

Turkey launches mass trial of officers charged in July 2016 coup attempt

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On Tuesday, August 1, Ankara's Fourth Criminal Court launched a trial of 486 defendants accused of complicity in the attempted coup in Turkey on July 15 of last year. They are formally charged with "violating the Constitution, attempting to assassinate the President, attempting to abolish the government of Turkey, managing an armed terrorist organization, seizing military bases, manslaughter, attempting manslaughter, and deprivation of liberty."

Prosecutors are demanding 330 life imprisonments for the 45 suspects accused of being leaders of the coup attempt. Of the defendants, 416 are jailed pending trial and 18 are not under arrest; 7 others are fugitives.

They are facing charges over events at the Akinci Air Base, the command center of the coup attempt, from which fighters took off to bomb the Turkish parliament and other key targets, killing 80 people. Akinci Air Base, near Ankara, was also where the putschists held the chief of general staff and other army commanders captive for hours, before they were freed by pro-government forces.

The explosive character of the trial and the deep political conflicts inside the Turkish state machine and armed forces were underscored by the announcement yesterday that the government had suddenly fired the officers leading the Turkish army, navy, and air force. A crisis in which this trial or related legal actions led to a renewed attempt by factions of the armed services to topple Erdogan cannot be ruled out.

Amongst the suspects are generals and civilians considered to be leading figures of the so-called Fethullahist Terrorist Organization (FETO). Fethullah Gulen, the US-based preacher Ankara blames for having orchestrated the coup attempt, is being tried in absentia, as the leading suspect. Gulen denies involvement, but evidence revealed since the July 15

coup indicates that he at least gave his approval for the scheme to topple Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan through a coup, as did the US government.

The ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) declared they would apply to be admitted as co-plaintiffs in the trial. Erdogan, ministers and lawmakers are also among the plaintiffs in the indictment.

The first trial on the failed coup attempt started in December 2016 and was followed by dozens of trials across Turkey. Since July 15 of last year, more than 50,000 people have been detained or arrested for suspected links to FETO, and Turkish security forces have launched operations against those suspected of working for FETO almost every day.

Following the defeat of the coup attempt, thanks to a mass mobilization primarily of workers and youth, the AKP government declared a state of emergency and launched a wide-scale crackdown against not only the putschists, but all expressions of political opposition. Erdogan is using this crackdown to further his bid to secure dictatorial powers.

US imperialism's war drive in the Middle East has provoked conflicts between Ankara and its NATO allies. As US imperialism moved to back Kurdish forces as proxies in Syria, Ankara, fearing the emergence of a broader ethnic Kurdish movement including inside Turkey's borders, moved away from Washington and its traditional European imperialist allies. As Erdogan sought to improve relations with Moscow, US and European officials became ever more determined to get rid of him (see also: <http://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2017/04/05/turk-a05.html>).

Having backed the coup, they are now also hosting military and civilian officers who fled Turkey to

Europe or the United States and appealed for political asylum after the abortive July 15 coup attempt.

Erdogan has long feared that he could share the fate of Egyptian President Muhammad Mursi, who was toppled by a US-backed coup in July 2013. The July 15 coup demonstrated that the danger of the overthrow of the Turkish regime by a NATO-backed military dictatorship is very real.

Erdogan is reacting with a crackdown on all opposition, presenting his assault on democratic rights as a nationalist campaign of “fighting external powers”—that is, primarily Washington and Berlin, and their co-conspirators—whose aims are “subjugating and dividing Turkey.”

Recently, German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel signaled that Berlin would review its policies toward Ankara and stated that he could not advise companies to invest in the country. This came only weeks after Turkish authorities handed Berlin a list of some 700 companies supposedly linked to the Gulen movement, and after Berlin decided to redeploy its troops from Turkey to Jordan.

In response to Gabriel’s remarks, Erdogan slammed Berlin over its barely veiled threats to impose economic sanctions, saying, “You have to take into account a bigger price [that you will have to pay], if you think you can frighten Turkey with your threats of embargo.”

The already frayed relations between Turkey and its NATO/European Union (EU) partners have further worsened. Ankara recently purchased an S-400 missile defense system from Russia, is seeking closer ties with China and is threatening the EU with the release of a new flow of Syrian immigrants to Europe.

The EU’s pretense that its growing pressure on Ankara is about “bringing democracy to Turkey,” like Erdogan’s claim he is pursuing an anti-imperialist policy, are political frauds. NATO and the EU are waging a ruthless struggle to maintain Turkey in their geo-strategic orbit, while the US government escalates its war drive against Russia and China.

The movement led by Fethullah Gulen, the US-based preacher who until 2013 was the closest political partner of Erdogan and his henchmen, is a strategic asset of US imperialism in its confrontation with China and Russia. Having moved to the United States in 1999, he rapidly developed his movement, particularly in the former Soviet republics of Central Asia and in Africa.

Gulen controls a wide network of schools and foundations under CIA patronage. His movement’s aim is to train a layer of the ruling elite in these countries aligned with Washington’s interests.

While Erdogan and his AKP pursue a reactionary and militarist agenda, the US and European powers are in fact ready to work with him, as they did during his first two decades in power, if they reach an agreement on what all sides consider to be the vital issues. The same imperialist powers that lecture the AKP government on democracy are the main supporters and partners of the arch-reactionary absolutist regimes such as Saudi Arabia and the Gulf oil sheikdoms.

Since November 2015, France has stood under a state of emergency, with the basic rights of the population suspended, while Paris continues its military operations in Africa. Having already declared its aim of becoming a major military power, corresponding to its economic might, Berlin revealed its disregard for fundamental rights in the recent police crackdown against protesters at the recent G20 summit in Hamburg.



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