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Hakkı Taş

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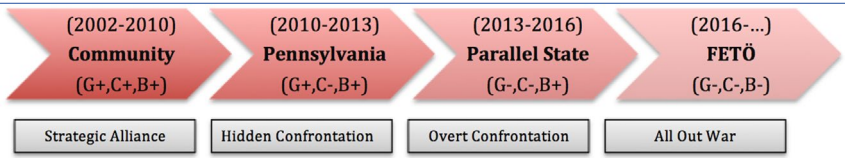
Institute for Intercultural and International Studies, University of Bremen, Bremen, Germany

ABSTRACT

Although organized independently, both the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) and the Gülen Movement (GM) have primarily addressed the same base and acted as mediums of upward mobility for Sunni Anatolian conservatives. Targeted by the old secular establishment, AKP and GM forged a mutually beneficial relationship in 2000s, with the former's political office reinforcing the latter's social and bureaucratic power and vice versa. Nevertheless, with the demise of their common enemy, this marriage of convenience gradually turned into a brutal fight, as epitomized in the abortive coup of 15 July. This profile provides a critical history of AKP and GM relations, illustrating how and why the image of Gülenists has changed in AKP's projection from a faith-based community to a terrorist organization.

At a time when the Middle East was haunted by the spectre of Salafi jihadism, a bitter fight between two 'moderate' Islamists, President Tayyip Erdoğan and Islamic cleric Fethullah Gülen overshadowed Turkey's once-promising future. The abortive coup of 15 July 2016 and the ensuing crackdown represent the apex of this fight. In the midst of the ongoing coup, Erdoğan was quick to pin the blame on Gülen and his followers. Soon, the government initiated a massive purge on a scale unprecedented since Turkey's democratic transition in 1946. For what amounted to a counter-coup, Erdoğan stated that '[the] nation took to the streets without hesitation and changed the coup [attempt] into a coup in its favour'.

The abortive 15 July coup clearly represents a milestone in Turkish politics. Yet, its analysis requires an initial focus on the relationship between the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) and the Gülen Movement (GM). Especially, one must consider GM's discursive trajectory, which resulted in Erdoğan's former ally being designated as a terrorist organization. While providing a critical and systematic sketch on the history of AKP-Gülen relations, this profile investigates the gradual securitization and criminalization of a religious movement through government-led framings. In particular, it examines how the image of Gülenists has changed in AKP's projection from a

Table 1. Gülen Movement in AKP's discourse.

G: Fethullah Gülen, C: Gülen's Inner Circle, B: The Base of Gülen Movement; (+,-) in AKP's projection

religious community' to 'Pennsylvania' to 'Parallel State', and finally to 'Gülenist Terror Organization' (FETÖ) to reach a particular conclusion and policy. By problematizing this politics of naming, it aims to reveal the predominantly political nature of AKP-Gülen relations (Table 1).

From revival to rivalry

Historically, Erdoğan and Gülen find their influence in different branches and traditions of Islamic activism in Turkey. Most of AKP's founding elite come from Necmettin Erbakan's National Outlook Movement (*Milli Görüş*), which has its origins in the Iskenderpasha Congregation, a Khalidi branch of the Naqshbandi Sufi order. The search for a religious revival through politics in this lineage contrasts with the Nurcu Movement, led by Gülen's antecedent Said Nursi, who denied political involvement, but was invested in reconciling science and faith.

Much like the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the National Outlook pursued a political path of forming political parties that would ultimately reinstate the Islamist dictum '*al-Islam din wa dawla*' (Islam is both religion and state). Erbakan adopted a developmentalist discourse infused with an anti-Western religio-populism. His rise to power in 1996 alarmed the secular establishment and triggered the 1997 military intervention, popularly dubbed 'the 28 February Process' or 'the postmodern coup'. Convinced as to the political inexpediency of antagonistic religious rhetoric, the reformists, led by Erbakan's protégés Tayyip Erdoğan, Abdullah Gül, and Bülent Arınç, ultimately split from the movement and formed AKP on 14 August 2001.

