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## THE BIGGEST OBSTACLE BEFORE THE COUP WAS THE MINDSET OF THE PUBLIC

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**Why did the military coup fail on July 15 in comparison with the previous coups in the history?**

A military coup which could be staged through classic means (abolition of the government and the military's seizing the power of civil government) has not been structurally possible in Turkey since the 1980s. Last two recent military interventions, February 28 and April 27, do not match the classic description of coup since the military staged those coups to warn the governments of those times. The coup attempt on July 15, 2016 corresponds to the classic coup in terms of methods and objectives. However, it failed even though it was eminently organized and well-planned. The reasons why it failed will initiate and has already initiated long-lasting debates.

In order to contribute to these debates, I can say that there are 6 different structural dynamics which effectively led to the failure of the coup. A number of factors such as the forced scheduling of the coup to an earlier time and the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the president of Turkey, played significant role in this failure. It is more essential to find the answers to the question why such an organized coup failed at such a time.

The first reason is that it was not possible to control the communication as before the 1990s. In other words, it was impossible for the coup attempters to cut off communication between those who would resist the coup and to mobilize this resistance. Therefore, this shows us why Menderes' supporters, who were the last to learn about the coup after all, could not resort to disobedience. The Prime Minister and, more importantly, the President were able to mobilize the crowd against the coup when it took place in the night between July 15 and 16, which is one of the most important structural reasons for the failure of the coup.

The second reason is the factor which is complementary to the first reason which is not sufficiently explanatory alone. For instance, it can answer the question "How come did the coup take place in Egypt whereas Morsi could call all his supporters to the streets?" This factor is the presence of another armed force which would balance the force that constituted the backbone of the military coup in Turkey. This force was significantly comprised of the Police forces, probably including the armed elements which were opposed to the coup in the army. This balancing force undertook the

critical operations in the example of July 15 and led the counter-coup units by acting together with the public in the streets.

**So, why did the police take the side of the public instead of the military?**

This critical question already leads us to the third structural dynamic. Why did the police take the side of the civil government but not the coup attempters? This question is important since the police would have most probably taken the side of the coup attempters if the coup had been attempted in 2013 when the eliminations of the Community had not started yet. Within the following three years, the government both knew its enemy better and significantly eliminated it. This is the most significant dynamic which enables the balancing armed force to come into play.

The fourth structural factor is again related to the third reason. The long time that the AK Party has passed in power brought together a “loyalty” in the public institutions (municipalities, governorships etc.), press and business world. Therefore, the de facto resistance of these institutional actors to the coup (e.g. the resistance shown when the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality was taken under

control) prevented the coup attempters from gaining position.

Fifthly, bad memories which have been previously gone through on both academic/intellectual and political platform caused the emergence of a serious objection to the coup. Therefore, supporting the AK Party rather than the coup far outweighed even among those who have strongly opposed the government for a long time thanks to this anti-coup culture.

**What is the last structural reason?**

The last but perhaps the most important reason is that, differently from the previous coups, there is a strong and large middle class population beyond the ideological positions in today’s Turkey. The middle class has the highest possibility to lose in political crisis. Having been created by the economic liberalization since the 1980s, this middle class constituted a large part of the crowd that stood in front of the tanks in the streets of Istanbul and Ankara and led the fight against them.

**What are the similar and different aspects of the coup attempt on July 15 and the other contemporary coups?**

The closest and most familiar coup was staged un-

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der the leadership of el-Sisi against the Morsi regime in Egypt in 2013. It is possible to make a comparison, excluding the difference between the social dynamics of these two countries and the Gulen movement's structuring. I think the most essential question of this comparison can be formulated as such: Why was the military coup successful even though Morsi supporters poured into the streets in Egypt and it was declared that Morsi would resist the coup?

This can stop us from making a romantic analysis that the coup will be prevented only with the people's taking to the streets. This does not mean denying the role of the public in the prevention of the coup. On the contrary, I am trying to say that the

barehanded crowd cannot succeed in its resistance to the armed military coup alone. We see that only one of the 6 dynamics (impossibility for the coup attempters to take absolute control of communication) that I indicated as an answer to the first question is recognized concerning the situation in Egypt under the Morsi regime. This was not even as clear and efficient as in Turkey. As a consequence, anti-coup resisters who had unfortunately no other protector but the bare force of the army in Egypt lost both their lives and democracy. This detail significantly shows to what extent romanticism will mislead us.

