

WHAT THEY ARE SAYING: About Gulen Charter Schools



Foreign Policy Research Institute, "Damaging Democracy: The U.S., Fethullah Gülen, and Turkey's Upheaval"

September 26, 2016

FETÖ is named after Fethullah Gülen, a Turk and religious figure who presides over a network of schools, test centers, media outlets, banks, and businesses that spans five continents. Gülen has resided in the U.S. for the past 17 years. Here, his followers run, among other enterprises, approximately 140 charter schools that bring in an estimated annual income of \$500 million from American taxpayers. As The New York Times and other newspapers have documented, Gülen's schools in the U.S. have been the subjects of repeated scandal and of FBI investigations into immigration visa abuse, kickback schemes, test fraud, and other alleged crimes and violations in numerous states including Texas, Pennsylvania, Georgia, Virginia, and Ohio. Indeed, these schools had grown so notorious for deceit and wrongdoing that the agenda-setting national television news program 60 Minutes aired an exposé on them in May 2012.



The Washington Post, "Largest charter network in U.S.: Schools tied to Turkey"

March 27, 2012

The movement portrays itself as a promoter of dialogue, tolerance, and understanding, but it is intensely controversial in Turkey. Controversies include the movement's involvement with creationism and other issues connected to its conservative religious agenda, claims about framing political opponents, intimidating the press, infiltrating police and military forces, and being connected to the arrest of prominent journalists.

Concerns about this group have arisen in other countries, too, especially about their schools being used to recruit members, and spread Turkish culture and fundamentalist religious ideas.

Although the topic is extremely complicated and sensitive, there are good reasons for Americans to learn about the Gulen Movement [GM] and its involvement with so many charter schools. That, and the time to insist that U.S. public officials address this situation, has most definitely arrived.

The concerns raised about the charter schools in the GM network have related to questionable admissions practices; the channeling of school funds to close associates; abuse of contractors; participation in biased, GM-created competitions; incidents of bribing; using the schools to generate political connections; science fair projects being done by teachers; unfair hiring and termination practices; and more. Still, authorizers continue to approve charter applications, ill-informed parents continue to use them, and taxpayers keep funding the schools – all without much discussion.

CITY JOURNAL

City Journal, "Who Is Fethullah Gülen? Controversial Muslim preacher, feared Turkish intriguer—and "inspirer" of the largest charter school network in America"

Autumn 2012

The FBI and the Departments of Labor and Education have been investigating the hiring practices of some of these schools, as the New York Times and the Philadelphia Inquirer have reported—particularly the replacement of certified American teachers with uncertified Turkish ones who get higher salaries than the Americans did, using visas that are supposed to be reserved for highly skilled workers who fill needs unmet by the American workforce.

Last year, the New York Times reported that the charters were funneling some \$50 million in public funds to a network of Turkish construction companies, among them the Gülen-related Atlas Texas Construction and Trading. The schools had hired Atlas to do construction, the paper said, though other bidders claimed in lawsuits that they had submitted more economical bids.

Federal authorities are also investigating several of the movement's schools for forcing employees to send part of their paychecks to Turkey, the Inquirer reports.

So what are the schools for? Among other things, they seem to be moneymakers for the cemaat. They're loaded with private, state, and federal funding, and they have proved amazingly effective at soliciting private donations. The schools are also H-1B visa factories and perhaps the main avenue for building the Gülen community in the United States.

The Atlantic, "120 American Charter Schools and One Secretive Turkish Cleric"

August 12, 2014

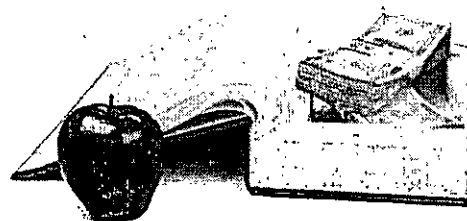
The FBI is investigating a group of educators who are followers of a mysterious Islamic movement. But the problems seem less related to faith than to the oversight of charter schools.

One of their most troubling characteristics is that they don't have a great track record when it comes to financial and legal transparency.

"The charter school system in Ohio is broken beyond repair," [former Gülen schoolteacher Matthew Blair] wrote in an email. "As it is, charter schools operate in a lawless frontier. Regulations are few and far between. Those that exist are consistently and consciously overlooked."

The Gülen schools, he wrote, "are an excellent example" of this problem: "A Gülen organization controls the real estate companies that own their schools. They charge rent to their own schools and tax-payers foot the bill. They refuse to answer public records requests, falsify attendance records, and cheat on standardized tests. Yet, Ohio continues to grant them charters to operate."

There are vulnerabilities built into the system, and one is a reduced oversight that enables schools to move vast amounts of public funds into private hands. The Gülen movement, with its foreign origins and mysterious leader, may make for a particular intriguing story.





