

Main Tenets of A Failed Coup Attempt

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- **How was the coup attempt supposed to work?**
 - **How did it fail?**
- **How did the process of fighting against the coup work?**

On the night of July 15, 2016, a group of coup plotters organized within the body of the Turkish military, using terrorizing and violent means, embarked on a military coup attempt in order to seize the political authority of Turkey. Following the reactions from different ranks and branches of the army, it was understood that the plotters violated the chain of command and the commanders-in-chief of the armed forces and the rest of the army did not take part in the coup attempt. Therefore it appeared to be an attempt by a small faction from the very early hours and President Erdoğan stated that the coup attempt was controlled by FETÖ (the Fethullahist Terror Organization). Turkey has a history of military coups; however the July 15 coup attempt, in many aspects, can be distinguished from the coups and juntas of 1960, 1971, 1980 and 1997. The most striking difference being that, the plotters used terrorizing means such as opening fire against the people in the streets from tanks and helicopters. However, the fact that they have used these means does not mean that they cannot be considered as a junta.

Considering the military units that took part in the action on the night of July 15, the junta planned

to mobilize a large number of military troops. A big part of the commando and combatant brigades, almost all of the airbases and the whole of the naval forces except the submarine flotilla, were planned to be set in motion. Relying on the information revealed on July 16, the aides of the President, Chief of Staff, and of the Commanders of the armed forces all took part in the junta together with the soldiers on active duty who hold critical positions such as intelligence and information services units. A crucial point here is that the junta met with resistance in almost all of these units. Later on it was revealed that even the most minimal amount of resistance had a significant negative impact on the conduct of the coup attempt. In operational terms, the junta operated within the frame of a three-stage plan. The first stage was to take control of the headquarters of army general staff. The second stage was designed to obtain the control in the whole country. The third one was to declare martial law and to establish the political and social order anew. When each stage is looked at individually, it is possible to find clues on how the coup process would proceed and on why it would eventually fail.

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In the first stage, the target was to gain the control of the headquarters of army general staff. To this end, the Chief-of-Staff and the Commanders of the Armed Forces were taken hostage. The main purpose here was to stage the coup, first of all, in the chain of command. This was the reason why forcible attempts were made to make the Chief of Staff and the Commanders sign the declaration prepared by the usurpers. However the resistance they faced made it impossible. Despite that, the junta did not renounce their attempt, retained the top rank of the army, and tried to take control of the military headquarters. The counteraction of the First Army against the junta on the ground was the most visible sign of this non-compliance. In addition many high ranking commanders went live on TV declaring that they are against any coup attempt. That hindered the full control of the junta on the general staff HQ.

The second stage was designed to gain the control on the ground in the whole country. To this end the junta deployed tanks to strategic locations such as the Bosphorus Bridge, Atatürk Airport, and İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality. Simultaneously the troops listed above took action. Taking the control of the strategic points and institutions in Ankara and İstanbul was very significant. That's why they intervened at the National Intelligence Organization and the units of Security General Directorate with artillery. The special operation command in Gölbaşı and security general directorates in Ankara and İstanbul were the first targets. An attempt to take over the Special Forces Command of the Army was also made. However in all of these points, there was a strong resistance against the rebel groups. Therefore from the very first moment, the junta faced a swift resistance in all of the points it tried to take control of, particularly in the Headquarters of the General Command. At the same time, the junta made a move to neutralize President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. In a program at CNN International, Erdoğan said that "it was an attempt of assassination or detainment; I escaped in the last instance" adding that two of his guards were martyred. The junta's inability to detain

and neutralize Erdoğan, who is both President and the Chief Commander, became a turning point for the failure of the coup attempt.

Another attempt of the junta was directed at media channels; in order to make the declaration of a coup and psychologically have the upper hand, media control is essential. In this regard, the control of the national channel TRT and the reading of the coup declaration from there were important to the junta and they succeeded in doing that. Contrary to the expected practice of reading of the coup declaration by coup plotters, they forced a speaker to read it. However as it was featured only in one TRT channel, it did not have a significant psychological impact. The appearance of the President, the Prime Minister, Ministers, Top Commanders, and several high rank officials on other TV channels ensured that the junta failed to take control over the public through the media.

