

Failed military coup in Turkey

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A coup attempt by a section of the Turkish officer corps was crushed Saturday, local time, by forces loyal to the government headed by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. There was fighting between rival military and police units in both Istanbul, the country's economic centre, and Ankara, the political capital. As of this writing, 265 people are reported to have been killed and many hundreds more wounded. Over 3,000 military personnel have been arrested and thousands of judges have been suspended.

The coup instigators, who appear to represent a wing of the military and state apparatus that has been sidelined by Erdogan and fears being marginalised even further, declared in a statement that their actions were seeking to “reinstate constitutional order, human rights and freedoms, the rule of law and the general security that was damaged.” Erdogan, who was on holiday at an Aegean Sea resort, used a FaceTime video call to a live news broadcast on CNN Turkey to denounce the putsch and call for “people to gather in squares and airports” to defend his government.

A WSWs correspondent reported early Saturday morning that, in the working class suburbs of Istanbul, “thousands of people are in the streets” in opposition to the coup and that he could hear jets in the air and gunfire nearby. Near Ankara, Turkish Air Force F-16 jet fighters shot down a helicopter operating in support of the attempted putsch. The Turkish parliament building in Ankara was bombed by the rebels.

The coup attempt was opposed by a large section of the armed forces, the main Turkish business federation, and, most significantly, by the Obama administration, which issued a statement in Washington in support of the Erdogan government. Within hours of the launching of the coup attempt, army units backing the putsch were withdrawing from the streets, while pro-government forces had retaken control of the main state television broadcaster, TRT.

The unfolding events are testimony to the generalised breakdown taking place internationally in the political institutions and mechanisms of bourgeois rule. Country after country is descending into turmoil under the impact of the intractable global economic crisis, historic levels of social inequality and the devastating consequences of the military agenda of US imperialism and its allies to dominate the oil-rich Middle East and undermine Russian and Chinese influence in every part of the world.

The failed coup in Turkey takes place in the context of the fallout from the “Leave” vote in the Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom and a political crisis in the United States over police killings and the possibility of Donald Trump winning the November presidential election. It follows the extension of emergency rule in France, an accelerating drive by NATO toward military confrontation with Russia, and immense tensions in Asia after an international court ruling that China's territorial claims in the South China Sea are invalid. There is no question that the uncertainty produced by global instability plays a major role in what appear to be reckless, even desperate actions being taken in ruling circles around the world—including the calculation by a faction of the Turkish military that the only way to stabilise bourgeois rule in the country was to overthrow Erdogan's regime.

Erdogan's Islamist-based Justice and Development Party (AKP) has held government since 2002. It has presided over a massive economic expansion based on the deregulation and opening up of the country and its labour force as a base for low-cost production for transnational corporations. The capitalist elite has enriched itself enormously, with the top 1 percent of the population increasing its share of national wealth from 39 percent in 2002 to 54 percent by 2015. The working class and rural poor, however, have seen their

living standards decimated. Even official statistics show that 22.4 percent of Turkish households earn less than the poverty line of \$1,626 a month. Unemployment stands at 10.8 percent, or some three million people, while another three million workers have left the country to seek jobs in other areas of Europe.

Alongside the growth of social contradictions, Turkey has been profoundly destabilised by the collaboration of Erdogan and the AKP with the US invasion and occupation of Iraq and their central role in supporting the US-led civil war in Syria against the Baathist regime of President Bashar al-Assad, which is being carried out by means of Islamist militias, including Al Qaeda and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

The Syrian war has become a debacle for the Turkish ruling elite. Thousands of Islamist militants have used the country as a transit point to join the fighting against Assad, while millions of people displaced by the carnage have flooded over the borders from Syria seeking refuge. In neighbouring Iraq, ISIS used the manpower and weaponry it gained with Turkish assistance to attack the pro-US government in 2014, prompting Washington to launch a war against the very Islamists it had been arming and to demand Turkish support. Russia's intervention to shore up the Assad regime has led to open military clashes, with the Turkish air force last year shooting down a Russian aircraft, posing the prospect of all-out war between Ankara and Moscow.

Ankara's greatest concern regarding developments in Iraq has been the ability of the Kurdish regional authorities to utilise the crisis to vastly expand their territory, occupying the oil-rich Kirkuk region and giving aid to Kurdish fighters in northern Syria, who have carved out a de-facto autonomous region on Turkey's border.

To divert internal social tensions and pre-empt renewed unrest among Turkey's Kurds, Erdogan has carried out a brutal crackdown on Kurdish-based political parties and the Kurdish population as a whole. Adding to the instability, ISIS, which had legitimately viewed Erdogan as a tacit ally, has retaliated against what it views as a betrayal by calling on its supporters to conduct terrorist attacks inside Turkey. Economic growth in the country has slowed dramatically under the impact of the global slump and political uncertainty,

and is expected to decline even further over the coming year.

The attempted coup by sections of the Turkish military will only raise the intensity of already explosive social and class antagonisms. The critical question, amid the crises and bloody infighting within the capitalist class, is the intervention of the working class to assert its own independent interests. In Turkey, as in every country around the world, what is paramount is the unity of workers of all ethnic and religious backgrounds in the fight for a socialist and internationalist solution to the failure of capitalism.



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