

US and Germany livid over failure of Turkish coup

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Judging by the reactions of the American and German governments to the failed coup in Turkey, there can be no doubt that they supported the rebels politically and had hoped for their success.

Washington, like Berlin, allowed much time to pass before tersely condemning the coup, only speaking out unequivocally when it was clear that the rebels had failed.

The first to speak on the night of the coup was US Secretary of State John Kerry, who issued a statement from Moscow at 11pm, local time. At that point, it looked as if the coup might succeed and Kerry was at pains to avoid speaking definitively.

He called in general terms for “stability and continuity within Turkey.” Only after Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan had called via FaceTime for the people to resist, half an hour later, and the situation had begun to turn, did Kerry and President Barack Obama call for support for the “democratically elected government of Turkey.”

The German government waited even longer. Only early on Saturday, at 1:00 in the morning German time, did government spokesman Steffen Seibert send a brief message on Twitter calling for respect for democratic order and the protection of human lives. Later on Saturday morning, Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier piped up and condemned “any attempt to alter the democratic order in Turkey by force.” In the afternoon, Chancellor Angela Merkel condemned the coup attempt in a brief statement to the press.

One might have expected that an armed insurrection within the ranks of the second-largest NATO military, with which both the American and German armed forces collaborate in the military alliance’s command structure and in daily war missions, would have unleashed a storm of condemnation, comment and debate. But nothing of the sort occurred.

Since the brief statements offering a pro forma defence

of democracy were issued, the criticism from politicians and media outlets has been directed almost exclusively against the target of the attempted coup, Turkish President Erdogan. The American and German ruling elites are angry that Erdogan is purging the state and military apparatus of their agents and using the failed coup to act against his internal opponents and strengthen his right-wing Islamist supporters.

It is inconceivable that the Turkish officers would have dared launch the coup without support and encouragement from the American and German sides. Tensions between the government of President Erdogan and both Washington and Berlin have intensified in recent weeks—over the Kurdish question, the Syrian war and rapprochement between Turkey and Russia.

However, the rebels and those pulling the strings had clearly miscalculated. For reasons that are not yet clear, the putsch went awry. Those leading it had likely underestimated the public support Erdogan could mobilize.

Had the coup succeeded, Washington and Berlin would have supported it, as they had backed the 2014 coup in Ukraine and the bloody counterrevolution in Egypt the previous year. If Erdogan were now sitting in prison, like former Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi, who was also elected democratically, they would not be expressing a single democratic scruple. They have raised the question of democracy only now that it suits their political calculations.

While criticisms of the rebels are hardly to be heard, politicians on both sides of the Atlantic are warning the Turkish regime against “revenge, acting arbitrarily and the misuse of power,” and urging observance of the “rule of law and democratic principles.”

Following a meeting with the foreign ministers of the European Union, Kerry indirectly warned Turkey on Monday that it might lose its NATO membership if the

government continued to act against its political opponents. “NATO membership supposes respect for democratic principles,” he announced.

Merkel, who exhibited no scruples in reaching a dirty deal with Erdogan on the return of refugees from war-ravaged countries, threatened an immediate end to EU accession talks if the Turkish government acted upon its threats and reintroduced the death penalty.

The media is playing a particularly cynical role in this campaign, pumping out government propaganda and making no secret of its sympathy for the rebels.

In an editorial headlined “The Countercoup in Turkey,” the *New York Times* centred its fire on Erdogan and his government’s post-coup crackdown on political opponents. Barely concealing its surprise and disappointment over the failure of the putsch, the newspaper wrote: “Mr. Erdogan has been no friend to free expression, ruthlessly asserting control over the news media and restricting human rights and free speech. Yet thousands responded to his appeal, turning back the rebels and demonstrating that they still value democracy, even if Mr. Erdogan has eroded its meaning.” *Die Welt* published an editorial titled “Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the eternal victim,” in which it bluntly asked, “Isn’t it the case that the only reproach that can be made of the rebels is that they failed?” Although the newspaper answered “No,” it did not do so on democratic grounds, but because “one coup merely brings the next coup” and a military seizure of power creates martyrs.

The *Welt am Sonntag* charged the coup officers with amateurism, assigning them a slot “on the top ten list of clumsy coup attempts.” The newspaper concluded by expressing the hope that the next attempt would go better: “When Erdogan has firmly installed his Islamic presidential dictatorship, it could happen that those who yesterday blocked the way for the tanks will wish for a pragmatic military interregnum to reestablish Kemalist democracy.”

The conservative *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* castigated the rebels’ dilettantism under the headline “Why the coup failed.” It offered advice on how to better manage things next time.

“The most important immediate question,” wrote Rainer Herrmann, “is how could an army that can look back on a long history of ‘successful’ coups undertake such a dilettantish attempt to seize power.”

“If the coup leaders wanted to be successful,” he continued, “they should have tried to take immediate control of the most important state institutions. Like their

predecessors, they should have eliminated the civilian apex of the state.”

Herrmann expressly supported the aims of the rebels. Their statement, he wrote, contained points “which most critics of Erdogan and his government under Binali Y?ld?r?m could support.” However, the rebels had failed to present “a road map or a programme for the coming months.”

But this could be rectified. “The attempted coup was defeated. However, the discontent in other sections of the army and police—responsible for public security outside the large cities—remains.”

Other articles accused Erdogan of staging the coup himself in order to create a pretext for the establishment of a personal dictatorship. *Politico* in the US wrote: “Some Western officials and analysts predict the thwarted coup will become Erdogan’s ‘Reichstag fire,’ a reference to the 1933 arson in Germany’s parliament that served as Hitler’s justification for suspending civil liberties, beginning the Nazi dictatorship.” *Junge Welt*, which is close to the German Left Party, also described the coup as possibly a “Turkish Reichstag fire.” The abortive putsch was “a further stage in Erdogan’s long-planned coup,” it wrote.

Kerry, Steinmeier and other ruthless defenders of imperialist interests stood behind the coup. The sensitivity of American interests involved is indicated by the fact that Incirlik airbase, one of the centres of the rebels, stores 50 American nuclear warheads.

Erdogan is a reactionary politician with authoritarian ambitions. But the settling of accounts with him is the task of the Turkish and international working class, not the Turkish military and imperialist powers. Not least, the coup attempt was aimed at pre-empting such a movement from below. Had the coup succeeded, the military would have detained tens of thousands of militant workers, as in previous military takeovers, torturing and murdering them, without Washington or Berlin blinking an eye.



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