



PERSPECTIVES

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Regional Implications of the Failed Coup d'État and Purges in Turkey: Initial Indicators

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: In the wake of the failed coup d'état, Turkey is going through a massive and convulsive wave of repression, apparently aimed against anything remotely related to Fethullah Gulen's supporters and the Hizmet network of educational projects. The fallout in terms of the regional balance of power is bound to be significant. There is little to cheer, even if the timely conclusion of the reconciliation with Turkey has so far spared Israel the traditional accusation of being behind the plot (and may even put Israeli diplomacy in a position to be of help in reducing the flames).

The failed coup d'état and subsequent purge in Turkey have rattled both local and distant onlookers. To begin with, the self-mutilation of the second-largest army in NATO can hardly be of benefit to anyone but those who seek to destabilize the region (and Europe). As the anti-IS alliance gathered this week in the US to weigh its next steps, and with the decisive battle of Mosul looming on the immediate horizon, the effective absence of Turkey from the battlefield is keenly felt – as is the decision by Erdoğan to disable all operations from Incirlik AFB.

Tensions between Turkey and the US have been rising for a while, as the Obama administration came reluctantly to the conclusion that the Kurdish forces in northern Syria (and their brethren in Iraq) are the most committed fighting force in the war on Baghdadi's "Caliphate". Just as opportunities to reduce IS seem to be taking shape, and an extra impetus is needed in any case after the horror in Nice, Turkey appears to be signaling that this objective is

scarcely on Erdoğan's radar – despite the Istanbul Airport massacre and the rising cost for Turkey of past tolerance of IS practices.

Moreover, Erdoğan's aggressive and persistent demand that Gulen be extradited – a demand with which the US is unlikely to comply – is adding fuel to the fire. Given what is at stake, it will be necessary for some European players to suppress their outrage at Erdoğan's overreactions and focus on securing his cooperation with a strategically important campaign at a decisive moment in the war against IS.

Meanwhile, relations between Turkey and the Sunni Arab "forces of stability" in the region, mainly Saudi Arabia and Egypt, are fast going from bad to worse. On July 16, Egypt refused to enable the UNSC to lend unanimous support to the democratically elected government in Ankara, questioning the UN's ability to declare who is a democrat and who is not. This was Sisi's way of settling a score. For three years, day in and day out, Erdoğan and his party – which see themselves as patrons of the Muslim Brotherhood across the region – have been questioning the Egyptian regime's political and moral legitimacy.

The Egyptians and the Saudis could hardly contain their glee when news of the coup first emerged; or their disappointment when Erdoğan prevailed. Such reactions will poison relations for some time to come. Erdoğan has already openly stated that he considers Sisi to be the same as the conspirators (the "putschists"). (This ignores the fact that the Egyptian military, unlike Turkey's hapless crew, came in only after millions had taken to the Egyptian streets demanding Mursi's ouster.)

All this turmoil provides Iran, which was quick to lend political support to Erdoğan, with ample opportunity for mischief. As the lines of battle are drawn across the region, most violently in Syria and Yemen, the Iranian regime looks upon Saudi Arabia and her allies as an enemy camp in active contention. Iran can thus be expected to use this opportunity to try to draw Turkey closer.

To accomplish this goal, Iran might attempt to delineate a common ground in seeking to diminish the Kurdish role in the IS war. At the same time, it will likely seek to enhance the profile of its proxies in Iraq, thus making the US and the West more dependent on Iran's contribution to the common cause. Presumably, given the tone already taken by John Kerry and others in Washington, this will end up eroding even further any motivation on the part of the Obama administration to keep up the necessary pressure against Iran's ongoing missile projects and support for terror – even if there are elements

within the administration who feel strongly that Iran remains an active threat to world peace and to US interests.

None of this serves the interests of Israel, the US, or Europe. There is little that can be done as the storm rages other than to keep channels of communication open and watch attentively for signs of Iranian fishing expeditions in Ankara or elsewhere. There can be no stop, however, to the anti-IS campaign, even if the emphasis for air support would need to shift once again to Jordan (indirectly backed by Israel's strategic presence). The campaign cannot be held hostage to Erdoğan's political agenda.

As passions abate, Turkey will emerge from crisis mode and remember that it still needs to be a member of the community of trading nations, a useful NATO ally, and a team player in the eastern Mediterranean. Sophisticated methods will need to be found to communicate to the AKP and its triumphant leader that their future does not lie with Iranian schemes to split the Sunni world and gain regional dominance for the Shi'a. To stay stable, Turkey will have to rebuild her alliance with the stabilizing elements whose help will be needed if Turkey and the region are to go back to business.

It was the rise to relative prosperity that built up Erdoğan's base of popular support. Alienation from the West is not the way to sustain it.

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