

TRT WORLD IN THE FACE OF THE JULY 15 COUP

HISTORY AND MEMORY



Edited by
Halil Berktaş
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TRT WORLD
**research
centre**

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“Introduction:

What if they had won?”

by Halil Berktaş

History and Memory

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History and Memory

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the July 15 Coup

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with PINAR KANDEMİR

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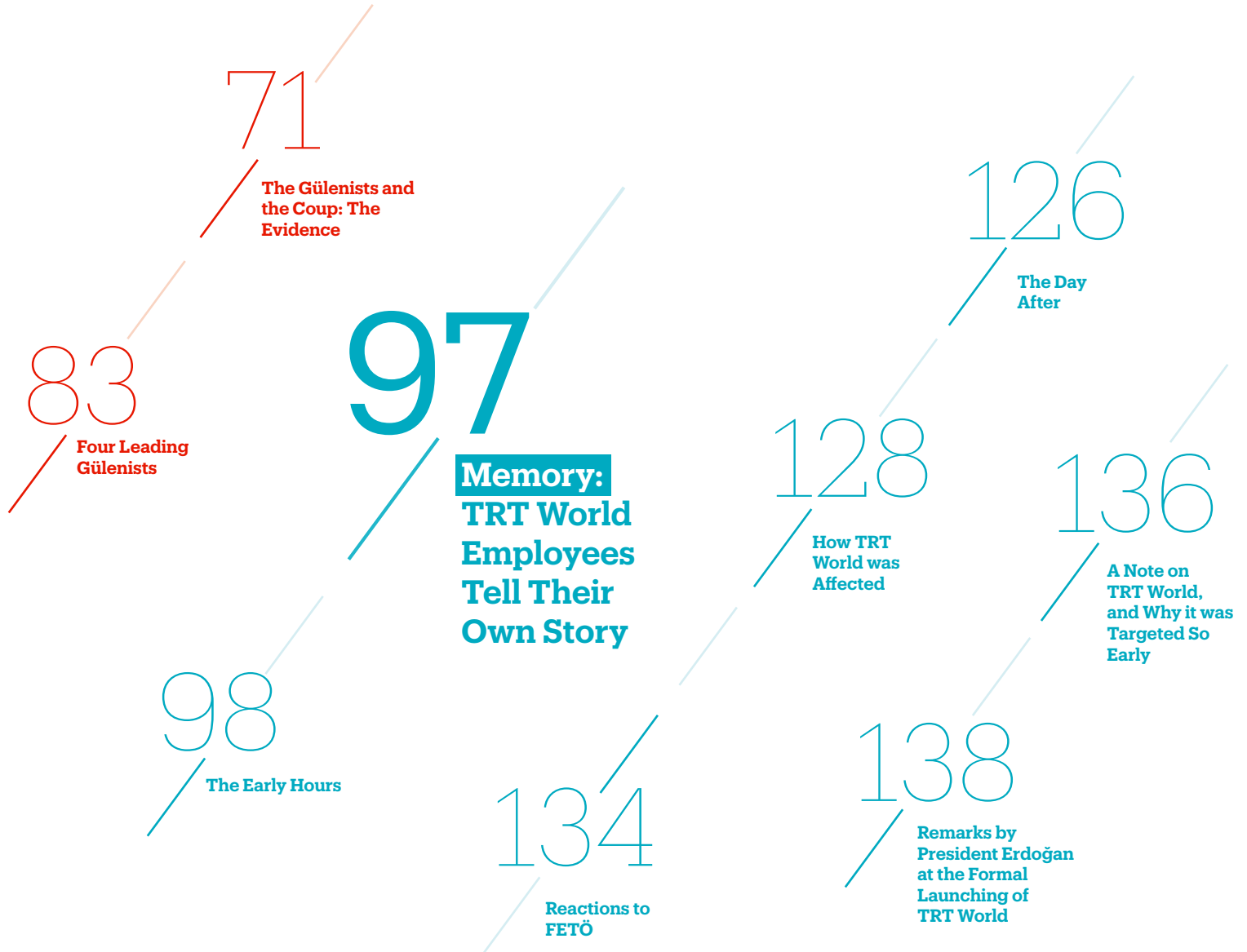
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Preface



İbrahim Eren
Chairman of TRT World

The night of July 15, 2016 and then the dawn of July 16 stand out as one of the worst but also one of the best times in our nation's recent history. For millions of people, having to endure the horror of the coup and then triumphing over such adversity was the experience of a lifetime.

That night, our president made an unconditional call, a come-what-may kind of call regardless of the consequences. Even before that appeal, people had believed that their president would not shrink from sacrificing his own life to save the country. It was with this degree of confidence in him that when they then heard his plea, they heeded it in their millions. The state could have no master other than the nation, he emphasised, and "I am here to represent you." In response, Turkey's citizens demonstrated just how committed they are to their democratic institutions, and the lengths to which they will go to ensure their integrity. The Gülenist network, which had evolved into a criminal FETÖ organisation, deployed guns, tanks, helicopters and even F-16 fighter jets to exercise massive violence against unarmed civilians. On the night of July 15, a total of 249 people were martyred and another 2000 people were injured as they stood up for their rights and liberties.

The TRT buildings in Istanbul and Ankara were seized by the putschists, but our staff together with local residents were also there to oppose them. As someone who was directly involved in this popular resistance, I can attest to the overwhelming feeling of urgency and responsibility that overcame us and drove us forward. We stood our ground not only for ourselves but also for our children and our children's future.

The July 15 coup stands as the greatest test TRT World has faced. As Turkey's first public international English-language broadcaster, we were an obvious target for the plotters. In an age of great pessimism about the ability of the media to cover events in a balanced and responsible way, and where fake news keeps distorting and obscuring reality, TRT World has proved itself to be

a news network worthy of the name. When its Istanbul headquarters were raided and occupied, TRT World turned to makeshift broadcasting from London to keep the world informed. Whilst many media outlets came under attack by the putschists, given how young it then was, TRT World was particularly creative and resourceful in being able to maintain its coverage (at various places in this book, you will be able to read just how). And by the next morning, our Istanbul studios were up and running.

At the time I also spoke to our friends in the US. They connected us to major American networks (including CNN and twenty other international news channels). Some foreign media -which were falsely claiming that the demonstrators in the street were actually celebrating the coup whilst Erdogan was going to seek asylum in Germany- had to change the content of their broadcasts.

Following the coup, Turkey has become more united against all threats. Massive Democracy Watches and joint rallies have highlighted this solidarity over least common denominators. The world has begun to appreciate Turkey's resilience. This is not the old Turkey anymore.

Those TRT World employees who had to face the violence of the coup head-on, as well as the staff in London and other places around the world who played a key role in confronting and undermining the coup's propaganda blast, deserve special mention. In creating this project, we were honoured to have them share their memories with us. These interviews were conducted in a Q&A format, and the voice recordings have received full-length transcriptions (before being edited and abridged for this book) in order to create a permanent historical record.

That night TRT World stayed true to its values, as did the Turkish people. We hope to build on this achievement and continue to carry Turkey forward and present its truth to the world.

What Actually Happened?

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Introduction:

What if They had Won?

by Halil Berktaş



In French, just coup means simply strike or blow. As a political term, coup is short for coup d'état, which connotes a sudden blow struck to change, overthrow, and/or establish control over the state, the government or the political régime. Hence it stands for one major variant of abnormal, violence-reliant politics. The other is revolution, which is generally regarded as (a) much more reliant on popular action from below; and (b) resulting in much more comprehensive systemic change -- not just at the apex of politics but throughout what used to be called the political (and even the social) body. Both are admittedly rather loose and subjective criteria. How much change is systemic change? How much mass involvement do you have to have before you can call something a revolution? These are never easy to establish, giving rise to some grey zones of historical interpretation. In contrast, a coup has more minimal content, and is therefore much easier to define. Here the use of violence is much more abrupt and concentrated in a way that cannot possibly be provided by a civilian or "amateurish" leadership (whether it resorts to urban uprisings, or guerrilla warfare, or a combination of both) but only by a professional, institutionalized locus with vast resources of men and material at its

disposal, meaning the army. As a result, army takeover or military takeover have come to be used interchangeably with coup or coup d'état (as well as putsch, golpe or golpe de estado, which have also enriched this malignant vocabulary of abnormality).

Paradoxically, coups or military takeovers are a corollary -- but of course a pathological corollary -- of democratic development. They do not derive from a previous and total absence of democracy. Instead, they presuppose a modicum of democracy, or a certain degree and direction of democratization -- which they are designed to interrupt. From the late-18th century, through the French Revolution and into the 1800s, two key dimensions or components of modernity emerged in parallel: democracy, comprising elections, representation and parliament; and at the same time the opposite, darker side of the modern state, meaning its coercive apparatus and especially that embodiment of the monopoly of legitimate violence that is the army. On the one hand, the development of liberal democratic ideas, the spread of constitutionalism, the legal consolidation of basic rights and liberties, and the extension of the vote all kept pushing against the Restoration shackles imposed by the Vienna Congress. But on the other hand, the forces of conservatism started to look for ways and means of arresting or reversing this trend -- and turned (together with the Church) to the army. From crushing the 1848 uprisings (under Cavaignac), through putting and keeping Louis Bonaparte in power, to installing the military dictatorships of the Interwar Years (like those identified with Horthy, Metaxas, Antonescu, Franco, Salazar or others), a few of which managed to survive into the Cold War era, armies and army takeovers led by aristocratic officers came to be an object of universal hatred. In Western Europe they mostly came to an end after 1945. In the process they also acquired a very bad name. Especially in academic thought there was left no room for theorizing the political utility of coups or military interventions.

Not in the West, that is -- but the Rest was a different matter. Modernity in the West had become a modernity that included and encompassed democracy, so that (at least after a point) the two were not regarded as contradictory or incompatible. Elsewhere, however, modernity as material, technical, economic, organizational and

administrative progress came to be forcibly introduced and imposed on native populations from the outside. In colonial contexts (and by 1900, there were only a very few countries left in Asia or Africa that had not been directly incorporated into European overseas empires), the entire colonial edifice itself, with all its regents, governors, generals, garrisons, port facilities, road, railroad and telegraph companies, newspapers and school systems that imitated those of the metropolitan or "mother" countries, was the primary agent of modernization. In semi-colonial settings where a settler colony arose and then achieved independence through its creole generations (such as Latin America), or where a traditional state or empire somehow survived and held on to a reduced sovereignty (such as China, Iran or the Ottoman polity), these creole or native elites shouldered that modernizing role. Trying to survive in competition with increasingly imperialistic European powers, the latter, meaning especially semi-colonial Middle Eastern modernities in the making, almost always began by importing the European army, which led, in a single inescapable chain reaction, to importing European laws, European administration, European schools and instruction, European dress, European money, European weights and measures -- because none of these links could do without the others. Long before the Young Turks and the Kemalist revolutions, this is the story of Tanzimat modernization during the "long 19th century" of the Ottoman Empire.

We cannot say that it should not have happened, or that it should not have happened "that way"; it did, and that is a fact of history, and it brought major gains with it, and that too is a fact of history. But it also had a price. There arose a socio-cultural enclave: a small but highly Westernized native elite that had imported and internalized Eurocentrism, adopted an *alla franca* outlook and life-style, and turned self-colonizer to its historical domains. It became increasingly separated and alienated from the much more traditional *alla turca* majority of its subjects (now on the way to becoming its fellow citizens). Against them, it barricaded itself behind its new modern army staffed by a Westernized officer class that evolved (by a process of class-formation not through the economy but through the state) into much more than just an officer class in the narrow military sense -- together with its accompanying bureaucracy and judiciary, a social class

in the fullest sense of the word, with its own clear-cut class interests, outlook, and ideology. It acquired a civilizing mission vis-à-vis the rest of society, which it quasi-imperially regarded as its own primitives, and which it subjected to progressive reforms from above. It came up with a version of modernity without democracy, of modernity at the cost of democracy.

In turn, this fed back into a bifurcation in Western political thought, academia and public opinion. Military establishments and takeovers that were emphatically "out" for the West itself came to be tolerated as *bon pour l'Orient* when it came to the Rest. These *alla franca* enclaves and armies came to be regarded as many outposts of Western civilization -- especially in Islamic lands. Orientalism had long posited Islam as a static, fatalistic, over-mystical religion responsible for much of the East's backwardness. In Turkey, first the Unionists and then the Kemalists also grew into this Islamophobia, fearing their own masses of believers and seeking to keep their potential "fanaticism" at bay through an authoritarian secularism guarded by the army. Here, therefore, subaltern reactions and demands for a voice, or for representation, were stigmatised as reaction, while the Westernized elites and military establishments on top represented progress. Time after time, in 1960, 1971, 1980, and 1997, modernity trumped democracy.

It almost did so in 2016. Despite appearances, though, it was not quite the same thing. Whether hierarchical or factional, all previous coups in Turkey had been carried out within the penumbra of Kemalism -- under the aegis of the military-bureaucratic establishment's civilizing self-perception and tutelage (or guardianship) ideology. This created a pattern, a *habitus* of army takeovers in the name of saving the country. It also conditioned the West, too, into seeing Turkey purely in terms of this army-vs-Islamism dichotomy. If there was some kind of coup brewing in Turkey, once more it had to be the staunch Kemalist old guard trying to defend the ramparts of civilization against Islamic reaction (now represented by the AK Party).

This was (and is) much too simplistic; it fails to understand that it was/is a case of "new wine in old bottles"; it overlooks nothing less than the Gülenist factor in Turk-

ish politics and society. By its own historic attitude and behaviour, the army set itself up as a target, an instrument to be usurped, a bastion to be conquered from the inside, and as the rest of this book amply explains, that is precisely what the Gülenist movement attempted. But at the same time, they could not do explicitly on their own ideological terms. That is to say, on the eve of 15th July they could not come out and say: "We are taking over and we shall be setting up a Mahdist, Messianic theocracy." First, there had evolved a huge gap between their inner agenda and the exterior that they presented to the outside world. Second, that inner ideological outlook was not capable of (suddenly) acquiring a mass character. Thirdly, it would not have been able to forge and sustain either domestic or foreign alliances -- at home with the still much more numerous Kemalists in the army and bureaucracy; internationally with the West, and especially the US, whom they hoped would at least tolerate this latest edition of a familiar-looking army takeover in Turkey.

So they dissimulated; ever since the 1970s they had built their entire existence around deception and dishonesty, and they did so yet again. They tried to present themselves as neo-Kemalists; more specifically, as a new edition of the 27th May 1960 coup. Nearly sixty years ago that junta had called itself the Committee for National Unity; they for their part chose to style themselves a Committee for Establishing Peace at Home. The 1960 putschists had adopted a relatively short and terse declaration that had been read over the radio. At least they were sincere in their Kemalism, and their text had an authentic ring to it. Their 15th July imitators would seem to have approached it with extreme pedantic insincerity, drawing it out into a verbose ineffectual mess that was so obviously fake nobody even really listened. Thirty seconds into it I was promptly reminded that "all great world-historic facts and personages appear, so to speak, twice... the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce" (Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*). Horrific as this was, it was also farcical. I remember thinking that such utter unoriginality did not, could not possibly stand a chance.

And so it didn't; and so, as with Macbeth, with Fethullah Gülen, too, we have seen a case of "vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself / and falls on th'other" side. But what

if? What if they had won, in perhaps one of two ways, or a combination of both?

(1) What if... Turkish intelligence had received no tip that afternoon about an attempt to kidnap MİT head Hakan Fidan? What if the rebels in their fear of exposure had not been forced to move back their H-hour from 3 in the morning, when the whole country would have been sound asleep? What if they had been able to trick or bully some top generals into siding with them? What if their risky gamble had actually acquired the appearance of a united takeover by the entire Turkish Armed Forces? What if it had therefore come to be condoned, even supported, by the outside world? What if those commandoes had reached Marmaris before President Erdoğan had left?

Would a deathly silence have descended on the land? What kind of military régime might have taken over -- something like Myanmar, perhaps? What sort of Kemalist-Gülenist coalition would it have entailed? After a time, would the Gülenists have started moving just as insidiously as ever to eliminate their partners? Meanwhile, how many tens of thousands would have been arrested, jailed, perhaps tortured, perhaps killed by their martial law authorities? What would have happened to the AK Party leadership both at the national and the local level? What of those liberal intellectuals that had supported the AK Party in its fight against military-bureaucratic tutelage?

(2) Alternatively, what if resistance had not subsided, but the putschists with their self-confidence growing by the hour had turned so brutal as to order their troops to show no mercy whatever to civilian protesters? What if the country had lapsed into a state of civil war, which might have provided an excuse for an international "peace-keeping" intervention of some sort? Might Turkey have gone through a process of Syrianization? Including perhaps dismemberment? As well as a partial UN mandate?

These might perhaps be worth thinking about. At least every now and then.

Military Takeovers, Near-Takeovers, and Comparable Crises in Recent Turkish History

Date	Key developments	The role of the media
May 27, 1960	The One Party regime in Turkey came to an end with the first truly free elections of 1950. The Democrat Party (DP) won, and governed Turkey for the next decade. Large sections of the army saw themselves as the real masters of the country, and the DP as civilian rabble who had somehow usurped the traditional prerogatives of the military-bureaucratic establishment. They bided their time, and eventually jumped on the opportunity provided by economic shortages as well as continuous student unrest. A junta that called itself the Committee of National Unity arrested President Celal Bayar, Prime Minister Adnan Menderes and the rest of the DP leadership, charging them with treason. Fifteen defendants were sentenced to death, but for twelve this was commuted to various prison terms, whilst PM Menderes, Foreign Minister Fatin Rüştü Zorlu and Finance Minister Hasan Polatkan were executed.	At the time there was no television in Turkey, but only radio stations run by the state, which were promptly seized by the junta. As there was no tradition of resisting the army, all national dailies also toed the line, mostly applauding the coup, and some of them even stooping to dirtier tricks such as circulating fake news about DP politicians so as to turn the public against them and thereby legitimize the coup.
May 22, 1963	Some in the army did not want any return to civilian politics. The armed forces, they thought, should establish its permanent Nasser-style or Baath-type dictatorship in order to impose “reforms.” One among such die-hards was Colonel Talat Aydemir, the commander of the Army Officer School in Ankara. Using the young cadets in his charge, he tried twice: on 22nd February 1962 and 21st May 1963. The first time he was pardoned, the second time arrested, tried and executed.	During his 21st May 1963 attempt, Aydemir’s cadets seized Ankara Radio, lost it, and seized it yet again, only to be silenced when the government cut all power. Aydemir admitted the importance of controlling the media by ruining rather pedantically in his diary: “We were defeated because we were unable to control the radio.”

Date	Key developments	The role of the media
March 12, 1971	From 1961 but more emphatically from the 1965 general elections onward, Süleyman Demirel's centre-right Justice Party (with AP as its Turkish acronym) had inherited the DP's mantle to promote economic growth and ensure a degree of democratic stability. But this was eroded by the rise of Cold War polarizations between the extreme right and the extreme left, dovetailing into street violence. Foreign currency imbalances proved to be the Achilles' heel of import-substituting industrialisation, inflation took off -- and once more the military took advantage, intervening yet again in the name of "restoring order." A five-man junta comprising Chief of Staff Memduh Tağmaç plus all four force commanders issued a memorandum to force PM Demirel to resign, underwriting a series of technocratic governments. At the same time, instead of abolishing the National Assembly, they ruled through a mixture of martial law with Justice Party support in parliament.	The five generals' 12th March 1971 ultimatum was first read and announced on TRT's radio broadcasts before being delivered in writing to the government. This reflected not only the importance that the top brass attached to public opinion, but also the dismissive contempt in which they held civilian government.
September 12, 1980	Street violence kept escalating between the extreme right and the extreme left; the two main parties, Bülent Ecevit's centre-left CHP and Süleyman Demirel's centre-right AP, failed to come to any kind of centrist agreement among themselves so as to defend parliamentary rule, enabling the military to step in yet again on the pretext of restoring democracy. This time not only parliament but all political parties, too, were abolished, and martial law became draconian, so that over the next few years some hundreds of thousands of people were arrested, many tortured, and dozens executed. Disappearances and extrajudicial killings were rampant. Chief of Staff Kenan Evren, who had led the coup, got himself elected president and remained in power until 1989.	The pattern was pretty much the same as in 1960 and 1980. The junta seized and controlled TRT, turning the public broadcaster into its mouthpiece. All statements and declarations were announced on radio, including martial law decrees and regulations across the country.

Date	Key developments	The role of the media
February 28, 1997	Islamist parties were becoming more and more popular in the 90s, only to be confronted by a rigid sort of anti-democratic intransigence on the part of the military-bureaucratic establishment. Necmettin Erbakan was the long-standing leader of political Islam in Turkey, and his Welfare Party (RP in Turkish) had surprised the establishment both in the 1994 local and the 1995 national elections, emerging without an absolute majority but with a strong plurality. Erbakan had gone on to form a coalition with the centre-right's Ms Tansu Çiller (a Demirel protégée). The semi-military, semi-civilian National Security council that had become an instrument of tutelage over democratic government then issued a series of policy directives targeting PM Erbakan and the RP. Mr Erbakan was forced to resign, as was Ms Çiller. A provisional government was formed while the Welfare Party was disbanded, and several of its leaders, including current President Erdoğan, then mayor of metropolitan İstanbul, were banned from politics for several years.	The buildup to this "light" or "postmodern" coup, as it came to be called, was theatrical and even farcical at times. Media highlighted some very exotic and marginal sects, spread rumors about their sexually deviant ways, and tried to stir up secularist sentiment in general, so as to prepare the ground for a military intervention. Many such manipulations would be exposed as fake news in subsequent years.
April 27, 2007	Parliament was due to meet and elect a new president, with the AK Party's Abdullah Gül as by far the strongest candidate. A simple majority was needed as a quorum, and then a two-thirds majority (meaning 367 votes) would have been needed to elect a candidate on the first round. But then some high justices intervened to throw a pseudo-legal spanner in the works. Sabih Kanadoğlu, former Chief Prosecutor of the High Court of Appeals (and therefore [former] Chief Prosecutor of the Republic) came up with the strange idea that a two-thirds majority should also be interpreted as the requirement for the National Assembly to meet in the first place. A lot of the media as well as the CHP main opposition started clutching at this last straw as the only means of keeping the Presidency (too) out of the AK Party's hands, and in yet more bizarre fashion the Constitutional Court upheld Sabih Kanadoğlu's fiction, resulting in a political deadlock. Typically, the Chief of General Staff chose precisely this moment to issue an "e-memorandum" about "secularism not just in words but in deeds," which as a menacing motion in the direction of the AK Party was generally regarded as a further military intervention in political life. The deadlock was eventually broken when some political groups in parliament had enough of playing the army's game, and appeared in the National Assembly to satisfy the two-thirds quorum requirement.	The "e-memorandum" regarding the Turkish presidential election was put on the official website of the Turkish General Staff. Coverage by several mainstream media outlets was basically pro-coup.





When the Fate of a Nation was Hanging in the Balance

On the night of July 15, 2016, Turkey survived a bloody coup attempt. An army faction associated with Messianic cleric Fethullah Gülen's sinister, secretive congregation deployed tanks, troops, helicopters, snipers and fighter jets in an attempt to bring down the legitimate government, with elected President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as their prime target. The conspirators tried to achieve total control over all nerve centres in Ankara and İstanbul while also seizing a number of key cities in the provinces. What then happened was out of the ordinary. The people of Turkey as a whole, including all opposition parties and civil society organisations, as well as the entire police force and most of the officer corps, closed ranks around the government to stand firm against the would-be junta. Together they helped foil the military takeover. While the Chief of General

Staff and other top commanders refused to bow to their Gülenist kidnappers' bullying, the last and most decisive blow against the coup came from masses of ordinary citizens who took to the streets to confront, block and paralyse the seditious units in defence of their democratic rights and liberties.

It all started around 21:00 with the sudden arrival of tanks and troops to close the two major bridges over the Bosphorus . Elsewhere, too, army units were on the move, creating major traffic jams throughout İstanbul. At this point, however, the public was not really aware that this might be a coup in the making. But then, as fighter jets started flying very low above Ankara and the first attack helicopters started circling over İstanbul, people rapidly came to grasp just how serious the situation was.

Fortunately, the tense wait for an official announcement from the government did not last long as Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım came on the air to announce an “unsanctioned military activity” that he qualified as an “insurrection.” It would soon be overcome, he promised, and order would be fully restored.

Nevertheless, it was still very much a night of anxieties and rumours. People were calling each other to get a sense of what was actually happening. Television channels were carefully trying to put bits and pieces of scant and scattered information into meaningful reporting. It gradually came out that Chief of General Staff Hulusi Akar as well as many other top generals were being held hostage in Ankara. This indicated that the putschists did not have the acquiescence, let alone support, of the legal chain of command of the Turkish Armed Forces. Somewhat later, rebellious units took over Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT), Turkey’s public broadcaster. They forced an announcer at gunpoint to read a lengthy statement by a mysterious “Council for Establishing Peace at Home.” Representing themselves as having achieved full control over the country, they proclaimed that the Turkish army had taken over, the Constitution was suspended, martial law was declared, and a nationwide curfew had been imposed. Actually they were very far from being able to enforce any of this. But there was one question that was paramount in everybody’s minds: Where was President Erdoğan?

