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TURKEY AFTER THE JULY COUP ATTEMPT

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Turkey's July Coup Attempt: "A Gift from God" to a new Authoritarianism

The July 15, 2016 unsuccessful "coup" attempt in Turkey happened in the midst of exceptionally stressful times when Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was going through both domestic and international crises which are essential to understand and better analyze how the so-called coup came about. In fact, as Erdogan himself addressed his supporters at the Ataturk airport just a few hours after the coup attempt, he called the coup "*a gift from God*" and later it became clear—that it provided the rationale for solving his many troubles and most importantly, the perfect opportunity to completely wipe out his growing opposition as he quickly grabbed authoritarian rule at a level he would never be able to attain through democratic means.

Pre-Coup Conditions

The political and economic atmosphere in Turkey before the coup was extremely difficult for President Erdogan. Turkey was going through turmoil for a variety of reasons. The economy was struggling, with the tourism industry almost collapsing in response to losing millions of tourists due to worsening security concerns following several terrorist attacks around the country. In addition, Russian President Vladimir Putin introduced economic sanctions on November 2015¹ for Turkey after the shoot down of the Russian warplane causing Turkey to lose one of its primary trade partners and source of tourism. Furthermore, several international investors (i.e. PayPal and Tesco) have left Turkey seeing what happened after the December 2013 corruption operations which reached up to the highest echelon's of Erdogan's government and which he promptly crushed by arresting the police involved. The rule of law in Turkey had started to mean nothing causing international investors to quaver. Several large media outlets (i.e. Koza Ipek Media) were also shut down or confiscated by Erdogan, key journalists were arrested, this beginning even years before the coup attempt, and the freedom of speech and free media were being attacked on a daily basis, eroding the foundations of democracy in the country.

One of the most important factors of course was Turkey's distancing itself from the West as a NATO member. Relationships between the EU and Turkey have been suffering due to the fact that Erdogan as the gatekeeper of ISIS kept threatening the EU with the release of hundreds of thousands of refugees and then demanding money and visa-free travel for the Turks. This had followed years of unsuccessful

¹ "*Vladimir Putin announces Russian sanctions against Turkey*"

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/28/vladimir-putin-calls-for-greater-sanctions-against-turkey>

attempts of Turkey to accede to the EU. Ties with the U.S. were also weakened due to Turkey's failure of real support to the Coalition forces against ISIS and other terrorist organizations and the illicit support given to the regional terrorist organizations in Syria including ISIS and al-Nusra. Turkey has unfortunately become the main hub and logistical support base for ISIS, allowing members to operate freely in its borders to provide all the logistical and military needs from Turkey without any interruptions and let its fighters pass back and forth through Turkish borders²—including allowing 38,000 foreign fighters from over one hundred nations stream into ISIS via Turkey.

In fact, the Turkish government consistently releases the suspects of ISIS cases around the country with surprisingly little investigation or judicial review while it was at the same time cracking down hard on journalists and political activists. Turkey is the leader in the world for jailed journalists. In 2016 alone number of the arrested journalists reached to 117³ apart from the journalists who were detained and released. Before the coup Turkey was already one of the lead nations for the number of jailed journalists, yet ISIS members and supporters in Turkey consistently evade prison. For example, on January 12, 2016, ISIS carried out a suicide attack near the Blue Mosque in Istanbul killing twelve German tourists. This attack's case was tried in Istanbul court and recently during the latest trial, half of the arrested suspects were unexpectedly released⁴. Similarly, Turkish ISIS leader Halis Bayancuk was released from prison in Manisa along with ninety-four other ISIS suspects⁵. Bayancuk openly supports ISIS on his social media accounts and operates freely in Turkey. The support Turkey has extended to ISIS and other terrorist organizations has distanced itself from the West and isolated itself not only in the region but almost in the entire world having only few friendly countries left.

Another troubling headache of Erdogan was the Zarrab "*oil for gold*" money laundering case that resurrects the December 2013 internal Turkish corruption case that Erdogan crushed. Iranian Turk, Reza Zarrab, who was arrested upon his entry into the U.S. on March 19, 2016 is currently held behind bars in New York and facing federal charges for his role in Turkey's Iranian "*oil to gold*" scheme. Zarrab is accused of evading sanctions against Iran, conspiracies to commit money laundering and bank fraud of millions of dollars through the Turkish banking system⁶. His U.S. federal court trial is set to start soon and Erdogan must be paralyzed with fright that Zarrab is going to testify about his and his family's as well as high government officials' roles in the over 100 billion dollars of "*oil to gold*" money scheme Zarrab is accused of arranging⁷. It is expected that Zarrab is going to reveal how this system worked and how the highest levels in the Turkish state along with some Turkish banks were behind his crimes.

