

MAKING SENSE OF FAILED COUP D'ETAT IN TURKEY AND ITS AFTERMATH

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ABSTRACT

Coup d'etat was not a new phenomenon for Turkey because several successful coups previously had happened led by military to protect the Kemalism in Turkey. However, what happened in the night of 16 July 2016 was very historical for Turkey, because the coup d'etat attempt was successfully defeated. This time, nevertheless, although done by a military junta, Erdoğan believes that the master mind of the coup was his former ally, Fethullah Gülen, leader of cultural Islamic based organization (Gülen Movement). This claim was very interesting, despite the fact that both parties are known for their deeply Islamic roots and former allies. Therefore, this paper tends to make sense of what actually had happened between both parties, hence Gülen Movement was alleged as the coup plotters. Why the coup attempt failed and what is the aftermath of the coup?.

KEYWORDS

coup, Gülen, Erdoğan, Turkey

INTRODUCTION

The night of July 15th 2016 was a historical night for the modern Turkey. The night marked the first failed coup conducted by a faction of military junta in modern Turkey. During the coup, two important cities in Turkey namely Istanbul and Ankara were claimed to be taken by coup plotters hence Erdogan was no longer the president of Turkish Republic. However, this circumstance was soon altered after hundreds of Turkish citizen went down to streets as instructed by Erdoğan to prevent the coup attempt by attacking the coup soldiers. Despites many

casualties occurred from both military faction and also citizen, it was soon clear that the coup attempt had failed as the morning came.

Soon after the failed coup, interestingly however, President Erdoğan announced the name of the person who plotted the coup. He claimed that Fethullah Gülen, a famous Muslim cleric based on Pennsylvania, United State, was the mastermind of failed coup attempt and expected the US to extradite him from his self-imposed exile to Turkey to be put on trial. As a response to the accusation, Fethullah Gülen rejected that accusation and even accused Erdoğan to have staged the coup.

This incident is very intriguing to be analyzed for both of the conflicting parties used to be allies particularly since AK Party came to power in 2002. Also, both Erdoğan and Gülen are rooted with a deep Islamic tradition. This paper tries to dissect the causes of the conflict until the coup attempt, why the coup had failed and what are the aftermath of the coup for Turkey.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF COUP IN TURKEY

Despite the coup was the first failed coup happened in the history of modern Turkey, that was not the first coup attempt. Since the foundation of modern Turkey in 1923 by Mustafa Kemal Attaturk, Turkey has suffered a number of coup attempts conducted by Military. As instructed by the Turkish constitution, military were blessed with an authority to intervene the ruling government to protect the ideology of Turkish nation, Kemalism. Therefore, as the guardian of a nation, they will directly take control of Turkish nation whenever they considered that Turkey or its ideology was threatened.

The examples were obvious from the history. Despite Turkish people were considerably better under Democratic party (1950 – 1960), the agricultural income increased very significantly which larger farmers benefited the most, and industrialist were also relatively much improving (Zürcher J. 2004, 226), in the early morning of May 27th 1960, however, Adnan Menderes—Turkey Prime Minister from Democratic Party—was the first victim of military coup. The coup might have happened due to Adnan Menderes seemed to loosen government restriction over religion as opposed to previous era during Mustafa Kemal and İnönü. He reopened thousands of mosques, lifted up the illegalization of Arabic *adhan*, opened many schools for religious personnel and shortened the period of mandatory military service. As the consequence, military stepped in and toppled Menderes's government. Not only some his comrades were arrested, Menderes was hanged. His position was replaced by military general Cemal Gürsel who ruled both as president and prime minister until 1965(Al Jazeera, n. d.). The military returned the presidential seat to the politicians in 1961 after making some important reforms. One of the important reforms was the establishment of *Milli Güvenlik Kurulu* (National Security Council), a body dominated by military to ensure the domestic and foreign policy were aligned with basic creed of the Kemalist Revolution (Ulus 2011, 16).

Second coup happened as military response toward restless “anarchy” condition in Turkey. Since the late of 1960s, Turkish economy stagnated hence many recessions happened. The current conditions led to many demonstration and violent among Turkish groups. The government failed to halt the violence on campuses and streets. Again, as the Turkey’s guardian, military delivered an ultimatum. They demanded Suleyman Demirel—Prime Minister at the time—should restore strong and credible government, otherwise military would take over his government. Eventually soon after that on 12 March 1971, Demirel resigned (Zürcher J. 2004, 258) and was replaced by non-military officer, Nihat Erim, a member of Republic Party.

