

# The 2016 Attempted Coup in Turkey and Its Outcomes

## Maia Kapanadze.

Doctor of History Science  
Caucasus International University Assoc. Professor  
Head of the Scientific Analytical Centre for Georgia-Iranian Relations

## Khvicha Khozrevanidze

Davit Agmashenebeli National Defense Academy of Georgian  
Caucasus International University PhD student

**Abstract:** The militaries played an essential role in the political life of Turkey. Namely, they intensively interfered with it for they appeared the most active defenders of the Kemalism idea. It is true that the Republic of Turkey is a secular country, but the vast majority of its population are Muslim. Hence, shortly after Mustafa Kemal's death, Muslim political parties came to the fore, trying more and more intensely to establish themselves in the politics of the country and, consequently, to limit secularism. The Turkish military servicemen could not tolerate the Muslim parties attempting to seize power. As faithful defenders of the Kemalist ideology, they often overthrew such governments. Similar cases took place four times in Turkey in the last century.

Turkey's "Justice and Development Party" (AKP) which is the ruling party nowadays, represents a moderate Islam follower. Therefore, the leader of the party, President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan tried to restrict the militaries yet in 2011, and he partially succeeded.

In 2016, when the last attempted military coup, the Turkish militaries failed. One of the reasons for this is a thought as if the Turkish president knew about the attempted military coup in advance and he needed it to limit the Turkish militaries. Too shortly after the attempted coup, many high-ranked military officials (including doctors, teachers) were arrested or fired from their working places. After that, the attempted coup by the Turkish military was almost neutralized and in this way the "threat" to Erdogan's government was eliminated.

**Keywords:** Turkey, secularism, Kemalism, military, coup

## I. Introduction

Turkey is a secular country since it was declared as the republic. It is even defined in the preamble of the Constitution of the Republic of Turkey. Laicism was the best model for this country, as Mustafa Kemal thought. He desired to control and transform religion to ensure Islam to have no more institutional influence on the Turkish government branches. All this began when Khilafat, lasting for centuries, was abolished, followed by initial restriction and further abrogation of the religious court. All this made it possible for various religion-related issues to be examined according to the civil legislation.

Despite being secular, Turkey remains a Muslim state, as absolute majority of its population are Muslims. Therefore, Islam plays an important role in the Turkish politics despite secularism. In Turkey, Islamic political parties started getting stronger even in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

They wanted to deviate from the Kemalism ideology that was strongly contradicted by the Turkish militaries. They happened to be mostly devoted to the Kemalism ideology. As a dominant force, they did not allow anyone (political parties or government institutions) to deviate from the ideology of Kemalism. Otherwise, they organized

## *The 2016 Attempted Coup in Turkey and Its Outcomes*

military revolutions and forced undesirable Islamic parties to leave the political arena. The last attempted military coup (2016) failed in this country for some particular reasons.

### **Policy Conducted by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan towards the Turkish Militaries**

Even while being the Prime Minister of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, in collaboration with the Party for Justice and Development took a step for weakening the Turkish militaries that led to great success.

When he won the 2011 parliamentary elections<sup>1</sup> and got stronger to conduct his policy, weakening the militaries' influence across the country was one of the most crucial issues for him. After the parliamentary elections, constitutional changes represented another relevant issue in Turkey. Most of the population voted in favour of this relevant topic as it got clear after the referendum outcomes were summed up. The Justice Ministry re-organization was one of the essential issues aimed at weakening the political influence of the militaries. They enjoyed so high influential level that through military riots they succeeded in changing the governments, deviating from the Kemalist policy. It happened four times during the last 60 years.

In 2007-2012, while investigating the activities carried out by high-rank military officers, Turkey arrested approximately 500 generals and other military servants. They were charged with causing instability in the state as well as preparing for a new military coup. Apart of this, the government did its best to influence the military leadership as it fabricated charges against them as a result of which police released or arrested those militaries refusing to follow their political course.

The military servicemen-government relations ended up in a deadlock, followed by appointment of new high leadership of the Turkish armed forces by the president. Once the military leadership became weaker, the Religious Leaders' Unity organization got immediately stronger. The Religious Affairs Department turned into one of the most influential structures. It made religion an obligatory subject in military academies, schools and universities. Besides, they built 7,300 mosques in the last decade.<sup>2</sup>

Recep Tayyip Erdogan weakened secularism via conducting his policy. Besides, he also sapped the militaries' high influential level across the country that enabled him to carry out the policy that differed from the Kemalism ideology.

### **The 2016 Military Coup**

The process of planning and implementing the 2016 July coup had its causes. The first and most important one was that the government dismissed high-rank military servicemen for no reason, or forced them to conduct the existing policy that was unacceptable for the Turkish military servicemen. Another cause was that Islam got stronger in the country, while secularism became weaker. Besides, Erdogan wanted to impose control over free media outlets and internet and repressions were made for achieving this goal. In case of implementing all this in full Erdogan could enjoy an opportunity to carry out his policy that was different from the Kemalism ideology.

