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Turkey three years after the abortive coup against President Erdogan

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Turkey commemorated Monday the July 15, 2016 failed coup attempt, allegedly orchestrated by the US-based self-exiled Turkish Imam Fethullah Gülen

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan laid flowers on the July 15 Martyrs Monument in the Presidential Complex early in the morning.

Erdogan, along with relatives of martyrs and veterans, went to the Bestepe Millet mosque for prayer services for the martyrs. Bakir Izzetbegovic, the former Bosniak member of Bosnia's three-member Presidential Council, also accompanied Erdogan in the commemoration ceremonies.

Turkey marks July 15 as Democracy and National Unity Day. The day is commemorated with events honoring those who lost their lives beating back the putschists.

According to Mustafa Akyol, a Senior Fellow at the Washington-based Cato Institute, in Turkey, there is almost a national consensus that the Gülenists were, at least, the main component of the coup. This consensus is shared by all opposition parties, along with many secularists, leftists or liberals who are bitterly opposed to Erdogan on most other issues.

“The very fact that Gülen is based in the United States made many Turks assume that the Gülenists could not have launched a coup on their own. This deep distrust, amplified by Washington’s support for Kurdistan Workers Party-affiliated Kurdish militia in Syria, boosted anti-Americanism in Turkey,” Akyol says adding: That should make it easy to understand why Turkey has bought and deployed S-400 missiles from Russia, despite all the objections from Washington. Turkey received first shipment of the S-400 missiles three days before the abortive coup anniversary.

EU expresses solidarity with Turkey over the abortive coup

The EU on Monday expressed solidarity with the Turkish people as the nation marked third anniversary of the failed coup attempt.

“Our solidarity with the Turkish people is not into question at all,” the EU’s High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini said in Brussels.

Addressing a meeting of foreign minister's council, Mogherini said the EU members do remember the day and night of July 15 very well.

"Today is the third anniversary of the attempted coup and I think that we all remember that day and that night very well," she added.

557 suspects nabbed at border since defeated coup

Since the defeated July 15 coup, Turkey has captured 557 suspects linked to Fetullah Gulen group in the country's northwest as they were planning to cross to Greece.

According to data analyzed by Anadolu Agency, Turkish soldiers stationed along the Turkish side of the Greek and Bulgarian borders prevented the suspects from escaping to Europe.

The suspects placed under travel bans are ex-soldiers, academicians, teachers, police officers, and judges.

Many Gulen supporters members who were trying to escape by infiltrating among irregular migrants and cooperating with terrorist organizations such as PKK and MLKP were caught before they could escape to Europe, Yeni Safak newspaper reported.

According to the provincial gendarmerie command, security forces nabbed 18 suspects in 2016, 149 in 2017 and 266 in 2018. A total of 124 suspects were nabbed since the beginning of this year.

Efforts to take over Gulen group-run schools across the globe gather momentum

Turkish authorities continue to be in talks with many countries around the world to take over Gülen group linked schools, Turkish media reported.

The latest talks include discussions with Ugandan officials over transferring the management of both Gulen-linked schools and hospitals in the country to Turkey.

"The Ugandan government says the transfer of the establishments should be done within legal means," Turkish Ambassador to Uganda Kerem Alp told Anadolu Agency (AA) Sunday.

"We have informed the authorities that some schools and hospitals in Uganda have links to FETÖ (Fetullah Terrorist Organization)," he said in the capital Kampala.

After the 2016 defeated coup, Turkey established the Maarif Foundation to take charge of FETÖ's overseas schools. It also establishes schools and education centers abroad.

Ethiopia: Meanwhile, Turkish Ambassador to Ethiopia Yaprak Alp has said that the efforts aimed at getting Turkish schools back from the control of those linked to the FETÖ was on the rise.

Briefing reporters to mark the third anniversary of the July 15 failed coup attempt in Turkey, Alp said that in a significant breakthrough, a school linked to the FETÖ in Ethiopia was handed over to the Maarif Foundation last week.

"With the hard work of our missions abroad and the Maarif Foundation, we are gaining traction and are getting concrete results," said the ambassador. "For instance, as a significant

breakthrough in Ethiopia, a school linked to the FETÖ was handed over to the Maarif Foundation last week in Harar," she added.

She said the school governed by the Maarif Foundation will prove beneficial for Ethiopia and the people of Harar in the eastern part of the country. She said it will also contribute to further improving relations between the peoples of Ethiopia and Turkey.

Afghanistan: Turkey on Friday took over five additional schools previously run by the Gulen group in Afghanistan. The schools -- four in the capital Kabul and one in the southern province of Kandahar -- were handed over to Turkey's Maarif Foundation, according to a statement by the office of Afghanistan director of the education body.

