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## Turkish president Tayyip Erdogan claims to have concrete documentary proof that the West is backing ISIS

- Erdogan claims to have photo and video evidence West supports terror groups
- Comes as he called for the US to extradite his political nemesis Fethullah Gulen
- Erdogan has blamed Gulen and his supporters for a failed military coup in July
- Critics say he is using coup to eliminate opposition, with 41,000 under arrest

By James Dunn For Mailonline

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Turkish President Erdogan has claimed he has evidence the West is supporting ISIS as he intensifies the political crackdown against rivals following a failed coup.

Tayyip Erdogan claims to have photos and videos proving that western nations backed groups including Islamic State and Kurdish militant groups YPG and PYD, who have launched numerous violent attacks on Turkey in the past.

It comes as he called for the US to extradite his political nemesis, preacher Fethullah Gulen, who the authorities accused of leading a plot to seize power in July.

Gulen, a former political ally turned foe, denies the accusations and Washington has refused to return him to Turkey.

Today, 29 police officers went on trial Tuesday accused of failing to defend president on a day when citizens took to the street to conquer the coup.

The hearings follows a massive crackdown on alleged putschists, with 41,000 under arrest in a national state of emergency in the most far-reaching legal process in the country's history.

Erdogan's critics have suggested that the Muslim leader is using the coup attempt to cleanse the country of his political opposition and introduce a more Islamist agenda.

Meanwhile, Turkish troops fighting ISIS in Syria have come up against increasing resistance, leading to a number of Turkish soldier deaths and casualties.

Today's accusation that the West supports terror groups comes as he called for Qatar and Saudi Arabia to be invited to talks with Russia on peace in Syria.

Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar are the main backers of rebels seeking to topple Syrian President Bashar Assad, who is closely allied with Moscow and Tehran.

It comes amid tension with Russia after its ambassador was murdered by a Turkish policeman in the capital after claims he was radicalised in the police force.

But Erdogan said Turkey would not take part if any 'terror organisations' are also invited, referring to Syrian Kurdish groups - such as those mentioned in his statement today - affiliated with Kurdish insurgents in Turkey.

'They [the West] were accusing us of supporting Daesh (Islamic State),' he told a press conference in Ankara.

'Now they give support to terrorist groups including Daesh, YPG, PYD. It's very clear. We have confirmed evidence, with pictures, photos and videos,' he said.

The police officers accused of involvement in the military coup are the first such case in Istanbul but small-scale cases involving suspects have already begun in the provinces. On Monday 60 people went on trial in the southwestern city of Denizli.

But the trial in Istanbul - in a gigantic courthouse outside the Silivri prison in the city - is the most significant to date. The government says 248 people were killed by the coup plotters.

The accused are charged with seeking to overthrow the government as well as allegedly being members of the group led by US-based preacher Gulen. Of the 29 police on trial in Istanbul, 24 are under arrest, one on the run and the rest on bail.

Special forces in camouflage gear stood guard outside the courthouse and snipers were posted on the balconies of nearby minarets.

The names of the accused and the indictment were read out, the state-run Anadolu news agency said. Arguments for the defence are expected to follow with the initial hearings expected to last until Friday.

Twenty one face up to three life sentences and the other eight officers could be handed jail terms of between seven-and-a-half and 15 years on charges of 'terror group' membership.

Three police helicopter pilots are specifically accused of ignoring orders to protect Erdogan's waterside residence in Istanbul. Others allegedly failed to report for duty or to support colleagues resisting the coup.

'We will make sure the guilty - within the framework of the law - are punished and given the most heavy punishment possible,' said lawyer Orhan Cagri Bekar, head of the July 15 Association, which represents victims of the coup.

President of the Turkish lawyers' association Mehmet Sari said the trials would have a wider bearing for the country.

'Never again will a group interfere in our state and to try to lead a putsch. This is what this trial will do,' he said.

However there has been growing international alarm over the extent of the crackdown amid the state of emergency imposed after the coup, with critics concerned it has been used to target Erdogan's opponents.

With the purge showing no sign of relenting, the interior ministry said 1,096 people suspected of links to Gulen were detained in the last week alone.

Erdogan has said there are strong public demands for retribution even extending to reimposing the death penalty.

