

Turkey: Coup plot arrests deepen political crisis

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With the arrests of 23 people in the early morning hours of July 1 on charges of involvement in an alleged coup plot, the bitter struggle within Turkey's state apparatus has escalated sharply.

The roundup unfolded as the Turkish Constitutional Court was expected to hand down a ban against the governing Islamist AKP (Justice and Development Party).

Simultaneous raids were carried out in the cities of Ankara, Istanbul, Antalya, Erzurum and Trabzon in connection with the so-called "Ergenekon probe."

Several pro-AKP papers have since reported that plans for an imminent military coup were found with one of those arrested, former General Sener Eruygur, who is head of the Ataturk Thought Association (ADD). According to these reports, for which there is no independent confirmation, the conspirators planned demonstrations in 40 cities on Sunday. Snipers were hired to shoot at demonstrators and assassinate well-known persons in order to create an atmosphere of fear, which would allow the military to intervene and topple the government. According to these allegations, sympathetic journalists were expected to support the operation.

Sunday's arrests were the third wave of detentions in connection with a yearlong investigation into the alleged network of a clandestine ultranationalist group called "Ergenekon." The name Ergenekon denotes a link to the Turkish fascist movement. According to the mythology of Turkic genesis, a grey wolf showed the Turks the way out of their legendary homeland Ergenekon. In line with this mythology Turkish fascists have been using the name and symbol of the "Grey Wolf" for decades.

The police investigation into Ergenekon was launched in June 2007 after the discovery of explosives—said to be of the same make that the military uses—in a house in a shantytown district of Istanbul. Forty-nine people, including retired army officers, have been detained for suspected links to the group since the beginning of the investigation. Thirty-three people were arrested in January.

Among them was retired Brigadier General Veli Kucuk, who throughout the 1990s was heavily involved in the "deep state." This network of covert groups and organizations targeted members and supporters of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) as well as common Kurdish people. Kucuk was one of the main figures in the "Susurluk affair" of 1996, which brought to light the close links between security forces, mafia gangs and fascist death squads. Later on, his name was mentioned in connection with the murder of the leading judge at the administrative court in 2006. It was learned that Kucuk had known the perpetrator, the lawyer Alparslan Aslan, who had links to the same milieu of mafia and fascist groups.

The Ergenekon gang is also suspected of being behind various provocations, including three bomb attacks against the staunch Kemalist daily newspaper *Cumhuriyet* in May 2006, the assassinations of Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink on January 2007 and nationalist writer Necip Hablemitoglu on December 18, 2002. People such as the lawyer of

Yasin Aydin, one of the suspects charged in the murder of Hrant Dink, have appeared before courts as suspects in the Ergenekon operation.

There are also claims that the Ergenekon gang was planning to kill some leading members of the Kurdish nationalist Democratic Society Party (DTP) and Nobel prize winner Orhan Pamuk. The novelist had been subjected to a hate campaign by the fascist movement and the Maoist-Kemalists led by Dogu Perincek, one of those arrested earlier in connection with the Ergenekon investigation.

There are also indications that the investigation has managed to link Ergenekon with two failed military coup attempts devised by now retired military commanders against the AKP government in 2004 and 2005.

More than a year ago, the weekly magazine *Nokta* printed lengthy excerpts from a diary allegedly written by former Navy Commander Admiral Ozden Ornek. According to the diary, some former commanders led by Sener Aydin had planned two separate coups under the codenames Sarikiz (Blonde Girl) and Ayisigi (Moonlight). General Eruygur, who has now been arrested, was a key figure in the diaries of Ornek.

Acting on a complaint filed by Ornek, the *Nokta* magazine's offices were raided by the police for three days as part of an investigation by the public prosecutor's office in Istanbul's Bakirkoy district. Initially, Ornek had admitted that the diaries belonged to him. However, following the widespread public attention and reactions against the reports of the coup attempt, Ornek said the diary was not his. Later on, technical probes of the diaries proved them to be authentic.

While there is strong evidence that many of those arrested are involved in a right-wing conspiracy against the government, some Kemalist journalists, like Emin Colasan, claim that the operation is utterly bogus and nothing more than a frame-up organised by the Islamist AKP leadership.