In fact, Zarrab was arrested in December 2013 in Istanbul, along with several key people very close to Erdogan for similar charges as a result of Turkish Police corruption operations. Erdogan managed to

² "*Deadly Interactions*" by Ahmet S Yayla. <http://www.worldpolicy.org/deadly-interactions>

³ "*Turkey's Press Crackdown Unparalleled in Recent History*" <http://www.turkeytms.com/2016/09/08/turkeys-press-crackdown-unparalleled-in-recent-history/>

⁴ "*Marshall Law is not Applied to ISIS*" <http://www.shaber3.com/iside%ADohal%ADislemiyor%ADhaberi/1271107/>

⁵ "*All Suspects Released at ISIS Trial*"

http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/turkiye/503898/ISiD_Davasi_nda_tum_saniklar_tahliye_edildi.html

⁶ "*Turkish National Arrested for Conspiring to Evade U.S. Sanctions Against Iran, Money Laundering and Bank Fraud*" <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/turkish-national-arrested-conspiring-evade-us-sanctions-against-iran-money-laundering-and>

⁷ "*U.S. Wants to Keep Charged Turkish-Iranian Businessman Reza Zarrab in Custody*"

<http://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-wants-to-keep-charged-turkish-iranian-businessman-reza-zarrab-in-custody-1464208901>

crush and hide these operations from sight at the time by arresting the police officers and prosecutors involved. In 2013, the arrests were made on similar charges of money laundering and bribery but Erdogan managed to turn the case around and deemed it as a coup plot against himself by the police officers involved, which also provided him rational for the complete overhaul and purging at that time of the Turkish (National) Police and Judiciary system. Inside Turkey in 2013, Zarrab was very quickly released after receiving open support by Erdogan claiming that he was an honorable businessman and charitable source—as Zarrab had donated millions of dollars to *Erdogan's wife's* charity organization!⁸ Furthermore, Erdogan was never able to explain why and how he had at that time over one billion dollars of cash at his home in Istanbul. It was clear that he, with his son and daughter, were trying to hide that money as the police operations were carried out. His son in fact, clumsily handled affairs and ending up with bungled money transfers showing up in the press—press that Erdogan attacked and shut down soon after. As the Zarrab Federal case in New York starts to further towards a full-scale trial, we will hear more details on the involvement of Erdogan and the Turkish banking system some of which were made public during the corruption charges carried out by the Istanbul Police—unless the U.S. government allows some plea bargain to occur which prevents Zarrab from testifying against the Turkish President, a player who the West so desperately needs at this time as an ally in the fight against ISIS. This would indeed be a troubling development and allow Erdogan once again to evade paying the price of serious corruption.

Additional troubles for Erdogan were the ISIS oil deals in which it was revealed after the Russian plane was shot down that ISIS was selling oil directly to Turkey and profiting Erdogan's son⁹. Turkey and Erdogan's close circles have repeatedly been openly criticized on facilitating the sale and transportation of ISIS oil¹⁰. Upon the attack on the Russian plane, several reports and satellite images were released on how this scheme worked. Moreover, in a recent letter¹¹ written to the UN Security Council, it was detailed how ISIS oil was being transported by BMZ Group Sea Transportation and Construction Company, owned by Erdogan's son Bilal Erdogan, against whom there is also a pending money laundering trial in Italy¹².

