

Erdogan's Checkmate: CIA-Backed Coup in Turkey Fails, Upsets Global Chessboard

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The failed coup in Turkey last week was a political and geopolitical earthquake as it has the potential to fundamentally alter the Middle East, NATO, and potentially the balance of power globally. But while the implications of the recent developments are clear, what actually took place on the night/morning of July 15 - July 16 is still somewhat shrouded in mystery. But why is that? Why are the connections for the most part not being made by Western pundits and journalists alike?

Here again we run into the controlled corporate media apparatus, one which is dominated by the very same interests that dominate the governments of the US and EU, and its incredible power to misinform. As the great Michael Parenti famously [wrote](#),

“[The media’s] job is not to inform but disinform, not to advance democratic discourse but to dilute and mute it. Their task is to give every appearance of being conscientiously concerned about events of the day, saying so much while meaning so little, offering so many calories with so few nutrients.”

Nowhere is Parenti’s contention more true than with the coup in Turkey. For while the media has certainly reported the [allegations](#) from President Erdogan and his government of the hidden hand of US-based billionaire Fetullah Gulen, almost none of the major media outlets have done the necessary investigation to uncover the real significance of Gulen and his movement. Specifically, and almost as if by magic, there is virtually no mention of Gulen’s longstanding ties to the CIA, his penetration of the various institutions of the Turkish state, nor is there any serious investigation into the financial networks and connections leading from Gulen to nearly every corner of the Islamic (and non-Islamic) world.

And while Gulen, along with many neocons in the US, have been propagating the narrative that President Erdogan and his forces themselves [staged the coup](#) in order to justify the ongoing crackdown on political rivals, secularists, and other anti-Erdogan forces, the media by and large has not connected the events in Turkey to their larger geopolitical significance, one which should shed some light on what may have happened. And, in a further dereliction of duty, the media has also mostly ignored the absolutely critical likelihood of the involvement of US-NATO intelligence.

History as a Guide

From Iran in 1953 to Chile in 1973 and countless other countries, the CIA and its intelligence agency cousins in NATO have been involved in myriad coups similar to the one that took place in Turkey last week. However, one would be remiss in not noting the striking

similarities between the 2016 coup in Turkey and the one that took place on September 12, 1980.

Throughout the mid to late 1970s Turkey saw a major upsurge of terrorism and violence, much of which was attributed to fascist formations such as the Grey Wolves, along with other groups. However, what is now known is that much of the violence took the form of provocations which many experts allege were orchestrated by CIA-affiliated individuals and networks.

Perhaps the most significant of these was Paul Henze, a man who spent decades as an intelligence coordinator in Ethiopia, Turkey, and elsewhere throughout the Cold War. As Daniele Ganser noted in his book [*NATO's Secret Armies: Operation GLADIO and Terrorism in Western Europe*](#),

“A right wing extremist on trial later plausibly argued that the massacres and terrors of the 1970s had been a strategy to bring [coup leader General] Evren and the military right to power: ‘The massacres were a provocation by the [Turkish intelligence agency] MIT. With the provocations by the MIT and the CIA the ground was prepared for the September 12 coup.’” (p. 239)

But of course, these actions did not take place in a vacuum; there were intelligence operators in place who facilitated the events that took place. As renowned author and media critic Edward Herman and co-author Frank Brodhead wrote in their 1986 book [*The Rise and Fall of the Bulgarian Connection*](#):

“Paul Henze began his long CIA career under Defense Department cover as a “foreign affairs adviser” in 1950. Two years later, he began a six-year hitch as a policy adviser to Radio Free Europe (RFE) in Munich, West Germany. By 1969, Henze was CIA chief of station in Ethiopia, and he served as station chief in Turkey from 1974 through 1977. When Zbigniew Brzezinski assembled his National Security Council team for President Jimmy Carter, Henze was hired as the CIA’s representative to the NSC office in the White House.”



Considering the intimate connection between Henze and Brzezinski (image right), it is not hard to see that Henze was essentially involved in the same global operation as Brzezinski, namely the weaponization of terrorism for strategic gain against the Soviet Union. And while Brzezinski famously masterminded the creation of the mujahideen in Afghanistan, Henze already had achieved similar results in Turkey, organizing right wing forces for the purposes of destabilization. In his book, Gansler cites counter-terrorism scholar and expert on GLADIO operations Selhattin Celik, who wrote

in 1999 that:

“[When US President Jimmy Carter] heard about [the 1980 coup in Turkey] he called Paul Henze, former Chief of the CIA station in Turkey who had left Ankara shortly before the coup to become a security adviser to President Carter in Washington on the Turkey desk of the CIA...Carter told Henze what the latter already knew: ‘Your people have just made a coup!’ The President was right. Paul Henze, the day after the coup, had triumphantly declared to his CIA colleagues in Washington: ‘Our boys have done it!’”