CBS News - 60 Minutes, "U.S. charter schools tied to powerful Turkish Imam"

May 13, 2012

When Gulen came to the U.S. in 1999, it was for medical treatment. But then this video surfaced in which he seems to order his flock to surreptitiously take over key government positions in Turkey in a stealth Islamic coup. Accused of treason by the government at the time, Gulen decided to stay in the Poconos -- even after he was cleared in 2008 in Abstenia.

He's the spiritual leader of a growing and increasingly influential force in the Muslim world -- known as "The Gulen Movement"

Over the past decade, followers of the mysterious Turkish cleric Fethullah Gulen have opened scores of charter schools in the U.S., inspired by a man who is as powerful as he is reclusive.

There are a total of about 130 charter schools... Together they form the largest collection of charter schools in the country. Here's what's curious: they're founded and run by immigrant businessmen and academics from Turkey. Why are they building public schools here?

Well, the answer seems to lie with this mystery man: the Turkish imam Fethullah Gulen who tells his followers that to be devout Muslims they shouldn't build mosques - they should build schools.

Lesley Stahl: So I guess one of the big questions is what kind of an Islamic leader is Gulen?

Andrew Finkel: He leads by his own charismatic personality.

Lesley Stahl: Would you call it a personality cult?

Andrew Finkel: Yes.

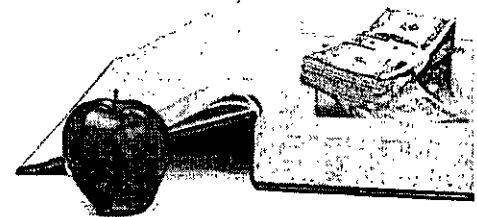
But federal authorities told us they take her seriously and are looking into allegations of immigration fraud and misuse of taxpayer money in various states, and whether it's somehow being funneled to the Gulen movement.

Gulen's followers can make money thru contracts to build and maintain the schools, but Addi has gone to law enforcement with charges that the schools also make money by bringing in foreign teachers in order to take a cut of their salaries. She says she learned this after marrying a Turkish teacher.

Seeming to have such power, this "Wizard of Oz" recluse invites conspiracy theories that he's running Turkey from the Poconos and is bent on global Muslim domination. His movement does lack transparency: its funding, hierarchy, and ambitions remain hidden -- leading our State Department to wonder in cables between Ankara and Washington if Gulen has an "insidious political agenda."

And now some of the suspicion revolves around the U.S. schools. Do they serve a function other than educating our kids? One accusation involves immigration fraud: that the schools are providing work visas for hundreds of Gulen followers from Turkey.

The enthusiasm is hard to miss, as is the fact that many of the teachers are Turkish, some just recently arrived and hard to understand.





USA Today, "Turkish faith movement secretly funded 200 trips for lawmakers and staff"

October 29, 2015

A Turkish religious movement has secretly funded as many as 200 trips to Turkey for members of Congress and staff since 2008, apparently repeatedly violating House rules and possibly federal law...

The group — a worldwide moderate Islamic movement led by a religious scholar named Fethullah Gülen — has been accused by the Turkish government of attempting a coup in that country...

A dozen different Gülen groups have sponsored congressional travel since 2008 and have filed forms with the House certifying that they were paying for the trips. The House Ethics Committee approved all the trips in advance based on the forms the Gülen groups submitted...

But a USA TODAY investigation found many of those disclosures were apparently false. Some of the Gülenist groups claimed to be certified nonprofits, but they do not appear in state or IRS databases of approved charities. Groups that did register with the IRS filed tax forms indicating that they did not pay for congressional travel. And five of the groups admitted to congressional investigators earlier this year that a Gülenist group in Turkey was secretly covering the costs of travel inside Turkey for lawmakers and staff...



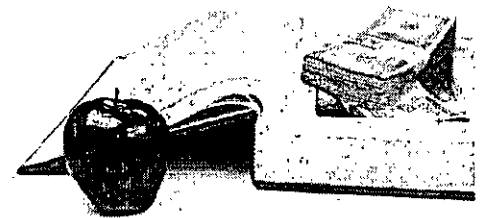
Spiegel Online, "Altruistic Society or Sect? The Shadowy World of the Islamic Gülen Movement"

August 8, 2012

The houses of light are the foundation of the movement, where young "Fethullahcıs" (as followers of Gülen are called) are taught to become loyal servants...

In his book "Fasildan Fasıla," (From Time to Time) Gülen writes that a pupil must be "on the go day and night" and cannot be seen sleeping. "If possible, he sleeps three hours a day, has two hours for other needs, and must devote the rest entirely to hizmet. In essence, he has no personal life, except in a few specific situations.

Residents of the houses of light are also expected to proselytize, and Gülen even offers advice in his writings on how to go about it. The students, he writes, should befriend infidels, even if it means having to hide their true motives. "With the patience of a spider, we lay our web to wait for people to get caught in the web.



NorthJersey.com
THE RECORD PART OF THE USA TODAY NETWORK

The Record - NorthJersey.com, "Investigation: Charter school leaders, founders linked to controversial Turkish cleric"

February 15, 2017

A group of charter schools that arose from North Jersey's Turkish community is rapidly growing in the state, with seven schools collecting more than \$60 million in taxpayer money last year alone to fund their growth.