As it so happened, on that day Erdoğan was on vacation with his family in the Turkish southwest, at a hotel in the seaside resort of Marmaris. It would come out only much later that he had already been through the worst of it. The conspirators had flown in a special commando unit from a military base near İzmir with explicit instructions to “get” (meaning either kidnap or kill) Erdoğan. Despite the danger that he was in, the President had managed to hold a first, very brief press

conference from his hotel, and when for some reason that did not get adequate coverage, he used FaceTime (since all other communications were cut) to go live on CNN Türk for a second public appearance. It was a dramatic moment that will long endure in memory. Erdoğan was speaking from what for the public was an unknown location, and in semi-darkness, too; in the flickering light of mobile phones all the tension of what he and the entire country was going through showed in his face. Drawn yet dignified, he spoke in a grave undertone to exhort the people to defy the coup by getting out on the streets to defend the nation and democracy. Together with his family and bodyguards, he then managed to leave his hotel in the nick of time, literally minutes before his would-be assassins arrived. They duly landed and stormed the place, entering into a murderous firefight with the rearguard of Erdoğan’s security detail, and then, realising that their cause was lost, melting into the darkness of the night (only to be caught in the wild after weeks of living off the land).

"The people of Turkey as a whole, including all opposition parties and civil society organisations, as well as the entire police force and most of the officer corps, closed ranks around the government to stand firm against the would-be junta."



As for the ordinary citizens to whose hearts and minds the President had appealed, they had already begun to shed all fear in going out to confront the Gülenists' guns and tanks, but from this tipping point onward the popular response became overwhelming. Tens of thousands of ordinary people came out of their homes and neighbourhoods to surround military garrisons, block roads, and prevent any further troop movements; to protect police stations against the army; to march on putschists guarding key choke points; to surmount and seize tanks and trucks; to swarm into and reclaim airports in İstanbul from units deployed by the conspirators. Not having expected anything like this mass resistance, the putschists were mostly shocked and paralyzed, though here and there they did order their men to open fire on unarmed civilians, killing or wounding hundreds of people. Other detachments involved in the insurrection tried, all too late, to silence private television channels which by this time had formed a broad democratic coalition and were broadcasting more and more coherent news of the coup's emerging failure. As part of this last-ditch attempt at suppressing the media, soldiers stormed the İstanbul headquarters of CNN Türk and tried to force staff to evacuate the building -- while the cameras were still running. The upshot was that another crowd rushed to the rescue and neutralised the building; the whole process was live-streamed including officers' arrogance, employees' delaying tactics, and shots being heard in the background.

Around this time Ankara's administrative district was being shaken by heavy explosions. Gülenists had long been suspected of making a special effort to infiltrate the Air Force (as well as the Gendarmerie); this was now corroborated as the Fourth Main Jet Fighter Base only 20 miles northwest of Ankara became the rebels' primary command centre, sending forth its squadrons in sortie after sortie intended to terrorise the capital and the government into submission. The Police Special Operations headquarters at Gölbaşı was hit by guided munitions, resulting in extensive damage and heavy loss of life. Bombs also rained down on the Presidential Complex, further revealing the plotters' intentions; last

but not least, around fifteen bombs were also dropped on the National Assembly just as members of parliament from various parties were beginning to converge there in order to demonstrate their allegiance to democracy and popular sovereignty. Police officers around the building were also shot while inside, a later video showed Justice Minister Bekir Bozdağ and others trying to calm deputies and impose order.



*One of many such acts of resistance --
people climbing on top of and taking over
an armoured vehicle
AA/Anadolu Türk/Fatih Kurt.*

In reaction, opposition to the Gülenist military takeover kept growing by leaps and bounds. After PM Yıldırım and President Erdoğan, CHP leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu and MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli also came out with strong statements against the putsch. Main opposition leader Kılıçdaroğlu noted that the country had suffered enormously from such coups in the past: "We don't want to go through all that yet again." Upon learning of the partial insurrection in the armed forces, Devlet Bahçeli rushed to his party headquarters to organise an emergency meeting with his colleagues. Refusing to move to a safe location, he stayed at his office throughout the crisis, issuing a declaration of solidarity with the elected government.

After his dramatic video call appearance on CNN Türk, Erdoğan had remained silent for two hours or more -- until it was reported that his plane had landed at İstanbul's Atatürk airport, by then liberated from the Gülenist military by pro-democracy demonstrators. Emerging from the main building, President Erdoğan spoke to the people surrounding the airport, asking them to sustain their active support, and promising that a heavy price was going to be paid by the plotters.

Violence, not only in Ankara and İstanbul but also in many provincial cities, continued throughout the night and well into the next day, leaving 249 dead and more than 2000 injured (mostly civilians). Strikingly, the army was not deployed to put down the rest of the army. Crucially, those top officers that had not been kidnapped or otherwise muzzled by the conspirators came out with calls for rebellious troops to put down their arms and submit to legitimate authority. The Army's Special Forces (Purple Berets) foiled all attempts by the rebels to take over their compound and command. Similar kinds of in-house resistance to the putschists took place in many other units. Nevertheless, especially as it was not clear at this point who was who among the field officers, in order to localise and contain the insurrection, the government carefully refrained from bringing more and more troops out of their barracks. Instead, various branches of the police, including their Special Ops detachments (not to be confused with the Army's Special Forces), did most of the fighting while civilian demonstrators kept surrounding, isolating and demoralising strongholds of the putschists. Over less than twenty-four hours, the balance shifted more and more rapidly against the Gülenists. Though initially small they may have had high hopes of making the top command come over to their side so as to make it seem like they had the whole Armed Forces with them. When that ploy failed, they became demoralised and disoriented, beginning to look for personal ways of coming in from the cold, trying to make it seem as if they had actually been trying to prevent or moderate the attempted takeover in order to maximize their chances of legal survival. Key bases or buildings were cleared; top hostages including Chief of Staff Hulusi

"Tens of thousands of ordinary people came out of their homes and neighbourhoods to surround military garrisons, block roads, and prevent any further troop movements; to protect police stations against the army; to march on putschists guarding key choke points; to surmount and seize tanks and trucks; to swarm into and reclaim airports in İstanbul from units deployed by the conspirators."



Akar were rescued or released; entire units blocking roads or bridges surrendered; and leading rebels began to turn themselves in one by one. By the morning of 16 July, what TV screens showed were scenes from a dying coup.



It was over -- but who was responsible? It was over -- but was it really and wholly over? Had the plotters thoroughly and completely exposed themselves in an all-or-nothing gamble? Were there no more "sleeping agents" left inside the Armed Forces?

The founder and undisputed spiritual leader of the Gülenist Congregation is Fethullah Gülen, a preacher in exile who for the last few decades has resided in an extensive, exclusive compound in Pennsylvania. Back in the 60s, he and whatever close circle he then commanded decided that it was futile to try to win freedom and representation for Muslims through regular, open and democratic struggle. Instead, the state had to be conquered, through slow but steady infiltration, from the inside. By its very nature, this led to a very shady, murky kind of self-protecting, self-aggrandising operation. A further level of amorality was imparted by blind belief in the Messianic infallibility of Gülen as a new Mahdi (Savior, Messiah). Great care and attention was devoted to placing talented young children in military schools from an early age onward, and then ensuring their steady rise through the ranks, without risking exposure and expulsion as Gülenists, to increasingly more sensitive postings. Total denial of congregational affiliation was the rule, and it was only during the night of July 15, 2016, that a surprisingly large number of especially one- or two-star generals or admirals revealed themselves as part of Gülen's extensive "parallel state" inside the Armed Forces.

They cropped up in all kinds of unexpected and unsuspected places: sometimes as key aides to top generals (monitoring all orders and communications);

very frequently as firmly embedded in personnel departments (thereby controlling all appointments and promotions); worse yet, in the driving seat for operations departments (hence with powers to plan and order troop deployments). Even more significantly, also exposed in the process were their undercover handlers, designated as imams in Gülenist terminology. Roughly corresponding to communist political commissars, these turned out to be either civilians or lower ranking army men (such as noncoms or petty officers), though in all cases they wielded far greater authority than their ostensible military superiors. While the coup was under way, it was these clandestine power relations that came out into the open, revealing those who both issued and received such formally non-hierarchical orders as belonging to the Gülenist network. As police, the National Intelligence Organisation, and public prosecutors kept probing deeper and deeper over the succeeding weeks and months, it also became clear that all Gülenist operatives in the military, bureaucracy and judiciary had long been using common cell phone encryption systems (called ByLock and Eagle) to prevent detection in the run-up to the coup, and that over the last few months before 15th July, some of Gülen's closest deputies had been constantly going back and forth between the US and Turkey, bringing fresh directives and holding several meetings in the Organisation's safe houses -- which as an added measure were never inside military compounds. Still better (or worse), many among those now in the dock have been pointing the finger at each other, claiming innocence for themselves but accusing their erstwhile comrades of belonging to the congregation and the conspiracy.

All kinds of evidence, therefore, have been mounting, and pointing higher and higher up the Congregation's hierarchy toward Fethullah Gülen himself; furthermore during the night of July 15 there was at least one case when a putschist general tried to persuade Chief of Staff Hulusi Akar by offering to put him in direct contact with Gülen Hoca (whom this particular plotter referred to as "our opinion leader"). Nevertheless, from his safe haven in Pennsylvania Fethullah Gülen has kept denying any involvement in the coup itself while maintaining his die-hard hostility to the AK Party and the government. He has thereby posited himself as a rallying point for his disheartened followers, suggesting that his organisation is still intact, so that all is not lost. In turn, the ominous implications of this message, however silent, have not been lost on the government. On the night of July 15 the immediate danger had been averted, but who knew how many other heads and bodies this Hydra had -- or what untapped resources some more deeply hidden junta might still have at its command? With official investigations just getting under way, and therefore the reliability of the bulk of the Armed Forces still unclear, President Erdoğan had no other recourse than to turn to the people yet again, asking all citizens to keep defending their democracy by coming out every evening to occupy public squares and thoroughfares in every city across Turkey. These Democracy Watches lasted for more than three weeks, providing the government with some much needed breathing space so as to begin (by declaring an inevitable State of Emergency) to bring things more fully under control. They also served to demonstrate to the whole world that the Turkish people were wholly and solidly behind the legitimate government. And they culminated in an immense Democracy and Martyrs rally in Istanbul (attended by around two million people, with many more unable to enter the Yenikapı meeting grounds) where the President and the Chief of Staff mounted the rostrum side by side, and where all AK Party, CHP and MHP leaders reiterated their common determination never to allow Turkey to slide back into an era of army interventions or military tutelage over normal, civilian political life.





Timeline

—

Ankara

15:30

The National Intelligence Organisation (MİT) receives a tip from a major in the Turkish Armed Forces to the effect that *“MİT head Hakan Fidan is going to be kidnapped by a special security detail from the Army Aviation School.”*

16:20

Hakan Fidan calls Vice-Chief of General Staff Yaşar Güler to inform him of the development.

16:40

Chief of General Staff Hulusi Akar calls back to ask Hakan Fidan for further details.

18:00

Hakan Fidan goes to General Staff Headquarters to meet with Akar, Güler and other top generals and evaluate the situation. At this point General Akar sends some of his top deputies to various units with orders to investigate further. Some preliminary measures are also adopted: Turkish skies are closed to all military flights; on land, all tank or armoured vehicle movements are prohibited. In most cases, however, such orders are neutralised as they come into the hands of key Gülenist officers. At the same time, the realisation that they have been at least partially compromised forces the plotters to move their H-hour back from 03:00 next morning to 21:00 the previous evening, i.e. 15 July.

Ankara

20:23

A unit of 33 soldiers drawn from the ranks of the army's elite Special Forces is first brought together at Akıncı Air Base, and then heads for Ankara with orders to break into and take over General Staff Headquarters.

20:25

In defiance of the previous orders issued by Chief of Staff Akar, putschists who have established control over the Air Force Operations Centre declare the ban on military air traffic to be lifted, allowing for the junta's jet fighters to take to the skies.

21:00

Major General Mehmet Dişli, one of the leading conspirators, barges into the office of Chief of General Staff Hulusi Akar with a few other putschist officers in tow, and asks Akar to join the coup that is already under way by putting his signature under a public statement drawn up by a so-called "Committee for Establishing Peace at Home." Akar refuses to do so, vocally informing Dişli and others that they are wholly illegitimate and outside the law. They treat him harshly, putting a gun to his head, then a belt around his neck which they tighten so much that his bruises are publicly visible the next day. Eventually he is handcuffed and muzzled (with a cloth stuffed in his mouth) before being heli-ported to Akıncı Air Base.

21:20

The Special Forces unit of 33 soldiers deployed from Akıncı Air Base arrives and establishes control over General Staff Headquarters.

Istanbul

21:26

The putschists having set up a WhatsApp group called "Peace at Home," one of their leaders uses it to issue orders to allow exits from but to block all traffic entering İstanbul.



*Putschists communicate with each other via a WhatsApp group named "Peace at Home" (Yurtta Sulh).
[Open Source.](#)*

21:28

Through the same WhatsApp group, orders are also shared to "proceed immediately with all planned arrests and internments." This is revealed only subsequently through the final report of a Special Committee set up by the National Assembly to investigate the coup.

Ankara

21:30

A putschist force of around 80-85 heavily armed soldiers seizes the Gendarmerie Headquarters.

Istanbul

21:30

Troops under putschists' command begin disrupting traffic in İstanbul's Çengelköy district, arbitrarily stopping vehicles, conducting searches and doing ID checks so as to spread confusion and terror.



Photo journalist Mustafa Canbaz went out into the streets in response to President Erdoğan's call. He was shot and killed by the putschists at Çengelköy while defending the local police station. [Open Source.](#)

Ankara

22:00

Gunfire is heard coming from inside the General Staff building. At the same time, a helicopter controlled by putschists opens fire on the defiant masses of people who have begun to gather outside.

İstanbul

22:00

Putschists close the Bosphorus bridge to traffic.

22:20

Another unit commanded by putschist officers and including four army trucks makes its way into TRT World's Ulus district compound. They trick the security staff on duty by telling them that they have received a tip about an imminent terrorist threat and requesting them to evacuate the building. The security officers hand over all their weapons, whereupon they are promptly detained by the putschists.



Putschist troops shown breaking into the TRT World building at Ulus, Istanbul. TRT World.

Ankara

22:50

Putschists break into TRT Ankara headquarters and occupied the building.

İstanbul

23:00

İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality located as Saraçhane is seized by troops under putschist officers' command. A mass of ordinary civilians rushes to resist this Gülenist onslaught. A major conflict develops, during which 17 citizens are martyred and hundreds wounded.



Prof. İlhan Varank, a prominent academic and the brother of Mustafa Varank, one of President Erdoğan's chief counselors, is among those who are martyred in front of the municipality building. Open Source.

23:05

Using his cell phone, Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım goes live on the private NTV news channel to formally inform the public that a small group within the Armed Forces has launched "an insurrection" against which security forces have been called in "to do whatever is needed." He adds that there is no way this can be tolerated; "those involved will pay the heaviest price."

Ankara

23:08

Police Aviation Headquarters located in the capital's Gölbaşı district is bombed by F-16 jets, control by putschists killing seven.



Fighter jets bombed various strategic points and buildings during the coup. AA/Ahmet Izgi.

23:24

Another explosion is heard at the Police Special Operations Centre at Gölbaşı.

23:30

Breaking news: Various media outlets report that Chief of General Staff Hulusi Akar is being held hostage by the conspirators.

00:02

Putschists take over TRT, forcing news presenter Tijen Karas to read a lengthy proclamation -- on behalf of an anonymous "Council for Establishing Peace at Home" -- hollowly claiming that the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) have uniformly stepped in to take over the government. This is already not very credible, and presidential sources keep further clearing the fog by insisting, through other, private channels, that the coup is solely the work of a small Gülenist faction that is not being joined by the rest of the army.



Anchor-woman Tijen Karas was bullied and threatened by the putschists who had seized the TRT building, and she was forced to read a declaration by the Gülenist junta. Open Source.

Ankara

00:03

Gülenist jets and attack helicopters target the Police Special Operations Centre at Gölbaşı yet again, this time launching multiple strikes and killing 53 men and women in total with the previous bombing..



31 year old police officer Demet Sezen, a mother of one, is among the martyrs. Open Source.

00:09

The headquarters of MİT come under attack by a military helicopter. MİT personnel return the fire.

Marmaris

00:26

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan shrugs off the danger posed by the imminent arrival of hostile commando units sent to “get” him as he connects via FaceTime to CNN Türk. Tense but composed, he presents an image of dignity and conviction as he solemnly urges the people to take to the streets to defend democracy by resisting the coup. After President Erdoğan left his Marmaris hotel, two police officers that were part of his presidential security detail were martyred and three others injured in rearguard action against a rebel commando unit.



President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan live on CNN Türk via FaceTime. Open Source.

İstanbul

00:35

A first legal investigation against the conspirators is launched by Küçükçekmece District Prosecutor Ali Doğan, who also issues arrest warrants for whatever names he has been able to identify. This is a psychologically important moment; for the public it is a sign of growing government confidence while for the putschists it is a harbinger of what is to come.

Ankara

00:44

Helicopters controlled by putschists start attacking the vicinity of the Presidential Complex.



Upon learning of some unusual military movements, 18-year-old electrician Rüstem Resul Perçin heads for the Presidential Complex, where he will be shot and killed by rebel troops. Open Source.

00:57

Türksat, Turkey's main cable television and sole satellite communications operator, is attacked by putschists in a last-ditch attempt to stop all television broadcasting.

01:01

Defence Minister Fikri Işık announces that Ankara Police Headquarters have been attacked by warplanes and helicopters in "an act carried out by a junta within the Turkish Armed Forces."

Marmaris

01:15

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, his family and Energy Minister Berat Albayrak fly by helicopter from Marmaris to Dalaman. A while after, his hotel is attacked by a commando unit deployed from İzmir to somehow eliminate the President as a locus of leadership and resistance. They storm into the hotel, killing two policemen from the President's rearguard while wounding 25 others. But in the meantime, Erdoğan flies from Dalaman to İstanbul.

Ankara

01:39

Over 100 MPs from the AK Party, the CHP and the MHP gather in the Grand National Assembly building in response to a call by Assembly Chair İsmail Kahraman.



MP's from all political parties represented in the National Assembly gather for an emergency meeting in defiance of the warplanes flying overhead.
AA/Bülent Uzun.

02:38

Masses of civilians gathering in the area between the National Assembly and the nearby General Staff Headquarters are ruthlessly strafed by machine guns.

02:42

Jet fighters controlled by putschists taking off from Akıncı Air Base begin bombing the National Assembly. A total of fifteen such strikes through the night leave the building severely damaged, and several policemen and service staff injured.

03:00

TRT's Ankara headquarters are recaptured by the police. Putschists who had seized and occupied it are taken into custody while TRT broadcasting is normalised.



A group of soldiers are being neutralised after trying to storm and hold on to Turkey's state-run Radio and Television Corporation (TRT) in Ankara.
AA/Anadolu Türk/Cem Özdel

03:15

More gunfire is heard coming from the General Staff Headquarters.

İstanbul

03:20

Flying from Dalaman, President Erdoğan arrives at Atatürk Airport, which by then has also been peacefully liberated from the putschists by ordinary citizens in their thousands. Erdoğan addresses the people, describing the coup as a move against national unity and sovereignty.

Ankara

03:40

Gülenist putschists keep firing at the civilian crowds surrounding the General Staff building.

İstanbul

03:40

A final display of futility involves desperate attempts by putschists to stop the flow of correct and heartening information through private television channels. A putschist junior officer takes his troops into the CNN Türk studio during a live broadcast, though once there, he does not quite know what to do, and the studio is rapidly reclaimed by masses of civilian demonstrators.

03:46

Digiturk, the biggest DTH TV platform, is also raided by putschists.

Ankara

06:43

Two more bombs are dropped near the Presidential Complex, strikes directed at which have left a total of 30 dead and 36 wounded.



Smoke rising and people running from bombs dropped near the Presidential Complex.

AA/Anadolu Türk/Murat Kaynak.

İstanbul

06:55

After hours of frequently bloody confrontation with masses of unarmed citizens, putschists' tanks and troops manning the Bosphorus Bridge roadblock finally surrender, being disarmed, handcuffed, and taken into custody by the security forces. 37 civilians were killed and hundreds were wounded throughout the night at the Bosphorus Bridge.



Erol Olçok (54) was a close friend of and campaign manager for President Erdoğan. He and his 16-year-old son Abdullah were martyred on the Bosphorus Bridge whilst protesting the putschists at the road block. Open Source.

Ankara

07:00

A rebel jet bombs the Gendarmerie Headquarters building close to the Presidential Complex.

İstanbul

07:45

Putschist officers and troops who had earlier occupied the TRT's Ulus compound (where TRT World, too, is situated) also surrender to the security forces.

Ankara

08:32

Chief of Staff General Akar is rescued from Akıncı Air Base and brought back to the capital.

08:36

Special Operations units of the police recapture the Gendarmerie Headquarters.

09:40

Hundreds of putschists inside the General Staff building begin to surrender to the police.

10:41

Having served as the coup's command centre, Akıncı Air Base is recaptured from the plotters. Throughout the night, civilians from Ankara's Kazan district headed for Akıncı Air Base to resist the coup. 9 people were shot and killed by the putschists, and dozens were wounded.



70-year-old Mustafa Zorova, who was in the forefront of the protest march on the Fourth Main Fighter Command, falls wounded to volleys ordered by putschist officers. AA/Ahmet İzgi.



Tijen Karas, together with
Interior Minister Süleyman
Soylu, at her press conference.
AA/Cem Özdel.

TRT Presenter Tijen Karas Testifies

I had to make the most difficult news announcement of my professional life. We were detained by armed people in our news centre. We were held hostage for hours. Our arms were tied behind our backs and we were thrown to the ground whilst also being threatened by the plotters. I was forced by armed men to read a prepared text in the studio.

We broadcasted the coup announcement under those circumstances. I was shaking as I read the statement; I was very scared. It was a terrible night which I don't want to have to recall yet again.

Key Figures in Defeating the Coup

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Recep Tayyip Erdoğan



Erdoğan personally played a huge role in orchestrating the defeat of the July 15 coup. He was on vacation in Marmaris when the insurrection got going, having been moved back from 03:00 in the morning of the 16th to 21:00 in the evening of the 15th. It later transpired that MİT chief Hakan Fidan, acting on incomplete information received in the afternoon, had then actually called but had been unable to reach Erdoğan. Subsequently, it was through other phone calls around 21:30 that the president came to know of confused movements, clashes and gunfire from the vicinity of the Beylerbeyi Palace (on the Anatolian side of İstanbul). Incredulous, he himself promptly called both Hakan Fidan and Chief of Staff Hulusi Akar, but could not get through because by that time both top officials were themselves in deep trouble. Unknown to the outside world, General Akar was in the process of being detained, bullied and brutalised by junta members in a vain attempt to get him to turn traitor to the Republic. As for Hakan Fidan, who was able to return Erdoğan's call only thirty minutes later, he was already in the thick of the struggle against the putschists' initial onslaught directed at the Presidential Complex, the Prime Ministry, and the National Assembly; his own MİT compound, where he was working, was also being bombed and strafed by attack helicopters.

Meanwhile, the President himself was in an extremely precarious situation. Almost everyone was aware that he was likely to be the single most important target for the conspirators, for not only had he long been identified by Fethullah Gülen himself as a primary hate object, but also, his charismatic presence or absence was regarded as capable of making or breaking any potential resistance. And as it turned, the Gülenists had actually charged a heli-ported commando task force with flying from İzmir's Çiğli Base down to Marmaris to take President Erdoğan out of the picture one way or the other. Forewarned by his conversation with Hakan Fidan as well as other communications, Erdoğan still calmly and patiently arranged for two key

television appearances. The second was much more critical as he used FaceTime to appear live on CNN Türk after midnight. Emphatic in his denunciation of an "unfortunate attempt... by a small minority of the Turkish Armed Forces subservient to the 'parallel state's mastermind," he called for "a great national response" to defend "our country's unity and integrity" against this onslaught. He also defiantly announced that he would soon be going to İstanbul -- which seemed very risky, for Atatürk Airport was occupied by putschists at the time.



Thousands welcome President Erdoğan at İstanbul Atatürk Airport. Open Source.

"The Gülenists had actually charged a heli-ported commando task force with flying from İzmir's Çiğli Base down to Marmaris to take President Erdoğan out of the picture one way or the other."