Celik bluntly referred to Henze as “the chief architect of the September 12, 1980 coup.” It’s not hard to see why. From having been on the ground in the early to mid-1970s, to then becoming a coordinator in Washington while being the point person on Turkey for the National Security Council under Brzezinski, Henze was clearly instrumental. As Gansler notes, according to Celik,

“Brzezinski supported the position of Henze. During a discussion in the National Security Council of the situation in Iran where in 1979 Khomeiny [sic] had seized power Brzezinski expressed his view that ‘for Turkey as for Brazil a military government would be the best solution.’”

While none of this should come as a surprise to anyone remotely familiar with how US intelligence operated in the Cold War, perhaps the depth of the connections between US intelligence, its NATO cousins, and the Turkish military and deep state represent something of an epiphany. As Turkish politician and social activist Ertugrul Kurkcü wrote in [Covert Action Quarterly](#) in 1997:

The close ties between the Turkish, US military, and intelligence circles, along with US concerns over Turkey’s military cooperation, have been major obstacles in Turkey’s path to broader democracy. [Turkish politician and journalist Fikri] Saglar charges that US interest in Turkish affairs is not confined to official NATO relations and trade ties. He points to the notorious message by the CIA’s then-Turkey Station Chief Paul Henze in Ankara to his colleagues in Washington the day after the 1980 coup “Our boys have done it!” Henze crowed. Saglar concludes that foreign intelligence organizations including the CIA, have coopted collaborators from among the extreme-right and exploited them for their particular interests.

In effect, what the 1980 coup demonstrates more than anything is that the Turkish military, as well as the far right fascist terror gangs such as the Grey Wolves, are in various ways assets of the US, and under the thumb of US intelligence. To be sure, one could quibble about the degree to which they are entirely assets, proxies, or simply longtime collaborators, but this distinction is of minor importance. What matters is that the historical record clearly indicates collusion between the Turkish military and deep state and the CIA.

But this is all ancient history, right? Surely these networks and connections have eroded over time, and what happened in 1980 is of only secondary significance to the internal politics of Turkey and the ongoing struggles for power. Well, yes...but on second thought, maybe not.

Who’s Who on the Turkish Chessboard?

In trying to provide analysis of what just took place in Turkey, one must have some understanding of the political factions vying for power in Turkey. They can roughly be broken down into three camps, though there is often overlap between the groups.

The first faction is that of President Erdogan and his Justice and Development Party (AKP). Erdogan and the AKP come from the “moderate Islamist” milieu of the Muslim Brotherhood, having spent years fighting against the militantly secular Turkish military and state order. As Dr. Essam al-Erian, a Muslim Brotherhood leader, [explained](#) in 2007, “the Muslim Brotherhood is an Islamic group that has a close relationship with all moderate Islamists, the most prominent of which is the Justice and Development Party.”

This point is of critical importance because it connects Erdogan and his political machine to a much broader international network active throughout the Middle East and North Africa. It further provides an explanation as to Erdogan’s seeming fanaticism over the war in Syria and the removal of President Bashar al-Assad whose father [crushed the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood in 1982](#), as well as his unwavering support for former Egyptian President Morsi, the Muslim Brotherhood leader deposed by current President Sisi.

The second faction is that of the Kemalists, with its power generally residing in the military and elements of the deep state. They see themselves as the custodians of the legacy of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the founder of the Republic of Turkey. The Kemalists are deeply connected to major capitalist interests in the country, and have a long history of collaboration with the US and NATO. As noted above, the Turkish military has long-standing ties to the CIA and NATO intelligence, and has long been understood as one of the most reliable US-NATO partners.

