

# After the Failed Coup: How to Deal with the FETO Threat in the Short and Medium Terms

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- **What kind of strategies can work against such a clandestine organization?**
  - **Is it possible to de-radicalize the followers of such a fundamentalist group?**
  - **How can international cooperation be facilitated against the provocative speculations disseminated in the international media?**
  - **What sort of strategies can be followed against the leadership and messianic ideology of the FETO?**
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The key factors that can facilitate purge of the FETO are closely connected to the organizational structure of the FETO network. The FETO is a hierarchically organized network and the leader of the organization, Fethullah Gülen, has himself absolute command and direct control over the entire organization. It is very difficult to manage such a complicated organization with operations in almost 140 countries and those who are placed in the middle ranks of the organization are only chains in its command and control system.

In the short term the main challenges, in order to deal with the FETO, are to dissolve the organizational structure, cut the material and human sources of the organization and to purge the militants and supporters from bureaucracy and civil society. The medium term challenge is the problem of radicalization of the militants and followers. When they are removed from the bureaucracy they may be immediately radicalized and resort to violence to destabilize Turkey. They may create crime networks, mafia style organizations and other secret illegal networks to threaten ordinary people and officials. Therefore, in the long term the main

challenge is to de-radicalize the body of the followers. This will be a long term challenge but the religious scholars, social scientists and bureaucrats need to deal with the “Gülenist belief system”, delegitimize the deviant symbolic system, replacing it with legitimate conventional beliefs.

Preventing the remnants of the FETO from cooperating with the enemies of Turkey and Turkish people and containing the media manipulations is an absolute priority. The struggle against the FETO will be a long and a challenging process, which needs to be well coordinated and the entire Turkish society should own this struggle like a national struggle. The aspect of public diplomacy is also another essential dimension. The most challenging aspect of this struggle is the international one. Since FETO is a transnational organization, the Turkish Government needs to coordinate its efforts in the international domain as well. This will appear as the soft underbelly of Turkey and some governments may want to capitalize on the FETO threat against Turkey rather than cooperating with the Turkish government. In order to

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facilitate such a struggle international law needs to be utilized. Turkey needs to develop new instruments to put pressure on the states that will not cooperate with the Turkish Government in such a struggle.

### **THE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF FETO AND INSTITUTIONAL MEANS TO DISSOLVE THE ORGANIZATION**

From their early entry into the FETO system until they become devoted militants, the loyalty and obedience of members is tested many times. The individuals can only ascent within the system if they are loyal to the orders of their superiors. The roles, which agents play within the totality of the system, are much more important than the individual skills or characteristics of the members. The FETO structure does not leave much room for individuality and most militants at the lower levels of the structure do not know much about what is going on at the higher levels of the organization. Since its establishment in 1970s, Fethullah Gülen as the mastermind of this sophisticated organization has overseen the entire body and given all the critical decisions. In terms of its organizational framework the FETO organization looks more like a regular military organization. The loyalty of the militants and the supports are to Gülen himself and his messianic views and objectives.

The leader and his messianic ideology play a critical role in maintaining unity and harmonious functioning of this organization. Any effort to deconstruct and eliminate this organization needs to take this framework into account. On the other hand the organization has skills to form clandestine bodies, militants are expert in infiltrating to other organizations, hiding themselves and increasing their loyalists and supporters gradually. It is therefore impossible to wipe out the entire organization. Sleeping cells and hiding militants will most likely continue but if they are not connected to their leader or their superiors they can hardly function. Therefore, decapitation and containment of the leadership and the elite structure of the organization is crucial. Because of their messianic

and apocalyptic views they may not consider the great purge within the bureaucracy as the ultimate defeat of the organization, they will rather continue to believe that when the time is right they will resurrect and take the control of Turkey and probably the entire world. The loyalists of the organization believe that they are on the right side of the history and those of who try to contain them are destined to fail. It is very difficult to convince them about anything else. Using the Islamic texts and some other sources, Gülen has formulated a messianic narrative, which is quite difficult to defeat.

All the profound efforts, organizational activities and routines of the entire structure is interpreted under the guidance of this belief structure. Two things are quite crucial in order to deal with this body: first of all the leader Fethullah Gülen and a few of his high ranking loyal acolytes need to be contained and the perversions and the absurdities within the Gülenist messianic belief system need to be demonstrated to the loyalists of the organization and the public. Material infrastructure, institutions and international aid to the FETO are only secondary to the leadership and the Messianic teachings. It must also be kept in mind that many of the loyalists of the FETO join the organization in the beginning because of their quest for a better education, position within the bureaucracy, faster promotion to the higher ranks of bureaucracy and for a business network. The FETO network has provided many opportunities to its members and loyalists. Looking at Turkish society as a whole, more effort must be made for equal opportunities to be provided to people in education, the bureaucracy and business so that they are not be vulnerable to this kind of clandestine body.

