



## How the failed coup changed Turkey

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Marking its third anniversary on Monday, Turkey's failed coup was a major trauma that spurred the government to purge some 150,000 public sector workers, destroying countless lives and sparking a wave of strident nationalism that has turned Turkey away from the West.

“The ferocious post-coup crackdown — one of the darkest eras in the history of the Turkish republic — triggered a wave of anti-Western, particularly anti-American, nationalism that threatens Turkey's at least 150-years-old Western orientation,” Mustafa Akyol, senior fellow at the Cato Institute, wrote in [an analysis](#) for U.S. think tank the Center for Global Policy.

On the night of July 15, 2016, a faction within Turkey's armed forces began [arresting top commanders](#) and taking over strategic positions such as Istanbul's Ataturk airport. Within hours, the government of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan had turned back the coup attempt, after some 250 people had been killed.

Ankara quickly blamed the religious group led by U.S.-based cleric Fethullah Gülen, though many in the West saw this as a conspiracy theory, according to Akyol. “In Turkey, there is almost a national consensus that the Gülenists were, at least, the main component of the coup,” said Akyol.

Yet the government surely exploited the failed coup. “Turkey soon turned into the proverbial ‘republic of fear,’ where Erdoğan's prior tilt toward authoritarian rule evolved into absolute power,” said Akyol, who [argued in the New York Times](#) that the planned “de-Gülenification” of the state turned into “a paranoid dictatorship's mindless witch hunt”.

The Gülen movement was labelled a terrorist group and the government targeted those with the vaguest links to the movement. “The slightest whiff of association with Gülen has destroyed lives,” Agence France-Presse [reported on](#) Sunday, citing 33,000 sacked teachers and 150,000 dismissed public sector workers.

Three years later, because of [the stigma attached](#) to Gülen suspicions, veteran teachers have been forced to toil in cafes, ex-judges are selling tea and former academics work in construction, according to AFP. “While other teachers teach, I make food and clean toilets,” said Elif, who was acquitted of any Gülen ties last year. “I am 37 and I am starting my life from scratch again.”

Russia, meanwhile, used the failed coup to strengthen its ties with Turkey, with President Vladimir Putin quickly reaching out to Erdoğan and pro-Kremlin media creating fake news about CIA involvement, boosting anti-Americanism in Turkey, according to Akyol.

“That should make it easy to understand why Turkey has bought and deployed S-400 missiles from Russia, despite all the objections from Washington,” said Akyol, who argues that the expected sanctions are likely to cause serious economic damage, provoking further anti-Western sentiment.

Akyol calls for less confrontation and more engagement, beginning with acknowledging the security threat Kurds and Gülenists pose to Turkey, while urging Ankara to deal with them legally.

“That would give more hope to the thousands of innocent political prisoners in Turkey’s jails,” said Akyol. Until Erdoğan is no longer the country’s leader, he added, “we all should try to minimise the damage done to Turkey’s people and the nation’s long-established ties with the free world.”