For many observers, the distinction between Erbakan and Gülen in the 1990s was equivalent to that between 'political Islam' and 'cultural Islam'. Like Nursi, Fethullah Gülen refrained from partisan politics and employed a gradualist approach focusing on a bottom-up Islamization of society. Despite its drive to spread through the ranks of Turkish bureaucracy, the movement, also called *Hizmet* (Service), is better known for investing its capital and energy in running some 2000 schools across 160 countries. While avoiding confrontation with the state, Gülen tended to disassociate himself from any kind of political Islam, including the National Outlook. In the 1990s, Turkish media promoted Gülen as a modern nationalist and moderate alternative to Necmettin Erbakan and his ummah-based political aspirations.

For Gülen, the 28 February Process began in mid-June 1999, when a leaked video showed him advising his pupils in the bureaucracy to lie low and cover their religious identities: 'You must move within the arteries of the system, without anyone noticing your existence, until you reach all the power centres'. In the lawsuit, opened in 2000 at the Ankara State Security Court, Gülen was accused of undermining the secular order. This indictment would define Gülen as 'the strongest and most effective Islamic fundamentalist in Turkey', and who 'camouflages his methods with a democratic and moderate image'. In 1999, Gülen moved to the US (ostensibly for health reasons) and remained there in self-imposed exile.

Strategic alliance (2002–2010)

Both AKP and GM were initially cautious enough not to trigger a second 28 February coup and maintained their distance from each other. The Pennsylvania-based imam continued to avoid aligning with political Islam, including the National Outlook's new heirs. Likewise, AKP also strove to steer clear of any association with the Gülenists. On 25 August 2004, the military-dominated National Security Council (MGK), which included then Prime Minister Erdoğan and select AKP cabinet members, signed an advisory ruling on 'measures needed to be taken to counter activities by the Fethullah Gülen group' and asked the government to draw up an action plan.

Despite the public perception that there was an inherent partnership between AKP and the Gülenists in this period, the relationship could be best described as a strategic alliance in pursuit of mutual benefits. The newfound political and strategic affinity enabled both groups to set aside their differences. First, declaring a clear break from its predecessors, AKP (as the Gülenists did) refrained from antagonizing the state elite with challenges to secularism. Second, both actors now shared a pro-Western agenda that sought to promote Turkey's European Union membership process and market liberalization. Third, AKP and GM combined their complementary forces as a means of surviving the hostile secular environment. While AKP benefited from GM's educated human capital in state bureaucracy, GM found the opportunity to expand further across social, economic, and bureaucratic fields. Although there are tens of other religious communities (*cemaat*), the massive expansion of the Gülenists made them *the* cemaat, dominating the term itself. Claims of a Gülenist infiltration proliferated at the time, but AKP opted for wilful neglect. Specifically, in 2005 and 2007 AKP rejected two notices of motion given by the main opposition party, the Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP), to investigate what it coined 'F-type Organization', with F referring to Gülen's first name.

This formidable alliance was capable of stifling legal manoeuvres aimed at finishing off each group. Following the institution of EU-oriented liberal changes to the Counterterrorism Law on 5 May 2006, the Ankara Criminal Court acquitted

Fethullah Gülen of subverting the secular regime. Similarly, AKP survived the military's indirect intervention on 27 April 2007, known as the 'e-memorandum', and the 2008 closure case in the Constitutional Court. Nevertheless, unlike the 28 February Process, the Islamists were more confident this time and carried out a counter-offensive. The two cooperated in the Ergenekon and Sledgehammer trials, which sent hundreds of retired and active military officers to jail and neutralized the tutelary capacity of the military. The alliance peaked during the constitutional referendum of 12 September 2010, which altered the composition of the judicial bodies and ultimately broke the secularist hold on the judiciary. With Fethullah Gülen personally campaigning for Turkish citizens to cast affirmative votes in the referendum, Erdoğan extended gratitude to those 'beyond the ocean' (*okyanus ötesi*), an intra-community reference to Gülen.