Others who feel uneasy about the operation maintain that the government is making use of an existing conspiracy to suppress its political opponents. According to them the people who are under arrest and were detained on July 1 are all personalities who have a respectable place in society and whose whereabouts is known to everyone. Thus, they say, under the existing legal framework it is impossible to justify their arrest and detention. On July 2 *Cumhuriyet* wrote: "The Ergenekon investigation has turned into an operation to silence the Turkish opposition."

There is a grain of truth in this claim. Some of those taken into custody—such as Ankara Chamber of Commerce (ATO) Chairman Sinan Aygun and *Cumhuriyet* Ankara bureau chief Mustafa Balbay—give the impression that a wing of judiciary controlled by the Islamists is taking advantage of the situation and using the probe against some of its most outspoken opponents, who probably have no direct involvement with the Ergenekon gang.

Besides his involvement in plans for a military coup, even General Eruygur is a well-known political opponent of the government. Along with General Tolon, he was prominent among the organizers of so-called

republican rallies called ahead of the July elections last year that protested against an Islamist becoming president of Turkey.

In 1997, similar demonstrations were organised by the military against the Islamist-led coalition government. The government was finally toppled under the pressure of the military in what amounted to a “cold coup.” It was a carefully planned operation, supported by sections of the bourgeois media, a number of political parties, business organisations, trade unions, women’s groups, intellectuals, etc. One army general was overtly referring to these civilian supporters as “unarmed forces.” After his retirement, Eryugur took over the leadership of the “unarmed forces.”

Some papers also pointed to the fact that some of those arrested have been detained for months without official charges. Yusuf Kanli of the *Turkish Daily News* asked, “What kind of a probe is this, that people are placed behind bars without a charge for so many months and a witch-hunt has been continuing for the past year, pro-government media and pen-slingers of the government have published glossy books about the activities of the ‘gang’ and even some of the alleged testimonies of the accused?”

Kanli also pointed to the fact that the latest arrests were timed to coincide with the court case against the AKP. The arrests took place just hours before the Supreme Court of Appeals’ chief prosecutor presented his oral arguments for banning the governing party. Kanli asked: “Is the prime minister the ‘spokesman’ of the prosecutor’s office regarding the ‘Ergenekon case’ or is there a ‘political connection’ aimed at taking ‘revenge’ for the closure case against the ruling AKP?”

In terms of timing, it is an undeniable fact that the Ergenekon operation had geared up since the case to ban the AKP was filed. In March, just a week after the case was filed, the “second wave” of detentions was carried out. As it seems, the timing of the “third wave” of detentions on July 1 was also no accident.

In fact, Erdogan and other leading members of the AKP have publicly associated the court case filed against them with the Ergenekon probe—albeit in an inverse fashion. Erdogan has said that the closure case is a response to the government’s determination to pursue its probe of the Ergenekon operation.

While the AKP, a bourgeois party, has refrained from appealing to the masses to counteract its impending ban, it uses sections of the state apparatus that are under its control—most of the police and a part of the judiciary—for this purpose.

From the standpoint of the working class this is extremely dangerous. The ferocious battle between different wings of the state, in a climate of conspiracies, murders and provocations, carries with it an ominous threat to the democratic rights of the masses.

There is nothing principled in the approach of the AKP. Erik Zurcher, a Dutch professor and author of *Turkey: A Modern History*, told Bloomberg news, “It seems the government is throwing down the gauntlet to the key players in the secular camp.” He added, “Perhaps it feels it has nothing left to lose because the party’s shutdown will come anyway.”

A Turkish official complained to Islamist daily *Today’s Zaman* that there has been no indictment since the operations started almost a year ago, though many people are being held in prison. He said, “To me, this situation leaves the impression that the ruling AKP is not seeking to settle scores with the ‘deep state,’ but rather it is trying to embarrass it.”

A former military prosecutor, Umit Kardas, told the same paper, “The AKP appears to have been acting in line with the developments taking place against it. Sometimes it takes a step forward and sometimes it takes a step back in the Ergenekon operations. Currently, I get the impression that Ergenekon has been used as a tool for a power struggle, rather than going deep into the illegal activities said to have been taking place within the state.”