Furthermore, domestically Erdogan was having hard times and struggling with the issue of not being able to produce his college diploma. Erdogan to this day could not produce a four-year university diploma to the public which is a constitutional requirement for serving as President of Turkey. Just before the coup attempt, several different copies of clearly fake diplomas were being circulated in the social media by his supporters as a proof of his graduation. However, it was clear that the diplomas were

⁸ *"Turkish First Lady's Charity Got Millions from Accused Fraudster"*

<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-05-26/turkish-first-lady-s-charity-got-millions-from-accused-fraudster>

⁹ *"Russia, Turkey trade accusations over who bought oil from ISIS"* <http://www.cnn.com/2015/12/02/europe/syria-turkey-russia-warplane-tensions/>

¹⁰ *"Russian Letter to UNSC Claims Erdogan's Family are Directing the Smuggling of ISIS Oil!"*

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/aydoaeen-vatanda/russian-letter-to-unsc-cl_b_9502784.html

¹¹ *"Russia unveils 'proof' Turkey's Erdogan is smuggling Isis oil across border from Syria"*

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/russia-releases-proof-turkey-is-smuggling-isis-oil-over-its-border-a6757651.html>

¹² *"Bilal Erdogan: Italy names Turkish president's son in money laundering investigation allegedly connected to political corruption"* <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/bilal-erdogan-italy-investigates-turkish-presidents-son-over-money-laundering-allegedly-connected-to-a6879871.html>

fabricated as the numbers did not match or the signatures of the professors were wrongly recorded (i.e. their academic titles were not correct for the time the academician signed the diploma).

Erdogan, while struggling with all of the aforementioned issues, was pushing hard for constitutional changes that would consolidate his authority as a President and would provide him continued immunity from prosecution as long as he held office. However, he had been losing ground in Turkey as polls prior to the coup showed weakening support towards the idea of a constitutional change. *It was obvious that he would not be able to reach to his goal through democratic means.*

The coup attempt took place in the midst of these political and economic instabilities at a time when Erdogan needed immediate solutions. Consequently, the coup which was most certainly staged came as a savior for Erdogan as he himself openly stated it was “*a gift given by God to him*”. In fact, he was very upfront about this from the beginning of the coup attempt and immediately started to consolidate all the powers he needed, he could not access in the past, because they were not in the constitution. With the coup attempt, Erdogan was able to appeal powerfully to national sentiment and unity while no one could raise any voice against him or would dare to question any of his policies—particularly so after the purges and widespread arrests began.

Uncertainties and Reservations about the Coup Attempt

From the start of the coup attempt until today, there are many crucial unanswered questions and occurrences which cannot be explained logically. To begin with, the coup attempt started at 10 p.m. in the evening. Turkey has experienced several coups in its past and the military is knowledgeable of when and how to carry them out. Indeed, the Turkish military historically has been regarded as the guardian of democracy. Under normal circumstances, people usually do not go to bed before midnight in Turkey and especially in the major cities the streets are alive till midnight. All the past coups happened around 3 to 4 a.m., early in the morning while people were asleep. The beginning of the coup from this perspective was very questionable for having any hope of succeeding. It would be very hard to keep coup actions a secret when television, radio and people themselves were all active observers. Some pro-AKP media argued that the coup was set into motion early in the evening because it had been uncovered and the coup attempters had to rush into carrying out their plans. However, the facts defy this, since the coup attempt was reported by the Turkish National Intelligence to the Military Chief of Staff around 4 p. m., yet there were not any counter measures taken to prevent them from carrying out the coup attempt¹³.

Furthermore, the coup attempters failed to restrict communications. The Internet was not restricted and people kept communicating through social media, and cell phone networks worked without any problems or interruptions. Normally in a coup, the Internet and the mainstream media would be shut down. On the contrary, from the beginning of the coup until the end, almost all media were broadcasting live—leading one to conclude that the plotters wanted the coup actions to appear in media rather than be hidden from it until they had successfully secured power. The only media initially restricted was Turkish State Radio and Television which were not the only major media outlets at the time and later on CNN-Turk was raided by a number of soldiers and the broadcasting was interrupted

¹³ “*Why didn't the Turkish National Intelligence Inform the Chief of Staff on Time*”

http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/turkiye/571482/MiT__darbe_girisimini_neden_haber_vermedi__Hakan_Fidan_MGK_de_cevap_verdi.html

around one hour¹⁴. It is clear that the coup attempters did not want to totally silence the media simply because if they really wanted to shut down broadcasting, they would deploy serious forces to do so.

The coup plotters also failed to arrest almost all the key government figures and allowed them to speak to the media freely. The Prime Minister and several other ministers went live, addressing people via televised broadcasts during the coup. However, it is a well-known fact that in the past, coup plotters would normally arrest all important figures with no one allowed to speak to the media. Not going after the government members and allowing them to freely speak to different media outlets also raises a lot of questions.