Since the last coup, Turkish economy did not show any improvement although Prime Minister had been replaced 11 times during 1970s. Consequently, the military started to consider replacing the ruling government again. In September 1980, another Turkish government was toppled and replaced by a naval military officer, Bulent Ulusu. The fourth coup happened in 1997, this time it was called as postmodern coup. This coup was triggered by the popularity of an Islamist political party, Welfare Party (Refah Partisi), led by Necmettin Erbakan. Erbakan and his party used *Milli Görüş* idea, a religious vision which focused on moral and spiritual strength of Islam. Due to his religious tendencies and also some terrorist issues, military faction gave him a series of ultimatum. Erbakan was out of choice but to accept it and then he resign and in 1998, his Refah Party was shut down. (Al Jazeera, 2016.)

THE RISE OF POLITICAL Islam AND CULTURAL Islam IN TURKEY

Mustafa Kemal’s and his successor’s, Ismet İnönü, top-down radical transformation had caused new division of society in Turkey. Due to most of the transformations were done in urban centers and hardly in countryside area, the Turkish people living in urban center became more modern and secular while suburban people still lived in their religious and traditional life. Although the dominant new elite was urban, modern, secular, and actively involved in politics, the larger part of the Turkish population, suburban people, was isolated from politics, still loyal to their traditional habits and lifestyle and Islam remained their strongest inspiration for life. This condition stayed as it was until after 1970s when Turkish military agreed to start the idea of “Turkish-Islamic synthesis” and Turgut Özal started his political and economic reforms in the mid-1980s. The military idea and Özal reforms had strengthen the role of Islamic groups. Turkish-Islamic synthesis was promulgated to prevent communism and leftist ideology spread within Turkish community. Therefore, religious education such as Quranic class, state-controlled moral education became compulsory subjects in all schools. Besides, Özal liberal economy resulted a large-scale arrival of suburban population into the cities. Also, his decision to give more religious freedom allowed the Islamist to organize politically (Rabasa and Larabee 2008, 31–39). Those progressions supported Islamist party, such as Welfare Party (Refah Party), to rise and even became one of

the largest parties in 1996 under Necmettin Erbakan. Unfortunately, the Islamist political reign did not last long for the military intervention in 1997.

Learning from the its predecessor, Refah Party, Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AK Party) under the leadership of Erdoğan has adapted and chosen a different political ideology. Erdoğan claimed that AK party is a conservative democratic party² and has abandoned *Milli Görüş* concept, therefore the focus of AK party is economic stability and EU Membership. The visions became the keys for the electoral success of AK Party in 2002. With the large-scale arrival of suburban population in the *Varoş*—poorer and less-developed part of the cities—AK party's visions and its Islamic roots has won the heart of the *Varoş* people, who are pious, socially conservative, and uninterested in secular parties (Rabasa and Larabee 2008, 49). From 2002 then 2007, 2011, and 2015 AK Party kept gaining significant ballots consecutively as 34%, 46,6%, 49. 83% and 49. 5% in Turkey general election.

In addition to the emergence of political Islam in Turkey, another Islamic movement has also emerged since the 1960s. The political policy supporting more religious freedom since in the early 1950 and followed by liberal economy policy applied particularly during Turgut Özal period opened many opportunity space to Islamist group to emerge. One of the famous groups is Gülen Movement (GM) founded by Fethullah Gülen. As a former employee of the State's Directorate of Religious Affairs, Gülen is a success leader who organizes transnational, wealthy, and faith-based Islamic movement in Turkey. His movement owns mass medias such as Zaman Newspaper and Samanyolu Tv, education centers such as Fatih University, and also many local and international businessmen.

He started the movement in Kestanepazarı Quran school by providing both secular and religious education in Summer camp. Along with the time, his charismatic figure, inspiring and emotional speech and deep knowledge of Islam has attracted many young men to sacrifice themselves to rejuvenate the Turkish's spiritual and intellectual capital which will help the Islamization of public space and debates. In addition, GM is not a static organization, it is very dynamic. The evolution of GM as recorded by Hakan Yavuz is divided into three phase, namely the formative period (1966 – 1983), the emergence into the public sphere (1983 – 1997) and the paradox of persecution and forced liberalization (1997 – present). Each of the phases formed by structural changes that reproduce a more contextual framing process (Yavuz 2003, 179).

Furthermore, although his claim to be apolitical Islamic movement, Gülen Movement, in Hakan Yavuz's words: "...*The movement used all political means to get access to educational institution, media, the market, and other urban public spaces by establishing its own institution or through its followers. Informal ties were critical in the evolution and activities of the community-building movement*" (Yavuz 2003, 182). This approach has been the model for many future policies applied by Gülen

² Despite the claim that AK party has abandon Islamist agenda and reconcile with the framework of Turkish secularization, many still refer AK party as Islamist party. However, I believe it is safe to say that AK party is a political party with strong Islamic roots.