██████████

What Erdoğan Said on CNN Türk at 00:26 on 16 July 2016

(FULL TRANSLATION)

The incident happening today is unfortunately an uprising organised by a minority group in our armed forces, and it is an attempt encouraged by the parallel state and managed by its mastermind. I believe that they will receive an appropriate punishment for this attempt against the unity, solidarity and integrity of our country. They will pay the heaviest price for using tanks, cannons, helicopters and so on, which have been paid for by this nation, against the nation itself. As the president, the prime minister and the government, we will stand upright and take every necessary step. We cannot measure the cost of this [act] in any other way and we cannot be frightened by them. I believe that in a short time, we will eliminate the occupation that they have put into effect. I would like to emphasise that we will proceed with great determination in this matter. And nobody can afford to test our determination about this. Meanwhile, I would like to make the following call to my nation: I invite our nation to take to the squares of our cities. I invite [them] to the airports. As a nation, we should gather at squares and airports and let them come with their tanks and cannon and do whatever they need to do to the people over there. So far I have never recognized a power over the power of [the] people. It is out of the question for us to recognize such a thing from now on, either.

President Erdoğan and Minister of Energy and Natural Resources Berat Albayrak during the press conference at Atatürk Airport. Open Source.



Nevertheless, this is precisely what Erdoğan did. First, he, his family and his security detail moved from their hotel to waiting helicopters and flew low under cover of darkness to Dalaman airport. Energy and Natural Resources Minister Berat Albayrak accompanied President Erdoğan the night and the next morning. It was not a minute too soon, for Erdoğan's assassins arrived soon after, storming an evacuated resort and running from room to room shouting and looking for "him" in a firefight that cost the lives of some brave defending policemen. By then, however, the president was safe in what was for the moment an unknown location, from where his plane took off for İstanbul, harassed on the way by Gülenists' jets though these in turn were shadowed by friendly fighters ready to blow the rebels out of the sky. And when he landed in İstanbul, the airport had already been reclaimed from putschist troops and tanks by thousands of ordinary citizens who proceeded to give the president a riotous welcome. It was 04:00 in the morning when Erdoğan first spoke to them, and 06:00 when he addressed them yet again, repeatedly asking the crowd, and through them all Turkey, to keep standing fast in defence of democracy.

"It was not a minute too soon, for his assassins arrived soon after, storming an evacuated resort and running from room to room shouting and looking for "him" in a firefight that cost the lives of some brave defending policemen."

Binali Yıldırım



*Yıldırım while talking to NTV.
Open Source.*



Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım connects to NTV, a private news channel, and announces that there is an "insurrection by a faction within the military." Open Source.



That night Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım had several close calls of his own. He had spent the day in İstanbul. Working late in his Dolmabahçe office on the European side, he had crossed over the Bosphorus Bridge on the way to his Tuzla residence on the Asian side -- only to be informed by his advisors, just ten minutes later, that roadblocks had suddenly and inexplicably appeared on both bridges. It was around that time, too, that he and the president established contact, concluding that they were facing a Gülenist military takeover. The PM appeared on the private NTV channel to tell the public that yes, an insurrection was under way: "But we are not going to allow them to succeed."

Around midnight, finally, PM Yıldırım headed for Ankara by car, not sticking to the main highway but taking various side roads and constantly changing itineraries, but even then not being able to evade being fired on by Gülenist elements in the gendarmerie as he and his

convoy passed through the countryside. They also had to wait for a long time in a tunnel as a precaution against air attack. In the meantime, the PM once more went on the air via NTV to label the putschists as "terrorists," and to thank the opposition leaders for their firm opposition to the coup. Firmly taking the reins of government in hand, Binali Yıldırım promptly contacted air bases loyal to the government to order no fewer than 48 fighter jets to take off and establish effective air cover over Ankara. These F16s quickly forced the aircraft controlled by putschists to land, and it was only after most hostile activity in the capital's skies had been brought to an end that Yıldırım could resume his journey and arrive in Ankara around 06:00 o'clock. Later that day, PM Yıldırım, accompanied by Interior Minister Efkan Ala and Chief of Staff Hulusi Akar (who had just been rescued from Akıncı Air Base, headquarters of the coup plotters), held a press conference to salute the people of Turkey for their heroic resistance to the coup.

Hulusi Akar



*Chief of Staff Hulusi Akar joins Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım in a press conference on the morning of 16th July. The black and blue marks on his neck were easily visible.
AA/Erçin Top.*

As the top-ranking officer in the Turkish military, the Chief of General Staff is the professional commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces. Since August 2015, this position has been filled by General Hulusi Akar, who was working at his Headquarters office in Ankara on the afternoon of 15th July when his then-second in charge, Vice-Chief of General Staff Yaşar Güler came around 16:00 to inform him that the MİT had received notice of certain unusual activities (planned or already taking place) in various military units. Around 18:00 General Akar was visited by intelligence chief Hakan Fidan in person; they were also joined by Yaşar Güler as well as Army chief Salih Zeki Çolak in a foursome meeting to address the question of what preliminary measures to adopt against the possibility of a coup. Chief Akar sent some of his top deputies to the suspect units in order to investigate further. Meanwhile, he also ordered Turkish skies to be closed to all military flights and for all tank

or armoured vehicle movements to be prohibited. All warplanes in the air were to be grounded, and no troops were to leave their barracks.

What then happened was that the inspectors sent by General Akar were brazenly misled and misinformed by the Gülenist officers in those compounds, while the C-in-C's stand-down orders were also disobeyed in deliberate and comprehensive fashion. Nevertheless, they had the effect of forcing the conspirators to pull back their striking hour from 03:00 in the morning of the 16th to 21:00 on the evening of 15th July. Indeed, it was around that time, i.e. 21:00, that a commando force of around thirty-three combat-equipped soldiers in special camouflage dress, led by some key putschist generals, forcibly entered General Staff Headquarters and were shown into the Chief's office by none other than General Akar's own aides. When they (the coup plotters) tried to invite and persuade Akar to join the coup, the Chief of Staff adamantly refused, yelling at his captors to cease and desist, to abide by army discipline, and to go back to their barracks. Insolent in their fanatical zeal, putschists then turned physical, brutalising General Akar by garrotting him with a belt so as to leave his neck black-and-blue for the next few days. Unable to get their way, they removed him by helicopter to their operational centre at the Akıncı Air Base (the Fourth Main Jet Fighter Command), where he as well as other top generals were held blindfolded and subjected to further psychological pressure. By then, however, the coup was coming unravelled, and some of the key plotters themselves were beginning to play mental games of presenting themselves as straddling the line or even being on the government side. In the growing confusion, a heli-borne operation was launched against the Akıncı Air Base on the morning of the 16 July that succeeded in rescuing General Akar while nearly seventy Gülenist rebels involved in kidnapping him were captured and taken into custody.

Hakan Fidan



Head of the National Intelligence Organisation, Hakan Fidan, was one of the key persons to thwart the coup attempt. AA/Ensar Özdemir.

Turkey's National Intelligence Organisation (MIT) is headed by a Permanent Undersecretary directly subordinate and accountable to the Prime Minister. Since 2010, this position has been filled by Hakan Fidan, who had come to be repeatedly targeted by Gülenist conspiracies even before the July 15 coup. Back in 2012, as instructed by then-PM Erdoğan, he and his staff had entered into secret talks with the PKK, only for the whole fragile affair to be deliberately exposed by Gülenists within the military and judiciary, who then preposterously tried to indict the intelligence chief on grounds of illegal complicity with a criminal organisation. Subsequently they had also used their minions inside the Gendarmerie to halt and search MIT trucks heading for Syrian rebel groups so as to try and present Turkey to the outside world as providing secret aid and support to Daesh. 15th July 2016 initially saw Hakan Fidan in Ankara and

working in his office. Then, around 15:00 an army major showed up at MIT headquarters with a crucial tip: his commanding officer, he said, had told him, the major, to be ready that night for a special heli-borne operation that would involve "getting" or "taking out" none other than Hakan Fidan himself. Raw, untreated and unverified as it was, this single, solitary piece of intelligence was still not something that could be taken lightly. Virtually as soon as the major had been debriefed, therefore, Hakan Fidan got on the phone to inform Vice-Chief of General Staff Yaşar Güler that there were indications of irregular goings-on inside various military units. Subsequently, he personally went to General Staff Headquarters to meet with Akar and Güler in an attempt to assess the gravity of the situation. Chief of Staff Akar did order some serious preliminary measures to be put into effect, though his orders were quickly countermanded by key putschists in sensitive positions.

"Later at night, helicopters controlled by putschists also attacked MIT Headquarters, where from 22:30 to 06:30 in the morning security forces and staff kept returning fire."

Soon after Hakan Fidan left, the General Staff building was stormed by a special detachment of Gülenist troops. Later at night, helicopters controlled by putschists also attacked MIT Headquarters, where from 22:30 to 06:30 in the morning security forces and staff kept returning fire.

Zekai Aksakallı



*On July 15, 2016 Special Forces Commander Zekai Aksakallı was on the front lines against the plotters.
AA/Gökhan Balci.*

Today, Zekai Aksakallı is a three-star lieutenant general in the army. At the time of the coup, as a two-star major general he was in command of the Army's Special Forces (popularly known as the Purple Berets). As a tough and hard-bitten field officer his experienced reactions and quick thinking under duress may be said to have played a critical role in foiling the coup by ensuring that the plotters did not gain control of the Special Forces.

On the afternoon of 15th July, General Aksakallı was taking part in a routine counter-terrorism meeting when a note was passed to Vice-Chief of General Staff Yaşar Güler, who promptly left; then a second note was passed to the Army Chief of Staff, who also left immediately, whereupon General Aksakallı sensed that something was seriously wrong, though he could not say what. Himself briefly leaving the room soon after 18:00, he learned that Vice-Chief Güler was in a meeting with

Chief of Staff Akar that was also being attended by MİT head Hakan Fidan. In the corridor, he also met one-star Brigadier General Mehmet Partigöç, who would soon emerge as one of top putschists, and who is now facing charges of high treason. In court, General Aksakallı has testified that Partigöç was very agitated and "so red in the face that it looked as if he were coming down with measles." It is now all too clear that what was worrying Brigadier Partigöç at the time was the possibility that the coup had been fatally compromised before it had even started.

It wasn't exactly so, but all these signs and encounters appear to have put General Aksakallı on a state of high alert. That evening he was supposed to be the guest of honour at a wedding at the Beştepe Officers' Club, where, in violation of military protocol, he found himself to be seated at the very back of the room, with his suspicions further aroused when a junior orderly at the National Intelligence Organisation whom he knew very well behaved strangely and pretended not to recognise him. Put off by all this, General Aksakallı and his wife decided to leave early with his civilian car and driver. Soon after leaving the Officers' Club, a black minibus blocked their way and a grey car came alongside, with two armed men approaching to request that he get out and accompany them. The general pretended to be doing so, only to suddenly get out and kick the two men off balance; his driver then used the opportunity to back out and drive them to safety.

Once out of the ambush, General Aksakallı both notified the police and, from the initial safety of his home, started contacting his Special Forces subordinates. When he realised that the rebels had pinpointed his location, he relocated to another flat, all the time gradually building up a picture of who remained loyal and who had turned traitor at Special Forces Headquarters. His attention was particularly drawn to one-star Brigadier General Semih Terzi, a Special Forces officer posted to Diyarbakır in Southeast Turkey, who that very day had requested (and obtained) his, General Aksakallı's, leave to come to Ankara on the pretext of visiting his ailing father. In

the course of the evening, General Aksakallı came to realise that General Terzi was in the thick of the coup and had actually been designated by the putschists to remove him. Aksakallı, from command and take over the Special Forces. He contacted, warned and mobilised as many general officers as he could; he contacted Intelligence Chief Hakan Fidan to supply him with the names of all the conspirators that he could identify; he also organised his trustworthy officers inside the SF compound to isolate and neutralise two key Gülenist conspirators in the SF (Colonel Ümit Bak and Lieutenant Colonel Mehmet Ali Çelik). He even sent four colonels as reinforcements to infiltrate the unit and make sure that his orders were carried out to the letter. All in all, General Aksakallı's courage, energy and presence of mind had a lot to do with the Gülenist insurrection faltering at an early stage in Ankara.



*General Zekai Aksakallı's aide Ömer Halisdemir stands out even among those who made the supreme sacrifice.
Open Source.*

Around midnight on 15th July, General Aksakallı issued what has turned out to be his single most crucial order. He later testified that he had called and spoken eight times with Ömer Halisdemir, a master sergeant on night duty at the main gate to the Special Forces compound. The last time around, General Aksakallı solemnly asked and ordered this brave noncom, who had spent twenty years under Aksakallı's command, to lay down his own life if necessary in order to shoot and kill General Semih Terzi if and when the latter should arrive at the entrance. This, indeed, is exactly what happened. As General Terzi and his retinue showed up at 02:16 to try and usurp the Special Forces Command, Ömer Halisdemir, who had been waiting in ambush under the nearby trees, mingled with the crowd without attracting attention, and fired three bullets at Semih Terzi from close range before he himself was strafed from behind as he tried to escape into the darkness. Learning of Halisdemir's supreme sacrifice through his hidden contacts inside the compound, General Aksakallı called GATA Military Hospital to arrange for all those accompanying the mortally wounded General Terzi to be disarmed and arrested. Terzi had already died on the way, but for some of his close collaborators, detainment at GATA was the end of the line.

It was close to 10:00 in the morning on 16th July when General Zekai Aksakallı was finally able to arrive at his SF Headquarters. Waiting at the main entrance were all the leading plotters whom he had ordered to be disarmed and taken into custody. Lying on the floor was the lifeless body of Master Sergeant Halisdemir. "I pulled back the sheet covering him," General Aksakallı told the court on 19th March 2017, "and kissed his forehead."



*Security camera footage at the Special Forces Headquarters in Ankara showing the moment when Ömer Halisdemir was martyred by the putschists under Semih Terzi's command.
Open Source.*

Defiance and Solidarity at the National Assembly

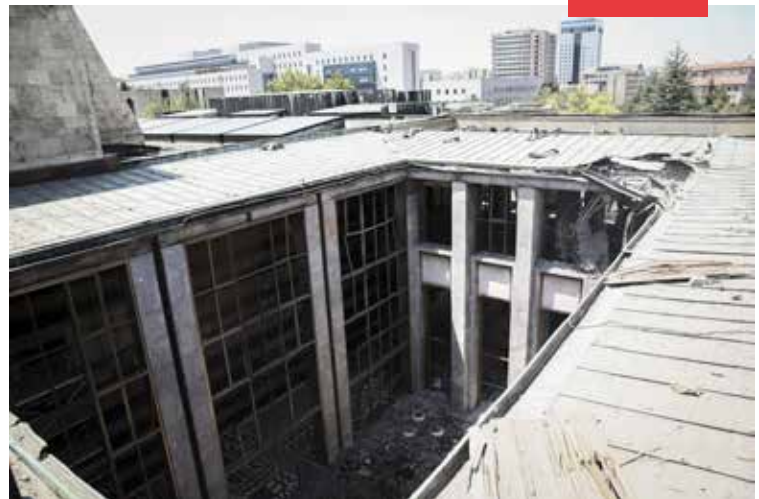
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Parts of parliament (the Grand National Assembly of Turkey) were severely damaged as a result of aerial bombardment by the putschists. At the time MPs were inside attending a meeting.
AA/Aytaç Ünal.

Ten to fifteen bombs were dropped on the National Assembly by putschists on the night of the coup attempt.
AA/Murat Kula.



What's in a name? Today, Turkey's parliament is formally called the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (TBMM for short). In 1919-22 it was just the Grand National Assembly (BMM), and at a time when the Republic of Turkey had not yet been promulgated, the government, too, was called the Government of the BMM (Grand National Assembly). It is a traditional and tradition-loaded designation. At the end of World War I, when the badly defeated Ottoman Empire had been forced to sign the Mudros Armistice, the foundations for a new resistance movement in Anatolia were laid by a series of local congresses (only the two most famous of which were held in Erzurum and Sivas under Mustafa Kemal's personal leadership). Nearly fifteen in all, they played a key role in gradually building a new consensus and a new representation. Then when a more nation-wide body and vision was finally brought together in Ankara on 23rd April 1920, it was called the Grand National Assembly -- with emphasis on "Grand" and "National" -- to distinguish it from all the previous gatherings -- and also because the country whose sovereignty it would ultimately represent had not yet taken clear mental and geographical shape. When the National Struggle brought victory and a modern Republic of Turkey was finally proclaimed, the Grand National Assembly itself became the Grand National Assembly of Turkey.

It was this hallowed gathering that over July 15-16 lived through one of the longest nights in its history. When it became clear that a faction within the Armed Forces was staging an insurrection to overthrow the government, Assembly Chairman İsmail Kahraman called on all deputies to meet in protest, confront the danger, and defend democracy. More than a hundred deputies from the AK Party, CHP and MHP were able to accede to his call, urgently meeting in parliament to condemn the coup and to convey messages in all directions that they would remain defiant in solidarity against the military takeover. Exceptionally, journalists were allowed inside the meeting chamber, and speeches were livestreamed onto the internet. Then exactly at 02:31 the bombing began, caused some heavy damage, and forced the MPs to seek shelter in the basement. They remained on standby for hours, coming to a close conclusion only with a message from the president urging them to be patient for the time being, and to cooperate along non-partisan lines in order to rehabilitate the country.

Bekir Bozdağ, AK Party (Justice and Development Party)



Bekir Bozdağ, MP and Justice Minister, refused to interrupt his speech and abandon the chamber even under bombardment.
AA/Evrim Aydın.

“Parliament has to go on. If we shut parliament down and go to the shelters while the people are risking their lives in public squares, they will say that parliament was afraid of the putschists. We should be ready to die here. Whoever wants to go can go; they will stand before our nation and be judged. No matter what they do, we will be here. We will hold the plotters to account and we will bring them to trial.”

Özgür Özel, CHP

(Republican People's Party)



Özgür Özel, MP and Parliamentary Group Leader for the CHP, was also at the National Assembly.
Open Source.

“As the CHP we have been contesting elections for 93 or 94 years. We may win at times and lose at other times, but we have never capitulated to military takeovers. We came out of the last elections as the main opposition party. Depending on whether our electoral fortunes change through democratic means, we may either be in opposition or enter into government. We are the main opposition party in this parliament, and we will comply all the way with parliamentary democracy.”

Erkan Akçay, MHP

(Nationalist Movement Party)



Erkan Akçay, MP and Parliamentary Group Leader for the MHP, was also there at the National Assembly.
Open Source.

“This July 15 will go down as a day of disgrace in the democratic history of Turkey. This attempt will be thwarted by the strong will of the Turkish people and the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (TBMM). No adventures will be tolerated, and this coup attempt will never achieve success.”

Joint Resolution Adopted at the Extraordinary Meeting of the General Assembly, *16 July 2016*



Representing this glorious and heroic nation, the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (TBMM) has kept exercising its duty amid a rain of bombs and bullets. It has shown that it is an assembly worthy of its nation. The TBMM is an assembly that has waged the National War of Independence, has fostered this system of parliamentary democracy, and has raised the nation from poverty and destitution. Our assembly has come up with its response to the coup in full unity.

The determination shown by the TBMM against the coup is extremely valuable for further reinforcing democracy in Turkey. As today, in the future, too, every encroachment against our venerable TBMM will be confronted by the iron will of the assembly.

It is of historic import that every political party group in our assembly should have stood with a common attitude and language against the coup; it will take its place in history. This common attitude and common language will further empower our nation and our national will. The TBMM is in charge, in full unity. And the assembly of the people will make those who launched this attack on the nation and on our sovereignty pay the highest price that the law permits. This declaration is the proof that nothing will ever be the same in Turkey.

Though we have our differences as four separate parties, we also all stand by the national will. We all look after it and we forever will. Let our nation rest assured. Our nation and its representatives have not let the nation down, and they never will. We once more strongly condemn the attack against our democracy, our nation, and the TBMM.

We call on everyone to abstain from acts of violence that are in excess of democratic reactions. We remember our martyrs with compassion and wish our wounded a quick recovery. We salute all friends and fraternal nations that have been sending us their messages of support.

Signatories

İsmail Kahraman,

Speaker of the
Grand National
Assembly

Binali Yıldırım,

Head of the AK Party
Group in the Grand
National Assembly

Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu,

Head of the CHP Group
in the Grand National
Assembly

Devlet Bahçeli,

Head of the MHP Group
in the Grand National
Assembly

İdris Baluken,

Acting Head of the
HDP Group in the Grand
National Assembly



The Prime Minister's parliamentary offices
were hard hit by Gülenist bombing..
AA/Bülent Uzun.

The Gülenist Mystery: From a Religious Congregation and “Service” Movement to a Power-hungry Criminal Network



*Characterised as a control freak by those who know him, Gülen micro-manages even the tiniest details of his organisations' activities.
Open Source.*

Behind the July 15, 2016 coup attempt in Turkey is an organisation that is variously referred to as the Gülenist Congregation, Fethullah Hoca's (or Hoca Efendi's) followers, or the Service Movement. In Turkish, they used to be referred to as (the equivalent of) Fethullahists, but because this is too cumbersome, it is usually rendered as Gülenists in English. A more recent appellation is FETÖ, which (in its FETÖ form) is short for Fethullah at the same time that it is an acronym for (the Turkish of) "Fethullahist Terror Organisation." This is a derivation from the last few years' court cases, which have seen groups of Gülenists brought to trial in the context of Turkey's Anti-Terror Law, with the term "FETÖ" coming to be formally utilized in at least one indictment. It has stuck, and especially after what happened on 15th-16th July clearly demonstrated that (through the army) the Gülenists were well and truly armed and ruthlessly capable of extreme violence, it has taken on a new reality of its own.

"The Gülenists, too, were (and are) presenting themselves as remaining entirely within the fold of Islamic belief while also recognising Fethullah Gülen as Mahdi, the new Messiah. The big difference is that they have dedicated themselves not simply to preaching a new belief but to conquering political power."

Nevertheless, especially for foreigners (but also for the mainstream of Turkey's Islamic community) this is arguably the single most difficult obstacle, the thorniest problem in the face of trying to understand what has been happening in Turkey since 2010. How could a single organisation or network have so many faces? How could it present itself for so long, and so successfully, as nothing but a peaceful religious community dedicated only to promoting education and fostering universal values? How could there be such incredible disparity between their outside appearance and inner agenda? How could any such group, seemingly without the benefit of a formal organisational structure, exercise such patience and command, such dormant yet complete loyalty over decades?

Last but not least: Why did not most other Turkish Muslims see anything wrong with the Gülenists? Or did they, but nevertheless benevolently tolerate, condone, even protect them? Why and how is it impossible to understand Turkish politics over 2010-2015, and even today, without the Gülenist Factor? Over these same six or seven years, did they catch (or to what extent did they catch) Turkey and the rest of the world unawares? And why did they not declare their true ideo-political colours even as they tried to seize power on 15th- July? At the end of the day, what proof, what evidence is there that it was truly the Gülenists who planned, organised, and tried to carry out the military takeover?

There is, of course, a very good reason why all this turns out to be so hard to grasp from the outside: because it is all so archaic, so "medieval" in character; because the world has seen nothing quite like it, at least not for

several centuries; because not even in Antiquity or the Middle Ages did secret societies revolving around their own arcane "mysteries" achieve such attractiveness, spread and power. The closest example, perhaps, is Christianity, which was initially no more than a reform sect within Judaism, and which then developed in a semi-clandestine twilight zone over its first three centuries before emerging as a world religion. The Gülenists, too, were (and are) presenting themselves as remaining entirely within the fold of Islamic belief while also recognising Fethullah Gülen as Mahdi, the new Messiah. The big difference is that they have dedicated themselves not simply to preaching a new belief but to conquering political power. It is a very worldly end that their spiritual leadership has pursued single-mindedly over three main phases. (1) Roughly from around 1966 to 1980 was when they were just establishing their doctrine, strategy and organisational identity, and taking the very first steps, in utmost secrecy, in infiltrating the state apparatus. (2) Paradoxically, it was a military coup in 1980 that, in its opportunistic search for a "tolerable, usable" Islam, provided them with their greatest opportunity, which they seized in quite aggressive fashion -- though even then, their sole tactical objective was simply to keep accumulating more and more power. (3) From around 1997 onward, they were increasingly overt, at times even arrogant in their ambition to achieve full control over state and society. It was this "final" drive that was cut short when they gambled everything on their military takeover attempt of 15th July 2016, and were defeated by the democratic resistance of the people.¹

¹ This summary is based on the (May 2017) Final Report of the Special Committee set up by the Grand National Assembly to inquire into the attempted coup of July 15, 2016, as well as all other activities by the Fethullahist Terror Organisation ("Fethullahçı Terör Örgütü'nün (FETÖ/PDY) 15 Temmuz 2016 Tarihli Darbe Girişimi ile Bu Terör Örgütü'nün Faaliyetlerinin Tüm Yönleriyle Araştırılarak Alınması Gereken Önlemlerin Belirlenmesi Amacıyla Kurulan Meclis Araştırması Komisyonu Raporu").

Early Times

Fetullah (or Fethullah) Gülen was born in 1941 in the province of Erzurum. His formal schooling was interrupted at a young age when his family moved to a village, after which he received only a traditional medrese (religious college) education. He was in the city of Edirne over 1959-65, when he became an imam and also did his military service. He had begun to make a name for himself as a passionate preacher (vaiz) as early as 1958, and his reputation kept growing in İzmir, where it was, during his tenure as chief preacher (1966-71), that he really began to create a circle around himself.

