

The Sledgehammer Coup Plan and the Case of Çetin Doğan—An Update

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We gave the background and facts on the case of Çetin Doğan in a previous note that is available online.¹ In this note we want to provide an update and discuss some additional reasons that throw doubt on the authenticity of the documents that have been published by *Taraf*.

As we made clear in our earlier note, the only thing that links Çetin Doğan to the alleged Sledgehammer coup plan is an unsigned Word document that has not been independently authenticated and could have been easily forged. Çetin Doğan's name is typed at the bottom of this document, and he is identified as the "Sledgehammer Martial Law Commander." The case against Çetin Doğan rests on the authenticity of this document. Çetin Doğan has steadfastly denied authorship (or any knowledge) of it.

The military prosecutor's report

In recent days, there have been several stories in the Turkish media that claim that a report by the military prosecutor's office has reached an affirmative conclusion on the authenticity of the Sledgehammer plan documents. This is false. These stories were refuted by a press [statement](#) from the military prosecutor's office on February 26th, which said:

The investigations and research to date have yielded no confirmation on the part of the military prosecutor's office that the said coup plan and the action plans that support it are authentic. Therefore, it is not possible to state that the seminar activities [the war simulation workshop held at the headquarters of the 1st Army, then headed by Gen. Doğan, on March 5-7, 2003] constitute a coup plan.

What seems to have led the media astray is that some of the passages in the report are conditional statements, taking the form "if the documents are genuine, then this constitutes a coup plan which was carried out secretly and without the knowledge of the chief of general staff and the commander of the landed forces." As the military prosecutor's press statement made clear, statements of this form were not meant to imply that the documents were in fact genuine (on which the military prosecutor found no evidence). Nevertheless, the media has had a field day with selective quotes from the

¹ At <http://cdogangercekler.files.wordpress.com/2010/03/the-case-of-cetin-dogan-1-1.pdf>.

report, stitching together a set of conclusions that is virtually opposite to that reached by the military prosecutor's office (as summarized in the quote above).²

Could the March 2003 simulation workshop have been a "cover" for coup preparations?

The authenticity of the voice recordings from the March 2003 workshop belonging to Çetin Doğan is not in question. Çetin Doğan has maintained that this workshop was a regular war-game exercise, unrelated to the government then in power and carried out with the full knowledge of the chief of general staff and other high-ranking officers in the military. Others claim that this workshop was a "camouflaged" effort to "road test" the Sledgehammer coup plan prepared some months earlier, and that it violated the guidelines set by the military hierarchy.

The facts speak against the second interpretation:

1. The then-chief of general staff Hilmi Özkök has publicly stated that it was he who ordered the March 2003 workshop to be held.
2. The workshop was attended by a very large group of military staff, including 29 generals and 162 officers. It is hard to see how any "improper" activities would not have leaked outside the seminar and to higher brass.
3. A report on the seminar was prepared and forwarded to the commander of the landed forces and the chief of general staff.
4. In addition, the commander of the landed forces and the chief of general staff had their own separate observers at the seminar, who would have certainly reported to their superiors any activity that fell outside the guidelines.
5. The voice recordings of the seminar were made on the explicit orders of Çetin Doğan. It defies common sense that Çetin Doğan would have wanted to have a record of the proceedings if these were indeed preparations for a secret coup planned outside the knowledge of the commander of the landed forces and the chief of general staff.

Inconsistencies in the Sledgehammer coup document

We do not know when, why, or by whom the Sledgehammer documents were prepared. The language in these documents suggests that someone from the military or with close knowledge of the military may have been responsible.

² The full text of the military prosecutors' report is not available. It is a secret report which has been apparently leaked to the press. All we have to go on are the passages that have been quoted in the media and the press statement of the military prosecutors themselves.

Interestingly, one major inconsistency with military usage in these documents is highly suggestive of a cut-and-paste effort to frame Çetin Doğan. The “Sledgehammer Action Plan” identifies Çetin Doğan’s title as the “Sledgehammer Martial Plan Commander.” This is sharply at variance with military practice:

- (i) martial-law was not in effect at the time this document is said to have been put together, and Çetin Doğan could not have signed off on an action plan using a non-existent title;
- (ii) leaving aside (i), proper military usage would have required the title “Martial Law Commander” to have been preceded by “1st Army.”

We list here a number of additional pointers that suggest the Sledgehammer documents were prepared not in 2002 but some years later.

1. Some of the text in the Sledgehammer “economic plan” matches verbatim with the text of a presentation made by a Turkish economist at a conference in November 2005.
2. One of the justifications provided for the coup in the Sledgehammer action plan is that the AK Party government had been using tax inspections to apply financial pressure on the opposition media (meaning the Doğan media group, no relation to Çetin Doğan) in order to silence them. Yet, at the time (in December 2002) Prime Minister Gül had excellent relations with the Doğan media group. The financial squeeze on the Doğan group did not start until Spring 2008.³
3. Other justifications in the coup plan document dated December 2002 ascribe to the AK Party government a very long list of anti-secular activities, including efforts to undermine the secular nature of the constitution, staffing the bureaucracy with partisan supporters, placing the educational system on a religious-fundamentalist footing, and other divisive acts. Yet the AK Party government had been formed only on November 18, 2002, and had been in power for barely a month.

These anachronisms are noteworthy in that they call for some degree of skepticism on the authenticity of the Sledgehammer documents. However, on their own they prove nothing. Each of them could have some valid explanation. We do not know when these documents were prepared.

What we do know is this: Çetin Doğan had no involvement in these alleged coup plans, regardless of how or when the Sledgehammer documents may have been put together. There is no evidence that shows otherwise.

³ This anachronism in the Sledgehammer documents was first raised by Sedat Ergin, a columnist for the *Hurriyet* daily.