Movement. For instance, after the coup attempt in 1980, Gülen's Movement and also his preaching was banned and even himself was put in jail for seven months. However, Turgut Özal, Prime minister then, helped the ban lifted because Özal wanted to profit from the Gülen Islamic liberal ideas and activities against extremist Islamist group (Yavuz 2003, 183). Moreover, despite his personal passive involvement with politics, he encourages his followers to insert themselves in many important positions in Turkish Government such as in Police Department, Judicial and also other bureaucratic offices.

ERDOĞAN VS GÜLEN

Despite his strong affiliation with previous Islamist Refah Party, Erdoğan is different with Erbakan. Therefore, AK party redefines itself by neglecting *Milli Görüş* idea and represents, as Tanju Tosun explained, a catch-all party and should not be regarded as religious party (Rabasa and Larabee 2008, 49). They managed themselves as a dynamic party who seeks to integrate center-right voters by stressing its socially conservative Muslim-Turkish and economically liberal project (Yavuz 2003, 250).

Therefore, AK party's vision about economy stability and also joining European Union attracted the attention of Gülen, who also differed himself from other Islamic groups including *Milli Görüş* Group, and shared similarity with more secular segment of Turkish society (Yavuz 2003, 201). This was the starting point of Gülen Movement and Erdoğan unofficial allies. In addition, Gülen's bad experience with military faction and Military scrutiny toward AK Party made the two group shared the same enemy. This then led to symbiotic cooperation between GM and AK Party. On one hand, GM community base will provide strong social capital for AK Party, on the other hand, GM can reach to various position in Government through the support of AK Party.

One of the obvious cooperation was on the case of Ergenekon and Sledgehammer. According to Turkish Prosecutor explained that Ergenekon and Sledgehammer operation was a conspiracy established in 2003 in order to trigger a coup against Erdoğan. This case targeted the former and active high-level military officer along with other anti-AKP institution such as media and NGOs who were accused of plotting coup the ruling government. As the action was the capturing of more than 300 people including Military officers such as Cetin Dogan, Özden Örnek, İbrahim Fırtına, which later will be put on trial. GM's follower who sits in judiciary helped to do the trial in 2013 and decided to sentence 20 year of jail for the mentioned army commander. (Aljazeera 2013)

However, such cooperation did not last for long. Both groups started to throw critics to each other on various occasion particularly since the third period of AK Party ruled Turkey (2011 – 2015). There is no clear evidence stating why and when exactly the crack was started. It is possible that the break was motivated by growing power possessed by Erdoğan. This condition worried GM that AK Party will not need any allies because they are already very strong. As Yavuz Cabanoğlu, a

Tunceli University scholar, says “*The AKP-Community (GM) relationship used to be always reciprocal. The government made use of the Community’s social base and media clout, while the Community easily achieved its interests — public office positions, public tenders and so on. Once the AKP asserted its political hegemony — and it is only natural for a democratically elected party to control the state apparatus — the Community became redundant,*” (Kutahyalı 2013). Another possible reason could be due to different approach on various domestic and foreign policy used by both group and taking this reason as consideration then the Gülen and Erdoğan clash can be explained chronologically through four major events.

First, according to a source close to Gülen, the crack was started in May 2010 related to Mavi Marmara cases. Gülen did not approve the political methods used by Erdoğan related to sending a flotilla to Gaza without asking the permission of Israel Government at the first place. During the expedition, Israel soldier attacked the flotilla resulting to some civilian casualties. Gülen responded that the organizers' failure to seek accord with Israel before attempting to deliver aid is a sign of defying authority, and will not lead to fruitful matters. ” This blunt criticism was never “forgiven” by Erdoğan.

Second was on the method used to approach Kurdish Issues. In February 2012, a pro-Gülen prosecutor called Hakan Fidan, head of National Intelligence Agency (MIT), to be interrogated as suspects for the his direct contact (illegal contact) with the head of PKK (Kurdish Rebellion). Despite Erdoğan’s clarification that the approach was a direct order from him, the case kept continue. Gülen’s comments on the even was that Erdogan should have focused on broader political reform, push for a civilian constitution and grant all the rights the Kurd of Turkey demand, including recognition of ethnic identity, education in their mother tongue, and endorsement of local government without talking directly to the PKK (Baydar 2013). Since then, the clash between Erdoğan and Gülen has worsen and the Erdoğan supporters started to call GM as “parallel state” within the state. The parallel states was accused to act on its own through empowering its internal hierarchy and employed state power for its own purposes. (Akyol 2014)