It was a crucial moment for Muslims and Islamists. The Young Turks (from 1908) and Kemalist revolutions (from 1923) had been carried out by Westernising military-bureaucratic elites that were more interested in forcing rapid modernisation from above than in democracy, and who with their internalised Eurocentrism had come to regard Islam as an obstacle to progress. Especially during and after the decisive consolidation of "One Party" rule in 1925-27, religion came to be decisively excluded from public space, and Muslims were denied representation in political life. The end of World War II, the San Francisco Conference and Turkey's re-opening to the West did facilitate a partial democratisation as a series of centre-right parties became more and more able to appeal to a conservative electorate's longing for freedom of conscience, belief and worship. At the same time, Kemalist Jacobinism's authoritarian version of secularism was still very much alive, and the military-bureaucratic establishment was by no means willing to relinquish its hegemony over public space, as successive army takeovers in 1960, 1971 and 1980 would repeatedly demonstrate.

A Critical Juncture

Under these circumstances, political Islam in Turkey faced a tough choice: whether to persist in an open and democratic struggle for representation, or to resort to other means. The majority chose the first path, stubbornly forming one party after another with clearly religious leanings, seeing them banned by the Constitutional Court (on some pretext of violating secularism), and starting afresh to set up a new one, hence suffering temporary reversals but gathering strength, moral conviction and momentum in the long run. It is this mainstream process that has fostered the rise of the AK Party and fed into the multiple emancipations of the past decade and a half. But sixty or seventy years ago, when the 27th May 1960 military takeover had overthrown the Democrat Party and brutally sent its leader Adnan Menderes to the gallows, or after the 12th March 1971 military takeover, when Gülen himself was jailed for seven months and acquitted only after a trial lasting three years, like hard-core Marxists rejecting "bourgeois democracy" some hard-core Islamists, too, are likely to have turned their backs on the promise of such non-violent evolution.

In any case, it may have been around this time that through a combination of his secretive disposition, distrust in politics, and immense self-belief, Fethullah Gülen opted for a strategy of conquering state power from the inside, through a long and patient process of slow infiltration. He appears to have started by focusing on two key groups: teenagers and businessmen. Both were central to his vision. Tender minds could readily be influenced, brought up in absolute loyalty, carefully directed into future careers and placements. Starting in his İzmir years, Gülen set about organizing intensive religious and ideological education for his young

disciples in student dormitories and summer camps. Also through them, he started building his personality cult. In time, this first generation of recruits became the foundation, the backbone of the Gülenist Organisation. They also played a key role in cultivating an image of Gülen as a mystical, universal leader, chosen by God to transform the entire global sphere of religion.

Upward Mobility and Solidarity

As for the businessmen around him, Gülen looked to them not just for short-term gifts but for systematically building up a comprehensive, long-term financial empire. He motivated them to use their financial assets in favour of the group, and they started funding private schools, dormitories, student houses, and prep courses for university entrance exams. It began with Western Anatolia, then spread throughout the country, and eventually beyond Turkey. Once more, a first "Golden Generation" of young Gülenists used these institutions to train subsequent generations of loyal cadres, creating an ever-expanding reservoir of human resources. Children of poor families were given scholarships to bind them to the organisation. Over time, layer upon layer of new schools and even universities were added, so that the whole mechanism became virtually self-perpetuating. Some students were encouraged to build professional careers in education so as to gradually occupy key positions in newly legislated Institutes (later Faculties) of Education, while others were motivated or propelled to seek positions in government service, including the military and the police as well as the judiciary and civilian bureaucracy. These were all professions that had previously been closed to overtly Islamic identities.

One has to understand what all this meant for many Muslims on the day. Here were hitherto deprived, disempowered masses of people who felt that there could be no future, no way out for them, and not only them but also their children. But suddenly there was: like the Medieval Church, now this Cemaat, this Congregation, too, offered a significant degree of upward mobility through what had become quite a hostile Republican caste system. Without themselves necessarily joining, large numbers of honest Muslim fathers and mothers were nevertheless grateful for the opportunities provided to their children, and therefore also willing to overlook the unorthodox, mystical, Messianic aspects of Gülenist belief and practice. Such tolerant coexistence was enormously helped by the official persecution that Gülenists began to be subjected to, since it overlapped with, and was perceived as part of, the authoritarian secularist persecution of Muslims in general. "Well, it is true that they are a bit odd," it may have been thought; "still, at the end of the day we are all members of the same faith."

"... through a combination of his secretive disposition, distrust in politics, and immense self-belief, Fethullah Gülen opted for a strategy of conquering state power from the inside, through a long and patient process of slow infiltration."

A Dual Organisation

Then there came the 12th September 1980 coup, which meant both fresh repression and also, because of Kenan Evren's and other top generals' search for a new ideological bulwark against the Left, a new and this time directly political opportunity. It was at this point that secrecy, or tedbir (precaution) as it came to be called by the Gülenists, entered the scene. Like Lenin building his "new type" of part-legal, part-illegal Bolshevik Party in the early-20th century, Gülen stopped, took fresh stock, and divided his group into two parts or levels which were given different roles and functions. On the one hand, their educational and other civic activities would constitute a façade of innocence and benevolence -- the Service Movement, an ironclad front, a totally legitimate showcase. On the other hand, now a much more secretive inner circle began to organise the effort to place Gülen's tested and most loyal followers into key state institutions. By then, it must be remembered, they had already made significant inroads in that regard, which had resulted in self-protecting, self-aggrandising networks. They put it to good use. In 1986, for an exam in a Turkish course at Kuleli Military High School, 250 students turned in perfectly correct answer sheets. The army started an investigation, which concluded (without being able to arrive at empirical and individual proof) that Gülenists had (or must have) stolen the exam questions and supplied them to their followers.² Something similar happened the same year at Kasımpaşa Naval High School, where another investigation revealed that many

students had been (or must have been) deliberately placed there by their Gülenist handlers. It should be noted at this point that normally all military schools accept students only after running background checks and security clearances. Members of the Gülenist inner circle, however, must have been so well-placed and covered as to circumvent all such measures. Though the full extent of their infiltration is still not entirely clear, the fact that they were able to achieve such success even in the 1980s may be taken as a relatively early index of what they eventually became capable of.

Fethullah Gülen has never admitted the existence of this inner, illegal circle or its various manipulations, always insisting that there has been nothing to his congregation except its legal façade of the so-called Service Movement. Meanwhile, more than two decades later freshly re-opened investigations have decisively proved that Gülenists actually stole those as well as numerous other exam questions, including admission exams for government service, for police schools, and many others. They were thereby able to place thousands of their members in state institutions. In the aftermath of 15th July 2016, much more thorough-going investigations have resulted in the exposure of more than 100,000 public servants (including high-ranking officers and other members of the military, policemen, judges, prosecutors and school teachers) as belonging to and working for (catering to the special interests of) the Gülenist network. Members of the organisation, it has been further revealed, leaked strategic information directly to their FETÖ superiors. The (May 2017) Final Report of a Special Committee appointed by the National Assembly also shows how the Gülenists usurped and exploited public funds. Included among their illegal activities were: establishing a secret chain of command within the military and the police; manipulating justice; manipulating national education; and imposing punitive tax controls on selected companies.³

"On the one hand, their educational and other civic activities would constitute a façade of innocence and benevolence -- the Service Movement, an ironclad front, a totally legitimate showcase. On the other hand, now a much more secretive inner circle began to organise the effort to place Gülen's tested and most loyal followers into key state institutions."

*A secret passageway inside a Gülenist school that was uncovered after the July 15 coup.
AA/Oktay Çilesiz.*



² Final Report of the Special Committee set up by the National Assembly.

³ Final Report of the Special Committee set up by the National Assembly.

FETÖ Global

In the 1990s, the group expanded its activities beyond Turkey, beginning to launch schools and other educational institutions throughout the world. At its peak the group was operating in more than 150 countries, running hundreds of schools, cultural centres, and associations. The geographical locus for the group's elite private schools was Central Asia and Africa. In Turkey they were collecting donations by touting this effort as one of spreading Turkish culture and influence while also charitably serving some of the poorest people in the world. In practice, the schools themselves were highly competitive and had a very selective entrance process. This enabled Gülenists to tap into these developing countries' elite families, through which they then tried to gain influence inside the régime for promoting their own political and economic interests. Especially in the West, other Gülenist NGOs have taken the form of humanitarian aid foundations, associations for interfaith exchange (such as the Dialogue Society, the Rumi Forum, or the Atlantic Institute) or other intellectual and cultural frameworks. The interfaith dialogue centres in particular, supposedly dedicated to promoting peace and mutual understanding, have served as tools for concealment as well as soliciting tolerance from the Western world.⁴

In 2014, the FBI launched an investigation into the Gülenists' more than 130 charter schools in the US, for

which they have received more than 2 billion dollars in government funds since 2010. The group was (and is) accused of using these funds outside their legally designated objectives, thereby diverting the money to the Gülenist network. In this regard, charitable and educational organisations run by Gülen are structurally and financially suspect, a senior US State Department official has also noted: they look "a lot like the ways in which organised crime sets itself up or folks who are trying to hide money for money laundering" rather than a "benign religious movement."

"In 2014, the FBI launched an investigation into the Gülenists' more than 130 charter schools in the US, for which they have received more than 2 billion dollars in government funds since 2010. The group was (and is) accused of using these funds outside their legally designated objectives, thereby diverting the money to the Gülenist network."

⁴ Final Report of the Special Committee set up by the National Assembly.

FETÖ Incorporated

Having established a firm base in education and recruited a growing number of followers, in the late-1970s Gülenists began to expand further into finance while also tackling the media. In 1979 they launched a religious periodical perhaps all too appropriately called Sızıntı (which is translatable as Seepage, Dripping or Infiltration), for which Gülen himself was writing all editorials. In time they acquired the daily Zaman (1986-87), Samanyolu TV (1993), Cihan News Agency (1994), Today's Zaman (2007), and many others. Concurrently, they set up Bank Asya in 1996, adding Asya Pension and Işık Insurance to it over time. They also formed a Turkish Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists (TUSKON) for domestic and global lobbying purposes. Thanks to Gülenists' expert financial advisors, businessmen under TUSKON's umbrella succeeded in paying very little taxes wherever they operated, though in return, they did have to make compulsory donations, called himmet to the organisation. In turn, these undeclared donations were used for the organisation's covert, illicit operations.

"Thanks to Gülenists' expert financial advisors, businessmen under TUSKON's umbrella succeeded in paying very little taxes wherever they operated, though in return, they did have to make compulsory donations, called himmet, to the organisation. In turn, these undeclared donations were used for the organisation's covert, illicit operations."

By the early-21st century the Gülenist movement had become one of Turkey's most powerful influence or pressure groups. It was not just a matter of their financial wealth and media resources. More crucially, they were firmly implanted in the bureaucracy and judiciary. These were traditional Kemalist, nationalist-statist strongholds traditionally closed to Muslims. But now the only exception, and a significant exception, were the Gülenists.

When the AK Party won an absolute majority in the very first national elections that it contested (in 2002), this is the situation that it found: it had nothing behind it except the popular vote, while from each and every sector of the state, including the army, the police, the judiciary and the bureaucracy, wherever it faced hostility stared it in the face -- with that sole exception of the Gülenists. At that early stage, they offered the AK Party what seemed like, and probably was, an indispensable alliance and counterweight. They also benefited from Islamic sympathies and proximities in general. At the same time, they began to use and abuse that alliance and benevolence for their own sinister purposes. In doing so, they vastly and blatantly overstepped what might have up to a point continued to be regarded as the legitimate bounds of tolerance. Pride goes before a fall. One thing that happened to Gülen and Gülenists over the first decade of the 21st century was that they grew excessively and overweeningly proud in all their power and influence. They thought they could exert any kind or degree of pressure on other civil society groups or figures. Over 2004-2007, when they saw that the AK Party was fighting to emancipate itself, Turkey, and democracy from the binds of military-bureaucratic tutelage, they saw this as an opportunity to weaken the Armed Forces to their own benefit -- by getting rid of huge numbers of active career officers and replacing them with their own loyal adherents. They got their technical specialists inside the police to manufacture piles of (what we now know to be) fake evidence against non-Gülenist generals or admirals; they got their public prosecutors inside the judiciary to use such forged evidence in bringing charges against vast numbers of high-ranking officers; they got their judges to try these cases in prejudicial fashion; they got their partisan papers,

editors, columnists and commentators to defame and extra-legally "sentence" the accused. Turkish society saw these trials as an opportunity to confront its long history of suffering at the hands of coups and juntas. It was also the case that the top brass continued to hold democratic government and public opinion in contempt. And in those days, there may have been a few in the Armed Forces who were actually thinking of violently overthrowing the AK Party. But the Gülenist onslaught went far beyond that. It developed into a massive army purge designed to create a vacuum to be filled by undercover Gülenists -- in preparation for their next move of seizing power on their own.

Unfortunately they were largely successful in this unprecedented effort at self-aggrandisement. But at the same time they made one fatal mistake. They underestimated the government. They thought they had the AK Party in a bind. They estimated that it would never be able to start moving against them because it could not possibly risk wrecking their alliance.

The Unravelling of an Empire

They did not realise that especially from 2010 on, the AK Party leadership was getting sick and tired of their power plays, unending demands, and arrogance. The proverbial straw that broke the camel's back may have come in 2012 in the form of an attempted strike at MIT head Hakan Fidan, and through him, at Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Prime Minister at the time, Erdoğan had empowered his Permanent Undersecretary for the National Intelligence Organisation to enter into informal talks (in Oslo) with the PKK in an attempt to find a peaceful solution to the long-standing

Kurdish question. It was supposed to be a top-secret affair, but inexplicably, the proceedings were leaked to the press in a way that left both sides confused and blaming each other. Still, there was widespread public satisfaction that the government should be undertaking such daring initiatives. But then, precisely on a day when PM Erdoğan was scheduled to undergo an operation, and would therefore be unable to intervene, two public prosecutors suddenly served an outrageous summons on Hakan Fidan on grounds of having entered into illegal contact and negotiations with a criminal Organisation. The plot failed only because Mr. Fidan refused to go and allow himself to be arrested, and then PM Erdoğan emerged from hospital to impose executive protection on the chief of national intelligence.

Rather predictably, it turned out that the proceedings had been leaked by Gülenists in the know, and that the prosecutors involved were also part and parcel of the Gülenist inner circle. With that, the battle lines were drawn. Also predictably, it was a typically determined Erdoğan who bit the bullet and carried the fight to the Gülenists by adopting a decision to close all university entrance exam prep courses so as to provide equal opportunity for all students. The Service Movement, so-called, was the leader in this multi-billion sector, which for them was a source of not just funds but new generations of young recruits. Stung to the quick, they reacted viciously -- by mobilizing their police and procurators in yet another effort at manufacturing "evidence," this time intended to support charges of corruption against key AK Party ministers. First on the morning of 17th and then of 25th December 2013, all "case files" assembled through such methods, including illegally tapped or spliced phone conversations, were directly leaked to the media while special police detachments made ready to move out with search and arrest warrants. They were halted at the nth minute by the Interior Ministry's extraordinary counter-measures. From then on, the government has been heavily removing more and more Gülenists from the state apparatus wherever they could be identified. It wasn't

"Stung to the quick, they reacted viciously -- by mobilizing their police and procurators in yet another effort at manufacturing "evidence," this time intended to support charges of corruption against key AK Party ministers. First on the morning of 17th and then of 25th December 2013, all "case files" assembled through such methods, including illegally tapped or spliced phone conversations, were directly leaked to the media while special police detachments made ready to move out with search and arrest warrants."

easy because they were always covering each other and trying to block all probes. Still, it seemed that the annual Armed Forces Board Meeting of August 2016 might see a lot of them expelled from the army. This might have frightened the Gülenists into early action, setting the stage for last year's 15 July showdown.

The Gülenists and the Coup: The Evidence

A year has passed since the July 15 attempt to overthrow the government. Since then, police and prosecutors have probed more and more deeply, and their findings have led to more than a hundred court cases being brought against the instigators. It has also resulted in public enlightenment. We now have a much clearer idea about the nature and workings of this shadowy underworld. And at a strictly legal level, mounting evidence -- in the form of original documents, video footage, e-mails and witness testimonies -- has been pointing incontrovertibly to Fethullah Gülen and the Gülenist network as having decided, planned, ordered and carried out the failed coup.



*Law enforcement agencies collecting evidence against the putschists in fields near the Akinci Air Base.
AA/Evrin Aydın.*

A significant amount of circumstantial evidence, however subjective, comes from various rash statements made by



Tuncay Opçin tweets: "They will come for you when you are still in bed and you will be hanged at dawn."

known Gülenists who appear to have been privy to what was coming, and who could not control their mounting excitement and enthusiasm before the coup. Long affiliated with the Gülen movement, journalist Tuncay Opçin hurled this ominous tweet from abroad on 14 July: "They will come for you when you are still in bed and you will be hanged at dawn."

Mustafa Ünal, who was then writing for Gülen's flagship daily Zaman, posted another tweet saying: "You'll soon see what happens." Exposed and indicted much earlier, former police officer Emre Uslu had fled to the US and never returned. Just before the coup, Uslu tweeted, in response to a question by one of his followers, that he would be coming back to Turkey on 16th July. On June 14, i.e. a month before the coup, former professor Osman Özsoy appeared live on a pro-Gülen television channel. At one point he said: "I wish I had become a colonel instead of a professor; I could have been of greater help during this process." Currently a fugitive, Özsoy then added: "We will not say that this country is facing a dark future. It is quite easy to end all these processes. It is a simple thing. Allah willing, it is all going to end in a short while. Turkey should fear no danger." But while they and their likes boasted, others were engaged in some hard preparation. Security camera footage from the War Academy (the school for staff officers) in İstanbul, for example, shows pro-coup officers locking themselves in a meeting room from 21:04 on July 14 until 12:30 on July 15, perhaps for going over all details, perhaps to make sure that they would not be randomly intercepted, perhaps to prevent anything from leaking out.

On March 8, 2017, an Ankara court accepted an indictment against 221 main suspects of the failed military takeover. Hearings began on May 22. Prominent defendants included (1) Adil Öksüz (in absentia), a professor of theology at Sakarya University who normally kept a low profile, but who as Fethullah Gülen's leading deputy kept shuttling back and forth between Turkey and the US throughout the last few months preceding the coup, holding secret meetings in safe houses with top military personnel, but

who after being apprehended at Akıncı Air Base on 16th July was promptly released by a Gülenist judge; (2) his closest associate Kemal Batmaz, said to be the conspiracy's second-in-command, who last entered Turkey (from the US) on 13th July, i.e. just two days before the coup; (3) Colonel Ali Yazıcı, former chief aide to President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan; (4) Lieutenant Colonel Levent Türkkan, former chief aide to Chief of General Staff Hulusi Akar (who has confessed to placing a bug that he received from Adil Öksüz in the office of Akar's predecessor Necdet Özel every single morning over a period of four years); and (5) Muhammet Uslu, a former official in the Prime Minister's private secretariat, whom Levent Türkkan singled out as his superior *abi*, "older brother" or handler. Just these names and their ranks or positions are indicative of the extent to which the Gülenist cancer had (or has) spread. As for the rest of the defendants, only a few have confessed to their Gülenist ties while most have kept insisting (despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, comprising conflicting testimonies, text messages or footage from security cameras) that they were unaware of the coup, having somehow been duped and led into what they thought was a counter-terrorism drill.

Consider former Army Captain Ali Emre Eral who, after admitting his FETÖ connections, stunned the court with the rest of his testimony. One day before the coup, Eral was told by his *abi* handler that he would "do whatever your superiors order tomorrow." As already noted, *abi* (as well as its female equivalent *abla* or "older sister") indicated civilian Gülenists with powers of command over FETÖ members in the army. Thus, Captain Eral's *abi* told him that the next day (i.e. 15th July) he would be receiving a confidential order which he should execute without questioning. He was unaware that the order had to do with participating in a coup, Eral claimed, until the actual day. After denying that he consciously and deliberately took part in a military takeover attempt, Eral nevertheless proceeded to tell the court in great detail just how his life had changed after joining the Gülenist movement in 2001, when he was still a student at military school.



Kemal Batmaz, a well-known Gülenist civilian, was caught on security cameras at Akıncı Air Base commanding respect from and giving orders to military officers. Open Source.



After the surrender: Adil Öksüz and other plotters under arrest at Akıncı Air Base. Open Source.

Further evidence has come from messages sent via ByLock. At some point over the last three or four years, perhaps in 2013-14, this secure messaging application seems to have been centrally and unilaterally imposed on the Gülenists' inner circle -- so comprehensively that just its possession has now come to serve as a hallmark. It was intensively used for secure encrypted communication during the months of preparation before as well as during the actual coup attempt. According to an indictment drawn up by the İstanbul Chief Public Prosecutor's Office, a total of 215,092 Gülenists are said to have used ByLock, with 184,298 among them identified and cracked at some point by army or police intelligence. The same indictment adds that ByLock remained popular with Gülenists until 2015, at which point FETÖ members started switching to Eagle, another messenger app that provides "256-bit end-to-end AES encryption," according to Google Play Store. But over 14th to 16th July, putschist officers also used WhatsApp to communicate. On some rare occasions they even referred, rather imprudently, to the extent of their preparations, some of which however failed to materialize. According to the İstanbul Chief Prosecutor's Office, on July 14 Colonel Uzeyir Şahin wrote to a WhatsApp group that "20,000 soldiers are ready in Thrace." He also used WhatsApp to issue several 15 July commands.

Encrypted or not, many text messages between putschists clearly show that they ordered their troops to open fire on unarmed civilians opposing the coup. In many cases such messages attest to an unbridled ferocity. A suspect from the eastern province of Kars testified to what a high-ranking Gülenist called and told him on the night of the coup: "Whoever comes in your way, whoever wants to stop you, do not show any mercy to them. Crush them, kill them, and go over them." Lieutenant Colonel Uğur Coşkun testified to another exchange. When putschists reported being overwhelmed by a group of protesting citizens at the İstanbul Governor's Office, Major Mehmet Karabekir replied: "Crush [them]. Burn [them]. No compromise." When putschist officers realised that the coup was failing, they fell into disarray. "Sir, we have been trying to survive,"

one said. "Do as you see fit," was Major Mehmet Murat Çelebioğlu's reply.



Uğur Coşkun after being apprehended by law enforcement agents. He too had given orders to kill anyone who opposed the coup. AA/Emre Ayvaz.

A prayer popular among Gülenists was found in the pocket of former Major Haldun Gülmez, an officer in the Army's Special Forces (the Purple Berets) who is charged with having participated in the commando raid on President Erdoğan's Marmaris hotel. Wounded during the shootout, he was subsequently captured by the police, treated, and placed under formal arrest. His testimony reflects just how important capturing (or "getting" or "grabbing") Erdoğan was for the putschists.

Prison guards in İzmir have intercepted the following note written to Gülen's nephew Mezher Gülen: "Mezher abi, you said that the thing was done. This attempt has failed. I guess the guys were not well organised. What will happen now, will there be a new attempt? I hope they don't cause us trouble here. Burn this note in the toilet after reading it."

Radio conversations between Air Force putschists who bombed Police Special Operations Headquarters in Ankara, killing 44 officers.

Ahmet Tosun:

Strike if there are any moving targets especially around the main entrance.

Ekrem Aydoğdu:

A helicopter is being fuelled. They are probably going to take off with it. Do we hit it?

Ahmet Tosun:

Strike if you see any activity. Strike if you see any activity.

Ekrem Aydoğdu:

One helicopter destroyed.

Ugur Uzunoğlu:

There was some activity at the main entrance. A big strike was made.

Mustafa Azimetli:

Roger that. It is understood that you hit the main entrance.

Ekrem Aydoğdu:

Be careful; there are probably are dead and injured. Ambulances will probably enter the area, be careful about that.

Uğur Uzunoğlu:

Around 15-20 people entering from the main entrance.

Ahmet Tosun:

Roger that. Fire at will at moving targets at the main entrance.

Radio conversations between putschists' helicopter pilots in Ankara

- I am heading for the Sports School. We will shoot anything with blue lights on top [meaning police cars].
- Sir, there are plenty of cars with blue lights on top.
- Then hit them!
- Everything below, they are all blue light cars, there are also ambulances.
- Carry out a strike.
- I hit the police cars, right?
- Yes, hit the police.

From the Indictment Submitted to Ankara's Aggravated Felony Court on the 8th March 2017

The accused: Flight Lieutenant M. M.

charged with dropping two MK-82 bombs near the Presidential Complex while piloting an F-16 with tail number 93-0671; said act having left 15 people dead and 7 others injured while damaging the properties of two others (Indictment, p.276).

The testimony of the accused Flight Lieutenant M. M.