Hidden confrontation (2010–2013)

By late 2010, though the 'old' was already gone, the 'new' had not yet arrived. With all three strongholds of the secular establishment (the presidency, military, and judiciary) neutralized, a new era was on the horizon for Turkish Islamists, who had long branded themselves as victims of secular oppression, but were now holding the reins of power in the country. This also meant that the *raison d'être* of the strategic alliance ceased to exist and differences surfaced in several domains. Firstly, the Gülenist strategy to avoid disturbing the international status quo clashed harshly with Erdoğan's ambition to become the leading power in the Muslim world. Secondly, while Gülenists now demanded a greater share of power, Erdoğan was determined to centralize state power in his hands alone and sideline even his (rival) party fellows. Lastly, Erdoğan's pragmatic policy to negotiate with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (*Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan*, PKK) towards a resolution of the Kurdish Question conflicted with the security-driven approach of GM, which deemed that the process would only help the PKK further strengthen its position in the region.

Though the frictions between AKP and GM have a much longer history, their strategic alliance concealed these differences (Özbudun, 2014: 159). Hence, their first public conflict after the Summer 2010 Mavi Marmara Incident surprised many. The Mavi Marmara set off to break the Israeli blockade of Gaza, but resulted in the killing of ten Turkish activists when Israeli forces attacked the flotilla. The incident echoed quite differently in AKP and GM circles. In contrast to AKP's full-fledged support for the flotilla and condemnation of the Israeli attack, Gülen criticized this initiative as an unlawful and counterproductive breach of Israeli authority. In addition to this friction, AKP's neo-Ottomanist foreign policy of forging closer ties with Iran and an assertive role in Syria also clashed with GM's conflict-avoiding realism that recognized regional and international balances of power to ensure its vast global network would remain intact.

On the eve of the June 2011 general elections, Erdoğan's refusal to include up to one hundred pro-Gülen candidates in the party list led to further tension.

However, the definitive rift occurred with the so-called 'MIT (*Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı*, Turkish National Intelligence Organization) Crisis' on 7 February 2012 when Sadreddin Sarıkaya, a 'pro-Gülen' public prosecutor, subpoenaed Hakan Fidan, the Undersecretary of the MIT and Erdoğan's confidante, to account for conducting secret talks with the PKK in Oslo and overstepping his authority. Among rumours about Fidan's impending arrest, Erdoğan shielded him from further legal process through an immediate legislative manoeuvre. Without naming them, Erdoğan referred to the Gülen affiliates in the judiciary and security behind this event as a 'state within a state'.

Having arrested the former Chief of General Staff İlker Başbuğ in January 2012 'for terror activities' and then subpoenaing the Chief of Intelligence the next month, this show of force of Gülen affiliates in the judiciary and security forces was not only alarming for Erdoğan himself, but also raised questions as to whether the Gülenists were taking over the state from within. The struggle against the secular establishment and the immense power they eventually reached politicized the Gülen Movement considerably and transformed it into something beyond their self-projection as a faith-based civic society movement. Considered along with allegations of evidence fabrication, wiretapping, and blackmail during the judicial investigations, the intimidation and pursuit of those criticizing Gülen resulted in the motto 'the one who touches, burns' (*Dokunan yanar*). Facilitated by its organizational opacity, the GM became the usual suspect behind any conspiracy and its image became that of an omnipotent, nefarious force engulfing the state apparatus in its entirety. The CHP circulated the alias 'Pennsylvania' for Gülen and his followers to draw attention to their alleged foreign ties and it slowly gained currency among AKP affiliates as well. While exercising great caution to avoid targeting Gülen directly, pro-government figures began suggesting that Gülen was being misled by his inner circle and whether the hardliners, especially the Gülenist clique within the security forces, were gaining the upper hand in the community (Küçük, 2012). The phrase 'Gülen is good, but his inner circle is bad' (*'Hoca iyi, çevresi kötü'*) was common in pro-government circles. Still, both sides were keeping this confrontation behind the scenes. In June 2012, Erdoğan even attended the Gülenist-organized Turkish Olympiads and invited Gülen back to Turkey, saying 'We want this yearning to end'.