Furthermore, F-16s flying over Istanbul did not prevent Erdogan's passenger plane from landing, even though it was clear that if he successfully landed, the coup attempt would be over. The pro-Erdogan media argued after the fact that Erdogan's Gulfstream G450 type TC-ATA small passenger airplane could not be stopped by the F-16's because it was presented as a passenger plane tagged THY 8456 before it landed¹⁵. However, at the same time Erdogan's plane's coordinates were being broadcast in social media with its exact coordinates and even its position on maps was being constantly updated by different Twitter accounts and in other social media platforms¹⁶. Furthermore, it would be naïve to believe that serious coup attempters would not be able to track down Erdogan's plane's position with the military technologies they had in their hands while the plane's coordinates were being spread all over the social media anyways.

Also the Parliament building was attacked by the F-16s in Ankara in a strange move that does not have anything to do with a coup and it is still unclear the rationale behind these attacks—unless it was to create a strong sense of nationalism, outrage and unity among the general population to rally behind President Erdogan who flew into Istanbul on cue, to call for just such demonstrations and outpourings of loyalty and outrage. Several Parliamentarians rushed to the Parliament buildings according to the narratives in the media as they learned of the coup attempt in an effort to counter it. During that time F-16s dropped around ten bombs on the Parliamentary buildings and a helicopter that was over powered by the security forces on the scene tried to land at the National Assembly's garden. The coup plotters again failed to utilize the full forces at their disposal, including land forces around the Parliament and allowed Parliamentarians to freely gather to counter the coup attempt by a joint statement¹⁷. If the coup makers were really serious about interrupting any progress in the Parliament building, they needed to use a squadron of soldiers to surround and empty the Parliament building, not to bombing it. It is a common sense that bombing the National Assembly would critically diminish any support that would be extended to the coup and would turn people away from it.

Indeed, senior AKP leadership and their representatives in the media called people to the streets for mass demonstrations, a move the coup plotters evidently failed to see and calculate. It is obvious that coup plotters risk all and plan ahead their actions and strategies for success. All precautions and

¹⁴ "A Group of Soldiers Enters CNN-Turk Building" <http://www.cnnturk.com/turkiye/asker-cnn-turk-binasina-girdi>

¹⁵ "How Erdogan's Plane Deceives F-16s" <http://www.cnnturk.com/turkiye/cumhurbaskani-erdoganin-ucagi-darbecilerin-f16larini-atlatarak-alana-indi>

¹⁶ "A Website Close to the CIA Made Erdogan's Plane an Open Target" <https://www.sadecehaber.com/cia-sitesi-darbe-gecesi-erdoganin-ucagini-acik-hedef-yapti>

¹⁷ "Parliament Deputies Talk about the Last Night: We have Questions?" <http://www.birgun.net/haber-detay/milletvekilleri-dun-geceyi-anlatiyor-sorulacak-sorular-var-120221.html>

measures are calculated in a way to lead to success. However, with the July 15 coup attempt, it is clear that the planners of this coup did not want to be successful or had somehow been undercut from their first moves.

The existence of inconsistent accounts of Erdogan and his close circles about the coup have also caused more uncertainties and reservations about the coup attempt. For example, Erdogan himself stated five different time frames to account when and how he learned about the coup attempt¹⁸.

If we continue to analyze the aftermath of the coup, we can find many more inconsistencies. For example, Erdogan connected to a TV station via facetime calling people to the streets to support him. At the same time almost without knowing anything about the coup makers and who were behind the coup, Erdogan blamed Mr. Gulen, a Turkish self-exiled Muslim cleric in Pennsylvania, for being behind the coup. That blame continued as he made his speech at the Ataturk airport. It was not clear how Erdogan gathered the evidence and knowledge about who was behind the coup attempt while running away from the coup makers. Later, however cell phone traffic, text-messaging and email intercepts by the UK GCHQ among Erdogan's high government officials were leaked in the German press (Focus magazine¹⁹) showing them agreeing even in the first moments of the coup to blame Gulen for it²⁰.

Erdogan Lands at Ataturk Airport as the Hero

As Erdogan landed at Ataturk airport, he was greeted with thousands of his supporters. It was clear that the coup attempt was over in a few hours and Erdogan all of a sudden became a hero and savior of democracy, versus its clear and longstanding enemy.

