

The Failed Coup in Turkey: Prolonged Conflict in the State Apparatus

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GONENC UYSAL, SEP 21 2016

Truth is like the town whore. Everybody knows her, but nonetheless, it's embarrassing to meet her in the street. (Borchert, 1968: 86)

On 15 July 2016, Turkey saw a failed coup attempt, which was undertaken by certain factions of the military, and which saw more than three-hundred killed, more than a thousand wounded, and thousands detained. However, the failed coup revealed the fierce and prolonged conflict within the state apparatus which can be dated back to the *Ergenekon* (named after a Turkish saga of re-birth) and *Balyoz* (Sledgehammer) trials. In order to examine this conflict within by examining both the domestic and international spheres, this paper will, firstly, briefly discuss civil-military relations in Turkey in accordance with its theoretical framework drawn from Marxism. Secondly, it will briefly discuss the relationship between the AKP (*Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi* – Justice and Development Party) government and the *Gulen* movement since the coup plotters were allegedly disciples and allies of the *Gulen* movement (Gulenists) according to their own confessions. Thirdly, it will discuss the aftermath of the failed coup in relation to the hegemonic project of neoliberal-Islamism. In this sense, it will particularly focus on the AKP government's discourse on national consensus, and the restructuring of the military and the field of security. Finally, it will conclude that the secular and democratic Republican regime with the rule of law should be defended, and that the class antagonisms and ill-doings of capitalism should be collectively voiced.

Regarding civil-military relations in Turkey, since the relationship between the military and the civilian sphere can be regarded as a response to and a result of the changes in relations of production, the Turkish military intervened in politics as an intermediary in moments of hegemonic crisis to restructure the pattern(s) of capital accumulation and class relations in the last instance in order to maintain the capitalist mode of production after having acquired consent of particular social class(es) (Gulalp, 1985). In this sense, the coups of 1960 and 1980 indicate different patterns of capital accumulation and their corresponding political, juridical, and ideological forms, and class relations. Therefore, contrary to the hegemonic liberal-conservative paradigm that has portrayed the military as an elitist institution with a pro-coup mind-set (Heper, 2012; Mardin, 1973), this paper considers civil-military relations as a field of class struggle.

In order to relate this theoretical framework to the recent failed coup, the relationship between the AKP government and the *Gulen* movement should be briefly discussed. After having formed the power bloc under the hegemony of finance-capital in 2002, the AKP government allied with the religious brotherhoods, significantly with the *Gulen* movement, in order to implement the hegemonic project of neoliberal-Islamism both at the state and social levels. While religious brotherhoods have begun to offer alternative Islamist social structures by infiltrating the fields of education, health, social security, and so on following the neoliberal state's withdrawal from many areas of social provision, they also staffed state institutions. Indeed, the *Ergenekon* and *Balyoz* trials, of which the latter turned into an attempt to purge the *critical* factions at the state and social levels (Dogan and Rodrik, 2014; Jenkins, 2011),^[1] enabled the *Gulen* movement to accelerate its staffing of key state institutions, including the judiciary, the police (Sik, 2011), and the military (Demirag, 2015).

Dating back to February 2012, the relationship between the AKP government and the *Gulen* movement has