However, in Summer 2013, the Gezi Protests broke out and forced a final test for the fragile alliance. The massive protests fuelled a 'can-do' spirit among the deprived urban secular groups and were expected to bring a halt to Erdoğan's ever-expanding power. In stark contrast to such expectations, Gezi became a lifesaver for AKP, which was losing its initial momentum. Relying on sustained tension and polarization to consolidate his electoral base, Erdoğan skilfully employed the Gezi challenge to manufacture new enemies now that the secular establishment was gone. He portrayed the protests as an international plot to topple the government and declared a second liberation war against Western

'imperialists' and collaborating 'traitors' inside. In this confrontational politics, the support of the Gülenist media outlets was below AKP's expectations. When the dissonance reached a point of no return towards the end of the year, all that remained for Erdoğan to do was to tie the Gülenists to the same anti-Western conspiratorial framework.

Overt confrontation (2013–2016)

Against this backdrop, what is known as 'the cram school quarrel' (*Dershane Krizi*) was not the cause, but the outburst of a long-festering enmity. In November 2013, the government's plan to close down the cram schools for the university entrance examinations was leaked to the media. Gülenists were operating a quarter of those cram schools, which were not only a financial source for the movement, but also channels for recruiting new, young members. Hence, this was widely perceived as a move to cripple the movement.

The quarrel was soon responded to by a graft probe into Erdoğan's entourage. On 17 and 25 December 2013, the police arrested 52 people, including senior bureaucrats, businessmen, and sons of ministers on corruption charges in Turkey's covert gold-for-oil trade with Iran that bypassed American sanctions to the latter. Nevertheless, in the post-Gezi political climate, this critical challenge only helped Erdoğan further convince his electoral base about the spectre of conspiracy against the government. Portraying the investigations as another plot like the Gezi Protests, Erdoğan accused the Gülenists in the police and judiciary of establishing a 'parallel state' (*paralel devlet*) in the service of 'dark alliances'.

In retaliation to the graft probe, the AKP government initiated a massive anti-Gülenist purge across state institutions. 'If that is called a witch hunt, then, yes, we will perform that witch-hunt', Erdoğan declared as a show of his determination. Several thousand police officers, judges, and public prosecutors considered sympathetic to Gülen were rotated or dismissed. The government also went after pro-Gülen media outlets and seized Samanyolu and Zaman Group in December 2014 and Koza İpek Group in October 2015. When responding to these events, GM members, for the first time in the movement's history, initiated peaceful sit-ins to protest the government. After AKP's victory in the November 2015 snap elections, however, the GM preferred to keep 'a low profile' like other secular opponents (Demiralp, 2016: 6).

Despite all these battles across the higher echelons of the state, the fallout between the two groups was difficult to digest for the flabbergasted, conservative base AKP and GM were both addressing. In an attempt to consolidate their followers, both adopted harsh rhetoric that rejected compromise. Gülen cursed those behind the purge of police officers involved in the graft investigation: 'Those who don't see the thief but go after those trying to catch the thief [...] let god bring fire to their houses, ruin their homes, break their unities'. Erdoğan also

escalated his hate-mongering, attacking Gülen as a ‘false prophet’ and labelling Gülenists ‘parasites’, ‘grave robbers’, ‘blood-sucking vampires’, ‘pawns of Turkey’s foes’, and ‘sucking like leeches’.

