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Anatomy of a failed coup attempt

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A military helicopter carrying an infantry team landed on the empty parking lot of the Doğan Media headquarters in Istanbul at around 3 a.m. on the morning of July 15.

As later understood from security camera footage, 14 soldiers emerged from the helicopter. The first group of seven went into the TV building of the media center, where the CNN Türk and Kanal D stations are based. The remaining seven headed for the other side of the building, raiding the Hürriyet newspaper and websites' building around a minute after the TV building.

The army captain, leading the team carrying G-3 automatic rifles, crashed into our office building carrying a 9 mm Glock pistol with its safety lock open. He demanded that we stop what we were doing immediately and leave the building at once. We objected that they had no right to do that, and said we had a paper to send to the printing house covering the ongoing coup d'état by a junta outside the chain of command, but it made no difference. "I have my orders," the young officer insisted, declining to tell us who gave him the orders, after we said some top officers had already stated that the move in no way represented the Turkish Armed Forces - despite their reputation for carrying out three coups between 1960 and 1980.

The coup attempt started at about 9:30 on July 14 when a group of soldiers blocked both of the bridges crossing the Bosphorus. Then the Air Force jets started flying low above the parliament

building and the presidential compound in Ankara, making very disturbing sonic booms. Then tanks started to appear on the streets of Ankara and Istanbul, while military helicopters started to open fire on the police and intelligence headquarters. By then, all signs pointed to a coup being carried out.

Tayyip Erdoğan was in the Aegean resort town of Marmaris. His flight back to Ankara or Istanbul was practically impossible as airports in both cities were under the control of the coup plotters. At that point, the Istanbul-based First Army's commander Ümit Dündar entered into the picture, taking back control of Atatürk Airport. In hindsight that marked a turning point in the failure of the coup attempt.

But even before then, there was a live interview with Erdoğan via FaceTime while he was still stuck in Marmaris on CNN Türk, a member of the Doğan Media Group. Ironically enough, the soldiers in the plot had raided public broadcaster TRT, which the opposition often criticizes for being little more than a voice of Erdoğan, at the moment when the president most needed to have his message heard by Turkish citizens. CNN Türk presenter Hande Fırat used the FaceTime app and turned the camera to the screen to carry out the interview. As a result, it was Aydın Doğan and his media outlets - which were subject to harsh attacks last year from pro-government circles - that provided a golden opportunity for Erdoğan to address the nation.

In his address, Erdoğan took the opportunity to denounce his former ally and now arch enemy Fethullah Gülen (an Islamist ideologue living in the U.S.) as the mastermind behind the coup attempt. He also called on the people to resist the plot by taking to the streets and the airport.

At almost the same time as Erdoğan was landing in Istanbul, the police were entering our TV and newspaper buildings to arrest the occupying soldiers. There was a clash in our building in which the army captain was wounded and scars were left on the walls of the Hürriyet office.

The thwarting of the plot accelerated as the morning progressed. The number of arrested officers, as well as their number of ranks, increased along with an unfortunate increase in the number of casualties.

Overall, it was like a nightmarish déjà vu for the Turkish people to live through the atmosphere of a coup attempt again, when they thought that era was over. The only good to come out of the whole chilling episode is the unity shown by all parties in parliament to stand against the coup attempt and defend democracy together - a rare sight indeed. The rest really was a night of shame for Turkey.