

Document points to alleged military plot against Turkish government

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Under conditions of economic crisis and social polarization, tensions between the Islamist and the secularist wing of the Turkish establishment are continuing to fester below the surface.

On June 12, the daily newspaper Taraf published a new document, which allegedly reveals fresh plans by the Turkish military to discredit and destabilize the ruling Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP). The plans include a frame-up to weaken the most powerful Sunni religious sect in Turkey, led by Fetullah Gulen. The action is also designed to give support to members of the military who were arrested as part of the ongoing Ergenekon investigation and court case.

Ergenekon is a clandestine, ultra-nationalist organisation, composed of retired generals, top bureaucrats, mafia members, leading members of the Kemalist-Maoist Workers Party, and some journalists. Popularly known as the “deep state,” its aim is to topple the government.

The document is entitled, “Action Plan to Fight against Reactionaryism” and is dated April 2009. It contains a detailed, multi-step plan drawn up by Naval Forces Senior Colonel Dursun Cicek and submitted to a department of the General Staff. It was seized in the office of Serdar Ozturk, lawyer of a retired colonel who was arrested earlier this year on charges of being a member of the Ergenekon gang.

According to media reports Colonel Cicek is commissioned in the Operations Command 3rd Support Unit, which replaced the notorious Psychological Warfare Department some time ago. This means that the alleged plot was actually tailored in the very centre of the General Staff.

In his column dated June 15, Ihsan Dagi of the Islamist English daily Today’s Zaman summarises the measures contained in the plan as follows: “Planting weapons in some people’s houses and then making it seem as if they belong to people from the Gulen movement, and then trying to paint them as terrorist organization; conspiring to provoke hatred amongst Sunnis and Alevis by fabricating anti-Alevi documents in Sunni households; fabricating information about the suspects in the Ergenekon trial and misleading the court; using controlled Islamists leaders to create a fabricated threat of Shariah; using media to discredit the Gulen movement and the AK Party; creating division inside the AK Party through agents planted inside the party; portraying the Gulen movement as in cooperation with the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party [PKK], the CIA and MOSSAD; appearing on TV and radio and making false confessions about the Gulen movement, etc...”

The “action plan” also envisages the systematic production of provocative and chauvinistic

news/rumours about Greece and Armenia in order to widen and strengthen support for right-wing nationalist parties.

The plan calls for launching a propaganda campaign to emphasise that the military personnel who are detained or arrested as part of the Ergenekon operations are in fact innocent and were put behind bars just because they are against the reactionary powers that are trying to overthrow the secular regime in the country.

The example of retired Brigadier General Veli Kucuk demonstrates the true colours of these “innocent” patriots. Throughout the 1990s, Kucuk was heavily involved in the “deep state” and its network of covert groups that targeted members and supporters of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) as well as common Kurdish people. Kucuk was one of the main figures in the “Susurluk affair” of 1996, which brought to light the close links between security forces, mafia gangs and Grey Wolf fascist death squads. Later on, his name was mentioned in connection with the murder of the leading judge at the administrative court in 2006. It was learned that Kucuk had known the perpetrator, the lawyer Alparslan Aslan, who had links to the same milieu of mafia and fascist groups.

In the 1970s the so-called “deep state” carried out numerous assassinations and destabilisation operations against the workers’ movement and left-wing organisations.

The General Staff’s “response”

On the day the news report hit the headlines, the General Staff announced it had launched an investigation into the claims published in Taraf. At a weekly press briefing, Brigadier General Metin Gurak told reporters, “An order has been given at once to the General Staff’s Military Prosecutor’s Office to thoroughly investigate the issue.” When asked what would be probed, the document’s accuracy or who leaked it to the press, Gurak avoided a clear answer and repeated; “the issue would be thoroughly investigated.”

Three days after Taraf’s news report was published, the General Staff issued a short statement claiming that the document “has not reached our office yet. It will be made certain whether the document is genuine or a fake one.”

In the press there are conflicting press reports about the authenticity of the document. Generally, the Kemalist-leaning media, citing military sources claim it to be fake while Islamist-leaning papers, citing police sources, claim it to be authentic. But there are many reasons to believe the document may be genuine. This latest “psychological war” plan creates the sense of déjà vu for anybody who closely follows the recent history of Turkish political life.