Various people including a person named M. were teaching us lessons. [...] I wanted to enter the air force academy. M. wanted everybody in the group to join the air force academy. They were teaching us that soldiers should be people who pray and fast. If I do not remember wrong, I entered the university entrance exam in 2005 and I received a score of 334. Based on my own desire and with M.'s guidance, I applied for all the military schools that I could and attended all the interviews. [...] [Once we got our appointments] we allocated 15 percent of our salaries to himmet [the euphemistic destination of all FETÖ donations]. The Cemaat [Congregation] started to talk about AK Party more often after December 17th. [...] Later, we took the academy exams. There we met M. A. whose code name was Mahmut. Mahmut began approaching us with another brother whose name I did not know; he made us swear not to tell anyone and told us that he would give us an sd card and we should study that. A. and I studied it. The exam questions were in the document. The questions we studied were the same questions as in the exam. If I do not remember wrong, I received a score of 88 or

90. They had asked me to receive a score of around 88 or 90, not to solve every question correctly. Thus, we managed this by doing 10 or 12 questions wrong. In the written exam, we wrote some parts wrongly. I felt bothered by this. When I asked them why they gave us the questions, they said "your cause is sacred and one of you should be there." (Indictment, pp. 1233-34.)

A day before the coup, [...] Major Ç. left a note to see us and M. Ç. K. [...] The three of us went to M. F. Ç.'s home at 00:00 on Thursday. He told us: "There is going to be an extraordinary mobility on base. The base will be crowded and it will be the main control centre. There will be troops coming from other military bases. Would you like to join this? You have been trained for this so far. You will return the favour we have done for you. I have been waiting for these war-like days. We have to do this for our country. There are five other people who know about this and today you have learned about it too. The base commander does not know about it, either." I understood that major M. F. Ç. was given the information that we used to receive at FETÖ congregation houses. He told us: "You and I have children. Do sacrifice them for the movement." I came to understand that Major Ç. was also a member of the FETÖ congregation after he called us at midnight and made this speech. For the speech was based on feelings of belonging and trust. Nobody in the FETÖ congregation accepts that he is a member. However, we think about this possibility for people who do not drink alcohol and do not sexually explicit language. [...] I understood

that Major Ç. was telling us that the FETÖ congregation contributed to the correction of the moral structure of the military. Lastly, he said: "Be ready at the 141st fleet at around 17:00 tomorrow. If you do not have your personal weapons with you, bring them too." (Indictment p. 742.)

We gathered at the briefing hall. [...] H. H. B. talked. He said: "They have a list of all our names. We are all on the list. Some generals were taken. One by one it will come to us. We need to do this today. We need to take action before them." What I understood from this speech was that the Hizmet [Service] movement was being targeted by the government. We would be fired from the army and our friends from the FETÖ congregation were trying to resist this and I was called there because I was a member of the FETÖ congregation member like the other people there. Then, Lieutenant Colonel B. Said: "I have a list of coordinates, they will be our targets. These coordinates should be turned into coordinates that aviators can use." He asked who had the lowest ranking and I said it was me. (Indictment, p. 1129).

[...] I dove and dropped one MK 82 on the crossroads. Then I took off again. This time, I dove and dropped [another bomb] close to the mosque in the Presidential Complex. At that time, I was aware that as the Hizmet [Service] movement we were executing a coup. I deliberately dropped [the bombs]." (Indictment, p. 1238)

The Accused: Staff Captain M. M. K.

The time that I met the FETÖ congregation almost corresponds to the year 1996 when I was a third-year student at middle school. At that time, cram schools used to hold an exam to attract students and provide scholarships to successful students. I took almost all the exams of the cram schools in Ankara. I might have attracted attention due to these exams that I took. Even though my grades were always high, they offered to give lessons to me. I entered the air force academy in 2001. In that period, I met some people from time to time. Those people sometimes had religious conversations. I met with my wife in 2010 thanks to a brother named Ömer from the FETÖ congregation. I married my wife in 2010. (Indictment, pp. 941-943)

After receiving the instructions of A. Ö. from the 143rd squadron through the phone, I delivered them to the aviators [pilots]. A. T. took over this task from me late that night. [...] There were people who managed and guided the movement at the 143rd squadron. At the 141st squadron, T. and I transmitted the instructions coming from the management. I think H. E., A. Ö. and M. A. were among those who were managing [the operation]. H. K. was in the tower. It is my guess

that the managers at the 143rd squadron might have been the imams of the FETÖ terror Organisation. (Indictment, p. 551)

I have been in contact with the FETÖ congregation since 1996.

However, I regret this so much. May God's damnation be upon them.

After these incidents on July 15, 2016, I came to understand how dangerous and sneaky the FETÖ terrorist Organisation was. [...]

I began to suspect that there might be a coup going on when the hostages were brought in. I understood that it was a coup at 01:00 on July 16, 2016 when bombs were dropped. After this time, I continued to follow the orders that I received. I knew that criminal orders should not be followed. However, I had already taken a path so I followed the path. I did not have the chance to go back since there were armed commandoes at the point where I was located. I had had contact with the FETÖ terrorist Organisation until July 15, 2016 -- the time when these incidents happened. However, these incidents showed me that I was on the wrong path. After this, I certainly do not want to be among them. I regret what I have done and I'm willing to accept the punishment. (Indictment, pp. 946-47.)

The Accused: *Lieutenant U. H. H. from the Akıncı Fourth Main Jet Fighter Command*

In the deposition that he made to the prosecutors, the accused Lieutenant U. H. H. talked about how he became a member of FETÖ. He said that when he was in seventh grade, he attended a cram school named Yenirenk Dershanesi which belonged to the Organisation. H. said that he was visiting some FETÖ houses and brothers were giving lessons to him. [...] "We only studied together for two or three months. Then they asked us if we knew Fethullah Gülen. When I said I did not know him, they gave us books about him. They made us watch his videos. [...] They also earned the trust of my parents by talking about religious values. They told me that they wanted me to attend a military school. I was opposed to this. I told them I wouldn't go to a military school but they convinced me saying that 'there is a need for faithful people who love their country and nation.' Likewise, my parents were convinced too. I was successful at the military high school exams in June 2005. After I won the written exam, brothers who stayed in the same house started to give me more information about the interview. They told me how I needed to answer the interview questions since they had archived the questions of the previous interviews."

H. further said that he had been in contact with people from FETÖ during his high school and university years. He stayed at FETÖ houses, read books, and listened to the sermons of Fethullah Gülen. H. stated that he continued to stay with FETÖ people after he graduated and gave 15 percent of his salary to himmet. He said that they did not bring books after the 17-25 December [2013] operations and instead watched videos on encrypted CDs. H. said that on the day of the coup attempt, H. K. had told them there would be a confidential operation against terrorists; they would be given various tasks and they should follow the orders coming from their commanders. (Indictment, p. 316)

H. K. said: "M. K. told us that today is a historic day, we have been waiting for this day to come. Today is the day of obedience. Even soldiers might stand and confront you. When I say shoot them down, you will shoot them down." (Indictment, p. 951.)

The Accused: Pilot Lieutenant U. B. from the Akıncı Fourth Main Jet Fighter Command

In his testimony, U. B. declared that in his high school and university years he was seeing people linked with Fethullah Gülen. He took lessons from them, he stayed in the cult's houses, and chose to attend a military high school through their guidance. He listened to Fethullah Gülen's sermons and read his books and engaged in religious conversations in those houses, and after finishing the school he rented a house with other members of the cult and lived together. He delivered 15 percent of his salary by hand to another terrorist suspect as himmet. He was told that "politics is important" and "people like them should come to better places to serve the greater good." After December 17-25, they (the cult members) began to disparage AK Party and make them listen to tapes discussing the government's corruption. U.B. stated that "those CDs were encrypted; the injustice, thievery and corruption of the government was taught to them..." On the date of the crime H. K. gathered them and took their phones by stating that there would be a secret counter-terror operation and various tasks would be assigned to them. Later H. T. delegated the duties and assigned U.B. to stand guard with the sentries at the security gate. (Indictment, pp.319-320)

[...] At 15:00-16:00 vehicles entered through the gate; at 22:00 planes started to take off, and around 00:00 the lieutenant at their head stated that SAT commandoes would come and provide security. From time to time an army colonel checked on the SAT commandoes,

and when M. G. said "bad things may happen, take precautionary measures," G3 weapons were distributed to them. While prayers were taking place at the mosques, commandoes began to fire in the air. The lieutenant ordered SAT commandoes to fire [at people] and they carried out the order. There were dead and injured people; they treated the injured who then went home. Afterwards they continued to wait at the security gate with M. G. When lieutenant H. T. said that they could take back their phones and leave, he left his G3 infantry rifle at the security gate and left the base. Later he responded for the head count. (Indictment, p. 1734)

... on July 15, 2016 the shift at Akıncı base ended earlier than usual, and staff who were thought of as inappropriate for joining the coup were sent home. Although the accused hadn't been on duty, he was at Akıncı base, the headquarters of the coup, and he guarded the security gate to the military housing area. As mentioned above, at the security gate of the military housing area 8 people were killed and 86 people were injured. 13 people participated in carrying out the coup attempt. When the financial crime report, the HTS analysis report, depositions by other parties and the entire file contents are analysed closely, it is understood that the accused fulfilled his duties as given by the putschists and took part in carrying out the coup attempt." (Indictment, p.1738)

The Accused: *Flight Lieutenant A. K. from the Fourth Main Jet Fighter Command*

The accused Flight Lieutenant A.K.'s declaration in court after taking off from the Fourth Main Fighter Command (the Akıncı air base) without permission in an armed F-16 fighter jet (Indictment, p. 315 and p. 1242)

From the deposition of the accused A. K.: "... The house we went to was owned by an old couple and located in Esenler. I went there with M. G. T., a community brother [high-ranking FETÖ member] to hold meetings, to pray, to read the Qoran and Fethullah Gülen's books -- after the old couple moved to another part of the house. A brother named Enes always told us to hide the fact that we were members of this congregation, to the extent of even praying with just our eyes when we were at school. I knew that almost half of the 195 students in my class were members of the FETÖ congregation. I came to this conclusion because of the way these students talked, behaved, and cleaned up. I didn't track down which community houses they went to or which community brother was guiding them, because like I said before, the only thing they told us was to keep up the grades, learn different languages, and be religious. In 2009, I graduated from the air force academy and was assigned as a lieutenant to Çiğli Second Main Fighter Command. The same year, I received a call on my registered sim card from a public telephone box -- it was Enes. He arranged a meeting with my friends G. T. and Z. B. in a café in Karşıyaka. There, he told us that from then on we would be in contact with another community brother whose name was Eren. I don't know his real name, but my own nickname within the community was Osman, M. G. T.'s was Enes, and Z. B.'s was Bilal. Enes introduced us to Eren in Bornova and we started meeting with him regularly. Z. B., M. G. T. and I rented an apartment and bought furniture in Bayraklı, in front of Maxi Tansaş. My friends M. G. T. and Z. B. gave 15 percent of their first paychecks to the community brother, Eren, who frequently visited us in our apartment. Because of my family's financial situation, Eren didn't take any money from me for seven or

eight months. I sent my money to my family over that time period and started giving Eren 15 percent of my paycheck irregularly when he came to visit us; the payment amounted to approximately 400 TL at the time. In addition, Eren would ask us to buy beer every now and then spill the drink down the sink, in order to place the empty cans outside our apartment where people could see them and assume we were normal members of the public. (Indictment, p. 315)

Also from A. K.'s deposition: "After returning from my flight with M. Ç. K. at around 15:00 on July 14, 2016, M. F. Ç. from the 142nd squadron approached us and told us that he was expecting us and M. M. in his house in the evening. I texted M., either via WhatsApp or sms, and told him that we were going to meet at Ç.'s home. Later that night, we met at around 23:00.

...also, the general staff will give you targets and coordinates both within and outside the borders, as there are going to be operations [he said]. M. M. and M. Ç. K. will be flying and A. K. you are going to wait at the base, and will be protected until you receive further instructions. Others coming from different squadrons will join the operation, and Akıncı will be at the center of all this. This is why I called you; there will not be an air base general present and major things will be taking place. Depending on the outcome, we may announce an authoritarian regime. You are under my protection and I am following you closely; you grew up in front of our eyes, he said.

These conversations were odd. After noting their content and style, we understood that Ç. was also part of the community. We even spoke amongst ourselves after leaving the house and he said something along the lines of: "I knew you were a good boy." It was at that moment that I realised that K. and M. had also been raised in community homes. From there, I went to the 141st squadron building... (Indictment, p. 1242)

Chief of General Staff Hulusi Akar's Deposition, 19 July 2016

O. H. (head of the Navy's North Region Command with its headquarters in İstanbul) first read a two-page document before handing it over to me. He said: "Commander, everything will be fine if you read this on TV and sign it (on the air); we are collecting everybody and bringing them here."

I refused furiously and violently: "Who do you think you are? Who are you? Where is the Second Chief and his commanders you said you had abducted? Where are the ministers? Whoever you have, bring them here! Who is controlling you?"

H. E. (commander of the Akıncı Fourth Main Jet Air Base) said something along the lines of: "We can organise a conversation with our leader Fethullah Gülen if you want."

I responded: "I will not talk to anyone!"

Four Leading **Gülenists**

Adil Öksüz, *a low-profile professor of theology*

*Adil Öksüz, one of the masterminds behind the coup, was taken into custody on the morning of 16th July near the Akıncı Air Base. He was immediately released by a Gülenist judge, and is a most wanted" fugitive at the moment.
Open Source.*



"It has now come out that during the last few months before the coup, Öksüz was in the habit of making one short trip to the US after another, the last being just two days before the coup."

Adil Öksüz, a professor of theology at Sakarya University, was at Akıncı Air Base all through July 15-16. Just this simple, factual statement borders on the absurd. As a civilian, what business did he have in a top-secret, highly restricted military zone? Who let him in, and on what grounds? What was he doing there especially at a time of intense and illegal military activity, directed at overthrowing the government? It is a context, a situation that defies explanation

The fact of the matter is that Adil Öksüz was there that night to lead and direct the coup. All along, he was (and is) one of FETÖ's most important names. He was top imam for all FETÖ members and activities in the Air Force. It has now come out that during the last few months before the coup, Öksüz was in the habit of making one short trip to the US after another, the last being just two days before the coup. He took his wife and children with him during his most recent trip to the US on July 11. Öksüz left his family in the US before returning to Turkey July 13. It appears that Öksüz was one of the masterminds (if not the mastermind) behind the planned takeover, that he was holding key strategy and decision-making meetings in Turkey with high-level Gülenists, and that he then went to the USA to get Fethullah Gülen's approval.

When the coup gradually collapsed, Öksüz was trapped near Akıncı Air Base. Caught red-handed, he came up with the ridiculous excuse that he was there to buy some real estate. He repeated the same excuse to the first judge that questioned him. Even more ludicrously, the judge in question accepted this as a valid explanation and released Adil Öksüz forthwith. The judge himself was subsequently arrested and exposed as a FETÖ member who had even had dinner with Fethullah Gülen at some point. But by then Adil Öksüz had simply disappeared into the unknown.

Kemal Batmaz,

*an innocuous
accountant*



*Kemal Batmaz was also caught and arrested
after the coup at Akıncı Air Base. AA.*

Kemal Batmaz is also believed to have been a top Gülenist, and another key planner behind the coup attempt. His cover job was working at Kaynak Holding, the biggest commercial enterprise in the FETÖ empire.

Other witnesses, camera footage and passport records show that just a few days before the coup, along with Adil Öksüz he too went to the US to meet with Fethullah Gülen.

Footage from security cameras at Akıncı Air Base, which served as the junta's command centre, shows that that night Kemal Batmaz was also at the base. Although Batmaz has always been a civilian, camera records show generals and other high-ranking officers wholly under his command, saluting him and taking their orders from him.

Having been unable to escape from Akıncı as the ring closed around the rebels, Kemal Batmaz is currently remanded in custody as he continues to face trial in Ankara.

*"Although Batmaz has
always been a civilian,
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*Just two days before the coup: Adil Öksüz
and Kemal Batmaz at İstanbul Atatürk Airport
after taking the same flight back from the US.
Open Source.*

Muhammed Uslu, *a school teacher turned secret handler for top officers*

Here is someone who had a degree in education, and actually worked as a schoolteacher for a few years before being transferred, thanks to the Gülenists' protection and implantation networks, to a politically sensitive spot: the Prime Minister's private office. Once there, Uslu assumed some key FETÖ responsibilities as the "elder *abi*" handling all the military aides or adjutants for the top echelon at General Staff. Because of their day-to-day closeness to some of the highest-ranking officers in the Turkish Armed Forces, these aides were extremely important sources of information for the Gülenists.

In court, Uslu has pleaded guilty to the charges brought against him. "I was the elder *abi* of the aides. Every week they were bringing us the voice recording devices that we referred to as the radio. We were able to listen to voice memos recorded in the offices of the Chief and Vice-Chief of General Staff. I was transferring the voice recordings to a USB drive via an encrypted laptop provided by my own elder *abi*. [...] I was getting in touch with other FETÖ members through an application called Tango. This application was on a tablet given to me by my elder. I was using a clean SIM card or Wi-Fi hotspots to connect to Tango."

Levent Türkkan, *former chief aide to the Chief of General Staff*

Levent Türkkan is typical of all the top General Staff aides that were handled by Muhammed Uslu. Once upon a time, he had been an elite infantry officer, a lieutenant colonel who had risen to serve not one but two successive chiefs of general staff. These are fragments from his sordid story:

* I used to be a son of a poor farmer. We had no land or other property. Since my early childhood I dreamed of becoming a military officer. I met Fethullah Gülen's followers in middle school. They took care of me, they too wanted me to become a military officer.

* While I was in middle school they took care of me. Before I took the exam for military high school they gave me the questions. During the exam we were asked to solve the same questions. In military high school and college, I continued my relations with the elderly *abis*. They weren't in the army, they used to be civilians. They thought Fethullah Gülen was Mahdi.

* My code name is Ahmet. They chose the name. They even choose the names of our children. Children of the Gülenists usually have two names. One of them is given from Pennsylvania (by Fethullah Gülen).

* We bugged the office of the Chief of General Staff, and not only Hulusi Akar but also former chiefs Necdet Özel and Yaşar Büyükanıt. An elder who worked at Telekom gave me the device, we used to change the device every week.

* Forty-two years of my life have come to nothing but a lie. I am ashamed of myself.



Lieutenant Colonel Levent Türkkkan was once chief aide to two successive Chiefs of General Staff. AA/Abdulhamit Hoşbaş.

International Reactions to the Coup Attempt

Though thwarted, the July 15, 2016 attempt to bring down elected President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and overthrow the legitimate government had some major international consequences. Turkey's relationship with many international powers were strengthened in some cases and compromised in others.

When news broke of the coup attempt, the United Nations (UN), NATO, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the European Union (EU) all released statements of solidarity with Turkey's elected government. In addition, many governments and leaders came up with more specific responses.

The United Nations

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon released a written statement on the Organisation's official website on July 16:

"The Secretary-General is following closely and with concern the fast-moving developments in Turkey. At this moment of uncertainty in the country, the Secretary-General appeals for calmness, non-violence and restraint. Preservation of fundamental rights, including freedom of speech and assembly, remain of vital importance. The Secretary-General underscores that military interference in the affairs of any state is unacceptable. It will be crucial to quickly and peacefully affirm civilian rule and constitutional order in accordance with the principles of democracy."



The then UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon with President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan few months before the coup attempt at World Humanitarian Summit organized in İstanbul. AA/Kayhan Özer.

The European Union

On July 16 at 03:10 (Turkish local time) European Council President Donald Tusk, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, and EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs Federica Mogherini released the following joint statement:

"Turkey is a key partner for the European Union. The EU fully supports the democratically elected government, the institutions of the country and the rule of law. We call for a swift return to Turkey's constitutional order. We closely continue to follow the developments and to coordinate with the 28 EU Member States." Tusk further tweeted on July 16 at 3:23 (Turkish local time): *"EU supports Turkey's democratically elected government, institutions and rule of law, and calls for the return to constitutional order."*



European Council President Donald Tusk was one of the few politicians to show support for the democratically elected government on the night of the coup attempt. AA/Halil Sağırkaya.

NATO

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg made his first statement on July 16 at 5:34 (Turkish local time):

“Just spoke to Turkish FM. I call for calm, restraint & full respect for Turkey’s democratic institutions and constitution.”

A further statement by Stoltenberg was published on NATO’s official website on July 18: ***“I have spoken to President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, in the aftermath of the attempted coup in Turkey. I welcomed the strong support shown by the people and all political parties to democracy and to the democratically elected government. The Turkish people have shown great courage.”***



NATO Secretary-General Jens Stolenberg somberly inspecting bomb damage inside the Grand National Assembly during his visit to Ankara on 9th September 2016.
AA/Evrim Aydin.

The Gulf Cooperation Council

All GCC countries celebrated the Turkish people’s victory over the intended military takeover. The Council is headed by Saudi Arabia, whose government expressed support for Turkey’s ***“elected government”*** that possessed ***“constitutional legitimacy.”*** Upon Ankara’s request, Saudi Arabia also detained Turkey’s military attaché to Kuwait (suspected of Gülenist connections) at Dammam Airport in Saudi Arabia, and further stated that they were willing to collaborate with President Erdoğan in the failed coup’s aftermath.



Pictured after a Gulf Cooperation Council meeting are leaders of GCC countries, including Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.
AA/ Saudi Royal Council/Bandar Algaloud.

The Council of Europe

Early at night, Secretary-General Thorbjørn Jagland of the Council of Europe became the first international statesman to express his support for Turkey and against the military takeover attempt. As the news was just beginning to spread, he promptly tweeted:

“Any attempt to overthrow the democratically elected leaders in a member state of the Council of Europe is unacceptable.”



Thorbjørn Jagland, Secretary-General of the Council of Europe, in Ankara. AA/Binnur Ege Gürün.

The United States of America

US Secretary of State John Kerry released a statement on July 16 at 00:14 (Turkish local time), where he said: ***“I hope there will be stability and peace and continuity within Turkey, but I have nothing to add with respect to what has transpired at this moment.”***

After it became clear that the insurrection had been quelled, a further statement was issued on July 16 at 02:13 (Turkish local time): ***“The President [Obama] and Secretary [Kerry] agreed that all parties in Turkey should support the democratically elected government, show restraint, and avoid any violence or bloodshed. The Secretary underscored that the State Department will continue to focus on the safety and security of U.S. citizens in Turkey. The President asked the Secretary to continue to keep him updated as the situation unfolds.”***

This was further echoed by the White House on the same day: ***“The President and Secretary agreed that all parties in Turkey should support the democratically-elected government of Turkey, show restraint, and avoid any violence or bloodshed.”***

In the months after the coup, Ankara's request for the extradition of the Pennsylvania-based Fethullah Gülen has not been met, which has placed a certain strain on relations between the US and Turkey.



Joe Biden, then Vice President of the United States, inspecting bomb damage at the Grand National Assembly. AA/Turkish Grand National Assembly/Haydar Aktaş.

The United Kingdom

From the start, the UK was one EU state that was most sympathetic to Turkey's predicament, opposing the military takeover, upholding the elected government's legitimacy, and also lending its support to Ankara's claim that the coup had been the work of Gülen's supporters.

On July 15 at 21:53 (Turkish local time), Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson tweeted:

"Very concerned by events unfolding in #Turkey. Our Embassy is monitoring the situation closely. Brits should follow FCO website for advice."

Johnson posted another tweet on 16th July at 7:12 (Turkish local time):

"Just spoken to #Turkey foreign minister @MevlutCavusoglu. I underlined #UK support for the democratic elected government & institutions."

On July 18 at the House of Commons, Prime Minister Theresa May proclaimed:

"We firmly condemn the attempted coup by certain members of the Turkish Armed Forces."



UK Prime Minister Theresa May with Binali Yıldırım, her Turkish counterpart.
AA/Hakan Göktepe.

Germany

As the world became aware that part of the army was trying to take over, Germany immediately released a statement of solidarity with the Turkish people and government. On the night of the coup, Chancellor Angela Merkel's spokesman posted on Twitter:

"The democratic order in #Turkey must be respected. Everything must be done to protect lives." The day after the coup, Angela Merkel told reporters in Berlin: "In the name of the entire German government, I sharply condemn the attempt by Turkish military units to overthrow the elected government and president. ... Germany stands on the side of all those in Turkey who defend democracy and the constitutional state. It is and remains the right of the people to decide in free elections who will rule."

Despite such solidarity, it has hurt Turkey that at least in part, German government has not responded so well to requests from Ankara to maintain a degree of supervision or monitoring over the FETÖ network in their country. A few months after the coup, the governor of the state of Baden-Wuerttemberg said that his regional government had received a letter from the Turkish consul-general requesting it to ***"check and reevaluate organisations, facilities and schools which are controlled by the Gülenists."*** Governor Winfried Kretschmann said that he was very distressed by this letter, and refused to comply. While he was aware of the criticism directed at the Gülenist congregation, noted Kretschmann, he had seen no evidence to back Turkey's assertion that it was responsible for the coup.



German Chancellor Angela Merkel condemned the coup attempt and expressed her solidarity with Turkey's democratically elected government. AA/Alı Balıkcı.