Erdoğan indeed undertook a systematic campaign against the Gülenists revolving around the term ‘parallel state’. Earlier in 2011, Erdoğan employed the term for the PKK’s urban network, Kurdish Communities Union (*Koma Civakên Kurdistan, KCK*). When the graft probe started on 17 December, he referred to Gülenists this time, stating ‘There cannot be a parallel structuring within the state. We will enter into your dens’. The term ‘parallel state’ designated Gülen and the alleged network of his followers in the state. Describing the community as consisting of three layers – ‘faith at the bottom, trade in the middle, and treason at the top’ – Erdoğan was then distinguishing the broader base of the community from the higher echelons.

In an effort to turn this anti-Gülenist campaign into state policy, the MGK issued an official statement on 30 October 2014 that referred to ‘illegal organizations under legal masks’ as the major threat to national security. After another meeting on 27 April 2015, the GM also entered the list of internal threats in the National Security Policy Document (*Milli Güvenlik Siyaset Belgesi, MGSB*) with the same reference. Eventually, on 26 May 2016, the MGK would explicitly refer the ‘Parallel State Structuring’ as a terrorist organization for the first time.

Secular groups in Turkey, already perplexed by the scope of the war of attrition airing in public, largely remained silent, believing that the Islamist fratricide would only benefit them. Further, during this overt confrontation with his old ally, Erdoğan made a tactical alliance with his old enemy, the anti-Western Kemalists, who still held some power in the military and judiciary. To this end, Erdoğan publicly disowned the Ergenekon and Sledgehammer trials, and most of the jailed politicians, journalists, as well as active and retired military officers were released in 2014 and 2015.

All out war (2016 and then)

Ironically, the accusing labels of two former legal cases that the Gülenist media had championed so fervently were now used to attack the movement: ‘Parallel state’, circulated during the KCK investigations, was now pinned on the Gülenists. Likewise, ‘Ergenekon Terror Organization’ (ETÖ) was replaced with FETÖ. Long before the coup attempt, FETÖ was first used in a secret security report, dated 4 March 2015. Written by Deputy Chief of the National Police Department Zeki Çatalkaya, the report referred to FETÖ/PYD (Gülenist Terror Organization/Parallel State Structuring). While the first legal case against ‘FETÖ-PYD’ was opened on 22 July 2015, Turkish authorities inserted Gülen as the leader of FETÖ/PYD on 28 October 2015 and thereby onto the list of most wanted terrorists alongside leaders of the PKK and ISIS.

According to the indictments, FETÖ is not only the perpetrator of the 15 July, but also behind recent atrocities and turmoil, including the 2006 assassination of Priest Santoro to the 2013 Gezi Protests. After 15 July, the acronym FETÖ gained wide currency, referring to the Gülen Movement and sometimes to Fethullah Gülen himself. Unlike the limited scope of the term 'parallel state', the term FETÖ designated all followers (and even sympathisers) of Gülen as part of a terrorist organization.

On 20 July 2016, President Erdoğan declared a state of emergency empowering him and the cabinet to rule the country by decree. Instead of going after those involved in the coup, the government embarked on a huge crackdown, which primarily targeted Gülenists, but also Kurds and liberals. Soon, more than 110,000 people were detained and nearly 50,000 imprisoned. Reversing the presumption of innocence, 'suspects' were treated as guilty until proven innocent. These far-reaching arrests and dismissals came at such a dizzying speed and gave the impression that the coup, which Erdoğan called a 'gift from God', was a pretext and catalyst to purge the pre-existing lists of profiled public employees and re-engineer the state's structure. In this purge, Erdoğan clearly outperformed the Kemalists during the 28 February Process. Nevertheless, the solitude of Gülenists and lack of public sympathy for their plight reveal much about their reception in Turkish society.

More broadly, the chain of events that turned Erdoğan's strategic ally into his nemesis has its repercussions in Turkey's social, political, and economic landscapes. 15 July is projected as the founding moment of Erdoğan's 'New Turkey'. However, the societal discord and perpetual political strife amid successive states of emergency put the country into a severe existential crisis and the only way out is perhaps through it.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

ORCID

Hakkı Taş  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3463-0804>

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