



TURKISH COUP ATTEMPT: WHAT COMES NEXT?

July 2016



TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Authors
- Introduction
- Objective
- Turkey
- Russia
- Germany
- NATO
- ISIS and Syria
- Israel

TURKISH COUP ATTEMPT: WHAT COMES NEXT?

AUTHORS



Dr. A. Kadir Yildirim: Research Scholar at Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy



Prof. Mark Galeotti: Professor of Global Affairs, New York University



Dr. Frank Umbach: Research Director at the European Centre for Energy and Resource Security, King's College London



Dr. Jelena Petrovic: Project Manager, Wikistrat



Dr. Amanda Skuldt: Project Manager, Wikistrat



Dr. Shay Hershkovitz: Chief Strategy Officer and Director of Analytic Community, Wikistrat

TURKISH COUP ATTEMPT: WHAT COMES NEXT?

INTRODUCTION



In the early morning hours of July 16, elements of the Turkish military attempted a coup against the government of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan while the Turkish leader was reportedly on vacation away from the capital.

After a few hours of uncertainty, the Erdoğan government gained the upper hand, with the President landing his plane in Istanbul and loyal units of the Turkish military and police capturing or killing many of those involved in the plot.

Official sources report 161 civilian deaths in addition to 104 coup participants killed in clashes with Erdoğan's supporters. As the Turkish government begins a crackdown, over 2,700 judges have been fired and 3,000 soldiers have been arrested under allegations of involvement.

TURKISH COUP ATTEMPT: WHAT COMES NEXT?

OBJECTIVE



The objective of this report is to provide insights from experts regarding the geopolitical and security implications which the Turkish coup attempt may have on global and regional actors.

TURKEY



Erdoğan's
Coup de Grâce

Concentration
of Power

- In a notable act of defiance, a significant majority of Turkish citizens opposed the coup attempt. This stands in stark contrast to previous coups.
- Nonetheless, Turkish democracy is the most important casualty. President Erdoğan, as a populist leader, thrives on mass support. The overwhelming rejection of the coup plotters has offered Erdoğan *carte blanche* to do virtually whatever he pleases – which he will take advantage of. Erdoğan now enjoys a concentration of power unprecedented since Turkey's transition to democracy. This is likely to irrevocably shift the dynamics of the country.
- The government will use this “gift from God” (as Erdoğan put it) to refashion the military and other state agencies in accordance with the party's goals, eliminating opposition under the pretext of fighting a “parallel structure” – a euphemism for the Gülen Movement. The suspension and detention of more than 2,700 judges and prosecutors is indicative of this new order.
- The Turkish parliament will quickly pass legislation to introduce a presidential system – if necessary, via referendum. Erdoğan's declining popularity prior to the coup attempt will reverse, securing the success of the reform.



”

Retribution has emerged as the mantra of Erdoğan and his supporters. This could facilitate a convenient mechanism by which to suppress broader dissent instead of merely holding coup plotters to account.

Dr. A. Kadir Yildirim
Senior Analyst, Wikistrat

TURKISH COUP ATTEMPT: WHAT COMES NEXT?

TURKEY



Rupture with
the West

- The Turkish government will face one less obstacle in pursuing its foreign policy objectives. Military commanders had prevented adventurism in Turkey's Syria approach, pushing it to fall in line with American policy – at least to some degree.
- Absent critical voices from the military, the Turkish government may engage in action that undermines the West's Syria policy and the war against ISIS.
- The Turkish government's insistence on Fethullah Gülen's extradition from the U.S. will further strain bilateral relations.
- Turkey's lukewarm participation in the war against ISIS will be negatively affected. More importantly, the Turkish government will utilize continued American use of the Incirlik air base as leverage for Gülen's return. Improved relations with Russia and Israel likely affect Turkish calculations in this regard.

Unwilling
Partner

- There is a significant risk that Turkish foreign policy could swerve away from the West to protest the U.S. and EU's lack of cooperation in and support for President Erdoğan's policy preferences.