Now, an investigation by The Record and NorthJersey.com shows that some founders and leaders of the schools have close ties to the movement of Fethullah Gulen, the controversial Islamic cleric accused of working to overthrow the government in his native Turkey last summer.

Records show the charter schools also have been a channel for state taxpayer money to private entities that serve the schools as landlords or vendors.

As the international controversy around Gulen swirls, the Turkish-led schools in New Jersey continue to collect tens of millions of dollars in state financing and local tax support, public records show.

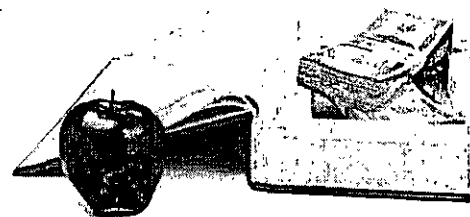
Overlap also can be found between the people involved with the Gulen movement and vendors that serve some of the local charters. A private firm and not the public charter school owns the property and can choose to rent or sell it for a profit. And it began with funding from state taxpayers. State law doesn't allow charter schools to incur long-term debt, so it's not uncommon for another entity to get involved. But there's no limit on how long the charter can pay rent – and no provision in the current leases calling for the property to be transferred to the school once the bonds have been paid off. The state Economic Development Authority said it's not "in its purview" to assess the long-term impact on taxpayers of such deals – or to assure a charter school ends up owning its facility. But critics say deals like this can end up hurting taxpayers.

NorthJersey.com
THE RECORD PART OF THE USA TODAY NETWORK

The Record - NorthJersey.com, "District alleges fraud in charter school application"

March 19, 2017

I believe that it was clearly fraud. If its initial application was based on fraudulent documents, then I believe that should be enough to disestablish this charter school, said Linden Superintendent of Schools Danny A. Robertozzi, adding: I believe there's shady business going on with this particular charter school application, and I think that if there's shady business going on here, that there was other shady business going on in their other applications.





Fort Worth Weekly, Harmony Public Schools are winning education awards in Texas and beyond, but critics believe they're revenue streams for an alleged Turkish preacher.

February 9, 2017

So-called Gulen schools are tricky to pin down because they use different names in every state and country where they exist. Critics say that is done to avoid linking the schools to someone as controversial as Gulen.

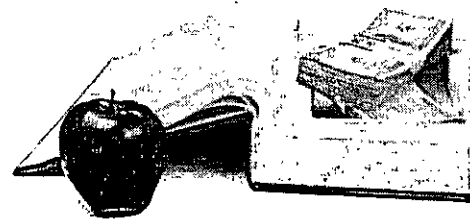
But the connections are visible. The schools are typically led by male Turkish scholars with expertise in STEM. Some have worked for Gulen-related organizations in the past,

The schools typically have Turkish-dominated governing boards, a practice of hiring Turkish employees through special work visas, and leadership positions dominated by Turkish males, according to the documents.

Controversy seems to follow the alleged network of Gulen schools. In Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Louisiana, schools were investigated by the FBI, although no arrests or other reports were made. Other so-called Gulen schools were chastised by auditors in Oklahoma and New York for illegal lease arrangements. In Texas in 2014, Harmony agreed to a \$125,000 settlement with a female American teacher who was paid less than her male counterparts from Turkey. That same year, Harmony agreed to a corrective plan by the U.S. Department of Education for reportedly underserving special needs students and English language learners.

Unlike traditional public schools, charter schools do not have to justify major construction projects that require construction bonds. Independent school districts must inform their taxpayers and citizens about the cost of a project, the scope of it, and any associated property tax increase. The public must also vote to approve the project before it can begin. That is not the case for charter schools. With zero public input, a charter school board of directors can vote to construct or expand schools and begin to secure funding for the projects.

Critics say money generated by the lease agreements amounts to a hidden public tax.



James Jeffries, former US Ambassador to Turkey, when discussing Gulen:

They're a threat to our relationship with Turkey and thus to the stability of the Middle East.

Jeffrey told CBS News that Gulen's followers are a powerful force in Turkey, with public good works, but more private political aims.

We need to investigate this movement again first and foremost for what it has attempted to do in Turkey. Secondly, what it is trying to do here in the United States and what laws it may be breaking in the process of doing so.

Fethullah Gülen

You must move in the arteries of the system without anyone noticing your existence until you reach all the power centers... Until the conditions are ripe, they [the followers] must continue like this. If they do something prematurely, the world will crush our heads, and Muslims will suffer everywhere... The time is not yet right. You must wait for the time when you are complete and conditions are ripe, until we can shoulder the entire world and carry it... You must wait until such time as you have gotten all the state power, until you have brought to your side all the power of the constitutional institutions in Turkey... Now, I have expressed my feelings and thoughts to you all—in confidence...trusting your loyalty and secrecy.

