

# Coups, Conspiracies, and the Uphill Battle for Democracy in Turkey

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(Gökhan Balcı - Anadolu Agency)

**There are various means and instruments employed by states to meddle in the affairs of other countries with economic, military and foreign policy interventions being the most common. Moreover, there are more subtle and indirect forms of intervention designed to exert influence on targeted states such as tacit support for military coups. Since rising the status of superpower in the wake of the Second World War, the United States has been among the most prolific in deploying such tools. The impacts of such interventions go well beyond their immediate political impact, with previous researching showing the longer-term toll on economic growth, political stability and democratic progress in targeted states. In this context, this policy outlook explores the use of military coups as an extension of US foreign policy. It also examines the legacy of coups and attempted coups in Turkey with a particular focus on how an underground terror network attempted to topple Turkey's democratically elected government on July 15, 2016, with the suspected assistance from the US intelligence community and the tacit acceptance of American political officials.**

## Coup d'états as tools for power politics

Coups, as [defined](#) by Peter Calvert, represent “a specialised form of violent transfer of political power”. A large body of literature documents how the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) actively engaged in coups or irregular regime changes worldwide. This pattern was more pronounced during the Cold War, but even after the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989), support for military takeovers remained a regular feature of US policy. Consequently, numerous covert actions undertaken by the US intelligence community, whether directly sponsored or tacitly approved by political officials, led to the toppling of governments across the world.

This course of action stems from the superpower's tendency to dismiss the legitimate political aspirations of various nations in the global south. Consequently, US meddling into the internal affairs of other countries has been directed not only against left-leaning leaders but also against nationalist leaders. In this context, the Truman Doctrine (1948) and the Eisenhower Doctrine (1957) were directed not just against the communist bloc but also against political forces seeking more autonomy from the dominant European colonial powers.

American author William Blum, who previously worked at the US Department of State, [argues](#) that, since the end of World War Two, the US has: “endeavoured to overthrow more than 50 foreign governments, most of which were democratically elected; grossly interfered in democratic elections in at least 30 countries; attempted to assassinate more than 50 foreign leaders; dropped bombs on the people of more than 30 countries; attempted to suppress a populist or nationalist movement in 20 countries.”

The toppling of the democratically elected Mohammad Mossadegh in Iran by the CIA in 1953 is sharply illustrative of this. In *All the Shah's Men*, Stephen Kinzer [depicts](#) Mossadegh as a nationalist leader whose entire political career was shaped by two ideas: bringing Iran onto the path of democracy and establishing Iranian control over Iranian resources. Nevertheless, Mossadegh's national dream was swiftly repressed. The coup also reversed Mossadegh's nationalisation policies. Subsequently, five US oil firms became major players in the oil industry in Iran, controlling about 40 per cent of Iranian oil. In contrast, they had no stakes before the coup. By engineering the anti-Mossadegh coup, the US sent a clear message to the Middle East that it was not interested in democracy but rather in oil and ‘strong man rule’.

At that time, the CIA-restored Shah was celebrated as an ‘enlightened’ and ‘modern’ ruler by the *Times of London*. *The New York Times* also employed colonial-style rhetoric in its editorial (6/8/1954) [explaining](#) the CIA-led coup. For the NYT, “underdeveloped countries with rich resources

now have an object lesson in the heavy cost that must be paid by one of their members which goes berserk with fanatical nationalism. It is perhaps too much to hope that Iran's experience will prevent the rise of Mossadeghs in other countries, but that experience may at least strengthen the hands of more reasonable and more far-seeing leaders [...]”

The Middle East was not the only region subject to destabilisation. Asia, Africa, and Latin America were also the theatre of military putsches. In Chile, Salvador Allende was democratically elected as head of state in 1970. Because of the left-leaning policies of his Popular Unity government, Allende attracted the ire of Washington. Then US President Nixon and his chief strategist Henry Kissinger led a [concerted effort](#) to undermine Allende, using a [combination](#) of political and media [warfare](#), while offering funds to various media and union leaders and grooming senior military officers in the process. The White House also used diplomatic pressure while obstructing Chile from gaining access to any international financial assistance. In blunter terms, Nixon [ordered](#) the CIA to “make Chile's economy scream”. Therefore, after concentrated economic, political, and covert actions, General Pinochet initiated his coup against Allende in September 1973, unleashing decades of repression and dictatorship in Chile.