Immediately after Erdogan left Ataturk airport, in two to three hours, a list of 1563 military officers suddenly appeared in which those listed were blamed as the organizers and participators of the coup attempt. The prepared list supposedly involved the active coup participating military personnel, but most of the officers in the list were not directly or indirectly involved with the coup, nor could such a list have been so quickly prepared after the coup. It very clearly had been prepared ahead of time.

If one were to believe Erdogan's government, strangely enough, while the mass demonstrations and post-coup attempt precautions were going on, the security and intelligence forces in an extremely short time period investigated the coup, analyzed and figured out who was behind it and found out the coup makers, compiling a list of 1563 officers from all around the country, including listing their whereabouts, their present addresses and got warrants on all of them signed by prosecutors, had judges approve the warrants and distributed that list to eighty-one different provinces all over Turkey so that the perpetrators of the coup could be arrested. I was head of the Turkish National Police Counter Terrorism Unit and I can tell you that from a policing and judiciary standpoint, this is simply impossible.

¹⁸ *"When Erdogan Learned about the Coup Attempt. Inconsistencies of Time Frames at Erdogan's Accounts"*
http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/foto/foto_galeri/575077/1/Darbe_girisimini_ne_zaman_ogrendi__Erdogan_in_soz_lerindeki_saat_farkliliklari.html

¹⁹ *"Report: British Intel Proves Erdogan Staged the Turkey Coup, 'Will Blame Gulen's Hizmet, Sack Millions'"*
http://www.thedailysheep.com/report-british-intel-proves-erdogan-staged-the-turkey-coup-will-blame-gulens-hizmet-sack-millions_072016

²⁰ *"German Focus: Tomorrow the Purge Begins, We Accuse Gulenists"*
<http://romanyahaber.com/2016/07/24/focus-dergisi-ingilizler-ipucu-yakaladi-dedi/>

All those post-coup investigations and operational activities somehow magically were carried out in less than three hours and massive arrests started around the country which targeted not only the officers who were involved in the coup attempt but also several other hundreds who did not have anything to do with it. Many were arrested during their vacations at resorts or at their homes. Some of the generals who were arrested were also clearly against the coup attempt and did not allow their personnel to get involved as they stood by the government. However, that reality was not enough to save them and somehow their names were in the list.

I worked for counterterrorism and operations divisions of the Turkish National Police for my entire tenure with the police as a mid-level manager and later as the Chief of Police in Ankara and Sanliurfa. I have been involved in hundreds of operations and I clearly know the capacity of the police in investigations and operations. Under normal circumstances the highest number the police would consider for a mass operation would be fifty and that would only be possible in the major cities. For an operation of fifty targets, the police would work at least six months prior to the operation to prepare the paperwork, investigation and evidence files against the suspects. Making a list of fifty suspects with their present addresses would even take at least a day or two to ensure there would not be any mistakes in the addresses raided with armed operations. Preparing a major list of 1563 military officers in just under three hours all with their addresses and whereabouts all over Turkey is simply impossible. Gathering such a list with exact present addresses would take days, if not weeks, apart from any investigative activities. Therefore, it is very clear that the arrestee list was prepared well before the coup and also the officers who were going to be arrested were distinguished in advance regardless of their role in the actual coup attempt.

Furthermore, as the first day passed, the arrests did not stop and it was clear and obvious that a very decisive and quick operational groundwork was already in place. People who had nothing to do with the coup attempt, or even did not have any ties with the military or coup makers were unceasingly and mercilessly arrested.

The government started to arrest and fire officers from different elements of society including teachers, doctors, university professors, judges, prosecutors, police officers, people working for different ministries, religious affairs and even workers including drivers and low skilled job employees immediately—all of whom are slowly being replaced with Erdogan's own loyal subjects. Especially the Hizmet movement and people close to Mr. Gulen were targeted. However, a wide range of society from different elements of the public were also arrested and soon people realized that the purge and arrests were not about only the Gulen movement—anyone who opposed Erdogan regardless of his/her ideology were victims of this new wave of arrests and firings. Eventually, the total number of the purged and fired officers from different government posts exceeded 100,000 and the people who were arrested or detained surpassed over 60,000²¹. Some of them have been tortured, others like a nursing mother and wife of a police officer, and an elderly mother of a journalist were arrested in lieu of the actual person under investigation—held until he turned himself in.