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deteriorated in accordance with the AKP's recent hegemonic crisis,[2] since both the AKP and the *Gulen* movement declared their tutelage over the political regime in Turkey. Indeed, such deterioration has become visible during the intelligence service crisis, the corruption scandal, the intelligence service truck controversy, and the debate on preparatory schools. However, the coup plotters failed to acquire consent of various social classes in the domestic sphere. Indeed, both the business associations and trade unions were already positioned against the possibility of a coup, and later condemned the failed coup attempt. However, it is still contested to what extent the coup plotters acquired consent of the internationally dominant classes, since the relationship between the West and Turkey has deteriorated following the AKP government's hegemonic crisis in the domestic sphere, its relations with China and Iran, and its position regarding Syria. Since the *Gulen* movement has organic and dependent relations with Western capital by significantly providing the USA with easy access to post-Soviet markets through its emphasis on education (Savran, 2014), and by becoming an important fraction of the bourgeoisie in the United States owing to its charter schools, the Western position regarding the failed coup remains ambiguous. Such ambiguity became significantly visible with the false report claiming that the President Recep Tayyip Erdogan sought asylum in Germany, and the United States' and the EU's positions against the purge of thousands in the military.[3] Therefore, this paper considers the failed coup as the final curtain of the conflict between the AKP government and the *Gulen* movement that has taken place in and targeted the state apparatus with them aim of consolidating the hegemonic project of neoliberal-Islamism under their own tutelage.

Regarding the aftermath of the failed coup attempt, it is already argued that various fractions of dominant and subordinate classes and their representative political parties condemned the possibility of a military coup. However, borrowing from the liberal-conservative paradigm, the AKP government and its organic intelligentsia has recently articulated the discourse on 'national consensus' (*'milli mutabakat'*) (Kalin, 2016), in order to restore the hegemony of neoliberal-Islamism by veiling class struggle and manufacturing consent of both dominant and subordinate classes.[4] It should be noted that this paper argues that *Gulenists*, who have been involved with coup-plotting as well as previous torts – such as unlawful activities of public prosecutors and police during the *Ergenekon* and *Balyoz* trials, the KCK (*Koma Civaken Kurdistan* – Kurdistan Communities Union) trials, the Hrant Dink trial –, corruption – such as fraud in entrance exams to state institutions –, slander and defamation – such as newspapers which acted as hitmen – should be put on trial in accordance with the rule of law. However, since the *Gulen* movement had been an ally of the AKP government in the power until recently, and indeed, since the AKP often explicitly accepted that 'demands of the *Gulen* movement were never declined', the AKP government is yet to take political responsibility for its negligence and its arguable support for the *Gulen* movement.

The discourse on a national consensus within the framework of neoliberal-Islamism should be further discussed. During the state of emergency, the AKP government legislated dozens of decrees, which cannot be appealed against to the Constitutional Court. Such decrees included the closure of *Gulenist* trade unions which curbed labour rights, and the introduction of a mandatory individual retirement annuity system which further privatised social security in order to favour finance-capital while violating the Constitution. At the time of writing, the AKP government is planning to legislate an omnibus bill which aims to privatise dozens of public goods and state institutions, and thus is opposed by the CHP (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* – Republican People's Party). It should be noted that the recent purge of tens of thousands of civil servants, which also deteriorated the condition of subordinate classes, sometimes turned into a witch-hunt against factions of the opposition. Thus, the discourse on national consensus has been further utilised to curb democracy. Furthermore, thousands on the streets, who gathered to oppose to the failed coup attempt and whose majority consisted of the urban poor, *Lumpenproletariat*, and the unemployed, chanted *takbir* ('Allah is great') in harmony with continuous calls for prayer recited by mosques. Factions of such crowds also harassed Alevi neighbourhoods and used violence against conscripts and new recruits. However, since crowds on the streets during the failed coup were arguably mobilised and followed the AKP's call, they represented the power and limits of the AKP government's attempt to restore the hegemony of neoliberal-Islamism as well as of the diffusion of Islamism in the social structure. Furthermore, the AKP government transformed the *Gulen* movement's schools into *imam-hatip* (prayer-leader and preacher) schools while the transformation of state schools into *imam-hatip* schools was already initiated in 2015. Therefore, the discourse on national consensus has been utilised to consolidate the hegemonic project of neoliberal-Islamism.