Contrary to common wisdom, CIA-sponsored coups did not only target ‘enemy’ leaders not aligned with US plans. Instead, they often targeted leaders who were allied with the US. For instance, despite his full alignment with US policies in South Vietnam, President Ngo Dinh Diem was assassinated, and his regime toppled in 1963. President Kennedy had full knowledge of the plot by a cabal of South



Supporters of President Nicolas Maduro gather for a pro-government rally in Caracas, Venezuela on October 28, 2016. (Carlos Becerra - Anadolu Agency)

Vietnamese generals, and he [sanctioned the plans](#) to overthrow Diem in 1963. While Diem was the keystone of American policy in Vietnam for a decade, his loyalty did not insulate him from being removed. Ironically, the anti-Diem putsch was an ill-fated endeavour. From that point onwards, things went from bad to worse, compelling the US government to deepen its involvement in Vietnam's quagmire with catastrophic results.

The collapse of the communist bloc in the late 1980s resulted in a general [adversity](#) towards military putsches within the international community, leading to a decrease in the overall number of military takeovers. However, the number of successful coups was augmented. Such a pattern suggests that foreign-sponsored coups have become used sporadically to minimise reputational damage to successive US administrations.

Following the fall of the communist bloc, coups continued to feature intermittently in the panoply of covert actions conducted by the US government. For instance, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez [accused](#) the US authorities of instigating a coup in Venezuela in 2005: "I know I am condemned... I am sure they are planning my death in Washington," said Chavez in a televised address.

Chavez was suspicious for good reason. Three years earlier, in 2020, a failed putsch was instigated against him, and he was ousted from office for two days. However, thanks to overwhelming popular support he managed to return to power. American academic Robert McChesney [highlighted](#) the gap between the anti-Chavez rhetoric and the anti-democratic reality of his opponents. On the one hand, Chavez was decried as a dictator who undermined democracy and civil liberties. On the other hand, the first act of the short-lived presidency of Pedro Carmona, who took the reins of power for 48 hours, was to immediately suspend the constitution and abolish the locally elected bodies in the country. Meanwhile, the editorials in the Washington Post and the New York Times did not voice any concerns towards Carmona's undemocratic actions. On the contrary, as McChesney emphasised, the New York Times' editorial depicted the coup leader in a positive light, asserting that Carmona [promised](#) "freedom, pluralism and respect for the state of law."

CIA-engineered military coups were utilised to topple governments not on the same wavelength as the US. Long before developing his 'Clash of Civilisations' theory, American political scientist Samuel Huntington was a key advocate of the military's role in political systems worldwide. Huntington [claimed](#) that the political role of the military as the 'guardian' of existing regimes pleased the "American opinion leaders" and that "frequently the United States was quite happy to have the military dislodge governments it disliked" (pp. 225–227).

An in-depth [study](#) by Jonathan Powell and Clayton Thyne (2011) reveals the extent of the coup phenomenon.

According to Powell and Thyne, 232 successful military putsches took place in 94 countries between 1950 and 2010. About 25 per cent of these coups toppled democratically elected governments. Of course, not all these military takeovers were fomented by the US intelligence. Russia (formerly represented by the Soviet Union), France, and the United Kingdom bear responsibility in many cases. Nonetheless, the US has one of the weightiest [track records](#) of covert and overt support for putsches, toppling democratically-elected governments, whether nationalists, leftists, or Islamists.

## Coups and consequences

Provoking coups and pushing the military to seize power overseas is not merely an anomaly or a relic of the Cold War. It is a policy that has been designed to serve US interests since World War Two. While US corporations tend to benefit from these actions, such policies were detrimental to recipient countries. Putsches produced significant and long-term regressions in democracy, significant deteriorations in real incomes, and substantial social unrest. In other words, nations that witnessed these coups became less democratic, poorer, and less stable than before.