The last military coup in Turkey was launched on July 15, 2016 when the insurgents took hostage those occupying high posts in the Turkish Military Staff Department, including the head of the General Staff, commander of the land troops and commander of the air forces (July 15 evening, about 21:00). Afterwards, military planes started moving across Turkey's capital Ankara's airspace. Meanwhile, in Istanbul, the Fatih Sultan Mehmet bridge and Bosphorus bridge were closed (23:00). Turkish media outlets released the video footage showing armoured vehicles entering the city, occupying strategic facilities, including the ruling party's (Justice and Development Party) office. Air missiles were also thrown at the strategic facilities. The parliament building was one of the important targets. The insurgents held the Taksim square in Istanbul which is located in the city centre. Besides, they occupied the building of Turkey's state broadcaster (TRT). The insurgents said in live broadcasting that the rule of the democratic and secular law was destroyed under the current government and the Peace Council of Turkey gained power 'to ensure the population's safety.'<sup>3</sup> They also maintained that the Turkish armed forces totally controlled and managed all its strategic administrative premises to restore the constitutional order across the country. They also reiterated the need of protecting

---

<sup>1</sup>Makaradze, E. History of Turkey in 1918-2018, Tb., 2018.

<sup>2</sup>Makaradze, E. History of Turkey in 1918-2018, Tb., 2018.

<sup>3</sup><http://onedio.com/haber/tijen-karas-bildiriyi-silah-zoru-altinda-okudum-hayatimin-en-zor-yayiniydi--721477>

## *The 2016 Attempted Coup in Turkey and Its Outcomes*

human rights and freedom, rule of law and general security as all these needs were not met<sup>4</sup>. They hoped to maintain positive relations with the rest of the world. The insurgents said they did it for maintaining democratic order and ensure the rule of law in Turkey, adding the latter is of high priority. They also highlighted the need of declaring the martial law. According to them the new constitution of Turkey would be ready shortly. Afterwards TRT stopped broadcasting.

Prime Minister of Turkey Binali Yildirim condemned the coup, assessing it as an assault on democracy. He also added that Erdogan and his government still maintained the power<sup>5</sup>.

President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan who was on vacation abroad meanwhile, made a statement in live broadcast at 01:00 AM (July 16). He called on his supporters to go outside despite the military-stated curfew. In his statement he noted that 'there is no power higher than the power of the people. I urge the Turkish people to gather at public squares and airports.'<sup>6</sup>

In large cities the Turkish population started going massively outside in protest. They helped police restore the law. Some shootings were observed in the parts of the cities, while armoured vehicles were used to destroy strategic buildings. The insurgents were shortly lagged behind in terms of releasing information and it became clear once a reporter said in live that he was the victim of blackmail, being forced to release the insurgents' address.

The rebellious groups showed signs of not being well-informed about this coup. Shortly afterwards, they saw the furious Turkish people being against them and certain rebellious groups surrendered to police officers. Law enforcement agencies shortly regained control over the situation and neutralized the rebellious groups. In fact, the coup totally failed.

### **The Reasons for the Attempted Coup Fail**

The main reason for the military coup failed was that there was a chaos amongst the insurgents. The head of the national intelligence office of Turkey was unexpectedly informed about the coup. It led the insurgents to launch the scheduled operation six hours earlier than planned. The coup failed to succeed as the leaders of the rebels, general Semih Terzi was killed when the operation was beginning. He was assassinated by a junior officer that led the insurgents getting demoralized and the operation was not managed in a coordinated manner<sup>7</sup>.

The insurgents failed to liquidate or arrest the President of Turkey and high-rank officials, as the leadership of the national intelligence service provided all the important agencies/persons with information on the coup attempt and therefore, ensured their safety. The rebellious groups did not manage to control neither mass media nor cable-based and satellite communications. Meanwhile, the government of Turkey succeeded in controlling and managing the satellite communications properly. They sent short messages to all the Turkish citizens and called on them to protest the attempted coup.

### **The Attempted Coup Outcomes**

All these aforementioned developments affected the country. The number of the victims got high. According to diverse reports, this attempted coup claimed about 300 lives. A total of 161 were peaceful ordinary citizens out of them, while the others belonged to the rebellious groups. Shortly afterwards, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan accused preacher and scholar Fethullah Gulen of organizing the coup. It is worth to note that Erdogan and Gulen were partners earlier. Gulen was a very influential person in Turkey. He even assisted Erdogan to claim victory in the parliamentary elections, but after the 2013 corruption-related scandal they split up. Gulen lives in the United States for a long time.

The government of Turkey says that the insurgents are Gulen's supporters. It also emphasizes that the Gulen-backed insurgents aimed to collapse the Turkish government for a long time. After the attempted coup, the Erdogan

<sup>4</sup><https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2016/jul/15/turkey-coup-attempt-military-gunfire-ankara>

<sup>5</sup><https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2016/jul/15/turkey-coup-attempt-military-gunfire-ankara>

<sup>6</sup><https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2016/jul/15/turkey-coup-attempt-military-gunfire-ankara?page=with:block-57895c1ae4b033b610b6e3fc#block-57895c1ae4b033b610b6e3fc>

<sup>7</sup><https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2016/07/turkey-coup-attempt-intelligence-agency-thwart.html> Sikharulidze, G. The Dilemma of Secularism in Turkey: Modern Challenges. Research document of the Institute of Politics of Georgia. Tb., 2017, p. 119.