If the documents were forged, it is likely that the General Staff would have shown evidence of this straight away. The military has already staged three coups between 1960 and 1980. In similar incidents in the recent past, the General Staff adopted the same “policy” of neither denying responsibility nor accusing the publishers of such documents.

A few hours after the publication of the document a military court decided to impose a ban on the media coverage “for the protection of public order.” As Resat Petek, a former chief prosecutor told Today’s Zaman, this is a “scandalous” decision adding, “There is nothing regarding this issue that threatens public order.” Petek also said, “It is illegal to impose a media ban on a document that was already published.”

The decision of the military court strengthens the belief that the document is authentic. On Monday legal representatives of Taraf appealed to an Istanbul court calling for the removal of the broadcast ban.

On Tuesday Taraf published an interview conducted with a retired general whose name is kept anonymous by the paper. He confirms the authenticity of the “action plan” and said, “The preparation of the document began in January. Two drafts of the plan were submitted to senior military members.” According to his remarks, there are other military documents outlining similar plans.

Underlying reasons

Given the extreme divisions and loss of credibility and influence on the part of the “secularist” parties, only one force within the Turkish political establishment that is capable of removing the AKP government is the military. This continuously threatens the regime with serious and uninterrupted instability and crisis.

After becoming the ruling party, the AKP distanced itself from the traditional line of the Turkish Islamist movement, known as the “national view” doctrine, and adopted a very friendly approach to Europe and the West and global finance capital. At the same time, the AKP has sought to further the interests of the Islamist wing of the Turkish bourgeoisie and has steadily undermined the hegemonic position of the “secular” wing of the ruling class.

Recently it hardened its line and started to hit out at leading members of the rival faction of the Turkish bourgeoisie, particularly the Dogan Media Group. Its deliberate refusal to sign an IMF deal ensuring the repayment of private debts coming to maturity this and next year—mainly owned by “secularist” capital— has led to increased tensions. The Islamist businessmen’s association MUSIAD has repeatedly spoken out against signing a new standby deal with the IMF.

Although there are many aspects attached to this conflict, including a struggle between different cultural lifestyles, in the final analyses it is a cutthroat struggle over financial resources between two rival factions of the ruling elites. This internecine war is taking place within the overall context of an international financial crisis and rising class conflicts, as well as growing tensions in the Middle East provoked by the American aggression against Iraq and US threats against Iran.

A warning to the working class

The recently leaked “action plan” is the latest indication of the danger of military intervention not only against the AKP government. The removal of a democratically elected government by a campaign of “psychological warfare” would represent a massive attack on the democratic and social rights of the working class. Preparations for such a coup are unfolding in a climate of nationalism and chauvinism spearheaded by the Turkish military itself and fuelled by the bourgeois parties (both right-wing and the nominally “left-wing”) as well as a section of the news media.

Opposition to the plans of the military however, in no way implies political support for the AKP or any other bourgeois force, which is incapable of defending the democratic rights of the working class, let alone assuring a decent standard of living for the toiling masses.

After suffering a humiliating defeat in the 2007 national elections, the Turkish military

decided to wait in the shadows to restore its credibility, while in a carefully planned fashion assigning the judiciary with the task of putting the AKP out of commission. In response the AKP and the Islamist movement at large, which control almost the whole police apparatus as well as a section of the judiciary, responded with the Ergenekon case. The timing of different detention waves carried out as part of the Ergenekon case was far from being accidental and was essentially designed to achieve the political aims of the AKP.

The class character of the Ergenekon case determines its limitations. It deliberately limits itself to acts of sabotage and assassination relating to the destabilization of the AKP government and ignores its activities targeting the Kurdish nationalist movement, the workers movement and left-wing parties. There are also many indications that the AKP and the Islamist prosecutors are using the probe and court case to suppress dissent.

Genuine democracy can only be achieved through the development of a politically independent movement of the working class based on an internationalist socialist program and the struggle to establish a workers' government.

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