As the backlash for the previous event, in the mid-November 2012, Erdoğan planned to close prep-school which prepare Turkish students to face various exams in the Turkish educational system. Prep-school was used by the GM as quarter of its finance and human resource, hence the closing of the prep-school could devastate GM institution. (Uras 2013)

The last event signing the divorce phase of the two group was the corruption accusation in 17 December 2013. Istanbul Police found shoeboxes stashed with \$4.5 million in cash at the home of a state-owned bank's chief executive. This case led, so called, “to be the most extensive and sensational investigation leading to dozens of detention – from renowned business people to senior bureaucrats and sons of minister”. Within eight days, Erdogan Bayraktar and his three other comrades were accused to be involved in the corruption hence they resigned. However, a shocking

statement was when Bayraktar said Erdogan should resign too (Kutahyalı 2013). The investigation definitely threatens to rock Erdogan's 11-year tenure.

Since then the two opposing group threw accusation to each other. The Pro-AKP alleged GM as the making “parallel state” by trying to take down AKP government by means of the corruption probe, while pro-GM accused the government trying to hide its pervasive corruption by making up a conspiracy theories and hindering the judiciary to investigate the government (Akyol 2014). Those are the four major event signing the crack and the divorce of the symbiotic cooperation between AK Party and Gülen Movement. The increasing tension between both parties continued and reach its culmination point on July 14th, 2016, a day before the coup attempt happened.

WHY THE COUP FAILED?

Interestingly, the coup failed owing to the bravery of thousands Turkish citizens who went down the streets to prevent the success of the coup attempt. Around 10 p. m Turkish time, 15th July 2016, a number of military faction was already stationed in two important cities in Turkey; Istanbul and Ankara. In both municipalities, soldiers and tanks already occupied strategic places in Ankara and Istanbul such as two bridges in Istanbul connecting Asia and Europe. Then around 11 p. m., Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım announced that a military faction attempt to overthrow the ruling government. Then later Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan also broadcasted on live TV that the Fethullah Terror Organization (FETO) was behind the coup attempt, hence he ordered his people to went down to the streets to save democracy. At around 3 a. m TRT State TV announced that the coup was failed. The incident took 265 death toll and 1. 440 wounded. (Gurcan 2016)

One of the factor that move the citizen of Turkey to take down the streets was the economic factor. This also has been one of the major factor of AK Party general election's success story back in 2002. In 2002, Turkish economy was very bad that it shrank up until 9,5 percent in 2001; the currency was undervalued several times, and the banking sector devastated (Rabasa and Larabee 2008, 48). After the winning in 2002, AK Party has proven its effectiveness by improving its economy stability since the first winning in 2002 and even soared at quarter of 2016 a rate of 4. 8 percent defeating Great Britain and Sweden (Anadolu Agency 2016). Fulfilled with the satisfaction, indeed, the citizen has trusted the AK party more than ever.

Another factors were mainly divided into four factors. First, the military faction failed to detain the head of Turkish Republic, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Owing to General Umit Dundar, his early warning to President Erdoğan about the coup attempt hence it was necessary for Erdoğan to leave Marmara before the coup forces raided his hotel. Second, the strongest military faction namely the land forces did not support the coup. The coup forces were only constituted of Air Forces personnel (8% of Türkiye Silahlı Kuvvetleri) and gendarmerie (15% of TSK), while the land forces constitutes 65% of the TSK. Third, most of the coup

soldiers were sent out into streets in order to “exercise or terror activity. Fourth, the coup forces failed to take down mainstream TV channel, which then gave the government psychological advantages (Gurcan 2016).

In the morning after the coup attempt, Erdogan directly accused Fethullah Gülen was the mastermind of the coup and demanded the US government to extradite the Muslim clerics to be put on trial in Turkey. However, despite the claim made by government and some evidences showing the involvement of Gülen’s followers, yet there is no direct evidence showing the coup related to Gülen himself. Mustafa Akyol, Hurriyet Journalist, also assumes that the coup only related to Gülen’s loyal followers, but also do not mention the direct relation to Fethullah Gülen. Gülen himself, in a few interviews, has rejected the government’s accusation toward him. Now, Turkish Government has detained nearly 60 thousands people, including military, academics, teachers, and students and close more than 1000 private schools and institutions.

CONCLUSION

The claim made by Erdoğan right after the coup attempt that the Fethullah Gülen was the mastermind of coup attempt then already make sense. The growing tensions between both parties since 2010 has separated both former allies who used to work together to defeat their common enemy. The tension between both parties could be caused by the significant growing power of AK Party and also different approaches on domestic and foreign policy. After the coup, the investigation upon the detainee keeps continue despite the critics from European Union about the method used by the Government to gain information from the prisoner.

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