One of the prosecutors who was on the list of fired prosecutors and judges, actually had died from natural causes 57 days prior to the coup attempt. In fact, according to journalist Saygi Ozturk the list that contained names of 2075 fired prosecutors and judges was prepared two years ago based on in

²¹"Turkey widens post-coup purge" <http://turkeypurge.com/>

which cities they were working at the time²². This alone proves that the lists were arranged before the coup.

Following the coup, some of Parliament members pushed a bill to establish an investigation commission, a constitutional tool to investigate critical incidents occurring in the country. However, Erdogan was against it and ordered his AKP party not to accept this petition which was then overturned with AKP votes. If Erdogan and AKP were so sure of themselves about the coup attempt, why wouldn't they accept a Parliamentary investigation to uncover the details of the coup also raises another challenging question.

The coup attempt was carried out by a group of military officers whom named themselves Yurtta Sulh Cuntasi, or Peace at Home Junta. However, to this day nobody knows the members of the junta, who assumed what kind of role and what were the ranks of the officers in it. If the junta had led the coup, not revealing the identities of the junta members still is one of the biggest and most important mysteries of this coup attempt. So far nobody knows who were the leaders of the coup attempt and who were the members of the junta.

The official criminal investigations during the court proceedings are being carried out secretly based on the decision of the courts. Because of that no one has seen any evidence against the arrested coup attempters and the public is not informed about the statements of military officers. The only statements made public are the statements which are leaked to pro-Erdogan newspapers and belong to the arrestees seen on TV and in newspapers confessing, after they were tortured. Therefore, if the government is not hiding anything, they would not carry out the investigations clandestinely and would reveal all the details of the coup attempt they uncovered during their investigations to the public without any hesitations. Likewise, the use of torture makes any confession suspicious.

The physical evidence that we can learn so far from the media through the purposefully leaked details of the investigations do not shed any light over the coup attempt. The biggest physical evidence put before of the public was one dollar bills which were said to be a signal and identifier of those involved with Gulen and the coup. For days the media close to Erdogan published the pictures of dollar bills that were found in the possession of arrested military personnel. For example, Diyarbakir Army corps commander Lieutenant General Ibrahim Yilmaz was arrested because he had a one-dollar bill in his possession even though himself and his officers were not involved in the coup attempt. When asked by the media as he was arrested, Lieutenant General Yilmaz explained that he often traveled overseas as part of his duty and he had in his wallet a one-hundred-dollar bill, a five-dollar-bill and two one-dollar-bills at the time of his arrest. He added that he also had Euros and Franks at his home simply because he traveled abroad frequently²³. However, he was arrested anyway. Like him, hundreds were arrested because of one dollar bills, an act of craziness as several people in Turkey used to distribute one dollar bills during wedding ceremonies as gestures. Another evidence put in front of the public came out to be a GTA (grand theft auto) video game cheat sheet.

²² *"A Prosecutor Fired for being Coup Supporter Actually Had Died 2 Months Ago"*

<http://www.baroturk.com/hsyknin-darbe-girisimine-iliskin-aciga-aldigi-savcilardan-biri-2-ay-once-olmus-23371h.htm>

²³ *"Diyarbakir Army corps commander Lieutenant General Ibrahim Yilmaz: 'I am Innocent'"*

<http://www.hedefhalk.com/tutuklanan-diyarbakir-7nci-kolordu-komutani-ibrahim-yilmaz-ben-masumum-817488h.htm>

It is claimed in the media that a team of SAT commandos were sent during the coup to arrest Erdogan in Marmaris where he was taking his vacation for the last week. Extraordinarily, the commando team sent to arrest Erdogan could not find the address where he was staying and asked people on the streets where his hotel was²⁴. If Erdogan was the prime target of the coup, how could the team sent to arrest him have not planned their operation in depth beforehand? What kind of professional operation team going after such a high important target arrives to the scene in such an absurd way to not to know the address of their prime target remains to this day, a mystery as well.

