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HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EUROPE, EURASIA, AND EMERGING
THREATS
HEARING: "TURKEY AFTER THE JULY COUP ATTEMPT"
SEPTEMBER 14, 2016**

Chairman Rohrabacher, Ranking Member Meeks, Esteemed
Members of the Subcommittee:

It is an honor to have been invited to testify today on this
important topic. With your permission, I would like briefly to
discuss six basic issues related to "Post-Coup-Attempt Turkey":

THE COUP

The July 15 coup attempt in Turkey was a nationwide trauma
for Turkey. The details are well-known by now. More than 270
people killed and more than 2,000 wounded; aerial bombings
of the nation's capital Ankara, including the Parliament
building; soldiers fighting police and soldiers fighting soldiers
in Istanbul and elsewhere throughout the nation; and the
revelation of the deepest sort of factionalism in the military
that historically was the nation's most trusted institution. And,
in the early days after the coupists seemingly had been

vanquished, it wasn't completely clear that the coup was truly over. The coup also assaulted the national pride of the many Turks who were convinced that the era of coups – the feature of Turkish political history that most distinguished Turkey, unhappily, from its NATO allies -- had ended for good.

Any discussion of the coup and its aftermath must start with basic understanding of that near-nationwide trauma. In response to a coup attempt, any government would tend to err on the side of over-reaction in pursuit of plotters and putschists. After all, a coup is not simply a protest demonstration; it is an assault on a regime.

U.S. RESPONSE

As the U.S. and EU responded to the military and civil service purge that followed the coup, our shock at the breadth of the purge seemed to many Turks to overwhelm our condemnation of the coup itself, our sympathy for Turkish society for having endured it, and our relief that the duly elected government had prevailed. I think we could have done a better job of balancing our reaction. The fact that we did not do so fed conspiracy-mindedness in Turkish society and made even our strongest friends and supporters in Turkey uneasy.

TURKISH RESPONSE

It is now almost two full months since the coup, and it is more than fair to take stock of the Turkish government's reaction.

That reaction has been found wanting in three major ways:

1) **Over-zealous purge.** The vastness and persistence of the purge has turned what may initially have been a somewhat understandable initial reaction into an unbridled witch-hunt. Almost immediately after the coup was quashed, the Turkish government determined, or decided, that the blame for the coup lay with military followers of Fethullah Gulen, a Muslim preacher who has been living in self-imposed exile in the United States since 1999 and whose organization, known as Hizmet, includes a vast international array of schools, hospitals, and other institutions.

Rather than focusing its wrath strictly on the military coupists, however, the Turkish government chose to expunge Gulenist influence from the entire civil service and, to the extent possible, all Turkish society. As a result, more than 100,000 civil servants have been fired or suspended and more than 40,000 arrests have occurred since the coup attempt. People are being arrested for owning books by Gulen or for having

made deposits in a bank owned by Gulenists. Adherence to Gulen's stated philosophy, which has nothing to do with coups or violence, is sufficient cause for job dismissal or worse.

Turkey has set out fifteen very broad criteria for these arrests when there should be only one: involvement in the coup attempt.

In addition to the purge of civil servants – including tens of thousands of teachers – more than a hundred journalists have been arrested and more than 2,000 fired. Many of the journalists being hounded merely wrote for Gulenist-owned newspapers and, as the net widens, many have no Gulenist association whatsoever. In addition, the government has shut down three news agencies, sixteen television stations, twenty-three radio stations, forty-five newspapers, fifteen magazines, and twenty-nine publishing houses – most, but not all, Gulenist-associated.

Gulenist institutions and private businesses owned by Gulenists also have been dissolved or taken over by the state. A Turkish official recently claimed that some \$4 billion in Gulenist-associated property has been seized.

And, of course, all this is happening against a background of growing authoritarianism in Turkey that pre-dates the coup attempt, as we discussed at our previous hearing.

