

Turkey: Failed coup was years in the making

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The failed coup in Turkey was years in the making, writes Ahmet Zeki Üçok.



Ahmet Zeki Üçok | *Photo credit: Youtube*

What happened on 15 July? Politicians and commentators in Europe and elsewhere have hastily sought and found simple answers, and prescribed equally simple solutions: "The military staged a coup. It failed. Now carry on as before."

This prescription is based on a diagnosis that is both superficial and wrong. Fundamentally, it underestimates the extent of the sickness that had taken hold of the Turkish body politic, as well as the depth and duration of the groundwork that made this possible.

For 40 years, the Gülen network has been working to infiltrate the organs of the Turkish Republic. Their methods are sophisticated, and their reach is broad: Gülenists carried codenames,

communicated through encrypted systems, reported to a parallel hierarchy of "brothers" and systematically bugged and wiretapped state institutions. They stole the military academy entrance exam papers to help their candidates.

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Today, approximately 100,000 officers are estimated to have links to the movement. Of the 358 generals in the Turkish Armed Forces today, 160 have been connected to this organisation.

Let me be clear: their influence is not benign. The movement's political objective is to destabilise the Republic of Turkey.

I have seen what the movement does first hand: I was both accused and imprisoned for allegedly taking part in a coup plot known as the Balyoz, or "Sledgehammer", case, in which Gülenist Terror Organisation FETÖ (Fetullahçı Terör Örgütü) agents who had infiltrated state apparatus fabricated evidence to frame their opponents.

Turkey is founded on a constitutional model familiar to many: republican government, equality before the law, and separation of powers. But these principles do not provide answers to the questions that stem from this widespread infiltration.

How should Turkish society respond when the integrity of the judiciary is compromised by widespread penetration by a terrorist movement? When police officers report to the Gülenist hierarchy, rather than their line of command?

Or when sections of the military are controlled by politically-motivated activists that do not shy away from flying bombing raids on the Turkish Parliament?

Turkish society is in shock. It is vital that our partners and neighbours understand why. The challenge is to restore the integrity of Turkey's institutions.

While there are huge difficulties ahead, there are also opportunities. Wide-reaching reform means that for the first time Turkey's military is subject to civilian control of an elected government - an epochal change.

Those officers and civil servants marginalised by the old Gülenist guard are being rehabilitated. And the unprecedented unity in opposing the coup made it clear that the vast majority in Turkey are committed to democratic principles.

The extraordinary turbulence we are witnessing would sorely test any country's mettle. The Turkish Republic is determined to master the challenges that FETÖ, PKK, ISIS and millions of migrants pose. This is in our mutual interest. Europe's own security is directly linked to Turkey's stability.

About the author

Colonel Ahmet Zeki Üçok is a retired Turkish army military prosecutor

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