The Devil You
Know

Bad Example

- Despite recent bitterness over the bombing of Turkish proxies in Syria and the downing of one of Russia's aircraft, there has recently been a rapprochement between Ankara and Moscow. Russia is ultimately relieved that Erdoğan survived, as it believes it can work with him – and also exploit his growing tensions with Europe.
- Had the coup succeeded, a military regime might have sought to win acceptance from the West – especially Washington – by adopting a more cooperative stance on Syria, which would have limited Moscow's ability to exploit the conflict, or else by challenging Russian positions in the South Caucasus.
- Although the notion *has* been floated in some of the Russian press (including state outlets), there has been no serious suggestion from Moscow that the West was in any way responsible for the coup attempt. The Kremlin holds a strong ideological line against violent and illegal regime changes.
- Had the coup succeeded and had the West eventually been forced to accept the new regime (as is likely), it would have been taken as one more example of the West being supportive of (and often facilitating) the very kind of regime change that has toppled Russian clients from Ukraine to Libya.



”

From the Kremlin's perspective, this coup offered at best momentary schadenfreude in exchange for a long-term headache. Moscow fears instability on its southwestern flank – and an Erdoğan regime (especially now that it has an excuse to tighten its grip on the country) offers at least that.

Prof. Mark Galeotti
Expert, Wikistrat

RUSSIA



Poor PKK,
Happy ISIS

- Erdoğan is likely to use the opportunity to redouble operations against the Kurdish opposition and the PKK. While Moscow had been considering providing these groups with greater political and practical support as a lever against Ankara, it is likely to put such plans on hold due to ongoing volatility.
- Conversely, Erdoğan's decision to briefly halt U.S.-led airstrikes against ISIS targets from Incirlik air base indicates that he is likely to be increasingly intransigent over Syria. This is a mixed blessing for Moscow: Washington is weakened, but Assad and his Russian defenders may face Turkish proxies with even more support from Ankara – as well as ISIS forces less concerned about the U.S. air threat.

Western
Headaches

- Moscow hopes Turkey's likely shift towards authoritarianism will create further distractions for an EU in the midst of negotiations over visa-free travel and migrant control. A divided and distracted EU is less likely to take a tough line on Russian adventurism.

Intelligence
Failure?

- Although Turkey is a major and growing target for Russia's intelligence agencies, there has been no indication that they were aware of the planned coup. It could be that a strategic decision was made to wait and see how things turned out, but it is more likely that this was an intelligence failure. That the West was also caught by surprise offers Moscow little comfort; this may lead to both recriminations within the intelligence community and a scaling up of operations within Turkey.

GERMANY



Germany's
Turkish
Population

- Germany must consider that the divisions among Turks regarding Erdoğan and the coup do not end at the borders of Turkey; indeed, they likely extend into the Turkish population in Germany (and other EU countries).

Migrant Deal

- These developments will intensify controversy within Germany regarding (and also generally complicate) bilateral relations with Turkey, as well as the recent migrant deal. The coup attempt will not decrease EU dependence on Turkey to control migrant flows.

EU
Membership

- For the majority of Germans, Turkish EU membership is now even more unrealistic after the failed coup and with more authoritarian policies already underway within Turkey. However, Erdoğan had already drifted away from interest in EU membership; this is indicative of an increasingly asymmetric relationship as the EU becomes dependent on stable gas supplies through Turkey via the TANAP-TAP pipeline network.



”

Critics of the EU's Southern Gas Corridor (and supporters of Russia and Nord Stream 2) will use the coup and Erdoğan's reaction to it to question the EU's increasing energy dependence on Turkey.

Dr. Frank Umbach
Senior Analyst, Wikistrat

GERMANY



Investments and Tourism

- The failed coup will hit German (and other European) investments and tourism in Turkey, which has become one of the most popular holiday destinations for the German public. This negative effect will last for at least the next two years and will afterwards be dependent on Turkey's political stability and overall image.
- As Turkey is also considerably dependent on its tourist industry (already negatively affected by the reduction of Russian and other travelers), the coup attempt will have negative impacts on overall GDP growth and socioeconomic stability – at least over the short term.





