

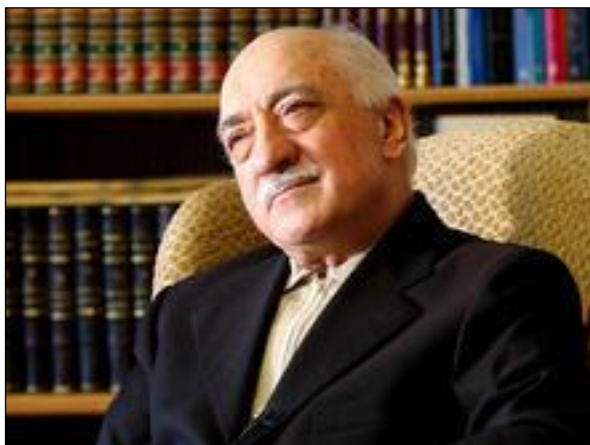
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Fethullah Gulen, Turkey, and the United States: A Reference

This In Focus product provides background information on this subject. For analysis of the subject within the overall context of U.S.-Turkey relations, see CRS Report R41368, *Turkey: Background and U.S. Relations*, by Jim Zanotti and Clayton Thomas.

Following the July 2016 failed coup in Turkey, the status of Muhammed Fethullah Gülen (hereinafter Fethullah Gulen), and the civil society movement that bears his name have become more significant for U.S.-Turkey relations. Gulen, born in Turkey between 1938 and 1941, is a former Turkish state-employed imam and now a permanent U.S. resident. The Turkish government has increased calls for Gulen's extradition in light of allegations that individuals with connections to him participated in the coup plot.

Fethullah Gulen



Source: CBS News

Gulen lives in seclusion with a few of his adherents at a Poconos Mountain retreat in Saylorsburg, Pennsylvania. The Gulen movement or community (commonly known by supporters as *Hizmet*, or “service” in Turkish) is an array of individuals, educational institutions, and other organizations in Turkey, the United States, and countries around the world with a connection to Gulen or his teachings. These teachings come from a distinctly Turkish brand of Islam inspired by the influential Turkish-Kurdish spiritual leader Said Nursi (1877-1960) and various Sufi traditions. Gulen's interpretation of Islam condemns terrorism and promotes interfaith and cross-cultural understanding, and in the sociopolitical sphere he publicly supports “values of democracy, universal human rights and freedoms.”

July 2016 Failed Coup and Turkey's Calls for Extradition

On July 15-16, 2016, elements within the Turkish military attempted but failed to overthrow Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (Erdoğan) and the government. Turkish officials blamed individuals with connections to the Gulen

movement for the coup attempt. The post-plot environment in Turkey features competing narratives amid a major government effort to purge Gulen's influence from Turkish institutions. The effort widely affects Turkish society. Public opinion in Turkey is largely suspicious of the Gulen movement and is divided regarding the scope of the government crackdown. Although many analysts have acknowledged the possibility of some Gulen movement involvement in the coup attempt, some U.S. and European officials have stated that existing evidence does not appear to prove Gulen's direct involvement.

Gulen strenuously denies any role in the plot, and insists that it went against all that he and his movement stand for, though he has acknowledged that he “could not rule out” involvement by some of his followers.

Turkish officials—with widespread popular support—have called for the United States to extradite Gulen under the applicable U.S.-Turkey treaty (in force since 1981). Multiple arrest warrants had been issued for Gulen before the coup attempt, and Turkish media reported days before the attempt that the Turkish government was about to request extradition formally. Following the failed coup, some Turkish officials have sought to portray Gulen's extradition as critical for positive U.S.-Turkey relations, and speculation continues about the possibility of Gulen fleeing to a third country. The treaty allows for the possibility of provisional arrest.

U.S. officials have stated their intention to respond, pursuant to the treaty, to documents that Turkey has submitted after the coup attempt. These documents reportedly refer to actions related to the coup attempt as well as to other matters. Deciding whether to honor an extradition request involves initial determinations by the Justice and State Departments. If a decision is made to go forward, a hearing would take place before a federal magistrate to assess whether the request is proper under the treaty and whether there is sufficient evidence to believe an extraditable offense was committed. Even if the magistrate certifies the extradition as permissible, the Secretary of State has final authority to determine whether the extradition shall occur. For more on the U.S. extradition process in general, see CRS Report RS22702, *An Abridged Sketch of Extradition To and From the United States*, by Charles Doyle.