As the conflict between the two camps deepens, legal principles have been turned into a mockery by both sides. Dengir Mir Mehmet Firat,

deputy chief of the AKP, has repeated literally the same words used by his “secularist” opponents with regard to the case against the AKP. He said that the independence of the police and judiciary to conduct their investigation should be respected. Columnist Cengiz Candar pointed out this contradiction in an article dated July 3: “Circles who invited everyone to have respect for the judicial process in the closure case [against the AKP] raised hell the other day in the face of the Ergenekon arrests.”

The fact that the AKP uses the Ergenekon operation as an instrument to take revenge and suppress some of its opponents must not, however, deflect from the fact that there is a real threat of a military intervention. It is beyond any doubt that the bombing of the daily *Cumhuriyet*, the attack against the Council of State, killing one top judge and injuring some others (both attacks were designed to look like acts of Islamist violence), the assassination of Hrant Dink and the murder of Christians in Malatya were ominous preparations for a new military intervention. They served as destabilisation operations to lay the groundwork for it.

This is why for more than two years the *World Socialist Web Site* has been warning the Turkish working class and other layers of working people against the rising threat of a military intervention. This is unfolding in a climate of nationalism and chauvinism spearheaded by the Turkish military itself and fuelled by the bourgeois parties (both right-wing and the nominally “left-wing”) as well as a section of the news media. Such a military intervention would pose a major threat to the social and democratic rights of the working class. The WSWS at the same time has warned that this threat in no way justifies any political support to the AKP or any other bourgeois force.

During the days preceding the recent Ergenekon detentions, some critically important information and documents regarding the campaign of the military against the AKP government were leaked to the press—namely the daily newspaper *Taraf*.

It is now known that on the evening of March 4, Osman Paksut, the second-highest judge on the constitutional court, had a secret meeting with ground forces commander General Ilker Basbug. It took place just after two Kemalist parties petitioned the Constitutional Court to overturn a constitutional change passed by the AKP allowing women to wear the Islamic headscarf at universities. A month later, the court accepted the closure case against the AKP brought by the chief prosecutor.

Paksut first denied the meeting had taken place, but later on he was forced to admit that he met Basbug. This meeting proves what the WSWS pointed out after the court case was filed: lying behind the case is an attempt by the generals to use the courts to overthrow a democratically elected government.

Taraf also published two documents detailing the plans of the general staff to mobilise public opinion against the government and carry out a series of measures to destabilise and overthrow it.

According to the leaked documents entitled “Information Support Plan and Information Support Plan Activity Table,” the general staff’s plan went into effect in September 2007, soon after the July 22 national elections, which was a huge blow to the line of the military and its civilian henchmen.

The “Activity Table” provides the background of Paksut-Basbug meeting as well as recent harsh statements issued by the top echelons of the Turkish judiciary, which created a row between the judiciary and the government and caused the further escalation of political tensions. (See “Turkey: Conflict escalates between government and judiciary”).

For example, Article 5 of the “Activity Table” reads: “Ensuring that the universities, the presidents of supreme judicial courts, the members of the press and the artists who have the power of forming public opinion act in line with the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) by maintaining contact with these people.”

In the “method” section the document notes: “The suitable grounds and opportunities will be created for this contact; [these contacts will be

established] at the level of the chief of General Staff, the deputy chief of General Staff, the commanders, the General Staff Headquarter Commands and the Secretariat General of the General Staff; there will be a great deal of scrutiny to ensure that the people to be contacted have the necessary qualities of defending and protecting the fundamental values of the TSK.”

Such leaks—including Ornek’s diaries—show that the military is not immune to infiltration by the Islamists.

On the same day as the latest arrests, Turkey’s chief prosecutor, Abdurrahman Yalcinkaya, went before the Constitutional Court to reiterate his demand for the banning of the ruling AKP, once again claiming that the party seeks to impose an Islamic state and sharia law. The case is expected to conclude at the end of August.

Behind this seemingly “judicial” dispute between so-called “secularist” and Islamist camps lies a deep historical chasm between two wings of the Turkish bourgeoisie. These internal political conflicts have already assumed the form of an internecine war. Given the lack of a politically independent movement in the Turkish working class based on a genuinely internationalist and socialist programme, this crisis has assumed an extremely malignant and threatening character.



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