Turkish Military Chief of Staff, Hulusi Akar's accounts for the coup are also inconsistent. According to Turkish National Intelligence (TNI), Akar was informed about the coup around 4 p.m. by the Director of the TNI Fidan personally going to the Chief of Staff's headquarters. However, Akar had not informed anyone including the President and the Prime Minister about the coup attempt based on the statements. The Prime Minister stated in public that he first learned about the coup around 9 p.m. when President Erdogan called him and added that he could not reach to the Chief of Staff when he tried to call him at 9 pm. President Erdogan on his account provided several different time frames ranging from 4 pm to 9 pm and obviously Akar was not among the people who informed him of the coup. Furthermore, even though Akar was informed about the coup attempt, he did not order for any preparations nor did he carry out any activity to halt or to prevent the coup attempt while he was sitting in his office without any extra security measures against the coup, even though it is very obvious that the Chief of Staff himself would be one of the prime targets of coup makers. Furthermore, Akar did not communicate with the Chief Commander of the Air Force who was in a wedding in Istanbul and the Chief Commander of the Gendarmerie who was also in a wedding in Ankara both of whom claimed that they learned about the coup from television while they were at wedding ceremonies²⁵. Akar also claimed that the coup plotters put a gun on his head to sign the coup statement in the middle of the coup²⁶. However, it does not make any sense for the coup attempters to worry about the legality of their actions as they are by default illegal till they seize the power, and if they can't seize the power no amount of paperwork is going to save them nevertheless. All these accounts are highly suspicious and clearly indicate the existence of a pre-arranged and staged coup attack. Under normal circumstances, a commander of the military would do everything in his power to halt and prevent a coup attempt and would communicate with his top brass immediately. However, we obviously see that clearly he was not concerned at all. More abnormally Akar and some of his top aides were not fired after the coup even though they did not take any measures to stop it.

Finally, Major General Mehmet Disli who is the brother of AKP Deputy Chairman Saban Disli²⁷ was told to be one of the main organizers of the coup attempt. General Disli was among the coup makers who forced Chief of Staff Hulusi Akar to sign the coup statement by putting a gun on his head and by strangling him with a belt based on Akar's statement. Akar with other arrested generals were sent to Akinci base as captives. However, strangely Disli accompanied Akar after he was saved from Akinci base as the coup was over. It is extremely difficult to understand why Akar would let someone to accompany

²⁴ "SAT Commandos Asked People on the Streets about Whereabouts of Erdogan"

<http://www.timeturk.com/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-in-yerini-sivillere-sormuslar/haber-215614>

²⁵ "An Army of Inconsistencies" http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/turkiye/574782/Bir_ordu_celiski.html

²⁶ "They Put a Gun on Akar's Head and his Throat was Tied with a Belt" <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/genelkurmay-baskani-hulusi-akaran-basina-silah-dayadilar-bogazini-kemerle-siktilar-40150883>

²⁷ <https://www.akparti.org.tr/english/yonetim/baskanliklar>

him after his release as the coup attempt was over; especially someone who threatened to kill him hours ago²⁸. If Disli was among the coup makers, why he was with Akar when they went to Prime Ministry building on July 16 morning remains one of the greatest uncertainties of the coup attempt.

Furthermore, over eight thousand military officers were arrested and almost ninety percent of them were not involved with the coup directly. They were either arrested at their homes or at vacation places. So far nobody knows what was the relationship of the arrested officers with the coup makers. Half of the generals in the Turkish military, over one hundred-forty, and about six hundred colonels were arrested. Several other officers from the military were also fired²⁹. If over half of the high-level military officers were involved in the coup somehow based on the arrests and the purge, why they were not successful and risked their futures in failing is also unclear.

Conclusions

The existence of unanswered inquiries and inconsistent accounts of Erdogan and his close circles have caused more uncertainties and reservations about the coup attempt rather than clarify what really happened.

Surprisingly, a clear pre-Coup pivot to reviving relations with Putin's Russia and also Israel occurred as Erdogan realized that the Zarrab case in federal court likely number's his days of any type of salvageable relationship with the U.S. Floundering to stay in power and to consolidate that power, Erdogan has now become a totalitarian dictator and is in the process of setting up a vertical system of governance much like Putin's. Indeed, the military generals who survived the coup are pro-Russian³⁰, where as those that were fired were pro-Western, a harm that U.S. Central Command Commander Gen. Joseph Votel said would be a loss to collaborative efforts with the West³¹. Erdogan also has accepted a pledge of 500 billion dollars³² from Saudi Arabia to keep him in power. Likewise, he continues to illicitly and even openly support ISIS who help him to keep the Kurdish issue at bay.

