

Our man in Ankara: US ambassador denies US role in Turkish coup

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In the wake of last Friday's military coup in Turkey, US officials have repeatedly been forced to deny Washington's involvement in and support for the abortive attempt to seize power, even as public reactions point to US disappointment that the rebellious officers were repulsed.

Much of the heavy lifting in this regard has been delegated to John Bass, "our man in Ankara," a US ambassador who is no stranger to dirty operations mounted by US imperialism.

Following the ending of the attempted putsch Turkish Labor Minister Suleyman Soyulu directly charged that "The United States is behind the coup." President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has insisted that the coup was the work of the pro-American Islamic cleric Fethullah Gülen. Directly taunting US President Barack Obama, he has demanded Gülen—widely believed to be a CIA "asset"—be extradited from his sanctuary in Pennsylvania. Erdoğan has charged that he made the request before, warning Obama that a coup was threatened, but the American government failed to act. While less direct than his minister's statement, Erdoğan's charges likewise lay blame for the military revolt at Washington's doorstep.

The public reaction of the Obama administration has only fed these suspicions. The initial response came from Secretary of State John Kerry, who was in Moscow. In the midst of the coup he issued a call for "stability and peace and continuity within Turkey," an equivocal statement that at the very least indicated no support for the country's elected president as tanks and warplanes besieged Istanbul and Ankara. Only after it became clear that the coup would fail did Obama and Kerry issue a statement declaring that "all parties in Turkey should support the democratically-elected Government of Turkey, show restraint, and avoid any

violence or bloodshed."

In the days following the coup attempt, the fire of both the Obama administration and the major US corporate media outlets has been directed almost entirely at Erdoğan and his use of the events to carry out a wholesale purge of his opponents from the state apparatus. Little breath has been wasted over the significance of a military coup against the elected government of a key NATO ally.

Ambassador Bass waded into this situation with a statement claiming that "false words" had been attributed to him personally, describing them as "an absolute fabrication that appears designed to heighten tension between the United States and Turkey and undermine Turkey's security."

Bass continued: "Some news reports—and, unfortunately, some public figures—have speculated that the United States in some way supported the coup attempt. This is categorically untrue, and such speculation is harmful to the decades-long friendship between two great nations."

If the "decades-long friendship" between Washington and Ankara proves anything it is that the job of the American ambassador is to deny the US government's responsibility for military coups, whether it is true or not.

This was the case with James Spain, the ambassador to Turkey in 1980 when the Turkish military last carried out a direct seizure of power. Spain was one of a large number of "diplomats" sent to Ankara after having first passed through a period of service in the Central Intelligence Agency.

As the US media reported at the time, Spain "denied charges that the United States was behind Friday's military coup or knew about it in advance."

Spain's denials were quickly exposed as a pack of

lies. The Turkish military gave the US embassy in Ankara advance notice of the coup, which was launched just hours after Turkey's air force chief returned to the country from consultations in Washington. The US State Department publicly announced the coup before anyone in the Turkish government.

Moreover, one of Spain's colleagues, the CIA's Ankara station Chief Paul Henze, was less reticent once the victory of the coup was clear. He cabled Washington proclaiming proudly, "Our boys did it!"

This "victory" opened up a period of horrific repression for the Turkish working class. Turkey's parliament was shut down and all political parties and trade unions banned. As many as 650,000 people were detained, hundreds of thousands were tortured and thousands were killed or "disappeared." The military regime imposed an economic program dictated by the IMF that froze wages and drove down living standards, while creating profitable conditions for foreign and Turkish capital. No wonder the CIA chief couldn't help bragging.

Whether Bass, the current ambassador, passed like Spain through the CIA on his way to Ankara is not known. It is common practice, however, for the agency to use diplomatic postings as "cover" for its operations. In Bass's case, such postings included Chad and Iraq, as well as in Europe. He was also assigned to the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence.

Bass's rise within the State Department included stints as an advisor first to Strobe Talbott, the State Department official who oversaw US policy in relation to the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, and then to Republican Vice President Dick Cheney.

Significantly, this career path precisely matches that of Victoria Nuland, the assistant secretary of state who played a key part in the orchestration of the fascist spear-headed 2014 coup that ousted the elected government of President Viktor Yanukovich in Ukraine. Bass worked closely with Nuland over the course of three administrations and was presumably groomed to play a similar role.

Before being posted to Turkey, Bass's sole previous assignment as a US ambassador was to Georgia, where he was sent in 2009 to coordinate anti-Russian operations with the right-wing regime of President

Mikheil Saakashvili. Also a top priority was securing Georgian logistical assistance for the US wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Before he was replaced three years later, the country had also become a focal point for the funneling of Islamist "foreign fighters" into the war for regime change in Syria.

It is understandable if some may find the "categorical denial" of US involvement in an attempted military coup less than convincing, coming from such a figure.



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