An Internal Focus

- Turkey's security focus is likely to turn inwards over the near term as it seeks to determine the scale of the coup and detain those responsible. This will negate any major regional efforts – the authorities in Ankara will be too distracted with securing their position to make ISIS or Syria the priority.
- Moreover, Turkey simply will not trust its armed forces with a major deployment for a long time; the prospect of any major intervention in Syria, already unlikely, has now become impossible to imagine.

Weaker NATO-Turkey Ties

- The failure of the U.S. and Europe to fully denounce the coup in its early hours may be seen as a desire to hedge their bets. Indeed, Washington's calls for "democracy" to be respected could be regarded as an attempt to bestow legitimacy on the coup plotters' grievances as much as a defense of the Erdoğan administration's right to govern.



Joint membership in NATO has traditionally served to temper hostility between Greece and Turkey. Yet the arrival in Greece of some coup plotters, where they have sought political asylum, is likely to reignite tensions unless they are swiftly deported. NATO may have to devote more time and attention to Alliance cohesion than had been expected.

Dr. Jelena Petrovic
Project Manager, Wikistrat

NATO



Return of “Zero Problems”

- Only in the last two weeks, Turkey had normalized relations with both Russia and Israel, and floated the possibility of ending its call for regime change in Damascus. The failed coup may expedite this approach, encouraging Ankara to calm tensions with adversaries in order to enable domestic consolidation.

A Strategic Pivot?

- Turkey now finds itself aligned with Russia, Egypt and Syria in resisting internal attempts at regime change. Its response is likely to echo theirs, and include further control of the press, efforts to crack down on minorities (in this case the Kurds) and increasingly authoritarian forms of government. This will increasingly put it at odds with NATO member states, making a more fundamental realignment a much greater possibility.

Nuclear Headaches

- NATO may choose to revisit Turkey’s participation in nuclear-sharing agreements, which see the deployment U.S. tactical weapons at Incirlik air base – especially after Turkish authorities cut power to the base after the coup began to fizzle. Any moves to review or withdraw nuclear weapons from Turkey would be seen by Ankara as an attempt to water down NATO’s obligations.



ISIS AND SYRIA



Focus of
Security
Forces on ISIS

- Erdoğan's initial attention will be on reconsolidating power – i.e., focusing security resources on purging the military and protecting his regime. This will leave the country vulnerable to increased ISIS activity.

Challenge for
ISIS

- The failure of the coup attempt and a new, clear mandate for Erdoğan presents a strategic challenge for ISIS, which has been using terrorism to undermine the legitimacy of his regime and may hold some responsibility for the conditions that led to the coup attempt.



”

The biggest concern following the coup attempt is that the country will not adequately stabilize (in part because of increased ISIS attacks) and that the conflict in Syria will further bleed into Turkey.

Dr. Amanda Skuldt
Project Manager, Wikistrat

ISRAEL



Recent Agreement

- The coup attempt will not affect the reconciliation agreement, which will be approved this week by the Turkish government. It is beneficial for both countries to reestablish strategic ties, as they increasingly share regional interests.

Reformulation of the Regional Equation

- Turkey, Israel and Saudi Arabia are worried that the Assad regime is increasingly strengthening its grip over Syria, and they fear Syria becoming a reinforced Iranian spearhead backed by Russia.

Economic Interest

- Israel strongly desires to utilize Turkey as a client and gateway to export its huge gas reserves, as well as to expand bilateral trade (currently estimated at \$6 billion a year). Turkey is interested in reducing its energy dependence on Russia and Iran, potentially by purchasing gas from Israel and becoming an energy bridge for Israeli gas to the West.

Restraining Hamas

- Israel believes that Turkey may be able to restrain Hamas and even become a channel of communication with the organization – as well as a potential investor in Gaza’s collapsing infrastructure.



”

Recently renewed bilateral ties between Israel and Turkey serves the strategic interests of both sides.

Dr. Shay Hershkovitz
Chief Strategic Officer,
Wikistrat



For more information on Wikistrat's crowdsourced solutions and systems,
contact info@wikistrat.com

www.wikistrat.com