The third political faction of note is that of Turkish billionaire Fetullah Gulen whose global network of schools has made him into one of the single most powerful individuals in the region, though he runs his network from the comfort of his Pennsylvania estate. Not only has the Gulen network made significant inroads penetrating nearly every state institution in Turkey, it is also hugely influential in the US, both in terms of long-standing ties to US intelligence, and perhaps equally important, its massive lobbying and influence-peddling apparatus. Indeed, in 2010 six major Turkish-American federations with ties to the Gulen movement joined together to create the [Assembly of Turkic American Federations \(ATAF\)](#), a non-profit organization that has become one of the more prominent lobbying groups in Washington dealing with Turkish and Turkic peoples issues.

It is essential to remember that although it is known that last week’s coup was carried out by elements of the military, it is unclear exactly which faction they were representing, or if it was a combination of two. But here it is useful to examine the recent history of the Gulen network (known as Hizmet) and its penetration of state institutions in order to assess what potential role it may have played in the coup.

Connecting the Dots: Fetullah Gulen and CIA Fingerprints on Turkey Coup?

While it is easy to point the finger at the CIA and US-NATO intelligence for anything that happens anywhere in the world – the Empire’s reach is truly global – one must be cautious not to simply assert US culpability without properly drawing out the tangible connections. And in this case, that is doubly true. However, it is here that Gulen’s significance really comes into play, for it is his far-reaching network of contacts, surrogates, and proxies that have penetrated nearly every significant state institution.

Long before last week's failed coup, analysts had been making the connection between Gulen, infiltration of the Turkish state, and the CIA. As political analyst Osman Softic [wrote](#) in 2014:

"Given that the Hizmet sympathizers skilfully [sic] infiltrated some of the most sensitive structures of the state such as the police, intelligence, judiciary and public prosecution, it is quite plausible that this movement may have served as a convenient mechanism for destabilization and even overthrow of the Erdoğan government, by much more powerful and sinister international actors... Gulen himself may have become a convenient pawn in their attempt to destabilize Turkey."

The allegation that Gulen agents have penetrated all throughout the Turkish state is nothing new. In fact, such assertions have dogged Gulen and the Hizmet movement for at least the last two decades. But it is the connection to US intelligence and the elite circles of US foreign policy that truly completes the picture.

Enter Graham Fuller, former Vice Chairman of the CIA's National Intelligence Council, whose links to Gulen's movement run deep. Fuller has gone so far as to defend Gulen on Huffington Post in recent days in an article entitled [The Gulen Movement Is Not a Cult — It's One of the Most Encouraging Faces of Islam Today](#) in which he admits - he had no choice as it is well documented - that he wrote a letter in support of Gulen's green card application to the US in 2006. Although his rhetoric attempts to distort the nature of, and reason behind, his support for Gulen, Fuller does imply that Hizmet represents a social movement aligned with, and amenable to, US interests, one which could be used as a potent weapon in a critical NATO ally.

Fuller fails to note that he doesn't simply have a passing connection with the Gulen movement, but that he has attended numerous Gulenist functions including large events, such as those organized by the [Turquoise Council for Americans and Eurasians](#), a reputed Gulenist umbrella organization run by Kemal Oksuz (a.k.a. Kevin Oksuz), [a prominent member of the Gulen network](#).

In addition to Fuller, infamous former CIA operative and US Ambassador to Turkey, Morton Abramowitz, also [wrote a letter backing Gulen](#) as he sought sanctuary in the US. Interestingly, Abramowitz was also the co-author, along with fellow neocons Eric Edelman and Blaise Misztal, of a fiery January 2014 [op-ed in the Washington Post](#) that all but demanded that the US topple Erdogan's government. Yes, chin-scratchingly interesting.

So, let's see if we got it all down. Gulen leads a multi-billion dollar business empire and [charter/private school network](#) with global reach. He is directly connected to two of the most notorious CIA operatives in the recent history of US-Turkish relations. He has a political lobbying network whose tentacles stretch from Washington to Central Asia. Oh, and by the way, according to former Turkish intelligence chief Osman Nuri Gundes, Gulen's network of schools in the Central Asian nations of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan provided the [cover for at least 130 CIA agents](#) in the mid to late 90s.

Now let's add to that equation the fact that the RAND corporation, one of the most influential think tanks within US policy circles, suggested in a detailed 2004 report entitled [Civil Democratic Islam: Partners, Resources, and Strategies](#) that US policy should:

“Support the modernists first, enhancing their vision of Islam over that of the traditionalists by providing them with a broad platform to articulate and disseminate their views. They, not the traditionalists, should be cultivated and publicly presented as the face of contemporary Islam...Support the secularists on a case-by-case basis.”