### *Harmful for the economy*

In his [book](#), "Overthrow: America's Century of Regime Change" (2006), Stephen Kinzer examines the nexus between US multinational corporations, wealthy political actors, and US intelligence. According to Kinzer, these actors often acted in concert to purposely topple foreign governments or support violent military takeovers around the globe. Kinzer contends that the political-economic benefits can better explain the rationale behind such actions as large US corporations make huge profits with the help of powerful government figures.

Whereas US corporations achieved considerable economic benefits, the nations that witnessed military putsches were definitively on the losing end. In a [paper](#) published in 1992, Londregan and Poole used a half-century dataset of financial information to argue that having a non-constitutionally elected head of state after a coup negatively affects economic growth. In a similar vein, Swedish professor Erik Meyersson conducted a [study](#) that reveals that in countries that were more democratic, a successful military putsch [decreased](#) annual growth in income per capita by as much as 1%–1.3% over a decade. Similarly, Narayan and Prasad [researched](#) the economic impact of coups in the Southern Pacific Island of Fiji. In the period between 1987 and 2000, Fiji witnessed a series of military takeovers. Narayan and Prasad found that any military putsch reduced real GDP by eight per cent.

## ***Increased political instability***

Furthermore, a large body of literature indicates that military coups encourage more political instability. For example, Political Scientist Patrick McGowan, in [research](#) on African putsches (1956-2001), found that successful coups, failed coups, and even coup plots undermined the chances of stability in any given country. According to McGowan, "once a successful coup has occurred, military factionalism often leads to more coup behaviour," often provoking additional failed coups and coup plots that are provoked by the military elites and their allies in the political class.

McGowan's findings echo other studies. For example, Aristide Zolberg's [research](#) (1968) suggests that "coups engender other coups. The success of one set of claimants encourages others to try" (p.80). Similarly, Bienen and Van De Walle (1989) [assert](#) that leaders that capture power via putsches are much more likely to be toppled in a coup. Finer (2002) also [argued](#) that a country's political culture declines after a military coup, prompting more political instability in the process.

## ***Serious damage to democracy***

In addition to the damage incurred to the economy and political stability, coups are rarely conducive to democracy. In a [study](#) put forward by Londregan and Poole (1990), the authors assert that a country's 'political culture' becomes seriously eroded post-coup. According to them, "once the structures of civilian authority and constitutional procedures are torn down, many years are required to rebuild them." Another [study](#) titled "Are coups good for democracy?" concludes that coups produce new authoritarian regimes and pave the way for higher levels of state-sponsored violence. These findings are in alignment with research focusing on coups in Africa. For example, Miller (2011) argues in a [paper](#) titled "Debunking the myth of the 'good' coup in Africa" that most military takeovers in Sub-Saharan Africa did not bode well for democracy. Even when a few African regimes issued from putsches tried to promote democratisation, the results were not adequate, and they were often toppled as a result.

At times, US officials were candid about some of the darker sides of their foreign policy, which often had nothing to do with promoting democracy. For example, Former Secretary of Defense and CIA chief James Schlesinger was asked in the late 1990s about the democratisation of the Muslim World. His [answer](#) was unequivocal: "An even deeper question is whether we seriously desire to prescribe democracy as the proper form of government for other societies. Perhaps the issue is most clearly posed in the Islamic world. Do we seriously want to change the institutions in Saudi Arabia? The brief answer is no: over the years we have sought to preserve those institutions, sometimes in preference to more democratic forces coursing throughout the region" (p.33).

