

## **The Coup Leader Must Be Held Accountable**

**By IBRAHIM KALIN**

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On July 15, a rogue faction within Turkey's military attempted to suspend the Constitution, impose martial law and enforce a nationwide curfew. As troops and tanks blocked traffic crossing from Asia to Europe over the Bosphorus Bridge in Istanbul, a number of government buildings including the Parliament, the Presidential Palace and the intelligence headquarters were heavily assaulted. During a series of coordinated attacks, more than 240 civilians and police officers in Istanbul and Ankara were shot by snipers, run over by tanks, shelled by assault helicopters and killed by bombs dropped from hijacked aircraft. Meanwhile, the rogue faction seized a public broadcaster and held an anchorwoman at gunpoint to announce that they were now in charge.

Prime Minister Binali Yildirim called the coup illegal and, in consultation with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, ordered the police and other security forces to stop the coup plotters. Soon afterward, President Erdogan appeared on television to call on the people to resist the power grab. When Mr. Erdogan's message was aired live on CNNTurk, a private TV channel, the junta soldiers invaded its premises as well. Millions heard the call and defied the rebels. Opposition leaders also deplored the coup and called for resistance.

In the meantime, an elite military squad was sent to the hotel on the Turkish Riviera where President Erdogan was vacationing, to kill him and his entire family. Having survived the assassination attempt, Mr. Erdogan escaped on his official jet, which reached Istanbul safely after the pilot deceived rogue F-16s patrolling the airspace.

In the wake of the bloody coup attempt, the government, acting on the recommendations of civilian and military leaders, exercised its constitutional mandate to declare a three-month state of emergency. Adopted by countries like France and Belgium in response to terror attacks, this measure is intended to expedite the legislative process and provide the authorities with legal tools necessary to bring those responsible to justice.

Several thousand military officers and their accomplices in law enforcement and the judiciary have been suspended or arrested for having links to the coup. Their removal from public posts makes the Turkish government stronger and more transparent. At least 1,200 rank-and-file soldiers, who weren't charged, have already been released from custody. A team of 70 prosecutors is investigating the case. The claim that this was a fake coup is no more credible than the laughable claim that the 9/11 attacks were orchestrated by the United States.

Testimony and evidence obtained from coup plotters point to Fethullah Gulen as the leader of the coup attempt, which was planned and staged by his followers within the

army. Levent Turkkan, aide-de-camp to the chief of staff for Turkish armed forces, Gen. Hulusi Akar, confessed to being a member of the Gulenist group after he was arrested, adding that he executed orders from his Gulenist superiors. Generals leading the coup also urged General Akar to speak to Fethullah Gulen, who runs a covert empire from his mansion in rural Pennsylvania, hoping to persuade him to join in their rebellion, according to General Akar.

Since the 1980s, the Gulenists, a religious cult whose members present themselves as peaceful educators, have always had a dark side. They have infiltrated the Turkish judiciary and security forces and manipulated the system to their advantage. They also fabricated evidence, engaged in illegal wiretapping and leaked government documents to smear their opponents.

They own a number of charter schools and companies across America and have been accused of engaging in financial fraud and violating immigration and campaign finance laws.

The United States should extradite Fethullah Gulen, a Turkish citizen, to Turkey, as is allowed under an existing treaty. Turkey has already provided a number of legal documents to American authorities and will send more as further evidence is collected. The United States should not let this man exploit its laws to avoid facing a fair and legitimate accounting in Turkey.

Fethullah Gulen's claim that he has had nothing to do with this coup attempt is as credible as his claim that he has had nothing to do with hundreds of Gulenist schools, banks, companies and media outlets that operate under his direct orders. A due legal process will establish his role in this failed rebellion. It does not make sense for any country to condemn the coup without taking action against the lead putschist.

Today, the people of Turkey are more united than at any time in recent history. In any democracy, citizens are bound to disagree. But our nation's response to the July 15 assault proved that democracy, freedom and the rule of law are nonnegotiable in Turkey. As the Turkish people mourn the dead, nurture the wounded and take pride in what we accomplished together, they also demand justice, closure and reassurances that never again shall we witness such a crisis.

*Ibrahim Kalin is the spokesman for President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey.*