He also said last week that the assassination of the Russian ambassador to Ankara was carried out by a Turkish policeman loyal to Gulen, a claim not yet accepted by Moscow.

In a rare political speech, Erdogan's prominent younger daughter Sumeyye Erdogan Bayraktar said the group of Gulen had been 'unmasked' in its tactic of 'taking possession of the minds and hearts' of people.

'Our state will defend the integrity, security and public will of our country with full vigour and force. All of this will be within the rule of law,' Anadolu quoted her as saying in Chicago.

Following the start of the Istanbul trial, several others will start, including on February 20 of 47 suspects accused of trying to assassinate Erdogan at a holiday resort.

The courthouse in Silivri has huge resonance for Turks after it was also used in trials against suspects in 2013 accused of a separate coup plot known as Ergenekon.

That case was strongly supported by Gulen and 275 police officers, journalists, lawyers and academics indicted for allegedly conspiring to oust Erdogan. But the convictions were quashed amid accusations Gulen had perverted the process.

Turkish forces are currently fighting in Syria and Islamic State recently published video purportedly showing the burning to death of two captured Turkish troops.

After users in Turkey reported problems using social media in the wake of the release of the video, Deputy Prime Minister Numan Kurtulmus said some media needed to 'watch their step' in the face of attempts by terror groups to spread fear.

But officials have denied that it is authentic. 'There is still no clear information from our armed forces or defence ministry to confirm these video images,' Kurtulmus told reporters in Ankara in televised comments.

'If there is confirmed information, it will be shared with the public,' he said.

But Kurtulmus added that terror groups were 'vile mechanisms' and were seeking to 'spread desperation' through fear.

'In particular social media is not the place for irresponsible publications,' he said, warning that 'some friends in the media should please watch their step'.

'Turkey is at the moment in a de-facto war with Daesh (IS),' he added.

'Working to break the morale of the Turkish people with fake images is not patriotism,' he said, without specifying which images he was referring to.

After the video was first published late on Thursday, Turkey's Defence Minister Fikri Isik said three Turkish soldiers were currently being held by IS, without giving further details.

Users in Turkey had reported severe problems with social media after the video emerged and the Turkey Blocks monitoring network said it had confirmed a 'throttling' of Twitter and YouTube affecting many users.

It said the blocks appeared to have been implemented at the Internet Service Provider (ISP) level, 'with each provider applying its own controls'.

However, by Monday access to Twitter was fully restored after some three days of disruption.

Turkey's Western allies have in recent years accused Ankara of turning a blind eye to the rise of IS, an accusation strongly denied by the government which has listed the group as a terror organisation since 2013.

The current controversy renewed claims that former premier Ahmet Davutoglu, who stepped down this year, had said while foreign minister that IS members were 'just angry young kids'.

In a statement on his Facebook page, Davutoglu's office said he had never spoken such words and said legal proceedings had been started against those claiming he had.

The operation in Syria - dubbed Euphrates Shield - has become a sensitive issue with the government keen to ensure public support is not undermined by the growing casualty toll.

Thirty-seven Turkish soldiers have died so far in the operation after another wounded soldier lost his life in hospital in Turkey, reports said.

A Turkish court has put a broadcast ban on reporting of the investigation into last week's murder of the Russian ambassador to Ankara Andrei Karlov, state media said on Tuesday.

A Turkish policeman opened fire on Karlov while he was delivering a speech at the opening of a photography exhibition, in an assassination that stunned Russia and Turkey.

An Ankara court has this week agreed to ban broadcasting images of the assassination - which was caught on film - as well as the investigation itself, the state-run Anadolu news agency said.

This includes news concerning witnesses, victims or suspects in the murder.

The ruling said such news could be prejudicial to the investigation and to national security. The ban will last for the duration of the investigation.

It was not clear what had prompted the ban one week after the December 19 murder but it came one day after the daily Hurriyet published a detailed interview with the sister of the murderer Mevlut Mert Altintas.

The sister, named as Seher O, said her brother had been 'brainwashed' while attending police school in Izmir.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has said Altintas was a member of the group of US-based preacher Fethullah Gulen blamed for the July 15 coup.

However this has yet to be echoed by Russian officials, who say it is too early to comment on the investigation.