**How will this coup affect the Turkish Armed Forces in the future? They have large-**

**ly lost their prestige. What kind of measures can be taken for compensation?**

There are both short-term and long-term effects. Everyone is already aware of the effects that we will face in the short term. Turkish Armed Forces constitute an important pillar, that is, the mobile force in the fights against the PKK and DAESH. The uncertainty and insecurity within the Turkish Armed Forces have the potential to significantly affect the course of these two fights. However, it is necessary to mention two positive situations at this point. The first one is that the Police which have been cleared from the Community within the last three years play an active role in the fight against the two terror organizations and it can compensate for the vulnerability that may result from the situation of the Turkish Armed Forces. Secondly, the Turkish Armed Forces have got rid of a bottleneck which seriously consumes its energy. The recent situation can make Turkish Armed Forces more efficient in the counterterrorism.

Concerning the long-term effects, I can only give some advices. Firstly, Turkish Armed Forces should be regulated according to the democratic standards. Efforts have long been made to put into practice a structural reg-

ulation that should continue. It is also necessary to indicate that a military coup has been attempted despite the efforts of democratization of the army which have continued this structural regulation for almost fifteen years. This paradox should be explained with further detailed studies. Secondly, insistence and sensitivity should be shown in a loyalty-based personnel system generally under all public institutions and particularly within the Turkish Armed Forces.

Thirdly, the Turkish Armed Forces should restore its relations with the public. The main goal of this restoration should be to replace an army which attempts to stage military coup and has an ideological wall between Turkish citizens and itself with an army at the disposition of Turkey's citizens as a bureaucratic institution. Efforts should be made to get rid of a culture which can be defined as militarism in the public, in other words, a social fact which has such symptoms as prioritizing the army under each condition and the methods of the army to resolve the problems. The political solutions that we have found in our ordinary debates of daily life should cease to be the solutions that normalize the military methods.

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**Do you think it is not necessary to intervene with the curriculum and understanding of education adopted in the military academies?**

Of course, this is one of the most important steps taken in order to regulate the relations between the army and society. The curriculum adopted for the education of the military officers creates a hierarchy between the members of the army and the rest of the society which will be in favor of the military. This hierarchy has been the fundamental element that has made military coups possible and rational.

**Finally, what can be done in the future to prevent the creation of the joint groups**

**that will serve the Gulen movement or the other groups in the army?**

In addition to the advices that I have mentioned in the previous question, the political actors should be aware that the phenomenon called the “politicization of the army” is a very delicate issue. We know that the previous coups were the result of the politicization of the army. One of the most important reasons why this country has witnessed a great number of coups is this politicization and the army’s considering itself as a protector of a political position. One of the biggest mistakes of the AK Party has been the policy to take the shortcut while eliminating this political ideology. This has opened the doors to



another politicization (structuring of Fethullahist movement in the army). Therefore, the last coup (attempt) is the result of this new politicization. The most important means which will ensure the prevention of such danger is to hinder the politicization of the army (similarly, the police).

**It is said that “the era of military coups has ended for Turkey” as a result of the painful event that we have recently gone through. Do you agree with this?**

The main argument of my academic studies has been that classic military coups ended in Turkey as of the end of the 1980s. In other words, I have defended that a military coup may be attempted but this is not possible to happen. However, it would have been possible to witness more serious consequences if the coup had been staged as scheduled on July 15. This possibility shows that we should undermine this coup under no circumstances. Indeed, we encounter a very well-planned and wisely-studied coup plot. Nevertheless, I agree with the argument you

mentioned in your question. I ground this on the structural reasons that we have used in explaining why the coup has not been successful. Furthermore, a new and very important reason has also been added to this list. Those who will dare to stage a coup do not only have successful examples any longer. There is now a country and society which have suppressed the coup. The mindset of the society is the biggest obstacle before those who will dare for a military coup.

**One of the greatest goals of AK Party government has been the extension of the fundamental rights and freedoms by abolishing certain bans. In other words, it was aimed to normalize the country. Does the attempted coup negatively affect these policies?**

I don't think it will have negative effects. The coup has shown to the AK Party government that the actors and institutions in serious ideological conflict with it are on its side when it comes to the final political stage. I don't think this is a negligible experience.

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\* This interview is adapted from the August 2016 issue of *Derin Tarih*.

ORSAM is an independent think-tank specializing on Middle Eastern affairs. ORSAM seeks to diversify sources of knowledge on the region and establish a channel of communication between the local experts and Turkish academic and policy circles. Toward that end, ORSAM facilitates the exchanges of officials, academics, strategists, journalists, businesspeople and members of civil society from the region with their Turkish counterparts. ORSAM conducts studies on the regional developments and disseminates their results to the policy and academic circles as well as the wider public through various publication outlets. ORSAM publications include books, reports, bulletins, newsletters, policy briefs, conference minutes and two journals *Ortadoğu Analiz* and *Ortadoğu Etütleri*.

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