## *The 2016 Attempted Coup in Turkey and Its Outcomes*

government started massive arrests across the country. Police arrested all those suspected of getting involved in the attempted coup. The 'cleaning process' applied to several thousands of military servicemen and governors, police officers and judges. All of them were arrested or fired. Besides, doctors, teachers and university employees were massively dismissed. This process still has not ended. It continues.<sup>8</sup>

Certain Turkish military servicemen that faced charges with participation or initiation of the attempted coup, asked Greece for a political asylum. They were accepted. The Foreign Minister of Turkey demanded their extradition but this issue is still under discussion.

On July 17, 2016, WikiLeaks publicized the Turkish e-mails and documents, including those of the ruling party. The publicized materials showed the description of the government - led repressions after the attempted coup.

There are certain opinions and evidence showing that this coup was pre-planned by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. It is also supposed that one of the leaders of the insurgents and Erdogan enjoyed personal ties.<sup>9</sup> From my point of view, I think it seems impossible to dismiss and arrest thousands of officials when only two days pass after the coup, unless all this is not pre-planned. This opinion emerges for the circumstances that it is known that Erdogan aimed at expanding his power and weaken secularism. For achieving all this, it was required to carry out some 'cleaning efforts' in Turkey's army for its full obedience.

The attempted coup was widely responded in foreign countries. The NATO officials thought of the need of reviewing the NATO-Turkey relations, as one of the NATO requirements implies respecting democratic institutions in any country. During his first after-coup visit to Turkey, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg confirmed that this country was still considered a strategic partner of NATO. The Incirlik military base, deployed in the southern part of Turkey represents an essential strategic object in terms of fighting the ISIS terrorist organization. However, Turkey closed this military base for a certain period of time, while it was involved in a fight against the military coup. NATO needs Turkey and this is the fact.<sup>10</sup>

The government officials from the United States and France released statements on Turkey having launched repressions after the attempted coup. The officials called on Turkey to stop the persecution as while such activities are carried out, political system goes far from the democratic style of governance.

### **Conclusion**

The last attempt of coup in Turkey totally failed. It was caused by several reasons. It is worth noting that one of the reasons was the Erdogan government being informed about the coup in advance, before it began. Erdogan needed this attempted coup to weaken the militaries' influence across Turkey as it would allow him to strengthen his power. Nowadays, the ruling party is an abstinent Islamic party. It is unacceptable for the Turkish militaries to remain devoted to the Kemalism ideas. In fact, the failed attempted coup showed its outcomes.

### **References**

- [1.] Makaradze, E. History of Turkey in 1918-2018, Tb., 2018.
- [2.] Sigua, Sh. NATO-Turkey Relations (workshop) (Caucasus International University) Tb.; 2019.
- [3.] Sikharulidze, G. The Dilemma of Secularism in Turkey: Modern Challenges. Research document of the Institute of Politics of Georgia. Tb., 2017.

### **Sources on the internet:**

1. <http://onedio.com/haber/tijen-karas-bildiriyi-silah-zoru-altinda-okudum-hayatimin-en-zor-yayiniydi--721477>

---

<sup>8</sup>[https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/turkey-jails-generals-as-post-coup-purge-widens/2016/07/19/db076c84-4d1f-11e6-bf27-405106836f96\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/turkey-jails-generals-as-post-coup-purge-widens/2016/07/19/db076c84-4d1f-11e6-bf27-405106836f96_story.html)

<sup>9</sup><https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/turkey-coup-conspiracy-theory-erdogan-military-gift-god-soldiers-istanbul-a7140516.html>

<sup>10</sup>Sigua, Sh. NATO-Turkey Relations (workshop) (Caucasus International University) Tb.; 2019, p. 14

## *The 2016 Attempted Coup in Turkey and Its Outcomes*

2. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2016/jul/15/turkey-coup-attempt-military-gunfire-ankara>
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2016/jul/15/turkey-coup-attempt-military-gunfire-ankara>
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2016/jul/15/turkey-coup-attempt-military-gunfire-ankara?page=with:block-57895c1ae4b033b610b6e3fc#block-57895c1ae4b033b610b6e3fc>
5. <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2016/07/turkey-coup-attempt-intelligence-agency-thwart.html>
6. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/turkey-jails-generals-as-post-coup-purge-widens/2016/07/19/db076c84-4d1f-11e6-bf27-405106836f96\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/turkey-jails-generals-as-post-coup-purge-widens/2016/07/19/db076c84-4d1f-11e6-bf27-405106836f96_story.html)
7. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/turkey-coup-conspiracy-theory-erdogan-military-gift-god-soldiers-istanbul-a7140516.html>