Russia

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters on July 16 that President Vladimir Putin was being kept constantly informed on the situation in Turkey. The Foreign Ministry stated that ***“Moscow is most concerned at the latest events in Turkey,”*** and called upon the Turkish authorities and people ***“to settle the problems without use of force, and to respect the constitutional order.”***

Separately, the government confirmed its ***“readiness to work constructively with the legally elected leadership of Turkey in the interest of promoting bilateral relations,”*** adding that this particularly applied to ***“fighting the threat of terrorism.”***



Russian President Vladimir Putin with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.
AA/Kayhan Özer.

Pakistan

Turkey and Pakistan have always enjoyed mutual trust and appreciation, which was only strengthened after July 15, 2016.

On July 16, Pakistan Prime Minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif strongly condemned the coup, and expressed Pakistan's support and solidarity with President Erdoğan. He also visited the Turkish parliament ***“to reaffirm Pakistan's unequivocal support and solidarity”*** with the government and people of Turkey against the failed military takeover.

Pakistan's response to the coup in Turkey was made more interesting because of the parallels many commentators have been drawing between the extraordinary influence that has traditionally been exercised by the military in both countries. This may be said to have imparted some extra passion and poignancy to the way Pakistani media have been covering the Turkish coup. Ahsan Iqbal, Minister for Planning, Development and Reforms, tweeted: ***“The lesson is that the real power is with one who is on the side of the rule of law.”*** Maryam Nawaz, the prime minister's daughter tweeted: ***“The brave people of Turkey have established that the sovereign will of the people cannot be made a mockery of. Democracy wins. Well done!”***



Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif at the Grand National Assembly, showing his support for democracy in Turkey. AA/Abdülhamid Hoşbaş.

Qatar

Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani called President Erdoğan on July 16 to congratulate him on his victory against a deadly coup attempt by the military. Thani became the first leader to make a personal solidarity call to Erdoğan. He ***“strongly condemned this failed attempt and voiced... (Qatar’s) solidarity with Turkey... in all measures it takes to protect constitutional legitimacy, enforce the rule of law and preserve its security and stability,”*** the official QNA news agency reported.

Subsequently the Ministry of Foreign Affairs also stated that ***“the State of Qatar has expressed its strong denunciation and condemnation of the military coup attempt, lawlessness, and violation of the constitutional legitimacy in the Republic of Turkey.”***



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Emir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani. AA/Mehmet Ali Özcan.

Iran

On July 16, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani publicly condemned the attempted military takeover:

“We support Turkey’s legal government and oppose any type of coup either [initiated] domestically or supported by foreign sides.”

Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif posted a tweet saying he was ***“deeply concerned about the crisis in Turkey. Stability, democracy and safety of Turkish people are paramount.”*** In another tweet, he added that ***“the Turkish people’s brave defense of democracy and their elected government proves that coups have no place in our region and are doomed to fail.”***



Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu and Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs Javad Zarif together at Ankara. AA/Fatih Aktaş.

TRT World Employees Tell Their Own Story

—

story

The Early Hours



July 15, morning. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary. Yes, the terrorist threat from the PKK and Daesh was always there, but even that was part of the country's routine. For TRT World, too, it was business as usual. Staff followed their shift patterns; the newsroom was covering international affairs. There were no signs of unusual activity inside or outside.

Later, Soraya Salam, an Executive Producer at TRT World, was at home babysitting her visiting sister's children. The working day had been completely normal, she recalls, which made the events of the night all the more surprising and shocking. Sitting across her, Lead Director Taner Yıldırımçı concurs. He was all set for a weekend trip with his friends to Çanakkale: "I had even put on my shirt and was about to depart," he says, "when the [news] bulletin was extended. This happens only if there is breaking news, in which case the broadcast might last five or six hours. So you look after your friends in case they need something. We decided to wait, in case something important happened."

The breaking news at TRT during those early hours was the previous day's Nice attack in France. In the newsroom was Deputy News Editor Sara Monetta, who had started her shift at around 15:00 and was preoccupied with this then-new method of driving a lorry into a crowd that had left 84 dead on Bastille Day. It was around 22:00-22:30 when four military vehicles carrying approximately 80 fully armed soldiers (including 10 officers) pulled up at the entrance of the TRT World building. Claiming that they were there for security reasons, they asked the guards on duty to open the gate. Once they were inside the compound, they ordered

all security staff to lay down their weapons, after which they immediately entered the office section by smashing the automatic turnstile at the entrance.

Director of Operations Metin Tuğtağ recalls: "That night I was working late at the office. A friend of mine called to say that soldiers had shut down the Bosphorus Bridge and jets were flying over Ankara. I had not been following the news, so I went down to the newsroom and asked the people there for clarification, but a couple of seconds later soldiers entered the room. I could make only a few hurried calls before they began taking all our phones. We were forced to evacuate the facilities."



Several military vehicles full of soldiers under putschist officers arriving at the TRT World compound. Open Source.



Around 80 putschists entering the TRT compound after neutralising security. Open Source.

Taner happened to be right there and was able to witness this very moment: "The putschists kicked their way through the turnstile. Scared, 'what the hell?' I blurted. At first they said it was for our safety, but as I began asking what was going on, 'just go outside bro,' one started to shout. Why are we going out, what the hell, why are you kicking the door, I kept retorting, while he kept yelling 'out, out, out!' It was like a quarrel between him and me. Whilst I was exiting the complex, however, I noticed more soldiers heading for the gallery. It was at that moment that I realised something unusual was happening. They were coming up the stairs; they were not behaving as if they wanted



Soldiers entering the building by smashing the automatic turnstile. Open Source.

to protect us. When they headed for the administrative unit, I moved to the gallery, where there was panic and everyone was crying. I tried comforting Şeniz, who was in charge of the news bulletin. But the soldiers came in and began shouting: 'Get out! Get out!' I swore; 'I am the son of a police officer,' I told them; 'do you think I'm afraid of a gun?' The very last thing I remember saying was: 'This is an international media channel, we shall be disgraced.' Then they hit me, and I don't remember clearly after that point."

Obaida Hitto, an Interview Producer at TRT World tells his confrontation with the putschists. "Suddenly there was an unusual movement in the office," he says; "what was happening was mind-blowing; I didn't understand why they were asking us to leave; I was convinced that it was

something to do with our safety. However, it began turning weird when – as we started to gather our things – they told us to just get up and leave. They spread across the entire building, and then I began to hear screaming and loud voices. There were three or four soldiers with rifles standing in the lobby, ushering everyone out the building. Suddenly they appeared to have either received or remembered a new order, and began taking our phones as we lined up to exit – no one understood why; bear in mind that we still had no idea of a coup at this point. They didn't seem as organised, as they then had a brief discussion amongst themselves and proceeded to usher us out without taking our phones."

Associate Producer Sümeyye Ceylan was also at work when the raid happened. She too first thought that there was a terrorist attack and the soldiers had come to protect them. "I remember that we had a guest speaker. He jumped out of the studio and said: 'Run, run for your life.' Still thinking that it was a terrorist attack, I remember wondering whether I should go and hide in the bathroom or follow



A picture taken the next morning of the damaged turnstiles in the programme department. Open Source.

everyone outside. I remember hearing screams and thinking that someone was killed. I thought I might be next; I was very frightened at that time. I did not see the soldiers until we went outside." Sara recounts those same moments: "One of my colleagues said this was a coup and I told her don't be silly. It just could not be a coup. I thought the military were evacuating the building because there was a bomb threat or something. We were trying to tell the soldiers that we could not leave at the moment since the news bulletin was on the air and [presenter] Andrea [Sanke] was on live. I clearly remember the first soldier who came in; he was just a boy; I could tell by his face that he was probably the same age as my younger brother. I only realised something was fundamentally wrong when we heard people screaming in the gallery. When we had left the building but were still in the compound the soldiers asked us for our phones. The first thing I did was remove my sim card. There was massive confusion about what we were supposed to do and where we were supposed to go. What really struck me was that the Turkish staff created a buffer zone between the soldiers and us (the international staff)."

Andrea, then anchor-woman, experienced the shock of the coup while she was on the air: "The program editor told me in the middle of a live program that I needed to sign off. The rest of us in the studio did not understand why. I asked her what I should say, at least if there was a technical problem, as we could not leave our viewers in such an unprofessional manner. At this point the floor manager exclaimed: 'Andrea we have to go now. There are soldiers outside!' So I immediately thought, 'Okay... we've been reporting on the terrorist attack in Nice the whole time so perhaps we were being subjected to some kind of threat linked to Daesh.' We walked out and got to the parking lot where there were about a dozen soldiers standing around. Even then, however, it did not feel like that big of a deal; we were prepared to hear that it was all just a security threat from Daesh or a similar group."

"I told them; 'Do you think I'm afraid of a gun?' The very last thing I remember saying was: 'This is an international media channel, we shall be disgraced.' Then they hit me, and I don't remember clearly after that point."



Windows inside
TRT World smashed
by putschists. TRT
World/Muhammed
Karim

"Andrea as an experienced journalist was telling us that she had been to Marmaris before, that it was a very small place, and so she feared for Erdoğan's life. This conversation had me in shock. She spoke to us of the coup attempts she had experienced, many of which were successful – which worried me even more."

By then, most of the staff had been evacuated to the parking lot. Here and there arguments were raging between rebels and staff. Obaida resumes: "The minibuses that usually take us home were all lined up near the exit, and there were a bunch of soldiers lined up in front, so that it was impossible to get to the minibuses without having to walk between these ten or twenty soldiers. There was a lot of confusion – what happens now? Many people had not wanted to hand in their phones, and had tried resisting – of course, we all wanted to phone our families and friends to ask what was happening. I had phoned my family as soon as our office was stormed. I had my sister visiting from Saudi at the time, and I knew they were out with my mother. I tried calling my mother but she wasn't responding, so I called my wife who was home with our new-born child. I

told her to close all doors and windows, and not open the door for anyone – and I told her to get in touch with my mother and tell her to return home as soon as possible and not take the TEM (highway) – because that's where



Andrea and Sümeyye evacuating the building together with other colleagues. Open Source.

the military vehicles appeared to be coming from and by that time we were receiving reports that they were taking over the bridge. So in my situation, I had time to call my family and warn them – this was not the case for most people."

Mohsin Majid Mughal, Executive Producer at TRT World, was home when he witnessed that the TRT World screen went black: "It was a normal evening. I had just left work to go home as we were expecting friends over



The TRT World screen went dark after the putschists barged in. TRT World/Mohsin Majid Mughal

for dinner. One of my dinner guests had to leave around 22:00 since he lived on the Asian side. A few minutes later he called to tell me that upon crossing the bridge, he had seen many soldiers. One side of the bridge was closed. We believed it was an anti-terror drill of some kind and ended the conversation. I switched on the TV. We were on the air until the screen went black. I called the news desk and no one picked up. That only added to my anxiety. I noticed other channels had gone black, too. None of my colleagues who were at work at that time were reachable. Eventually, colleagues from the US and other parts of Turkey informed me that our office had been taken over. The plotters had barged in, confiscated everyone's phones, and ordered them out of the compound. It was a coup!"

Most of the TRT staff having congregated outside, soldiers began randomly forcing them on the buses, and when people objected that saying each bus had a specific route, they said that they didn't care – they should just get on any minibus and leave. Most did so, but Andrea asked to take her car instead, which the soldiers allowed on condition that she depart immediately. She took four colleagues with her, and Sümeyye was amongst them: "Just before I handed my phone in I was speaking to my



TRT World staff heading to the shuttles after being forced to leave the building. Open Source.

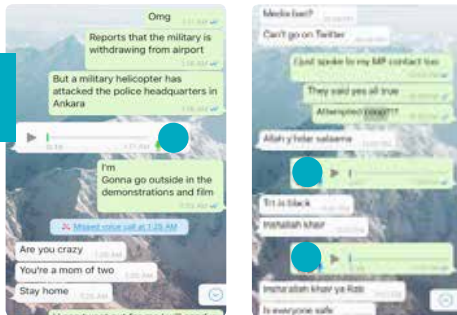
mother, and unintentionally made her panic. I attempted to hide my phone, but a soldier saw me, and crossed his arms telling me: 'Look, you're going to cause harm

to yourself – just do as you're told and leave!' His tone frightened me, so I handed my phone in and hurried off to join Andrea and other colleagues in her car. As we drove, I was looking out on the streets, and nobody yet knew what was going on. Everything appeared normal. Laura, my colleague was holding my hand, and I was holding hers, as she tried to comfort me. We opened the radio and heard Binali Yıldırım speaking; he didn't quite say it was a coup, but he made it clear that something was going on. We ended up spending the night in the house of Andrea's neighbour, who was also a journalist. We stayed there watching television and all updates as they came in; he allowed me to use his electronic devices so that I could update my family about my safety via Facebook. Andrea as an experienced journalist was telling us that she had been to Marmaris before, that it was a very small place, and so she feared for Erdoğan's life. This conversation had me in shock. She spoke to us of the coup attempts she had experienced, many of which were successful – which worried me even more. I was trying to prepare myself mentally, and in my head all I was waiting for was news on Erdoğan."

Taner, meanwhile, after further quarrels with the soldiers had been forced by them to leave. He took a shuttle with his friends, and they all went to one of their colleagues' house because his children were alone at home. "Şeniz's husband is a manager at ATV, and had to leave the children to go to his channel. I personally had no way of contacting anyone, and had not learned any of my key phone numbers by heart. I called 118 80 and gave them the name of my father, but there were too many numbers recorded under the same name. I then called my uncle in Ardahan, who was not aware of what was going on. No one yet knew because the plotters had come to TRT first. I told my uncle: 'Call my father, there is a coup being staged, I am fine and tell my father to call me on this number.' My father was apparently preparing to go outside at that point, and telephone traffic had also started. Protests were beginning. We were still on our way to Şeniz's house in Zekeriyaköy, and we began seeing F-16s flying low. It definitely felt like an upcoming disaster."

Conflicting reports of unusual military activity had started circulating through the social media. People were telling each other that the two bridges in İstanbul were blocked by soldiers, yet no one knew exactly what was happening. Still at home, Soraya too was unaware of what was happening until a friend messaged her from the US. "Are you okay? I saw something on Twitter," she wrote. "What are you talking about? I think you must have read some fake news," I replied. Still, I went on Twitter to see the news and I remember very specifically speaking to my Turkish brother-in-law and telling him there were emerging reports of a coup, to which he replied: 'No. There is no way. Not in Turkey, never!' At first I took his word for it, and did not believe anything until all reports began corroborating each other. At that point, I became very scared for my colleagues still at work, and began calling them at TRT – but I couldn't get in touch with anyone."

Soraya
informing a
friend of hers
about the
coup attempt
taking place.



Soraya eventually got hold of the then-Director of News Carlos, who was in Washington DC at the time and he told her that he knew as much as her, asking her to update him if possible. Executive News Producer Mehmet Yaşar

Dikbayır had completed his shift and was wandering around town with a friend when their evening was interrupted by the coup. "We had decided to hang around the Hisarüstü district where Boğaziçi University is located," he recalls. "I had my police radio scanner with me. We carry it in case something happens so that we can immediately receive and relay information. A friend of mine who is a sergeant in the Selimiye army barracks called me and said that something seemed to be going on. Though he didn't specifically say 'coup', it was definitely implied – I assumed he wasn't allowed to say so in his circumstances. A friend from İHA, İhlas News Agency, called me and said tanks were moving towards the bridge. At this point, I opened my police radio and switched it to the traffic channel, thinking that the tanks would have caused a traffic jam which would then be reported. However, as I flicked through the channels, it seemed as though the police were not yet aware of the situation. My initial assumption with regard to tank movements was that they might be heading toward the Greek border because of some tension between the two countries. I still hadn't been able to internalise that it was a coup. At about 22:00 I called my sergeant friend back and it was he who confirmed the coup attempt."

Ashfaaq Carim, Digital Content Manager, had been at the movies with his wife and two children, and it was upon returning to the TRT World building (where he usually parked his car because it was so close to his home) that he saw the trucks

and troops outside. "I tried to enter, not knowing what was happening, thinking that it could be a state visit of some kind, but the soldiers told me to go away and so I left. I started to phone my colleagues, my director, the head of news. Only then did it become clear that there was a coup going on."

Mehmet Özen, Field Producer for TRT World, had returned from holiday on the evening of July 15. After realising that something was off, he went all the way from his home on the Anatolian side to the TRT World compound on the European side. In order to do so, he had to pass through the Fatih Sultan Mehmet Bridge, which had been already blocked by the plotters. He recorded what he saw with his mobile phone, and actually witnessed a putschist shooting a person. What then transpired in front of the TRT's Ulus compound?

"When I arrived the vicinity of TRT World was calm and quiet as no one was on the street. Going there that night was a matter of honour; it was my way of staking my claim on our channel. By then, the plotters had already entered the building and my colleagues had been forced to leave. Some of them were waiting in front of the gate. The rebels opened fire, partly in the air and partly directed at us. I started to broadcast this on Facebook and Twitter. We also tried to argue and reason with them. The soldiers were very young and were taking directions from high-ranking commanders. We waited there until the morning. I recorded many videos to document the night. When the

soldiers finally surrendered, we were able to re-enter the building. I believe I was the first to do so. The next thing I did was to document the damage, how the place looked. They had pillaged the cafeteria. It was outright vandalism..”

Khurram Khan, Output Producer for TRT World, had finished work at 21:00. His wife's elderly uncle and aunt were visiting them from London, so they all went out for dinner. The evening was going along fine until the waiter came running to ask them to leave. Khan continues: “A bit put off by his lack of courtesy, I asked him the reason and he said the army had taken over. Confused and anxious, I looked around the streets and asked him if an army battalion was expected here in Beşiktaş. The waiter replied: ‘No sir. The TV channels are saying the army has taken over the country.’ I hurriedly paid the bill and tended to my relatives. Old as they were, I just couldn't leave them. I was also holding my three-year-old Aryan and my wife was holding our one-year-old Nyle. The traffic on the road also seemed to hit panic mode as people were scurrying past each other and cars were recklessly zooming by. I decided to drop my relatives at the closest bus stop. I told them to grab the next cab and head for their hotel. They were a bit scared and I only realised their tension when even after saying goodbye at the stop they continued to follow us. I told them they needed to stay at the bus stop where they would easily catch a ride. After seeing each other off, my wife, kids and I waited on the sidewalk for a taxi ourselves. After a while, a taxi which was already carrying

a passenger stopped and asked us where we were headed. I shouted ‘Ortaköy.’ He waved at us to get inside. On the way, I saw the first desperate signs of the long night to come -- there was a car accident and somebody was lying in the middle of the road in a pool of blood. There were people and police around him or her. This was at the entrance to Yıldız Park.”

Having confidence in President Erdoğan, Khan calmed down his nervous wife by telling her to be patient. Khan recalls: “My wife was very scared -- what will happen? Will there be bloodshed? What will happen to us?” I tried calming her down by telling her to wait for President Erdoğan. I'd read about İstanbul's former mayor ever since the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) came to power. I was then a cub reporter for a newly-established newspaper and was simply fascinated by how a mayor could become prime minister of a country as big as Turkey. I told my wife that President Erdoğan would know what to do. From the newspaper articles I'd read about him, I knew he would retaliate against the plotters. And that's exactly what happened. Minutes after his FaceTime interview with a private TV channel, when he asked his people to turn to the streets, we saw thousands of citizens pouring out from their homes in İstanbul and Ankara. I saw people defeat an army of well-armed soldiers with their bare hands. By morning, everything had ended, and, as they say, a new beginning awaited Turkey. Pictures of President Erdoğan landing at İstanbul's airport with his supporters near him absolutely astounded me and the world. I went to

bed at 5 am, woke up at 7 am, and headed straight for work. To my surprise, I saw a few shops open, a market open, and even the Halkbank ATM working. It was almost as if nothing had happened. Yes, a number of shops were closed, but those that were open were doing business as normal. This was amazing to witness. For the financial sector of a country to stay open at a time when it was militarily challenged was a strong sign about the strength of Turkey.”

Deputy Producer Walid Bin Siraj was in Ankara to renew his passport. “In the morning [of 15th July], I met my friends near Kızılay. After that, I returned home, had dinner and took a rest. I subsequently saw something unusual on Facebook. I saw the closure of the Bosphorus Bridge; the military were out on the streets. At first I believed it was a terrorist attack; no one thought that it might be a coup. But as I went out to smoke, just as I lit my cigarette I saw a lot of fighter jets go past, and they were flying so low that you could even see the munitions they were carrying. This is a residential area, I thought; why should fighter jets be flying so low -- unless something very bad was going on? I went back in to watch TV, and in Ankara around that time explosions could be heard and the internet became very slow. Television channels weren't working, so that may have been when they hit the Türksat facilities around midnight or 00:30.”

Istanbul

Resul Serdar Atas
Managing Editor

"A military takeover was not on anyone's mind because there was practically no reason for one. There had been an election five or six months ago, when one party had taken 50 percent of the vote and come to power."

A military takeover was not on anyone's mind because there was practically no reason for one. There had been an election five or six months ago when one party had taken 50 percent of the vote and come to power. The economy was going well; the country was both politically and economically stable. This is why, we were baffled when we began to receive all these news of troop movements, roadblocks and landings from helicopters. The era of army coups was over, we thought, because the new generation was not one for it; nor were they used to the army parading. Under AK Party governments, one might have expected a coup over 2002-2007 but not in 2016, especially not when the government had just won 50 percent of the votes. We dismissed even previously published articles warning of a potential coup, assuming that the authors were nothing but wishful thinkers or coup lovers because there was no rationality behind it. So even when matters were beginning to become a little clearer, I still kept thinking that we must be facing some kind of threat from either the PKK or Daesh. At one point, I was beginning to wonder if Turkey was going to war with another country.

When the soldiers came in and entered the building by smashing the turnstiles, and our access to the external world was cut because they confiscated everyone's phones, there was still something within us which made us think that they might really be here to protect us from some external threat. We were also thinking that broadcasting should not stop under any circumstances. The whole point of

the media is to inform people about what's happening; it should never be silenced or closed down. So surely there had to be something extremely dangerous going on if TRT's screens were blacked out and the national broadcaster had gone off the air. Only when I, Director of Operations Metin Tuğtağ, and one of our guests for the night went to our cars (but remained outside the compound) did we switch on the radio to hear the memorandum being read out in the name of the Turkish Armed Forces. Later, it was also repeated on TRT. That is when it became clear to all of us that what was happening was a coup. We began trying to communicate with people through different means, and following the invitation from the president for people to take to the streets, both TRT staff and ordinary citizens began gathering in front of TRT World at around 01:00 in the morning. There were also at least two police cars parked outside. There were several turning points that night; the call of the president for people to take to the streets was a major turning point, as was the arrival of the Police Special Operations in the early morning. In fact, the arrival of the Special Forces was a psychological turning point for the plotters as it signalled their effective failure. There were protracted negotiations until the soldiers inside the TRT eventually surrendered at approximately 09:30 on the morning of the 16th, and were escorted outside the building and taken away by the riot police in minivans. In fact, because a second coup attempt was strongly possible, the military vehicles

remained in place for quite some time before returning to their original posts in Üsküdar.

We started broadcasting from our London bureau soon after our screen went black. At the time it was under construction, and not fully operational like it is today. Despite their technical shortcomings, our London staff put together a special report on the coup. Those of us in İstanbul did not have a full picture of what they were doing. Our managers abroad got connected to London from different locations and took charge of the broadcast. My first connection with London was through a friend's phone. I went live to explain what was going on in the midst of the incredibly emotional atmosphere that prevailed in Turkey. I can say that this London call was the most emotional telephone connection of my life.

No matter how much it has already been praised, that night was really something different. The people came out from everywhere to oppose those who wanted to disunite us, just as it had happened during the War of Independence. It was as if we had moved into another world and time. Our hearts were united in a powerful outpouring of courage -- we saw it when the soldiers opened fire in front of TRT World -- and people did not run away. This courage led to some losing their lives. They stood up to fully armed and trained military personnel, which is not for the soft-hearted. I do not intend to enter abstract, high-level discussions or to glorify death. But it was real; when the soldiers opened fire, they stood defiant. Instead of the people

running away, it was the determination of the people that caused the putschists to lose their nerve. It was all achieved by the grace of Allah.

My first sleep after Thursday was three days later on Sunday afternoon. We had been doing special broadcasting without a break, and there was no time for sleep. The intensity of the work also meant that I did not go home until the eleventh day after the coup; I was staying in my office all the time.

If you ask me, what happened on July 15, 2016 was the biggest trauma for a generation which had not seen even the 1980 coup. It is a serious lesson for all of us. We were faced with the sight of those who claimed to be soldiers abusing state and army facilities against their own people. We saw tanks on the streets, as if we were living in a previous Turkey and not a new era. It was both a huge breaking point for Turkey as well as a stark reminder of just how fragile all our achievements are. At the same, the perpetrators finally exposed themselves -- and this was the silver lining for the night. Despite how much we suffered as a nation, at least the perpetrators came out and exposed themselves, and we now know just who wished ill upon us. Our martyrs, may God bless them, protected the future of our children. We may not have seen World War I or the National Struggle, but the stories of the bravery of our forefathers have been handed down over many generations -- and the story of the bravery of the 15 July generation will also continue to be narrated into the future.



