-darbe-bildirisi-tam-metni/>. For the wording and content analysis of the coup declaration see Yıldırım Oğur's column that he wrote after the July 15 coup attempt in the daily *Türkiye*.
3. There is no doubt that the 15 July 2016 coup was conducted by the Gülenists. There is plenty of evidence in this regard. One of the most important pieces of evidence is the declaration of an arrested colonel. He said that "they wanted to take head before their heads were taken." The colonel admitted that they were ordered "to act before the last castle conquered." *Hürriyet*, (21 August 2016).
4. It has been long discussed whether or not Gülen established a terrorist organization. As no known terrorist action of it existed many people, including this author, have been reluctant to name it as a terrorist group. I have preferred to call it as an organized criminal gang. However July 15 coup attempt proved that it is a terrorist gang. A good explanation for why it is a terrorist group see the report by HSYK for dismissing Gülen gang members from the judiciary: [http://www.hsyk.gov.tr/DuyuruOku/889\\_hakimler-ve-savcilar-yuksek-kurulu-genel-kurulunun-24082016-tarihli-ve-201642.asp](http://www.hsyk.gov.tr/DuyuruOku/889_hakimler-ve-savcilar-yuksek-kurulu-genel-kurulunun-24082016-tarihli-ve-201642.asp).
5. Şinasi Gündüz, *Din ve İnanç Sözlüğü*, (Ankara: Vadi Yayınları, 1998), pp. 253-54.
6. For Gülen's character and acts see the book of Latif Erdoğan who spent 40 years in Gülen group: *Şeytanın Gülen Yüzü*, (İstanbul: Turkuvaz Kitap, 2016). The first person who discovered Gülen's intelligence activities was Necip Hablemitoğlu who probably was assassinated for his book *Köstebek*, (İstanbul: Pozitif Yayınları, 2016). The book was published for the first time in 2002.

7. Marc Galenter, *Cults: Faith, Healing, and Coercion*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. ix.
8. Galenter, *Cults: Faith, Healing, and Coercion*, p. 2.
9. Galenter, *Cults: Faith, Healing, and Coercion*, p. 4.
10. For observations how FETO brings up its members see Ömer Çaha, "Gülen'in Mankurtları Nasıl Azgın Kurtlara Dönüştü?," *Karar*, (10 August 2016).
11. Atilla Yayla, "Bir İstihbarat Örgütü Olarak FETÖ," retrieved from <http://www.hurfigirler.com/bir-istihbarat-orgutu-olarak-feto/>.
12. You can find my evaluations about the Gezi Revolts at Atilla Yayla, "Gezi Park Revolts: For or Against Democracy?," *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 15, No. 4, pp. 7-18.
13. Necdet Özçelik, "How did FETO Terrorists Infiltrate the Turkish Armed Forces?," retrieved from <http://thenewturkey.org>; Y. Hakan Erdem, "Askerlerin Vaizinden Vaizin Askerlerine I-II," *Karar*, (14, 21 August 2016).
14. The weakest support came from the HDP, which bases its policies on hatred of Erdoğan. Not only did the HDP present a weak stance against the coup attempt, they also engaged in humiliating, slanderous and hurtful accusations against those who took to the streets to fight.
15. Ünsal Çetin, in his article published in [hurfigirler.com](http://www.hurfigirler.com), (<http://www.hurfigirler.com/liberal-vizyonun-zaferi-olarak-15-temmuz/>) claims that Turkey succeeded to prevent July 15 coup attempt due to liberalization in the last 15 years in Turkey.
16. For information about the political system of Iran see Atilla Yayla, *Karşılaştırmalı Siyasal Sistemler*, (Ankara: Adres Yayınları, 2015).
17. About reforms that need to be done in the Turkish army, see the report by the retired Turkish officer Yusuf Alabarda, "TSK'nın Reformu: Sivil-Asker İlişkilerinin Dönüşümü İçin Bir Yol Haritası," retrieved from <http://www.setav.org/tsknin-reformu-sivil-asker-iliskilerinin-donusumu-icin-bir-yol-haritasi/>.
18. In another article of mine I explained in more detail why the July 15 event should be considered as a revolution: "Turkey's 15 July Revolution," retrieved from <http://thenewturkey.org/turkeys-july-15-revolution/>.



# HAYATI CİDDİYE ALAN DERGİ

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