## **Coups in Turkey**

### ***27 May 1960 and 12 September 1980***

Both coups had devastating effects on democracy and the public sphere in Turkey. The 1960 coup represented a clear set back to all the democratic gains in Turkey, which stemmed from the country's first truly free elections in 1950. The Democrat Party (DP) had won these elections, however, the military establishment, which considered itself as the real rulers and the guardians of the state, perceived the DP as an obstacle to its ambitions. As soon as the DP's rule faced an economic downturn, military plotters overthrew the government. They arrested President Celal Bayar, Prime Minister Adnan Menderes and many others, accusing them of treason. 15 defendants were sentenced to death and 12 saw their convictions changed into prison terms. Prime Minister Menderes, Foreign Minister Fatin Rüştü Zorlu and Finance Minister Hasan Polatkan were executed.

Similarly, in 1980, violence between the extreme right and the extreme left reached new levels whilst centre-left and centre-right parties failed to reach a power-sharing compromise that could calm the political situation in the country. The military used this opportunity to topple the government once again on the pretext of restoring democracy. This time, they abolished not only the parliament but all existing political parties, imposing a draconian martial law. Over the course of the next years, hundreds of thousands were arrested, while extrajudicial killings and torture became the norm. The military Chief of Staff Kenan Evren, who engineered the coup, got himself elected as president in sham elections and remained in power until 1989.

While several sources place the responsibility of both coups in Turkey (1960 and 1980) on local dynamics, it is now widely believed that these coups would have never taken place without the endorsement, tacit or otherwise, of US decision-makers. It is believed that coup leaders, whether the mid-ranking officers that engineered the 1960 coup or the top military brass that led the 1980 putsch, obtained the approval of the US [before](#) the putsch, as per various historical documents and testimonies, including an interview by former CIA official Paul Heinze. It is the norm for coup plotters to obtain such pre-approval from foreign powers to govern afterwards, as Edward Luttwak in his seminal work "[Coup D'état](#)" indicated. However, many observers believe that the US had significantly more agency in the case of the coups in Turkey than it is generally acknowledged.

In a long interview provided to the Oral History Project of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training (ADST), Former US Ambassador Michael W. Cotter [described](#) some of the actions undertaken by the US in the context of

several military takeovers ranging from Chile and Bolivia to Turkey. From Cotter's testimony, it is evident that the US military influenced leading Turkish senior military officers. While US denial of direct responsibility has always been the norm, there are many exchanges related by the participants to these military takeovers suggesting that the US was privy to the coup plotters' plans.

In his informative [book](#), Assistant professor Ömer Aslan provided numerous examples that reveal how American officers were privy to the coup plans in Turkey before they happened. For example, Aslan quoted the memoirs of General İbrahim Şenocak, who was the Commander of the 2nd Army in 1980. In his book, Şenocak said that he asked General Kenan Evren, the leader of the 1980 coup: "if [the coup leaders] considered how other countries particularly the US would react and if the coup would not harm the economy?" Evren listened calmly to the question then told Şenocak that he needs not concern himself because "these matters have been taken care of" (p. 179-180).

Aslan also referred to Professor Tanel Demirel's [study](#), which reported that General Evren acknowledged that the coup instigators had already received necessary signals from their military counterparts in the US before the coup. Thus, they planned their military takeover with absolute confidence that there will be no complications with the US. Based on what General Evren stated, Demirel asserts that if the coup plotters "found resistance from their counterparts and consistent signals that a coup would be unacceptable, they would have thought twice before acting" (p. 269).

In any case, there are other indications concerning such involvement. For instance, it was [claimed](#) that after the 1980 coup, President Jimmy Carter was briefed by the CIA's former Turkey chief Paul Henze, who told the US president: "Our boys did it!" Henze later denied making such a declaration, but existing interview tapes cast doubts about Henze's denial.

The 1980 coup was followed by a heavy crackdown on civil liberties. Heavy censorship was imposed on the media whilst serious human rights violations were committed. It is [believed](#) that about 650,000 people were detained post-coup. From this number, 230,000 people were tried in court, 50 were executed, 171 were killed in [custody](#), 14,000 were stripped of their citizenship, whereas hundreds of thousands were tortured, and thousands are still missing.

