

# State of emergency declared in Turkey

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Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan declared a three-month state of emergency on Wednesday.

The move was preceded by a five-hour meeting of the National Security Council and a meeting of Erdogan's cabinet. The president, who has vowed to purge from all state institutions the "virus" responsible for the failed July 15 coup, said, "The aim is to rapidly and effectively take all steps needed to eliminate the threat against democracy, the rule of law and the people's rights and freedoms."

Notwithstanding such reassurances, under the state of emergency the president and his ministers are empowered to bypass the parliament in enacting laws. The government can also decide to curtail legal rights and freedoms.

The right-wing Justice and Development Party (AKP) government has already charged over 100 generals and admirals, nearly one third of Turkey's 356 top military officers, in connection with last Friday's coup attempt. The charges include treason, establishing and being members of an armed terrorist organisation, and attempting a coup.

The Erdogan government is carrying out a large-scale purge of state employees, including the security forces, police, military judges and prosecutors, civil servants and academics, who are accused or suspected of being connected to the failed coup. Nearly 60,000 people have been detained, sacked or suspended. On Wednesday, the government announced a ban on travel abroad by all academics. Hundreds of state institutions have been closed.

Two members of Turkey's constitutional court were arrested Wednesday, among more than 100 judiciary officials taken into custody. The state-run news agency reported as well that the education ministry was closing 626 private schools.

The clampdown is likely to intensify with the announcement of the state of emergency.

Reports continue to emerge concerning the events surrounding the coup attempt, giving a picture of a major operation. Erdogan himself narrowly evaded being assassinated while on holiday in the southwest resort of Marmaris, according to reports. Helicopter-borne troops attacked his hotel shortly after he left for Istanbul—not the capital Ankara—where a senior army commander could guarantee his security. The troops sent to eliminate Erdogan killed two police officers and injured seven others. En route to Istanbul, the president's plane was reportedly in the sights of rebel pilots in two F-16 fighter

jets.

With ever more senior figures accused of involvement, there are indications that the government fears a possible second coup attempt. In a television interview Wednesday with Al Jazeera, Erdogan said, "I don't think we have come to the end of it yet." He reiterated his suspicions that foreign countries were involved in the July 15 attempt, although he did not name any specific governments.

However, at least one prominent government official has directly accused Washington of involvement, and Erdogan has charged his American-based rival, Fethullah Gülen, widely believed to be a CIA asset, of having masterminded the coup. Ankara is planning to formally file a request for Gülen's extradition with the US government.

There are many indications that Washington and Berlin supported the coup plotters. In the aftermath of the abortive putsch, American and European officials and major Western media outlets have almost universally directed their fire against Erdogan rather than the coup plotters. The US and German governments were both noncommittal in the early stages of last Friday's events, despite Turkey's status as a NATO member and the close ties between the Turkish military and the rest of NATO's forces. They issued statements backing the elected government only after it had become clear that the coup was failing.

It appears that a centre of the coup operation was Incirlik airbase, where the US stores nuclear weapons and launches bombing attacks on Syria and Iraq.

Tensions had mounted in the weeks preceding the coup between Erdogan and his nominal allies in the US and NATO, as the Turkish president sought a rapprochement with Russia.

The Obama administration and European leaders had clashed with Erdogan over his support for Islamist groups such as Islamic State and al-Nusra, the Al Qaeda affiliate in Syria, which the US-led coalition purports to be fighting in Syria and Iraq. Erdogan has unofficially sponsored these forces as bulwarks against the Syrian Kurds.

Since the failed coup, Washington has threatened Turkey with losing its NATO membership if it does not ease up on the crackdown. CIA director John Brennan was evasive when asked whether the US knew about the possibility of a coup, saying only that he was well aware of sizable domestic opposition to President Erdogan.

The speed and scale of the post-coup purge are themselves indicative of the political, economic and social tensions wracking Turkey following the 2008 global financial crisis, the years of US-led wars in the Middle East, constant shifts in US policy that have brought Erdogan into conflict with Washington, and Ankara's war against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in southeast Turkey.

