# The Turkish coup: A warning to the international working class

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**18 July 2016**

While Turkey's abortive military coup of July 15 appears to have been crushed, after the deaths of nearly 300 people, the country remains in a state of extreme political instability, overshadowed by the threats of fresh violence and repression.

A *World Socialist Web Site* correspondent reported from Turkey late Sunday that cell phone messages were again sent to the population urging people to return to the streets and take control of public squares, an apparent admission that the danger is not over and the army could renew its intervention at any moment.

The government of President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an has responded to the coup attempt with a dictatorial crackdown, arresting some 6,000 people in addition to detaining thousands of officers and soldiers. The scale of the roundup is indicated by the use of a sports stadium to hold some of the prisoners, a disturbing echo of the bloody events in Chile in 1973.

Arrest orders have been issued against thousands of judges and prosecutors, who are now branded as participants in an "armed terrorist movement." In addition to its vow to "cleanse" the state institutions of all possible opponents, the Erdo?an government has indicated that it will push for the restoration of the death penalty to use against them.

The government has unleashed onto the streets Islamist mobs that have wreaked violent revenge against Turkish soldiers, in many cases teenage conscripts. There have been reported beatings and lynchings. A video circulated on social media purports to show the beheading of a soldier on Istanbul's Bosphorus Bridge.

It is difficult to see, under the circumstances now unfolding, how Turkey can maintain even a semblance of democratic forms of rule or return to any meaningful state of political stability.

The implications are far-reaching for the entire capitalist world. Turkey is by no means a political or economic backwater. A country of 75 million at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, it is a key member of the US-led NATO imperialist alliance, boasting its second-largest military after the US itself. It constitutes the sixth-largest economy in Europe. While not a member of the European Union, Turkey is closely integrated into the EU's economic and political structures.

Turkish history is replete with coups and coup attempts, but there had not been such an event in the country in two decades. In 1960, 1971 and 1980, the military seized power in Turkey, as it did throughout much of Latin America and in Greece, Indonesia and elsewhere during the same period, with the close backing of the Pentagon and the CIA.

If large sections of the military can once again attempt to seize power in a country like Turkey, the inescapable conclusion is that the age of military coups has returned, not just in Turkey, but on a world scale. The extreme violence, instability and crisis fueled by twenty-five years of US-led wars in the Middle East, the Balkans and elsewhere are now spreading inexorably to the major capitalist centers of Europe and throughout the entire planet, amid unprecedented levels of social inequality and the sharpening of geopolitical and military tensions.

That these tensions were at the root of the bloody events in Istanbul and Ankara over the weekend is manifested in the reactions in the US and Europe—as well as Turkey itself—to the coup attempt and its aftermath.

Suleyman Soylu, Turkey's labor minister, went so far as to charge that "The United States is behind the coup." Erdo?an himself has attributed the entire affair to followers of his former ally and current enemy, the pro-American Islamic cleric Fethullah Gülen, who lives in exile in Pennsylvania and apparently enjoys protection from within the US state. When Erdo?an denounces Gülen, it is safe to say that he is really talking about Obama.

Washington's initial reaction to the reported coup was at best equivocal, with US Secretary of State John Kerry voicing only US hopes for "stability and peace and continuity within Turkey." Only after it became apparent that the coup was failing did the White House issue a statement indicating support for "the democratically elected government of Turkey."

The German government of Chancellor Angela Merkel similarly took its time in condemning the coup. Since the official statement, the German media and many politicians have centered their fire on Erdo?an, warning him against extra-constitutional measures while saying next to nothing about the implications of a coup inside a NATO country.

Suspicion of US involvement is hardly unwarranted. Just three years ago, the Obama administration lent its all but open

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support to the military coup led by General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, refusing to call the overthrow of Egypt's elected president, Mohamed Morsi, a "coup." Washington continued to pour in military aid as the Sisi regime massacred, imprisoned and tortured its opponents. Then, in 2014, together with Germany, it engineered the fascist-spearheaded coup to oust the government of Ukraine.

Whether or not the attempted coup in Turkey was explicitly sanctioned by the United States and Germany, one cannot escape the impression that its success would not have been unwelcome to Obama and Merkel.

Tensions between Washington and Ankara have intensified in relation to the five-year-old civil war in Syria, in which the Erdo?an government has until now functioned as a key supporter of the Islamist militias serving as proxy forces in the US-orchestrated war for regime change. Ankara has viewed with increasing anger Washington's close reliance on Syrian Kurdish forces. It fears that the Kurds' military successes in Syria will strengthen demands for Kurdish autonomy within Turkey itself.

With the war next door exacting ever-greater political and economic costs upon Turkey, Erdo?an last month issued an apology to Russia over Turkey's November 2015 ambush and downing of a Russian warplane. The attempted rapprochement with Russia reportedly involves discussions on a political settlement in Syria outside the control of the US government.

There have even been reports that Erdo?an has threatened to give Russian warplanes, instead of those of the US, access to the strategic Incirlik airbase, where the US keeps its largest stockpile of nuclear weapons in Europe. The base's Turkish commander was reportedly a leader of the coup and is now under arrest.

The British Telegraph newspaper elaborated on the growth of tensions between Washington and Ankara in the weeks before the coup attempt:

"Mr. Erdo?an suddenly launched a dramatic diplomatic revolution in the month before the coup. In rapid succession, his government repaired its relations with Russia, Egypt and Israel. Overnight Mr. Erdo?an's descriptions of Putin, Sisi and Netanyahu as murderers were forgotten. Then, on the eve of the coup, Turkey's new prime minister even talked of reviving relations with Syria.

"At the same time, relations with the United States have taken a nosedive. The Pentagon was taken by surprise when the Turkish government included US planes and drones operating out of their Incirlik airbase against Isil in Syria in the "no?fly zone" imposed over Turkey following the coup. Worse still, electricity was cut off to the base. Then the Turkish base commander was arrested, which sparked a flurry of rumours in Turkey that he was the 'link-man' between the putschists and the Pentagon. That may be dismissed out of hand abroad, but it is a symptom of how alienated Mr. Erdo?an's support base is from its American ally."

Whatever the precise tensions and conspiracies that have given rise to these events, the question is clearly posed: is Turkey the only NATO member where the threat of a military coup is on the political horizon? Recent developments suggest that the chain may have broken first at its weakest link, but it is the chain that is severed and the threat is universal.

What of Britain, where Brexit has thrown both major parties into profound crisis while threatening the breakup of the UK and the disintegration of the European Union as a whole? Only recently, military commanders threatened a "mutiny" in the event that Jeremy Corbyn, leader of the Labour Party, became prime minister. Corbyn's rivals for the leadership of the party, who are heading up an internal party coup to remove him, have pledged their willingness to use nuclear weapons in a bid to win the military's support.

In France, President François Hollande warned in the wake of the Nice terrorist attack that prolonging the country's state of emergency would endanger the country's status as a republic based upon laws. In short order, however, he extended the extraordinary powers for another three months, while calling the military onto the streets.

And in the US itself, the capitalist two-party system is in a state of terminal crisis, with the prospect of an electoral victory by the fascistic Republican candidate Donald Trump. Unending war abroad is inevitably accompanied by repression at home, with the increasing integration of the police and the military, carried out in the name of fighting "terrorism," but directed against growing opposition and radicalization within the working class.

The Turkish events are a harbinger of what may come in countries around the world, where democratic forms of capitalist rule are becoming untenable under the weight of a global economic crisis, the relentless growth of militarism and war and, above all, the intensification of the class struggle.

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