It would seem that, more than a decade ago, and at a time when Gulen and Erdogan were still friendly, their organizations still allied, that US policy was to push Gulen and the moderate Islamist elements that he and Erdogan represented. It seems quite likely that the falling out between Erdogan and Gulen had less to do with personal issues and egos (though that undoubtedly played a part) than it did with policy and loyalty.

The Geopolitics and Strategy of the Failed Coup

Despite his commendable service to US imperialism in Syria, including [hosting both terrorist and Syrian expatriate proxies of the US](#), Erdogan has clearly upset the apple cart with Washington. Perhaps his most egregious crime came just recently when he issued [an apology](#) for the November 2015 downing of a Russian jet. But, of course, it wasn't the apology itself that set off official Washington, it was the reorientation of Turkish foreign policy away from the US, NATO, and Europe, and towards Russia, China, and the emerging non-western power bloc. This was his grave sin. And it wasn't the first time, though undoubtedly Washington wanted to make sure it would be his last.

One must recall that Erdogan has a nasty habit of making deals with US adversaries, including the signing of the massive [Turk Stream](#) pipeline deal, the [decision to purchase missile systems from China](#) (which Erdogan later reneged on), the signing of a lucrative [nuclear energy deal with Russia](#), and many others. In short, for Washington, Erdogan proved to be an unreliable ally at best, and a dangerous political manipulator at worst. So, as with so many leaders who came to be seen that way by the US political elites, he had to go. And Gulen's network would come in handy.

Perhaps one of the most striking aspects of the events of the failed coup was the use of the NATO base at Incirlik. As the [Los Angeles Times noted](#):

“Turkish officials said the organizers of the uprising were given crucial aid from officers at Incirlik Air Base, a facility that hosts most of the 2,500 U.S. military personnel stationed in Turkey and is a key base for the U.S.-led coalition's ongoing air campaign to defeat the Islamic State militant group in neighboring Iraq and Syria... official media reported the arrest of the top Turkish military official at Incirlik, Gen. Bekir Ercan Van. Van was among 10 soldiers arrested at the base, part of an operation Turkish officials say provided air-to-air refueling for F-16 fighter jets...[which] were a crucial part of the coup attempt, used to intimidate government supporters in the streets.”

The implications of this information should not be understated. While it is entirely possible that the story was concocted by Erdogan's people in order to carry out a purge of top military officials perhaps seen as disloyal to Erdogan or much too loyal to secular Kemalists, it is also plausible that the Turkish government's narrative is correct.

Were that to be the case, then the obvious implication would be that Incirlik was a base of operations for the coup, the locus of Turkish military power behind the coup, and US intelligence and military behind them. Considering the centrality of Incirlik to NATO

operations in the Middle East, it is not unreasonable to assume that aside from just military personnel, Incirlik is a node in the global CIA network. In fact, considering that the base is home to both [US drones conducting operations in the Syria-Iraq theater](#), as well as [a hub of the US “extraordinary rendition” program](#), it almost goes without saying that Incirlik houses significant CIA assets.

Seen from this perspective then, Incirlik was obviously pivotal to the failed coup plot, and has since become essential to Erdogan’s purging of his rivals from the ranks of the military. Moreover, it was long a bone of contention between Ankara and Washington, with [Erdogan’s government wanting to assert more control over the base](#) than Washington was prepared to allow. In many ways, Incirlik became the nexus of a tectonic shift in Turkish politics, and in the geopolitics of the region.

Ultimately, the failed 2016 coup in Turkey will have lasting ramifications that will impact the years and decades ahead. With Turkey now clearly breaking with the US-NATO-EU axis, it is rather predictable that it will seek to not only mend fences with both Russia and China, but to place itself into the non-western camp typified by BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, China’s One Belt One Road strategy, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, etc.

The failure of the coup is clearly a failure for the US and its allies who see in Erdogan an adversary, not a partner. For his part, Erdogan has much criminal behavior to answer for. From his illegal fomenting of war in Syria, to the purges and arbitrary detentions ongoing in Turkey today, to the attacks on secular institutions and human rights, Erdogan has a rap sheet a mile long. But of course sharing a bed with criminal regimes has never been a problem for Washington.

No, the problem has been, and will continue to be, that Erdogan doesn’t play by the rules; rules set forth by the US. And with this US-backed coup, he will only get stronger. Surely, many sleepless nights lay ahead for the strategic planners in Washington.

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