As yet, the loyalty and whereabouts of the Turkish Navy are unclear. On Tuesday, the London-based *Times* newspaper reported that Veysel Kosele, the admiral in command of the Turkish Navy, has been out of contact since the start of the coup, and 14 ships and two helicopters with 25 Special Forces troops are believed to be missing. Presidential spokesman Ibrahim Kalin said that "everything was accounted for," although "a few rebel soldiers were still on the run."

Ankara scrambled F-16 fighter jets Wednesday to check reports that missing Coastguard ships had appeared in Greek waters in the Aegean Sea, Turkish military sources reported.

Among those arrested or suspended are hundreds of personnel from Prime Minister Binali Yildirim's office and from the parliament and various ministries. Included in this number is Ali Yazici, Erdogan's aide de camp.

Former Air Force commander and Turkish Supreme Military Council member Akın Öztürk has been accused of planning the coup. His group allegedly included Erdogan's own top military advisor, the commander of Incirlik airbase, and the commander of the powerful Second Army. Öztürk, who was shown with injuries to his face while under arrest, has denied any involvement.

If the involvement of these figures is confirmed, it means the attempted coup was staged by individuals at the centre of the ruling political establishment.

Erdogan has, in recent months, sought to sideline his political rivals, including the former president and co-founder of the AKP Abdullah Gul and his former foreign minister and hand-picked prime minister Ahmet Davutoglu, whom he has replaced with the loyalist Binali Yildirim. Davutoglu's forced resignation, in particular, evoked the ire of both the US and the European powers.

There is no doubt that Erdogan is using the opportunity provided by the abortive coup to settle old scores and legitimise his longstanding efforts to establish a dictatorial regime under the guise of an executive presidency. The Turkish authorities have already revoked the licences of a number of media outlets on the basis of allegations of involvement in the coup, including several TV channels the government had previously taken into administration. They have blocked access to the WikiLeaks web site after it leaked 300,000 AKP emails, dating from 2010 to July 6 of this year, in response to the post-coup purges.

Erdogan has thus far focused his attention on supporters of the opposition Gülenist movement. Prime Minister Yildirim told parliament on Tuesday that Ankara had sent four dossiers

to the US to back up its demand for Gülen's extradition.

One of those arrested, Lieutenant Colonel Levent Turkkan, aide to Chief of General Staff Hulusi Akar, has reportedly admitted membership of Gülen's organisation, which was officially registered by the Turkish National Security Council last May as the Fethullah Terror Organization (FETO). He confessed that he and others spied on top army commanders, and claimed that "60-70 percent of those people who have been accepted inside the armed forces since 1990s are Gülen-linked people."

Turkkan said he was informed about the coup on July 14 by Staff Colonel Orhan Yikilkan, who served as an adviser to the chief of staff. Yikilkan told him that the president, the prime minister, the chief of staff and the commanders-in-chief would be arrested, with the coup due to start early Saturday, July 16.

Gülen has denied any involvement in the coup and it is by no means clear what part, if any, he played. Nor is it clear which political forces were behind the plot to unseat the Erdogan regime, or their motives and aims. The three opposition parties—the Kemalists, the right-wing Nationalists and the pro-Kurdish party—joined the AKP in denouncing the attempted coup.

According to the state-run Anadolu news agency, a file was found in Judge Mehmet Sel's office at a court house in Istanbul. It apparently contained a document that would have been used to charge Erdogan, former prime minister Davutoglu, Interior Minister Efkan Ala and intelligence chief Hakan Fidan with assisting a terrorist organisation between 2009 and 2015—the period when the Kurdish peace process was underway.

Millions were brought onto the streets last Friday and Saturday in opposition to the coup. But Erdogan will inevitably utilise whatever popular support this generates to strengthen his hand against the working class. During the coup and in its immediate aftermath, he mobilised thousands of Islamist militia members, mainly from the pro-AKP Ottoman Societies, along with nationalists, who turned on AKP opponents, shouting jihadist and religious slogans.



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