İbrahim Eren
Chairman of TRT World

Ankara

On the 15th of July, I was in Istanbul with my family. However, I then had to go to Ankara for a TV program. At around 22:00, I received messages from friends in Istanbul who informed me of what was happening. At first, we didn't take it seriously. But after they sent me videos of soldiers closing the bridge, I began to get worried. Still, the thought of this being a coup didn't even cross my mind. I thought such things were of the past and that Turkey had permanently moved on.

After some time, I also learned that jets were engaging in flyovers. I was supposed to take the 23:50 flight back to Istanbul. When I heard about the flyovers, I wanted to go back to the TRT's Ankara headquarters as quickly as possible. TRT in Istanbul had been raided at an early phase. I had been able to reach my colleagues there at the beginning but later all their phones were confiscated.



Chairman of TRT World, İbrahim Eren, at the front gates of TRT Ankara Headquarters invaded by putschists. Open Source.

Still at TRT Ankara, I made my way to the continuity studio as I assumed that the plotters would first seize the broadcaster. Everything seemed in place. I decided to go back to my room only to learn that soldiers were entering the building through

the main entrance. But after a while, a squad from the police intelligence bureau entered TRT through another entrance. The police advised us to exit the building and re-enter with a larger group of people. Meanwhile the coup proclamation was read out on TV. I was shocked. I instantaneously tweeted that the proclamation was illegal. I called people to gather in front of the main TRT entrance in order to recapture TRT.



We are waiting for all the patriotic people of Ankara to come to TRT Headquarters. Come show your love for Democracy and your Motherland!!!

Turkish flags at hand, there is great enthusiasm!!!

Thank you for Ankara. We invite the people of Istanbul to TRT İstanbul Ulus studios with flags. May Allah be pleased with you.

We tried to weaken the soldiers' resolve by showing them pictures of arrested soldiers in Istanbul, and told them that their destiny would soon mimic those in the photographs. Some soldiers began to cry, and we were able to coax many more from there. Our tactic was to take one soldier at a time and then disarm them all at once. I showed a photo of arrested soldiers to an officer, who responded by pointing his gun at me. I thought he was going to shoot me, but instead he fired his gun in the air. The soldiers were soon divided by a car in the middle of the road. We proceeded to approach the soldiers, starting from the ones who had no officers among them, and managed to take them all into custody one by one.

In the end we entered the building all together. We walked arm in arm towards the studio, but when we entered, we saw that the soldiers who had been there were already fleeing the building. We managed to recover TRT, and called in our crew to reorganise the studios. I worked straight through the next two days. I did not go home as I wanted to keep up staff morale.

Around 23:00 Prime Minister Yıldırım appeared live on a private news channel to confirm that a faction within the armed forces had launched an insurrection; an hour later, the putschists forced a TRT news presenter at gunpoint to read a lengthy statement by their so-called "Council for Establishing Peace at Home." Another hour, and this time President Erdoğan appeared live via FaceTime on another news channel to denounce the conspirators and call people to take to the streets to defend democracy.

Upon hearing what was happening, Mehmet was in a hurry to reach TRT World's digital office in Dördüncü Levent so as to pick his camera and rush out again to record the events of the night. But on the way he changed his mind: "I realised that there were no night shifts since we had not yet started 24-hour broadcasting like we do now. So we ran away on a motorcycle with our laptops and all the necessary equipment, and went to my my ex-colleague Oytun's place in Rumelihisari. We turned the house into a news office, and with the help of friends we began updating the social media and also began working on montage and editing. Initially we were also thinking of inviting TRT presenters and guests for live interviews. Our London connection continued all night, and by around 03:00 several other colleagues including my director had come over to do more work and also strategise. We continued to work by editing live videos coming in from Facebook and Periscope – whilst going through a very emotional time. It was indeed a strange atmosphere – it felt like losing someone and having to deal with the funeral arrangements while also having to keep going; this is really how it felt that night."

Meanwhile, the rest of the digital team were making the most of having been located not in the main Ulus compound that had been raided by the putschists, but in

that separate Dördüncü Levent building for which Mehmet had been heading before he turned to Rumelihisari. They got quickly organised and began relaying their messages to an international audience. After learning of the coup during his attempt to park his car at the main compound, Ashfaaq also got in on the act: "I called my team and asked them if they were safe and secure. They were, but had not yet heard about the coup, and were not sure what to do if the plotters should eventually raid their building. I met with a few friends and discussed what we might do; we decided to follow all the live coverage. We watched Erdoğan use FaceTime to make a live call to the people via CNN Türk, and heard the adhans and calls from the minarets to resistance."

Riyaad Minty, Digital Strategy Manager, also got involved. "Myself, Ashfaaq, Mohammed Qarim and Ned had all only just moved to Turkey, and were still setting ourselves up," he recalls. "That night we went to watch a movie, and upon returning home, Ashfaaq called us and told us of the military presence at TRT World. We tried in vain to find out what was happening, so we decided to go back to my apartment to strategise. At that time, I didn't even have any furniture, just a bed and two chairs. So we were sitting there and getting online to see what was happening. We saw people saying on social media that it was a coup. Then we realised our broadcast had been taken off the air. We ended up trying two things; one was attempting to get our stream up on Facebook as it was blocked on satellite – this way people could still watch TRT World. And then we got in touch with the London team – and tried as effectively as possible to explain to them the technicalities of plugging in so that they could broadcast from their office. We also communicated with them and the Washington team for social media updates, as accessing Twitter and other information sources was difficult in Turkey."

Later in Washington DC



As the coup was in the making, the then Director of News of TRT World, Carlos Van Meek gave more than 12 interviews to different TV channels. Open Source.

Mohammed Akhlaq, Director of Tech Ops was in Washington DC with a group of colleagues: "I recall the day very clearly, as I was on a mission in the USA to evaluate potential sites for our permanent Broadcast Centre in DC. I remember we were visiting a building and the Bureau Manager received a call. I will never forget the look on his face after he took the call. His face turned white and a look of absolute disbelief took hold. He finished his call, walked over to me and whispered in my ear that there is an attempted Coup d'état in progress in Turkey and we need to head back to the Bureau immediately."

Washington, DC

A Double Narrative

Mahmut İpşirli

Managing Director

Fatih Er

Director of News

(Then-Manager of Input)

Mahmut İpşirli: During those days, we had a dual policy of strengthening the quality of our broadcast from İstanbul and establishing new broadcasting offices in London and Washington DC. That is why I was in Washington with my colleagues to check on progress and strategise further improvements. After a morning of meetings, we went to the Diyanet Centre of America in Maryland to do our Friday prayers.

Fatih Er: As we left the mosque, I was surprised to find my WhatsApp full of unread messages – 750 to be exact, plus a score of missed calls. When I opened them, I saw that many of them were from group of journalists. Skimming through them revealed that something was out of place in Turkey. Desperate for Wi-Fi, we went to a nearby cafe. It was right at that moment that I saw the junta's one and only statement, the long declaration by the so-called "Council for Establishing Peace at Home," being read out on TRT. A chill ran down my spine.

Mahmut İpşirli: My first reaction was disbelief. Like many others, I also thought the days of such outrage were behind us. In particular, I had never thought that the Gülenist radicals would dare to attempt a coup against the legitimate government. Being abroad evoked feelings of regret and helplessness. Eventually, I shook off those emotions and tried to focus on the work at hand. We turned the Wi-Fi cafe into an ad hoc newsroom (much to the surprise of the customers).

Fatih Er: We were driving to the office in heavy traffic. I wasn't driving as I was constantly checking social media. Broadcasting from Washington did not prove feasible because

our Washington office did not have the resources to shoulder the burden, but our London office did. In fact, London began to broadcast even before we reached our Washington office. We started calling our friends in Turkey but couldn't reach them. The rebels had seized their phones when they raided TRT World. I managed to reach a TRT editor in another department. "I am in a corner," he said: "Soldiers have raided the office and sent everyone out. There is a coup happening here, there are jets flying overhead, and I've heard explosions." It hurt all the more because I wasn't there. "They've shut down the channel," I told my colleague. When I tweeted "Let's save TRT World," a journalist friend called and asked: "Where are you Fatih, are you stuck inside?" "No, I am in the US," I shyly replied.

Mahmut İpşirli: Once we had verified that a coup was taking place, Fatih and I headed for our DC studio, where I asked Carlos and Muhammed Akhlaq to join us as soon as possible. I directly called our London office and asked Andrew Steele to take over the live-stream and continue to broadcast from London. I contacted Turkish and international media directors, whoever I happened to have a connection with, asking for their cooperation to help make our voice heard in the world. Most of them expressed their objection to military takeovers. At the same time, we told TRT World staff from 42 different countries, whoever we could reach, to connect by phone to TV shows and try to explain what was actually happening in Turkey. These media outlets included Reuters, CNN, BBC, ABC, and CBS. That night, Carlos (who was our Director of News at the time) gave more than twelve interviews to different TV channels.

Fatih Er: Many Turkish students in Washington DC mobilised and started translating the news coming from Turkey immediately into English so as to keep the world up to date and do away with the inconsistencies and unconfirmed rumours that foreign media coverage was full of.

Mahmut İpşirli: Initially, quite a few American media outlets were announcing a successful military takeover. Later, they changed their editorial lines and began to project the coup attempt as staged and fake.

Fatih Er: I collected my Istanbul friends' passwords for our social media accounts, and started managing those accounts with other friends. They continuously tweeted, shared videos on Facebook, and translated Turkish news into English. We kept broadcasting until the morning, doing our best to support London. If we couldn't broadcast through Turkish channels, we sought others to get the message out, whether Indian, Canadian, or American. We were actually doing all other channels quite a favour by providing them with all this information. When the rebels finally gave up and surrendered that morning (in Turkish local time), I shouted in jubilation, and everyone in the Washington news centre, all those other foreign journalists who had witnessed our tribulations, clapped and expressed their congratulations. It was an emotional time. Once in Istanbul, I stayed in the office for the next ten days without going home.

Mahmut İpşirli: After Istanbul came up and running the next day, I took the first flight back to help coordinate the TRT World broadcasts from the headquarters. Since all direct flights to Turkey were cancelled, a long and tough journey was awaiting us. As four directors in DC, we decided to take four different flights with different carriers, and with four different transfer points in order to make sure that in case any flights were cancelled, at least one of us reached Istanbul.



Later in London

As these traumatic events were unfolding in İstanbul, TRT World's fledgling London office, established just a couple of weeks earlier, was passing through a difficult test. It lacked staff, equipment, and infrastructure. Nevertheless, the London crew did everything possible to go on the air and managed to relay what was happening in Turkey to the outside world.

Vice Director of Operations, then-London Bureau Chief Bilal Bedir explains: "Normally the shifts in London used to be ending at 17:00. Hence when the first danger signs started circulating, no one was at the office. Still, it took a very short while for London staff to go back on duty since they had just started having a weekend party downstairs. Others living close by also rushed into the studio to support broadcasting. The emergency broadcast that was put together incredibly rapidly continued until the morning, when the İstanbul studio was recovered from the putschists."

London

Andrew Steel
Former Director of Operations

"The instructions from İstanbul to London were simple – keep TRT World on the air, no matter what."

The instructions from İstanbul to London were simple – keep TRT World on the air, no matter what. The devil was in the details – how do you keep a TV news service going with no staff, no distribution signal, no broadcast material, no scripts and no backup from the İstanbul newsroom, which hours before had been closed down at gunpoint?

I was in London on the evening of July 15, relaxing with my family at the end of a week of checking on the early progress of TRT World's production studio there, the channel's first outside Turkey and at that point just a few weeks old.

As I headed back to the TRT World office through the weekend party atmosphere of London's West End, it was hard to imagine the events unfolding 3,000 km away in Turkey. I arrived at the newsroom before midnight (Turkish time), together with one of our presenters and one of our executive producers (EP), both on temporary work assignments from İstanbul. They too had been hastily summoned to put together an emergency news service, by any means possible.

In truth, we had little more to work with than the TRT set and a fibre link to İstanbul HQ – with nobody at the other end. What happened next was a tribute to ingenuity, improvisation, and sheer determination to make things work.

Our EP stepped in to find a skeleton roster of gallery and studio staff. Amazingly, a vision mixer and sound/camera operator were sourced within minutes and two more were lodging in a hotel round the corner for a few hours' sleep. Now at least we had the human resources to operate the gallery and studio for the foreseeable future.

Next, in the absence of a fibre connection via İstanbul, we had to find a way to distribute a digital signal. Armed with a telephone and a credit card, and after hasty conversations with our digital and technical colleagues in Turkey, EP found the right software online.

Another miracle – we could now feed London output directly on to TRT World's fledgling YouTube and Facebook channels. We were back with our audience. But what of the content?

Our presenter and I spoke to friends, colleagues, contacts and acquaintances in Turkey to get some idea of what was going on. Slowly we managed to paint a sketchy picture of the events unfolding in Turkey. President Erdoğan's FaceTime broadcast, the bombing and strafing of parliament, tanks on

the streets, counter-demonstrations. These unfolding events had to be reported and put into some kind of context; we had to find pictures to illustrate and witnesses to explain.

Online we found agency footage, much focused on the Bosphorus Bridge in İstanbul, so familiar to those of us based up the hill at TRT World HQ in Ulus. We were able to loop the footage – giving us a dramatic and continuing visual backdrop for our live reporting from the studio.

Just a couple of hours after arriving breathlessly at the office, our presenter launched into TRT World's first emergency broadcast after the coup attempt. It was directed at a hitherto uncharted digital audience – the main TV distribution signal via Türksat would remain disabled overnight.

It was important to find guests who could advance the story and who were fluent in English – at that time of the morning and given the circumstances in Turkey and limited communications, no translators could be found.

I worked on set with the presenter as “the presenter's friend,” maintaining a live dialogue over the pictures we could find, using the information we could glean. The first broadcast lasted no more than 15 minutes, but it had an immediacy and intimacy that other news networks lacked. Our friends and loved ones were involved; we felt a responsibility to report as professional journalists -- but we also felt a strong personal link to events.

TRT World was back on air, albeit hanging by a thread.

Another longer bulletin emerged a few hours later with more up-to-date pictures, more witness reports and more studio analysis. It was a lesson in journalistic stamina, technical improvisation and team spirit, taking us through the night on coffee and adrenalin.

Fortunately, the emergency plan needed to last no longer than late Saturday morning. The coup attempt was vanquished, the TRT World studio restored, and staff returned to work in İstanbul.

TRT's brand new London studio had survived its first real test of breaking news with flying colours. More importantly, it had played a significant part in maintaining the integrity of the channel's news output during a harrowing night.

Later Back in Istanbul

Sara recounts: "After leaving TRT World, we went to the metro station. We heard from CNN Türk Radio that a coup was taking place. Parliament was being attacked. I didn't know what to do because I didn't have my phone with me so I couldn't get in touch with my family. I decided to stay over with a friend who wasn't working that night. News of the coup had already travelled around the world, so I called my family using my friend's phone. They were very scared for me. We went up on the roof as we wanted to see what was going on. We could clearly see the TRT World building and the helicopters. We saw protesters gathering in front of the gate and



The Italian original says: Dear all I'm sorry if I've worried you. I'm fine. I was at work when soldiers entered the newsroom. I couldn't take your calls because they took my phone yesterday. It seems the worst is over. Inshallah everything will go well. I kiss you all.

took some videos of them because we wanted to send them to our team in London. When we moved nearer

to the gate, there was a lot of fighting going on and the soldiers told us to go home. We heard what sounded like a sonic boom and it broke the windows of our flat. This was traumatic for my Bosnian friend who had been through war before. I specifically remember when President Erdoğan came on TV via FaceTime and asked the people to go out into the streets. In Italy we don't have very strong patriotic feelings, so people would not have gone out but they did in Turkey. I remember all my Turkish friends going out. I told them it was going to be dangerous but they said they didn't care. They weren't going to let the coup win."

Mohsin had left home after President Erdoğan's call and made his way to the TRT World office: "There was momentary silence at home – broken by gunfire. We continuously flipped through channels and found one that was still broadcasting; we stayed with it until the Turkish President's message was aired via a video application. That was the turning point. He told the people to go out into the streets to defend democracy. A few minutes later, I could hear people cheering from distant streets and lanes - my neighbourhood was nearly emptied as people began pouring out of their homes to resist the coup. I tried to go out myself but men in civvies lining parts of the lane asked that I go back in. It wasn't until a few moments before dawn that I was able to inspect what was going on at the office gates. The street leading to the office was filled with people challenging the rebels to leave the TRT World Ulus compound. Common, unarmed people were challenging the putschists. There was a huge police build-up right in front. The police began making announcements on a loud speaker, demanding that the plotters surrender. After some time, one of the cops went in to negotiate. This lasted for about fifteen minutes, with a constant roar of people shouting from the outside. Finally a police bus emerged, carrying them all out. "

For her part, Assistant News Editor Nisa Yıldırım was afraid that if something happened to President



Erdoğan, Turkey would turn into another Syria: “I was thinking we will wake up to Syria, not Turkey. I was beginning to feel like nothing will return to normal, and we will be engulfed in war and civil war. Whether or not the coup is successful, they are still going to come after him.” Ahmed Raza, Output Poruducer, had almost given up hope -- until President Erdoğan suddenly appeared on TV and galvanised the whole population yet again. “We were unable to sleep all night, as reports of violence continued to come our way. I was getting reports that many people had been killed and hundreds injured by gunfire. In Fatih, in downtown İstanbul, tanks ran over peaceful protesters, crushing many to death. It was terribly disturbing. Hours later, though, the situation began to be reversed.”

Initially in a similar spirit, after seeing President Erdoğan on TV, Sümeyye turned more optimistic. “The fate of the whole country is at stake,” she said. Today she recalls: “In my mind, while I did think we could lose many things that night, I believed that the people going out into the streets would be successful. I had been waiting for

“If unarmed civilians could defend their country like this, it was certainly in safe hands. I spent the following few hours answering calls and messages, dispelling the misinformation people had received from other media.”

Erdoğan to speak as I knew that would make me feel better. I was happy because I thought the coup would fail. But at the same time, I knew that people were going to die. I thought about my family. I knew they were going to go out to defend their country. There were so many sounds outside. We actually thought the window was going to break because of the noise from the jets. We saw more and more people running in the streets as the tide began to turn against the plotters. There were many people dying and even more injured.”

Mohsin recounts: “After a brief visit to work, I returned to my worried family. Although it was one hell of a night, I was relieved and empowered by the people’s courage. If unarmed civilians could defend their country like this, it was certainly in safe hands. I spent the following few hours answering calls and messages, dispelling the misinformation people had received from other media. Many of my journalist friends called me and assumed I had already packed my bags. I clearly had not. I went on various media outlets to share the true story, the story that I had seen unfold with my very own eyes. Turkey was

not under the control of its army. It was just a bunch of putschists who had tried to overthrow a democratically elected government. If anyone was in control of Turkey that day, it was the people of this country.”

Obaida recounts: “So I got home to find my family already there. By that time, we were in the thick of the coup. Since our house overlooked the bridge, we were able to see the military occupying it. The putschists moved closer and closer to the middle of the bridge through the night. I tried to keep my family inside because by around 23:30 or midnight there were jets flying over the bridge. Every time they came down, it was so fast and noisy that it sounded like a sonic boom. We were also hearing rifle shots and machine gun fire. It was really scary, especially for my nieces, nephew, and my new-born child as they were rattled by all the noise. We were looking outside from the balcony and saw our neighbours running out into the streets. The mosques were calling people out into the streets for the day’s last Isha prayer. At that time Isha was pretty late because it was summer. I remember they prayed Isha and then they continued to make Tekbirat and Salavat and to call people to go out on the street. We watched all this from our balcony. We weren’t interacting with our neighbours as everyone had their doors and windows closed. All this lasted late into the night. I was up pretty much all night until about 4-5 in the morning which was Fajr time.”





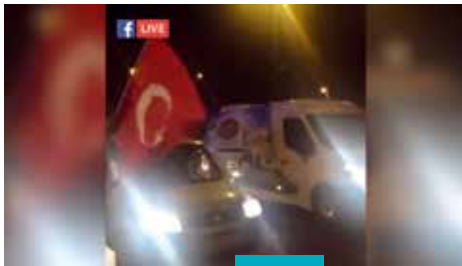
Mohammed Akhlaq, the then Director of Tech Ops in Washington DC, recounts: "We managed to find flights via various routes and countries to get to Istanbul within a few hours of each other. Upon landing we headed straight to our channel in Istanbul to check on the situation, to see what the damage was. We ensured that our staff were briefed and where possible, tried to facilitate additional security measures to keep our staff safe. It was an extremely difficult and challenging time for me, as I had never been in a situation like this, but to be honest my focus was with my Turkish friends and colleagues and to ensure that we, TRT world did our jobs regardless of what was trying to be done to this country and its people, maintaining a strong front on the accuracy of information flow to our audiences."

In İstanbul, tens of thousands of people were pouring out of their homes and neighbourhoods to confront the Gülenist rebels. They for their part were controlling the bridges while trying to move against key government buildings like the İstanbul Governor's Office, the Greater İstanbul Municipality, the Security Department (or Police Headquarters), or the Disaster Control Centre. Against this threat, masses of ordinary citizens gathered to form protective human barriers around these and other nerve centres. TRT World's Soraya was among them:

"Basically, in the beginning we didn't really know what was happening. Eventually President Erdoğan came on CNN Türk and told everyone to go out and take over the streets. At that time, I was with my brother-in-law who is Turkish. He told me he was going to go out to defend his country. I told him if he was going then so was I 'because I'm a journalist and want to document history in the making.' I remember taking my phone and going out

with him. I live in the Eyüp Sultan area, so we were just down the street from the AK Party headquarters. I started streaming live on Facebook and thousands of people were watching from the States and all around the world. They were amazed to see history in the making and the Turkish people coming out to defend their country and stand up for democracy. I remember we were walking on the highway and so many people were coming out from their houses; men, women, children, people from all political parties, everyone was awake waving their flags and honking their horns. They were determined to stand up to the military. We started to walk towards Vatan Street, a very iconic street in Turkish history, and as we were walking we saw that there was a military vehicle but there weren't any soldiers; rather, there were only ordinary people on top. They had somehow taken over the military vehicle and were cheering. I was just completely amazed and perplexed by the bravery of the Turkish people. They literally went up to the military and looked them straight in the face. I saw it with my own eyes."

Soraya continues: "So then as the night progressed, we were walking towards the police headquarters in İstanbul and as we were walking we saw bus drivers pulling alongside with their big buses. They were telling people to get on to go to Atatürk International Airport. They were providing this service for free. We ourselves didn't go on the bus because we were heading for police headquarters, but I saw many others doing so. Again, what really surprised me was the bravery of the people. After overcoming the military in one place, together they were heading for another place where the military were still in control. It amazed me that they just didn't go home. They really wanted to confront the military. Eventually we got to İstanbul Police Headquarters and



Soraya Salam streaming via Facebook and reporting on the people's reactions to the putschists

people started getting suspicious of me because I was speaking English and live-streaming all the time. They were getting nervous about me so someone reported me, and the police apprehended me and took me aside. My brother-in-law came with me and translated on my behalf. He explained to them that I was with TRT though here I was just filming as a resident to show the world what was happening in Turkey. So eventually they let me go."

Meanwhile, having first moved from his Marmaris hotel to Dalaman, now President Erdoğan was on a plane from Dalaman headed for İstanbul. An assassination team had raided Erdoğan's hotel in Marmaris a while after the president left. In order to confuse and deceive the putschists, three planes in three different airports

"After overcoming the military in one place, together they were heading for another place where the military were still in control. It amazed me that they just didn't go home. They really wanted to confront the military."

close to Marmaris had been prepared for the president. It was from Dalaman Airport that he eventually took off in a plane using a Turkish Airlines passenger call sign for concealment. Soraya continues: "Towards the middle of the night, a big aircraft came overhead and everyone started cheering. We all thought it was President Erdoğan because there were reports that he was coming back and would be giving a speech at Atatürk Airport. Around 03:00 we received messages comprising fragments from the president's airport speech saying the coup had failed. So everyone started celebrating and people weren't afraid anymore. I too felt more comfortable because I heard that my colleagues at TRT were safe. At least at TRT and TRT World this putschists just broke some windows but did not hurt anyone."



Masses of Istanbulites pouring out on the streets to engage in resistance. Open Source.

Elsewhere it wasn't so. The putschists opened fire on thousands of people from all ages, injuring more than fifteen hundred. In some extreme instances of brutality they even passed over civilians with tanks or used artillery to disperse the crowds pressing in on them. Frequently the only sounds to be heard above the firing and the cheering were the sirens of ambulances trying to reach the dead or wounded. "It was around 04:00 when we decided to go back home," Soraya recalls.