### ***The 'postmodern coup' of 28 February 1997***

As parties with conservative views became more visible in the 1990s, the military elites and their allies in the administration became irritated. Necmettin Erbakan, the

renowned figurehead of political Islam in Turkey, surprised many with the gains he achieved in the 1994 local elections and the 1995 national elections. His Welfare Party managed to achieve commendable numbers in the 1995 elections but could not secure the majority. Erbakan went on to become Prime Minister thanks to his coalition with the centre-right party of Ms Tansu Çiller. However, the military elites and their civilian allies in the National Security Council, which effectively controlled political life in the country, decided to stop Prime Minister Erbakan via a series of edicts, ultimately obliging him to submit his resignation. Subsequently, the Welfare Party was disbanded.

There were many allegations that the US was involved in the 1997 postmodern coup, with these assertions being reported by the Turkish media at that time. Academic İsa Afacan [quoted](#) an article by Samil Tayyar from the *Star*<sup>1</sup>, in which Erbakan was interviewed more than a decade after the putsch. During the interview, Erbakan produced an alleged US national security document suggesting that the US administration had become uneasy with Erbakan's policies. The document asserts that Secretary of State Warren Christopher forwarded a memo to the US Ambassador to Turkey on 30 October 1996, calling upon the Turkish military to act against the Erbakan government. The US administration was reportedly very concerned to see the Turkish authorities promoting pan-Islamic economic cooperation<sup>2</sup> and distancing themselves from the West. Erbakan maintained that the purported document revealed the part played by the US in the coup against his government.

The 1997 postmodern coup was detrimental to democracy and civic life. It left hundreds of thousands of people from all walks of life -- including students, academics, and military officers -- deeply affected. Under the name of "Action Plan against Reactionary Forces," numerous decrees were issued to fire civil servants from their jobs, blacklist companies, and prevent hundreds of thousands of people from accessing their rights in education, work, and social life. Moreover, repression particularly targeted religious segments of society, including a ban on headscarves at public universities.

### ***The 15 July 2016 coup attempt***

On the night of 15 July 2016, Turkey was the scene of a bloody coup attempt fomented by elements associated with the messianic cleric Fethullah Gülen and his underground network, subsequently referred to in Turkey as the "Fethullah Terrorist Organisation" (FETO). During their attempt to seize power, they deployed fighter jets, helicopters, battle tanks, and troops to topple the legitimate and democratically elected government of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The coup plotters attempted to seize the

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<sup>1</sup> Samil Tayyar, "28 Şubat Talimatı Abd'den" (February 28th Order Was from the United States), *Daily Star*, December 15, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> For example, Erbakan [envisioned](#) a common-market organisation which is made up of mainly Muslim-majority countries who would cooperate on trade goals and policies. This idea was pursued via the establishment of D-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation in 1997. The D-8 witnessed the participation of Iran, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Indonesia, Egypt and Nigeria.

# FETO FUGITIVES

Prosecutors, judges, businessmen, and former police chiefs are among the fugitives



Fetullah Gulen, the Pennsylvania-based preacher accused of masterminding the July 15 coup attempt, has lived in self-imposed in the U.S. since 1999



**Ekrem Dumanlı**  
Ex-editor-in-chief of Zaman daily



**Prof. Dr. Şerif Ali Tekalan**  
Ex-rector of Fatih University



**Akın İpek**  
Koza Holding Chairman



**Osman Karakuş**  
Ex-deputy Police Chief



**Emre Uslu**  
Ex-police officer



**Zekeriya Öz**  
Ex-prosecutor



**Celal Kara**  
Ex-prosecutor



**Fikret Seçen**  
Ex-prosecutor



**Mustafa Yeşil**  
Ex-president of the Journalists and Writers Federation



**Hakan Şükür**  
Ex-AK Party deputy



**Mutlu Ekizoğlu**  
Ex-senior police officer



**Mehmet Likoğlu**  
Ex-senior police officer

## ESCAPED GENERALS, ADMIRALS



**İRFAN ARABACI**



**AYHAN BAY**



**HAYRETTİN İMREN**



**NAZMI EKİCİ**

Source: Anadolu Agency



People gather at the Presidential Complex to protest the July 15 failed military coup attempt in Ankara, Turkey on August 10, 2016. (Aytaç Ünal- Anadolu Agency)

