

Three Helicopters sent to ‘Kill or Capture’ Erdogan at Hotel During Coup, Leaks say

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Information leaked to both Turkish daily Hurriyet and Al-Jazeera on Sunday confirmed an attempt to kill or capture Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and unveiled further details about the inner workings of the attempted coup.

Hurriyet reported that First Army Commander Umit Dundar contacted Erdogan on Friday night, about an hour before the coup began, to inform him that putschists had started to move on his position, allowing time for the president to escape before soldiers stormed his place of residence.

The Turkish newspaper published the new leaks, obtained by a writer close to decision-making circles, which said that Dundar called Erdogan while the president was on vacation at a resort in Marmaris, southwest Turkey.

“You are our legitimate president,” Dundar told Erdogan. “I am at your side, there is a huge coup and the situation is out of control in Ankara. Come to Istanbul and I will secure your access to the roads and accommodations there.”

The newspaper said that special units backed by helicopters stormed the hotel to arrest or assassinate the president, about a half hour after he left. By that time, he was on his way to Istanbul.

Details of the story were confirmed by Al-Jazeera Istanbul bureau chief Abdul Azim Mohammed, who added that the three helicopters from the military’s special forces that arrived at Erdogan’s hotel in Marmaris were carrying 40 soldiers with the intention of killing or capturing the president.

The presidential guard clashed with the coup soldiers before several of them fled through the mountains after one of their helicopters broke down.

Al-Jazeera also reported that the commander of the gendarmerie in Bursa, Colonel Muharrem Kose, was arrested three hours after the attempted coup.

Kose was in possession of a list of more than 80 people who were supposed to administer the country in the next stage of the coup, after a state of emergency was declared.

The list included military officers, ministers, judges, prosecutors and governors.

Inside the coup

Al Jazeera also received leaks of a series of WhatsApp messages between the coup leaders and participants.

They had created a group on the smartphone application to communicate and send commands to their fellow conspirators. The leaks show that the group was active, with the coup leadership receiving responses from their subordinates.

According to the leaked messages, the coup was planned to start at 03:00am (local time), but an emergency forced them to bring forward the start of their plot in Ankara and Istanbul.

They then set about controlling key government buildings, bridges and airports.

The messages show that the coup began at 21:30pm. Military units were sent to the two cities and, within 15 minutes, they had taken control of the bridges that cross the Bosphorus Strait in Istanbul. Ten minutes later, they took control of the building of state-run broadcaster TRT.

The leaks also indicate that military units arrived at the Ataturk Airport in Istanbul to surround it at 22:00pm, and that the putschists faced resistance from police in Bayrampasa district of central Istanbul.

The correspondence included evidence of some police officers' willingness to join the coup.

Turkish authorities became aware of the plot at 22:00pm, prompting the coup leaders to send orders to their soldiers to shoot any members of the security forces who resisted them.

The leaked messages include an order to the coup forces present on the Bosphorus bridges to allow some stranded citizens to leave and to kill any resisting police officers trying to cross the bridge.

Copies of the leaked messages confirmed that former air force commander General Akin Ozturk was the mastermind of the attempted coup, and that the original plan was to declare a state of emergency and curfew and halt air traffic at 06:00am.

CIA, CNN & Coups

Hurriyet also reported that two months ago, a former US intelligence agent revealed he had discussed with Turkish officials "the possibility of a coup".

On Friday evening, CNN hosted several former CIA agents to discuss the coup attempt.

Among them was former officer intelligence Robert Baer, who said that he had participated in successful coups in other countries.

Baer said the coup attempt in Turkey was "not professionally done". He added that the putschists should have occupied CNN Turk's building, where Erdogan appeared that night via Facetime and asked the Turkish people to protest against the coup.

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