The failure of the coup attempt can be evaluated through four factors. First is the popular resistance against the coup, second is the powerful political leadership and the third one is the operational activity. While these three factors formed the resistance bloc, the media is the fourth factor which broadcasted in compliance with the three resisting actors. The activity of each factor in terms of resisting the coup attempt can be summarized as follows:

The very first sign of the coup was the closing of the two bridges in Istanbul by tanks. People, who suspected a coup as a result of the closing, began to gather in the critical points occupied by the coup plotter forces and intervened in the situation. The popular resistance in the critical locations such as airports, bridges, security headquarters and the Presidential Campus precluded the coup plotter activity from succeeding. Furthermore, the resistance of the people that never ceased, even under the heavy gunfire of the coup plotter forces, contributed to the gaining of the upper hand by the security forces. The active popular resistance also helped in the gaining

of the psychological edge. The stance of the people despite the reading of the coup declaration on TRT and taking back control of TRT from the coup plotter forces provided one of the most critical victories to the civilian resistance. In brief, the people used all the opportunities available to thwart the coup attempt without resorting to arms and without harming public or private properties, displaying an effective performance of civilian resistance.

The second factor has been the strong leadership of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. His appearance on TV at the most critical moments of the coup attempt stating that he stands against the coup by any means and calling people out onto the streets to protect the Turkish democracy was significant from two aspects. Firstly that provided a strong motivation to the people resisting the coup. His appearance fused the different anti-coup groups together for the sole purpose: to bring about the failure of the coup attempt. The second factor that reversed the crisis in the early hours was Erdoğan's taking the risk of flying to İstanbul while the coup plotter F16 war planes were in-flight. With his coming to İstanbul, the civilian initiative and the operational units on the ground united with the political leadership. In addition to that the integrated actions of the cabinet members and the President, was important for managing the process efficiently. Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım, as well as other ministers, went live on the TV and openly declared that they will stand against the coup resulting in the mobilization of the public. The support from the leader of the Nationalist Action Party, Devlet Bahçeli also had a significant contribution to the popular resistance in the streets.

The third factor that hindered the coup attempt was the mobilization of security units. Together with the Special Operations Unit, mobilization of all the facilities of internal security organizations provided

a capacity to counter the coup plotter forces. The resistance of most of the units in the Turkish Army, primarily that of the Special Forces Unit, and the public statements of the army high-ranks against the coup attempt, helped people to realize the exaggerated capacity of the junta and contributed to the decisiveness of the resisting groups. The rescue of the Turkish Chief of Staff and the Commanders-in-Chief of the armed forces by the Special Forces Unit were significant for regaining the ground control.

The coming together of these three factors into one bloc drew the media over to that side. The broadcast of the popular resistance and not supporting the coup attempt in Ankara and İstanbul from the very initial moments had a high motivational impact over the people. The negation of the enforcedly read coup declaration at TRT, or partial coverage of it in other channels exposed an important deficit of the coup plotters: They could control neither the ground nor the media. Withdrawal from the raided buildings of TRT and Doğan Media Group showed that the anti-coup bloc had the upper hand.

Considering all the process so far, the coup attempt had no legitimate political ground. Turkey is governed by a President who achieved 52% and a government that received 49.5% of the overall votes. The people of Turkey have come to a point where they can reflect on political and social events rapidly. The government and the security units have been carrying out effective operations against the terrorist organizations. While there were hot public debates on the one hand, there has been a process of social solidarity and cohesion. The opposition has been alive and well. The media, for the first time in the history of Turkey, has been free to use the harshest tones against the ruling party. The economy has stable indicators. In this current political, social, and economic environment, the anti-coup bloc mobilized and thwarted the coup attempt.