

Weapons Cache Unearthed in Turkish Coup Plot

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A large cache of weapons, ammunition and bombs was found yesterday buried in Ankara's Gölbaşı district as a result of a police search based on a map found in the home of İbrahim Şahin, a former head of the National Police Department's Special Operations Unit. The operation was launched after Şahin recently ordered the assassination of non-Muslim minority leaders in Sivas.

Şahin was detained along with 36 others on Wednesday in the investigation into Ergenekon, a clandestine network of groups and individuals accused of trying to overthrow the government. Thirty types of explosives and bombs as well as two shoulder carried LAWs (light-anti tank weapon) were found buried in the ground. Newspapers wrapped around the weapons were from the year 2004, the police said. According to the initial official list, there were a large number of bullets for 9mm guns, two LAWs, 10 hand grenades whose serial numbers had been removed and 10 smoke bombs used in training with colored smoke. Another boxed explosive was found in the first phases of the excavation, the police said. There were also plastic explosives buried at the site. The materials found have yet to be examined thoroughly at a police crime lab.

The excavation of the site started on Thursday and continued until midday. The teams resumed digging on Friday and located the munitions. Excavations were also launched in the Bala, Mamak, Emek, Beştepe, Saklıbahçe and Atatürk Orman Çiftliği districts of the city, as well as in the city of Hatay, to locate more weapons possibly buried in these areas, based on evidence that emerged from investigations following Wednesday's arrests.

The operation started when Şahin, whose phone conversations had been tapped by police for at least two months, recently gave the order to finalize plans to assassinate Armenian community members in the city of Sivas. Twelve others were detained in Sivas during Wednesday's operation. Police also found evidence that the group was plotting to kill prominent figures including Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Former Chief of General Staff Yaşar Büyükanıt, Police Department Intelligence Unit Chief Ramazan Akyürek, journalist Fehmi Kuru, author Orhan Pamuk and some politicians, including members of the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP).

The fields brought to mind a large number of depots of NATO arms found buried during an investigation launched by Italian prosecutor Felice Casson, who discovered the existence of Operation Gladio, a NATO stay-behind paramilitary force left over from the Cold War. In a panel discussion he participated in in İstanbul last April, Casson said these weapons were found buried in cemeteries, under churches and even in caves. Ergenekon is also thought to be a remnant from the original Turkish Gladio, which was founded against a possible Soviet

invasion during the Cold War, but later turned into an organization trying to cut off Turkey's ties with the West. The retired generals arrested in the Ergenekon investigation seem to have an anti-European Union and anti-NATO stance favoring a closer relationship between Turkey and Russia and Eurasian nations.

Analysts said on Friday that the buried weapons might shed light on a number of murders committed in the Gölbaşı area prior to the Susurluk investigation of 1996, which started when a former police chief, a southeastern tribal leader whose men were armed by the state to fight separatist violence and an internationally wanted mafia boss were involved in an accident near the small township of Susurluk while riding in the same car. The police chief and the mafia boss as well as his girlfriend, a former model, were killed in the accident. No serious arrests followed the ensuing investigation, which had exposed, for the first time in modern Turkish history, a gang with links to the state.

Some of the most significant unsolved murders in the area were the assassination of Yusuf Ekinci, a lawyer of Kurdish origin, and that of retired Maj. Cem Ersever and his girlfriend. Investigators are examining possible links between the Gölbaşı weapons and unsolved murders in the area in the '90s.

Ergenekon suspects on the run

Meanwhile, Lt. Col. Mustafa Dönmez, an Ergenekon suspect whose houses in Sakarya and Ankara were found to contain a stockpile of bullets, hand grenades and weapons, is now reported to be a fugitive. Police called Dönmez's cell phone on Wednesday to inform him that an arrest warrant had been issued for him. Dönmez, who assured them he would go to a police station "right away," disappeared shortly after the phone call. Police claim that when they went at the Adapazarı Central Command on Wednesday to capture Dönmez, gendarmes told them the area fell under gendarmerie jurisdiction and that they would find Dönmez. Later, the gendarmerie told police that they had been unable to locate Dönmez and that they believed he had escaped.

Twenty-two hand grenades, five revolvers and a Kalashnikov rifle as well as 8,300 bullets were found in a house belonging to the lieutenant colonel in Sakarya. The search in another house belonging to Dönmez in Ankara revealed three revolvers, two Kalashnikovs and a pair of night-vision binoculars.

Thirty-seven people in total were detained in the latest wave of Ergenekon detentions on Wednesday, including six active members of the military as well as seven retired generals. In addition to Dönmez, police also on Wednesday searched for Bedrettin Dalan, a former mayor of the city of İstanbul, but they soon discovered that he was in the US. However, some newspapers claimed on Friday that Dalan had fled to the US after being tipped off about the Ergenekon operation.

Political clashes over Ergenekon

On Thursday, one day after the high-profile detentions, Chief of General Staff Gen. İlker Başbuğ visited both Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and President Abdullah Gül, with no statement on the content of the talks other than to say that they were indeed about the recent detentions in which some retired generals and active duty officers were taken into custody. Newspapers wrote yesterday that Başbuğ was seeking special treatment for members of the military. According to sources that spoke to several newspapers, Başbuğ

demanded that members of the military be summoned to the prosecutor's office instead of being taken into custody.

Sources also say Başbuğ demanded that senior generals Hurşit Tolon and Şener Eruygur, arrested last year as part of the investigation, be released pending trial.

Başbuğ's visit on Thursday came after a six-hour meeting of the force commanders on Wednesday evening, convened immediately after the detentions.

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