Deputy Producer, Walid Bin Siraj, celebrating after the July 15 coup attempt. TRT World/Walid Bin Siraj

"We passed by a hospital and heard people shouting 'A positive' or 'B positive.' They were trying to get blood donors. It hit me that in a few hours we would know the real death toll. I walked through a street where people had been shot. I saw that many people had died in that area, while the wounded were being rushed to hospitals. I felt the utter gravity of the situation."

Perhaps more than İstanbul, the putschists had prioritized subduing and controlling Ankara. Fighter jets bombed the parliament building, Türksat's satellite communications centre, and the Police Special Operations Headquarters compound of the police. Army helicopters kept attacking the headquarters of the National Intelligence Organisation as well as the General Directorate of Security throughout the night. Still, police units were clashing with putschists at every corner.

Imams were calling adhans and salahs from all mosques, asking for God to help this brave nation. TRT World's Walid, one of the unsung heroes of 15th July, was in Ankara: "Around half-past midnight or maybe 01:00, I guess, the President said get out of your homes and gather in streets, squares or other public places. With that I grasped that it was a coup. I heard the adhan [ezan] from the mosques, took ablution, and left to find out what I should do. As I'm not very familiar with Ankara, I called a couple of friends and they agreed that we should go out; if we don't go out tonight, Turkey will fall. They will enter our homes, throw us out, imprison us, and we will experience tremendous persecution. So I said yes, let's go out. We went to a mosque, and there was an imam there, probably a müezzin, and he said we should go to Çankaya, near the Prime Minister's office because the military were heading there -- which he knew through some taxi drivers since they had become a crucial link in communicating with the police, mainly through their wireless systems.

They were telling people where to go, and were also using their cabs to create barricades for preventing military vehicles from leaving their compounds or breaking into sensitive places. So a taxi driver arrived with his taxi, and we got into the cab to head for Çankaya Palace. It was not far and we could have walked but this taxi driver took us and then put his car in the middle of two police cars to create a barricade in front of a tank. At that time we were like four or five hundred people carrying flags and shouting slogans. After forty-five to fifty minutes, tanks appeared and they were firing from their machine guns, so we all lay down beneath the cars to avoid the machine gun fire. But as it came closer, two or three people, I can't remember exactly, crawled past the taxi and beside the tank. They then got on the tank, grabbed the machine gunner and pulled him down and took him prisoner."

*"Imams were calling
adhans and salahs from all
mosques, asking for God
to help this brave nation."*



The Day After



Sümeyye spent the night at Andrea's place and did not have the opportunity to call her family. "When I woke up in the morning, Andrea came to the door and said 'your father is here.' I said 'Are you serious, how did he find this place?' He had gone to TRT and had asked where I was. I don't know who told him that I had gone with Andrea. He had found Andrea's address, and he came looking for me with my little sister. We hugged and cried, and we went home. I heard different stories about what my parents had gone through, what my uncle had gone through, and so on. I actually wrote a little document about what happened to my family. I wanted to write every single thing that happened so that we do not forget."

Walid eventually found his way to Kızılay in the heart of the capital: "At 7:30 in the morning [on 16th July] I went from Çankaya Palace to the house where I was staying in Ankara. I took a shower and I fell asleep until afternoon. I woke up, once more did my ablutions, and left for the streets crossing at Kızılay, the main avenues

of Ankara. There was a huge rally. It was overwhelming. I'd never seen anything like it. The Turkish people were so determined; they had stood up and defended their government and saved it from danger, and they had also retained the right to vote for the government that leads them."

Immediately after the rebels at TRT World surrendered, the channel went back on the air. Soraya was one of the first to arrive: "I went home and I couldn't sleep because there was a sonic boom. You could still hear aircraft and helicopters. So I slept for an hour, and then I got a phone call from TRT saying: 'Come in right now, we are



*Morning of the July 16, Associate Producers
Muhammed Şerif and Ozan Ahmet Çetin, seen on
the back of a military vehicle left at the TRT World.*

going to go on the air.' So I felt like, yes, let's go on the air. I rushed back to the office and we went on the air only a few hours after they had taken down our signal. I felt very proud at that moment, that all of us, especially as journalists, as a team -- even people who weren't scheduled to work that day -- had come in to make sure that we got back on the air to tell the story of the Turkish people and their bravery of that night."

"The true story, however, was that the Turkish people had come together to stand up against this coup and to show that no matter what their views were, they were not going to take a military coup lying down. So the mood in the newsroom was one of humility but also of great responsibility."

Soraya explains the atmosphere prevailing in TRT World in the wake of 15th July: "There was a very triumphant and unifying mood, because from my experience that night, no matter what their political beliefs were, whether they had been supporting the government or critical of it, they had all come together to defend democracy. No one wanted to see their country taken over by the military. Coming in that morning, I guess that we as journalists felt like this had been one of the most incredible stories we had ever witnessed, and we therefore had a duty to tell the story properly. Because hours before there had been some other networks who were misrepresenting the whole story. Maybe they hadn't known better since they weren't there, but we were there and we knew. They were making it seem as if the coup was successful and the people were celebrating. The true story, however, was that the Turkish people had come together to stand up against this coup and to show that no matter what their views were, they were not going to take a military coup lying down. So the mood in the newsroom was one of humility but also of great responsibility."



Riyaad Minty documented the vehicles abandoned by the putschists in TRT World's front yard



How TRT World was Affected

For Turkey, 16 July was a very different day. Too much had happened on the night of the coup to attempt to absorb it quickly. Everyone knew that this historical day would be talked about for years, maybe even decades to come.

Inevitably, there was shock and horror. Walid did not speak to his family for a couple of days, because he was afraid they would worry too much if he told them about the intensity of what was happening. "I stopped communicating with my family because they were afraid, and I knew they would panic if they heard more. I texted them and told them that I was safe in Ankara, and that they did not need to worry about me - but otherwise I did not call them. I lied to them so that I could go out, especially to my mom; she's sensitive about these things and could have had a stroke due to her high blood pressure. There was no need to worry her. That said, some weeks later she saw some of my coup-related pictures on Facebook, but everything was over by that time."

Ashfaaq's children were also very worried about him, and kept checking up on their father: "I can still remember those moments. My kids even remind me of it, because when I left, my kids had already seen the soldiers. When I took them home [after the movie] I left before the sonic booms. My kids asked me: 'Where are you going?' and I said: 'I am going to go and work.' I tried to explain to them that something bad was happening in the country, and that I was going to help sort out the coverage, but to this day my children are convinced I fixed the coup attempt, which I think is really funny! But the experience of the night in and of itself was still incredibly historic and interesting."

For some, it was too much. "It has been really difficult to establish an English-language channel in Turkey," notes head of the News Department Fatih Er: "Immediately after the coup, 15 to 20 people left the job because they did not feel secure any more. Their life was in danger, they felt. And so they left." Although it is entirely understandable that the coup should prove so frightening for expats working at TRT, Andrea Sanke, the channel's anchor-presenter, is convinced that a bit more patience and prudence might have been called for: "A lot of people were very worried because they did not know what was going to happen. People were starting to think of the worst-case scenario, and some quit very hastily. Just wait, do not jump to conclusions. It is a very peaceful country. Maybe I was being naïve but I did not think it would get ugly. It didn't have to get ugly, and it didn't. Some people did leave anyway, but most of us decided to just stay and see how things go. We were all working again and we felt good about what we were doing. We are still here. I am really proud of how this channel and how this country has overcome what happened."

Not only did many remain, but they also reacted differently. Sara began thinking deeply about her engagement with Turkish society. She realised that as an expat she should try to integrate herself more into society: "This was a wakeup call. It forced me to better understand the reality of the country I lived in. I had moved to Turkey in August and had been here for almost a year. But I had lived the life of a foreigner and used to stay with other foreigners. That night's events made me really look around at where I was. I began speaking to more people to understand what was happening and why. I did not want to just go with assumptions. I wanted to do my job better."



TRT World employee Arabella Munro giving her account of the coup attempt. Open Source.

Arabella Munro, who is an Output Producer on News, finds it amazing that the event brought everyone together in common defiance: "I went in to start working, and there was this military vehicle abandoned right outside the office, and we were just climbing it and taking pictures on it! Everyone was so relieved; everyone wanted to get on with their job, and there was this spirit that you couldn't shut us down, you couldn't silence the voice of the media. On the night itself, obviously it had been a tragedy. But as a journalist, your adrenalin kicks in, and it was very exciting and I was too busy to be emotional or scared or anything."

Ahmed Raza was astonished at the bravery of the Turkish people in defending their democracy: "For me, as a journalist and a Pakistani, the most surprising thing was to witness the Turkish people crowding the streets and peacefully defending their right to democracy against heavily armed soldiers at the cost of their lives, the most precious thing for a human. It was unbelievable! We have experienced military coups in Pakistan. But we could never resist it at such a mass level. In Pakistan we could never believe people coming to the streets to argue with

or to confront soldiers holding guns and driving tanks to brutalize democracy. For me, the Turkish people's commitment to democracy and democratic values is unmatched in the modern world. I think the unity, solidarity and nationalism of the Turkish people at the core element in their progress and the only guarantee of stability and prosperity."

In the face of the gathering crowds, Ahmed Raza had been trying to process his own emotions when his daughter approached him with "questions full of childish curiosity." Anushika asked, he now recalls: "Papa! What's going on? Is it a protest like the ones Imran Khan does in Pakistan or what? What are they protesting for? 'I don't know beta [my daughter]. But it seems like they are protesting for their right to rule, their right to democracy, and freedom,' I replied. But who is trying to take away their freedom? 'The military, of course. Like they have been doing in Pakistan.' Why do the military do so Papa? Are they mad? What do they want to achieve from all this... [expletive]? It isn't their job, Anushika said as she watched the crowd getting bigger and louder. 'This is called a military coup, beta. But it's not the entire military that are doing it. It's always a few generals who do this... [same expletive], just to grab more power, and always with a reform agenda. You know they always consider themselves superior to the bloody civilians. Allah rehama karey [May God have mercy upon us], I finished."

Muhammed Akhlaq, who were in DC at that time says "I'm glad to say the attempted coup was suppressed and the culprits arrested. Not only did it affect the citizens of this country but it was also a difficult time for expats within Turkey who were worried about the safety of their families, their friends and themselves. We are very fortunate that the people of Turkey are very brave, resilient and were able to turn things around and reassure everyone by bringing things back to normal in 24/48 hours. Even though this took a lot of effort regarding security services to secure and stabilise the

country, in the best possible way that it could have. My heart goes out to the brave souls who lost their lives defending this country and to those families who suffered by losing loved ones."

Soraya, too, found that having been in Turkey on the night of the coup enabled her to better understand the country's situation: "I think the way it influenced me was to approach Turkish issues with much greater care and realise that things are not black and white. Everything is much more complex than they may seem; we do have a responsibility to cover these issues carefully and not always come to them with preconceived notions. The coup taught me that it would have been a much different story if I had been outside Turkey. I think outsiders didn't really understand how there could be factions within the military linked with a criminal. Seeing that with our own eyes was very enlightening."

After 15th July, a lot of expats came to understand and acknowledge just how unfair the Western media's take had (and has) been on Turkey. Sara argues that one must thoroughly know a country before reporting on it: "The feelings of the Turkish people have changed. At first people felt threatened, then scared. But even then, they decided not to keep in a corner. They were even more determined, and they came out proudly. It was difficult at that point to try to stay balanced in reporting because you are also very much involved. I was so angry when I read articles in Italian newspapers claiming the coup was fabricated. I was furious! It was not fabricated. I lived through this! The immediate aftershock for us was anger. From my point of view, I think we did make some mistakes. Sometimes we slipped a little bit, but these challenges were useful because we managed to find a balance in the end. Now we are more aware of how to give better coverage. We wanted to explain what was happening here in Turkey fully and thoroughly. I have come to realise, for instance, that many Western media outlets have no knowledge whatsoever of Turkish

"For me, the Turkish people's commitment to democracy and democratic values is unmatched in the modern world. I think the unity, solidarity and nationalism of the Turkish people is the core element in their progress and the only guarantee of stability and prosperity."



history and politics. You can't report on something that you don't understand. You need to know the history of this country. You cannot provide coverage based on stereotypes and generalisations. You can't just say: 'Oh this is bad and this is good, so let's stay with the good.' That's not how it works. So I think we have begun doing a lot of work to clearly explain both sides of the story and provide in-depth knowledge of this country."

Professionally, Arabella says, what she was observing did not necessarily match what she saw in the media. She understood once more that nothing can replace being on the ground and listening to people. "At the time, it had been my first year as a professional journalist and I had witnessed a significant historical event at first hand. What I saw and the stories that my friends were

telling me did not necessarily match what I was seeing in the media. For most of the Western press, the moment the coup was announced, it was a done deal, which however did not turn out to be so. These events are so complicated you can't just assume why it's happening, so we need to keep pushing and be critical of what we're told. Sometimes there's an easy narrative that's being offered but you shouldn't always believe what you hear; you need to keep pushing for the sources. The number of soldiers I see outside might not be the same as what someone else sees, so with those kinds of things, you can't always rely on eyewitnesses either. But I think there's something irreplaceable about talking to people. It also taught me that I actually do want to go to the centre of wherever events are happening, because it was very exciting and probably the most interesting thing I've lived through."

In the wake of the coup, Munro found it exciting how the Turkish people were celebrating the defeat of the putschists. She could not think of any other country where the people would respond to the President or the Prime Minister in this way: "For the week afterwards, I remember bands of those really nationalist motorcyclists who were driving around every night with Turkish flags. At first I couldn't figure out what they were since they were really loud, and therefore reminded me of military vehicles. But eventually I realised what they were and that it was safe, and about a week later, I went to one of those rallies. That was great to see, because there were kids there, and it was kind of like this big celebration. There was this slightly more uncomfortable side with these guys on their motorbikes, but there was this defiant spirit of 'You can't shut us indoors.' I got to understand a lot more about Turkey and the Turkish people. Where I'm from, which is the UK, if the Prime Minister asked everyone to come out to defend democracy, I don't know if they would. I can't really imagine it in any other country, people lying down in front of tanks, and no matter what political beliefs they had, their complete

rejection of a coup against democracy. No matter what you think about the current government, the fact that it is democratically elected, and for something as undemocratic as a coup to happen... People even took their families out to passionately defend democracy. That was really amazing to see. Especially since the West sees itself as the defender of democracy, though I don't think I would see there that sort of personal sacrifice for democracy."

During and after July 15, as an international news platform based in Turkey, TRT World has to be given serious credit, says Ashfaaq Carim from Digital. He continues: "I think it was quite impressive. For a newsroom to go through the trauma of having soldiers inside the building, confiscating people's phones and intimidating them... And then in a few hours to go back on the air, and to cover this professionally and to continue covering the events over the following days and months, as best they could. It was great coverage. I think TRT World's in terms of informing the narrative of what occurred that night has been substantial." Fatih Er is also convinced that the channel's atmosphere and outlook changed drastically after July 15. People have begun to embrace their work with a heightened sense of passion, he says. "Our mission was set even before the coup. It was to spread the voice of Turkey correctly and in a balanced way. After the coup, we have become even more conscious of how important this is. We are making a proper effort for this country."

Ashfaaq believes that there has also been a positive turning point for TRT World's digital product: "July 15... was a very historic occasion because people were able to stop a coup that tried to overthrow a democratically elected government. But it also saw an evolution in the digital product of TRT World. It was the first time we really covered a major story -- despite the fact that at that time, we had a very junior team with very few international and experienced journalists. During that

"Where I'm from, which is the UK, if the Prime Minister asked everyone to come out to defend democracy, I don't know if they would. I can't really imagine it in any other country, people lying down in front of tanks, and no matter what political beliefs they had, their complete rejection of a coup against democracy."



period, we also had relocate our offices so we could work more effectively. And it was where it really got started; we began to improve our coverage quality. I think that has been an amazing journey."

Riyaad is also among those who started to do more multi-dimensional research on Turkey following the coup. As the Strategy Manager of the Digital Department, he too regards the post-coup period as a valuable time for improving TRT World. "At the time our digital office was located in Levent -- a different neighbourhood from where the main TRT World building is located -- so on 15th July Ashfaaq and his team were able to go there to

get our website up and running because no one knew that we had an office there. The following day we were all back here to cover the aftermath. We spent a lot of time, a lot of hours reporting. We were still a small team, but we did a lot of work to try and explain Turkey's various contexts to the rest of the world. What was the Gülenist movement? What is FETÖ? It was a lot of new information for us. How do we turn this information into content and share it with the world across whatever platforms? We spent a lot of time gathering and analysing information as everything was still unfolding, and we created a lot of digital content."

Two days after the coup, the Digital team from Levent moved to the main TRT building, so it was the first time the digital department could operate as a newsroom. "If you look at our graphs and stats you will see a big spike in our coverage for the first time," says Riyaad: "Despite limited resources we were able to get our livestream online, which meant that TRT still had a voice in the world. It showed the potential of digital platforms. With a digital platform you can just go online immediately without having to worry about satellites or anything else. You can still keep your coverage going from anywhere in the world. You do not rely on one physical base. From that night on, we sustained an audience and were able to capitalise on the global interest about what was happening within Turkey. Our digital content and livestreaming in Facebook and YouTube, along with the coverage in Twitter, provided insights that got us new audiences. It was a big push for our digital content."

Riyaad further admits that in sheer professional terms, he faced such a big occasion for the first time in his life: "Prior to working at TRT World, I had worked in Al Jazeera for ten years. A lot of our coverage was about events in the region and around the world. I think nothing in Qatar was as exciting or interesting as what happened here. It is different when you are impacted by your story in a direct way. It highlighted the importance

of understanding the country and its people, and how they deal with the story as opposed of an outsider looking in. When you live here, actually understanding important details gives you a very different perspective. My family were calling me, saying I should leave Turkey, because when they turned on the TV to see the news, they were seeing a very different coverage from what was happening here inside Turkey. Covering a story from the inside is very important since it gives you a very different take from when you are covering it from the outside. Professionally, this was something I was always taught and spoke about, but this was the first time that I actually experienced it. Even after having worked in journalism for so many years, it was a big learning experience for me."

Reactions to FETÖ

When Foreign Policy and Prospect magazines asked their readers to vote for the world's most influential public intellectual, many Western readers were surprised to find that Fethullah Gülen had won, for they saw him as nothing more than the leader of a shadowy cult, not appreciating the extent of his large but concealed international as well as domestic following. Nor did they grasp the implications of its ongoing penetration and infiltration of Turkish state institutions. It became all too clear -- though the sheer audacious enormity of the undertaking may have caused many to remain incredulous -- only with the July 15 coup.

Walid claims that he was aware not only of their shadowy nature within Turkey but also their subversive potential internationally: "Yes, I know a lot about the group who orchestrated the coup. I know their working methods because in 2011 I had prepared a report on this Gülenist group. It was more financial than political. At the time, I told a friend of mine: 'Look, these people can cause a blockade. A financial and economic blockade of Turkey.' Everybody knows they have schools everywhere in the world, but they also have business organisations and chambers of commerce."

Sara, on the other hand, knew almost nothing about the organisation before the coup. She says that as a foreigner, it is not easy to understand what motivated FETÖ or how they went about executing the coup: "Of course as a foreigner I had never heard or talked about it. So I wasn't fully aware of the extent of this organisation. I tried to understand who these people were and what they were doing. So I began reading about it and once I realised what was happening, I tried to explain it to everyone I know back home. Friends in journalism have called me to try to understand better. My family, especially my mom, wanted to know who these people are. Western media often portray the event as a hoax staged by Turkey to

form a pretext for cracking down on dissidents. I've tried to explain to them what FETÖ really is; how they work. I can relate to it a little bit as an Italian, even though it is not exactly the same thing. The Mafia were similarly entrenched in Italian society. Many foreigners may say: 'Oh the Mafia is nothing.' But it is entrenched in society. They control shops, factories, governments. That is a similar way of operating."

Walid argues that behind this benign educational façade, the Gülenists have been "engaging in a lot of money-laundering, a lot of illegal imports and exports, and a lot of financial corruption. I know what they did in Pakistan and also in Africa because I have some African friends who can tell you how they exploit their country. In Africa, they mine a lot of gold and diamonds and smuggle them into other countries. They also wield influence because they recruit and educate the children of influential people. They did this in a lot of countries in Central Asia, in Africa, and even in North America. Anything can be expected from them, since they have people in the police and the judiciary. They've snuck into and infiltrated all branches of government. They were not working for Turkey's but their own interests."

Like Sara, Andrea Sanke, too, was a recent arrival: "I had no idea what was going on. Because at that time we had not been in Turkey for very long. Turkish politics is difficult to understand and even professional politicians will tell you the same. Some people tried to explain to us how the deep state and other elements were working behind the scenes. We didn't understand at first, but I could see that our Turkish friends were all on the same side, no matter what their political affiliation. Everyone was immediately like: 'No, no, no. This is not going to happen.' They helped me understand that there was another element involved here, and that they were not going to let this go. As

foreigners, most of us had been here for no more than a year. I've just started to get to know Turkey and still don't speak the language. We just had to take the lead from our Turkish colleagues and feel the general sentiment. We could see that everyone was on the same page. Turkey is a pluralistic, multi-party society comprising all types of views and political ideologies. However, following the coup, all parties have rallied around the government on this issue. It was really beautiful to see that kind of unity."

Obaida believes that it is very important to have a clear view of the Gülenist network's internal structure because otherwise it is impossible to grasp the threat that it posed (and continues to pose): "No, I don't think that the world has a complete understanding. They have a very different take on what the FETÖ setup is, who are its leaders, who influences them, and who are its supporters around the world. People are very ill-informed on these matters, partly due to the way the media cover FETÖ. There is a certain hypocrisy that goes into covering FETÖ for instance, when compared to covering Daesh.

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A Note on TRT World, and Why it was Targeted So Early

Established two years ago (in 2015), TRT World is Turkey's first English-language broadcasting news platform. Its main purpose is to convey Turkey's voice to the rest of the world. This was precisely why it became the putschists' very first target..

For Walid, "The importance of TRT is not only that it is a public broadcaster, but that it is a voice for Turkey. The media are crucial for communication between the government and the people, which is what the plotters aimed to cut off. If we consider the previous coups in Turkey, they all played out the same way as their plotters, too, chose TRT to declare the coup to the nation and the world."

One of perhaps many differences in 2016 was that TRT World had emerged as Turkey's first English-language broadcasting channel, which made it a key target for the plotters. "TRT World is our window to the world," Taner notes: "There are perhaps a hundred Turkish channels but only one in English. They could address the Turkish people through TRT, and the whole world through TRT World." Obaida concurs but also notes that the proliferation of private channels over the last half-century also helped: "Television and especially public broadcasting is important for any country, so the implication here is that the targeting of TRT World was pre-planned. Thankfully, they were not too good at implementing that plan. They tried to take over Turkey's public broadcasting but other channels also stepped up that night and ensured that the voice of Turkey was heard loud and clear all over the world."

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Remarks by President Erdoğan at the Formal Launching of TRT World

(November 15, 2016; excerpts)



President Erdoğan giving a keynote speech at the official launching for TRT World, 15th November 2015. AA/Turkish Presidency/Murat Çetinmühürdar.

My cherished brothers and sisters , there was, of course, another side to this coin. In all that we were able to achieve for the sake of our country and democracy, those media establishments of ours, certainly headed by the TRT, that adhered to a local and national line in publishing or broadcasting played a very major part. What I find particularly meaningful is that the putschists should have targeted TRT World and tried to seize it that night. If these conspirators had been able to strangle TRT World, they would have succeeded in silencing Turkey's one and only English-language channel capable of broadcasting to the outside world. But they failed, and they failed in their plans to seize Türksat, too, and thereby to darken all television screens across the board. Most of our private media outlets also displayed an exemplary stance in the name of law and democracy. I had thanked them at the outset, and now, four months later, I am offering my thanks yet again. You know, there is this African folk saying that I really love: As long as lions do not write their own stories, we'll have to keep listening to the hunters' tales. That is why, lions will have to persist in writing their own stories.

Brothers and sisters, it is futile to expect others to understand and truthfully narrate us, as we have come to know full well. This is why all our audio-visual media and especially TRT World have to shoulder such major tasks. We would never ask for TRT World to become an official government bulletin. On the contrary, what we expect of this elite outlet is to come up with the best

reporting and television coverage possible in order to convey our country's and nation's realities to the rest of the world.

What we would like is to have TRT World adjust its cameras' viewfinders not to power and the powerful, but to focus on the oppressed, the downtrodden, those who are looking for someone to listen to their story. We would wish for this channel to emerge not as the propaganda mouthpiece of the oppressors but as the strong and clear voice of the oppressed. In the past the TRT has served as a truly great school for most other media establishments. Its presenters, reporters, technical staff... All these and other TRT cadres have always been highly treasured. I believe that God willing, in the field of English-language broadcasting TRT World, too, shall evolve into a major source of human talent for both Turkey and all friendly countries. I wholeheartedly believe that every single employee of this channel will constantly carry a sense of being part and parcel of the outward-looking face of our country, and will always be conscious of the heavy responsibility that this imposes on them. What would most befit you is to realise high quality projects capable of challenging the prevailing state of media affairs, of developing a new approach in publishing and broadcasting, of making the world sit up and take notice.