The Gulen Movement: An Overview

The Gulen movement gained influence across Turkey in the 1970s and 1980s. Initially, Gulen's ideas attracted support for various youth educational initiatives. Over time, Gulen-inspired schools, businesses, media and publishing enterprises, charitable organizations, business

confederations, and civil society groups have come to exercise considerable influence in Turkey and elsewhere.

For decades, many observers have speculated that Gulen movement adherents and sympathizers occupy influential positions within Turkey's official institutions. Gulen and his close supporters insist that he has not hierarchically controlled Turkish state employees or any others who either publicly or privately align themselves with him and his teachings, though this point is actively debated.

The Gulen movement does not have its own political party. Many observers claim that the movement aligned itself with Erdogan and the Justice and Development Party (AKP) during Erdogan's first decade in power (2003-2012), using its social connectedness, international reach, and media clout to bolster AKP rule at home and abroad. Both the Gulen movement and the AKP sought to curb the military's longstanding secularist control over civilian politics. Many of the movement's adherents and sympathizers were among the strongest supporters of the Ergenekon and Sledgehammer (*Balyoz*) prosecutions and convictions, which dealt with alleged military-centered networks aimed at overthrowing or undermining the AKP government. Some analysts assert that these cases, along with changes in military vetting practices under AKP rule, may have given officers with Gulen movement sympathies greater opportunity for promotion.

In December 2013, when the AKP-Gulen movement alliance was reportedly already troubled, the relationship became outright adversarial when prosecutors brought corruption charges against some close associates of (then-Prime Minister) Erdogan, and audio recordings implicating Erdogan and his son Bilal in possible improprieties were anonymously leaked. Erdogan accused Gulen and his loyalists of an illegal effort to oust elected officials via a "parallel structure" within key state institutions.

The Turkish government has taken a number of steps ostensibly targeting the Gulen movement's societal influence that widely affect others in Turkish society. These measures intensified after the coup attempt, and include (1) dismissing or reassigning thousands of government security personnel and civil servants; (2) repressing or taking over independent media and educational outlets; and (3) detaining and prosecuting journalists and civil society activists under anti-terrorism laws. Also, with Erdogan's support, Turkish courts dismissed or reversed the military-related Ergenekon and Sledgehammer charges and convictions. The Turkish government has also petitioned other countries to close institutions suspected of affiliation with the Gulen movement, with varying levels of success.

The Movement's U.S. Activities: Charter Schools and Otherwise

A number of Gulen-inspired organizations have U.S. locations or presences. Reportedly, some of these organizations operate schools. Taken together, this may include more than 150 publicly funded charter schools across 26 states and the District of Columbia.

Some of these charter schools have reputations for successful student achievement, but in recent years some have reportedly lost their charters or faced public criticism and government regulatory action or investigation. Issues of concern range from student performance to specific financial, hiring, or other business practices. Some individuals voice the possibility that anti-Muslim bias affects discourse regarding the charter schools. Lawyers representing Turkey's government have brought recent legal action within U.S. jurisdictions against Gulen and some charter schools.

Organizations with stated or reported connections to the Gulen movement (such as the Alliance for Shared Values and Turkic American Alliance umbrella organizations) conduct various public relations activities throughout the United States. These include outreach to governments and lawmakers at local, state, and federal levels, sponsored trips abroad, cultural events, and interfaith dialogue.

Timeline of Key Events

1971	Gulen imprisoned in Turkey shortly after military coup under a law criminalizing activities that undermine Turkish secularism; released six months later in general amnesty.
1980s	Gulen movement allowed to operate more freely in Turkey following 1980 military coup.
1999	Gulen relocates to United States, citing health reasons. Video recording of disputed authenticity airs on Turkish television depicting Gulen calling on supporters to gain power inconspicuously within Turkey's constitutional system.
2000	Gulen indicted by Turkish authorities in absentia on conspiracy charges.
2003-2014	Erdogan serves as prime minister.
2006	Gulen acquitted of conspiracy charges.
2008	Gulen obtains U.S. permanent residency after an initially adverse ruling is reversed by a federal court. Various individuals write in support of his application, including some former U.S. government officials.
2007-2015	Investigations and legal proceedings in Ergenekon and Sledgehammer cases.
2013	AKP-Gulen movement controversy begins regarding corruption charges.
2014	Erdogan elected president.
2016-2017	Turkish government designates the Gulen movement a terrorist organization. July 2016 coup attempt and aftermath.

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