However, the coup instigators were faced with heavy resistance from the Turkish people in the streets who refused to obey the orders to disperse. The resistance was led by Erdogan and the AK Party, a stance that was also shared by opposition parties and civil society organisations that were also opposed to the military takeover. Turkey's main political actors all declared their unequivocal refusal to accept military rule, and by this token, consecrated their belief in democracy and faith in the progress that was made in the past two decades. Similarly, the police corps and a large majority of military units remained loyal to the government. Several top-level military commanders, such as the Chief of General Staff, refused to acquiesce to the putschists' demands or submit to their threats. Such high levels of patriotism and sense of togetherness went a long way in helping to foil the coup. Sadly, the coup attempt resulted in 251 fatalities and 2,734 injured.

Numerous questions surround FETO and its connections with the CIA. Accusations of connivance between FETO and US intelligence have gained currency in Ankara. For example, Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu adopted a gloves-off approach when he declared in February 2021: "It's plain as day that America was behind the 15 July coup attempt. FETO carried it out at their behest," Soylu [told](#) Hurriyet newspaper. "Since I became interior minister [in September 2016], I've seen FETO's presence wherever America is influential," he said.

Most Turks hold the belief that the US was involved in the 2016 coup attempt. The New York Times [reported](#) in August 2016 that the Turkish public opinion across the political spectrum largely believes that the US was behind the coup. This perception did not change over time.

Mehmet Ali Kulat, head of the research and consultancy company MAK, [stated](#) that 70% of respondents still believed so in a survey conducted in December 2020 on this matter. The rate reached 81% in September 2016 after the coup attempt and has oscillated between 67% and 73% since then, Kulat added.

There are strong indications that the CIA originally groomed the FETO network during the Cold War. Almost a decade before the coup attempt, prosecution documents in Turkey in the 2000s [revealed](#) the existence of a potent nexus between known CIA agents and FETO members. It is generally known that FETO terror leader Fethullah Gülen's application for a US green card suggests strong connections with the [CIA](#). The letters of recommendation in his application included references from two seasoned CIA executives (George Fidas and Graham Fuller) and a former US ambassador to Turkey (Morton Abramowitz). More recently, the case of [Enver Altaylı](#), a former staff member of Turkey's national intelligence agency (MIT), uncovered evidence about the connections between the CIA and FETO. Professor Dani Rodrik [contended](#) that the testimony of Hulusi Akar, the chief of staff of the Turkish military, should have been enough to kickstart Gülen's extradition from the US. Akar openly [declared](#) that the coup instigators offered to put him on the phone with Gülen, "our opinion leader," they said. Such developments should not come as a surprise. The mercurial nature of the Gülenist terror network allowed its members to infiltrate different political parties in Turkey and different state organisations, security agencies, economic bodies, and media outlets. Such capacity to infiltrate various entities would make FETO a considerable asset for any intelligence agency.

Despite the considerable bearing of NATO's Cold War stay-behind networks on political developments in many European countries, Academic Hakki Taş [noted](#) the lack of academic interest towards this subject, including towards the [Gladio programme](#). While there have been some sparse publications about this topic,<sup>3</sup> there is still a considerable gap to be filled in the literature. Initially, the Gladio programme paved the way for the formation of underground networks in NATO countries to fight the influence of communist parties and [far-left movements](#). In Turkey, the Gladio programme was [reinvigorated](#) after the 1980 coup. Consequently, some far-right and religious extremist elements were cultivated as part of the programme to stop the democratisation process. Therefore, although the 1980 coup leaders ruthlessly dismantled many existing parties and political groups, the Gülenists were given free hands to establish their parallel structures with total impunity because they were useful to their handlers. Their perfidious designs grew over time to the extent that in the 2000s they orchestrated numerous assassinations (Academic Necip Hablemitoğlu, Turkish-Armenian intellectual Hrant Dink, Journalist Nedim Sener) and several sophisticated campaigns to destabilise the country in an attempt to provoke a coup. At times, as witnessed during the [Sledgehammer](#) case, the FETO terror network resorted to methods like wire-tapping, fabricating evidence and smear campaigns.