In order to eliminate domestic establishment of the organization, this aforementioned hierarchy can be purged by deciphering its institutions and actors. Due to its hierarchical characteristic, the organization might be dissolved when the leader, who keeps the organization together, is decapitated. When hierarchy fails, it is not possible for such organizations to ensure their existence unlike other secret organizations

that are set-up in a cell system. However, credence to system does not decline as long as the leader is still in power because members of such organizations are absolutely committed to their leader.

It would be quite difficult to eliminate FETÖ using rational arguments due to the organization's messianic and apocalyptic characteristic. Even faults of the leader are legitimized somehow by presenting these faults in a plausible format and by suggesting that "There might be unknown reasons." Thus, the organization's existence can be maintained as long as the leader is in power and sends messages to his followers. The main momentum that leads to elimination of the organization is to overthrow Gülen, the leader of the organization. Elimination of the leader would be very decisive for the struggle because Gülen's spiritual leadership and influence over his organization is the main impetus for the members to ensure its survival. For this reason, Turkey should request the deportation of Gülen and also should ensure the rehabilitation and normalization of Gülenist youth.

The FETO is already organized in the judiciary, police department, education system, bureaucracy, military, business, and academic circles. The fact that FETO's known affiliations in the military have been eliminated does not mean that the organization is totally wiped out. National security risks will remain particularly in sectors that the organization is still active and well-organized. In short term, total elimination of the organization is not easy. In long term, the organization will remain in the establishment by effacing itself through mingling with other groups. By doing so, the organization with its messianic understanding will be biding the next reorganization moment. The main danger in this process is that the organization attempts to smuggle itself into other civilian organizations, NGOs, and networks. The fight against this organization will take many years, however, it will not be possible for the struggle to be maintained consistently if governments and actors who operate against the organization change. Thus, a well-planned, gradual but urgent struggle is essential. It also should be kept in mind that if

this purging process is delayed and diffused, the possibility of militants and sympathizer to hide themselves increases. It is therefore crucial to act rapidly and in a very coordinated manner until the visible elements of the organization are completely wiped out.

Some secret layers and segments of the organization will never be completely wiped out in the next couple of decades. Therefore an official institution composed of police, intelligence officials, judges and academics which is especially expert in fighting against this organization is an absolute necessity. In particular, governmental and bureaucratic actors should establish strategic communication units in order to manage the complications, which are derived from the fact that crucial and top secret governmental information is in wrong hands. A new judicial framework is also required in order to ensure that the relevant actors can take actions.

## **STRUGGLING AGAINST FETO IN THE CIVILIAN DOMAIN**

FETO is particularly well-organized in civil society and the Turkish education system. Thus, the struggle with FETO in governmental bodies only is not adequate. In short term, it is not easy to eliminate the social capital that FETO has obtained by developing warm relations with the public. Sanitizing all institutions from FETO will spread over time since the organization is well-organized in business, education system, judicial system, and the medical sector. The organization will strive to find new ways and methods in order to maintain its existence, thus it will try ensure its association if not its activities. The government has to follow up structures that the organization has hidden itself in. The domestic dimension of the struggle will be tough and comprehensive. Due to their capability to cover themselves within other groups, it might not be easy for Turkish officials to totally eliminate the organization.

The fact that the members of the organization who are in the military and police have guns and they are expert in the use of sophisticated weaponry is a significant risk. The government should locate these

weapons and prevent third-parties from seizing them. At this moment nobody knows whether this organization has hidden weapons from the military in secret places to start a guerrilla style uprising against the government. The members of the organization might drag Turkey into an unstable process by using these guns. These weapons must be found and registered to official institutions.

The next and the hardest task is to struggle with the FETO's international network and institutions. Some states and intelligence agencies might use FETO in order to weaken and threaten Turkey and FETO itself can threat Turkey's interests by aligning with other states. Turkey needs to persuade other states in order to struggle with FETO in the domestic realm. Presenting materials that can assist judicial process is not adequate for persuading other states. Turkey should present comprehensive data and more-detailed files through public diplomacy in order to demonstrate the illegal activities of FETO. Putting pressure on the international media, academic and policy circles is an absolute necessity. Lobbying and law companies and a comprehensive plan to publicize the danger of FETO are key roles for this task. These companies should formalize Turkey's cause in a proper way abroad. The

International struggle is more challenging than the domestic struggle, however, in the event of the elimination of the leader, purging the international organization of FETO would not be a tough task for Turkey.

### THE PROBLEM OF RADICALIZATION

In the following period, the biggest threat that might come from the isolated, radicalized and illegitimate organization is political and civilian assassinations. Further, the organization can also trigger the civil war dynamics of Turkey by provoking the public. The only way to deal with these potential threats is to restore and strengthen the social peace. The assassination squads of the FETO may conceal themselves in various institutions including other terrorist groups such as the PKK and the DHKPC. The struggle against the FETO should be a national matter therefore the TGNA and the opposition parties need to play an important role in this process. A new legal framework and set of laws needs to be enacted in order to deal with the FETO threat. Public diplomacy office needs to explain the struggle against FETO in both international and national domains. Maintenance of the popular support and containing the international efforts are two necessities at hand.



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