2) Divisiveness. Government-led post-coup efforts at healing were, in fact, divisive, excluding Kurds – or, at least, excluding the party that most of the Kurds in Turkey’s southeast support, the Peoples’ Democracy Party (HDP, in Turkish). For example, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan instructed that court cases against parliamentarians be dropped, except those directed at HDP members. This is the case, even though HDP – like the other opposition parties – condemned the coup immediately, and its parliamentary caucus huddled with other parliamentarians inside the parliament building as the coupists’ bombs rained down on that building and elsewhere in the parliament compound. More recently, the leader of Turkey’s largest opposition party, the secularist, center-left Republican People’s Party (CHP), called the purge a “witch-hunt” that has gone way beyond capturing Gulenists to engulf a variety of Erdogan critics, including social democrats, leftists, and Ataturkists.

3) Anti-U.S. scapegoating. The pro-government media has repeatedly blamed the coup attempt on the U.S. government and various U.S. citizens, public and private. One Turkish cabinet minister, now holding the all-important interior portfolio, blamed the U.S. government directly, and another said the U.S. had prior knowledge of the coup attempt and didn't warn the Turkish government. More recently, at the G20, President Erdogan thanked President Obama for opposing the coup, but the damage done to popular attitudes toward the U.S. is likely to be immense. The government has re-inforced these attitudes by raising suspicions about Gulen's long-time residence here and leading the public to expect the U.S. to deliver Gulen to Turkey quickly, with little acknowledgement that extradition is a lengthy process that can only be successfully achieved with hard evidence.

According to a generally reliable Turkish poll taken during the third week of August, one-quarter of Turks believe the United States was behind the coup, whereas 55% believe Gulen was the mastermind. Anecdotal evidence, however, suggests that far more than one-quarter believe the U.S. had at least indirect involvement in the coup through its hosting of Gulen.

GULEN AND GULENISTS

It is impossible now to separate a discussion of Turkey's post-coup response from consideration of the nature of the Gulen movement itself and its alleged role in the coup. As we discussed at the last hearing, there are two hallmarks of the Gulenist movement that have significantly and positively distinguished it from many Islamic movements, particularly the radical movements with which we've become all-too-familiar in this century and, for that matter, in decades previous: The Gulenist movement establishes schools that emphasize science and math rather than religion, and it preaches a message of peace and inter-faith comity.

However, there is now a considerable body of circumstantial evidence suggesting that there is another side to this movement, a secret side that has exploited the institutions of the Turkish state in order to pursue its enemies. That side apparently showed itself in the Ergenekon and Balyoz trials, which led to the destruction of hundreds of military and other careers – careers that couldn't be revived in most cases even after evidence was proved fraudulent and convictions were overturned. It also robbed many of these same innocent people of years of their lives, as they endured prison and, reportedly

in some cases, torture. There is also circumstantial evidence – strong circumstantial evidence -- to suggest that those trials opened pathways for promotion for other followers of the movement.

Yet, widespread skepticism outside Turkey about the government's coup accusation against Gulenists is understandable. The Turkish government's all-too-quick determination that Gulenists were culpable seemed a bit too convenient. Erdogan had been attacking Gulen and Gulenists since his government was made the target of a corruption probe in December 2013, which Erdogan believes was an effort by Gulenist prosecutors to drive him from office. The fact that Erdogan's first step the day after the coup was to fire 2,745 judges only re-inforced the impression that he was using the coup to go after his enemies – an impression further re-inforced by the ongoing purge of civil servants.

Furthermore, some 40% of Turkey's generals and admirals were arrested or simply relieved of their duties as a result of the coup. Thousands of other military officers have been arrested as well. The Turkish government doesn't say that all of them are Gulenists but the implication is that most are. To

believe Gulenists had penetrated the leadership ranks of the military so thoroughly is to believe that hundreds if not thousands of religious Gulenists held to a conspiracy for more than two decades, moving up the ranks of an institution devoted to secularism and committed to opposing Gulenism. If it's true – and perhaps it is – it's certainly the conspiracy to end all conspiracies.