Furthermore, the worst is not only the arrests that took place. Amnesty International reports that military officers arrested in Ankara and Istanbul were bloodied and even raped to exhort confessions from them³³. Youth were arrested without reasons. Anyone carrying a dollar bill, even wedding revelers throwing dollar bills to the newly wedded couple were arrested and charged as terrorists. Anti-American sentiment was fanned into flames with the Incirlik air base surrounded by demonstrators as Erdogan's

²⁸ "Major General Mehmet Disli Puzzlement" <http://www.sozcu.com.tr/2016/gundem/mehmet-disli-muammasi-1319328/>

²⁹ "Several Generals are Detained" <http://www.sozcu.com.tr/2016/gundem/cok-sayida-general-ve-amiral-gozaltinda-il-il-gozalti-listesi-1317450/>

³⁰ "Playing with Fire: Erdogan's Anti-U.S. Scheme" By Ahmet S Yayla & Anne Speckhard <http://www.worldpolicy.org/blog/2016/07/27/playing-fire-erdo%C4%9Fans-anti-us-scheme>

³¹ "Pentagon Allies Jailed in Turkey Amid Coup Backlash, General Says" <http://blogs.wsj.com/washwire/2016/07/28/pentagon-allies-jailed-in-turkey-amid-coup-backlash-general-says/>

³² "King Salman Decides to Invest 500 billion dollars in Turkey" <https://www.sadecehaber.com/kral-selmandan-turkiyeye-550-milyar-dolarlik-yatirim>

³³ "Turkey detainees tortured, raped after failed coup, rights group says" <http://www.cnn.com/2016/07/26/europe/turkey-coup-attempt-aftermath/>

controlled press whipped them into a frenzy of believing the Americans were behind the coup and unbelievably, were harboring ISIS members at the base³⁴.

Western policy makers need to formulate the right combination of incentives and disincentives to deal with Erdogan. Obviously, Erdogan is no longer a friend of the U.S. and its NATO allies, and likely can never be so again. While the world clearly needs Turkey to stem the flow of foreign fighters and now those leaving ISIS—as they will likely be dangerous to the EU, Balkans and to U.S. interests at home and abroad, it is unlikely the democratic West can offer anything to Erdogan—except support as a totalitarian dictator and immunity from corruption charges—that would entice him to meet the West’s needs in the fight against ISIS and the struggle to bring peace in Syria and Iraq. Erdogan has not been a true ally to the U.S. and to the West for years now—shutting down the free press and supporting terrorist organizations on their soil and in Syria and Iraq. He will not be the West’s ally in the future for sure. And Russia’s Putin is delighted to use him as a member of NATO with full veto power and to embrace him as the totalitarian dictator that he has become—arresting, torturing, imprisoning and purging any that oppose him.

We need to stand strong and firm as a supporter of democratic Turkey with freedom of expression, human rights and the free press which is essential in all democracies. We also need to stand against torture and a radically unjust judicial system. Turkey is clearly being governed by an oppressive regime now. The due process, rule of law, human rights and simply human dignity mean nothing for this regime as long as its illicit objectives can be met. Erdogan and his close circles for years have now gotten away with crushing the press, massive corruption and illicit dealings, human rights violations and the open and hidden support provided to terrorist organizations in the region including ISIS. With the press under government control, ordinary Turkish citizens have no access to the truth and they cannot really understand what is going on in Turkey. Undoubtedly, Western policy makers must understand that there is an urgent need to formulate effective responses to deal with this oppressive regime which is now blackmailing the United States with the Incirlik air base and the fight against ISIS and the EU with the open flow of Syrian refugees. Otherwise, very soon, we will have to deal with a new Turkey and a possibly even a new Political Islamist Turkish Dictatorship—a country that may become the Sunni version of Iran, as we watch Turkey cut its ties with the West and NATO and approach even closer to Russia and to radical and extremists elements in the Middle East.

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³⁴ “Cuppeli Ahmet Analyzes Post Coup Attempt and Calls People to Prayers” <http://akmusluman.com/cubbeli-ahmet-hoca-efendi-gundemi-degerlendirerek-vatandaslara-onemli-bir-cagrid/>