The schools were named in the statement as Afghan-Turk Kabul Ariana Boys High School, Kabul Girls High School, Kabul Darul-Ulum High School, Kabul International Bereket High School, and Kandahar Primary School.

With the move, all 13 FETÖ-run schools in the war-torn country have been handed over to the Turkish education body.

What is the Gulen Movement?

Since the 1970s, Gulen and his followers have slowly built up a network of educational institutions, non-governmental organizations and businesses that started in Turkey, spread to Central Asia, and now is entrenched in every continent but Antarctica. This network is called the Gulen Movement.

According to Turkish Invitation website, by November 2012, there were Gulen group run schools were established in as many as 120 countries.

It is extremely secretive, and many of its members (the "Gulenists") and organizations will not even openly admit their affiliation. Publicly, the Gulen Movement advertises itself as a grassroots volunteer civil society movement that is interested only in humanitarian and educational works. Its members like to stress that it is loosely organized with no central coordination.

Outside of Turkey, the network of Gulen schools has been rapidly expanding all over the world, and around 1999 the Gulenists began to establish publicly-funded charter schools in the United States, where they already had a small number of private schools.

In September 2010, a respected former police chief named Hanefi Avci wrote a best-selling book about how the Gulen Movement has infiltrated Turkish institutions and stealthily taken over the state. Not long after this book appeared, Avci was arrested. It is widely believed that the charges against him are false, and that the underlying reason for the arrest was retaliation for this book.

Gulen and his schools have been controversial not only in Turkey, but also in Central Asia , Europe , and now the United States and now the United States as well.

The doctoral dissertation of Mustafa Gokhan Sahin, who has several Gulenist affiliations, contains references to US support for the Gulen Movement's activities outside of Turkey. Here are two quotes from his dissertation (boldface added):

"For many in Turkey this was exporting 'Turkish Model' to a region [*Central Asia*] which was under Iranian and Wahhabi influence. In policy circles, **especially with U.S. support**, the Turkish model of a secular state with a moderate pro-western Islam was the most highly regarded alternative. **The international support for the Turkish Model also contributed to the expansion of the Gulen community in the region** without any impediment until suspicion and resistance replaced the 'cautious acquiescence of Russia' and some other Central Asian states. At times **the activities of the movement was [sic] considered too pro-American**, and schools run by Gulen community both in Russia and Uzbekistan were closed by the state in late 2000."

What is Fethullah Gulen?

In an article with the above title Germany-based American writer Frederick William Engdahl provides incite into Fethullah Gülen life:

When Gülen fled to Pennsylvania in 1999, Turkish prosecutors demanded a ten-year sentence against him for having "founded an organization that sought to destroy the secular apparatus of state and establish a theocratic state."

At that time the US Government's Department of Homeland Security and the US State Department both opposed Gülen's application for what was called a "preference visa as an alien of extraordinary ability in the field of education."

They presented arguments demonstrating that the fifth-grade dropout, Fethullah Gülen, should not be granted a preference visa.

However, over the objections of the FBI, of the US State Department, and of the US Department of Homeland Security, three former CIA operatives intervened and managed to secure a Green Card and permanent US residency for Gülen.

The three CIA people supporting Gülen's Green Card application in 2007 were former US Ambassador to Turkey, Morton Abramowitz, CIA officials George Fidas and Graham E. Fuller.

In 2008, shortly after he wrote a letter of recommendation to the US Government asking to give Gülen the special US residence visa, Fuller wrote a book titled *The New Turkish Republic: Turkey as a Pivotal State in the Muslim World*. At the center of the book was praise for Gülen and his "moderate" Islamic Gülen Movement in Turkey:

"Gülen's charismatic personality makes him the number one Islamic figure of Turkey. The Gülen Movement has the largest and most powerful infrastructure and financial resources of any movement in the country... The movement has also become international, by virtue of its far-flung system of schools...in more than a dozen countries including the Muslim countries of the former Soviet Union, Russia, France and the United States."

During the 1990s, Gülen's global political Islam Cemaat spread across the Caucasus and into the heart of Central Asia all the way to Xinjiang Province in western China, doing precisely what Fuller had called for in his 1999 statement: "destabilize what remains of Russian power, and especially to counter the Chinese influence in Central Asia."

By the mid-1990s, more than seventy-five Gülen schools had spread to Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and even to Dagestan and Tatarstan in Russia amid the chaos of the post-Soviet Yeltsin era.

Gülen never left the United States after that, curiously enough, even though the Erdoğan courts later cleared him in 2006 of all charges. His refusal to return, even after being cleared by a then-friendly Erdoğan AKP government, heightened the conviction among opponents in Turkey about his close CIA ties, Frederick William Engdahl argues.