Even were the conspiracy indeed proven true regarding some of Gulen's followers, that would not prove that Gulen himself gave the order for the coup attempt. That issue will be considered in the extradition case Turkey is preparing against Gulen.

ERDOGAN UNASSAILABLE

It is clear that Erdogan is now a far more dominant ruler even than he was before the coup attempt. He rules by emergency law. He enjoys considerably bolstered popular backing born of his leadership against the coup. For the first time, according to a respected poll, a plurality of Turks favor Erdogan's idea of a "strong Presidency." His assault on the Gulenists is widely supported not only by his own traditional base but by secularists as well. And he has taken advantage of popular

revulsion at the coup attempt finally to bring the military to heel, putting its military school system under the ministry of education, its university-equivalent War Academy under the state's Higher Education Council, and its hospitals under the ministry of health and generally ending the military's status as a closed-caste system that runs its own schools and makes its own rules. That will allow the government to influence admissions to cadet schools and the academy to an unprecedented degree and lay the groundwork for a very different, presumably more socially conservative officer corps - - and one fully responsive to civilian leadership.

Erdogan seems also to have won the chastened and presumably weakened military leadership over regarding Syria policy. Long reported as resistant to intervening directly in Syria, the military complied with Erdogan's orders and moved tanks and special forces into Syria on August 24; they are still there and are likely to be so for some time. Of course, in this case, the military leadership may have shared with Erdogan a desire to demonstrate to the region as well to fellow Turks that the military remains a force to be reckoned with in the post-coup-attempt era.

TURKEY: EAST, WEST, OR IN-BETWEEN?

And where is Turkey headed for the near and medium term?

Despite the revival of the Erdogan-Putin flirtation – and despite ongoing disputes with the U.S. over extradition of Gulen and over U.S. cooperation with the Syrian-Kurdish, PKK-associated militia YPG -- I believe Turkey's preference will be to remain within the Western community of nations. Turkey's military, whatever its composition, is likely to continue to appreciate the benefits, strategically and educationally, of NATO membership. Economically, Turkey is structurally linked to the West. Nearly half its trade is with the EU (45% of its exports and 38% of its imports in 2015), which is also the source annually of roughly two-thirds its foreign direct investment.

Turkey's remaining in NATO and fundamentally tied to the West is the good news here – or, at least, the optimistic projection. The less optimistic one is that Turkey will remain an often independent player within NATO – an ally but an ally that pushes the boundaries of partnership. In a recent speech in the U.S., Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Numan Kurtulmus rhetorically asked whether Turkey is “changing its axis,” meaning from alignment with NATO to alignment with Russia.

"Turkey never changes its axis," he said. "Turkey has only one axis, and it is its own." That statement captures much of the spirit of Turkish foreign policy under Erdogan, sovereigntist but within NATO.

It should also be the U.S. preference that Turkey remain within NATO and within the Western community. Turkey is geostrategically important to the United States, and that importance is naturally heightened when we are fighting a war, as we are now, against ISIS. Turkey's status as a prominent Muslim-majority nation in NATO also serves our interests in many ways, as well as Turkey's.

We will face challenges, however. For one, using Turkish military facilities and convincing Turkey's leaders and the Turkish public of our commitment to their security, while calling Turkish leaders out on mounting human rights violations at the same time, is a tricky business. It is a balance we must find, however. We cannot turn a blind eye to Turkey's deteriorating human-rights situation nor conveniently forget that this deterioration began well before the July 15 coup attempt.

Second, and more broadly, we must remain alert to the possibility that Turkey could indeed drift from the Western alliance. As I've indicated, I do not believe that will happen, but the possibility is now sufficiently plausible that it would be wrong not to plan for that contingency.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.