Warning Against Senior Turkish Aide’s Abduction Threats in US

Erdogan's Long Arms Aiming to Reach US Territory

Turkey Seeks to Target Erdogan Opponents on US Soil

Turkey’s long-running campaign to target and capture political opponents of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan living abroad has taken a new turn after his spokesman threatened to conduct operations in the U.S., similar to the ones which took place in Moldova, Ukraine, Kosovo, Malaysia, Gabon and a number of other countries.

Ankara’s indulgence in risky and bold operations, in clear disregard and violation of international norms, have already aroused controversy and a state of tension with its allies and the countries where such kidnappings or captures occurred. [As recently as in September](http://silencedturkey.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Report_-Expulsion-of-Turkish-Teachers-From-Moldova_-The-Whole-Story.pdf), the Turkish National Intelligence Organization (MIT) snatched a group of Turkish teachers critical of the Erdogan government from Moldova after collaboration with the local security agency.

Almost all incidents, without an exception, have stirred political controversy and intense partisan bickering among political parties within countries where Ankara’s [long arms](http://silencedturkey.org/erdogans-long-arms-abroad-and-recommendations-to-governments) involved in controversial security operations to target opponents, mostly affiliated with Gulen Movement, a banned civil society group in Turkey.

Turkey’s assertive and robust push to get Gulen-linked people shows no signs of receding. And after Ibrahim Kalin, President Erdogan’s spokesman, stepped in to declare that Turkey may conduct similar operations on the U.S. soil as well, things would stumble into an uncharted territory and would inject a new layer of uncertainty into an already perilous and tense relationship between the two NATO allies.

Speaking to reporters in Ankara in late September, Kalin vowed that the Turkish government would never relent its campaign against Gulen people. “They will feel Turkey breathing down their neck,” he [said](https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/turkey-will-conduct-operations-against-erdogan-s-enemies-u-s-n912996).

He went on to say: “Relevant units and institutions will continue their operations in countries where Gulen Movement operates, whether in the U.S. or another country. The Turkish Republic will not let them rest.”

Turkey’s authorities describe the Gulen Movement as a terrorist organization and ascribe the blame for the abortive 2016 coup to the movement, without offering a convincing evidence.

The presence of Fethullah Gulen, the inspired leader of the movement, in the U.S. territory remains a lasting source of friction between Ankara and Washington. Turkey’s numerous attempts and endless demands for the extradition of Gulen from the U.S. have yielded no result so far today. Although Ankara sent countless boxes of documents and dossiers supposedly containing evidence to Washington, the U.S. authorities did not budge their position.

The U.S. officials say Turkey has yet to offer tangible evidence linking Gulen to the coup.

While Turkey’s relentless pursuit of Gulen people in countries with weak rule of law and corrupt governments is a well-known phenomenon, the hint from a senior aide to Erdogan about a potential attempt to snatch people linked with the movement from the U.S. soil is a first of its kind.

This evidently illustrates the zeal and ambition of the Turkish government to get their opponents from anywhere else with little regard for diplomatic ramifications. It also clearly reveals that Ankara, otherwise unanimously and collectively condemned and pressured by its Western allies, would never abate its operations to target Gulen people, even in the U.S.

Kalin’s threat comes on the heels of an ongoing dispute regarding the continuing imprisonment of a U.S. pastor in Turkey. Erdogan already unveiled his plan for a potential prisoner swap to get Gulen back to Turkey in exchange of Pastor Andrew Brunson. But his proposal was bluntly rebuffed by the U.S. officials in 2017.

Kalin’s remarks appear as no mere speculation or wishful thinking. Rather, his statement points to the existence of determination and a certain course of policy on behalf of the Turkish government to haunt Gulen sympathizers in the U.S.

In 2017, the U.S. prosecutors revealed a scheme involving Michael Flynn, former National Security Advisor of President Donald J. Trump, to spirit Gulen away from the U.S. territory. Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu, former Energy Minister Berat Albayrak, Turkish envoy to the U.S. and a former CIA chief were also present during the discussion of a plan to [smuggle](https://www.wsj.com/articles/ex-cia-director-mike-flynn-and-turkish-officials-discussed-removal-of-erdogan-foe-from-u-s-1490380426) Gulen. Flynn also [lobbied](https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/mueller-probing-possible-deal-between-turks-flynn-during-presidential-transition-n819616) on behalf of Ankara for the extradition of Gulen.

Against this backdrop, Kalin’s threatening remarks have taken a special meaning and context. The Turkish government has already expertly versed in the business of overseas operations to capture Erdogan’s opponents. The U.S. authorities should keep an eye on this possibility and would remain alarmed in the face of threats for conducting similar operations on the U.S. soil.

We write you to emphasize our great concern about such threats and urge the U.S. authorities to seek clarification from the Turkish administration over Kalin’s threatening remarks. In this respect, the State Department may summon the Turkish Ambassador to the U.S. to demand further elaboration and elucidation of Kalin’s remarks.

Separately, we request from the U.S. law enforcement agencies to pay extra attention to the situation and keep a closer eye on any suspicious moves or acts of pro-Erdogan Turks living in the U.S. with regard to the security and wellbeing of Gulen Movement sympathizers across the U.S.

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