The question that remains, as succinctly [put](#) by Professor Şener Aktürk in the immediate aftermath of the coup attempt, is "whether the Gülenists have any significant autonomy from the United States, or whether they are merely an extension of the US' intelligence apparatus without much autonomy or agency of their own. Despite this rather minor disagreement, however, the Turkish public mostly believe that the United States, using the Gülenists as its (at most semi-autonomous) instrument, condoned or even actively sought to overthrow the democratically elected government of Turkey on 15 July 2016."

## Conclusion

Even a cursory survey of the post-World War Two era makes it apparent that the US adopted coups and violent transfers of political power as policy, sometimes acknowledged and sometimes under the veil of plausible deniability. Studies [reveal](#) that the US was involved in at least 81 overt and covert known interventions in foreign elections from 1946 to 2000. While this course of action was more pronounced during the Cold War, successive US administrations pursued this policy whenever it suited their purposes in the years after the fall of the Berlin Wall. In the post-Cold War era, the US succeeded in either

directly or supporting the toppling of democratically-elected governments via coups in countries such as [Haiti](#) (1995), [Honduras](#) (2009), and [Egypt](#) (2013) but failed in other instances where there are strong suspicions of US involvement like [Venezuela](#) (2002) and Turkey (2016). These coups (or coup attempts) came at high cost to the recipient countries, both economically, socially, and politically.

There is a long history of US participation in coups in Turkey. In many instances (1960, 1980, 1997), it is believed that the US was involved, one way or another, in placing the military at the helm of the country's affairs. However, on 15 July 2016, the FETO network's sinister plans were unravelled by the strong will of the Turkish people, their high civic sense, and attachment to democracy.

Despite evidence linking the FETO terror network to CIA operatives, US officials deny their prior knowledge of the coup attempt or direct involvement in it. However, maintaining such a position is ultimately untenable. The simple fact that the US continues to harbour the head of the FETO network in the US raises serious questions about the strength of US denials. The US hosting of Fethullah Gülen and refusal of his extradition to Turkey also reinforces the public belief that the US is protecting him as a useful tool used in the coup attempt.

The coup attempt threatened to strike a massive blow to hard-earned democratic rights gained in the previous decades and could have pushed the country to the brink of political and economic collapse. The popular mobilisation against the coup attempt highlights the considerable evolution of the Turkish public's common consciousness towards democracy and the rule of law. On the other hand, the fact that the US and other Western Powers are suspected of at least tacitly approving the designs of the plotters have alienated ordinary citizens in Turkey. When it comes to preaching about democracy, US (and Western) credibility has been severely dented in Turkey, especially given the large gap between the White House's rhetoric about democracy and the clear historical pattern of backing violent illegitimate power grabs in Turkey and around the world.

Despite ongoing tensions as a result of this issue, the US and Turkish governments continue to work together to bridge their differences and further their common interests. Moreover, Turkey remains a key NATO member and a key regional partner for the US. Meanwhile, it is vital to enhance the confidence building measures between both parties to address mistrust and uncertainties, especially those resulting from the 15 July coup attempt.

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<sup>3</sup> See for example: Leopoldo Nuti and Olav Riste, "Introduction – Strategy of 'Stay-Behind,'" *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 6 (2007); Daniele Ganser, *NATO's Secret Armies: Operation Gladio and Terrorism in Western Europe* (London: Frank Cass, 2005); Jean-François Brozzu-Gentile, *L'affaire Gladio: les réseaux secrets américains au coeur du terrorisme en Europe* (Paris: A. Michel, 1994); Emanuele Bettini, *Gladio: la repubblica parallela* (Roma: Ediesse, 1996).