In addition, the AKP government declared as its aim to restructure the military in accordance with the framework of

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NATO. While zoning military areas for private sector construction to favour mainly the industrial and rentier bourgeoisie, the AKP government further paved the way for a privatisation of security. Indeed, the head of SADAT (*Uluslararası Savunma Danışmanlığı* – International Defence Consulting), which provides consultancy and military training services including irregular warfare, has become a key advisor of the President. While the company has been functioning since 2012 without legal regulation and oversight, the head of SADAT was previously forcefully retired from the military due to his Islamist activities. In the meantime, military high schools and academies were abolished, and their students were to be relocated to civilian schools, including the *imam-hatip* schools. Moreover, both the Chief of General Staff Hulusi Akar and the Director of Religious Affairs were invited side by side in the Assembly. While Akar later greeted the sheikhs of various religious brotherhoods, the name of the military hospital in Ankara was replaced with the name of Sultan Abdulhamid – the sultan of the autocratic *Hamidian* regime –, and it is now under authority the Ministry of Health, which has been staffed by the *Menzil* community, a branch of *Nakşibendi* order. Therefore, the restructuring of the military and the field of security has been in accordance with the hegemonic project of neoliberal-Islamism.

Overall, the recent purge of and defamation against Gulenists would arguably prevent bringing justice to coup-plotting as well as previous torts, corruption, slander and defamation, and it would veil the political responsibility of the AKP government. It would also arguably result in a further veiling of class struggle since the majority of Gulenists have already belonged to the subordinate classes and joined the Gulen movement due to socio-economic problems. Furthermore, the restructuring of the military and the privatisation of security would arguably further broaden and blur the meaning and practices of security, dissolve the secularist Republican state apparatus, abolish the state's role to provide security as a public good, and reproduce Turkey as on the (semi)periphery of the international capitalist system. It would also arguably deteriorate the conditions of the military officers, whose lower- and middle-ranks are considered as fractions of subordinate classes, while favouring the industrial and rentier bourgeoisie, while reinforcing corruption. Therefore, the discourse on national consensus would veil the unequal and dependent relationship between the Turkey and foreign capital, and restore the hegemonic project of neoliberal-Islamism to the detriment of the subordinate classes. In conclusion, in order to contest the hegemony of neoliberal-Islamism, the secularist Republican regime should be defended in order to maintain the rule of law, and the class antagonisms and ill-doings of capitalism should be collectively voiced by the subordinate classes. In this way, civil-military relations as well as the state and social structures can be reformed within the democratic framework and in favour of the subordinate classes.

Notes and References

[1] Contrary to the liberal-conservative paradigm which has portrayed the trials as an attempt to bring justice to the deep state (Aydinli, 2011; Polat, 2011), this paper argues that the trials neither questioned nor investigated the structure of the deep state. Rather, the trials were based on false claims and/or false documents to support the allegation that the critical factions planned to overthrow the AKP government. Although the trials arguably sought legitimacy by presenting the controversial press release, which has often been considered as an e-memorandum by many commentators since it was published on the website of the Chief of the General Staff, as evidence of a pro-coup mind-set, this paper argues that the military was institutionally already incapable of undertaking a coup against the AKP government due to the lack of support of both international and domestic social classes in the 2000s. Therefore, the trials contributed to the consolidation of the hegemonic project of neoliberal-Islamism.

[2] The AKP government's hegemonic crisis has become visible during the *Gezi Parki* protests, the general election of June 2015, bomb attacks by Islamist/jihadist and Kurdish-separationist terrorist groups, and the armed conflict in the southeast.

[3] It should be noted that neither the United States nor the EU took such explicit positions against the purge of thousands during the *Ergenekon* and *Balyoz* trials.

[4] This paper argues that in the neoliberal era, the boundary between coercion and consent is further blurred.

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Gonenc Uysal is pursuing a PhD in War Studies at King's College London. Gonenc has published articles with *The Centre for Policy and Research on Turkey (Research Turkey)* and *E-International Relations*, and a book review in *Review of Social Studies*. She has also written several blog posts for *Strife*. Her next book review will be published in *Kurdish Studies*.